CHAPTER 1
Orientation

1.1 Motivation

There is a spiraling thread of the Kingship of God whose starting point might be traced back from the pre-history era, prior to creation - at the very heart of God; entwined in the corridors of the Old Testament salvation-prophetic history; knitted in and through the mission, ministry, life, death, resurrection and Parousia of Jesus Christ; weaving through the witness of the New Testament church with the aim of bringing every person under God’s Kingdom through the Blood of the Lamb; and at the ending point of the same spiraling thread - every living creature, including the enemies of God, accepting, conceding and bowing because

“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” (Phil. 2: 9-11).

This work seeks to stimulate a fresh look and focus that place a weighty accent on the Kingship of God with special reference to and within the throne-centric liturgical hymns as written and sung in the theatrical framework of the Apocalypse of John. The primary aim is to demonstrate that the Kingship of God, together with its theology, is promoted, established, and expressed in the hymns of John’s Apocalypse. The secondary purpose of this work is to stimulate fresh interest particularly among African believers who largely shy away from the Apocalypse of John because of its intricate symbols and visions.
The aim is to attempt to cause African believers to read the Book of Revelation within the framework of hymns of John’s Apocalypse - with the aim of enriching their worship exercise and enhance their theology through the profound content encased in those hymns. The terms “kingship” and “kingdom,” while they are different, but they will be used inter-changeably because in Greek language, “the word *basileia* means both “kingship” and “kingdom,” and the same word “is also gender inclusive and therefore means royal power and royal domain.”¹

The term "Kingship" will be understood to mean or refer to God’s right or authority to rule over a kingdom, a “realized eschatology”² for God’s children, and also an “anticipation of dramatic divine activity intervening in the course of history in the future.”³ After analyzing several interpretations, Ladd⁴ argued that the phrase “kingdom of God” should take a dual interpretation. He said,

“*Malkuth* (the Aramaic rendition for the term “Kingdom”) can be either a monarch’s kingship, his reign, or it can be the realm over which he reigns. It is our thesis that both meanings are to be recognized in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and that the primary meaning is the abstract or dynamic one, or it is God’s kingly act establishing his rule in the world which brings into being the realm in which his rule is enjoyed… Jesus taught that the rule of God, which would manifest itself in his person, mission, and message, to those who would hear and respond. Before the eschatological manifestation was a

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manifestation of a different sort. God, who would act at the end of history to transform history, had invaded history in the person and mission of Jesus to bring his reign and rule to men.”

This work does not in any way purport to be turning tables against the landmarks or work that has been done by renowned scholars. In fact, there is a truce among New Testament scholars, which is based on the truth that the Apocalypse of John rests on the Greek’s symmetrical, theatrical, and dramatic performance – and hymns constitute a critical component in the narrative, theological plot.

In general, a lot of work has been concentrated on deciphering the symbols of Revelation, interpreting its visions and symbols, studying the sources of John’s thought, searching for suitable structure on which the theology is resting, its dating and authorship book, approaches to or methods of interpretation, and exegesis. Of late, few are beginning to focus their attention on the theology of Revelation.5

In the past there have been serious considerations aimed at establishing the literary, theological function of hymns in the structure of Revelation, but the issue of the Kingship of God as the theological motif in the hymns of Revelation, has not been addressed.6 Some of these studies, for example

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the work Harris,7 give attention to the literary function of the hymns and on the religious dimensions of within the narrative, but not on the Kingship of God. Du Rand’s8 work has attempted to address the Kingship of God in the hymns of Revelation, but such work was limited to certain songs or hymns, and other hymns were not dealt with, including the study of the Kingship of God as a theological motif in such hymns.

Koester9 has concentrated his attention on trying to find a contrast between the contemporary hymns and those found in the Apocalypse, and how they impacted the lives of the audience or hearers – but this author did not look at the motif of the Kingship of God. Ruiz10 studied the hymns of Revelation in relation to the Roman Catholic liturgy, but did not come

Revelation were vibrant with antiphonal relations, and that it permeates the entire narrative.

8 J. A. du Rand, “The song of the Lamb because of the victory of the Lamb,” Neotestamentica, vol. 29 (2), 1995, pp. 203–210; the writer demonstrates in the hymns of Rev. 12: 10 –15 that the purpose of those specific hymns is to provide a reason to praise God in their sufferings, and the same songs provide a “cathartic experience” for the faithful. The writer alludes to the Kingship of God, but not as a theological motif, but as context and object of worship. The author limits his work to Rev. 12 and 15 only. See also by the same author “‘Now the Salvation of our God has come…’: A Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12-15,” Neotestamentica 27 (2), 1993, pp. 313-330. In this work the author looks into the unfolding of the “Kingdom of God” in a general sense, not specifically in the hymns of Revelation. His contention is that those hymns (Rev. 12 and 15) constitute an interpretative commentary on the story that put its emphasis on God’s victory. Du Rand maintains that the readers or hearers respond on the basis of that victory. See also by the same author “A ‘Basso Ostinato’ in the Structuring of the Apocalypse of John?” Neotestamentica 27 (2), 1993, pp. 299-311. Du Rand, in this article, concentrates on Jesus Christ-event in the selecting hymns of Revelation, as a unifying principle, but he does not deal with the Kingship of God in the same hymns.
close to our topic at issue. Some of important works on the “Kingdom of God” which should be noted are that of Fuellenbach and Schnackenburg wherein they addressed the “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of heaven,” or “Kingship of God” within the Scriptures in general terms, but their thrust were not on the motif of God’s Kingship in Revelation. Coleman has done an excellent work in analyzing the liturgical aspects of the hymns of Revelation, but not the Kingship of God.

The work of Mowry is worth mentioning. The author analyzed the hymns of Revelation within the concurrence of political and religious or cultic imagery, but not necessarily the motif of the Kingship of God. The study of hymns from the standpoint of source criticism consumed the attention O’Rourke as reflected in his work, but the Kingship of God did not constitute the burden of his work.

The commentary of Preston and Hanson dedicated 18 pages of their work discussing the devotional aspect of the Revelation, particularly

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11 John Fuellenbach, *The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995). This author addressed the theme “Kingdom of God” in both the Old and New Testament, and also critically analysed differing views - “the already, not yet, and tension between the already and the not yet” with regards to the theme of the “Kingdom of God,” but for some reasons, he did not even allude to the issue of the “Kingdom of God” in the Book of Revelation.
within the 7 Letters to 7 churches, the “victory passages,” but they chose to analyse and dedicate only one hymn or song (Rev. 7: 12). Their book is about “glory” in the Book of Revelation, but in process they not only refrained from searching for the motif of “glory” within the hymns, but they also the missed the issue or theological motif of Kingship of God.

Kiddle,17 in his commentary, recognised the importance of understanding Rev. 4 and 5 within the framework of the three songs or hymns (Rev. 4: 11; 5: 9; 5: 13). He also mentioned that the rest of the story in the Book of Revelation is simply a commentary of those three songs. The work of Kiddle does a good work on those three hymns –although not addressing the topic at issue. Other hymns or songs of Revelation are not given their due attention.

The “new song” of Rev. 5 fascinated Hastings18 to the extent that he featured it in his book. He maintains that the newness in the song has to do with the “new hearts, new lips, new hopes, new graces,” and that the song will have “eternal newness.” For some reasons unknown to us, Hastings did not address himself to other hymns scattered in the Apocalypse of John. He does not even come close to the Kingship of God in the hymn of Revelation 5. While he recognises the importance of the “new song,” there are also critical issues to be considered – among others, the motif of the Kingship of God.

From the all of the above-cited works, particularly those that related to the state of our question, it is clearer that there have been discussions on the hymns of Revelation. Those discussions range from source criticism, liturgical aspects and, literary function, contrasting them with contemporary hymns, their usage in early Christian history, their symbolism in relation to political and liturgical imagery, to their function as an interpretative commentary, but not on the motif of the Kingship of God per se. This work seeks to stimulate and attract attention to this aspect of the hymns of Revelation – the Kingship of God as a theological motif in the same hymns.

1.2 Methodology

This work will employ the services of a comparative literary method, exegesis, and theological reflection for the purpose of analyzing and evaluating selected texts that contain liturgical hymns of John’s Apocalypse. The historicist approach, sometimes called “continuous-historicist method,” will also be employed, together with its “year-day principle,” to form a basis for textual interpretation, and also to locate a text within its relevant context.

The continuous-historicist method operates on the premise that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are to find their fulfillment within history – from the time of Daniel and John respectively, and finally finding their fulfillment when God ultimately establishes His Kingship or

Kingdom at the *Parousia*. The continuous-historicist method take into account the epistolary form of the Book of Revelation, and operates on the premise that there were seven Christian Churches in Asia Minor, and the text of Revelation was intended to be read within a worship setting. The continuous-historicist method views the visions of Revelation anticipated the second coming of Jesus Christ and the new heaven and new earth. The Book of Revelation allows for continuous or sequential movement in that John was instructed to “write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter,” (Rev. 1: 19). This text is an example, and it suggests progression, development, and unfolding of events and time.

The continuous-historical method takes seriously the fact that the symbols found in the Book of Revelation depict the continuing great controversy between the forces of God and those of Satan. This method not only appreciates the reality of the great controversy between God and Satan, but also highlights the fact that there is bright light to be ushered in by the second coming of Jesus Christ. This continuous-historical method of interpretation relies on the “year-day principle” (in which a prophetic day symbolises a literal year) in order to attach meaning to timeframes that are extensively used in the text of Revelation.

The “Year-day principle” serves the continuous-historical method of interpretation in order to locate the prophetic events throughout history. Jesus Christ employed the continuous-historicist method of interpretation when He explained the fact that His ministry was actually the consummation of Danielic prophecy.\(^{19}\) He again used the continuous-historicist method to address and expound on the prophecy of the
destruction of Jerusalem and its splendid Temple. Most of the 6th century Protestant Reformers subscribed to and used the continuous-historicist method of interpretation.

In short, the continuous-historicist method of interpretation divides the Apocalypse of John into two main segments, namely, (1) A historical section [Rev. 1-14] – this section covers the time of the church, and (2) An eschatological section [Rev. 15-22] – this second section concentrates on the end-time events or the time of the end of the world.

A critical analysis of other approaches to interpretation led to the selection and employment of the continuous-historicist approach - given the fact that it takes seriously not only the primary audience or recipients of John’s Apocalypse as expressed in the epistolary form of the Book of Revelation, but also provides meaning and cathartic experience to any reader or believer in any depressing situation in the life of the church prior to Parousia. A rational for considering the historicist approach will be addressed.

This work will attempt to compare relevant arguments, positions proposed by various scholars on the topic at issue or other aspects of this work, with the sole aim of arriving at what might be considered fresh, innovative, reasonable and biblical, theological understanding and function of selected liturgical hymns found in the Apocalypse of John whose focus and proclamation are on the Kingship of God. The Bible or Holy Scriptures will be taken seriously as the primary source in this work,

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19 Dan. 9: 25; cf. Mark 1: 15.
and other extra biblical material or literature germane to the topic will be treated as secondary sources.

1.3 The Structure of this Work

The Second Chapter deals with the theological introductory matters or the theological framework of the Apocalypse of John. Its main aim is to highlight and consider and recognise the author’s immediate milieu, primary and intended audience, context and background of his work. The introductory matters will address issues relating to the basic background of the book, namely, authorship and date, purpose and theology of the book, sources of John’s thoughts, overview of different structures, and interpretive models or approaches to the Book of Revelation.

The Third Chapter looks at the general theological issues relating to the Kingship of God in the selected books and passages of the Scriptures – both the Old and New Testaments. This chapter seeks to trace the Kingship of God in those selected Old and New Testament Books with the sole purpose of establishing if indeed there is a thread of the Kingship of God that spirals throughout the selected books of the Holy Scriptures.

The search will try to demonstrate that in the Old Testament the Kingship of God operates in two levels, namely, on “general” (His universal reign) and “particular” (reigning on His people) levels. This chapter will begin by tracing the Kingship of God from within the creation story, within the genesis of life and the account of humankind’s fall, with a special emphasis on how God shared His domain or Kingship with humankind, and how
the adversary, namely, Satan usurped it - and culminating in some passages of Scriptures in the Psalms and the Prophet Daniel, and other prophets.

The search for the Kingship of God will continue in the New Testament Books (the Gospels, Acts, Pauline Corpus, Hebrews, James, Peter and John’s Epistles), and this will constitute the second section of this chapter. Current debates with regards to issues of the meaning of and time of the Kingdom of God will be analysed and evaluated.

This section will try to demonstrate that the theme of Jesus’ ministry and mission, the proclamation and ethos of the primitive church, the hope of the Parousia, the Holy Spirit and His spiritual gifts to the primitive church, the ethical teachings of the Epistles, were all intended to establish the “Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of heavens,” and all people who responded to the Gospel call were to constitute citizens and subjects under God’s Kingship.

The Fourth Chapter will trace God’s Kingship within the Book of Revelation. God’s Kingship in the Book of Revelation finds its expression in His role as a Creator who is calmly sitting on His throne, in control of both the heavens and the earth, although His Kingship is still contested and challenged. The implications of God’s Creatorship in relation to the ideologies of the secular world will be analysed and evaluated. This chapter will demonstrate that history of this world unfolds theothronically or from the throne-centric perspective, and ultimately culminating in heaven at the white throne. Kingly roles such as sitting on the throne and the right to judge will be alluded to.
John demonstrates that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and blood, and the Holy Spirit play a critical and a decisive role in establishing the Kingship of God, in strengthening the saints, and also in defeating the counterfeit kingship and kingdom of Satan.

The saints contribute towards establishing God’s Kingship through their non-military resistance and witnessing which ultimately cause their death – but their death becomes victory through the Blood of Jesus Christ. This chapter will also seek to clarify the meaning and identity of the “Two witnesses” of Rev. 11, and the “Year-day principle” will be instrumental in locating the time of the “Two witnesses” in historical events.

The Fifth Chapter will focus on the Kingship of God as theological motif in the hymns of the Apocalypse of John. This work will limit itself to the ten main hymns of the Book of Revelation. It will be demonstrated that there is a progression in the liturgical hymns of Revelation wherein a song begins next and around the throne, and its ripples permeate the entire universe wherein the whole creation kneels to acknowledge the Kingship of God.

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21 Rev. 4: 1-11, (God’s Kingship expressed in God’s Being and Creatorship); Rev. 5: 1-14 (God’s Kingship established through the death of the Lamb – Jesus Christ becomes the object of worship, and then the event is celebrated by the entire universe); Rev. 7: 9-12 and 14: 4, (God’s Kingship expressed through the victory of the 144,000 and “a great multitude”); Rev. 11: 14-18 (God’s Kingship is forever); Rev. 12: 9-12, (A song that invites heaven to celebrate the first phase of Satan’s defeat in heaven); Rev. 15: 2-4, (God’s Kingship expressed in His vindication of His Character and His Saints through the judgment); Rev. 16: 4-8, (God’s righteous Kingship is expressed in judgment, through plagues and redemption of God’s people); Rev. 18: 4, 5, 20, (God’s Kingship demonstrated in son that anticipates avenging the blood of His prophets, saints and apostles); Rev. 19: 1-10, (God’s Kingship expressed in a song of restoration and redemption).
The last or **Sixth Chapter** will function as a recapitulation of the arguments made, make recommendations, and conclude the arguments advanced earlier in the preceding chapters. Our conclusion will attempt to show that there is indeed a threat of the Kingship of God that spirals throughout the corridors of the both the Old and New Testaments, and surfaces in the hymns of the Apocalypse of John. The theology of the Book of Revelation is not only entrenched in the visions or in its symbolic parole, but also in the Christocentric hymns of Revelation. This chapter will also highlight the contribution of this work to knowledge.
CHAPTER 2

A Theological Framework of Revelation.

2.1 Introduction

The Book of Revelation is one of the books that have a built-in benefit to those who spend their time reading it, yet it is one of the ignored books of the Bible. John wrote, "Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near." (Rev. 1:3). The book has built-in benefits or blessings, as opposed to confusion, for those who read, hear and apply the teachings of the book.

Some have identified beatitudes in the Book of Revelation. For example, Strauss summarily described them as: “The Blessed Challenge (1:3), The Blessed Comfort (14:13), The Blessed Cautiousness (16:15), The Blessed Calling (19:9), The Blessed Conquest (20:6), The Blessed Cherishing (22:7), The Blessed Conformity (22:14).” The English title of the book comes from a Latin word, revelatio, which in fact, appears in the Latin Vulgate. Apart from the built-in blessings in the Book of Revelation, John cautions us from the manipulation of the book. He says,

“I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book,” (Rev. 22:18-19).

Bauckham\textsuperscript{24} has rightly remarked that the Apocalypse of John “is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology.” The Book of Revelation set a stage for celebration, hope and challenge to believers.\textsuperscript{25} Pippin\textsuperscript{26} is of the opinion that the Book of Revelation was written against women.

She expresses her frustration thus: “The irony of the grotesque burning of the Whore is that the Christian utopia is itself an oppressive world (for women) ... But in the Apocalypse narrative, gender oppression is left untouched by the sword of God.” According to her views, female persons in the Book of Revelation are silenced and marginalized. Pippin’s ideas evoked critical discussions and responses from Schaberg\textsuperscript{27} and Robbins.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{25} W. Riley, \textit{The Spiritual Adventure of the Apocalypse: What is the Spirit saying to the Churches} (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1997), p. 139.


One of the leading reformers, Martin Luther, interestingly and surprisingly viewed the Apocalypse of John as “neither apostolic nor prophetic,” a book that was devoid of Jesus Christ because of its excessive use of visions and symbols. Martin Luther, notwithstanding his views in relation to the Book of Revelation, did not hesitate to use it against the Roman Catholic Church.

According to Lawrence, the Apocalypse does not rest its case until the world, together with those who refuse to align themselves with God's will, is finally annihilated. He describes John's Apocalypse as “a rather repulsive work.” The Apocalypse of John emerged from the rugged, depressing milieu and dungeon of Patmos - where John's spirits were intended to be crushed and broken - his voice forever silenced.

The visions of hope not only promised a relief to the Christians in the seven churches, but also offered therapeutic effect to John's current Patmos experience. The visions and messages of Revelation carried promises of destruction to the old order, and climaxing at the Parousia of Jesus Christ. This chapter will deal with some brief selected, relevant introductory matters – functioning as a theological framework. Those will include authorship, date, occasion, purpose, sources of John's thoughts, genre of Revelation, theology, interpretive models and literary structure.

2.2 Authorship and Date

The authorship and dating of the Book of Revelation have stimulated debates, and one can safely say that the best conclusive arguments for the authorship and dating of John's Apocalypse are still in future. Some current arguments are not far from the truth on the authorship and dating of the book. Issues relating to authorship and dating would still be raised even in future, and insufficient answers would still be given simply because ancient letters mentioned their authors and recipients, but not their dates.

2.2.1 Authorship of the Book of Revelation

The debate on the authorship of the Book of Revelation hinges on two arguments – namely, (1) the assertions by the author himself, and (2) historical tradition. On the basis of the text itself, the writer of Revelation identifies himself as John (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). The issue that keeps begging for answers from New Testament scholars is whether John, the writer of Revelation, was the same with that of the Gospel and the Three Epistles.32

The Apostle John was regarded as the author of Revelation until the 16th century when the issue of divergent style of writing was raised. From then

on the New Testament scholars' fingers have been pointing to different characters as the probable authors of the Book of Revelation. Different writers ranging from the Apostle John, son of Zebedee, his editor, John the Baptist, pseudonymous writer, John Mark, John the Elder, to an apocalyptic prophet, have been cited. Very few would argue for a “Gentile Christian,”

33 authorship. We shall briefly allude to those proposed divergent views whose aim is to resolve the problem of authorship of the Book of Revelation.

2.2.1.1 The Apostle John, son of Zebedee

Quite a number of scholars are of the opinion that the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee is the possible author of the Book of Revelation.34 Ryrie35 maintains that “The Hebrew idioms in the book, the authority of the


author in relation to the churches, the use of distinctively Johannine terms like logos and "Lamb of God," and the corroboration of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian and Clement all affirm that the Apostle John was the author of this book.”

On the other hand, Morris, among other authors, disputes and questions the apostolic authorship of Apocalypse on the basis of style of writing. Fiorenza pointed out or distinguished similarities between the style, vocabulary and theology of the Apocalypse and that of the 3 Epistles of John, but she does not see those similarities between the Apocalypse and the Gospel of John, and as a result of her views, she pointed elsewhere for the possible authorship of the Apocalypse of John. Poythress reasons that the three books - Gospel of John, Johannine Epistles and Revelation, originated from one person. He basis his conclusion on his studies focused on intersentence Greek conjunctions, in particular "kai," in Rev. 1-3. Anderson is of the opinion that the Gospel of John, 3 Epistles of John and Revelation owe their origin from the same John.

His argument is based on the writings and statements of Eusebius, the Historian, and also that there are similarities in those writings to warrant

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for one author. According to Sanders the editor of the Gospel of John is also the author of the Book of Revelation. Sanders argues vehemently for his position. The gist of Sanders' argument is that the Book of Revelation is a composition of two authors, the original author [the beloved John] and the editor who forced on it a fresh theology and theatrical order on the book. Sanders' argument is not convincing and conclusive.

2.2.1.2 John the Baptist

Ford sings a solo in her position regarding the authorship of the Book of John. She contends that chapters 4-11 came from the pen and thought of John the Baptist, and the rest of the remaining chapters [12-22] originated from the disciples of John the Baptist. This is one of the few lonely voices agitating for this position. The proponent of this position may have to advance substantial and convincing arguments so as to gain plausible position. It is quite doubtful that John the Baptist could have written the Apocalypse. John the Baptist died before Jesus Christ and the rest of the apostles.

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2.2.1.3 Pseudonymous Writer

The proponents of this position believe that someone who posed as John wrote the Book of Revelation. It is unlikely that the Book of Revelation came from a copycat. The proponents of this view may have to labour harder in order to advance their argument and consolidate their position. The book is not only apocalyptic, but it is also a prophecy and an epistle.

2.2.1.4 John, the Elder

Some are of the opinion that John the Elder wrote the Book of Revelation. For example, Gunther, in his article entitled “The Elder John, Author of Revelation,” contends that Elder John did not only write the Book of Revelation, but he was also a high priest and chief elder in Ephesus Church after returning from Patmos exile, and that, in terms of “personality and apocalyptic perspective,” he was almost certainly bound to succeed the son of Zebedee. Du Rand accedes to the view that John is the probable author might actually be implied in Lukan Acts 13:13ff and

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42 E. Lipinski, "L'Apocalypse et Le Martyre de Jean à Jérusalem," *NT* 11, 1969, pp. 225-232. Lipinski maintains that the author of Revelation was acquainted with the Apostle John, and he knew that the Apostle John had been recently martyred. The writer of Revelation, according to Lipinski, chose to identify himself with the Apostle John in order to convey the message through the Apostle's name. For further refutation of this position, see also Jan A. du Rand, *Johannine Perspectives: Introduction to the Johannine Writings - Part 1* (Doornfontein, Johannesburg: Orion, 1997), pp. 224, 225.


also from Dionysos’ account, but he immediately refutes that speculation as being inconclusive and unlikely.

2.2.1.5 John, the Christian Apocalyptic Prophet.

The current scholarship has not provided us with authoritative, conclusive and convincing arguments regarding the authorship of the Book of Revelation. The original recipients of the text of Revelation had no problem with the identity of the author of the same work hence there is no attempt on John's part to belabour the authorial matters.

For the sake of the scope of and accent of this work, it is reasonable to leave the task of determining the authorship of the book of Revelation to future scholarship - for it to excavate and unearth the truth. It would seem, without preempting future research and scholarship, that the conclusive literary material pointing to the truth relating to the Apocalypse's authorial issues might not be recovered at all.⁴⁶

At this point it is enough to state that the Apocalypse came from the pen of a well-known John, conversant with Old Testament Writings and Prophesies, “a Christian apocalyptic prophet,”⁴⁷ who at some stage, during the Domitian’s reign, was in the island of Patmos where he received his visionary message.

2.2.2 Date of the Book of Revelation

Once more, we can mention that during the New Testament era the apostolic epistles were not dated. There are two main contested dates as possible dates for writing of Apocalypse of John that scholars argue about. Scholars split comparatively evenly between placing the work during the time of Domitian reign - AD 81-96. For instance, Isbell, among others, supports the later date - that of Domitian ca. 95-96 because of external and internal evidence pertinent to the local church situation. He further argues that the usage of the phrase, “the Lord's Day,” and the related heresies could only apply to the understanding of the Christians in Asia Minor during the reign or Domitian.

The other group argues for an earlier date - in the seventh decade of the first century during the reign of Nero or before A.D. 70 – prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, and its temple. For example, Bell

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acknowledges the external evidence [especially that of Irenaeus' dating of the Revelation ca. 95-96], but still proposes a date that is earlier than A.D. 70 - in the sixties.

Robinson\textsuperscript{51} believes that John wrote Revelation between A.D. 64 and 70. His argument is premised on his understanding of Rev. 11, 17 and 18 as they relate to the events in Jerusalem and Rome around that period. He is of the opinion that there is no evidence that there were persecutions of the Christians during the reign of Domitian, except during the reign of Nero. He asserts that the number 666 in Rev. 13:18 refers to Nero.

Gentry\textsuperscript{52} has looked into the historical and internal evidence for a date prior to A.D. 70. His conclusion is that the book was written between 65 and 66 A.D. during the reign of Nero. The weight of evidence seems to be pointing towards the later date - that of Domitian around A.D. 81-96. Primitive tradition places the writing of the Apocalypse in Domitian's reign through Irenaeus' testimony that the Apocalypse “… was seen no such long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.”\textsuperscript{53}

2.3 Purpose of the Book of Revelation

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The primary focus of the Book of Revelation is to reveal Jesus Christ and the end time events (Rev. 1:1). The Apocalypse of John is written to demonstrate that God is in control. It reveals God seated upon the throne. It parades Jesus as Lord of Lords and King of Kings. It reveals Jesus Christ crushing His and God’s enemies with the armies of heaven (the church) following him (19:14). The decisive question in the Book of Revelation is: “Who is Lord, is it Christ or is it the Roman Emperor - Domitian?”

Jesus Christ, the Lamb\textsuperscript{54} of God, takes His role in Apocalypse as an instrument of establishing God's Kingship, both on earth and in heaven through His death, resurrection and His ever presence (Rev. 1:17-18), and He stands not only as the Lord who is coming soon (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20), but also as an object of our worship (Rev. 5:8,11-13). The Book of Revelation projects a “twin foci” perspective – “the person and ministry of Jesus Christ…” and “the experience and the destiny of the elect.”\textsuperscript{55}

His shed “blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,” (Rev. 5:9b). Jesus Christ is the central figure in the Apocalypse of John, and that Jesus Christ conquered Satan.\textsuperscript{56} The Book of Revelation arose out of a predicament. Some authors are of the opinion that there was no crisis, but simply a “perceived crisis.”

\textsuperscript{54} Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23; 22:1, 3.


For example, Collins\textsuperscript{57} is of the view that there was crisis among Christians in the Churches of Asia Minor, and that crisis gave birth to the Book of Revelation, but she does not think the imperial cult itself was a contributing factor, and that there was no real persecution. Her position is that there was more of a crisis of faith triggered by the extrication between the faith of these Christians and their social experience of estrangement.

She contends that the Book of Revelation is even more metaphorical or symbolic in its approach; it presents a brand of drama of catharsis (or “cleansing”) that settles the in-house faith-related struggles of John's primary audience. The internal evidence or the Book of Revelation points to the fact that there was an existential persecution and death suffered by John's audience or hearers.

According to Thompson,\textsuperscript{58} much of the bad reputation piled on Domitian arose only after his death, when the succeeding emperors (notably Trajan, who ruled from 98-117 CE) made Domitian a “whipping boy” in order to depict themselves as compassionate and generous rulers. Thompson closes his argument by stating that the imperial cult presented little or no direct crisis for the Christians.

Bell\textsuperscript{59} is of the view that there is no evidence pointing to the idea that there were any persecutions on Christians by Emperor Domitian. It is difficult to understand and accept Bell's positions on the basis that the apocalyptic


literature in general arose out of a stressful milieu and intense suffering, even death.

According to conventional views, the Book of Revelation arose out of an experienced physical persecution. The text of Revelation attests to the fact that there was an existential crisis of faith, apostasy, persecution and even death in the churches in Asia Minor. The very genre of the text of Revelation, particularly its apocalyptic style, suggests that the text of Revelation provides a “carthartic journey” in order to control the harsh effects of their (saints) current milieu.

Two scholars, Schüssler Fiorenza and John Gager take the view that the specific state of affairs that was menacing the Christians of Asia Minor in the mid-90's CE was aggravated by a new accent on the imperial cult in Ephesus, initiated under Domitian. Both authors indicate that the Christians were coerced to take part in the regal cult's sacred festivals, with an intimidation of chastisement or death if they resisted.

There was indeed an existential dilemma facing these Christians. Friesen has contributed to learning through his exceptional painstaking research.

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and findings aimed at demonstrating far-reaching archaeological proof for the existence and the function of the imperial cult in Asia Minor during the reign of Emperor Domitian. He maintains persuasively that there was a distinct presence of the imperial cult that set the agenda for and created an occasion for the writing of the Book of Revelation. He goes further to show how the imperial cult was not just a coerced participation in specific sacrifices or festivals, but was a more prevalent “social, political, economic, and religious dynamic” in the lives of the citizens of Asia Minor. The writer of Revelation wrote as a way of reacting to that predicament by clearly cautioning his audience of the lure of participating in secular society and royal cult.

According to what is being said by Lenski, the Book of Revelation "is the answer to the cry: 'How long, O Lord... Revelation is the prophecy of continuous triumph - triumph absolute is its end.'" It indeed emerged as a “response to a crisis, but one that resulted from the clash between the expectations of John and like-minded Christians and the social reality within which they had to live.” The text of Revelation expresses not only tension and frustration because of the oppressive status quo, but it also offers an eschatological hope to the faithful and to John, himself.

2.4 The Structure of the Book of Revelation

This section will look into some structures of the Book of Revelation. Some structures will be analysed and evaluated, but some will be mentioned with the aim of showing and demonstrating variations among them. The study of structure of the Book of Revelation is important, and in the same breath, also difficult because most scholars have come up with so many structures that are, to a certain extent, conditioned by their worldviews and different, and mostly conflicting interpretations.

Some scholars arrange the contents of Revelation in terms of a sequence of sevens, some precise and some inferred: seven churches (Rev. 2-3); seven seals (Rev. 6-7); seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11); seven signs (Rev. 12-14); seven plagues (Rev. 16-18); seven last things (Rev. 19-22).

Some partition the inside of the book in the order of four vital visions: (1) The vision of Jesus Christ among the seven churches (Rev. 1-3); (2) The vision of the seven-sealed scroll, the seven trumpets, the seven signs, and the seven plagues (Rev. 4:1-19:10; (3) The vision of the Parousia as the zenith of the age (Rev. 19:11-20:15); and (4) The vision of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21-22).

Some see three primary divisions which are based on Rev. 1:19: (1) “the things which you have seen,” - history, (Rev. 1:1-20); (2) “the things which are,” - present, (Rev. 2-3); and (3) “the things which shall take place after

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these things,” - future, (Rev. 4-22). Walvoord,⁶⁸ one of the scholars who prefers Rev. 1:19 as the possible division or structure, says,

“The advantage of this outline is that it deals in a natural way with the material rather than seizing on incidentals as some expositors have done or avoiding any outline at all, as it is true of other expositors. It is not too much to claim that this outline is the only one which allows the book to speak for itself without artificial manipulation …”

Du Rand,⁶⁹ among other scholars, has also engaged himself in almost an exhaustive work in his attempts of evaluating and assessing those various divisions before creating his own structure. Those divisions range from “chronological,” “numerical,” “theological,” “poetic,” “literary,” “liturgical,” “text-linguistic,” “drama,” “concentric,” to “parallel progression.”

This scholar cautions us that “We are too inclined to isolate and then absolutise only one possible division.” From Du Rand’s statement one gets an impression that one’s structure, to a larger extent, may not offer an exhaustive solutions, and it is often influenced or determined by one’s mode of or interpretive approach. It is difficult for one to remain objective when one is a product of his/her environment and learning.

Du Rand⁷⁰ describes his structure or division as “Christological word composition,” because all events in the Apocalypse orbit around Jesus

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⁶⁹ Jan A. du Rand, Johannine Perspectives, pp. 293-316.
⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 313.
Christ. The following is the proposed structure that is divided into three acts which, according to Du Rand, serves “as literary framework for its (the Book of Revelation) theological message,”

(1) “God’s involvement in the Church because of the Christ-event (Rev. 1-3),
(2) The unfolding of God’s plan of salvation and judgment in the Cosmos on the grounds of the Christ-event (Rev. 4-11), and
(3) The final unfolding of God’s salvation and judgment in the history because of the Christ-event (Rev. 12-22).”

Strand has rightly observed that the Apocalypse of John is “structured into an overall chiastic pattern in which prologue and epilogue are counterparts and in which the intervening major prophetic sequences or visions are also paired in a chiastic or inverse order.” Strand appreciates an aesthetic, symmetrical composition of the Book of Revelation. The following is Strand’s prepositional chiastic structure of the Apocalypse of John:

Prologue (1:10a),

A “Church Militant” – Church on earth, 7 churches (1:10b-3: 22)
B God’s ongoing work of salvation (7 seals) (4:1-8:1)
C Trumpet warnings (7 trumpets) (8:2-11:18)
D Evil powers opposing God and His saints (11:19-14:20)
D1 Bowl Plagues- 7 last plagues, Exodus Motif (15:1-16:17)
C1 Evil powers judged by God (16:18-18:24)
B1 God’s judgment finale (19:1-21:4)

Epilogue (22:6-21).

According to Ford,\textsuperscript{74} the Book of Revelation can be divided into four stages that are expressed in the Christian history. The following is Ford’s suggested composition of history, which is, to some degree, informed and premised on her view of the authorship of the Book of Revelation:

Pre-Christian Stages:
I. Revelation to the Baptist (Chs. 4 - 11)
II. Revelation to a Baptist Disciple (Chs. 12 - 19)
III. The Resurrection of the Firstborn (Chs. 20 - 22:15)

Christian Additions:
IV. The Prophecies to the Seven Churches (Chs. 1 - 3; 22:16-21)

Collin’s\textsuperscript{75} short and simple structure takes the following shape:

Prologue (1:1-8)
Part One: The Sealed Scroll (1:9-11:19)
Part Two: The Open Scroll (12:1-22:5)
Epilogue (22:6-21)

Talbert\textsuperscript{76} is of the opinion that the Book of Revelation rests on the following structure:

\textsuperscript{74} Ford, “Revelation,” pp. 46-50.
A. The Seven Letters to the Seven Churches (1:1-8; 1:9–3:22)

1:1-8 Title and Introduction
1:9–3:22 Prophetic Call and Seven Letters

B. The Seven Visions of the End Times (4:1--22:5)

4:1--8:1 The Seven Seals
8:2--11:18 The Seven Trumpets
11:19--13:18 The Roots and Role of Roman Power
14:1-20 The Seven Agents of Judgment
15:1--16:21 The Seven Plagues of Wrath
17:1--19:5 The Role and Results of Imperial Power
19:6--22:5 The Consummation

C. Epilogue (22:6-21)

Fiorenza\textsuperscript{77} proposes the following structure as the framework for the theology of the Book of Revelation:

1:1-8 - Introduction and Theme
1:9 - 3:22 - Seven Prophetic-Apocalyptic Letters of the Resurrected Lord
4:1 - 19:10 - Main Body: The Seven-Sealed Scroll; including:
Seven Seals (6:1-8:1); Seven Trumpets (8:2-9:21; 11:15-19); Seven Bowls (15:1, 5-16:21)
Babylon Visions (17:1-19:10) as an extension of the bowl septet
Inserted: Small Scroll and miscellaneous visions (most of 10:1-15:4)
19:11 - 22:5 - Visions of Judgement and Salvation
22:6-21 - Concluding Admonitions, Announcements, and Prayers

Later on Fiorenza\textsuperscript{78} noticed a symmetrical and chiastic structure in the Book of Revelation. The following is her proposal:

Once more, it is clear that several proposed structures are informed by different positions and opinions, hence a variation. It is also apparent that the structure of the Apocalypse of John has aesthetic value and symmetrically designs intended for oral presentation. The picturesque structure of the Apocalypse of John also encases hope-producing effect to the primary audience or recipients and the contemporary audience.

2.5 The Sources of John’s thoughts

John owes a debt for his thoughts to “the Old Testament, contemporary Christian traditions, apocalyptic and other Jewish sources, and the pagan environment of Asia.” It is evident from the Book of Revelation that John came from a Jewish background, and when one reads the Book of Revelation, one cannot help but be “plunged fully into the atmosphere of the Hebrew Scriptures.”

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Eller\(^{81}\) correctly concluded that the Apocalyptic John might have memorised the entire Old Testament text. Beckwith,\(^{82}\) in his book *The Apocalypse of John* maintains that John's "mind was stored to a marvelous degree with the ideas, the language, and the imagery found in the Old Testament and in apocalyptic writings." He (John) had obviously immersed himself into Old Testament Scriptures.\(^{83}\) He also drew "symbols,"\(^{84}\) unconventional and "composite symbolism"\(^{85}\) which are "true-to-life-patterns" echoing those "of course, in the art and literature of the ancient Near East,"\(^{86}\) and "concepts"\(^{87}\) from his immediate milieu, and also "consciously employed non-canonical sources at times."\(^{88}\)

Paulien\(^{89}\) advances two reasons for John's employment of "non-canonical sources" in the Book of Revelation - (1) Most of his readers/hearers came from a non-Jewish birth, background and they were part of pagan milieu, but they had assimilated the Old Testament into their lives; (2) "He used


\(^{84}\) For extensive work on symbols, see Jan A. Du Rand, *Johannine Perspectives*, pp. 250-257.


\(^{86}\) Ibid

\(^{87}\) Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, p. 32.

\(^{88}\) Ibid. p. 48.

\(^{89}\) Ibid. p. 46.
apocalyptic ideas as well as pagan imagery and practices as a polemic against aspects of the thought-world from which they came.”

Paulien had earlier argued that John's usage of “non-canonical sources” was not aimed at giving credit and recognise their theology, but that “The very thrust of Revelation is in violent opposition to much that the pagan society of the first century stood for (cf., e.g., Rev. 2:13-15, 20-23).” Anue in his “Now You See It, Now You Don't! Ancient Magic and the Apocalypse of John,” an Unpublished Research Paper read at the meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, GA., is of the opinion that John drew his ideas from the secular world for the sole purpose of analysing and criticising their irregularities.

It has been discovered that almost 2% of John's allusions came from “non-canonical documents.” Westcott & Hort have compiled a list composing of more than 400 citations in Revelation quoted from the Old Testament in their work entitled The New Testament in the Original Greek. John did not allude to the Old Testament directly, but he employed “familiar turns of phrase quite naturally.”

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90 David E. Anue, in his "Now You See It, Now You Don't! Ancient Magic and the Apocalypse of John," Unpublished research paper read at the November 1986 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, GA., USA.
91 Paulien, Paulien, Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets, p. 47, footnote 4.
92 Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort have compiled a list composing of more than 400 citations in Revelation quoted from the Old Testament in their work entitled The New Testament in the Original Greek (London: Macmillan and Company, 1911), pp. 612-618.
It appears that in studying the Apocalypse of John, it is crucial for the reader to understand the Old Testament Sanctuary and its related functions and symbolism because the Old Testament Sanctuary, to a certain degree, is the framework of the book of Revelation. It is interesting to note that Rev. 11: 1-2 echoes or alludes to the language of the Old Testament Day of Atonement, Lev. 16. For example, terms such as high priest, sanctuary, altar and people were crucial during the Old Testament Atonement Day. Davidson,95 in an attempt to throw more light to the understanding of sanctuary typology in Revelation, discovered that there are allusions to Old Testament sanctuary first apartment ministration, temple daily services, second apartment ministration, major Israel cultic festivals, Passover and Pentecost themes, Day of Atonement and Feast of Tabernacle themes. In his amazement, he remarked,

“It is not an overstatement to conclude that the final book of the NT gathers all the major threads of OT sanctuary typology and weaves them into an intricate and beautiful tapestry to form the backdrop for the entire book. In the process, the prophet reveals the centrality and crucially of the sanctuary motif for unlocking the structure, message, and meaning of the Apocalypse.”

A careful study of the Book of Revelation reveals that John was familiar with the Old Testament sanctuary services. The theme of or judgment motif in the Book of Revelation is embedded in the Old Testament sanctuary. The Book of Daniel is one of the books of the Old Testament

that plays a major role in understanding the book of Revelation. Lehmann made a striking observation regarding the connection between Daniel and Revelation. He concisely remarked,

“Many relationships between Daniel and Revelation are evident. For example, the worship of the image of gold in Daniel 3 and of the image of the beast in Revelation 13; the vision of Christ in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1; the fall of Babylon in Daniel 5 and Revelation 14 and 18; the God who comes to deliver His own in Daniel 3 and 6 and Revelation 14; the beasts of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 and 17; the times of Daniel 7 and Revelation 11, 12, etc. Both prophetic books overlap in their chronological data and ethical concerns... All these justify for every Christian the mutual study of Daniel and of Revelation.”

These two books, because of their scope and content, should be studied together because they also furnish believers with “great spiritual principle,” and they also provide the followers of Jesus Christ with “an

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entirely different religious experience.”99 Other Old Testament Books also played a significant role in the formation and formulation of John's thoughts and ideas regarding the Apocalypse.100 Paulien101 has discovered that

“Zechariah is... the most highly utilized book of the Old Testament in Revelation. In fact, 38 of 210 verses in Zechariah are alluded to (18.1 percent). Joel and Daniel are a close second (17.81 percent and 15.73 percent respectively). In addition, Revelation alludes to more than 2 percent of 14 other Old Testament books (Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Malachi). According to Nestle, only Ecclesiastes and Haggai are not alluded to.”

It is sensible for one to take the Old Testament Scriptures seriously if one desires to arrive at a reasonable and accurate interpretation and understanding of the Book of Revelation.

2.6 The Genre of Revelation

There have been discussions on the genre of the Book of Revelation in the recent past.102 The book of Revelation, as the title states, is about “an unveiling or unfolding of things not previously known and which could not be known apart from unveiling.”103 Bauckham104 correctly described

100 Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, pp. 46-47, footnote 4.
101 Ibid.
the Book of Revelation as “an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia.” The Book of Revelation presents itself primarily from three different standpoints – namely, as Apocalypse (Rev. 1:1), Epistle (Rev. 1:4, 11; 22: 21) and Prophecy (Rev. 1:3).105

Each of this standpoint or perspective serves unique and decisive purpose for both primary readers/hearers and modern readers/hearers. In fact, modern scholarship views the Book of Revelation from two points of view, “literary and historical approach.”106

The proponents of the literary approach maintain that the Book of Revelation portrays itself primarily from three different standpoints - as Apocalypse, Epistle and Prophecy. Those of historical approach point to the fact that “the book is a product of its time: namely, persecution of Christians in Asia Minor by the Roman Emperor Domitian, who like his predecessors, demanded worship of himself as a deity.”107

The reader should note that it is important to maintain a balance between those two views or approaches – historical and literary. We need to be careful not to emphasis the historical aspect to the detriment of or at the expenses of the literary approach. Each approach presents a one-sided view of the genre of the Book of Revelation

107 Ibid.
2.6.1 The Book of Revelation as Apocalypse

The book presents itself as a "revelation" or apocalypse (1:1). The Book of Revelation belongs to the Jewish apocalyptic genre of writings.\(^{108}\) The first apocalypse is deemed to be the Book of Daniel,\(^{109}\) the approach of which was emulated in a sequence of works.\(^{110}\) The Apocalyptic Books thrived during the inter-testamental era following the Book of Malachi simply because people felt the need to understand the anguish of God's people and the procrastination of God's kingdom.\(^{111}\)

These apocalyptic writings are sometimes called “heir of prophecy.”\(^{112}\) This genre of books was written some time between or from the era of the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes in 137 B. C. and or to the uprising of Bar Kokhba in 135 B. C.\(^{113}\)

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\(^{113}\) C. Wilson, *Revelation,* p. 11.
These books were not canonised not because they were deemed to be of no value. They did play an important role during the inter-testamental era. In fact, “by sustaining and intensifying the eschatological hope, they played a decisive, important role as a bridge between the Testaments,”\textsuperscript{114} during the development of Jewish religion.

The Apocalyptic Literature essentially evaluated the current situation in terms of the struggle between God’s Kingdom and that of darkness, and the victory over the current state of affairs or immediate enemy as seen in the light of or as a symbol of the definitive triumph of God over His rivals.\textsuperscript{115} Barclay\textsuperscript{116} rightly observed, “The Apocalyptic Literature was the product of and result of an undefeatable and indestructible Jewish hope.”

John's Apocalypse was different from Jewish Apocalypse in the sense that it is couched with “visual imagery,” and it also has a distinctive “unity and continuity of the visionary sequence.”\textsuperscript{117} As opposed to writing psuedonymously in the name of a long dead hero, John used his own name (Rev. 1:4). Instead of harbouring pessimistic view of the present and past, John gazed into the historical work of Christ as the foundation for current hope.

He was not despondent because of the past, but he saw it as the panorama of deliverance, and the Lamb of God as the only One who could unravel

\textsuperscript{114} Bauckham, "Apocalyptic," p. 74.
the problems. The Book of Revelation, especially its apocalyptic aspect, is beginning to dominate some cults. For example, David Koresh recently, after harbouring the thought and belief that he was an anointed one – the very messiah, the very lamb who opens the seven seals in the Apocalypse of John, died together with his followers.

In short, apocalyptic literature is “characterized by the view that the current world is meaningless, evil, wicked. God has given it over to destruction and in due time he will intervene and bring in the end of this age while inaugurating his kingdom.”

2.6.2 Revelation as An Epistle

The Book of Revelation is also in a form of a letter, and it is also vibrant with “pastoral touch.” John can be rightly addressed as a “prophet-pastor.” John's letter to the seven churches was informed by or followed the prevalent tradition of the “Christian apostolic letter similar to those

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written by Paul.” The letter was addressed to the seven churches located in Asia (Rev. 2:1-3:21).

Bauckham disputes the view that chapters 2 and 3 are seven letters, instead of one letter, and “that such a view misleads readers.” His position is that “These are not as such letters, but prophetic messages to each church. It is really the whole Book of Revelation which is one circular letter to the seven churches.” The salutations are similar to those of Paul's Epistles. While the book is vibrant with symbolism, it is also an existential book because it deals with real historical events, human names, places, regimes, human experiences and how God interact with humankind.

This feature of the book casts a doubt on the idealist approach to interpreting the book of Revelation. North, Meinardus, and Mellink, in their archaeological excavations, discovered and demonstrated the remains on Patmos and the location of the seven churches of Revelation cited in Rev. 2-3. Their works threw more light on the historicity of the Book of Revelation. Their findings, again, not only render the idealist

126 Compare Rev. 1:4 with Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3.
approach to interpreting the Apocalypse of John untenable, but they also contributed towards adding more credibility to the Scriptures.

2.6.3 Revelation as Prophecy

The Book of Revelation fits the description of prophecy (Rev. 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18,19) because it was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Revelation looks into the future to events that “must soon take place,” (Rev. 1:1), and those that would “take place hereafter,” (Rev. 1:19). Pauline rightly observed that

"Revelation points forward to a future sealing time (7:1-3); to a future "hour of trial" (3:10; 7:14); to a future redeemed multitude (7:9ff.); 19:1ff.); to a great final proclamation of the gospel (10:8-11; 14:6-12); to a final judgment (11:18; 20:11-15); and to a great, final battle (12-20) climaxing in Christ's coming (14:14-20; 19:1ff.), ushering in God's final, universal rule (11:15-17; 21-22:5). Thus Revelation is concerned with issues that are future from the author's perspective."

Taking after Old Testament prophecy, the book addresses and responds to the issues and needs of its primary and immediate context - the situation of Christians in the seven churches in Asia Minor. John, a Christian prophet, following in the footsteps of the Old Testament Jewish prophets, did not only see visions, but he acted out or participated in the unfolding

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130 Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.
of the vision. Hosea’s prophetic office involved his endeavor to express the idolatry of Israel through imagery borrowed from his own dysfunctional matrimonial circumstance.

Bauckham points out that there are two types of prophesy – the “reports of visions” which a prophet receives them and in turn share them with the fellow believers, and “oracles” that are “spoken in the name of God or Christ.” John’s prophetic messages echo and harmonise with that of the Old Testament prophets, but John

“Understands himself to be writing at the climax of the tradition, when all the eschatological oracles of the prophets are about to finally fulfilled, and so he interprets and gathers them up in his prophetic revelation. What makes him a Christian prophet is that he does so in the light of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic expectation in the victory of the Lamb, the Messiah Jesus.”

2.7 The Theology of the Book of Revelation

Most scholars have, to a certain extent, neglected the theology of the Book of Revelation. A lot of attention has been afforded to the “historical, textual, grammatical and literary issues at the expense of the interpretation of the Apocalypse…” The Book of Revelation deals with quite a number of thematic issues, and almost all of them are linked to and revolve around Jesus Christ.

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134 Ibid.
The function of Jesus Christ in the Apocalypse is actually described through the theological themes permeating the book itself. Jesus Christ’s primary, key function in the Apocalypse of John is that of the Lamb – gaining victory through His death, blood, victory and witness. Webster\textsuperscript{136} has briefly and pointedly described the centrality of Jesus Christ’s role as the Lamb, Son of man, King of Kings, Judge, Husband of the bride, Michael and Saviour, in the entire Book of Revelation. He said

“Revelation shows us the glorified Jesus – almost alarming in His splendor. But chapters 2 and 3 show us the gracious Jesus, reassuring us of His love as He still ministers to His people. In chapters 4 through 7 we see Jesus as the Lamb – sacrificed for our salvation, exalted in heaven, worthy to be worshiped, the One who controls the future. Chapters 12 through 14 picture Him as the “son of man,” the man child born of Mary, and also Michael, the champion who fights for His people against the dragon. In chapter 19 Jesus is the triumphant “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” who comes reaching down the avenues of heaven on a white horse, conquering all His foes. He is the Judge in chapter 20, the Husband of the bride, His Church, in chapter 21, and the Saviour who is coming soon in chapter 22.”

The Book of Revelation is about the Kingship of God finding fulfillment and expression in the ministry, redemption, death, resurrection, and vindication of God’s character and ultimately in the coming again of Jesus Christ. Quite a number of scholars are of the view that \textit{Parousia}\textsuperscript{137} as introduced in the very first chapter of Revelation (Rev. 1: 7),\textsuperscript{137} is the thrust


\textsuperscript{137} Moses Stuart, \textit{Commentary on the Apocalypse}, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845), p. 273. According to this author, Rev. 1: 7 is a “title-page” of the content of the Book of Revelation; See also David Chilton’s \textit{The Days of...}
and theme of the Book of Revelation. John closes his work with a yearning for the *Parousia* (Rev. 22: 7, 12, 20).

There are also two additional major, central themes upon which other John’s Apocalypse’s themes and theology hinge. Those are (1) the conflict between forces of good and forces of evil, and (2) the judgment of the forces of evil and the victory of the forces of good. The conflict between the forces of good and those of evil began in heaven (Rev. 12: 7-10), and in that war the devil was defeated and evicted out of heaven by Jesus Christ and cast into the earth (Rev. 12: 9-11) – and this war or conflict will reach its zenith at the eschatological end of this world – when God will finally establish His visible Kingdom.

While it is a conflict between the forces of good and that of evil, there are also major and crucial characters that play a decisive role in this conflict. Those are God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, ministering spirits or angels, and his followers on one side, and Satan, the beasts and his image, and his followers on the other side (Rev. 13:1-10; 2 Thess. 2:3; Matt. 24:15). This conflict is couched in visions and dreams, expressed in both prophetic and

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apocalyptic symbols and allegories – and these events unfold within a figurative, prophetic time frame that may be understood in the application of “year day principle.”

Jesus Christ, in the context of conflict against forces of evil, assumes both the role of “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” and that of “a Lamb,” (Rev. 5:5-6). The Jews anticipated the Messianic seed of David to emancipate them from the Roman oppression. John heard about the victory of “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and to his amazement, he saw the sacrificial Lamb. The sacrificial Lamb echoes Isaiah 53:7 and also the Exodus theme of the Passover Lamb.

Bauckham points out that “by placing the image of the sacrificial victim alongside those of the military conqueror, John forges a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death.” He points out that Jesus Christ is introduced by one of the elders as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” but the conquest is not in a martial style, but rather through the sacrificial death of the Lamb. The decisive, lethal missile aimed at the devil and his evil forces was released at the Cross-when Jesus Christ died a sacrificial death. The followers of the Lamb receive victory over their sins and against the devil and his forces through the blood and sacrificial death of the Lamb (Rev. 5:9; 12:11; 19:13).

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Wagnalls, 1886), p. 28. This author understands Rev. 1: 7 to be the “principal theme” that highlights “the fundamental motto of the whole book.”


The sacrificial death of the Lamb not only defeats the forces of the devil, but also is the very event and act that establish God’s Kingship, and that the Lamb is an agent to accomplish the same event. The war between the forces of good (under the leadership of Jesus Christ) and those of the devil began in heaven (Rev. 12: 7-9), continued on the planet earth (Rev. 12:9-11), and ultimately consummating at the Parousia where Jesus Christ would save His own from the presence, environment of sin and conflict (Rev. 1:7; 22: 12, 20).

Jesus Christ does not only intervene on behalf of His followers through judgment on their persecutors (Rev. 16: 1-17) and vindicate God character (Rev.19: 1-3), but He also gives His followers a higher status – that of sharing in God’s Kingship and also participates in Jesus Christ’s Priesthood (Rev. 5: 10; 20: 4-6; 22: 3-5).

The followers of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit and being freed from their sins through the sacrificial death of the Lamb, participate in the conflict through their sacrificial testimony and ministry that ultimately cost them their lives. Their witness and testimony is intended to warn the judgment-bound people of this world of the impending eschatological judgment to those who refused the Christ-event provision for cleansing their sins – and rather chose to alienated themselves from God with the aim of worshipping the beast or Antichrist (Rev. 13: 11-15). Du Rand\textsuperscript{140} summarises his throne-centric acts of the Book of Revelation thus,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Jan A. Du Rand, \textit{Johannine Perspectives}, p. 10.}
\end{footnotes}
“At the beginning of each act the throne scene dominates. According to the first act, chapters 1-3, the greetings come from the throne. The second act, chapters 4-11, narrates the vision of God on his throne from where the seals, trumpets and bowls as well as salvation come. At the beginning of the third act, chapters 12-22, the new born child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The story ends with God and the Lamb on the throne (22: 1, 3).”

This *throne-centric* approach, as observed by du Rand, implies Kingship and control. God rules from a vantage point because His Omniscience allows Him to see the end from the beginning – He is not caught up by events unawares and the earthly events are open to His searching eye; His Omnipotence allows Him to intervene, direct, control in and also provide meaning for the history of mankind. The plan of redemption begins in and is demonstrated and dramatised from the throne-room of God, in the context of worship. The history of the world unfolds from the throne-room point of view. The solution for the cosmic conflict and that of the immediate audience proceed from the throne of God.

2.8 Interpretive Models

There are several schools of thought regarding the mode of interpreting the book of Revelation. We will limit this work to the “four prominent interpretive approaches” that have been used by several scholars in their quest to finding a key that would unlock the codes of the Apocalypse.
2.8.1 The preterist method of interpretation.

The word "Preterist" is from a Latin word meaning “past.” The preterist interpretive approach, sometimes labeled “contemporary-historical,”142 sees the entire book of Revelation as the ancient history whose events take place during the author’s time and finding their fulfillment in 312 A.D., and not excluding the era of the conversion of Constantine to Christianity. This approach is usually ascribed to the innovation of Luis de Alcazar, a Spanish Jesuit around the 1610s.143

Examples of the modern preterist view are Morris, Hailey and Barclay. The proponents of this view identify the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as the main focus of Revelation. John’s vision of the beasts, in Revelation 13, is interpreted to mean the “Imperial Rome and the Imperial priesthood.”144 The messages of John, according to this view, are intended only for the encouragement of saints in their historical setting, addressing issues facing them in their context, but not to apply to any other context.

Future eschatology, according to the preterist view, is a foreign element in the apocalypses of John. The only future that is espoused by its proponents is that which follows shortly so as “to embrace things anticipated by

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John.” This future reaches to the early post-Apostolic Christian centuries. The apparent weakness or problem of this approach is that some of the predictions were not fulfilled during the time of John and after the post-Apostolic era. For example, God did not overthrow Rome, and saints did not gain victory that was promised in the Apocalypses of John.

It would seem that John's visions extended beyond John’s time – to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While the preterist approach does justice to the primary audience of John's messages, but it robs the reader of the hope in the future and also detracts the eschatological tone of the Apocalypse “by relegating the prophecies of both books [Daniel and Revelation] to the past. Revelation is not allowed to extend farther than the sixth century A.D.”

2.8.2 The idealist method of interpretation

This approach, which sometimes is labeled “non-historical,” or “ahistorical,” interpretation, states that John’s messages did not target any particular people and church in history, but it is a struggle between righteous and evil for the duration of the church’s pilgrimage until Jesus Christ comes. This view does not relate or derive meaning of symbols and allusions from either history or future.

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147 Boring, Revelation, p. 47.
149 Johnson, Revelation, p. 410.
The beast, according to the idealist's approach, is the Roman Empire and other ungodly empires that would succeed the Roman Empire. Christians have been persecuted in many centuries, so each generation should decide whom to be their beast. This simply means that any persecutor of Christians at any given time in the history of the Church is the beast. The main proponents of this approach are Hendriksen, Beale and Wilcock.

The internal evidence of the book of Revelation (4:1) disputes this approach because the factors of concrete events in history, names of places and persons, and also John’s future predictions militates against the idealist approach. The negation of historical context renders the interpreter vulnerable to subjectivity. While this approach to the interpretation of the Book of Revelation provides some comfort to the persecuted, it robs the original, immediate context of its meaning. This approach is correctly criticised by Boring. He said that idealist approach to interpretation of the Book of Revelation

"... Ignores or minimizes the specific historical references in Revelation to its first century situation, robs it of anything specific to say to its first readers who were facing a particular crisis, reduces its message to generalities, and denies its character as a real letter."

The idealist approach is untenable, and it subjects the Scriptures to the mercy of our own interpretation, instead of allowing the sacred text to speak for itself. John did not write to an unreal situation and people, but

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he addressed the concrete situations as indicated by people’s names, places and experiences.

2.8.3 The futurist method of interpretation.

This method sees the book of Revelation from chapter four to the end as proclaiming prophecies yet to be fulfilled. The future that is referred to is that which will be realised shortly but beyond our present time.\textsuperscript{152} There is also another category of futurists that is composed of most evangelicals – that of pre-tribulationism or dispensationalism. This category interprets Rev. 4:1–19:10 as occurring in a seven-year period still in future to us. The seven-year period, according to this view, commences with a “secret rapture” and climaxes at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

That seven-year period is actually seen as “the seventieth week of years of the prophecy of Dan. 9:24–27.”\textsuperscript{153} While the futurist approach focuses to the future, but it also "wipes the Christian era clean of any prophetic significance by removing the bulk of the prophecies of Revelation (and certain aspects of Daniel) to the end of the age for their fulfillment."\textsuperscript{154} This approach is almost unsustainable.

It would be naive to refrain from noting or mentioning the other modification of the futurist approach – that of moderate futurist. Ladd\textsuperscript{155} is

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” p. 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid. pp. 5, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{154} William H. Shea, Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, p. v.
  \item \textsuperscript{155} G. E. Ladd, A Commentary On The Revelation Of John. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 7-14; See also by the same author
\end{itemize}
one of the proponents of this approach. This approach does not recognise any difference between Israel and the church, and that the seven churches, according to this approach, do not point to the seven eras of the history of the church. The moderate futuristic approach virtually “is blending of the preterist and futuristic methods.” The beast, according to this view, is seen as both Rome and the “eschatological Antichrist” or any demonic power that persecutes the church.

2.8.4 The historicist method of interpretation.

The historicist approach, sometimes known as “church-historical” interpretation, states that the book of Revelation describes actual events from the time of the prophet John to the eschatological end-time. The historical approach has in itself two essential streams, namely, “straight-line” approach which sees history unfolding from an Apostolic age, proceeding and reaching its apex at the eschatological event of the coming of Jesus Christ, and the “recapitulation” approach which sees history proceeding beyond the prophet’s time to the end-time. The writer of this work subscribes to the historical approach because

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159 Kenneth A. Strand, “Foundational Principles of Interpretation,” p. 4. A number of early scholars subscribed to the Historist “straight-line” approach. Those were authors like Alexander Keith, Adam Clarke, E. B. Elliot, Albert Barnes, and others.
“The method recognizes that some prophecies were fulfilled in the prophet's day; some have found fulfillment over the centuries; some are presently being fulfilled; and some will find fulfillment in the end-time in connection with the Second Coming and the subsequent millennium.”¹⁶⁰

A number of early scholars subscribed to the Historist “straight-line” approach. Those were authors like Alexander Keith, Adam Clarke, E. B. Elliot, Albert Barnes, and others.

In a nutshell, the historicist approach acknowledges that the predictions of Daniel and Revelation are aimed at finding their fulfillment in concrete historical era – from the time of Daniel and John, to the ultimate establishment of God’s Kingdom at the Parousia of Jesus Christ. It would not be a far-fetched thought to conclude that Jesus Christ Himself applied the historicist approach when He introduced the fact that His ministry was the actual fulfillment of prophecy.¹⁶¹

The historicist approach in general has its critiques that argue that the approach is based on conjecture and more so that it is difficult to arrive at a mutual agreement on the meaning of symbols employed by John.¹⁶² The historicist approach sounds reasonable in the sense that it allows for “sequential historical developments or process”¹⁶³ of history. Strand¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Dan. 9:25, 26; cf. Mark 1:15; Matt. 24:15.
marvels at "the sequences of the seven seals and of the seven trumpets, the
seals being broken in succession and the trumpets being blown in
succession. Strand also maintains that the view of "sequences" or
"succession" are not only unique in Daniel and Revelation, but "the
extracanonical apocalypses have indications of the same. For instance, the
brief ‘Apocalypse of Weeks’ in Ethiopic Enoch 91:12-17 and 93:1-10
divides history into 10 successive periods, the last one embracing the final
judgment and introducing the eternal age.”

Strand\textsuperscript{165} fortifies his position by also citing Baruch's parable recorded in
chapters 53-74 “of a thundercloud which rains down clear and inky
waters in some 12 alternately bright and dark periods, finally reaching the
eschatological consummation. And there are number of other examples as
well, including the vision of the multi-winged eagle in 4 Ezra, chapters 11-
12, and the dream-vision of bulls and sheep (plus a wide array of other
animals) in Ethiopic Enoch, chapters 85-90.” Johnson\textsuperscript{166} is also of the view
that there is “genuine sequential movement” of events. His view is
premised on his interpretation of Rev. 1:19 - “Now write what you see,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Strand, Kenneth A., "Foundational Principles of Interpretation," \textit{Daniel and
Revelation Committee - Symposium on Revelation - Book 11.} Edited by Frank B.
Holbrook, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p. 17.
\item Ibid.
\item Johnson, William G., "The Saints' End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil," \textit{Daniel and
Revelation Committee - Symposium on Revelation - Book 11.} Edited by Frank
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
what is and what is to take place hereafter.” He sees a movement of events from the present to the future.

Johnson makes a case that there is an evidence of sequence in Rev. 12. He comments that “The woman is pregnant; she gives birth; the child is snatched away; the woman flees to the desert; she finds protection in the wilderness for 1260 days; the dragon makes war with the rest of her offspring.” Johnson rests his case by pointing out that in Rev. 13 and 14 the same concept of “genuine sequential movement” play a role.

History is seen as starting at a particular point in time in the immediate milieu of the seer, and moving towards the ultimate eschatological occurrence or coming of Jesus Christ. This approach interprets and accepts the first 14 chapters of Revelation as “historical,” and the remaining 8 chapters as “eschatological.” This means that the first 14 chapters of Revelation found their fulfillment in the life of the Christian Church, and the rest of the remaining chapters will be fulfilled in future.

Seiss and Bunk correctly argue that the seven churches in the Book of Revelation point to the seven segments of the church's history, unrolling from the period of the apostles to the Second coming of Jesus Christ. John’s technique of identifying and naming those churches reveal their distinctiveness. The historicist or “continuous-historical school” approach

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167 Ibid. p. 3.
to breaking the code of the Apocalypse of John seems reasonable because of the following reasons:

1. The Apocalypse of John was initially intended for God’s people in the churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1: 4, 11; 2:1). John planned that his epistle should be read in a concrete, worship setting. The futurist approach ignores this aspect of the Apocalypse of John.

2. The Apocalypse of John deals with themes that focus on the *Parousia* and the new heaven and new earth. The preterist approach does not see any light or activity beyond the time John.

3. John in Rev. 1:19 sees the cosmic history unfolding – from the present (John’s current situation), and future (time beyond John’s milieu and time). The visions of Revelation lead one to see a sort of development in prophetic time and history. For example, Rev. 12, 13 and 14 suggest that there is a sequence of unfolding events.

4. The Apocalypse of John not only deals with historical events, but it also focuses on symbols that encase

    “A philosophy of divine activity, a timeless portrayal of the struggle between forces of good and evil. Thus, Revelation brings more than hope for the second coming; it speaks existentially to all loyal followers of
the Lamb especially to those who are undergoing oppression.”

We have seen that the Book of Revelation has received and evoked both negative and positive responses. The Apocalypse of John, including that of Daniel, to some extent, has not been given the same attention as given to other New Testament writings. Although the discussions relating to the authorship of the Book of Revelation have not been exhausted – it will suffice to conclude that John, a Christian prophet, who was conversant with the writings of the Old Testament, authored the Book of Revelation. It is prudent to place the writing of the Apocalypse of John around A.D. 81-96, during the reign of Emperor Domitian.

John, a Christian prophet incarcerated in Patmos, wrote as a way of encouraging himself, together with the Christians in the seven churches in Asia Manor, to hold on and trust in God during their trying times – and also to reveal future intervention from God’s throne-room perspective. The Apocalypse of John was designed to yield therapeutic effects to the persecuted Christians. John was allowed to, in a visionary form, look into the conflict between Lamb, together with his angels and followers, and Satan, together with his angels and followers. Ultimately the Lamb conquers Satan through His death, resurrection and victory.

The Book of Revelation’s framework is the Old Testament prophecies and writings, and in particular, the sanctuary. The Book of Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy couched in an epistle. There has been several

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interpretations or approaches to understanding the Book of Revelation, and most of them are based on eisegesis instead of exegesis of the text. The theology or messages of the Apocalypse of John flow and rest on an aesthetic, symmetrical design that was intended for oral or dramatized presentation.

CHAPTER 3

The Kingship of God as a General Theological Issue.

3.1 Introduction
In chapter two we dealt with the essential introductory matters pertaining to the Apocalypse of John. This chapter looks at the general theological issues relating to the Kingship of God in the selected books and passages of the Scriptures. The observation of Rice\textsuperscript{171} is worth considering particularly at the beginning of our brief journey to theologically searching for and studying God’s Kingship in the selected passages of Scriptures and also in pertinent literary material. He remarked,

“The reign of God is a present reality, but it will not be fully realized until the future. As a result, we cannot identify the kingdom of God with any achievable state of affairs in the present, but we cannot relegate it entirely to the future, either. God is at work in the present, in spite of appearances. And he uses human actions to accomplish his work, although we may not be aware of it, so we can never abandon the attempt to live as citizens of the Kingdom here and now.”

Rice is basically saying that God’s Kingdom is both an experienced and anticipated eschatology. This chapter will search for the Kingship of God from some passages and events in the Old and New Testament writings. The aim of this chapter is to ascertain if there has been apparent, consistency in the Kingship of God in the affairs of nations and the lives of people. This chapter looks into shades of the notion of God’s Kingship. This chapter explores areas that are decisive to kingship, such as, the kingdom, throne, territory, subjects of the kingdom, and the law of the kingdom.

3.2 The Kingship of God in the Old Testament

The idea and reality of God’s Kingship are well developed in the Old Testament Scripture. Moses’ hymn, following God’s deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian army, although written later, states that

“Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of thy arm, they are as still as a stone, till thy people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased. Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them on thy own mountain, the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thy abode, the sanctuary, LORD, which thy hands have established. The LORD will reign for ever and ever,” (Exo. 15:16-18).

The song or hymn of Moses reveals God defending His Kingship against His opponents, the Egyptians, (Exo. 15:1-18) and this Kingship would be demonstrated and defended against other God’s enemies on the long journey of God’s Israel to the promised land, Canaan. This deliverance would later form a historical background to the Psalms. Later in the Book of Numbers 23:21 and cf. 24:7, reminiscing on God’s deliverance and also as a “basis of faith in the kingship of God,” Moses quoted the words of the prophet Balaam, “He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob; nor

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173 Cf. Exo. 14:21; Psalm 74:12-13; 89:12ff.).
has he seen trouble in Israel. The LORD their God is with them, and the shout of a king is among them.”

God’s Kingship in the Old Testament is understood on two levels, namely, in “general” and in “particular.” The Kingship of God viewed in “general” terms in the sense of universal ruling of God premised on God’s act of creating heaven and earth. The Kingship of God is also understood in “particular” terms in the sense that God’s Kingship was expressed over His chosen people, the Israelites.

While the Old Testament Scripture recognises God as the King, but the central New Testament concepts of “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” are foreign in the Old Testament Scriptures. The same concepts, namely, “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” were not central in the worldview during the rabbinic era, especially when compared with their employ in the ministry and sayings of Jesus Christ.

3.2.1 Creation and God’s Kingship

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175 Exo. 15: 18; cf. vss. 11, 14; 1 Kings 22: 19; Isa. 6:5; cf. vs. 3; Ps. 47: 3; 103: 19.
Moses, the writer of the Book of Genesis, introduces the reader to the God, the Creator, who created His realm or dominion or kingdom, heaven and earth, in order to establish His Kingship – (Gen. 1:1). God, according to Moses’ account in the first two chapters of Genesis, created all necessary and essential infrastructures for His kingdom – space between waters, sky and land, seas, vegetation, lights, land and sea creatures, and climaxing at the creation of unique creatures – male and female (Gen. 1: 1-2: 24).

The Kingship of the Creator-God may again be traced back to the creation account when God chose to share His kingship with the first created couple, Adam and Eve (Gen. 1: 28). The Creator-God did not only instruct Adam and Eve to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth,” but to start a process of populating the territory or God’s kingdom with people. He said, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” (Gen. 1: 28a). Adam and Eve were entrusted to their care the task of manning, managing the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2: 15). The act of naming objects and other creatures demonstrated God's Kingship over His subjects, and God shared a kingship act of naming with humankind (Gen. 2: 19, 20). Adam named his wife,\textsuperscript{179} and also named animals.\textsuperscript{180} Act of naming Eve was not intended to put her on the same level with animals, but she was to serve as the queen of Adam’s God-given little kingdom.

\textsuperscript{179} 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17.

The right to rule was given to both Adam and Eve. In fact, Eve was also royalty because she was created from Adam’s rib, (Gen. 2: 21-23). God’s act of sharing His Kingship with Adam and Eve at creation anticipated yet another act of God sharing His Kingship with His re-created, redeemed subjects in heaven and in the new earth.\(^{181}\)

The kingdom of God, namely, the Garden of Eden, had love-motivated laws that governed and regulated the lives of the subjects of God’s kingdom (Gen. 2: 16, 17). The subjects of God’s kingdom expressed their loyalty to their God-King through their love-motivated obedience or adherence to God’s laws. The God-King was also an object of worship and praise for His subjects because of His Creatorship and Eternal Self-existence.

3.2.2 God’s Kingship and the fall

The account of the fall of the first couple, Adam and Eve, as recorded in the third chapter of Genesis, hinged not only on falling from grace, but also on challenging God’s kingship through disobedience to His law (Gen 3: 1-5). The issue at stake was not only disobedience to the revealed rules, but also an attempt to usurp and replace God-King from His kingship and throne, or even to start a new, separate and independent self-governing state where Adam and Eve would be the ultimate gods and kings.

This rebellion or challenge to usurp God’s kingship would permeate through God’s dealings with humankind during the patriarchal era,

\(^{181}\) Cf. Rev. 4: 4 ; 5: 10; 20: 6; 22: 5.
through the entire journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan, through the establishment of the New Testament Church, and reaching its zenith at the Parousia. The fall of Adam and Eve is a sequel to or can be linked to the Michael-Dragon conflict, resulting to defeat and fall of Satan (Rev. 12: 7-12). Michael is another name for Jesus Christ.\(^{182}\) Minear\(^{183}\) has observed that Gen. 3: 15-20 is the framework of Rev. 12, and he contends that Gen. 4: 1-16 alludes to the same chapter – Rev. 12.

In a nutshell John, in Rev. 12: 7-12, recaptures a conflict, which originated prior to creation of the earth, which reached its climax at the cross.\(^{184}\) The original cause to the conflict was the Devil’s desire to usurp and dethrone God in order to be God.\(^{185}\) The Dragon and his commiserating angels were defeated and evicted from heaven, and there is an indication or suggestion that they are waiting for an eschatological judgment.\(^{186}\)

The Devil’s fall, together with that of his angels, preceded and caused the fall of Adam and Eve. Although creation was perfect when it came from the hand of the Creator-King, rebellion and evil have challenged God’s Kingship as a result, God’s kingdom or rule over all creation does not find universal recognition, and it is even challenged in the Old Testament.\(^{187}\) God-King devised and revealed a plan of vindicating His Character and

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184 Cf. Col. 2: 14, 15.
185 Isa. 14: 12-14; cf. Eze. 28: 12-17.
His Laws and also that of solving the issue of rebellion and sin committed by His subjects through - a promise of the “seed” of a woman Who would come and “bruise your [Satan’s] head.” (Gen. 3: 15). John in the Apocalypse alludes to this promise of salvation. The Lamb (Jesus Christ) is revealed as having been “slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13: 8 KJV).

3.2.3 The Kingship of Yahweh

Another concept is that of Yahweh as king, which is more prominent than that of the messianic king and hard to relate to it. God, in Jewish economy, is described *El* or *Elohim*, this entails that He is a solid appearance of divine reality. The notion does not have the dynamism of the name, but shapes a basis for its development as a basic devout experience. This understanding differs for Israel inasmuch as Israel’s God is truly God, i.e., sovereign, creative, and self-revealing as distinct from the natural forces that pagans symbolize in images or cultic actions. Such forces are inactive; they can neither help nor impel, and are therefore vain (Is. 44:9; 1 Sam. 12:21).

God, Yahweh-king, extends protection and demands obedience.\textsuperscript{188} His kingship is never ending.\textsuperscript{189} His Kingship is not being fully visible now because it has an eschatological dimension.\textsuperscript{190} Yet it is a present reality kingship. This is perhaps expressed in the so-called “Coronation

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{188} Cf. Num. 33: 21; Deut. 33: 5; 1 Kings. 22:19
\item \textsuperscript{189} Exo. 15:18; 1 Sam. 12:12; Ps. 145:11ff.
\item \textsuperscript{190} Is. 24: 23; Zeph. 3:15; Zech. 14:16-17.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Psalms.” Messianic viewpoints see the coming messianic king as ruling in Yahweh’s kingdom. Before the exile Yahweh is mostly the king of Israel, bringing tranquility to his special people. Later He is called King of the world, enthroned in Jerusalem and magnified by all nations. But Yahweh can equally well be called the Shepherd (Micah 5: 3) or Creator and Redeemer (Is. 43:14-15), so that His Kingship has no very specific content.

3.2.4 The Kingship of God in the Psalms

The Kingship of God is conceivably expressed in the so-called “Coronation Psalms.” These Psalms were first described and classified as “Enthronement Psalms” by Gunkel. These Psalms not only declared God as King, but they also reveal “His power to vindicate His supremacy, or Kingship, against all that opposed it…”

The “Enthronement Psalms” functioned in the liturgical setting especially in the “New Year’s Day, in post-exilic times 14 days before the Feast of Tabernacles, which was formerly Autumn-cum-New Year festival,” and this event “was associated with creation and judgment, essential features of the Reign of God in the Enthronement Psalms.” Zechariah (14: 16-19) echoes the same sentiments (in the context of cyclic festivals) thus,

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191 Psalm 47; 93; 96; 99.
193 Psalm 47; 93; 96-99.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid. p. 10.
“Then everyone that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain upon them. And if the family of Egypt do not go up and present themselves, then upon them shall come the plague with which the LORD afflicts the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths. This shall be the punishment to Egypt and the punishment to all the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of booths.”

Zechariah was actually echoing what Isaiah had announced previously. Isaiah prophesied,

“Therefore my people shall know my name; therefore in that day they shall know that it is I who speak; here am I.” How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the LORD to Zion,” (Isa. 52: 6-8).

The “Enthronement Psalms” not only functioned as a way of encouraging God’s people to celebrate those festivals with their focus on God as their King, but also to counter the “liturgy of the chief seasonal festival at Babylon, the spring new year,” which appeared to be similar to the enthronement of kings of Israel.197

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3.2.5 God’s Kingship among the Old Testament Prophets

Old Testament prophets understood the Kingship of God in terms of the future. It has already been mentioned earlier that the concepts of the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of heaven” were not central and did not even appear in the Old Testament, but “the idea is found throughout the prophets.” Nevertheless, the Old Testament prophetic writings anticipated the Kingdom of God in future. This future expectation of the Kingship of God, also linked to the promise of salvation, and also in the context of them being oppressed by other nations, was central in the Old Testament prophets’ messages.

Some New Testament scholars are of the opinion that there was a development in the prophetic hope of the “truly Hebraic.” There was, among the Hebrews, an expectation of God’s Kingdom to invade history – and this Kingdom would be within David’s family, but their hopes were shattered after their return from their Babylonian captivity. This Davidic hope of the Kingdom of God was replaced by the “apocalyptic inbreaking of God in the person of a heavenly Son of Man with a completely transcendental Kingdom “beyond history” (Dan. 7).”

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God’s Kingdom is also described in the context of “Israelites’ nationality” or within the framework of future restoration that is also linked to the future salvation – and this idea is premised on the desire that Jerusalem will serve as the place of throne. According to Schnackenburg, “The ark of the covenant represents God’s throne.” Ridderbos correctly observes that the promise of salvation and “The coming kingdom of God will be inaugurated by the great day of the Lord.”

3.2.5.1 The Kingship of God in the Book of Daniel

The prophecies of Daniel play a crucial role in pointing out a conflict between God and Babylonian gods (Nebu and Marduk) – and this conflict is premised on the direct challenge of God’s Kingship and Divinity. Daniel demonstrates through his prophecies that God is not only waiting to rule in future, but his Kingship is a present reality, and that God not only directs the course of history, but He is in charge of the universe – His domain. The theme of the Book of Daniel is that “God Rules In The Kingdoms Of Men.”

We shall limit our search to the first seven chapters of the Book of Daniel for the reason that the remaining five chapters (Dan. 8-12) are, to a certain extent, a recapitulation and expansion of the judgment motif that was developed in the first seven chapters. The five last chapters of the Book of Daniel unpack and elucidate, in a detailed fashion, God’s revelation, which

is couched in dreams and visions intended to give meaning and significance to human history, and also to demonstrate God’s Hand in the affairs of humankind.

There are three primary approaches to the Book of Daniel, namely, “preterist,” “futurist” and “historicist.” The “preterists” maintain that the prophecies of Daniel found their fulfillment in the past during the time of oppression by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). It is believed that the Book of Daniel was written during the Maccabean era – and this approach is sometime called “Maccabean Thesis.”

This approach enjoys a larger support from a majority of critical scholars and a bulk of commentators. The only credit that can be given to this approach is that it takes the immediate milieu of the prophet seriously. Gammie, as a way of refuting the “Maccabean Thesis,” maintains that the king in Dan. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 demonstrates tolerance to the Hebrew young persons, and this positive attitude is not consistent with what is purported in “Maccabean Thesis.”

The “futurists” project all predictions of Daniel into the future. The proponents of this view, which is sometimes called “dispensationalists,” maintain that “a gap of about 20 centuries intervenes between the end of


the 69th week at Christ’s death and the 70th week at the time of the end.” 207 This approach should be commended for the fact that it takes the eschatological aspect of the Book of Daniel seriously.

The earliest approach, “historicists,” maintains that the Book of Daniel contains events beginning from the time of Daniel to the time of judgment or Parousia. This method makes sense or is reasonable to the writer of this work because it “respects the historical intention of the biblical author… The “preterist” approach makes the Bible a lie, the “futurist” approach makes the Bible a work of science fiction; neither one seriously takes the historical data into account.” 208 This approach sees a sequence of events from Daniel time, expressed in the chronological sequence of the kingdoms till God’s Kingdom in the end of time destroys other secular kingdoms.

The “historicist” method or approach incorporates the “preterist” and “futurist” approaches, but the point of departure is not history or politics, but the text itself. We will briefly proceed to search for the Kingship of God in the first seven chapters of Daniel.

In the first chapter of Daniel, God’s people are in captivity in Babylon. On the surface, one may be tempted to conclude that Babylonian’s gods under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar had usurped God’s Kingship, but the truth is - God was in control because He allowed king Jehoiakim, together

with the Israelites, to be captured as earlier prophesied by Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{209} Daniel had a different understanding of their national captivity. He understood Babylonian captivity and Israeliic defeat in the context of Israelites’ disobedience to God’s will, and also in the context of a fulfilled prophecy.\textsuperscript{210} Daniel described the Israeliic ordeal thus:

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god” (Dan. 1: 1, 2).

According to Daniel, “… the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his (Nebuchadnezzar) hand…” Daniel ascribed credit to God’s Kingly initiative, but not to Nebuchadnezzar’s might or the powers of the gods of Babylon. Daniel distinguishes the Hand of God in the affairs of Judah and in Babylon. For Daniel, the disobedience of the Israelites against God’s revealed will occasioned their Babylonian captivity – just as the disobedience of Achan against God’s revealed will occasioned the Israelites’ defeat in the hands of Ai armies – and victory followed after Achan’s sin had been dealt with (Joshua 7-8).

The issue in Daniel chapter one is not the might of Nebuchadnezzar’s armies and gods, but the crux of the matter is that of God dealing with His disobedient Israelites. Nebuchadnezzar, together with his armies, was a mere instrument of chastisement in the Hands of God. In spite of Babylonian captivity, Daniel and his friends recognised God’s Kingship

\textsuperscript{209} Dan. 1: 1, 2; cf. Jer. 25: 11, 12.
\textsuperscript{210} Isa. 39: 5-7; cf. Jer. 20: 5.
and Deity in their lives through their loyalty in matters of food. They chose to subsist on God’s menu or diet rather than that of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and his friends did not see a dichotomy between worshipping God and eating. They did recognise any distinction between the act of eating and that of worshipping. Daniel and his friends regarded eating as a form of pledging their allegiance to God, and also as an act of worship. Paul also echoes this concept when he cautioned that “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,” (1 Cor. 10: 31).

Doukhan, commenting on Daniel’s choice of diet, and also perceiving a link between eating and religion, hits the nail on its head in his remark,

“Daniel teaches us that faith involves both the soul and the life of the body. That religion concerns itself with eating can disconcert mind-sets influenced by Platonistic dualism. It remains nonetheless a biblical concern. The first test humans faced involved a dietary aspect. Adam and Eve determined their destiny and consequently that of humanity on the basis of a very simple eating choice (Gen. 3).”

In the second chapter Nebuchadnezzar recognises the power, kingship and wisdom of the God of Daniel after Daniel had not only helped to recollect or revealed Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, but also supplied the interpretation of the same dream. Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery,” (Dan. 2: 47). Notice that Nebuchadnezzar himself accepted the present reality of God’s Kingship in the affairs of

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211 Dan. 1: 8, 12, 15; cf. Gen. 1: 29.
Babylon and in the world. It is worth noting the revelation and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as recollected by Daniel. Daniel said,

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever; just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (Dan. 2: 44-45).

The God-King, according to Daniel’s interpretation, would in future break into history in order to set up His Kingdom. It is apparent from this passage of Daniel that God has a plan to destroy all worldly kingdoms, and then install His kingdom that will stand forever. It is worth noting that God will give His kingdom to His Son, Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ will also in turn share His dominion, not with the secular kings’ people, but with His saints (Dan. 7: 13, 14, 18).

In the third chapter of the Book of Daniel, subsequent to Nebuchadnezzar’s act of defiance against the meaning of the dream, and following God’s deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the furnace of fire, Nebuchadnezzar passed a law, together with its sentence or punishment, which protected God from any blasphemy (Dan. 3: 47). Nebuchadnezzar, once more, accepted the reality of the Divinity and Kingship of God. The underlying issue in Daniel 3 was the object of worship and obedience – the God of the three Hebrew young people? Or
Nebuchadnezzar? Once more Nebuchadnezzar desired to usurp God’s Kingship and unseat God as the object of worship.

In the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel Nebuchadnezzar declared in the Babylonian Government Gazette: “It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has wrought toward me. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation,” (Dan. 4: 2, 3). The Kingship of God or the Kingdom of God is dynamic rather than static; it is not only a pie in the sky in the sweet by-and-by, but a current and concrete reality; not just a concept or notion or an idea, but a vibrant, real force.

Nebuchadnezzar chose not to ascribe honour and glory to God for His blessings and prosperity in his life and in Babylon. God revealed and interpreted the fate of Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel’s dream. Daniel said,

“This is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will,” (Dan. 4: 24-25).

Once more, God reveals through Daniel that He does not only influence decisions or direct the course of history, but also He “rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will.” In commenting about the
Nebuchadnezzar’s experience in relation to the Kingship of God in the fourth chapter of the Book of Daniel, Ferch\textsuperscript{213} said,

“All kingship, greatness, majesty, power, and glory is derived from the Most High (2:7; 4:25; 5:18). Earthly monarchs, good or bad, pagan or Israelite, exercise their kingship solely by divine grace and not merely by “legal right” or conquest (1:2; 4:36; 5:28; 7:6; 9:1). Even the “one like a son of man” receives his “dominion and glory and kingdom,” as do the “people of the saints of the Most High,” from the Ancient of Days (7:13-14, 27). …God’s supremacy is rooted in the fact that He alone lives forever (cf. 4:34; 6:26), that His dominion is endless (2:44; 4:3; 6:26; 7:9), and that He is accountable neither to the powers in heaven nor peoples on earth. Indeed, the inhabitants of the earth count as nothing before His majesty.”

God installs and unseats both sacred and secular kings – hence God requires that we should reasonably respect secular powers on the basis that He ultimately rules over the affairs of the nations (Cf. Rom. 13: 1, 2).

In chapter five of the Book of Daniel, Belshazzar looses his kingdom simply because he ignored the Kingship of God. The sin of Belshazzar led to his judgment, and his kingdom being divided into two. When he ignored the truth that he was but a steward of Creator-King’s territory (Babylon), God passed judgment on him, and gave the kingship to the Medes and Persians. The climax of Daniel’s message to Belshazzar was not only in interpreting the writing on the wall, but it was also in pointing out to Belshazzar that Nebuchadnezzar was dethroned “until he knew that the Most High God rules the kingdom of men, and sets over it whom he will.”

\textsuperscript{213} A. J. Ferch, “Authorship, Theology, and Purpose of Daniel,”\textit{ Symposium on Daniel}. Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Silver
Daniel went further to release his last punch on Belshazzar thus, “And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven,” (Dan. 5: 21-23). Once more, the issue in Belshazzar’s sin is that of challenging, ridiculing and usurping God’s Kingship in spite of knowing the ultimate King of Babylon.

In chapter six of the Book of Daniel, God demonstrates His deliverance by rescuing Daniel from the hungry predators. God’s act of delivering Daniel from the lion’s den demonstrated God’s might – and also threw more light to the fact that God is able to deliver, and in other instances He chooses to abstain from delivering His children – in this case, He chose to deliver Daniel (and earlier in chapter three He had delivered the three Hebrew young people), but chose not to prevent Nebuchadnezzar’s armies from conquering and leading Israelites into captivity.

Once more, the kernel of the sixth chapter of the Book of Daniel was the object of worship and obedience (6: 6-10; cf. Exo. 20: 3-6). God, together with His Decalogue, the object of worship and obedience, was to be replaced for a month. In His place king Darius was to be the object of worship and obedience. Daniel chose to recognise the Kingship of God in his life, and that constituted disobedience and treason against the laws of the Medes and Persians. God, the Creator-King, once more demonstrated that He is in control and directs the affairs of humankind and history – and also in charge of nature and animals (Dan. 6: 21, 22; cf. Mark 4: 39). He does not only control, but saves His servants.

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Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), pp. 52, 53.
The seventh chapter of Daniel deals with the judgment motif. The four beasts or kingdoms of the seventh chapter of Daniel recapitulate and reiterate the image of the second chapter of Daniel. God judges the “little-horn” for blasphemy, persecuting God’s people, and manipulating and altering God’s times and laws (Dan. 7: 25). Daniel, in his dream/vision, saw thrones, and one of the thrones was similar to that which Ezekiel saw (Dan. 7: 9; cf. 1: 27, 28). Doukhan’s profound comments on God’s throne, in relation to judgment, warrant our contemplative attention. He said,

“In the ancient Middle East, as a whole and in Israel in particular, judgment was a royal function. The king would make legal decisions while seated on his throne. This image of the king who judges is especially vivid in the psalms sung during the Temple services. The key expression “the Lord reigns” is usually linked to the notion of judgment… The vision of the throne, as part of the scene of judgment, also reveals the divine kingdom. Monarchy is not our idea of perfection. The people do not elect God, and His government does not include different political parties. In fact, His presence dominates everything and He has all control. Yet, such rulership was the greatest wish of the biblical heroes (Ps. 139:7-9; 33:5; 119:64; 104:24; Isa. 6:3; Num. 14:21; Hab. 3:3; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10).”

God is depicted as the “Ancient of Days,” and this description gives a picture of “king-judge’s eternity, a concept reinforced by the imagery of white hair… The Talmud alludes to this passage in Daniel when it mentions God’s hair as being black when He goes to war like a young man and white when seated like an old man.”

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215 Ibid.
Daniel introduces the God, Creator-King, who is in charge of His universe. In His Wisdom and Providence, He deliberately and intentionally and subjects His disobedient people to Babylonian captivity. In the process, the Babylonian discovered that God is not only the King of kings who inaugurates and overthrows secular and sacred kingdoms, but He is also a revealer of secrets and directs the course of history. The Book of Daniel

“... Encompasses the whole of history from a divine perspective. Beginning with Daniel’s own day history moves steadily and selectively to the establishment of the kingdom of God when all peoples, nations, and languages will render Him undivided worship, and His saints will receive and possess the kingdom for ever and ever. In the NT the end point of Daniel’s history coincides with the consummation of the kingdom of God. The Danielic kingdom of God is established after all earthly dominions are broken to pieces and the saints have experienced both the eschatological woes and the resurrection.”

In short, it has been demonstrated that the concepts of “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” were not used in the Old Testament, but the ideas did exist. God was understood and seen as ruling in the general affairs of the secular nations, and particularly in those of Israel. The Kingship of God was not only understood as the present reality, but was also expected to invade history through the David’s descendents, but their hopes were shuttered after their exilic era, they then anchored their hopes on an apocalyptic-transcendental Kingdom of God which would be realised after earth’s history.

3.3 The Kingship of God in selected New Testament Occurrences

The thread of the Kingship of God that began in the mind of God prior to time and creation knits through and permeates the New Testament writings. This section seeks to trace and follow the lace of the Kingship of God in some of the writings and passages of Scriptures in the New Testament to ascertain if the theme of the Kingship of God is an organizing principle in the New Testament Scriptures. This section will try to search through the Scriptural corridors of the four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, writings of Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude. The Kingship of God in the Apocalypse of John will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

As a point of departure, we need to mention that both New and Old Testament refer to Jesus Christ as King. In the Apocalypse of Daniel (7: 13-14), Jesus Christ is portrayed not only as the God-man who identifies Himself with humankind, but also as coming in the clouds of heaven and He is taken into the throne room where the Ancient of Days is sited on His throne to mete out judgment on the “Little horn.” The phrase “one like the son of man” refers to Jesus Christ. In many New Testament passages, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ occurs in the context of “clouds of heaven,” or at least, the clouds transport Jesus Christ. In the vision of Daniel 7: 13, 14 Jesus Christ is also seen coming in the clouds, but it is not the Parousia, but the framework is the judgment scene. It is within the context of judgment that Jesus Christ is given dominion – both power

\[217\] Jn. 1: 1-4, 12, 14; cf. Mk. 2:10; Phil. 2: 7; Heb. 2: 14; 4: 15.

\[218\] Matt. 24: 29-30; Mk. 13: 24-26; Lk.21: 27; Acts 1: 9; 1 Thess. 4: 17; Rev. 1: 7.
and terrain. The act of coming to the Ancient of Days and receiving a kingdom is alluded to in one of Jesus Christ’s parables. Jesus Christ is a King and He is referred to as the “ruler” (Zech. 6: 13; Micah 5: 2); He is the “Head of the Church;” and He has a divine throne.

3.3.1 The Kingship of God in the four Gospels

The phrase “kingdom of God,” appears approximately 51 times in the four Gospels – 4 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 31 times in Luke and 2 times from John. The Gospels reflect that the “Kingdom of God” was central to Jesus Christ’s ministry. It was the undergirding subject of His preaching (Mark 1: 14-15), also as revealed in the content of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), and most of the parables were intended to explain and describe the “Kingdom of God.” He performed miracles as a way of showing its nearness, for giving credence to it, and also for describing “the nature of life in the kingdom of God.”

The phrase “kingdom of heaven,” in the four Gospels, appears about 31 times – and all those texts come from the Gospel of Matthew. It has been

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220 Isa. 9: 6-7; Lk. 1: 33; 19: 38; Jn. 18: 36-38.
221 1 Cor. 11: 3; Eph. 1: 22-23; 5: 23; 4: 15; Col. 1: 18; 2: 19.
222 Ps. 45: 6-7; 132: 11-12; cf. Heb. 1: 8-9.
mentioned earlier that the word *basileia* means both “kingship” or “royal power” and “kingdom” or “royal domain,” in Greek and Hebrew languages.225 The phrase “kingdom of heaven” carries the same meaning with that of “Kingdom of God.”

The Jews refrained from using absolute statements about God because of God’s awfulness and God’s Divine Name – so that the word “heaven” in the phrase does not always refer to God’s domain, but to His Name. The word “heaven,” during the time of Jesus Christ, was a synonym of God.226 Jesus Christ used the term “Kingdom of God” when addressing a Gentile community because Gentile listeners were not conversant with that “Semitic idiom” 227 – namely, the “Kingdom of heaven.”

Ridderbos228 correctly accepts that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” refers to kingship and domain, but he also adds and argues “there is a personal connotation in the expression ‘kingdom of heaven.’” He continues to say, “The manifestation of the kingdom of heaven cannot be conceived as an impersonal metaphysical event, but as the coming of God.” On the basis of the former statement, we shall use the following phrases or terms “kingdom of God,” “kingship of heaven” and “kingship” interchangeably.

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228 Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, pp. 24-25.
There is no substantive distinction between the words “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of heaven.” 229

One needs to recognise that some dispensationalists see a substantial difference between the “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven.” The “King of heaven,” according to some dispensationalists, “Starting from the premise that all Old Testament prophecies to Israel must be fulfilled literally,” and that the Kingdom of heaven is “… the rule of heaven (God) on earth and has primary reference to the earthly theocratic Kingdom promised Old Testament Israel.” 230 The position of the dispensationalists needs to be further developed in order for it to earn or warrant serious consideration and attention.

There is also a need to mention that there were different views of the “Kingdom of God” during the era of the Church Fathers. For example, it was regarded as the very aim of the church; a concept and experience of the future when Jesus Christ would finally come; as the future millennial rule of the Messiah; Augustine viewed the church as the “Kingdom of God;” Catholicism perceived it in relation to their model of church governance; the Reformers understood it to be a synonym of the mystic church; Kant and Ritschl saw it as “an ethical kingdom” whose aim was to transform and enhance the values and norms of their current society. 231

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229 Ibid. pp. 11-12.
The subject of the “Kingdom of God” has attracted and stimulated debates among New Testament scholars. Different positions have been taken throughout the history of the Christian era. There is still a tension relating to the time of the fulfillment of the “Kingdom of God.” There are three main schools of thought pertaining to the time of the fulfillment of the “Kingdom of God.” Some point their fingers to the future, some to the present, and some to both present and future.232

(1) Weiss,233 among other scholars – including Schweitzer234 and some of his disciples235 - subscribes to a view that perceivesthe “Kingdom of God” as a near future event. This view did not associate the church with the “Kingdom of God.” Weiss and others accepted the fact that there are Jesus Christ’s sayings indicating that the “Kingdom of God” has been realised in the present, but such statements are interpreted to mean “prophetic visions.”236 From the analysis of this position, it is difficult and not safe for us to build a position that is premised on one perspective. One


233 See the work of Johannes Weiss, Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God, edited and translated by Richard Hiers and David Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, [German original 1892] 1971).

234 Albert Schweitzer, The Quest of the Historical Jesus, translated by W. Montgomery (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 229. This author agrees with Weiss’ view of the future, but Schweitzer’s understanding is that Jesus Christ expected to see the “Kingdom of God” in His lifetime or prior to or at his death. His view is that Jesus Christ was disappointed by the delay of the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus Christ, according to Schweitzer, changed His position – Jesus Christ understood His death and sufferings as substituting those that would be experienced by saints in the last days. Schweitzer’s views attracted interest from many scholars, particularly those who understood Jesus Christ within the framework of Judaism.


perspective cannot offer an exhaustive interpretation and understanding of the “Kingdom of God.” One will risk presenting a one-sided view of the concept of the “Kingdom of God” and draw a narrow conclusion.

(2) Dodd\textsuperscript{237} represents those scholars who maintain that the “Kingdom of God” has already been consummated; it has invaded the current time. This view is popularly known as “realized eschatology.” The parables of Jesus Christ relating to the “Kingdom of God” are interpreted to mean events and occurrences taking place in the present moment. The miracles that were performed by Jesus Christ are interpreted to mean, “The sovereign power of God has come into effective operation.”\textsuperscript{238} Dodd centers his views on two texts, namely, Luke 11: 20 – “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you,” and also in Matt. 12: 28 – “But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Inevitably Dodd had to deal with Jesus Christ’s statements that indicated and anticipated the “Kingdom of God” in future. To those statements with future connotations, Dodd interpreted them to mean persons who would be invited to partake of the blessings of the “Kingdom of God,” and also “… as a series of symbols standing for realities that the human mind cannot directly apprehend.”\textsuperscript{239}

Dodd\textsuperscript{240} has since reviewed, altered and refined his position in the light of the vehement criticism leveled against his position by Jeremias – and also

\textsuperscript{237} C. H. Dodd, \textit{The Parables of the Kingdom} (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1961).
\textsuperscript{238} Fuellenbach, \textit{The Kingdom of God: The Message of Jesus Today}, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{239} Ladd, \textit{A Theology of the New Testament}, p. 58.
conceded that there is an element of future in the statements of Jesus Christ. The gist of Jeremias\textsuperscript{241} criticism is that Dodd has presented one aspect of the “Kingdom of God” to the detriment of other perspectives. His revised position accommodates the fact that the “Kingdom of God” has a future dimension.

Once more we need to mention that the “Kingdom of God” needs a multi-facet approach that accommodates all sayings and statements of Jesus Christ. It is difficult to build a house using one brick. We need to mention that closer to Dodd’s view of “realized eschatology” was that of Bultmann\textsuperscript{242} - popularly known as “existential eschatology.” Bultmann frowned at the view that the “Kingdom of God” would be a future reality, and also criticised the view that purported that the “Kingdom of God” was a “realized eschatology.”

The gist of Bultmann’s view is that a person should make a decision “Now,” not in future or at other times, because “Now is always the last hour, in which his decision against the world and for God is demanded, in which every claim of his own is to be silenced.”\textsuperscript{243} Bultmann’s approach included “His famous demythologizing program in order to recover,” what he called “the essential understanding of existence contained in both Jesus’ eschatological proclamation and the early church’s eschatological outlook.”\textsuperscript{244}

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid. p. 131.
Once more, we need to mention again that one perspective or approach does injustice to interpreting and understanding the “Kingdom of God.” One-sided approach limits and provides a limited view of truth. A thesis that is based on a limited or one perspective tends to lead to a faulty or narrow conclusion. Bultmann’s approach is correct only if it is understood to be one of the bricks or perspective towards understanding the “Kingdom of God.” The New Testament scholars are like persons who each are looking through a keyhole with an earnest desire to discover the mysteries and meaning of the truth about the “Kingdom of God.” One’s view based on one keyhole perspective provides a limited approach.

(3) The third view is that which accepts the “Kingdom of God” as both a “realized eschatology” and a future reality. This view attempts to find a balance between the future and present (or even past). The proponents of this view acknowledge a tension between the “already” and the “not yet,” (as coined by Cullmann); between the present and future – and each of its proponents emphasize different aspects of the same view. The danger of this approach is to emphasis the “already” over the “not yet,” or the other way round – rather than to maintain a balance.


A careful analysis of the three above-mentioned approaches shows that one can safely point to the present, future and present-future/future-preset as the time of the fulfillment of the “Kingdom of God.” All these positions are based on the Scriptures, and largely on the sayings and statements of Jesus Christ. It is safer to maintain balance and accommodate the future and present as stated in supporting texts of Scriptures. If one emphasizes the future aspects of the “Kingdom of God” at the exclusion of the present, the concept of the “Kingdom of God” will be reduced to a “pie in the sky” in the “sweet by-and-by,” which tragically ignores the current reality of Christians.

On the other hand, when one places a heavy accent on the present to the degree that the future aspect of the “Kingdom of God” is compromised, one risks inferring that there is nothing beyond the present. If the argument is pursued, then one needs to provide an explanation for the anticipated Parousia. Once more, it is safer and reasonable to take a multi-facet or multi-dimensional approach to understanding the meaning and significance of the “Kingdom of God.” A multi-facet approach accommodates other Biblical-based approaches to understanding and interpreting the concept of the “Kingdom of God,” and also provides us with other aspects of the truth that might otherwise be hidden from our own perspective and angle.

The four Gospels have described the “kingdom of God” in concrete terms. For example, Jesus refers to the “kingdom of God” in the sense that people
are able to enter into it or not enter into it, the subjects of the “kingdom of God” are able to sit down and eat within it, the “kingdom of God” has a visible entrance - a door or a gate on which one can knock, and the doors to the “kingdom of God” have keys and doors can be locked. Aalen has made an excellent research on the concrete image of the “kingdom of God” which is sometimes described as a “pictorial image.”

The devil’s kingdom is also described in concrete terms – as a house and a city. There is a strong indication in the words of Jesus Christ that the phrase “kingdom of God” refers not only to a future consummation, but also to a present reality. Jesus Christ, “Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you,” (Lk. 17: 20-21).

The statement or reply of Jesus Christ about the nature of the “kingdom of God” has evoked lengthy discussions – especially to the meaning of the Greek term entos, which might mean either “within” or “among.” Some scholars rightly cautioned that if one prefers to use the former meaning (within), it would oppose and ridicule the concrete or pictorial image of the “kingdom of God.” While it is true that the “kingdom of God” is an eschatological reality, it also true that to the subjects of the “kingdom of

248 Matt. 8: 11-12; Mk. 14: 25; Lk. 22: 30.
God” or believers, the gospel of the “kingdom of God” provides, requires, and motivates believers to govern their lives accordingly and in relation to the ethics of the “Kingdom of God.”

This simply means that the “kingdom of God” is a present reality based on the “Gospel of the Kingdom” and Christ-event at the Cross, and will also be an eschatological consummation at the Parousia. This view appears to be paradoxical or one may sense a tension, but this tension is eased when we realise that “God is now the King, but he must also become King. This is key to the solution of the problem in the Gospels.”

Ridderbos254 accepts that the words “kingdom of heaven” refer to Kingship and domain, but he also argues “there is a personal connotation in the expression ‘kingdom of heaven.’” He continues to say, “The manifestation of the kingdom of heaven cannot be conceived as an impersonal metaphysical event, but as the coming of God.” The Gospel of Matthew reveals Jesus Christ, together with His disciples and John the Baptist, frequently using the phrase “kingdom of heaven” in their preaching.

For instance, John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and His disciples demanded repentance from their audience prior to and in view of the imminence of the “kingdom of heaven,” (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17; 10: 6-7). Their repentance had to be concretized in and symbolised by/through baptism. It seems that

The core message of the Sermon on the Mount was the “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God.”

The “Kingdom of heaven,” from Matthew’s perspective, belonged to those who sense their spiritual poverty (Matt. 5: 3). To be poor in spirit is to have an introspection of one’s sinful nature and recognize that one cannot save himself/herself, and that one is to be prudent in accepting his/her sinfulness, that we have no intrinsic righteousness of our own, to recognize our helplessness and hopelessness in an attempt to save ourselves, and to be willing to be saved only by God’s abundant grace and mercy. This text points to the character of those who have willingly and intentionally chosen to be subjects of God’s Kingdom.

The “kingdom of heaven” is given to those who suffer persecution because of their righteousness (Matt. 5: 10). The source of their righteousness is Jesus Christ, Himself. This text reveals the character of the citizens of the “kingdom of heaven.” The “kingdom of heaven” belongs to those whose righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and Scribes (Matt. 5: 20). The Pharisees and Scribes refused to recognize a close relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

They (Pharisees and Scribes) deliberately encouraged their audiences to listen and obey what they preached, but not necessarily pay attention to their lifestyles. The daily lives of those church leaders were entangled by materialism, and not governed by the Scriptural guidelines. They virtually, misrepresented and indirectly challenged God’s Kingship, and also refused to be subjects of the kingdom of heaven. The text at issue states
 emphatically that righteousness is visible and concretised in day-to-day life.

To those who pay attention to the laws and prophets, through their lives and influence, will be great in the “kingdom of heaven,” (Matt. 5: 17-19). The “kingdom of heaven” is promised to those who adhere to the will of God (Matt. 7: 19-20); it belongs to those who have faith in the words and power of Jesus Christ (Matt. 8: 7-12); John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, because of his mission and sacrifice, will be great in the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 11: 11-12); the disciples of Jesus Christ have been given the right to know about the secrets of the “kingdom of heaven” that were couched in Jesus’ parables (Matt. 13: 10-11).

In the parable of the good seed and weeds, Jesus Christ likened “kingdom of heaven” to the judgment;255 Jesus Christ likened its growth to a grain of a mustard seed and to a leaven bread (Matt. 13: 31-33); And finally, the “kingdom of heaven” is likened to a treasure hidden in a field and like a pearl of great value which must be secured at all costs by the seeker—including selling all what he has.256

Jesus Christ promised to give Peter the keys (the gospel of Jesus Christ) of the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16: 18-19); humility is a requirement to the entrance into the “kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18: 1-4); it will be given to those who receive forgiveness and in turn offer it (forgiveness) to their fellow human beings (Matt. 18: 23-35); it belongs to those who sacrifice because of it, and to those who have a childlike faith (Matt. 19: 12-14, 23);

the only requirement and qualification into the “kingdom of heaven” is God’s grace (Matt. 20: 1-16); Jesus Christ sounds a warning to Pharisees and Scribes for not accepting the “Kingdom of heaven” and also for causing others not to enter into it (Matt. 23: 13-15); And finally, Jesus Christ encourages humankind to prepare for His Parousia which is also linked to a judgment day (Matt. 25: 1-13).

It will suffice to conclude that the Four Gospels define, explain and express the “Kingship of God” through the life, mission, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ which are all encased in the sayings, parables, teachings and preaching of Jesus Christ, Himself. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God continued through the instrumentality of the disciples and followers of Jesus Christ after His ascension.

The thread of the “Kingship of God” is defined by the writers of the Four Gospels and experienced by the believers as the fulfilled salvific promises through the Christ-event at Calvary, and the anticipated cataclysmic consummation at Parousia. One can safely explain the “Kingship of God” as the promises fulfilled at the cross when the universal guilt was dealt with in order to provide mankind with the entitlement to the “Kingdom of God.” Our current sinful nature is being sanctified through God’s grace as expressed in our daily victory over the power of sinful powers and Satan, and ultimately we will be saved from the milieu of sinful powers and Satan through the Parousia.

It is safer to maintain a balance in the understanding and interpretation of the “already,” “not yet,” and “already-not yet,” with regards to time of the “Kingdom of God” – and that one perspective tends to offer a limited and
narrow view of the time of the fulfillment of the “Kingdom of God.” In short, the message of the Four Gospels is that

“The Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history, and consummation at the end of history.”

3.3.2 The Kingship of God in the Book of Acts of the Apostles

It seems that there is little dispute with regards to the authorship of the Book of Acts. Many scholars have argued that the Book of Acts should be named “the Acts of the Holy Spirit.” This is true in the sense that a turning point in the life of the primitive church begins on Pentecost day – at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, not when Peter preached to three thousand people (Acts 2: 14-47).

Peter, together with other apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, spoke to his multi-cultural and multi-lingual audience after his encounter with the

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257 G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, p. 91. See also R. L. Thomas, “The Kingship of Christ in the Apocalypse,” Master’s Seminary Journal [Sun Valley, CA], 3 (2), 1992, pp. 117-140. Thomas maintains a balance between the realised and anticipated Kingdom. He is of the view that in Revelation, the Kingdom of God will be predominantly but not exclusively in future. This Kingdom, according to Thomas, will involve (1) the entire earth, (2) the new heavens, (3) the new earth – and will be social and political while enduring opposition until the end of the present world order. He goes further to say that this Kingdom will last 1000 years, and then have an unlimited duration in the new order of creation. Obviously, Thomas locates Parousia after 1000 years and that his 1000 years includes opposition – surely these view are un-Revelation.
Holy Spirit. In the light of the below-quoted Lukan text, it becomes
difficult to give credit to Peter and other disciples and apostles, for the
growth of the primitive church or to the increasing number of the citizens
of the “Kingdom of God.” Luke writes,

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together
in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like
the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where
they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of
fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they
were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other
tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2: 1-4).

The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts gave birth to the community of
Christians, and the content of Peter’s message was the explanation and
definition of the agent and means of establishing the “King of God.”
Peter’s message took his hearers back to the Old Testament prophecies of
the Holy Spirit in order to provide meaning and significance to the
outpouring of the Holy Spirit, (Amos 2: 28). Jesus Christ had already
promised them that the Holy Spirit would come and dwell with them,
(John 16: 8-11).

Notice that the coming of the Holy Spirit is not only to give power and
utterance to the primitive church, but also that He (the Holy Spirit) is
linked to the act of judging the Devil. This gives us the impression that
Jesus Christ started the act of defeating Satan at the Cross, and the process
is not yet complete. The major defeat (Jesus Christ event at the Cross)
defines that the saints, through the Holy Spirit, will move from victory to
victory.
Luke, the physician, in introducing the Book of Acts to his primary reader, Theophilus, pointed to the fact that Jesus Christ, after His resurrection; spoke to His disciples for forty days – His discussions with His disciples hinged on the “Kingdom of God,” (1: 1-3). According to Lukan account (1: 6-8), Jesus Christ’s disciples were still concerned with the narrow, exclusive view of the “kingdom of Israel” – the actual and literal establishment of Davidic kingdom.

Jesus Christ had to help refocus the attention of His disciples to the power of the Holy Spirit that would not only empower and enhance their witnessing so that both believing Jews and converted Gentiles should subject themselves to God’s Kingdom, but also to widen their horizon with regards to the global nature of the “Kingdom of God.”

Although the accent of Jesus Christ’s disciples’ teaching had shifted from the theme of the reign or Kingship of God, Philip and Paul used the “kingdom of God” as the central aim of their preaching.258 The observation of Schnackenburg259 is worth considering. He remarked,

“When the apostles took over the preaching and mission of their master, we might have expected that after his death they would have proclaimed the coming reign of God which had already showed itself, as their central theme. What we actually find is an astonishing change, at least at first hearing. God’s reign is scarcely noticeable. A second theme occupies the stage, the gospel of Jesus, Messias and Lord. This very significant change in the history of revelation emerges from the account given Acts and from Paul’s epistles... It is even more significant that the reign of God is no longer mentioned...

in the missionary discourses. In the whole of the Acts it is introduced only seven times as against thirty-nine times in Luke’s gospel. On the other hand, the theme of Christ, that is the gospel of Jesus’ redeeming ministry from his baptism, and of his crucifixion and Resurrection, is central motif of these discourses.”

Schnackenburg’s view makes sense because he states the facts as they are. A closer study of the Book of Acts of the Apostles reveals that the content and thrust of the preaching and teaching of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus Christ had shifted. For instance, “Only once is the basileia made the object of εὐαγγέλιον αὐτοῦ (8:12); the person of Jesus occurs more frequently (5:42; 8:35; 11:20; 17:18) or other closely related expressions: the word (8:4), the word of the Lord (15:35), peace through Jesus Christ (10:36), the promise fulfilled in Jesus (13:32 seq.).”

The shift from “Kingdom of God” - theme, to “Resurrection” - theme, should be understood in the light of the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies and Christ-event at the Cross. One could say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ and its role in the salvation history provided a new meaning and understanding of the concept of the “Kingdom of God” among the disciples.

Many New Testament scholars have noted that the book’s title: *Book of the Acts of the Apostles* does not give an extensive account of the acts of the apostle as it does to that of the Holy Spirit – the Third Person of the Trinity or Godhead. The Kingship of God in the Book of Acts is expressed through the work of the Holy Spirit as He (the Holy Spirit) empowers, guides, endorses and directs the work of the primitive church as she witnesses
according to mandate of Jesus Christ - in order to bring everyone who believes her (primitive church) testimony under God’s Kingship. The Holy Spirit is the central figure in the Book of Acts. He is the Supplier of all guidance.261 The Leaders of the primitive church were full of the Holy Spirit.262 The Holy Spirit was the basis of their daily strength and courage.263


There were some orthodox and orthopraxy hiccups in the early church during the process of proclaiming the gospel and inviting both believing Jews and converted Gentiles to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. The content of the Gospel of the Kingdom had to be reviewed in order to accommodate the believing Gentiles since the membership growth had moved beyond the Jewish into the Gentile world (from Jerusalem, Judea,

260 Ibid. p. 261.
261 See Acts 8: 9 (He leads Phillip to the African); Acts 10: 19; 11: 12 (He prepares Peter for meeting with Cornelius); Acts 11: 28 (Inspires Agabus to predict famine); Acts 13: 2-4 (He directs in the ordination of Paul and Barnabas); Acts 15: 28 (He provides a solution for the theological problem of the Council of Jerusalem); Acts 16: 6 (He leads and directs Paul through to Europe); Acts 20: 23 (He reveals to Paul what to expected in Jerusalem).
Samaria and the rest of the world) per instruction of Jesus Christ (1: 8; cf. 8: 4-6).

The main issue that threatened the unity of the early church was “the age-old tribal practice of circumcision which constituted a pledge of allegiance to the Hebrew covenant with God, coming down from Abraham, “the father of the faithful.” And the issue at stake was “Should they (Gentiles) come to Jerusalem to observe the three principal feasts, attendance upon which was required of all male Jews (Exo. 23: 14-17; Deut. 16: 16, 17)? Should they look to the sacrifices as a means of expressing their faith in salvation?”

The obstacles to proclaiming the gospel were resolved, and this virtually “set the church free to grow, with no racial or national trammels to hamper it in reaching all men. The emancipation the early church received at the council was a most significant factor in its steady growth among the Gentiles during the apostolic era, and was reflected also in its spirit of freedom of and power in Christ.”

The primitive, early church, in her endeavours to prepare a people to be subjects in or under God’s Kingship, made advances through the preaching and proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Their (primitive church) efforts were met with opposition and persecution from without, and also exposed to internal threats by Judaism (Acts 15: 5).

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265 Ibid. pp. 32-33.

The ministry of subjecting everyone who believes under the Kingship of God took a different shape in the preaching of the early church – given that the emphasis had already been shifted from the “Kingdom of God” to the Person, teaching, life, sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the agent of bringing about God’s Kingship.

According Schnackenburg, Acts 19: 31 points to Jesus Christ’s Kingship finding expression through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, and that “The organization of the Church is an integral part of the advent of God’s reign,” and also that “the Church is the domain in which Christ’s saving rule is fully developed.” Berkhof perceives the “Kingdom of God” in relation to the church. He accepts the fact that the “Kingdom of God” is primarily an “eschatological concept,” and that

“... The rule of God established and acknowledged in the hearts of sinners by the powerful regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, insuring them of the inestimable blessings of salvation, - a rule that is realized in principle on earth, but will not reach its culmination until the visible and glorious return of Jesus Christ. The present realization of it is spiritual and invisible... While the Kingdom of God and the invisible Church are in measure identical, they should nevertheless be carefully distinguished. Citizenship in the one and membership in the other are equally determined by regeneration. It is impossible to be in the Kingdom of God without being in the Church as the mystical body of Jesus Christ.”

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It is clear from Berkhof that new birth or “regeneration” is secured through believing and accepting the meritorious act of Jesus Christ at Calvary, and also accepting and regarding Him as Lord (King) and Saviour are key to one’s status in God’s Kingdom. The church is not necessarily the “Kingdom of God,” but she constitutes part of it. Berkhof seems to ignore the fact that God is also the “Creator-King.” His domain and terrain encompass the entire universe.

The “Kingship” of God cannot be limited to the church, but it is transcendental and embraces even those who have not yet chosen to live under His domain. Ladd\textsuperscript{269} is of the opinion that “The Kingdom creates the Church.” He continues to explain “The Kingdom as an action that is likened to drawing a net through the sea. It catches in its movement not only good fish but also bad; and when the net is brought to shore, the fish must be sorted out.”

The Kingship of God was accepted into people’s hearts and this was demonstrated when, to mention a few, 3000 persons chose to accept the Kingdom of God in their hearts (Acts 2: 2-41); when 2000 received the Jesus’ Lordship and Redemption at Solomon’s Porch (Acts 3: 1-4: 1); When Samaritans or Gentiles chose Jesus Christ, His Lordship and Salvation, they actually received God’s Kingship (Acts 8: 4-25); The Ethiopian Eunuch chose to be baptised after discovering that the suffering and dying prophet of Isaiah 53 pointed to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and Him being the means of entering God’s Kingdom (Acts 8: 26-40).

Saul fought vehemently to protect what he perceived to be God’s Kingdom, and his zeal led him to persecute those whom he understood to be defying God’s Kingdom, and to his amazement, he discovered that he was actually persecuting Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah, the very agent of bringing about God’s Kingship – he then switched camps.\footnote{Acts 9: 1-19; 22: 6-16; 26: 12-18.} Cornelius and his household were invited to enter into the “Kingdom of God,” (Acts 10: 1-48; 11: 1-18); two households [Lydia’s and that of the Philippian jailer] in Philippi chose to become citizens of the “Kingdom of God,” (Acts 16: 6-34); The Athians were converted into the “Kingdom of God,” (Acts 17: 16-34).

The conversion of many Corinthians, including the ruler of the synagogue demonstrated the power of the gospel of the “Kingdom of God,” (Acts 18: 1-18); and the same was demonstrated in the conversion of the 12 disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus (Acts 19: 1-10).

\subsection*{3.3.3 The Kingship of God in the Pauline Corpus}

Paul, a devout Jew and a Pharisee, discovered that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was actually the Davidic Messiah, the hope of the Israelites. After the Damascus encounter and experience with Jesus Christ, Paul had to redefine Jesus Christ as the Messiah “… who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us,” (Rom. 8: 34). Swete\footnote{H. B. Swete, \textit{The Ascended Christ} (London: SCM Press, 1912), pp. 95, 119ff.} explains this interceding not to mean that Jesus Christ is
trying to conquer God’s unwillingness to forgive, but that of “a throned Priest-King, asking what He will from a Father who always hears and grants His requests.”

The word “Kingdom” in relation to God and Jesus Christ in the writings of Paul appears approximately 16 times. The phrase “Kingdom of God” is employed in several instances. According to Paul, sinners, sin and all unrighteousness including “flesh and blood” will not be accommodated in the “Kingdom of God.”272 Paul defines and describes the “Kingdom of God” as a place of righteousness, peace, joy “in the Holy Spirit.”273

The “Kingdom of God” belongs to those who are saved, righteous, those who suffer affliction for Jesus Christ’s course, and to those who spread the Gospel at all times.274 God’s righteous kingdom remains forever and it will not be shaken (Heb. 12: 28). The “Kingdom of God” is also called the “Kingdom of Christ,” and Christ’s throne is eternal, and He rules with a “righteous scepter.”275

Paul understands the “Kingdom of God” or the “Kingship” of God in the context of Christology and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Blair276 has traced the Kingship of God in the Old Testament. His thesis is that God has determined that Israel should be a spiritual kingdom. He demonstrated how the kings of Israel failed God through their lifestyle and leadership. For instance, “Saul’s autocracy,” “David’s numbering of people,”

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272 1 Cor. 6: 9, 10; 15: 50; Gal. 5: 21; Eph. 5: 4.
273 Rom. 14: 17; cf. 1 Cor. 4: 20.
274 Col. 1: 13; 4: 11; 2 Tim. 4: 1, 18.
275 Eph. 5: 4; Heb. 1: 8.
“Solomon’s marriage alliances,” “Hezekiah’s politics with implication,” and “Josiah’s interference with Egypt.”

Blair\textsuperscript{277} is of the opinion that the church today, by implication based on the Old Testament God’s Kingship, is to be subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The church is to minister through the gospel to the world, and also “making effective divine powers as powers of the New Age,” and also inviting the world to submit itself under the rulership of God. Paul understood the “Kingdom of God” in an eschatological sense or as a future reality.\textsuperscript{278}

\textbf{3.3.4 The Kingship of God in the Book of Hebrews}

This section searches for the indications of the “Kingship of God” in the Book of Hebrews. The author of the Book of Hebrews assumes that his readers are aware of its author hence he does not append his signature to his work. Theological and scholarly radar devices have been pointing to different directions in an attempt to establish and resolve the issue of the “authorship and the destination”\textsuperscript{279} of the Book of Hebrews.

\textsuperscript{276} Hugh J. Blair, “Kingship in Israel and its implications for the Lordship of Christ today,” \textit{Evangelical Quarterly} 47 (2), pp. 70-77.
\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{278} Schnackenburg, \textit{God’s Rule and Kingdom}, p. 286.
There are possible suggested authors throughout the history of the Christian Church – authors such as Barnabas (as suggested by Tertullian), Apollos (as suggested by Martin Luther), Priscilla (as suggested by Harnack), by Timothy (as suggested by other traditions), Saint Luke, Barnabas, and out of frustration, Origen remarked: “But who wrote the epistle, to be sure, only God knows.”

There are some strong indications that Paul might have written this “essay” (Heb. 1: 1-2), or “sermon” (Heb. 2: 1-4), or “epistle” (Heb. 13: 23-25). The task and focus of this work is not to attempt to deal with authorial matters, but with the “Kingship of God.” The key character in the Book of Hebrews is Jesus Christ who is described as greater than prophets because of the unique mode of His revelation of God (Heb. 1: 1-3); He is higher than angels because of His Divinity and Humanity, (Heb. 1: 4-2: 18); He is better than Moses in the sense that He granted rest for His people (Heb. 3: 1–4: 13).

His Priesthood is more than that of Aaron’s because He was actually the sacrifice (Heb. 4: 16-8: 6). Second to Jesus Christ’s position, the covenant is also central in the Book of Hebrews. The new covenant is superior to the old covenant not because of its intrinsic defect and inferiority, but simply because God found imperfections with the people of Israel, but the defect was not with the old covenant (He 8:7-10:18).

This new covenant is based on “better promises,” (He 8:7-13); premised on a better sanctuary (Heb. 9: 1-28), and it is also rooted on a “better sacrifice,” (Heb. 10: 1-18). The remaining chapters of the Book of Hebrews deal with the focus of the recipients’ attention. The author entreats his audience to
anchor their faith on Jesus Christ. The Hebrews had to gain knowledge of not looking at peripheral things any longer, but to look by faith to the hidden, glorified Christ and Lord\textsuperscript{280}—just as their forefathers had lived by this faith. But the greatest model was Christ Himself.

The author of the Book of Hebrews in chapter 1: 5-9 alludes to Psalms 45: 6-8 in applying the royal or “Kingship” language such as “divine throne,” “Lord,” “God,” “royal sceptre,” “righteous sceptre,” “throne,” and the “kingdom” that last forever. The author of the Book of Hebrews identifies Jesus Christ as God’s medium of communicating with the world; an agent of creation and salvation, and ultimately Jesus Christ subdues God’s enemies and make them His footstool. God’s Kingship is expressed and accomplished through Jesus Christ. God creates His Kingdom, saves His people and conquers His enemies through Jesus Christ.

The recipients of the Book of Hebrews were to look to him and to better things he had innovated (Heb. 11-12). That stance is applied to practical circumstances. The letter closes with reprimands and compliments to the subjects of God’s Kingdom - aimed at leading them to live a life aligned to and consistent with the ethics of the “Kingdom of God” as expressed in the immutable character of Jesus Christ and promises of God (Heb. 13). The underlying message is that there are forces which might attempt to lure the Hebrews out of the “Kingdom of God” into the opposing and enemy kingdom – that of Satan.

\textsuperscript{280} Jesus Christ is referred to as Lord several times – Heb. 7: 21; 8: 8, 11; 10: 16, 30.
In the Epistle or Book or Sermon to the Hebrews, the “Kingship of God” is premised on and articulated through the Creatorship, Priesthood, redemptive sacrifice and better ministry and promises of Jesus Christ, whose Deity and Humanity are crucial in the new covenant. Believers are to testify through their lives of or about the power of God in keeping and ultimately saving them.

3.3.5 The Kingship of God in the Book of James

The author of this epistle was in all likelihood James the son of Alphæus, and our Lord Jesus’ brother. It was written from Jerusalem, which St. James does not seem to have ever left. Although the date of Epistle of James cannot be precisely established, it is reasonable to conclude that the letter was probably written about or before A. D. 62, during the period between Paul’s two incarcerations. Unlike other general epistles, the epistle of James was not fully accepted and had to negotiate its way into the canon.

Martin Luther viewed the Epistle of James as “the epistle of straw” simply because it did not address Christological issues in a Pauline fashion, and also that its ethical teachings are not Christ-centred.281 The Epistle of James encourages the Gentile Christians and Jews everywhere to grow in moral principles of the “Kingdom of God.” James closes the gap between theory and praxis, between profession and practice, and between being

and doing. The crucial, main focus of the Epistle of James is not to teach doctrine, but to improve on morality.

The Apostle James is regarded as the ethical teacher of the New Testament. He wrote for the Jewish Christians and Gentiles, whether in Jerusalem or abroad, to warn them against the sins to which as Jews they were most liable, and to console and exhort them under the sufferings to which as Christians they were most exposed. The Epistle of James focuses on three major themes, namely, the (1) genuine religion expressing itself in deeds and words of kindness, (James 1: 2-27); (2) genuine trust or unwavering faith in God concretising itself in practical life (James 2: 1-3: 12); and (3) genuine, ultimate astuteness or wisdom whose origin is God (James 3: 13 – 5: 13-20).

In simpler terms, James deals with the inevitable results or ethics of one who is a citizen of the “Kingdom of God.” James raises issues with and challenges those who claim to be subjects of God’s Kingship, but still do not take responsibility of being victorious against temptations, instead, blame God for their temptations (James 1: 13), to those who do not treat their fellow brethren equally (James 2: 1-7), to those who do not act out their faith (James 2: 14-26), to those who do harm than good with their tongue (James 3: 2ff.), to those who do not help curb conflicts and strife (4: 1ff.).

The Apostle James in James 1: 27 provides his readers with a simple definition of a pure religion. He says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” One’s citizenship
in God’s Kingdom and under God’s Kingship is expressed in accepting the brotherhood of all humankind. James simply says that taking care of the needs of the needy constitutes worship. James advocates for the ethics of God’s Kingdom expressed in a folded-sleeve Christianity. The last part of the text (James 1: 27) addresses one’s relation with God – the Fatherhood of God.

In short, James assumes that his readers have already gone through and understood, accepted and experienced issues relating to Christology as their motive for their ethics. James cautions his readers to further understand God’s and our role in temptations, our responsibility to our fellow brethren, and also concretise their belief in praxis.

### 3.3.6 The Kingship of God in Peter’s Epistles

This section will attempt to search for the clues to the Kingship of God in the two Epistles of Peter.

#### 3.3.6.1 The Kingship of God in the 1st Epistle of Peter

There is a general consensus regarding the authorship of the First Epistle of Peter, and also the message and language reflect that of Peter’s sermon in the Book of Acts (Acts 2: 14-40). The purpose of this epistle was to offer encouragement to Christians who were going through trials and persecutions under the Roman Empire. The first Epistle of Peter addresses and expresses God’s Kingship in the several general theological themes. Peter looks at approximately five major theological themes in his First
Epistle, namely, (1) The Character of the Creator-God,\textsuperscript{282} (2) Exhortation to God’s followers in the face of persecution,\textsuperscript{283} (3) encouragement on marital relations,\textsuperscript{284} (4) Issues around Christology\textsuperscript{285} and Parousia,\textsuperscript{286} (5) The liturgical\textsuperscript{287} and ecclesiological\textsuperscript{288} issues, and (6) Christian Ethics.\textsuperscript{289}

Peter prepares his audience for being informed citizens of the Kingdom of God while they are pilgrims on earth, and also gives them gleams of life during and after Parousia. God’s Kingship, according to Peter, has been achieved through the blood of Jesus Christ, and His saints constitute the subjects of the Kingdom through their allegiance with and commitment to Jesus Christ.

### 3.3.6.2 The Kingship of God in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Epistle of Peter

The Second Epistle of Peter addresses different issues. It seems, from the content of the same Epistle, the recipients of Peter’s Second Epistle were in danger of deception and imbibing false teachings by false teachers. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{282} 1 Pet. 1: 14-17 (God’s righteous judgments); 1: 3 (His relationship with Jesus Christ); 3: 17 cf. 4: 19; 5: 6, 10 (He provides strength and assurance for victory to His suffering followers); 5: 5 (He judges the wicked) and 3: 20 cf. 5: 12 (He vindicates and redeems the saints);
  \item \textsuperscript{283} 1 Pet. 1: 6-7; 3: 16-17; 4: 12-19; 5: 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{284} 1 Pet. 3: 1-7.
  \item \textsuperscript{285} 1 Pet. 1: 11; 2: 7-8, 21; 3: 15, 18; 4: 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{286} 1 Pet. 1: 5, 7, 13; 2: 12; 4: 13, 17; 5: 1, 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{287} 1 Pet. 3: 20-22; 1: 3-4:11 (Allusion to Baptism and instruction to new converts).
  \item \textsuperscript{288} 1 Pet. 5: 1-14 (Church governance); 2: 5, 9; 5: 2
  \item \textsuperscript{289} 1 Pet 2: 13-3: 17 (Husband-Wife and Church-State relationships).
\end{itemize}
authorship of the Second Epistle of Peter, although bearing the name of the Apostle of Peter, is still open for debate.\textsuperscript{290}

The Kingship of God is demonstrated in the Second Epistle of Peter through the defense that the author put up in order to protect the Christian ethics and orthodox in the face of the attack by what he perceive to be “false teachers.” The author understood the “false teachers or prophets”\textsuperscript{291} who arose from the Christian ranks - as threatening to unsettle the Community of believers, Kingdom ethics, standards\textsuperscript{292} and also challenging the very foundation of the Christians’ hope – \textit{Parousia}.\textsuperscript{293}

The author of the Second Epistle of Peter cautioned his readers of those false teachers who manipulate the teachings of Paul in order to use them as a license that encourages ethical slackness\textsuperscript{294} In order to refute these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{290} Claude Holmes Thompson, “The Second Letter of Peter,” \textit{Revelation and the General Epistles}, in the \textit{Interpreter’s Concise Commentary} (Nashville: Abingdon Press, [1971] 1983), pp. 99-100. This author points to several reasons which have been advanced by more than a few scholars in an attempt to prove that the Apostle Peter could not have authored the Second Epistle of Peter. Their reasons range from (1) ancient scholars did not attribute this Epistle to Peter, (2) the Epistle reflects or cites texts and ideas from Jude, and Jude had not been written during the time of the Apostle Peter [those texts are 2 Pet. 2: 1-3: 3], (3) the epistle addresses or combats a denial of \textit{Parousia} and there were no such denials of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ until after the death of Peter and before the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, (4) apparent difference between ideas, language and use of the Old Testament between the First and Second Epistles of Peter, (5) no trace of Hellenism in the First Epistle of Peter or in the life of Peter as is demonstrated in the Second Epistle of Peter, and (6) the Second Epistle of Peter refer to the writings of Paul as “Scriptures” when such a claim had not been made during Peter’s lifetime. The reasons for the canonization of the Second Epistle of Peter, in spite of the objections raised, still remains a bone of contention among New Testament scholars. Suffice to say that the Second Epistle of Peter was accepted, respected and canonized around A.D. 393 during the Council of Hippo.
\item \textsuperscript{291} 2 Pet. 2: 1; 3: 17.
\item \textsuperscript{292} 2 Pet. 1: 19; 3: 2.
\item \textsuperscript{293} 2 Pet. 3: 3-7.
\item \textsuperscript{294} 2 Pet. 3: 14-17.
\end{itemize}
false teachings, Peter appeals to true knowledge as a way of replacing false teachings.²⁹⁵

In spite of the fact that the New Testament scholars have not resolved the dating and authorship of the Second Epistle of Peter, it is clear that the author of the epistle at issue was a fervent defender of the Kingdom of God. The Parousia was cardinal to the understanding redemption, salvation through the Jesus Christ-event at the Cross. The Cross of Jesus Christ was understood as the beginning of the establishment of an invisible God’s Kingdom, but visibly expressed through the lifestyle and hope of the redeemed.

The Cross of Jesus Christ did not only provide a fulfillment to the hope of the Old Testament prophets, but also provided pardon for our sins. Pentecost did not only provide the primitive church and us with the power to understand and proclaim what transpired at the Cross, but also with the assurance that sin and Satan no longer reign in our lives through yet a stronger power of Jesus Christ. The Parousia will not only establish a visible Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ, but will also put an end to all opposing forces of evil so that the throne of God will stand uncontested and unchallenged.

Peter understood all those phases of God’s salvation, and opposed anyone whom he understood to be threatening the very foundation (the Second Coming of Jesus Christ) of God’s Kingdom. In précis, the Kingship of God in the Second Epistle of Peter is primarily expressed in refutation of false teachers who threatened to dilute the moral fiber of the Christian

community, and in defending a Christian fundamental belief of Parousia against the ridicule from or of scoffers.

### 3.3.7 The Kingship of God in the Johannine Letters

There is a relative truce among New Testament students regarding the fact that the Three Epistles of John bear marks of mutual authorship.\(^{296}\) We will then attempt to find out how the Kingship of God is demonstrated in each of the Three Epistle of John.

#### 3.3.7.1 The Kingship of God in the 1st Epistle of John

In the introduction, 1 John 1: 1-4, the author or apostle asserts the rationale for his epistle: it is to pronounce the word of life to those whom he is speaking to, in order that he and they might be knitted together in genuine close association with each other, and with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. In fact the Apostle John’s teaching can be summed up in 1 John 3: 23, “And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.” John built his theology on the concept of love or agape-ethic which also permeated the social fabric of the 1st century church.\(^{297}\)

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\(^{297}\) For an extensive work on the concept of love as knitted within the milieu of the 1st century family dynamics, see J. G. Van der Watt, “Ethics in First John: A Literary and Socioscientific Perspective,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61(3), 1999, pp. 491-511.
His lesson throughout is that the instrument of union with God are, on the part of Jesus Christ, his atoning blood, and advocacy in Jesus Christ (1 John 2: 1); on the part of man, holiness that is expressed in walking in the truth (1 John 1:6), saving knowledge of God expressed in keeping His commandments (1 John 2: 3) and also in being able to determine the origin of the spirits (1 John 4: 1), purity of life (1 John 3: 3), faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and faith in incarnation, and above all love for Jesus Christ which is expressed in obedience and for love for each other.

The writer speaks of the forgiveness of sins, of fellowship with other believers, with God and Jesus Christ (1 John 1: 3, 4), of eternal life, and the Holy Spirit. As a way of combating and resisting gnosticism which promoted dualism – wherein the spirit supercedes the flesh – so that what is done to the flesh is not sinful because flesh is already sinful, the writer advocates for obedience and purity of life.

Some maintain that the First Epistle of John is about contrasting godliness and evil. For example light is contrasted with darkness; love of the world with the love of God (1 John 2: 15-17); the children of God versus the children of Satan (1 John 3: 4-10); love and hatred; and the of Spirit of God in opposition to the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4: 1-3).

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298 1 John 1: 7; 2: 2; 3: 5; 4: 10, 14; 5: 6.
299 1 John 3: 23; 4: 3; 5: 5.
301 1 John 1: 8–2; 2: 2: 12.
303 1 John 2: 27; 4: 12, 13.
304 1 John 1: 10; 2: 15-17; 3: 4-10; 5: 18.
305 1 John 1: 6, 7; 2: 8-11.
God’s Kingship in the First Epistle of John is established and demonstrated through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ; made known and explained to the believers through the Holy Spirit; the reality of the Kingship of God is demonstrated through believers’ love for one another, through fellowship with the Godhead, through purity of life, and through obedience to Jesus Christ’s commandment – and this demonstration of God’s love through the purity of the saints does not only make them to be in tune with God, but also it is instrumental in challenging gnosticism.

3.3.7.2 The Kingship of God in the 2nd Epistle of John

The writer of the Second Epistle of John addresses himself as “the elder.”

The intended recipients of the Second Epistle of John “the elect lady and her children,” (2 John 1), “some of your children,” (2 John 4) and “the children of your elect sister,” (2 John 13). Once more it seems from the exhortations of John that “many deceivers have gone out into the world,” whose one and only mission is to deny and cause others to deny “the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh,” (2 John 7), and John labels them “deceiver and antichrist.”

The content of deceivers’ deception borders or hinges on the very incarnation that is crucial to establishing God’s Kingship. If Jesus Christ did not “come in flesh,” then there is not hope for salvation for humankind. The false teachers challenged the very foundation of and the
means of establishing God’s Kingship – that is, the Human Nature of Jesus Christ.

John points to the fact that they are not only false teachers and deceivers, but they do “not have God,” because they do “not abide in the doctrine of Christ,” (2 John 9). John exhorts the recipients of his letter not only to reject their false antichrist doctrine, but also to refuse them excess to basic Christian hospitality, and also to shrink from greeting them lest they contaminate themselves with their “wicked work” (2 John 10, 11). “The elder,” in an attempt to combat the deceptive teachings of the false teachers, zeroes in on the supremacy of love in Christian life – and the objects of this love are God and fellow believers (2 John 5, 6). The love that is aimed at God is expressed in and is the very motive for Christian obedience.

In a nutshell, “the elder” appeals to his readers or audience to demonstrate love to God [expressed in obedience to God’s commandments], and love to their fellow believers as the only motive for serving others and obeying God. God’s Kingship is recognized and obeyed on the basis of love. Love is the underlying principle of God’s Kingdom. John cautions his audience of the destructive teachings of false teachers who do not only abide in God, but oppose the cardinal doctrine of incarnation.

Their false teachings, if accepted and followed, dilute the very fundamental power of the gospel, and render God’s Kingdom null and void. It was imperative for “the elder” to vehemently defend the Human Nature of Jesus Christ because it [especially the death of Jesus Christ] was and it is crucial to establishing God’s Kingship.
3.3.7.3 The Kingship of God in the 3rd Epistle of John

When one listens attentively to the message expressed by “the elder” (3 John 2), one cannot help but conclude that John deals with the housekeeping matters relating to the church or the visible Kingdom of God. It seems the writing of the Third Epistle of John was occasioned by the problem of undesirable treatment of the itinerating Christian teachers and prophets by Diotrephes (3 John 9, 10).

It is interesting to note that John in the Second Epistle advises against offering hospitality to false teachers, but in the Third Epistle he rebukes Diotrephes for withholding hospitality for itinerating Christian teachers and prophets. Apparently the task of these teachers and prophets was to guard against any infiltration of any heresy among the Christian Churches.

This Diotrephes is rebuked for putting “himself first,” and for refusing to “acknowledge my [John’s] authority,” (3 John 9). John promises to visit with Diotrephes and the church in order to make a follow-up on issues that he had raised in his Second Epistle. “The Elder” encourages the members to follow in the steps of doing right instead of “imitating evil,” (3 John 11), and he then highly praised Demetrius, possibly one of the well known and highly regarded church members.

In conclusion, the Third Epistle of John takes a protective interest in those who were perceived and understood to be active in advancing God’s Kingdom through teaching and instruction. “The Elder” emphasizes the
fact that the church should serve their needs because they are engaged in a supreme ministry.

Those who are seen to be a hindrance in the welfare of the itinerating Christian teachers and prophets did not escape the stern rebuke of the Apostle John. The message which the Apostle John proclaims is that the Christians should not only guard themselves against the deception of false teachers as outlined in the Second Epistle of John, but they should cater for the welfare of those who promote the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and invite others to be subjects of the Kingship of God.

3.3.8 The Kingship of God in the Epistle of Jude

The author calls himself “Jude” or Judas (Jude 1). As noted earlier, the Second Epistle of Peter depended heavily on the Epistle of Jude. The Epistle of Jude alludes to or cites a non-canonical piece of writing – that of Enoch. Scholars have raised questions whether Jude recognized the writings of the Apocalypse Enoch as inspired? Which Enoch did Jude quote – Enoch as in Genesis or the 1 Enoch? Such questions still beg for our attention and solutions. Space, scope and time prohibit us from giving them our attention, and also for the fact that they do not fall within the parameters of our assignment.

From the onset the author of the Epistle of Jude out-rightly divulge his intention for or the occasion of his letter – that the believers should contend for their faith, and also condemn heretics who have not only covertly intruded into the flock, but have also repudiated Jesus Christ as
Lord (Jude 3, 4), ridiculed authorities and angels (Jude 8), and Jude calls them “scoffers” (Jude 18).

Those “scoffers” claimed to be under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, when they are in reality void of the Holy Spirit (Jude 19). Jude does not give those “scoffers” any hope for their work, except for the visitation of God’s eschatological judgment (Jude 14). From what we glean from the contents of the epistle, it is apparent that the Letter of Jude is a formulated response to a predicament. The Epistle of Jude seems to be defending orthodoxy and orthopraxy against false teachings or heresies from intruders (Jude 5-16).

The Christian community was not under threat of persecution, but by incursion of heresy. Apparently heretics taught the primitive church that salvation through God’s grace permitted them to sin simply because their sins would not be charged on them. In short, the Epistle of Jude defends the Kingdom of God’s beliefs and practice. The subjects of God’s Kingdom or pilgrims are warned to be vigilant because some former Christians have made it their burden to unsettle their faith. The Second Epistle of Peter addresses or scratches on the same issues that were itching to and triggered the Epistle of Jude.

We have seen that the Kingship of God is a fiber that spirals within the New Testament writings, binding together themes that are different, but related and finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Kingship of God was established at the Cross through the Jesus Christ-event; expressed through the life, hope and practice of the primitive, New Testament Church;

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explained and defined through the parables and the sayings of Jesus Christ and His disciples.

The Kingship of God was proclaimed and witnessed by the Primitive Church. The Pentecost marked the time for the Primitive Church through the descending and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The ethics of the “Kingdom of God” was expressed and reflected in the life of the Primitive Church, and through apostolic epistles, the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. We are now ready to try to trace the Kingship of God in the Apocalypse of John.
CHAPTER 4

The Kingship of God as a Theological Motif in the Apocalypse of John

We have attempted to trace and follow the thread of the “Kingship of God” throughout the selected passages and narratives in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. This chapter seeks to and examines the theme of the “Kingship” of God in the Apocalypse of John.

4.1Introduction

John saw the prophetic, apocalyptic visions from the throne-room perspective “on the Lord’s day.” (Rev. 1: 10) We will not delve into the meaning of “the Lord’s day” because it does not fall within the scope of our work or theme. Suffice to note that there are three major interpretations to “on the Lord’s Day”/. A majority of scholars interpret “the Lord’s day” to mean “Sunday,” some feel that the phrase refer to “Easter-Sunday,” and few are of the view that it refers to “Sabbath” or


Saturday, and others are of the opinion that it refers to *parousia* or the “eschatological day of the Lord.” 312 John’s audience understood what he meant by “the Lord’s Day,” hence he did not have to labour harder in order to provide his readers with a pointed interpretation of the same text.

There is little or no adequate internal data from Rev. 1: 10 to respond to the speculative mind of the modern reader. A lot of clues or conjectured clues comes from external historical material, and also from some Scriptural texts both in the Old 313 and New 314 Testaments. It seems that the key to unlocking the meaning of “the Lord’s Day” should in part be found in reading the text within the context and background of a conflict between “Lord Caesar” and “Lord Christ.” 315


The phrase “on the Lord’s Day,” is found only in Rev. 1: 10. It is, therefore, difficult to build a dogma or a position using one brick (that is, one text or verse from one passage of the Scriptures). Bacchiocchi,\(^{316}\) in refuting the historical views which claim that the phrase “the Lord’s Day” refers to “Sunday,” according to one view, and to “Easter Sunday” or day of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, according to another view, - has demonstrated convincingly that there is a strong and reasonable case for eschatological interpretation of Rev. 1: 10 that can be defended contextually, linguistically and also “in the light of parallel expression” (Rev. 1: 10 cf. 4: 2).

The content, together with its time frames, of John’s prophetic, apocalyptic visions, is more crucial than the time when John saw those visions. The fundamental question is not “When did you see?” but “What did you see?”

God initiated the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1: 1). The Book of Revelation came from the heart of, God. There are emblems and objects pointing to the “Kingship of God” in the Apocalypse of John. This chapter will look into God as the Creator, King, His throne, and the means for establishing His Kingship - Jesus Christ and the witness of His saints.

4.2 God’s Kingship expressed in His act of Creating

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John gives a verbatim description of God in the context of a song of praise expressed by His creation, thus: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.” (Rev. 4: 11). Notice that the basis of ascribing praises to God is on His Creatorship.

God, the Creator, creates His Kingdom or domain from nothing. God does not create in the sense of poiew or constructing something anew, with the connotation of using resources already in existence, but in the sense of ktizw or creating an object or something that has no prior existence without using any earthly material or resources.

Bauckham, in his attempt to explain God as the Creator, remarks that “The understanding of God as Creator was not only integral to Jewish and Christian monotheism; it was also essential to the development of Jewish and Christian eschatology,” and he further says that “Jewish monotheism in New Testament times was defined by the doctrine of creation and the practice of worship. The one Creator of all things is God and he alone may be worshipped.”

Bauckham views the Creatorship of God not only from historical dimension - in the sense that creation was marred by the fall of the first couple in the garden of Eden, but also as having the possibilities of the future. In the past, according to Bauckham, God “gave life that ends in death,” but in future He “can also give life back to the dead.”

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318 Ibid p. 49.
319 Ibid.
does not only see God creating in the past, but He equates the eschatological resurrection of the righteous with new creation. Michaels\textsuperscript{320} also echoes the same sentiments thus, “The elders’ song celebrates creation and God the creator, probably as a reference point for the new creation to come.”

The gist of Baukham’s\textsuperscript{321} perspective of God’s Creatorship is, “The first creation, by its nature, lapses back into nothing. It requires a fresh creative act of God to give it, as it were, a quite new form of existence, taken beyond all threat of evil and destruction, indwelt by his own glory, participating in his own eternity.”

This author links the Creator with Noahic covenant as alluded to by Rev. 4: 3 – “… and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald.” He understands God not only as the Creator who would create a new creation, but also as the Creator who is faithful to His creation. He arrives at this conclusion on the basis that the rainbow serves as the covenant between Noah and God that God would not destroy His sin-infected creation with water. God is still faithful to that Noahic covenant.\textsuperscript{322}

The fact of creation is also stated in the context of impending judgment. John writes,


\textsuperscript{321} Richard Bauckham, \textit{The Theology of the Book of Revelation}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{322} Ibid. pp. 51-52.
“Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water.” (Rev. 14: 6, 7).

His judgment is come and the reason given for worshipping God is because He caused creation to be. Judgment is also related to the Old Testament Day of Atonement. Doukhan\(^{323}\) makes a striking observation on a relationship or link or association between creation and judgment. He is of the view that “The entire Bible attests the very function of the Day of Atonement as pointing to Creation and Judgment... In the Pentateuch, Creation and Judgment are the two landmarks around which the book revolves. The word moves back and forth, from Creation to Judgment, from Judgment to Creation, and so on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Judgment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 1-2 (the two creation stories)</td>
<td>Gen. 6-7 (the flood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 8-9 (recreation after the flood)</td>
<td>Gen. 11 (the tower of Babel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen. 12:1-3 (the call of Abraham)</td>
<td>Ex. 6-11 (the ten plagues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex. 12 – Lev. (the Exodus and the tabernacle)</td>
<td>Num. 14 (the sentence: they shall not see the land)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut. 34 (perspective of the promised land, allusion to Moses’ resurrection).”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In keeping with or being consistent with the views of Doukhan, we can also add that in the Apocalypse of John, *Judgment* [that is, putting an end to sin and Satan] will precede *Creation* (resurrection/recreation of the saints and creating the new earth and heavens).

The text at issue (Rev. 4: 11) emanates from a context and scenario where the Roman Emperors demanded to be addressed as “lords and gods.” The only difference between God of Heaven and the Roman Emperors was that they (Roman Emperors) never created anything. Their domains were inherited or per appointment, but God is a causal factor in the existence of His own territory or domain, including His entire creation.

The concept of creation – or the Creatorship of God does not only respond to the question of the genesis of all creation, but it also challenges theories that ascribe the origin of life to other alternative theories – for example chance and accident (evolution or Darwinism); it is a response to a view that fails to distinguish between the Creator and creation (pantheism). It is a refutation of a view that places an accent on created things, rather than the Creator, as the ultimate goal of life (materialism); it is a challenge to a view that sees several causal factors or ultimate sources of reality (polytheism); it is a rejection of a view which depicts God through some

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form of finite, physical man-made reality (idolatry);\textsuperscript{326} and it is a dismissal of a view which perceives God as the property-owner who has mysteriously absconded from His responsibility (deism).

The concept of God’s Creatorship in the Book of Revelation 4: 11 frowns at the so-called “scientific” and “naturalistic” accounts that attempt to trace the origins of humankind outside of the Creator-King. For example, Monod,\textsuperscript{327} a biologist, wrongly remarked that “Man knows at last that he is alone in the universe’s unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance. His destiny is nowhere spelled out, nor is his duty.”

Humankind finds its meaning and purpose for existence in the Creator-King – as opposed to the so-called “scientific” and “naturalistic” views espoused by Monod and others. Mankind is a product of God’s plan, and God has created us in order to love and relate with us.

The Creatorship of God serves also to provide a distinction between Himself and His creation or creatures. Creation is derived from God, but God is not derived from His creation. Ramsey\textsuperscript{328} further hits a nail on the head in his elucidation: “Man is for God, not God for man; the creation is for the Creator, not the Creator for His creation.” “Everything that exists belongs to one or the other of these categories (Creator and creation).”\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{326} Richard Rice, \textit{The Reign of God}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{329} Richard Rice, \textit{The Reign of God}, p. 69.
4.3 God’s Throne: An Emblem of His Kingship and Control

The word “throne”\textsuperscript{330} appears approximately 37 times in the Book of Revelation. The term “throne” has been used in different contexts and also carries different meanings. The word “throne” signifies or denotes a high chair or stool with back, arms, and footstool. A throne is a chair for elders, teachers, dignitaries, and is reserved for kings and gods. The Scriptures often attach a genitive to the word throne. For example, throne of grace (Heb. 4: 16); throne of glory;\textsuperscript{331} throne of the kingdom (1 Kings. 9: 5), and throne of wickedness (Ps. 94: 20). We will try to trace the concept of a “throne” in the Old and New Testament, and also in extra-biblical literature.

4.3.1 A qrovno\textsuperscript{332} in the Old Testament

\textsuperscript{330} See Rev. 1: 4; 2: 13; 3: 21; 4: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10; 5: 1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6: 16; 7: 9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 8: 3; 11: 16; 12:5; 13: 2; 14: 3; 16:10, 17; 19: 4, 5; 20: 4, 11, 12; 21: 3, 5; 22: 1, 3.

\textsuperscript{331} 1 Sam. 2: 8; Matt. 19: 28.

\textsuperscript{332} For the definition and ideas on the word “throne,” the writer of this work is indebted to Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, \textit{The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985).
The word “throne” in the Old Testament is used both in figurative and literal fashion.

(1) **In a literal sense** - a throne is the chair of the king (Gen. 41: 40), of the queen mother (1 Kings. 2: 19), and of the governor (Neh. 3: 7). The firstborn of Pharaoh shares the throne (Exo. 11: 5), and Solomon sits on David’s throne (1 Kings. 1: 13).

(2) **In a figurative sense.** It is the Anointed One’s throne in Isa. 9: 6. Since Davidic kingship entails that of God, the throne is that of Yahweh’s Kingdom (1 Chron. 28: 5) or of Yahweh Himself (1 Chron. 29: 23). References, then, to the throne of God,\(^333\) or to God’s throne in heaven (Isa. 66: 1) are meant to express the majesty of the divine Ruler. This majesty manifests itself on earth; the coming age of salvation is the Lord’s throne in Jer. 3: 17 (cf. the link with the name and covenant in Jer. 14: 21). The throne is thus a symbol of rule. David’s throne is to last forever (2 Sam. 7: 12ff.).

Majesty and presence also come together in the address in Jer. 17: 12-13. The power of God’s throne extends over the Gentiles (Ps. 47: 8). It is eternal.\(^334\) It carries with it the administration of justice (Ps. 9: 4, 7). Thrones are depicted in the judgment scene in Dan. 7: 9ff. The throne of the Ancient of Days is fiery flames, and myriads of angels surround it.

\[^{333}\text{Cf. Is. 6: 5; Ezek. 1: 26.}\]
\[^{334}\text{Ps. 93: 2; Lam. 5: 19.}\]
4.4.2 A qrovno" in the New Testament

The New Testament corpus is vibrant with the concept of “throne.” It is interesting to note that God’s throne is, to a larger extent, depicted together with that of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ refers to God’s dwelling place, heaven as a “throne.”

1. The Throne of David. David’s throne is the throne of the Messiah King in Luke 1: 32. Heb. 1: 8 quotes Ps. 45:6 in which Jesus Christ is portrayed as the eternal Son. The Davidic monarchy reaches its true fulfillment with the sovereign majesty of the Messiah.

2. The Throne of Glory. This phrase occurs often in Synoptic sayings with reference to the future rule of the Messiah over Israel, in which the disciples share (Matt. 19: 28). This rule extends to the Gentiles (Matt. 25: 31-32), though others do not now have a part in it. In Revelation, too, there are thrones at the beginning of the millennial rule (Rev. 20: 4), but at the end there is only the great white throne of world judgment and the One who sits on it (Rev. 20: 11).

3. The Throne of Grace. Now that Jesus, our great High Priest, is seated at God’s right hand, the throne may be called the throne of grace, for God’s sovereignty is manifested in mercy rather than condemnation (Heb. 4: 14ff.).

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4. The Throne of the 24 Elders. The throne of God and the Lamb is in the city (Rev. 22: 3). Jesus shares throne with his Father and promises the fellowship of the throne to those who are victorious. The elders have their own thrones in Rev. 4: 4, but these are not independent, for they worship Him who sits on the throne. In contrast, God’s own throne itself is finally the throne of the Lamb. This twofold throne represents the same eternal dominion.

5. The Throne of Satan and of the Beast. There is an ungodly counterpart to the throne of God and the Lamb. The throne of Satan in Rev. 2:13 may contain an allusion to the cult of Aesculapius at Pergamos, or more narrowly to the altar to Zeus in the fortress there. The dragon gives a throne to the beast in Rev. 13: 2, and an angel pours out a vial on the throne of the beast in Rev. 16: 10. This results in darkness for his kingdom; the throne and dominion are related.

6. The Throne as a Class of Angels. Paul in Col. 1: 16 mentions “thrones” among the supraterrestrial powers (cf. Slav. En. 20:1). The reference seems to be to the highest class of angelic powers.

4.4 Jesus Christ: An Agent of achieving God’s Kingship

Jesus Christ, the key member of the Triune God, plays a major role through His death (Rev. 5: 6, 9, 10) as a Paschal Lamb. Although Jesus Christ plays a role of a Son, and God plays the role of the Father, their relationship should not be understood in a biological sense, but in terms of the mission which Jesus Christ came of accomplish. The fact that He was
born from and through Mary does not relegate Him to a position of a creature or even compromise His Deity.

In fact, John the Baptist describes Him as “He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me,” (John 1: 15). John understood Jesus Christ’ two natures. He perceived Him (Jesus Christ) to be fully human being hence he mentioned that “He who comes after me ranks before me…” John the Baptist also understood Jesus Christ’s Divinity - “… for he was before me.” John the Baptist’s evaluation of Jesus Christ allows us to accept Jesus Christ as a Human Being with a biological genesis, and also to accept Him as an Eternal, Self-existent, Divine Being with no beginning.

As a “Son of Man,”337 He had a biological beginning, but as the “Son of God,”338 He is Eternal and un-derived. Some scholars perceive father-son analogy as a contradiction of terms.339 His role as Son to accomplish the mission of the Father should not be understood in terms of seniority and inferiority. Jesus Christ’s role has nothing to do with His Divine Nature; it has all to do with Him accepting the call to engage in Operation Redemption. In fact, the word “son” should not be understood in a narrow, literal, and biological fashion only.

The sons of Z?bede? were known as “sons of thunder,” (Mark 3: 17). Their father was Z?bede?, not thunder. The word “thunder” described their temper, not their biological genesis. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but that does not mean He came from the loins of God, the Father. Jesus

337 Matt. 8: 20; Mk. 2: 10, 28; Lk. 17: 26; Jn. 12: 23; Acts 7: 56; Rev. 1: 13.
338 Matt. 8: 28; Mk. 3: 11; Lk 22: 10; Jn. 3: 18; 1 Cor. 1: 19; Gal. 2: 20.
339 Donald Guthrie, The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse, pp. 54-55.
Christ declares Himself as “… I am the first and the last,” (Rev. 1: 17); “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,” (Rev. 22: 13).

John had no problem with the Deity of Jesus Christ, but he took precautions in order not to project a view of polytheism. John’s expression of an understanding of monotheism is seen in his usage of the singular pronoun “he” when referring to two personalities [Jesus Christ and God the Father] (Rev. 11: 15). Jesus Christ existed before and originated God’s creation (Rev. 3: 14). He not only served as an agent of our salvation through His role as a Paschal Lamb, but also in creating the world and creatures. In fact, God rules the world through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ was made an object of worship by the primitive church because “Jesus functioned as God in early Christian religion, and that he was worshipped. All the divine functions in relation to the world – as Saviour, Lord and Judge – were exercised by Jesus, of course on God’s behalf.”

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341 Cf. John 1: 1-3, 15, 30, 33-34; 1 Cor. 8: 6; Col. 1: 15-18; Heb. 1: 2.


Jesus Christ is formerly introduced as “the Lion of Judah and the Root of David,” (Rev. 5: 5). The background to this title is that of “the Messiah as the Jewish nationalistic military conqueror.” Jesus Christ conquers not in an expected militarily fashion, but through His death (Rev. 5: 5, 6). In summary,

“The Lamb’s death is the crucial key in God’s programme of conquering evil and establishing his kingship on earth. His judgments are part of his world history programme to convince people to acknowledge his reign on earth. Christ’s representative task is to turn the kingdom of the world, which is presently influenced by evil, into the kingdom of our Lord and Messiah (11:15).”

Jesus Christ is not only the agent to accomplish and cause God’s Kingship, but also He is the very focal point of the entire Book of Revelation. God controls the world events through His Sacrificial Lamb. For example, in Rev. 1: 1 God gave Jesus Christ the revelation to show his servants what must soon take place. Notice that right at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, Jesus can be seen as the Lord of his servants showing them his plan for the future.

Jesus Christ is described as the Faithful Witness; the Firstborn from the dead; the Ruler of the kings of the earth; the One who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood; the One Who has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father; the One to whom be

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345 J. A. du Rand, “Your kingdom come ‘on earth as it is in hear’“: The theological motif of the Apocalypse of John,” *Neotestamentica* 31 (1), 1997, p. 72.
346 For a detailed discussion on God’s control of the world through His Lamb, see A. Inman, “This is the Lamb of God, *New Blackfriars* 74 (870), 1993, pp. 191-197.
glory and power for ever and ever; the One Who is coming again in the full view of the whole world, (Rev. 1: 5-6).

John, in Rev. 1: 13 saw Someone “like a son of man” standing among the seven churches. This text places an accent on the humanity of Jesus Christ, which He never lost when he ascended into heaven. A God-Man, the first among many brothers, controls the universe.

John continues to describe Jesus Christ as the magnificent man “dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance,” (Rev. 1: 13-16).

The sight of him was enough to make John fall at his feet as though dead. Jesus then gives some of his divine titles (note the 'I am'): “... I am the First and the Last; I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever; and I hold the keys of death and Hades,” (Rev. 1: 17b, 18).

Jesus Christ originated the epistles to the seven churches, and He is portrayed as the One who walks among the seven churches and whose burning eyes scrutinize their spiritual condition. He has a keen interest on each church, and He knows their deeds as He walks among them. He commends what is good and condemns and corrects what is unacceptable.
He, Himself, promises and guarantees heavenly rewards to those who overcome.

The message of Jesus Christ to the Ephesus Church is, “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands,” (Rev. 2: 1). In Smyrna Church, He declares, “These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again,” (Rev. 2: 8); To the Pergamum Church, the message is, “These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword,” (Rev. 2: 12); To the Thyatira Church, the testimony is “These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze,” (Rev. 2: 18).

The source of the message to the Sardis Church is, “These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, (Rev. 3: 1); To the Philadelphia Church, John writes, “These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open,” (Rev. 3: 7); To the seventh Church, Laodicea, John reveals the source of the message thus: “These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation,” (Rev. 3: 14).

John in Rev. 5 portrays Jesus Christ as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David” as the one who has overcome. He is standing at the centre of the throne of God encircled by the living creatures and elders, which pictures Him at the very centre of heaven. He is then introduced as the
“Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.” Jesus Christ is the only one worthy in all creation to take the scroll from the hand of the One sitting on the throne, (Rev. 5: 7). The four living creatures then praise him as the one who is worthy to open the seals:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth,” (Rev. 5: 7).

The angels then praise him as the one who is worthy: “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation,” (Rev. 5: 9). He is then praised by all creation: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever,” (Rev. 5: 13). Jesus Christ receives worship, together with God the Father.

In Rev. 6 Jesus Christ is the One who opens the seven seals to reveal the contents of the scroll – the very purpose of God for this world. In Rev. 7: 14 we encounter a spectacular description of the great multitude as those that have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. In Rev. 7: 17 John describes the Lamb as their Shepherd who leads them to springs of living water. He is the One “who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter,” (Rev. 12: 5). The book of life belongs to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Rev. 13: 8). The Lamb is the One who reaps the harvest of the earth, (Rev. 14: 14 ff).

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In Rev. 19: 7 we find that the bride has made herself ready for the wedding of the Lamb. In Rev. 19: 11 ff. we encounter one of the fullest descriptions of the Lamb in victory over his enemies. John summarises the Kingship of Jesus Christ thus:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron sceptre.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”

John, in Rev. 19: 17-21, describes the final victory of the Lamb over the beast and false prophet and their army, and the victory over Satan is described in Rev. 20. God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lamb are the temple of the New Jerusalem, and the Lamb is the lamp of the New Jerusalem, (Rev. 21: 22). The source of the river of life is the throne of God and of the Lamb, (Rev. 22: 1). Jesus Christ testifies that He is coming soon with His reward, and that it is He who will reward the righteous and the wicked for their deeds, (Rev. 22: 12). In Rev. 22: 13 the Lamb is described with the three-fold divine titles as the “Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.” Jesus Christ describes himself as the “Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star,” (Rev. 22: 16). Lastly in Rev. 22: 20 it is Jesus Christ Himself who testifies to the truth of the Book of Revelation, and who promises, “Yes, I am coming soon.”
4.5 The Holy Spirit: God’s Means of achieving His Kingship

The word “Spirit” appears about 15 times in the Book of Revelation. Seven of these are in relation to the exhortations aimed at the seven churches;\(^{348}\) four are in relation to the transportation of John to four different visionary locations;\(^{349}\) two in relation to prophecy [testimony or testifying of Jesus Christ] and to the seven Spirits who are before the throne;\(^{350}\) and the last two are in relation to the words uttered by the Spirit.\(^{351}\)

The Holy Spirit plays one of the major roles in establishing God’s Kingship.\(^{352}\) He was actively involved in the preparation of the Sacred text – the Bible; He enabled the readers and hearers to anticipated the coming Kingdom of God and eternal life, and provides meaning and interpretation to what transpired at the Cross of Calvary.

He (the Holy Spirit) served as an attendant to John. For example He transports John to the eschatological “Lord’s Day” so that John could gain a gleams of God’s mysteries and world history from the perspective of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Rev. 1: 10). In Rev. 4: 1-2 John, after receiving a vision of seven churches, is invited to “Come up hither,” and “At once I [John] was in the Spirit…” Whenever John is “in the Spirit,” his location, vision and scenery change.\(^{353}\)

\(^{348}\) Rev. 2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22.
\(^{349}\) Rev. 1: 10; 4: 2; 17: 3; 21: 10.
The Holy Spirit permeated the Old Testament writings from the creation of the world, and through dealing with and influencing people’s hearts. In the New Testament the Holy Spirit played a unique role in participating in, describing and explaining the Christ-event at the Cross, and also in unifying and consolidating the newly formed church, and also in establishing the governance of the same primitive, apostolic church - through the spiritual gifts.


4.6 The Saints: The witnesses of God’s Kingship

The saints or witnesses or church participate in God’s Kingdom through the redemptive Blood of Jesus Christ. The Blood of the Lamb gives the

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353 Rev. 1: 10; 4: 2, 17: 3; 21: 10.
354 Gen. 1: 2; Ps. 51: 10-12; Isa. 63: 10-13.
356 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Heb. 2: 4; The Holy Spirit has a keen interest in establishing God’s Kingship in the seven churches of Apocalypse of John - Rev. 2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22.
357 Acts 15: 28; Gal. 5: 16-23.
358 1 Tim. 3: 16; Heb. 1: 1; Rev. 14: 13; 19: 10.
church a status of “a kingdom and priests to our God, to reign on earth,” (Rev. 5: 10). They are priests in the sense of interceding on behalf of others, praying directly to God for us and for those who are on earth, but have not yet chosen to be subjects of the Kingdom of God. The death and resurrection of the Lamb have established the church into a “kingdom,” and the subjects of the kingdom have been made “priests” as individuals.

The saints’ position of priests does not put them on the same level with Jesus Christ – the High Priest. Saints should not be mediators for other fellow believers or even forgive their sins, but Jesus Christ. The Church is God’s visible Kingdom on earth. The administrative roles [one of the spiritual gifts] in the Church as provided by the Holy Spirit are but a symbol of or a visible expression of God’s Kingship.

The Church was redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ at the Cross; she was organized, established, and empowered to witness by the Holy Spirit during Pentecost; and will ultimately be redeemed from this sinful earth at Parousia. The church is composed of all who believe in what was accomplished by Jesus Christ at the Cross.

The beast makes war with the saints and it seems the beast is invincible (Rev. 13: 4). The saints witness through their death (Rev. 13: 7), but they gain their victory through and in resurrection when Jesus Christ comes the Second time (Rev. 19: 11-21). The death of the saints or witnesses gives

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360 Heb. 4: 15, 16; 5: 1; 8: 3; 1 Pet. 2: 5, 9.
361 Nichol, “Revelation,” in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, p. 733.
them a status of “overcomer,”362 and it would seem that the Book of Revelation largely focuses on the “overcomer” motif. The saints gain their lives through loosing them just like their Redeemer who laid down His life in order to save us. We need to recognise that there is an ongoing debate hinging on whether the word marturia refers to “witness” or “martyrdom.”363

Ford364 contends that there is little evidence in Revelation to substantiate the view that the word marturia refers to one who dies for faith. Ford’s view is that one should bear witness in daily living. One needs to strike a balance between “witness” and “martyrdom.” One’s daily witness of the word may lead to martyrdom, but one should not bear witness in order to hasten his/her death – that would be tantamount to suicide. One needs to witness and leave the results of his/her witness to the Maker and God. In a nutshell, the saints faithfully face and overcome evil by patient endurance. The suffering of saints has meaning because bearing it is the result of imitative witness to Jesus Christ.

If they die in the event of standing for the truth, the death is not meritorious, but should be understood within the framework of suffering

362 For an extensive discussion of the “overcomer” motif in the Book of Revelation, see the work of K. A. Strand, “‘Overcomer’: A Study in the Macro-dynamic of Theme Development in the Book of Revelation,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 28 (3), 1990, pp. 237-254. Strand looks into the “overcomer” motif in relation to Revelation’s major literary chiasm. He divides his discussions into (1) an “overcomer” in the historical-era visions (Rev. 1:10b-14: 20), and (2) an “overcomer” in the context of the eschatological-judgment-era visions (Rev. 15: 1 –22: 5). His conclusion points to the significance of the “overcomer” motif in the Book of Revelation.


and dying for or while witnessing for Jesus Christ. Their suffering, or even their death, is embedded in John’s theology of suffering that is entirely Christocentric. The wander of it all, or even its paradox is that a victim becomes a victor which in essence is a new redefinition of triumph. Triumph is achieved despite of the fact that there is not physical fighting on the part of the saints – and this is a grave shift from the pre-Christian Messianic Jewish views.

4.6.1 The “Two Witnesses” of Revelation 11

There have been robust discussions on “The Two Persecuted Prophet-Witnesses of Rev. 11.” John in Rev. 11 points to the 2 witnesses. There are many major interpretations that have been advanced in an attempt to gain knowledge of the identity of those two witnesses. Some contend that 2 witnesses refer to “the church,” “Moses and Elijah,” “the Apostles Peter and Paul,” “John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton,” “female

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369 Gonzalez, Revelation, p. 71.
and male aspects of God,”372 “not particular individuals,”373 and “New and Old Testament.”374 Few argue for “Law and Gospel” and “Law and the Prophets” as the possible identity of the 2 witnesses.

Firstly, it seems, from the interpretation of the 2 witnesses, that the New Testament students agree that 2 witnesses are emblematic or figurative - given the fact that the genre of the Book of Revelation includes prophetic material. As indicated earlier, the New Testament scholars’ fingers point to different directions as possible clues to the identity of 2 witnesses.

Secondly, the 2 witnesses of Rev. 11 carry out their activities within a specific period - they are given authority to prophesy for a period of “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 11: 3); the beast kills them after they have accomplished their prophetic mission, their dead bodies remain “in the street of the great city” because they are denied burial, and they lie in street for a period of “three days and half” (Rev. 11: 7, 8, 9).

God resurrects them after “three and a half days” (Rev. 11: 11); the period of “forty-two months” in which the “holy city” is trodden is identical to “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” [1260 days] period of the 2 witnesses, (Rev. 11: 2, cf. verse 3 of Rev. 11). The key to unlocking the

371 Cited by J. Ramsey Michaels, Revelation, p. 139. This interpretation gave birth to a sect known as Muggletonians that lasted for three hundred years.
372 Quoted by J. Ramsey Michaels, Revelation, p. 139. The male aspect of the 2 witnesses was interpreted by the American Shakers or Quakers to mean Jesus Christ especially His second coming, and the female feature pointed to Mother Ann Lee, the pioneer of the Quakers.
373 John Sweet, Revelation, p.185. As a result of this position, this author accepts anyone ranging from Moses and Aaron, Paul and Peter, Elijah and Moses, to James and John as contributing to the identity of the 2 witnesses.
374 Nichol, Revelation in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, p. 801.
identity of the 2 witnesses is found partly in understanding the meaning of the above-mentioned time references.

Many New Testament scholars have rightly understood the Book of Revelation, among others, as prophetic, hence various interpretations of the 2 witnesses. Unfortunately, consistency has not been maintained when applying the same prophetic interpretation principles to 42 months, 1260 days, and 3 ½ days. This simply means that the 2 witnesses are understood to be figurative, but the time references are not afforded the same prophetic or figurative interpretation.

In the next section we will try to employ the “year-day principle” as the possible key for breaking the code or finding a clue regarding the identity of the “2 witnesses.”
the “2 Witnesses” of Rev. 11.

The ancient “Year-day Principle” approach towards making sense out of the Rev. 11 time seems plausible, and might be employed as a key to helping us understand the prophetic time interpretation, and we will then apply this principle as a key to unlocking the meaning and identity of the two witnesses found in Rev. 11. Shea points to the fact that approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation played a major role in how scholars handled time references. He said, “Commentator from two of the three main schools of interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation – preterists and futurists – interpret the time elements in these prophecies as literal time.”

Firstly, Shea argues that these time references should be understood “as symbolically representing longer periods of historical time.” Shea’s

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statement reveals that he obviously subscribes to the historicist school of interpretation. His thesis is that “These periods... should be interpreted according the principle that a ‘prophetic day’ stands for a ‘year’ of actual calendrical time extending through the historical events in which they were fulfilled.”

Shea, in keeping with the theology of the prophetic times, argues that the “year-day Principle” is based on the Scriptures and that it was “established through reasonable interpretations of Scriptures.” According to Shea,

(1) The “days” were used to stand for “years” when the annual event was being referred to. The example for this is found in Exo. 13: 10 where it is mentioned that annual sacrifices were referred to as “sacrifice of the days.” Hannah, Samuel’s mother, yearly made garments for Samuel and would give them to Samuel at Shiloh during the time of the “sacrifice of the days” (1 Sam. 2: 19, 21; 20: 6). The same phrase “days to days” referring to yearly is also used during the time of mourning for Jephthah’s daughter (Judges 11: 40).

(2) The word “days” was employment to point to a time equivalent to a “year.” For example, in 1 Sam. 27: 7, David and his entourage spent “days and four months” in the Philistines’ territory. “That a period of a

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377 Ibid. p. 56.
378 Ibid.
379 Ibid.
380 Ibid. pp. 56-85.
year and four months is intended…” 381 Again in Num. 9: 22 where “days” are intended to mean a year according to the translations.

(3) The word “days” is frequently used in equation with the “years” of an individual’s life. For example, in 1 Kings 1: 1 David is described as being “old and advanced in years.” Literally the phrase means “in the days.” The usage is also found in Gen. 47: 9, “And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.”

Another example is that of the genealogy of Gen. 5. “X lived so many years and begat Y. And X lived so many years after he begat Y and begat sons and daughters. All the days of X were so many years, and he died.” 382 Again in the context of the genealogy of Gen. 5, a statement is made which throws more light on the relationship between “days” and “years,” - “My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years,” Gen. 6: 3). This text refers to the time- prophecy of Noah where “days” and “years” are directly linked in a prophetic context.

Leviticus 25: 8 can be also be used to substantiate a link between “days” and “years” pointing to the future or in a prophetic setting. “You shall count seven Sabbaths of years, seven years seven times, and to you the days of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be forty-nine years.” “Sabbath

381 Ibid. p. 68.
382 Ibid. p. 67.
of years” is to be comprehended as a period of seven years. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the weekly cycle. Therefore, the seventh day should be taken to stand for seventh year. In fact, the Sabbaths were understood to stand for the “weeks” (Lev. 23: 15; cf. Lev. 25: 1-7). There are many other Old Testament texts recorded in the poetic literature that advocate for and substantiate the “year-day Principle.”

(4) Num. 14: 34 is worth our attention. Moses stated, “According to the number of days in which you spied out the land forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity, forty years and you shall know my displeasure.” The punishment of the Israelites was explained within the prophetic framework. In an apocalyptic prophetic setting, a prophetic day represents a historical year. In this text [Num. 14: 34], Moses uses a “past day” to represent a “future year.”

(5) When one scrutinizes Eze. 4: 4-6, one is once more introduced to the idea of “year-day principle.” Ezekiel wrote,

“Then lie upon your left side, and I will lay the punishment of the house of Israel upon you; for the number of the days that you lie upon it, you shall bear their punishment. For I assign to you a number of days, three hundred and ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment; so long shall you bear the punishment of the house of Israel. And when you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side, and bear the punishment of the house of Judah; forty days I assign you, a day for each year.”

There are closer comparative elements in Eze. 4: 6 and Num. 14: 34. It appears that Eze. 4 relied on Num. 14, and more so, there are close

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383 Deut. 32:7; Job. 10: 5; 15: 20; 32: 7; 36: 11; Ps. 77: 5; 90: 9-10.
linguistic similarities in both texts. The two texts refer to symbolic “days” which would take place in the future from the seers’ point of view. From Shea’s argument for the “year-day principle,” it is clear that there is a reasonable Biblical case or basis for applying the same principle as a key to unlock the meaning and identity of the two witnesses.

Prior to employing this tool (year-day principle), we need to recognize that Maitland\textsuperscript{384} (1792 – 1866), together with those who followed in his footsteps, attempted to refute the “year-day principle.” The “year-day principle” is still plausible, given its Biblical foundation, in providing a missing code to unlocking the identity of the “2 witnesses.” With the background of the “year-day principle” as espoused by early theologians and further developed by Shea, we are ready to approach Rev. 11’s time references.

In keeping with the apocalyptic–prophetic time periods, and given that the Book of Revelation fits the apocalyptic-prophetic description; we note the following relating to the time references:

a. That the 42 months of Rev. 11: 2 (cf. Rev. 13: 5),\textsuperscript{385} 1260 days of Rev. 11: 3 (cf. Rev. 12: 6), 3½ “days” of Rev. 11: 11 are identical to Dan. 7: 25 (cf. Rev. 12: 14) “... a time, times, and half a time.”\textsuperscript{386} They all point to the 1260 years.

\textsuperscript{384} Froom, \textit{The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers}, vol. 3, pp. 541-543.
\textsuperscript{385} 42 months x 30 prophetic calendar days = 1260 days. 1260 prophetic days symbolises 1260 years.
\textsuperscript{386} A “time” symbolises “a prophetic year,” which points to 360 literal days, [the reader should be aware that the Jewish Calendar with 29-day and 30-day months or Solar Calendar of 365 days.] See Nichol, “Revelation,” p. 833. See also Doukhan, \textit{Daniel: The Vision of the End}, p. 21. Doukhan points out that “time” (in Aramaic \textit{idan}) should be
b. The 1260 prophetic days are emblematic of 1260 years. From this argument it is clear that the “2 witnesses” cannot symbolise human beings as advocated by other scholars. The oldest person on earth, according to the Old Testament Scriptures, is Methuselah who lived 969 years (Gen. 5: 27). In keeping with the “year-day principle,” the two witnesses seem to be older than the oldest person in the Scriptures. It becomes untenable and unsustainable to conclude that the two witnesses are literal human beings.

c. The “2 witnesses” are classified or described as “two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth” (Rev. 11: 4). Earlier on John in Rev. 1: 20 received the interpretation of 7 lampstands as 7 churches. The “two” lampstands in Rev. 11: 4 cannot possibly point to or symbolise the churches or community of believers. The 2 lampstands and 2 olive trees in Zech. 4: 1-6, 11-14 point to the two witnesses. The angels explained to Zechariah that the lampstands are, in the words of an angel, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord,” (Zech. 4: 6). Notice that the 2 lampstands are the Word of the God according to Zech. 4: 6.

Again in Zech. 4: 11-14 the angel explains to Zechariah that the “two olive trees” symbolise “the two anointed who stand by the Lord of
the whole earth.” These “two anointed” serve as channels of the oil or Holy Spirit. From the description of the angels’ description of “two anointed” or “the word of God to Zerubabel…” one cannot help but conclude that the “2 witnesses” do not point to any human being and a community of believers, but there is a Biblical case for arguing that the Word of God, namely, the New and Old Testament Scriptures are represented by the two witnesses.

The Psalmist in Ps. 119: 105 stated “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” He continues to say, “The unfolding of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple,” (Ps. 119: 130). Jesus Christ, in the Gospel of John (John 5: 39), echoed the same sentiments about God’s word: “You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.” The Word of God provides witness about Him and His plan for this world.

d. Notice that the “2 witnesses” were killed soon after they had accomplished their prophetic mission (Rev. 11: 7). We do not have any Biblical basis to assert that the beast that emerged from the abyss killed Moses and Elijah or Paul and Peter. All these did not live or conduct their prophetic ministry for the period of 1260 years. In fact, Elijah was translated to heaven (2 Kings 2: 1-11), and Moses died and was buried by God (Deut. 34: 5, 6). The killing of the “2 witnesses” can be linked to a historical period known as the Dark
Ages (A.D. 538 to 1798 A.D.) during which the Word of God, together with the saints, was suppressed. 387

We have seen that the saints are witnesses for the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for what He has done for them through the Jesus Christ-event at the Cross. Jesus Christ, as a Chief Witness, died and rose again in order to secure eternal life and redemption for them. The Holy Spirit witnesses through revealing and expounding on the secrets of the Most High through and to God’s prophets and Christ’s followers. He serves as the context and transport to the prophet John, and He also invites the saints to recommit themselves to the promises laid down in a letter to the 7 churches.

It has been demonstrated, through the technique of the “year-day principle” that the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, serves as another form of witnessing for God and Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was instrumental in facilitating for the production of God’s Word, and also in revealing the same Word to the prophets, apostles and the rest of the Community of the Saints. 388 The Word of God, the Scriptures, have not only played a role as the textbook intended for outlining ethics, but it has also played one of the major roles in revealing the character of God towards humankind; in revealing the plan of redemption intended to

387 Doukhan, Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), p. 109. This author points out that apart from the persecution of God’s Word and saints, there was an uprising of Jesuits, the emergence of the Encyclopedists (philosophers of doubt), and “the French Revolution with its outcry of rage against ecclesiastical authority. The French Revolution would confront the church with atheistic society having but one god: reason.” 388 2 Pet. 1: 20, 21; cf. 2 Tim. 3: 16.
rescue the universe, and in providing hope to the saints in their pilgrimage on earth particularly during the trying and uncertain times.

We have looked at Jesus Christ as the means of and an agent of establishing God’s Kingship through His redemptive act at the Cross of Calvary – and also through His life and witness; and we have briefly demonstrated the Holy Spirit’s role in revealing God’s will for and to humankind and also being instrumental in establishing God’s Kingship; and also the Saints’ witnessing for God through His Word and their lives - the Word of God as the transcript of God’s character and a text book that reveals His purpose for humankind in the Apocalypse of John. We are now ready to search for God’s Kingship through the hymns found in the Apocalypse of John.

CHAPTER 5

The Hymns in the Book of Revelation: Their Function in the Theological Structure – with special reference to the Kingship of God.

5.1 Introduction

We have seen how the theme of the Kingship of God permeates the rest of the New Testament. This chapter seeks to study the theological function of the hymns in the Apocalypse of John, and this venture is focused at discovering God’s Kingship in the same hymns. This section deals with the hymns of John’s Apocalypse, their setting, function, and their theological significance in relation to the Kingship of God. This study will be limited to the 10 passage of the Apocalypse of John where the main
hymns are expressed. Some have noticed a relationship between some of those hymns and have also chiastically arranged the same songs.

According to Dinwiddie, God the Father, together with the two members of the Godhead, is a Singer. He gave worshippers, singers, and songwriters skills and training in order for them to use their skills in the worship setting so as to express their earnest praise. In deed Biblical hymns can be understood not only as a means of praise, but also as the very theology of the Church, and they also provide an expression of faith in simpler forms.

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The Book of Revelation is the only Book in the New Testament Corpus that has many hymns, and the Apocalypse’s hymns reveal not only the fact that God is in charge of the universe, but also that He is faithful, and that His Kingship does not advance unchallenged. Christianity emerged from within a Jewish milieu – and this environment was heavily influenced by the Greco-Roman culture. Prior to Christian era, Jews relied on the Psalms for their singing. Reynolds and Price have this to say regarding the impact of hymns in the Hebrew economy,

“In the Temple, priests and choirs chanted the psalms and portions of the Pentateuch, but in the synagogue the people shared in the musical portion of the service. Instrumental music was employed in Temple worship, while in the synagogue singing was generally unaccompanied. The Book of Psalms, found in the Old Testament, is thought to have been compiled during and after the Babylonian exile.”

In the New Testament, prior to and also after the production and compilation of the Hebrew Psalms, there were ancient hymns that were sung by the Hebrew community of faith. Apart from the hymns found

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394 C. R. Koester, “The Distant Triumph Song: Music and the Book of Revelation,” *Word World* 12 (3), 1992, pp. 243-249. This writer points out that there are more songs in the Apocalypse of John than in other New Testament texts. The songs in the Book of Revelation, according to Koester, deal with challenged and disputed sovereignty of God, and the same songs lift the saints higher than earthly terror, and help us experience the New Jerusalem in faith.


396 For example, the Song of Moses in Exo. 15 – celebrating victory over Egyptian army; second Song of Moses in Deut. 32 – in form of exhortations just before Moses handed over the leadership to Joshua; the Song of Isaiah in Isa. 26: 9-21; the Song
in the Apocalypse of John, the New Testament writers supplemented the Jewish body of songs by producing hymns that would reflect and express their new Christian theology or beliefs.397

The hymns are an instrument to express beliefs or faith or doctrine, and also communicate experiences of a Christian life.

In African culture, hymns or songs were or are still used for several reasons – including expressing frustration, challenging what was understood to be unfair and inhumane, to teach an ideology, for instruction, for preserving and transmitting culture and tradition, for honouring dignitaries, for transmitting values and norms, for providing courage for warriors in times of war, for forging and expressing unity. An African (including a child398 and a woman399) sings when he/she expresses

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of Hannah in 1 Sam. 2: 1-10; the Song of Jonah in Jonah 2: 2-9; and the Song of Habakkuk in Hab. 3: 2-19.

397 For this information, the writer of this worker is fully indebted to Reynolds and Price, A Survey of Christian Hymnody, pp. 2-4. These authors have compiled examples of such songs: the Song of Mary in Luke 1: 46-56 which is now known as the Magnificat; the Song of Zecharias in Luke 1: 67-80 which is now known as Beredictus; the Song of Simeon in Luke 2: 27-32 which is known as Nunc Dimittis; other New Testament hymnlike structure of writings gives an implication that they were either sung or chanted. The following texts reflect such hymnlike passages: 1 Cor. 2: 9; Eph. 5: 14; 1 Tim. 1: 17; 3: 16; 2 Tim. 2: 11-13. In other New Testament passages an indication of hymn singing is given, but the content of those hymns is not revealed – for example Paul and Silas singing in prison (Acts 16: 25); and other allusions to singing by the New Testament congregations (1 Cor. 14: 15; Eph. 5: 18-19; Col. 3: 16). For the exploration of the imagery of worship that was derived from the cultus and liturgy of the early church in Revelation, see also Marienne Meye Thompson, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” Ex Auditu 8, 1992, pp. 45-55.

398 Judith Nqatyiwsa Mbalekwa, “Urban Children’s Action Songs,” (Rand Afrikaans University M.A. Dissertation, 1994). This author mentions that there are many play-songs composed by children during their playtime – educative songs, enjoyment songs, call and response and antiphonal patterns. Unfortunately, some of those songs are soon disappearing because they are not being documented.

399 For example, see the work of Edith Morongwa Dikotlwa, “Batlokwa Women’s Songs,” M.A. Dissertation: Rand Afrikaans University, South Africa, 1996).
frustration in workplace - commonly known as *toyi-toyi* or *toyi-toying*,\(^{400}\) when mourning, when rejoicing, when celebrating success, when worshipping, etc.

Songs play a major role among the traditional diviners or healers known as *izangoma*.\(^{401}\) Most of African songs are short and precise. They rarely have more than one stanza. The aim for this arrangement or a shortness of a song is to make a song or hymn easier to learn, transmitted, sung, and preserved. Songs among Africans are communal activities hence it is strange or unusual to find a person *toyi-toying* alone. The songs found in the Apocalypse of John are also short and precise – easy to learn.

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This writer mentions that songs mirror realities and experiences of Batlokwa women (Northern Sesotho Women in Northern Province, South Africa), they help conserve culture and traditions; they are used to grace important private or public occasions and ceremonies; and also serve as an instrument to strengthen public opinion. Songs are a medium of communication.

\(^{400}\) The writer of this work is not aware of the person, who coined this word, but the word is commonly understood among traditional Africans to be a song or hymnal intended for expressing protest or frustration or joy. Almost all of the *toyi-toyi* songs are accompanied by a dance, and they are short and easy to learn. For more information on Political Songs within the South African context, see Martha Dolly Mendisi, “Political Songs,” (Rand Afrikaans University M.A. Dissertation, 1998); cf. H. C. Groenewald and S. Makopo, “The Political Song: Tradition and Innovation for Liberation,” in *Oral Tradition and Innovation: New Wine in Old Bottles*? Eds. E. Sienaert, N. Bell and M. Lewis (Durban, South Africa: University of Natal Oral Documentation and Research Centre, 1991).

\(^{401}\) See the work of Elias Nsibande, “Izingoma zezangoma: Zangoma Songs,” (Rand Afrikaans University M.A. Dissertation, 1994). Nsibande, in his research made in Soweto, mentions that that *izangoma* (traditional healers or diviners) sing different songs as a tool to their work. For example, he mentions that there are songs of praise (giving praise to both ancestors and their trainer (*inyanga*); songs of enjoyment; songs of appeal (appeal to the ancestors to give them power); educative songs (especially to the trainees); songs about ancestors (rendering praise to them for being powerful); warning songs (intended to cause the *sangoma*-trainee to demonstrate respect to his/her trainer). Singing and dancing constitute the integral part of the *izangoma*. Their songs have elements of poetry, aspects of call and response, repetition, rhyme, tempo and refrain; Cf. H. C.
The African National Congress (ANC), the current ruling party in South Africa, on the 8th January 1912, was formed immediately after the people sang a moving Xhosa song, written by Tiyo Soga, titled “Li zalis’ idinga Lakho, Thixo we Nyaniso,” – “Fulfill Thy Promise, God of Truth.”

The type of songs recorded by John in the Book of Revelation is succinct. The task of the New Testament scholarship is to unpack and make the Book of Revelation more understandable to Africans so that they might benefit from its comforting prophecies and also participate in its rich liturgy.

In fact, the Book of Revelation is not a foreign terrain to and for Africans. Issues of worship, kingship, politics, suffering and struggling, sacrificial systems, ultimate victory for the sufferers and punishment for the perpetrators of suffering, royalty, thrones, hymns and new creation provide an African with not only immense field of study, but also comfort and exhortation to and for his/her existence – because such issues are part and fabric of the social milieu of the African society. Palmer makes an interesting and almost accurate comment regarding the hymns in chapters four and five of Revelation.

He says, “The songs of chapters 4 and 5 form a dramatic focal point for the Book of Revelation. They are the great high towers upon which every

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other theme and truth is dependent.” Indeed, they (the hymns of Rev. 4 and 5) do not only set a pace for the entire visionary experience of John, but they encourage us to experience tranquility premised on the truth that God is calmly sitting on His throne, He is in control, and that He is reigning over His creation.

The heavenly liturgical setting of the Book of Revelation reflects the Roman imperial court ceremonial and Hellenistic theatre setting, as opposed to the view that it is a projection of the earthly church. Some see a close relationship between John’s Apocalypse (particularly in Rev. 5) and the Feast of Tabernacles. It has also been vehemently argued that


\[406\] H. Ulfgard, “Feast and Future: Revelation 7: 9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles,” Coniectanea Biblica 22, 1989, pp. 17-28. See also J. O’Rourke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 30, 1968, pp. 399-409. This author argues that there is a clear evidence that John cannot be credited with hymnic material which is not in agreement with its context. For instance, he argues from the perspective of doxologies (particularly that which appears in Rev. 4: 8) – the commendation of worthiness. O’Rourke’s views have been challenged on the basis that the parallels he used to prove his point were far from being irrefutable. See also D. M. Stanley, “Carmenque Christo quasi Deo dicere…” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 20, 1958, pp. 182-183. This author reasons that there are traces of Eucharistic practice in the hymns of Revelation. See also W. C. van Unnik, “1 Clement 34 and the Sanctor,” Vigiliae Christianae 5, 1951, pp. 204-208. Unnik is of the opinion that Stanley’s views are more of speculation and unconvincing because they are premised on the second century practice. See also L. Mowry, “Rev. 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” Interpretation 7, 1953, pp. 78-80. This author basis his view on the fact that the primitive church modified its liturgy from that of a synagogue – and an influence of this
John has modeled phrases such as “I have the keys to Death and Hades,” “I am coming quickly,” and “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” after the Graeco-Roman magical divination – but John uses them (phrases) to refute the authenticity of such magic.407

The songs of the Apocalypse of John have been designed in a way that they echo the Second Temple liturgy, and they are first and foremost intended to be a medium for the exhortation, instruction, prophecy, praise and theology for the primary audience of John’s Apocalypse.408 The songs of the John’s Apocalypse emanate from a situation which not only exhorts Christians who lived under oppressive rule of the Roman world, but also intended to exhort those saints or witnesses who are currently going through religious intolerance and have no excess to religious liberty. Others have patterned their liturgies after that of the Apocalypse of John.409

Undeniably, Revelation is a relevant book whose time has come. It is also a book that invites and challenges God’s followers to faithfulness on the basis that Jesus Christ has conquered, and that He has become an instrument and means of establishing God’s Kingdom on earth.410 With this background in mind, we are now ready to delve into a journey of

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searching for the “Kingship of God” in the hymns of the Apocalypse of John.

5.2 Rev. 4: 1-11: The Eternal Creator-King

John introduces us to the throne-room where God is seated silently, while His creation relentlessly adores Him. Notice that the first thing that John sees in his vision is a “throne.” The word “throne” has been mentioned approximately ten times in chapter 4 of the Apocalypse of John, and the frequent occurrence of the word “throne” suggests and points to God's rule.

John’s language demonstrates that activity in Rev. 4 takes place “on the throne” (Rev. 4: 2, 4, 9, 10); “around the throne” (Rev. 4: 3, 4, 6); “out from the throne” (Rev. 4: 5); “in front of the throne” (Rev. 4: 5, 6, 10); and “in the midst of the throne,” (Rom. 4: 6). This frequent occurrence establishes that the “throne” is indeed fundamental in Rev. 4.411

Tucker,412 in echoing the same sentiments, describes and enumerates “7 conspicuous things” connected with the throne of Rev. 4 thus:

1. On the throne – One seated
2. Round the throne – A Rainbow
3. Round the throne – 24 Elders
4. Out of the throne – Thunders
5. Before the throne – 7 Lamps of Fire

6. Before the throne – Sea like unto glass
7. Amidst the throne – 4 beasts.

Notice Bullinger’s\textsuperscript{413} symmetrical chiastic structure of God’s throne together with activities and creatures around it:

\begin{itemize}
\item[a] 1-3-. On it: the Enthroned One.
\item[b] d | -3. Round it: a Rainbow.
\item[e] 4. Round it: 24 Thrones.
\item[c] 5-. Out of it: Lightnings.
\item[b] d | -5. Before it: Seven Lamps.
\item[e] 6-. Before it: a Crystal Sea.
\item[a] -6-8-. In the midst and round about it: the four Zo\textsubscript{a}.
\end{itemize}

The throne is a point of reference and centre of focus in Rev. 4 and the following chapters. The salvation history unfolds from \textit{theothronic}\textsuperscript{414} standpoint and also consummated \textit{theothronically}.\textsuperscript{415} The intention of this \textit{throne-centric} vision is to show John, his immediate audience, and us that God is in control of human history and in particular, the history of His church.\textsuperscript{416} Du Rand\textsuperscript{417} points to another dimension of God’s Kingship, that of “cultic and political imagery.” “Cultic” in the sense of expressing celestial liturgy, and “political” in the sense that “God exercises his rule over the world.”

\textsuperscript{414} The coined word \textit{theothronic} (or \textit{theothronically}) [from two words Theo (God) and \textit{thronos} (throne) – refer to God’s regal or royal throne-view or perspective. The past, present and future unfolds under the control, interpretation and determination of God from His royal throne].
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{416} C. L. Kuhn, “The Fine Line: The Relevance of Apocalyptic Today,” \textit{Bible Today} 28 (5), 1990, pp. 267-269. This author mentions that the Book of Revelation is an excellent vehicle to remind the saints that God is in control of all powers and principalities, despite all evidence to the contrary.
\textsuperscript{417} J. A. du Rand, “Your kingdom come ‘on earth as it is in heaven’”: The theological motif of the Apocalypse of John,” p. 69.
The combination of these two dimensions (cultic and political) of God’s rule reflects, in the words of du Rand, “Political loyalty is often expressed through religious worship.” John was not only given a gleams of God’s Kingship, but also the “heaven’s perspective of earthly events as he walked through the door that was opened to him in 4:1.”

The prophet John, in the fourth chapter of Revelation, transits from a vision of the messages to the seven churches to the heavenly courts through “an open door,” (Rev. 4: 1). John receives the invitation to “come up hither” in order for him to see “what must take place after this,” (Rev. 4: 1), and was then transported to a different location “in the Spirit,” (Rev. 4: 2).

The significance of this invitation to John reminds and instructs us that revelation and prophecy begin and end in God. God, not human beings, is the source of revelation and prophecy. One of the aims of the Apocalypse of John is to instill in us “God-consciousness” and at Parousia we will welcome full and final “Kingdom-consciousness.”

John, in his vision, saw the following characters:

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God, “like jasper and carnelian,” (Rev. 4: 3) calmly sitting on His throne in heaven. Keathly makes the following fascinating observation in relation to the precious stones which describe the appearance of God, especially their connection with the Old Testament sanctuary services:

“So these stones are used to portray something of God’s eternal glory, awesome holiness, and majesty. “Jasper.” This was a clear, crystal-like gem, a translucent rock, perhaps even a diamond. It portrays the purity and brilliance of God’s holiness. Since such a stone picks up and reflect light, it calls our attention to the fact that God is light, a holy God who reveals, and unmask the darkness. “Sardius.” This stone was blood red undoubtedly portraying God’s wrath and justice, but it would also look at His redemptive work of love and grace in the person of the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world through His death on the cross.”

From Keathly’s observation, we glean and see God’s character and attributes of Holiness, Omniscience, and also His balance between grace and justice. Keathly continues to say,

“In the Old Testament these stones had a special relationship to the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had a representative stone which the High Priest wore on his priestly garment. As the High Priest, he was representing each tribe before God at the altar. The Jasper was the stone representing the first tribe, the tribe of Reuben. The last tribe, Benjamin, was represented by the Sardius. So these two stones represent the whole nation, the first and the last and all in between.”

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420 J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation: Christ’s Victory Over the*
Without a doubt the Old Testament sanctuary is the framework of the Book of Revelation. The whole purpose of the Old Testament sanctuary, as reflected in Keathly’s statement, was to demonstrate the magnitude of sin, the process and mechanism of dealing with and responding to sin problem, the ultimate eradication of sin and its adherents, the salvation of the faithful, and the establishment of the visible Kingdom of God.

(2) John introduces us to the 24 elders, clothed with white garments, wearing their golden crowns on their heads, and seated on their 24 thrones which encircled God’s throne, ever responding to the song initiated by the 4 living creatures, singing the lyrics of their song: “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created,” (Rev. 4: 11). In their response to the song of the 4 living creatures, they fall down to worship in front of the main throne, and also engage in a “liturgical gesture” of laying down their crowns.


(3) John alludes to seven torches of fire (Seven Spirits) before the main throne; the “seven torches of fire” refer to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit plays or occupies a crucial role particular in the prophetic writings. He is instrumental in revealing and interpreting the will of God to and through His prophets. The Book of Revelation is about unfolding of God’s Divine Purpose for the heaven and earth, evil and Satan, saints and Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation reveals the salvation history from start to end.

(4) Around the throne, on each side, stood 4 living creatures singing an unending song day and night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4: 8). Their praise song triggers a response by yet another song from the 24 elders, which is followed by a gesture of worship and that of casting their crowns before the central throne.

The role of 4 living creatures around the throne is similar to that which takes place in the African royal context, wherein a king has a person, in Xhosa and Zulu languages he is known as an imbongi and in Sesotho language he is known as seroki - which means a person who renders or gives praise to dignitary or royalty, whose role is to poetically praise the king before the king gives a speech or as a way of introducing him to either his nation or to guests. The content of an imbongi or seroki’s praise largely deals with the identity of the king, his royal ancestry, his successes, and the greatness of his nation. Sometimes an imbongi or seroki would respectfully and

\[422\text{ The “seven torches of fire” point to or are emblematic of the Holy Spirit (cf. ch. 4: 2, 6, 10).}\]
gracefully criticize the king for his dealings with his people or for anything, and this is done with impunity. The former State President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, because of his royalty, had an imbongi or seroki who also praised him during his April 1994 inauguration. Africans are at home in the throne-centric framework of the Book of Revelation.

(5) Apart from the above-mentioned characters, John also saw other objects and activities – a “sea of glass” like crystal and also fire and thundering sounds proceeding from the central throne.

(6) The “One seated” on the central, main throne is, undoubtedly, God, the King of kings and of the universe. The phrase “One seated on the throne” appears approximately 12 times in the Apocalypse of John. It is interesting to note that John does not describe God on His throne, but prefers to address Him as “one seated on the throne,” (Rev. 4: 2). John virtually “implies only that a presence was upon the throne,” and this description of God avoids any suggestion of “anthropomorphic” portrayal of God. The “presence” on the throne “has no name or title, but for the moment…” John, as a Jew, would refrain from pronouncing the Name of God because it was not acceptable in Jewish economy.

We now turn our attention to the singers in the fourth chapter of Revelation – the 4 living creatures and 24 elders. There are divergent

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423 Rev. 4: 2; 5: 7, 13; 16: 16; 7: 10, 16; 19: 4; 20: 11; 21: 5;
views pertaining to the identity of the 24 elders. It will suffice to mention that the milieu of the 24 elders echoes Isa. 24: 23, “Then the moon will be confounded... the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before his elders he will manifest his glory.” Matthew records that when Jesus Christ gave His spirit and died at the Cross, there was an earthquake, the graves were opened and at His resurrection, the saints rose with Him (Matt. 27: 52-54).

It is possible that those saints (representing or and composing those who died during the era of Old and New Testaments) who resurrected with Him on the first day of the week, also ascended to heaven with Him and some of them constitute the 24 elders. The 24 elders should be understood in the context of God restoring humankind’s kingship that was lost at creation soon after the entrance of sin. The victorious, crowned 24 elders

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426 For example, G. E. Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 78, is of the opinion that the 24 elders are “a company of angels who serve as a sort of heavenly counterpart to the elders in Israel (Exod. 24:11); who are helping execute divine rule.” See also Wilfred J. Harrington, Revelation in Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 6 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), and p. 79. Harrington is of the opinion that 24 elders “are not angels, they are human symbols,” and that “they have a cultic role (4:9-10; 5:8-11; 11:16-18; 19:4). This author goes on to say that the 24 elders “fittingly represent the people of God, that “royal house of priests” (1:6).” See also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World in the Proclamation Commentaries, ed. Gerhard Krodel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 59. This writer maintains that the 24 elders are “twenty-four angelic vassals” whose role is that of “attendants of the royal court” assigned with the function of giving “homage and praise to the all-powerful ruler of the universe.” See also Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, Revelation in the Westminster Bible Companion, Eds. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Barlett (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 40. These authors interpret the 24 elders to mean “Israel (the twelve tribes) and the church (the twelve apostles).” M. E. Boring, in his Revelation in Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1989), p. 93, is of notion that the 24 elders are an emblem of the people of God. Boring basis his conclusion on the view that 12 is derived from 24 and that 12 is an emblem of the people of God.

might represent or point to the beginning of a process of receiving back the
God-given dominion that was lost when humankind succumbed to the
lures of the deceiver in the Garden of Eden.

We are not aware of any biblical support pointing to the view that those
resurrected saints of Matt. 27: 52-54 went back to their graves after the
ascension of Jesus Christ. It is possible that they are part of the 24 elders
sitting on the 24 thrones encircling the main throne. The crowns on the
heads of the 24 elders suggest the firstfruits of victory, and their white
robes point to or indicate their redemption and salvation through the
blood of Jesus Christ.

Swete\textsuperscript{428} seems to be on the route to finding a reasonable interpretation of
the 24 elders. He concluded that

"The symbol (24) appears to be based on the number of the
tribes of Israel; the \textit{dwdeka\textsuperscript{fulon}} is represented by 24 Elders,
two for each tribes, the double representation suggesting the
two elements which coexisted in the new Israel, the Jewish
and Gentile believers who were one in Christ. Thus the 24
Elders are the Church idealized and therefore seen as already
clad in white, crowned, and enthroned in the Divine Presence
- a state yet future (\textit{? de\textsuperscript{gen?sqai}}, but already potentially
realized in the Resurrection and Ascension of the Head…"

Swete interpretation is plausible to the extent that the 24 elders represent
both Jews and Gentiles in the sense of the new Israel, but he,
unfortunately, succumb to his approach to the interpretation of the
Apocalypse of John that locates the 24 elders into the future. Swete’s

\textsuperscript{428} Henry Barclay Swete, \textit{The Apocalypse of St John} (Grand Rapids: William B.
interpretation ignores or does not take into account the event of the resurrection of the saints recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt. 27: 52-54).

There are also differing views in relation to the identity of the “four living creatures,” and also that they might have been patterned from traditions that relates heavenly throne with an ark. It will be adequate to mention and conclude that the 4 living creatures are suggestive of Ezekiel’s visions. John did not or the Holy Spirit did not sufficiently reveal the identity of the 4 living creatures. The Book of Revelation should be allowed to be mysterious and imperceptible particularly to issues that do not carry salvific or condemnatory value. God should be allowed to be mysterious, especially in using a different pattern in creating other creatures, in particular, the 4 living creatures.

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429 J. Ramsey Michaels, Revelation, p. 93. This author sees no difference of interpretation between the identity of 24 elders and 4 living creatures. His conclusion is that “it is wiser just to let angels be angels.” See also Robert W. Wall, Revelation (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), p. 94. This author maintains that the 4 living creatures are “angelic representatives, perhaps ‘celestial doubles’ of God’s animate creation.” Wilfred J. Harrington, Revelation in the Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 16, edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegevale, Minnesota: A Michael Glazier Book published by The Liturgical Press, 1993), p. 80 is of the opinion that the 4 living creatures are “the four angels responsible for directing the physical world; therefore they symbolize the whole created cosmos.” W. Leon Tucker in his Studies in Revelation: An Expositional Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), p. 106, maintains that 4 living creatures are “ministers of justice connected with the throne of judgment which is seen set for judgment.” Tucker challenges and refutes a view that purports that 4 living creatures are “4 Gospels” and/or also “ministers of the gospel.” The proponents of the “ministers of the gospel” = 4 living creatures base their conclusion on their interpretation and understanding of the description of those 4 living creatures. Their understanding is that lion represents their boldness, ox – their patient service, eagle – their affections, and man – their prudence.

430 R. G. Hall, “Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4-6,” New Testament Studies 36 (4), 1990, pp. 609-613. This author views the 4 living creatures of Rev. 4 as an integral part of the throne, and that the 4 living constitute components, but not occupants of the throne.

431 See Eze. 1: 5-26; 10: 20-22.
While it is true that the Bible provides a wealth of information to the earnest reader or digger of the truth, it will do us good to heed the counsel of Moses. Moses has cautioned us pertaining to the mysterious issues. He said, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law,” (Deut. 29: 29). The Scriptures have revealed and provided us with sufficient knowledge and revelation pertinent to and essential for our daily living and ultimate salvation.

The two songs of the 4 living creatures and 24 elders emphasize two different aspects of God – His Divine Being and Divine Act. One may be tempted to believe that even the tunes of those two songs were different from each other, but not causing discord. Notice the following interesting characteristics of the song by the 4 living creatures and that of the 24 elders:

1. The hymn of the 4 living creatures. The content of the song of the 4 living creatures does not only point to God’s Kingship (Lord), but also refers to His character – His Divine Being. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4: 8). The hymn of the 4 living creatures functions as a means of inviting the entire creation to worship God as the very and only object of their adoration and glory – and this worship is to be rendered for no other external reasons except that He is a Divine Lord and Eternal Being.
The 4 living creatures entreat us to render worship and praise to Him for the reason of Who God is. The song points to the fact that “The reign of Heaven is about to be established in the Earth, when all shall be holy, where now all is unholy.”

It also points to the context of and time-terrain of His existence, in the sense of “divine eternity… timeless being.” The phrase “… is to come” (Rev. 4: 8b) in relation to God, should not be understood in the sense of “a mere future existence” of God, but should be understood in the sense of and in the same level “with the parousia of Jesus Christ.”

2. The hymn of the 24 elders. The content of the song of the 24 elders points to what God-King has done – His Divine Act of creating, (Creator of all existence), and this attribute elicits and forms the basis for worshiping Him. “Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created,” (Rev. 4: 11).

God’s act of creating should not only be limited to the understanding of creation as indicated in the Book of Genesis, but also creation in the sense of God creating us anew in and through Jesus Christ-event at the Cross. The song of the 24 elders challenges the theory of evolution, humanism and atheism. The object of our

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434 R. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 28
435 Ibid. p. 29.
worship or Whom we worship is one of the key themes of Revelation.436

The song of the 4 living creatures and that of the 24 elders point to or are emblematic of praise and glory aimed at the Divine Presence on the main throne – and this praise and glory are expressed by the heavenly (represented by 4 living creatures) and earthly-redeemed (represented by the 24 elders or new Israel) creatures. Barnhouse437 has rightly observed that “Satan may have seduced the world through millenniums of struggle to accept him as the prince of this world and as the god of this age, but now beings mightier than he show the way of true worship. God alone is to receive the homage of men.”

We need to mention before we close our discussions that there are strong allusions to the Old Testament sanctuary and its services in the fourth chapter of the Book of Revelation.438 For example sanctuary language such as “trumpet” (Rom. 4: 1);439 “door,” (Rev. 4: 1);440 precious stones (Rev. 4: 3);441 seven lamps (Rev. 4: 5);442 the sea of glass (Rev. 4: 6);443 four living

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439 Cf. Num. 10: 8-10 where trumpets were used for liturgical and war purposes.
440 Cf. Exo. 29: 4, 10-11; Lev. 1: 3, 5; 1 Kings 6: 31-32, 34 all these verses relate to the sanctuary doors.
441 Cf. Exo. 28: 17-21, the precious stones allude to the precious stones that decorated the Old Testament high priest’s breastplate.
442 Reminiscent of the candlestick found in the Old Testament sanctuary, in the holy place (cf. Rev. 1: 12, 13, 20).
443 It is possible that the “sea of glass” echoes the “molten sea” in the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 7: 23-24).
creatures next to the throne (Rev. 4: 6-8).\textsuperscript{444} Indeed the Old Testament sanctuary and services form a crucial background of the Apocalypse of John, in particular, of the fourth chapter of Revelation.

In summing-up, the content or theology of the song of the 4 living creatures and that of the 24 elders or new Israel remind us that God should be worshipped by His creation for Who He is and for what He has done, and this worship and praise should be expressed by all His creatures – both in heaven and on earth.

The attention of and the object of worship in chapter four of Revelation are directed towards God, Who is the King seated on His throne. The fourth chapter of Revelation winds up with this “great anthem of praise by the four living ones and the 24 elders to God as creator. In Rev. 5: 11-14 the focus of worship is on Jesus Christ as Redeemer.”\textsuperscript{445} The issue in chapter 4 of Revelation is the “throne and its formless occupant”\textsuperscript{446} Whose from defies any human description. This Divine “formless occupant” Whose technical Name in Book of Revelation is “One seated on the throne.”\textsuperscript{447} We are now ready to peruse Revelation 5 whose outlined crisis point to the development of the controversy between God and Satan over the earthly dominion – culminating in victory through Jesus Christ’s Blood.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[444] The 4 living creatures next to throne might suggest the cherubim of Ezekiel 1 & 10 connected with the Ark of the Covenant in Exo. 25: 18-20; 1 Kings 6: 23-28. And further, in Jewish economy lion, calf, man and eagle, together with the 4 posters or flags around which Moses prearranged for the Israelites’ encampment in the wilderness (Num. 2).
\end{footnotes}
5.3 Rev. 5: 8-13: The Lion-Lamb, the Object of Praise and Worship

The events in the throne setting seem to occur at the beginning of the Christian era. God the Father on the throne (Rev. 4) and Jesus Christ joining the Father on the throne after receiving worship because of the redemption accomplished through His death (Rev. 5: 5) are crucial in this throne arena. Later on the saints will join the throne area in Rev. 7: 9-10. The seals will unfold between the Jesus Christ-event at the cross and Christian Era or triumph of the redeemed.

The fifth chapter of the Apocalypse of John is the continuation of scene one of the fourth chapter. It is, so to say, act two of scene one. In fact, Rev. 4: 8-11 and 5: 9-13 constitute “narratological framework” to confirm the identity of the Lamb and of God, and also that of the hearer or reader.

The two songs – that of the 4 living creatures and that of the 24 elders, centred on God, the Divine Being seated on the throne. God, the King, was and is the object of praise and adoration for Who He is and what He has done as a Creator. The accent was and is on God, the Father. The central figure of attention in Act two of Scene One, is Jesus Christ, because of His credentials and through His act of breaking the seals of the scroll – who is also the Lion and Paschal Lamb.

449 For further discussion on this topic, see A. du Rand, “Die Narratieve Funksie van die Liedere in Openbaring 4:1-5:15,” *Skrif en Kerk* 12 (1), 1991, pp
The setting of John’s vision is still the same. When the 24 elders had sung their song which was activated by that of the 4 living creatures, John saw God holding a scroll in His right hand and the scroll was written both inside and outside. There are several interpretation offered regarding the contents of the scroll.450

Suffice to say that, for John, the scroll or a “fan-folded book”451 reveals the unfolding salvation history, exhortations to the immediate Christians and John, war between the Lamb and the evil forces, and culminating in victory for God and for His people through the Lamb. In a nutshell, the scroll contains God’s solution for sin-problem.

5.3.1 The Roman sealed Scroll and Hebrews Tradition

450 J. M. Ford, Revelation in Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 92-94. Ford contends that the scroll contains the prophecies of divine judgment reflected in the Book of Revelation. See also Robert W. Wall, Revelation in New International Biblical Commentary, edited by W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 100. This author mentions that other scholars argue that the scroll refers to the Old Testament on the basis that the same word for scroll (biblios) is the same word from which “Bible” is derived. This author disputes this view on the reason that Jesus is required to die before He opens the scroll. See also O. Roller, “Das Buch mit den sieben Siegeln,” Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 26, 1937, pp. 98-113. Roller maintains that the scroll refers to the “legal bond, of man’s debt or guilt before God.” See also Harrington, Revelation, pp. 83-84. This author maintains that the scroll is “God’s preordained plan for this world, to be revealed and carried through by the Lamb… The sealed scroll of Revelation is a Christian Book, closed to all except the slain Lamb and his followers.”

We need to note that the notion of a sealed scroll was not uncommon during the time of John and in the Roman economy. The Roman Practice\textsuperscript{452} of making a will included a formal procedure of involving a testator and seven witnesses. For each of the seven witnesses there was a seal. A very trustworthy acquaintance was selected who would, for a coin or any acceptable currency, procure the assets or inheritance for the family. In this way the property or assets would become the property of the dependable friend, however, upon the death of the testator, the very reliable friend would return the property to the rightful heirs.

For such a text, a long scroll of parchment was used. The writer of the document would begin writing and after a period, he would stop, roll up the parchment enough to cover his words, and then seal the scroll with wax. He would then resume writing, stop, and seal another portion, and so on until the entire scroll was sealed with seven seals. In this way, the scroll would read a section at a time after each seal was broken.

In the equivalence, and also in the context of Revelation, the Lord Jesus Christ is the trustworthy Friend who has procured our redemption and is here seen opening the seals that provide us with our inheritance. In this case, He is salvaging that which was lost by Adam and the rest of the humankind. Further, this procedure was used to keep illegitimate persons from opening the seven-sealed scroll. Only a “worthy” person, the one with the right qualifications, could open the seals, read the inheritance, and give it to the inheritors.

\textsuperscript{452} For information on Roman and Jewish traditions regarding the usage of legal scrolls, see J. Hampton Keathley III, \textit{Studies in Revelation: Christ’s Victory Over the}
The practice of redeeming the property or inheritance by the next of kin was not unknown in the Hebrew Tradition. If a Jewish family were to lose its property or possessions by some kind of hardship or anguish, their property could not be permanently taken from them (the Old Testament law of jubilee and the kinsman redeemer protected them against this). However, their losses were listed in a scroll and sealed seven times.

Then the conditions necessary to purchase back the land and their possessions were written on the outside of the scroll. When a qualified redeemer could be found, who could meet the requirements of reclamation (a kinsman like Boaz as in the story of Ruth), the one who had taken the property was required to return it to the original owner (Ruth 4: 6-11; cf. Lam. 5).

5.3.2 Tension in the Throne Room

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Ibid.
John saw a vision in which the problem of sin was being solved, and in the same vision, the Lion-Lamb had been slain already,\textsuperscript{454} and the Christ-event had already taken place at the Cross including His resurrection, but the drama was enacted simply to benefit John and his primary audience, and also to give them and us courage to stand because the Lamb had already conquered.\textsuperscript{455} The elders were already aware of the Lion-Lamb as the One “worthy” to break the seals, but John was not aware. The Lion points to the power of God, and the Lamb points to God’s manifestation of the same power.\textsuperscript{456}

The song of Revelation 5 is preceded by a high tension created by a soul-searching question put forward to everyone in the throne-room - which caused John to weep because there was no one found “worthy” to respond or open the scroll (Rev. 5: 2-5). The act of posing a question by the elder did not only help to focus the readers’ attention to the scroll in the Hand of the One sitting on the throne, but it was also heightening a transition of thought and also for the purpose of putting an emphatic accent on the means and agent of redemption – the Lion-Lamb, Jesus Christ Himself.

Note the following chart that contrasts the two pictures [revealing the characteristics of a Lion in relation to those of a Lamb – within the context

\textsuperscript{454} Jon Paulien, “The Seven Seals,” in the Symposium on Revelation – Book 1, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p. 203. This author alerts us to the understanding that “The Greek verbs (\textit{enik\texttt{a}}sa, \textit{ekathisa}, “I overcame...sat down,” 3:21, \textit{enik\texttt{es}}en, “he overcame,” 5:5) are aorist indicative, indicating specific events in the past time.” In exegeting a song of Rev. 5, Paulien points out that it refers to the past events. For example “You were slain” (\textit{esphag\texttt{a}}s), “bought” (\textit{\texttt{?goras}}as), “made” (\textit{epoi\texttt{s}}as).

\textsuperscript{455} Wall, Revelation, p.98.

\textsuperscript{456} Harrington, Revelation, p. 87.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus as the Lion</th>
<th>Jesus as the Lamb</th>
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<tr>
<td>the lion character refers to His second coming</td>
<td>the lamb character refers to His first coming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the lion speaks of His majesty</td>
<td>the lamb speaks of His meekness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as lion He is sovereign</td>
<td>as lamb He is Savior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as lion He is Judge</td>
<td>as lamb He is judged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the lion speaks of the government of God</td>
<td>the lamb speaks of the grace of God</td>
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Notice that the Lion-Lamb picture of Jesus Christ, according to the above-mentioned chart, not only reveal the function of Jesus Christ, but also point to the three eras that encompass His mission – pre-Calvary, post-Calvary and eschatological return of Jesus Christ. It is interesting to note that the imagery of Jesus Christ as a Lion appears once in Rev. 5: 5, and thereafter the imagery of Him as the slain Lamb is used repeatedly. It can be concluded that the prominence of the imagery of the Lamb than that of the Lion points to the view “that divine conquest will not be achieved by a display of might… but by suffering and sacrifice.”\footnote{J. Vernon McGee, \textit{Reveling Through Revelation}, p. 47 as quoted by J. Hampton Keathley III, \textit{Studies in Revelation: Christ’s Victory Over the Forces of Darkness} (Biblical Studies Press, \texttt{www.bible.org}, 1997), p. 154.}

John’s act of weeping shows the intensity of the crisis that had been created. The weeping on John’s side was caused by the report that “no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it,” (Rev. 5: 4). The crisis had no solution because no one qualified to address it. The crisis did not only function as a tool to reveal to John that Jesus Christ is worthy to be praised and worshipped as God because He died and resurrected, but...
also for providing John with an indelible experience so that he will not be able to forget what he saw and experienced - because that event constituted the very climax of the Book of Revelation.

The tension in John and the enacted crisis in heaven are resolved when one of the elders cried out to John: “Weep not, lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals,” (Rev. 5: 5). Notice that the historical event of “conquering” had already taken place in the past – at the Cross of Calvary, and also that Jesus Christ’s lineage is consistent with and the very fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ’s victorious death and His subsequent resurrection become the basis and qualification for taking and opening the scroll.

After Jesus Christ had taken the scroll from the right hand of the One seated on the throne, namely, God, the 4 living creatures and the 24 elders responded by kneeling to worship the Lamb, “each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints,” and they started singing “a new song” (Rev. 5: 6-8).

5.3.3 The Content of the Song of the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures - Rev. 5: 9-10

The content of this song is a central point of this chapter, and also the Lamb provides content to Easter messages and experience to us because

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458 Donald Guthrie, *The Relevance of John’s Apocalypse*, p. 48.
they introduce us to crucified, risen, reigning and returning King.\textsuperscript{459} It would seem that one of the goals of this song is to offer applause to the worthiness of the Lamb, and also to let loose the sentence as outlined in the seals. Horrendous judgments will follow as a manifestation of God’s holiness and justice against mankind’s deliberate sin and rebellion. Calvary has already atoned for mankind’s sin, but some chose to rebel and in turn, die for their own sins.

Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb and the Son gave His life as God’s answer to the dilemma of sin, but a majority of mankind has chosen to reject a salvation offer from God’s Son. This section addresses, in part, Theodicy, a vindication of God’s goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil and the judgments that will follow. The song in question outlines five rationale for and motivation that point to the worthiness of God, and those reasons fall into three time gaps, and that all of them are based on the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

Firstly, Jesus Christ the Lamb “was slain,” (Rev. 5: 9; cf. 5: 6) or killed, and this phrase should be understood within the framework of the Christ-event at the Cross, and also within the milieu of the surrogate death of Christ for the sin of the world – and this event has taken place in history, and also indicated the revelation of God’s love for the world.

Secondly, John writes, “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth,” (Rev. 5: 9, 10; cf. 1 Pet. 2: 9, 10).

This passage draws our attention to the value and efficacy of the Jesus Christ’s death, and also points to two time frames, a completed or historical act, and also a present reality. Jesus Christ’s death established God’s spiritual Kingship at Calvary, and the Parousia will usher in God’s physical Kingship on earth at which time “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,” (Phil. 2:10).

The death of Jesus Christ has virtually changed the course of history, established God’s throne and Kingship, anticipated the judgment of Satan and justice for saints, not only affirmed the future of the saints, but provided framework of meaning in which they can understand their present suffering, and provided another opportunity for saints to exercise their choice after Adam and Eve had plunged them into darkness through their wrong and misguided choices.460

The salvation of humankind is described as a consummated act and fact. John uses a Greek word hjgovrasa" from the word ajgoravzw, which means to be ransomed, to be redeemed, or to be purchased in the market place, (Rev. 5: 9). John employs the word ajgoravsai to caution believers to purchase from Jesus Christ genuine rather than sham gold. Paul utilised

the same word \textit{hjgoravsqhte} in 1 Cor. 6: 20 and 7: 23 to indicate that Jesus Christ has redeemed or ransomed us in order to set us free from the power of sin, and for Himself.

The concept of ransom or redemption appears to have existed outside of the Jewish economy. According to the Delphic inscriptions, there was a legal form of practice known as “The Sacral Manumission of Slaves”\textsuperscript{461} in which the god purchased the slave, using the slave’s own money for the transaction for the purpose of setting free the same slave. There was no sacral redemption in the Old Testament temple, but “manumission” took place in the synagogue and church, and the Jewish world applied the idea of redemption religiously.

This Greek word \textit{ajgoravzw} is often used in relation to the salvific or redemptive work of Jesus Christ that emancipates us from sin and death. The reader should note that the tense, a consummative or effective aorist indicates salvation or redemption as an accomplished fact and act. There is a process of or a present effect in that every time a person believes in Jesus Christ, His redemptive and salvific death becomes the means of the believer’s salvation and redemption. Saints have been redeemed or ransomed or purchased in order to constitute them under God’s Kingship.

Thirdly, John says that Jesus Christ “hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God,” (Rev. 5: 9), and this statement points to both historical and present effects of the Cross, the establishment of a kingdom. This event has taken part in the past; it is rightly labelled as “Inaugurated
Eschatology.” Jesus Christ redeemed or ransomed us at the Cross, and on every occasion a person puts his/her trusts in Jesus Christ, they are set free from the kingdom of darkness and sin, and are made citizens of a new kingdom, a kingdom of light in concurrence with God’s will for man (Col. 1: 13). As citizens of the Kingdom, the believers share in God’s Kingship.

Fourthly, John mentions that believers are “priests to our God.” This role, or priests, puts an accent on believers’ current or present intercessory, representative function. Through Jesus Christ’s work we have a right of entry to God, and are empowered to minister and represent Him to humankind here on earth during the church age prior to Parousia. In their priestly role, the believers are not only redeemed, but they stand in the gap between God and prospective believers in order to intercede for them.

We need to mention that in general sense or in non-technical sense the Greek word or priest has several connotations and usages, and also that the word is pre-Greek. For example, the word priests has its synonyms, namely, divine, holy, devout, righteous and pure. During the


462 For an extensive discussion on “Inaugurated Eschatology,” see an article by A. J. Bandstra, “A Kingship and Priest: Inaugurated Eschatology in the Apocalypse,” Calvin Theological Journal 27 (1), 1992, pp. 10-25. This writer points out that in Rev. 1: 5 and 5: 10-12 saints are made to be a kingship and priests, and that the two texts point to an “Inaugurated Eschatology” with the view of balancing out the “not yet” of the future by affirming that “already now” Christians rule in Jesus Christ’s name on earth. Saints are a royal community who rejoice in the presence of God, intercede for the world, and share the gospel of the risen, reigning and returning Jesus Christ.
Hellenistic Judaism, the word “priests” or "priest" took different shades of meanings.

For example, Josephus used the word “priest” in a general sense; Philo used the word priest to mean the sacred writings or a divine instruction, but he put heavy accent on the ethnicity of the word; For Josephus, Philo and Apocrypha, "iJerei" described the sacred writings, the divine instruction, any holy object or thing dedicated for usage in the temple or tarbernacle, and also for any special and holy days such as the Sabbath. From the synthesis of the word "iJerei", we conclude that believers or saints represent any function, sacred writing, or object, or a thing dedicated for holy purpose, especially for the house of God. They are virtually depositories of God’s blessings, and the expression of His character and purpose for the world.

Lastly, the Book of Revelation (5: 10) says, “And they shall reign on earth.” The Greek employs the word basileus,ouin points to a future indicative of a promised future fact and act. The Book of Revelation portrays God as always sitting calmly on His throne, reigning in the heavens and also in full control of all that goes on, but the church is not ruling yet nor sharing in God’s Kingship.

God’s church will rule with Christ in the future after Parousia, and He did not intend to have His church rule in the present age (1 Cor. 6: 2). Currently the church plays a role of inviting everyone to be subjects in and citizens of God’s Kingdom and Kingship, and also to prepare a people to meet Jesus Christ at Parousia - and this mission is accomplished through
the gospel of Jesus Christ and the witness of the believers. The believers establish God’s Kingship on earth through their lives and witness, and ultimately, they will also share in God’s Kingship when Jesus Christ comes again.

5.3.4 The Content of the Song of the 4 Living Creatures, 24 Elders, and Angelic host (Rev. 5: 12)

John mentions that a swarm of countless angels encircle the throne, together with the four living beings and the 24 elders, and their fwnh' / megavlh/. John mentions that they all sang with one voice. The mere mention of a “voice” in singular form stresses the fact that they are singing or speaking in complete unity, as one. The host of countless of heavenly, mighty beings sing and speak in complete admiration for the Lamb, for what He has accomplished, and is now about to do. They speak in a mevga" or loud and great voice. The word mevga" speaks of both greatness and magnitude.

The angelic hosts witnessed, experienced, and resisted the Devil’s insurrection, and also witnessed a tragic fall of humankind. They now share in and participate in a joyous excitement at the forecast of the divine judgments. They rejoice because their chief enemy is now about to receive punishment in proportion to his wickedness. The seven-packed exaltation of Jesus Christ is declared in the context of the Devil’s impending judgement.
Firstly, Jesus Christ is described as “worthy to receive power,” (Rev. 5: 12). The word power or Greek *duvnamí* is used for the reason that Jesus Christ needs great power to destroy the kingdom of darkness in order to establish God’s Kingship and Kingdom. This *duvnamí* or power is also instrumental in helping prospective citizens of the Kingdom of God to break the power or hold of sin on their lives. Jesus Christ uses this *duvnamí* not for His personal gain or for self-gratification, but justice and love govern Him.

Jesus Christ needs to use this power to consummate the war that started in heaven, continued on earth, and ultimately to end at *Parousia* as recorded in Rev. 12: 7-12. The word *duvnamí*, particularly in relation with Jesus Christ, should be understood within the Greek Philosophy context, wherein the word is used not only in the sense that Jesus Christ has power, but also that He is power or *duvnamí*. The acts of *duvnamí* will be demonstrated in full when Jesus Christ metes judgment on Satan, his angels, Babylon and all her followers. This *duvnamí* should also be understood in the context of Jesus Christ’s role of “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” which points to the eschatological judgement, (Rev. 5: 5).

Secondly, Jesus Christ has earned a right to *plóutō* “wealth” or “riches.” The word “wealth” or “riches” may refer to the wealth of the world. The world belongs to Jesus Christ both by creation and by re-creation or redemption. He created it by His power, and also re-created or redeemed or ransomed or purchased it by His blood. The word “wealth” or “riches” should also be attached to the value which Jesus Christ put on humankind
in the light of the Christ-event at the Cross. Humankind is precious, and therefore, constitutes the πλοῦτος or wealth or riches of Jesus Christ, and they also will benefit from “his (God’s) riches in glory in Christ Jesus,” (Phil. 4:19).

Thirdly, Jesus Christ has earned the right to receive “wisdom,” or σοφία (Rev. 5: 12). The word σοφία refers to the Lord’s omniscience and its wise use in carrying out the purposes of God in the world, and also as demonstrated in planning and executing the salvific, redemptive plan of creating and governing the universe and its contents, and also in saving humankind and setting up or establishing God’s Kingship on earth.

Fourthly, Jesus Christ is worthy of receiving “might” or “strength” or εξουσία refers to working might or power in action and stresses His omnipotence to carry out God’s will – that of establishing the Kingship of God on earth. Jesus Christ had already demonstrated that might and strength in securing humankind’s salvation through His precious Blood. The root of the Greek word εξουσία is derived from εχω, which means to have or to possess.

Jesus Christ alone possesses that power and strength to achieve God’s Kingship on earth seeing that that Kingship is already un-controverted in heaven. Jesus Christ contends with the powers of darkness under the leadership of Satan, whose aim is to thwart God’s purpose of establishing His Kingship on earth. The act of conferring on Jesus Christ εξουσία

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463 Rev. 5: 12; cf. Rom. 11: 33; Phil. 4: 19.
anticipates and prepares Him for the final, eschatological showdown with or against the powers of darkness.

Fifthly, Jesus Christ has earned the right to receive timhv, “honour” and “praise” by reason of what He has accomplished. This value and respect is due to or afforded to Jesus Christ because of Who He is and what He has and will accomplish to the glory of God and to the benefit of the world. The context of this honour is based on the already accomplished phase of establishing God’s Kingship through the Jesus Christ-event at the Cross, and the eschatological phase of establishing God’s Kingship will be consummated at the Parousia.

The sixth honour expressed by the universe, which is due to Jesus Christ is “glory” or dovxa, which refers to the tribute and public display of adoration that should accrue to the Lion-Lamb, Jesus Christ, and again this praise or adoration stems from His person and work, both past, present, and future. This attribute can also point to the intrinsic value of Jesus Christ’s personal excellency or His kingly majesty - belonging to Him alone not only through His redemption of humankind, but also through His pre-existence.

The seventh and also the last quality which is given to Jesus Christ, and also constituting the content of a song is “praise” or “blessing” in the (NASB), and which is the Greek word eujlogiva. The word eujlogiva refers to or means a “fair or good speech.” It refers to the praise that should be given to the Lord because of His wonderful acts of redemption and reclamation. The word eujlogiva comes from the word eujlog?w, which
means to invoke blessings or ask blessings from God for a person or a thing. The inhabitants of the universe identify themselves with Jesus Christ notwithstanding the fact that Jesus Christ is God, they still invoke blessings on and for Him.

5.3.5 The Content of the a song by all Creation – Rev. 5: 13

John writes the following lyrics which he heard and noted from the song of the entire creation,

“And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, “To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!”

The focal point of Rev. 5: 13 is on the fact that the entire universe will ultimately render its praise to Jesus Christ, and also recognize His Kingly authority and right to rule as the God-man. The accent or limelight of the fourth chapter of Revelation was on God the Father. The fifth chapter of Revelation concentrates on both the Son and the Father, and both are praised.

It would seem that the event or lyrics of the song allude to or consummate the prophesy that was predicted by Paul in Phil. 2: 10-11. “Every knee,” including that of the arch enemy of God, Satan and his followers, will reluctantly accede to the fact God the Father and Son of God deserve worship, praise and obedience. This event will mark the end of a long
controversy which began in heaven, and the same conflict will forever be
ended. The evidence of God’s righteous ways and acts will render the
devil speechless, but to accede and join the entire universe in order to
kneel and praise God and Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of God will not lead Satan to repentance, but Satan will
have no choice, based on the weight of evidence in favour of God’s ways
and means of dealing with the problem of evil, but to grudgingly kneel
and praise God. His act of praise will not stay or prevent God’s judgement
on him and his followers.

Notice that foursome praise or blessing consists of “praise and honour and
glory and might.” Notice also that “praise and honour and glory” carry the
same meaning with those on Rev. 5: 12. The new word that has just been
added is kravto" meaning might or power which one is invested with. For
example, the word kravto" is used in the context of power to rule or execute
ones’ legally invested responsibility. The reader should note that the
Greek word, kravto" in Rev. 5: 13 could also be interpreted as “power” or
duvnami" and also shares the same meaning with the word ijscuv".

The Greek word duvnami" carries the meaning of might, strength or power,
but kravto" is strictly used in the royal or kingly milieu or for Kingship.
The word clearly points to the fact that Jesus Christ is indeed taking or
mightily taking the Kingship of the world which was usurped by the devil,
in order to restore it to its rightful, legitimate ruler, God the Father. The
duration of God’s Kingship on earth and in heaven is eternal. God’s kravto"
will be forever. From the time of Parousia the Kingship of God will
eternally be uncontested, un-controverted and unchallenged. The precious Blood of Jesus Christ will be a guarantee that wickedness and evil will no more rear its ugly head again.

5.3.6 Act of Worship by the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures – Rev. 5: 14

The climax or thrust of the Book of Revelation of John is worship – but the big question is, “Who should be the object of our worship - God or Roman emperors?” The Blood of Jesus Christ becomes the decisive factor in causing a worship mood in the entire universe. The evil power fights good power in order to mount the throne – and then demand worship. In Rev. 5: 14 we see an act of worship as an appropriate response from the four living beings and the worship of the 24 elders, the effects of the above praise. The 24 elders fell or e[pesan to worship Him.

It would seem that the 24 elders were in an upright or standing position, and they then fell on the ground or surface. This is an act of praying or kneeling or prostrating wherein creatures or human beings signify that they come from the ground or earth – and that they are mortal. It is only in the act of kneeling or falling down on the ground that a clear distinction between a King and subject, Creator and creation is realised. Moses had to touch the earth or be reminded that He was but mortal in the presence of the Immortal and Divine God (Exod. 3: 5). The Kingship of God is realised

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464 J. D. Charles, “An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 34 (4), 1991, pp. 461-473. This writer maintains that Rev. 5: 1-14 is the very highest point in the apocalyptic visions of John, and that the Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb, His royal power and splendour, His priestly sacrifice and atonement, His death, evoke a worship wave among the worshippers of Revelation 5.
and accepted whenever we fall down from an upright, standing position in order to kneel or prostrate on the ground. The God-King is the only One who should remain standing or sitting on His throne while we are on the ground worshipping Him.

The word \textit{ajmḥn} or “amen” signifies commitment or to concur. It also means “truly, truly.” In the Old Testament the word \textit{ajmḥn} was used to express confirmation (Num. 5: 22); or acceptance or pledge to an assignment or task (1 Kings 1: 36); and as a response to praise or doxology (1 Chron. 16: 36); or at the conclusion of a prayer (Num. 6: 24). In the New Testament the word \textit{ajmḥn} is often found at the end of a prayer;\footnote{Gal. 1: 5; Eph. 3: 21; 1 Tim. 1: 17.} as a response in the liturgical setting (Rev. 5: 14); and also at the end of prophecy (Rev. 1: 7) or at a conclusion of a book or a letter.\footnote{Gal. 6: 18; Jude 24; Rev. 22: 20.}

There is also an interesting and profound usage of the word \textit{ajmḥn} wherein Jesus Christ describes Himself as “Amen” (Rev. 3: 14). The Apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 1: 20 mentions that Jesus is the anchor or basis or foundation of our \textit{ajmḥn}. He is the guarantee of the promises He has made to His Church, the very worshipping community in its liturgical mood – the very focus and accent of the Book of Revelation.\footnote{Gal. 1: 5; Eph. 3: 21; 1 Tim. 1: 17.}

The word \textit{ajmḥn} is heaven’s response—the response of the angelic hosts asserting and confirming the validity of the praise. The falling down of the elders in worship demonstrates the Sovereignty of God and the worthiness
of the Lamb. The Lamb’s mission is not only to extend God’s sovereignty to earth, but also to recover it for Him and for the redeemed humankind. In deed, “in the Amen we have all Christology in a nutshell.”

5.3.7 A Concept of “A New Song”

John points out that as soon as the solution had been found in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb, the tension was eased by a new hymn of praise. It is possible that the new hymn turned John’s tears of pain into tears of joy, and John himself participated in the singing of the new hymn. The act of expressing joy, praise and worship towards God and the Lamb on the throne echoes and alludes to the Exodus account, with special reference to the providential crossing of the Red Sea.

God, through Moses, eased tension and sense of insecurity of the Israelites at the Red Sea through saving them by destroying their enemies and opening a dry land through the Red Sea. The Egyptians behind them were invincible. The Red Sea in front of them was impenetrable. The wilderness on their side was overwhelming, (Exod. 14: 1-3). The situation facing the Israelites was enough to cause tension in them. They could not fathom any escape out of their problems.

It was at that time when their tension was highest that God chose to intervene on their behalf – the dry land was miraculously opened in the

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Red Sea, but the Red Sea swallowed the Egyptians (Exo. 14: 30, 31). The salvation of the Israelites ran parallel with the judgment of the Egyptians. Once more, redemption and judgment are twin sister. In the next chapter (Exo. 15) Moses and Merriam led out in a song intended to praise God. God, in the song of Moses and Merriam, is addressed as “the Lord” or “O Lord” about 18 times – a pure acknowledgement of God’s Kingship.

The content of the hymn of Moses and Merriam point to God as “my salvation” and Redeemer (Exo. 15: 2, 13); He is not only the content of the song, but He is “my song” (Exod. 15: 2); The rest of the hymn point to God’s strength, might, love, victory, holiness, wonders and sanctuary. Moses concluded his song by mentioning that there is no end to God’s Kingship. He said, “The Lord will reign fore ever and ever,” (Exo. 15: 18). The song of Moses and Merriam functioned as an instrument not only to praise, worship and express their understanding of God, but also as a tool to ease their heightened tension.

The song of Moses and Merriam functioned on both anthropological and theological levels. It functioned on the anthropological level in the sense that it provided a solution for a painful, depressing situation. It also functioned on the theological level because Moses and Merriam theologized in song as an expression of their new understanding of God. The same functions of the songs of Merriam and Moses can be applied to the “new song” of the 4 living creatures, 24 elders, angelic hosts and the rest of the universe (Rev. 5: 9-14).

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On an anthropological level, John is seen as weeping and moaning because it seemed the solution or the dilemma of the sin-infected universe will remain unsolved. On the theological level, after the tension had been eased because of the qualifications of the Lion-Lamb Jesus Christ; the content of the song proceeds to explain what the Lamb is to humankind and also the role of the Lion in relation to mankind’s redemption.

On theological level, Jesus Christ, qualified by His death to open and break seals, is accepted not only as the Redeemer, but also as God worthy to receive worship and praise. The “newness” in the song occurs on this level. The song is not only new because of its eschatology;469 not new only because it points to the “New Age”;470 not new only in the sense of “time (neos)” but with regards to “quality (kainos),”471 not new only because “it has deep roots in the Old Testament messianic psalms;472 not new only because it “focuses on the future eschatological exodus of the triumphant church out of this world in order to serve God on the earth made new;”473 not a new song only because “Christ’s death has inaugurated a new era”474 or it points to “his work”475 or that a song “will never grow old,”476 but it is

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469 Wall, Revelation, p. 103.
470 Sweet, Revelation, p. 129.
471 Harrington, Revelation, p. 85.
a new song in the sense that a new Being, the Lion-Lamb, because of His qualification, has been revealed, introduced, and formally included as the Member of the Godhead and as the object of worship and praise.

This is a new recognition not only because of Jesus Christ as the “pre-existent logos,” but also that He qualified by becoming the Passover Lamb in order for judgment to pass-over sinners, but consumed sin which the Lamb bore on His body and conscience. The song is new because worship is also directed at Jesus Christ because, in essence, He accomplished the redemptive mission of saving humankind. The newness is more of a new or fresh approach and focus, and a new divine revelation (rather than a new God) in worship where Jesus Christ is included in the Godhead – resulting to two Divine Beings sharing in Kingship, Deity or Godhead, and receiving worship, while maintaining and upholding the full and fundamental understanding and acceptance of Jewish monotheism, and also being endorsed by John in his usage of “the singular pronoun autou” - despite the fact that it is referring to two Divine Beings but referred to as One God in Rev. 11:15.

The “new song,” points to the Kingship of God as demonstrated in that God the Father chooses to Majestically assume a low profile on the throne while the limelight focuses or falls on Jesus Christ in order to affirm and draw attention to the newness in a “new song.” The “new song” is then

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sung by or receives acceptance from the 4 living creatures, 24 elders, angelic hosts and the entire inhabitants of the universe – affirming that Jesus Christ is indeed God. In conclusion, Barnhouse\textsuperscript{479} acclaimed:

“Never will such music have been heard in the universe. Never will so many voices have intoned such mighty praise. The armies of armies come to the last note. The mightiest of God’s creatures sound the amen. We gaze upon the scene with no voice for utterance and, prostrate, we worship the Lord Jesus Christ who now proceeds to the most awful scenes of judgment with actions that are rooted in His cross.”

In Revelation 4 God receives honour, glory, praise and wisdom because He is the Creator. In Revelation 5 Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb is deemed worthy to receive praise and worship because He re-created mankind through His blood, death, and resurrection. Bullinger’s\textsuperscript{480} analysis of the combined songs is worth noting especially that it points to two phases, namely, ransom (price for redemption) and power (the act of saving or rescuing the captive). He said,

“But the payment of the price is only one part of the work of redemption. If the price be paid and there be no power to take possession and eject the holder the payment is in vain. And if power be put forth and exercised in casting out the usurper, without the previous payment of the redemption price, it would not be a righteous action. So that for the redemption of the forfeited inheritance two things are absolutely necessary, price and power. The first redemption song has for its theme the payment of the price. The second celebrates the putting forth of the power.”

\textsuperscript{479} Barnhouse, Revelation: An Expository Commentary, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{480} Bullinger, Apocalypse, p. 137.
It is clear from Bullinger’s statement that the song does not only point to our redemption and that of other saints, but also to the victory over the powers of Satan. The Lamb does not only pay a price for our salvation, but He frees us from power and dominion of the enemy in order for us to be free to be subjects of the Creator-King, God. He sets us free from the dominion of sin in order for us to be free to accept His Lordship and Kingship. From the standpoint of His redemption on behalf of us, doing His Decalogue become a delight to us. God, through His agent – Jesus Christ, not only saves us, but also Lords over us as our King. Achtemeier\textsuperscript{481} views Rev. 5: 1-14 as the “climax and heart” of the Book of Revelation because its contents are seeds that germinate throughout the entire text of the Apocalypse of John – ranging from themes of creation, \textit{Parousia}, hope of the saints, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to cleansing and renewing the sin-infected world. God establishes His Kingship through the blood, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paulien\textsuperscript{482} observed a “deliberate progression of thought in the five hymns” prior to breaking of the seven seals. He remarked,

\begin{quote}
“Two hymns are addressed to the Father (4: 8, 11). The next two are addressed to the Lamb (5:9-10, 11-12). The fifth and final hymn is addressed to both the Father and the Lamb (5:13). That the equality of praise is the explicit highlight of this backdrop is evident from the ever-increasing volume of
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\textsuperscript{482} Jon Paulien, “The Seven Seals,” \textit{Symposium on Revelation – Book 1, Daniel & Revelation Series}, vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p 207.
participants. The hymn of 4:8 is sung by the four living creatures alone. The hymn of 4:11 is sung by the 24 elders. The hymn of 5:9-10 is sung by both the living creatures and the elders. With the hymn of 5:11-12, scores of millions of angels join the heavenly choir. The fifth and final hymn (5:13) is sung by all creation. This ever-increasing participation indicates that it is heaven’s greatest joy to exalt Jesus Christ even as His Father is exalted (cf. John 5:23).”

In deed, it is God’s pleasure to establish His Kingship through and share it with Jesus Christ. The Lion-Lamb establishes God’s Kingdom not by conquest, but by His blood, death and resurrection. The paradox of it all is that it is in death or martyrdom that Jesus Christ becomes victorious. It seems that G. F. Handel’s “Worthy is the Lamb” at the conclusion of his song Messiah demonstrated that he had caught the gleams of the Lion-Lamb receiving homage because of what He had accomplished through His meritorious death and resurrection. We are now ready to participate in another liturgical hymn of Rev. 7: 9-12.

5.4 Rev. 7: 9-12 & 14: 4 - The songs of “a great multitude,” and the 144,000

The song or hymn in Rev. 7: 9-12 occurs within a context. John in Revelation 7 presents a continuation of events recorded in Rev. 6 wherein the Lamb had just closed the sixth seal, and the seventh seal will be opened later in Revelation 8. This section will focus on the setting of the songs found in Rev. 7: 9-12, and also allude to the relationship and identities of both the 144, 000 and “a great multitude,” and finally concentrate on the content of the songs.
We shall also look into the setting of the song of the 144,000 in Rev. 14. We will treat Rev. 7 and 14 (with special reference to the 144,000) together given that they almost refer to the same group, although for functional and elucidation purposes, the 144,000 and “a great multitude” are treated separately.

### 5.4.1 The Setting of a song sung by “a great multitude”

John wrote,

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen,” (Rev. 7: 9-12).

The setting of the hymn of Rev. 7: 9-12 is quite interesting. It appears that the piercing question asked in Rev. 6: 17, after the sixth seal had been opened, is responded to in Rev. 7. The question is expressed thus: “for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?” John saw the four angels holding “the four corners of the world” and “the four winds” of the earth (Rev. 1: 1). The background of the song of “a great multitude” is the opening of the seals by the Lamb.
The interpretation of the seals hinges on one’s approach to the interpretation of the Apocalypse of John. For example, the “end-time interpreters” or futurist approach maintains that the seven seals and seven trumpets point to the end-time rather than to the total scope of the Christian era. We need to note that “sealing” has to do with God’s sign or mark of protection or ownership (cf. Rev. 14: 1 and 7: 2; 9: 4), and “seals” have to do with hiding or concealing information or knowledge (cf. Rev 10: 4 and 22: 10).

Paulien’s interpretation seems plausible and worth considering. Paulien locates the events of the seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets within the Christian era, “beginning in John’s day and reaching to the Second Coming.” This writer maintains that there is a strong background of the sanctuary or judgment theme in Rev. 4 and 5, and he rightly contends that Rev. 4, 5 contain parallels to Eze. 1-10, Dan. 7 and Rev. 19.

The writer continues to argue that Rev. 4 and 5 allude to the “services on the Day of Atonement.” Paulien understands the “door” of Rev. 4: 1 to be pointing “to the door between the apartments in the earthly tabernacle of the OT.” The author sees Rev. 3: 1 as a “springboard

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passage,”488 for the understanding of the seals, and that it serves “as climax of all the promises to the overcomer (Rev. 2-3).”489

From John’s point of view, “the believer’s overcoming is described as a present ongoing experience, but their sitting on Christ’s throne is future (dős?),” and that “Christ’s overcoming (enik?sa) and being seated (ekathisa) are specific past-time events,”490 because “Both verbs are Greek aorist indicatives and express past action as points in time rather than a process.”491 Rev. 5 and Rev. 7:9ff are related in the sense that both Christ and saints receive rewards, but they are “equally separated chronologically.”492

The seals of Rev. 6 point to an “ongoing period in which God’s people are in the process of overcoming.”493 Notice that there are about seven promises494 intended for a believer in seven churches of first-century Asia who is in a process of overcoming, whose “period of their overcoming had already begun in John’s day and will continue until all God’s people have joined Jesus on His throne.”495

The first seal (Rev. 6: 1-2), according to Paulien’s exegesis and interpretation, points to “the progress of the gospel during the entire Christian Era,” and also that it makes sense “to understand the white to

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487 Ibid [footnote 17].
489 Ibid.
490 Ibid.
491 Ibid. [Footnote 4].
493 Ibid. p. 203.
494 Rev. 2: 7, 11, 17, 26; 3: 5, 12, 21.
symbolize Christ’s Kingdom and its gradual conquest of the world through the preaching of the gospel by His church.”

The second seal (Rev. 6: 3-4) means, “Wherever the gospel is preached victories take place, but even more often comes division and persecution as a result of its rejection.” The third seal (Rev. 6: 5-6) “depicts a famine for the Word of God (cf. Amos 8:11-12).”

The fourth seal (Rev. 6: 7-8) symbolises “the most serious spiritual declension yet described in the book (the climax come in 18: 2-3). It is a pestilence of soul. These plagues whose rejection of the gospel has hardened to the point of near hopelessness,” and they may refer to “the Middle Ages… a time of spiritual decline and persecution.”

The fifth seal (Rev. 6: 9-11) “fits well between the great persecutions of the Middle Ages… The gospel task is not yet complete when this seal draws to a close.” The sixth seal (Rev. 6: 12-17) prior to an interlude points to a “period from the cry of the martyrs to the end-time. Since the heavenly signs of 1780 and 1833 had a great impact on the developing interest in the study of prophecy, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is the best candidate for the earthquake of 6:12. Revelation 6:14 points forward to the final crash of all things terrestrial and celestial insofar as they pertain to this planet (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-12).”

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496 Ibid. pp. 230, 231.
497 Ibid. p. 231.
498 Ibid. p. 232.
500 Ibid. p. 236.
501 Ibid. p. 237.
The seventh seal (Rev. 8: 1) points to “the end-time counterpart to the silence at the beginning (Gen. 1:2; cf. 4 Ezra 7:26-31); the silence of the universe as it watches the destruction of evil (in stark contrast to the celebration of Revelation 5); and the silence of the courtroom when the book is finally opened.”

From this discussion, we gather that the sealing of the 144,000 and the redemption of the entire multitude take place prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. When “a great multitude” realizes what the Lion-Lamb has done for them in securing their salvation, and how He has sustained their faith during the process of their overcoming, and what He will ultimately do for them just before the opening of the seventh seal, they cannot help but express their joy and praise in song.

5.4.2 The 144,000 and “a great multitude”: Their relationship

There has been a debate with regards to the relationship of the 144,000 and the great multitude. In fact there are three main positions in relation to the connection between the 144,000 and “a great multitude.”

a. The first view maintains that both groups, namely, the great multitude and the 144,000 are actually one group but under different conditions. The identity and victory of the 144,000 are revealed in Rev. 7:9-17. The act of sealing is intended to prepare them for the impending difficulties before the coming of Jesus Christ. The proponents of this

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502 Ibid. p. 238.
position understand the obvious differences between the description of the 144,000 and “a great multitude” as explanations rather than differences.

This indicates that since the great multitude is innumerable and the 144,000 is a figurative as opposed to literal, therefore, both point to the same and one group. This one group (composing of both the 144,000 and “a great multitude”) is understood to be both spiritual Jews and Gentiles, given that the text stipulates that they emanate from all nations.

b. The second view puts an accent on the differences between two groups, namely, the 144,000 and “a great multitude.” For example, one group is numbered, and the other is not. One is composed of a peculiar group known as God and Lamb’s “first fruits,” “who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14: 4), and the other group is just a group of victorious saints or believers.

c. The third view sees “a great multitude” as pointing to the entire group of the redeemed, not excluding the 144,000.

Notice that each of the three above-mentioned views explains and emphasizes certain and specific aspects regarding the 144,000 and “a great multitude.” They are not necessarily and essentially opposed to each other. One of the keys to understanding and unlocking the relationship and identities of the 144,000 and “a great multitude” may be found in Rev. 14: 4 wherein, among other descriptions, the 144,000 is viewed and described as the “firstfruits.”

The “firstfruits” may allude to the practice of returning “tithes and offerings” as required in Mal. 3: 8-10. A tithe-portion is part of the harvest, but tithe has a specific function – that of not only constituting daily subsistence for the Levites, but also recognizing the ownership of God.

For the sake of revealing the aspect of “firstfruits,” the 144,000 is separated from “a great multitude” not for the purpose of finding a distinction, but for functional purposes - in order to give God His portion of the harvest of salvation. Tithe is part of the harvest or increase or income, but it serves a specific purpose. The 144,000 are part of the multitude, but their experiences and function (in the context of tithing concept) set them apart from the “a great multitude.”

5.4.3 The Identity of the Redeemed 144,000

John saw two visions. In the first vision John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the winds from blowing on the earth, sea, or on any tree. An angel arises from the east having the seal of the living God, who cries out to the other four angels not to harm the earth, etc., until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads. John then hears the number of those who are sealed. The sealing of the 144,000 alludes to the Old Testament sealing during the Israelites’ Exodus when the blood was placed over their doorposts as a mark to protect from death those who proved loyal to God according to Exo. 12: 7, 22-23.  

They are 144,000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel, with 12,000 from each tribe. Of interest is the fact that Ephraim and Dan are not mentioned, while Levi and Joseph are counted as tribes. This suggests to many that the 144,000 of Israel is symbolic (Rev. 7: 1-8). The identity of the 144,000 still remains open for debate. It seems that New Testament scholars have not exhausted arguments aiming at solving the issues around the identity of the redeemed 144,000. The identity of the 144,000, to a certain degree, is determined by one’s approach to the interpretation of the Book of Revelation. There is an agreement among scholars to the view that the 144,000 are opposed to the beast, but several positions and views have been advanced – but it seems that there are two main schools of thought regarding the interpretation and understanding of the 144,000.

One school of thought is of the notion that the 144,000 points to a literal number - and this position of viewing the number 144,000 from a literal

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505 R. E. Winkle, “Another Look at the List of Tribes in Revelation 7,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1), 1989, pp. 53-67. This author is of the view that a list of tribes in Rev. 7: 5-8 can best be understood based on a counterclockwise reversal of the list of tribes in Ezek. 48: 31-34. The author mentions that the reversal has a theological implications in the Revelation – that of upholding the primacy of the tribe of Judah. He goes further to suggest that the exclusion of the tribe of Dan probably originates from the association of Judas Iscariot with the same tribe (Dan).

506 Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 182. This author has explored several views with regards to the identity of the 144,000 – those range from “Jewish Christians, elect and saved Christians, Christian ascetic males, the eschatologically saved and protected holy rest of Israel, the perfect victims and sacrifice, the high priestly followers of the Lamb, the military army of the Lamb gathering on Zion for the messianic battle, those who have followed the Lamb into death,” to “those who follow the Lamb in heaven.”

507 See J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1865), pp. 405-406. This author maintains that the 144,000 should be understood in literal terms. He contends, “Nor is there a vice or device of sacred hermeneutics, which so beclouds the Scriptures, and so unsettles the faith of men, as this constant attempt to read Church for Israel, and Christian people for Jewish tribes. As I read the Bible, when
perspective has been riddled with criticisms.⁵⁰⁸ Some argue for a figurative or emblematic position.⁵⁰⁹

It seems that the 144,000 is part of the great multitude, but for the sake of a special function, the difference is highlighted. The 144,000 should be understood as the name of the group as opposed to understanding them as a number of people.

5.4.4 The Setting of a Song of the 144,000 of Rev. 14: 3-5

The 144,000 of Rev. 7 surface again in Rev. 14. They are seen standing on the Mount Zion. A closer examination of Rev. 14: 3-5 reveals that the 144,000 do the following:

“Sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been

God says “children of Israel,” I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not; and when He speaks of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles, in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not.”⁵⁰⁸

Charles Ryrie, Revelation (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1968), pp. 51-52. This author points out three problems which cast a doubt on literal interpretation of the number 144,000 – (1) the first is the inclusion of Levi among the twelve tribes. Normally Levi, being the priestly tribe, was considered to have no inheritance among the twelve tribes. Perhaps he is included here because the priestly functions ceased with the coming of Christ. (2) the second is the mention of Joseph instead of Ephraim. Normally Manasseh and Ephraim are both mentioned since they both received an equal portion of territory along with the rest of the tribes. Of course, a double number is counted in this list, but under the names of Joseph and Manasseh rather than Ephraim and Manasseh. (3) The third problem concerns the omission of Dan from this list, something that was necessary if Levi were to be included.

⁵⁰⁹ For one example among many of the argument that purports that the number 144,000 is symbolic and points to the church, see R. A. Taylor, Revelation: A Reference Commentary, 14 August, 2000, p. 92, http://www.apocalipsis.org.
redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are spotless."

From the above-quoted passage from the Apocalypse of John we note the following:

(1) The 144,000 sing a “new song” which cannot be learned by anyone except them because their unique experiences. The content of the song is not stated, but it seems that their unique experience qualifies and gives them the special ability and grace to can learn and sing that new song. The word “learn” or manqavnw means “to learn, appropriate to oneself...through experience or practice.” It seems that the “new song” of Rev. 5: 9 is different from that of Rev. 14: 4 simply because the “new song” of Rev. 14: 4 will be learned by the 144,000 based on their experiences. The content of the “new song” is not yet revealed, and any speculation will not help the text. We need to allow God to remain mysterious in His ways and revelation. It is possible that God and Jesus Christ reign supreme in that hidden “new song.”

(2) The 144,000 have “been redeemed from the earth,” meaning that they benefited from the Jesus Christ-event at the Cross through the blood of Jesus Christ. The presupposition is that they participated in and were subjected to the curse brought about by the first Adam at the Garden of

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Eden, and they also benefited through the blessings conveyed by the Second Adam, Jesus Christ Himself.\footnote{1 Cor. 15: 22, 45; cf. Rom. 3: 21-24.}

(3) The 144, 000 are the “firstfruits” for God and the Lamb. There were sacrificial “firstfruits” in the Hebrew economy. Those included various animals, both wild and domesticated, and were considered “holy to the divinity and were consecrated before the rest could be put to secular use.”\footnote{Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., \textit{A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature}, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 13.} In Jewish milieu, “firstfruits” were offered both on individual (Deut. 26: 1-11) and corporate levels (Lev. 23: 10, 17).

The motive for giving of “firstfruits” to God was to recognise that God caused good harvest. Ezekiel mentions that God required His people not to delay in offering to Him the “firstfruits” of their ripe fruits, of their sons, oxen and sheep (Eze. 22: 29-31). Paul mentions that if the “firstfruits” of dough are holy so is the rest of the lump of dough (Rom. 11: 16; cf. Num. 15: 18-21). The “firstfruits” are part of the rest of the harvest and also give a foretaste of the entire harvest.

The first converts are referred to as the “firstfruits” (Rom. 16: 5; cf. 8: 22). Paul describes the “firstfruits” in the context of the resurrection of Jesus Christ wherein Jesus Christ is understood and accepted as the “firstfruits” of those who will be resurrected (1 Cor. 15: 20). The 144, 000 are part of the first harvest to God. They may be understood as a “tithe” to the Lord pointing to the truth that there has been a victorious harvest (Mal. 3: 10).
(4) “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste”- they are virgins. This phrase from Rev. 14: 4 has received several comments ranging from “the most misunderstood words in the book,”513 “John’s puzzling sentence,”514 to “the most enigmatic in the book.”515 The interpretation of this text has evoked robust discussions simply because “John’s words cannot be found elsewhere in Revelation to which they point.”516 Some have argued for ascetic masculinity with the hope to discourage marriage,517 some perceive this text to mean avoidance of sexual immorality,518 and yet others have argued from the perspective of “military and priestly interpretation.”519

Olson520 refutes these approaches simple because those texts refer to temporal sexual abstinence rather than virginity. It appears that the

519 Olson, “Those Who have Not Defiled Themselves with Women”: Revelation 14: 4 and the Book of Enoch,” p. 494. Olson shows the background of this masculine “military and priestly interpretation” is based on the OT regulations of war which called for sexual abstinence (Deut. 23:9-10; cf. Lev. 15:16; 1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:11); and also some have appealed to the “general purity regulations of priests” as per Lev. 15:18 – since the redeemed of Revelation are described as priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).
520 Ibid. p. 495. This author, Olson, points out that the Greek word parthenoi “does not refer to a short-term foregoing of sexual relations.”
apocalyptic or and prophetic nature of the text of Revelation frowns and forbids any literal interpretation of the 144,000 – particularly where it is assumed that the 144,000 is composed of males, and also to assume that they are all female virgins who have not involved themselves with men. The Bible often interprets or uses the word “woman” to symbolise or point to the church. A God-fearing woman symbolises the church, and an immoral woman refers to a church that has apostatized.521

The believers are called virgins because they refused to defile themselves with false teachings from the same apostate church [Babylon and her daughters or followers].522 Literal interpretation of virginity is not intended in this passage because such an interpretation would contradict the Bible’s approval of marriage union (1 Cor. 7: 1-5).523 They are spiritual or figurative virgins. A symbolic interpretation of virgins would be more reasonable and plausible. We need to recognise that Collins524 has rightly observed a possible parallel between Rev. 14: 4 with the 1 Enoch’s “Book of the Watchers.”

5.4.5 The Redeemed Multitudes (Rev. 7: 9-12)

The second vision reveals a large countless multitude of all nations standing before the throne and the Lamb. Clothed with white robes and palm branches in their hands, they cry out “Salvation belongs to our God

521 Rev. 12: 1; cf. 17: 1-5.
522 Rev. 14: 8; 17: 4-5; cf. 2: 20-23; 18: 4; see also
who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” They are joined in their praise by angels, the elders, and four living creatures.

One of the elders told John that those dressed in white robes have come out of the great tribulation, with their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Before the throne of God, they serve Him day and night in His temple. Future blessings are then described: God will dwell among them; they shall be free from hunger, thirst, and the heat of the sun. The Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to fountains of living waters, and God will wipe all tears from their eyes (Rev. 7: 9-17). Notice they function in the temple and this suggests that they are occupying priestly role with priestly white robes.525

5.4.6 A Song of Praise by “a great multitude”

The angel mentions that those who will be able to stand are those who have the seal of God. Notice that sealing does not protect the saints from “danger and death, since many die under the persecutions of antichrist (14:13; 17:6). It is rather to secure them from the destructive force of the seven last plagues (16:1-2; cf. Ezek. 9:6).”526

John writes the following regarding a song of the multitude,

“And crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the

angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen,” (Rev. 7: 10-12).

The first word swthriva or “salvation” in the song sung by the multitude should be understood in the context of Greek language, “to make safe, to be salvaged, and therefore caries the connotation of wholeness, healing. It is the New Testament word that expresses the rich meaning of the Old Testament word Shalom.”

The Greek word swthriva also carries a meaning of deliverance from any molestation by the enemy, and in the eschatological sense, it also means “the sum of benefits and blessings which the Christians, redeemed from all earthly ills, will enjoy after the visible return of Christ from heaven in the consummated and eternal kingdom of God.”

The great multitude responds with singing to the dialogue that started in Rev. 6: 14 and consummated in Rev. 7: 1-3. The world trembles at the wrath of the Lamb and the unredeemed inhabitants of the earth feel helpless to face the Lamb, and in their despair, they turn to nature (mountains and caves) to crush them because they cannot stand the ultimate judgment for refusing to recognise the Kingship of God in their lives, by refusing to choose to accept the Lamb on the alter as their Saviour - and in turn, the Lion will not accept them and share His throne with them. They do not have a right in and to God’s Kingdom. Those who

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527 Orgilvie, 1, 2, 3 John, Revelation, p. 182.
chose to be redeemed by the sacrifice of the Lamb rejoice and praise because He has redeemed them and claimed them as His own. They sing a song of healing in the sense of being salvaged from sin-infected lives, and they are at peace with God – A song of *Shalom*. When the unredeemed kings and peoples of the world seek their peace through death – pleading with caves and mountains to crush and swallow them, “a great multitude” expresses its Lamb-secured peace through singing.

The end of the kings’ reign marks the beginning of God’s visible reign. Prior to that, the Kingship of God was openly acknowledged in heaven, but invisibly recognised by His subjects on earth. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ turns the tables against the enemy’s kingdom. The unredeemed kings and peoples of this world are depicted as singing a song aiming at communicating with caves and mountains, but it is a song of despair. The great multitude sings a song of victory and peace. In summing up, the comment of Ogilvie[^529] is worth noting and fitting in closing this section. He said,

> “Whoever we are and wherever we are in the journey of our lives, we need to know this assurance of the boundary of the sixth and seventh seals. We need to know that God’s faithfulness stretches beyond the times and seasons of our own measurable existence here on earth. God’s promises extend beyond these time-space dimensions that we watch so closely. John is privileged to hear a great song that bears crystal-clear witness to this fact. He hears the triumphant shout of thanks to God for the salvation that has crossed over the barrier of death. This song gives a glimpse beyond death into the mystery of vindication.”


[^529]: Ibid. p. 184.
Notice that Ogilvie sees the vindication of God as being mysterious. One needs to add that the character of God and His attributes require of Him to be fair and just in dealing with the issue of opposition, the issue of death, and ultimately, the issue of sin and Satan who caused misery in the universe. The song of praise hinges on God’s solution to the conflict of the ages.

5.5Rev. 11: 14-18 – “He shall reign forever and ever.”

John heard the heavenly hosts singing just after the passing of the second curse or woe, under the seventh trumpet. There are actually two songs “which serve as a commentary on the preceding events.”530 John writes,

The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come. Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth,” (Rev. 11: 14-18).

The first song announces and reveals that the Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ, and their reign will last eternally. The 24 elders respond by kneeling on their faces in order to

530 Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” p. 147.
worship God. Their song emphasizes and points out that the reason for worshipping God is that He is eternal, and He is also Mighty and Powerful in a military sense,\textsuperscript{531} and that He has established His power to rule, power to condemn the enemies of God, and also to commend the saints of God.

The song of the 24 elders seems to be celebrating the end of the earth’s history where God has taken over the reigns from His enemies through His agent, Jesus Christ the Lamb.

The saints are not only saved, but their good works are rewarded – including “those who fear thy name,” or, in other words, “those who have not completely known Christ and His way, but who lived in the fullness of the light that has come to them.”\textsuperscript{532} This aspect of this song reveals the grace of God in saving and wooing people into His Kingdom. God extends His salvation and Kingship to those who demonstrate a desire to lead a life that has aligned itself with the ethics of His Kingdom.

The God-King receives praise and honour for meting judgment on those who were deliberately and angrily working hard to oppose and fight against Him. God’s judgment over the wayward world is a sign that God is in control and acts justly – although “His reign has not reached its pinnacle.”\textsuperscript{533} The powers of sin and Satan have not been eradicated. In a way, God unintentionally and invisibly governs over one part of the earth, but a time will come when His Kingship will overshadow and destroy all opposing kingdoms.

\textsuperscript{531} Nichol, “Revelation,” p. 805.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{533} Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” p. 150.
We have already dealt with this section in depth in section 4.6 where the role, identity and time frame of the two witnesses (the Old and New Testaments or the Word of God – the Bible), including the role of the witness of the saints, were discussed. The song of the elders addresses what can be termed “environmental issues.” Those who are guilty of polluting and destroying the earth will receive what is due to them.

In a nutshell, God continues to reign by way of vindicating His character, by rewarding those who chose to be subjects of His Kingship, by extending His salvation to those Who, despite the fact they were ignorant of the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, chose to lead a life consistent to the biddings of the ethics of His Kingdom, and by passing judgment to those who deliberately and consciously chose to reject the revealed light. Schillebeeckx534 said that the Kingdom of God

“... is a new world in which suffering is abolished, a world of completely whole or healed men and women in a society where peace reigns and there are no master-servant relationships.”

On the aspect of God’s Kingship or Sovereignty which seems to be an issue of conflict in the Book of Revelation, Ballinger535 sees it as a preparation for an eschatological turning of tables against all forces and spurious kingdoms whose aim were opposed to God, and if possible, their aim was to overthrow God from His throne. The reverberation of the trumpet result in great motion and agitation in heaven from where it is sounded. It

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is indeed a declaration of the coming “Coronation of earth's rightful king (compare 2 Sam. xv. 10, 1 Kings i. 39).”

According to Ballinger, it is a sign that the decisive hour has come, and also a prefigure of the glorious newscast “of the setting up and establishing of God's kingdom on earth. It is the announcement that the prayer of the ages — "Thy kingdom come" — is about to receive its wondrous answer.”

The content of the song or hymn or loud voices in heaven of Rev. 11 points to the truth that the issue has been and will be one of sovereignty or God's Kingship. This is the whole matter that has been under debate. And this matter is now about to be addressed and completed by these final judgments of the seven plagues. The outcome of this final judgment becomes the cause for celebration expressed in a hymn or singing from heaven. The song or hymn of Rev. 11 looks forward to and anticipates the culmination of the entire text of Revelation.

The events of Rev. 19 will mark the ultimate and climax of the eternal establishment of the uncontested Kingship of God. In a summary form, the hymn of Rev. 11 confirms and highlights the Kingship of God and His Character as expressed in His just acts of settling scores with His strategic enemies, rewarding His faithful people for their loyalty in the face of persecution and death, and saving through His grace those who led a

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536 Ibid.
faithful life despite of the fact that they had no clue to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

5.6 Rev. 12: 9-12: “The Kingdom of God and the Authority of His Christ.”

John rejoices because Jesus Christ and His followers have defeated the dragon, and the fatal blow that resulted to the dragon’s defeat was through the instrumentality of the Blood of Jesus Christ. Satan accedes to defeat only at the Cross of Calvary. Once more, we notice that conquest is based not on military might of Jesus Christ and His followers, but on His death, the death of saints, and their testimony. John said,

“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" (Rev. 12: 10-12).

The inhabitants of God’s heaven are invited to rejoice because the first phase of victory has been attained. The Devil no longer has power to tempt or cause any confusion in heaven. The Kingship of God has been established and reaffirmed in heaven through the shed Blood of Jesus Christ. The first part of Jesus’ prayer has been accomplished, namely, “Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven,” (Matt.
6: 9, 10). The will of God in heaven, the dwelling place of God, is now an experienced reality. Victory over Satan and his angels, through the Blood of the Lamb, has been accomplished, and the earth will be victorious in the second phase of victory when “…every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” (Phil. 2: 10b, 11).

The initial victory over Satan and his angels in Rev. 12 has been accomplished. There is a call to heaven to rejoice because heaven has been depopulated of all enemies of God whose aim was to usurp God’s Kingship, and if possible, dethrone Him. This call to rejoice anticipates a call to rejoice by an angel in Rev. 18: 20. The last call will be extended not only to heaven, but also to the saints, prophets and apostles.

In Rev. 12: 12 an angel laments the fact that in the interim or during a period between a call to rejoice in Rev. 12 and that of Rev. 18: 20, the saints, prophets and apostles will be suffering persecution and torture from Satan and his angels. In spite of the fact that Satan and his angels will fiercely and angrily harass God’s saints, prophets, and apostles – God has assured His followers of victory at the end of time through the Blood of Jesus Christ. In fact, from God’s throne-room perspective, victory has already occurred. Saints have been promised victory before Satan and his angels even landed and touched the earth.

Notice that Jesus Christ and His followers’ victory over the enemy took place in the past. This simply means that history is narrated from the point of view of God – future. God, from His throne room, reports the plight of His children and the death of Jesus Christ not from past to future – as
human logic would demand, but from future to the past. Once more we are reminded of the concept of the God of Israel who is coming to His people from future, as opposed to the gods of Greeks, who simply exists.

God chooses to follow a different pattern of unfolding history. The sole intention of providing His followers with a throne-centric view of history, whose sequence does not follow the normal, logical human pattern. He relates or recounts the end of the story before the story actually happens. He, so to say, reports the last round of the boxing match before the boxing match begins.

This simply means that His followers encounter the Devil from a standpoint of victory. Even if it appears that Satan has conquered Jesus Christ at the Cross of Calvary, and has caused the martyrdom of His saints, but from the throne-room perspective, they have already conquered him because future-victory is in their favour. Once more, the Kingship of God is established and demonstrated through suffering and death of Jesus Christ and His saints.

The Kingship of God is demonstrated through His Divine attribute – Omniscience (God’s ability to determine or see future or interpret events from their end point back to their starting point). The death of Jesus Christ addresses the problem of sin and humankind’s salvation, and the death of His followers or witnesses demonstrate their loyalty and love for Him – love and loyalty that are stronger than death.

The casting out of the Devil from heaven occurs prior to history of humankind, and his future defeat is introduced as if it has already taken
place in the past – His fate is determined, sealed, and announced in the process of him, together with his angels, being evicted from heaven. This concept of introducing victory prior to battle is vibrant in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{537}

The song of Rev. 12 points to God’s Kingship in the sense that He sees History from its eschatological end – He unfolds the destiny of the Devil from the standpoint of the Cross of Calvary where Jesus Christ is reported to have died before His actual incarnation. The song of Revelation offers therapeutic encouragement to John and his immediate audience, and to the saints living in the end time.

In summary, God is still on His throne in spite of rebellion orchestrated by Satan and his angels in heaven. God is still in control because His agent has secured an initial defeat on Satan and his angels, and has driven them out of heaven. This was accomplished through His blood. The entire heaven is invited to rejoice and celebrate this victory. This heavenly victory is also linked to the victory of those who dwell on earth and in the sea. Although the earth has not yet suffered persecution when a call to rejoice was made in Rev. 12: 12, but their victory had already been determined and sealed – although not yet enacted.

The second phase of victory will be realised when the angel finally summons everyone, namely, saints, prophets and apostles, to rejoice.

\textsuperscript{537} Gen. 3: 15; cf. Rev. 13: 8 (Names are written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.) The Old Testament Text is rich and vibrant with statements that say that God has handed over victory to His children before they actually fight the battle. See also Dan. 2: 44 where the end result is revealed prior to the events.
because their blood would have been avenged, and judged meted out on the great city, Babylon. The actual rejoicing, celebration and singing take place in Rev. 19. We are now ready to look into the hymn of Moses and the Lamb.

5.7Rev. 15: 2-4: The Song(s) of Moses and the Lamb

It appears that from Rev. 12-22 John reveals a “thematic unity of Christ’s vindication of His new-covenant people.” God starts a process of implementing the principle of “sowing” and “reaping,” as echoed by Paul, (Gal. 6: 7-9). It is God’s time to get even with His enemies. While, on one hand, the enemies of God cry and mourn because of judgment, the saints on the other hand, sing songs of praise. God’s judgment on His enemies should be understood against His longsuffering and patience.

We need to mention once more that the Old Testament Sanctuary systems are the framework of the Book of Revelation, and in general, it is a context of Rev. 15. The Old Testament Tabernacle or Sanctuary was intended to deal with the problem of sin and evil; to deal with transferring of sin from sinner to Saviour or the Lamb – and in turn, judgment would be meted on sin on the Atonement Day. John records song(s), which he attributes to Moses and the Lamb. He writes,

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that build up towards the same climax – the setting up of the Kingdom of Stone or Kingdom of God which would last forever.

“And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed.” (Rev. 15: 2-4).

From this passage of Scriptures, it is clear that John records a song of Moses and that of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. From Moses’ perspective or experience, the song alludes to or points back to a song of victory after God had miraculously intervened, rescued and saved the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians (Exod. 15: 1-18).\textsuperscript{539} The song was sung on the bank of the Red Sea. Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, and had visibly represented or symbolised God’s Kingship to the Israelites.

God had rightly and justly saved the Israelites from the Egyptian slavery after pleading and working with the unwilling heart of Pharaoh. God saved them through His miracles. The song is aimed at vindicating the character of God, and it celebrates God’s Kingship – God is addressed as “the King of ages.”

The context of the songs of Moses and that of the Lamb is quite gripping. It appears that the victorious saints are depicted in the Kingdom of God. It seems that they are now beyond the reach of earthly wickedness and Satan’s wiles just as the Israelites were safely standing on the bank or

shore of the Red Sea after God had providently saved them from the Egyptians’ sword and slavery.

Their (saints or witnesses of Revelation) victory can be linked to the Blood of the Lamb, because of their willingness to lay down their lives rather than to compromise their faith (Rev. 13: 7, 15). Prior to the night of their departure from the ancient Egypt, the Israelites had to slaughter a male lamb “without blemish,” and put its blood on the doorposts of their houses, (Exod. 12: 21-29). This act or ritual or ceremony typified and anticipated the death of Jesus Christ at the Cross, and also symbolised “a type of the final deliverance of the church by Christ as her glorious Antitype (Exod. 15:1-18).”

Their song points to an accomplished redemptive and salvific work of God through Jesus Christ. Notice that the “sea mingled with fire” alludes to or “evokes the Red Sea,” as experienced by the Israelites, and also can be described within the context of the extra Old Testament writings.

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542 Harrington, in his Revelation, p. 159, is of the opinion that a sea “mingled with fire,” is a “symbol of God’s judgment.” Note that Nichol, in his “Revelation,” p. 836, maintains that the “sea mingled with fire” points to “the reflection of the glory of God.”
543 Harrington, in his Revelation, p. 159.
544 See J. A. du Rand, “The song of the Lamb because of the victory of the Lamb,” Neotestamentica, vol. 29, Issue 2, 1995, pp.203-210. Du Rand reckons that exploration into the milieu of the song of the Lamb carries the investigator into the Old Testament LXX. Tobit, 1 Maccabees and the Tosefta Targum on 1 Samuel 17 depict David as a lamb and Goliath as the lion and bear. The Messiah is accepted as the anointed progeny of David, depicted as Lamb, according to Revelation, who subjugated the beast, symbolically representing Goliath. This author maintains that the length (6 cubits) and number of toes (6) of Goliath may contribute to more fascinating conclusions.
The sea may also provide encouragement to John because of his exilic or banished situation in the Patmos Island where he hoped for God’s intervention to release him and deal with his oppressor.\footnote{Michael Anthony Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” (Doctoral Dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), p. 171.} In this song, John does not demonstrate “sympathy” on the plight of those who are on the receiving end of God’s judgment in the form of plagues as he shed tears in the throne of Revelation 5 when it was apparent that “… no one was found to open the scroll.”\footnote{Ibid. p.170.}

The song belongs to Jesus Christ, too. Jesus Christ, an agent serving just like Moses, but even better than Moses in the sense that He did not only lead the spiritual Israel out of the spiritual slavery, and from the attacks, persecutions orchestrated by the beast and Satan, but also laid His life to redeem His followers.

Seiss\footnote{547} blends the song(s) of Moses and that of the Lamb thus:

“Here, however, the song goes beyond that of Moses, and takes in that of the Lamb as well, which is the song of victory over sins and death, the song of justification and eternal life through the blood and triumph of Jesus, whose dominion and right as the Lord of the nations are attested by these mighty judgments.”

Keathley\footnote{548} is of the opinion that there are actually two songs, but those two songs are synchronized into one. He has this to say pertaining to the song of Moses and that of the Lamb,
“These are two distinct songs. Note that “song” is mentioned two times and in both cases it has the article which specifies two distinct songs. However, they do seem to be harmonized into one. The Song of Moses emphasizes the power and faithfulness of God both in Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32. The Song of the Little Lamb emphasizes the redemptive work and plan of God in Christ. It lays stress on Christ’s submission to the plan of the Father. “Lamb” is arnion, the diminutive form which is also a term of endearment. It means, “a little lamb.”

Indeed, the two songs or one harmonious song, achieve the same purpose and goal, and they also complement each other. Notice that the victorious singers of the song(s) of Moses and the Lamb have received their harps from God. God’s act of providing triumphant singers with harps emphasizes God’s intention of helping His creation to focus on the means (the Blood of the Paschal Lamb) and agent (Jesus Christ the Paschal Lamb), of their redemption, and all these are expressed in a hymn. God’s deliverance in both Moses and John’s context was political in the sense that oppression was perpetrated on political or emperorial level.549

God’s people were oppressed by a political power, namely, Pharaoh in Egypt, and later by Emperor Domitian in the Roman Empire, and by the beast – their liberation had to be on Divine-Royal-political level. God

549 For further development of a political nature of this deliverance, see the work of J. Casey, “The Exodus Typology in Revelation,” in the Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm, Concilium 128, edited by B. van Iersel and A. Weiler (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 187-194. See also Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John, p. 172. Harris points out that there is also a higher political motif where Jesus Christ is seen sharing His Kingdom with His redeemed people (Rev. 1: 6; 5: 9-10), and
rescues the New Israel from the imperial powers of this world. God’s people suffered persecutions perpetrated through royal power, and God uses His Divine-Royal power to liberate His saints. The song refers to God’s acts as “Great and wonderful,” and that He is “King of the ages” (Rev. 15: 3).

The song of Moses alludes to the song of victory which he sang after God had miraculously intervened and freed the Israelites from the Egyptians through plagues and parting of the Red Sea (Exod. 15:1-18). The last plagues of Revelation 15 do not mark the end of the world, but point to the punishment that God inflicts on those who chose not to recognise His Kingship – just as the Egyptians’ Pharaoh refused to acknowledge His Kingship in spite of signs expressed in miracles or plagues.

John says,

“...And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed,” (Rev. 15:3).

In conclusion, we turn to Harrington who interestingly summarises the song(s) of Moses and the Lamb thus,

“God is king of the nations and the nations will come to acknowledge him as their King. Our God, even in judgment, this reigning is in the context of “the Kingdom of God having come (7:10; 11:15-17; 12:10).”

Harrington, Revelation, p. 160.
is always in the business of salvation, bent on the salvation of humankind.”

Notice that God, the very King of the universe and nations, is in the business of saving His people - saving in the sense of redeeming His created beings from second death, from the hand of Satan, and from Satan’s beast. Salvation is also linked to judgment. Whenever God saves His people or saints, He also judges those who have chosen to align themselves with His enemies, Satan and the beast. The theology of judgment and creation, destruction and redemption, salvation and judgment are highlighted in this hymn.

5.8Rev. 16: 4-8: “Just art thou in these Judgments.”

John records a proclamation or a song by an angel. He writes,

“The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of water say, “Just art thou in these thy judgments, thou who art and wast, O Holy One. For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!” And I heard the altar cry, “Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!” (Rev. 16: 4-8).

Firstly we notice an apparent parallel to or an allusion to or an antitype to one of the ten Egyptian plagues wherein water of the Nile River was turned into blood.\footnote{Exod. 7: 17-23; cf. Rev. 8: 8-10; 1 Enoch 66: 1-2 mentions that “After this he showed me the angels of punishment who are prepared to come and release all the powers of the waters which are underground to become judgment and destruction unto all who dwell upon the earth… for they were angels who were in charge of the waters.” For a further discussion on the antitype aspects of the 7 plagues of Revelation 16, see also} Isaiah seems to be alluding to the fact that while
enemies of God suffer under the “angel of waters,” God’s children will be provided with water and fountains (Isaiah. 33: 16; 41: 17, 18). God’s righteous judgment is always two-fold, namely, punishment for God’s enemies, and salvation for His faithful ones; or destruction of the sinful world and new creation. God practices fairness in the sense of rewarding every person according to his/her works and choices.

Secondly, God is described in terms of time in the sense that He existed in the past, prior to history and any existence - “who wast,” (Rev. 16: 5). This description of God echoes Daniel’s vision wherein Daniel saw God, the very “Ancient of Days,” whose hair was as “pure as wool,” symbolising eternity (Dan. 7: 9b). Notice that God is described in terms of time - “the Ancient of Days.” God is also described in terms of the present or current time - “who art,” (Rev. 16: 5). He introduced Himself to Moses as the “I AM WHO I AM,” (Exod. 3: 14). The phrase “I AM” denotes that He is ever present and eternal. There is no time when He is out of existence. This attribute of God is a guarantee and assurance of His full control over the affairs of His created world.

Thirdly, God’s judgments are declared to be just or righteous or Greek word, divkaio". The word divkaio", in this context, should be understood in a setting of a judicial decision. God takes a judicial decision to mete judgment to His enemies not only because of His Deity, but also of His Kingship. It takes a just or righteous judge or king to carry out justice.


552 For a discussion on “angel of waters,” see A. Yarbo Collins, “The History-of-Religion Approach to Apocalypticism and the ‘Angel of the Waters’ (Rev 16:4-7),”
God-King’s just or righteous ways stem from His Righteous and Just Character. God-King’s Character and patience were on trial - both from the standpoint of His saints or followers, and also from his enemies. From the saints’ point of view, God had to respond to a figurative cry from souls under the altar: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?” (Rev. 6:10).

From God’s enemies’ point of view, God’s law, love, patience, righteousness and goodness were on trial. God had to step in to prove Himself righteous in all His ways, and also reward them for the evil they had done to the world and to His people. God’s righteous or just Character has a limit to its patience, and at the end of God’s patience, His wrath kicks in. God’s judgment fits the crime committed. The crimes committed, not only against God, but against His saints, will be punished on the basis of Paul’s principle of “sowing and reaping,” (Gal. 6:7), and also on the principle of Wis. 11:16, “that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which he sins.”

The blood of the saints and prophets was shed, and the punishment or judgment is also on the basis of the same blood - and part of the punishment is to figuratively let God’s enemies drink the blood of the saints and prophets because they caused and shed it. The severity of the persecutions or tribulations of the saints and prophets should be understood within the context of the prediction of Jesus Christ in Matt. 24:21-22. Jesus Christ, in the dual foci prediction, mentions that the

tribulations will be severe in their intensity, and also short for the sake of the saints or the elect. The reason for the fairness of God in executing righteous judgment is located in His attribute – οὐσία “Holy One,” (Rev. 16: 5b). The Greek word οὐσία refers to holiness that is un-derived, undefiled by sin and wickedness, and moral purity.

Although the enemies of God had wrongly and unfairly shed the blood of the saints and prophets, God would execute His judgment on the basis of His Holy Character, and the judgment would fit the committed crimes against His people and against His Kingdom. God’s righteous judgment stems from His Holiness. In almost all cases of tribulations aimed at God’s saints, God is the prime target for such persecutions, but His saints are the enemies’ soft targets. For example, Cain killed his brother Abel in order to get at God (Gen. 4: 5, 8). God-King, will righteously avenge the blood of His saints.

Fourthly, the quiasiasthvrion an altar is said to be crying loud and uttering words. Obviously we need to remember that the Book of Revelation is not all literal. In fact, given the fact that it is composed of a text that is an apocalyptic prophecy, it stands to reason that we are faced with the figurative or symbolic language. In the prophetic language altars speak (Rev. 16: 7), and they are also spoken to, “And the man cried against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, “O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice upon you the priests of the high places who burn incense upon you, and men’s bones shall be burned upon you,’” (1 Kings 13: 2).
The language that is used in relation to the utterances of the altar points to the Hebrew background of the Apocalypse of John. Hebrew language is vibrant with the personification of inanimate objects, particularly in the context of worship or praise. The speaking of the altar and that of souls under the altar are figurative or symbolic. In the case of the souls under the altar, we can cite Gen. 4: 10 wherein God employed symbolic language to address the sin of Cain. He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground.” Surely, the blood does not have a voice, and that saints do not go under the altar after they loose their lives through tribulations.

The content of the cry of the altar warrants our attention. John writes, “And I heard the altar cry, “Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!” (Rev. 16: 7). The altar The King James Version (KJV) rendition suggests that the voice came from “another,” not from the altar itself. For the sake of maintaining and appreciating the beauty of the theatrical language of the Apocalypse of John, it is better to leave this text in its poetic, symbolic fashion.

The altar adds another dimension of God’s judgments – that they are true or its Greek, ajlhqinov". The Greek word ajlhqinov" refers to the unconcealed truth in the framework of judicial righteousness. The truth, in relation to God, is both a personal quality and also expressed in His acts

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553 George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, in *The Mellen Biblical Commentary* vol. 22 (United Kingdom: Edwin Mellen Press Ltd., 1993), p. 408. Buchanan has compiled a list of “personified inanimate objects” such as the heavens, the earth, the desert, the fields, the trees, Mount Tabor, Mount Hermon, Mount Zion, and the land. These were all ordered to render praise. The following are example of such “personified inanimate objects,” (1 Chron. 16: 31, 32; Ps. 96: 12; 97: 1; Isa. 35: 1)
of righteousness. The verdict is not only fair or fit the crime, but it is also based on the bare truth. It is in this respect that God’s Kingship is demonstrated. The altar adds its voice to justify God’s righteous and true judgments.

God is not only righteous and true in executing judgment, but He also described as pantokravtwr in Greek. The Greek word pantokravtwr means almighty or omnipotent or all-powerful or the one who has rulership or kingship over all. God is able to do anything or even punish His enemies without giving them a chance to prove their case because He is Creator-King, but He chooses to exercise His Divine patience and righteousness in order for the saints to see and hate wickedness, and also in order for the enemies of God to be exposed in their vice and wickedness.

In summary, God’s Kingship in the hymns of Rev. 16: 4-8 is demonstrated in that He fairly and righteously avenge and vindicate His Character and that of His saints. His judgments are true and righteous. His Holiness of Character is the basis of His judgments. The hymn of Rev. 16: 4-8 demonstrates the Kingship of God in the sense that He operates under self-restrain for the sake of His Character and Holiness, and this is a sign to prove that He is in control.

He is independent from the control by His faithful servants, and also free from any form of manipulation by his enemies. He operates within His timeframes, and He sometimes, from the humankind perspective, seems to be delaying in vindicating His and the character of the saints. The reason is
that God is true and righteous, patient and fair, omnipotent and wise. Tucker’s\textsuperscript{554} observation and commentary are worth noting in his attempt to reflect on the song/proclamation at issue. He notes,

“Holiness of God is the basis of all government and law and order in the universe. If God should wink at sin, then a world of sin would never know forgiveness for sin. God does not condone sin; He condemns sin. Even when He found it on His Son… It is the holiness of God that brings judgment… God is always justified in what He does or He would not be God. His acts are always “righteous and true.” As severe as these judgments, one can but say, Amen Allelujah!! “Righteous Thou art.” “Because Thou judgest thus, Thou art Holy!”

\textbf{5.9Rev. 18: 4, 5, 20 – An Invitation to Rejoice because of “great” judgment meted out on Babylon}

There are three texts (Rev. 18: 4, 5, 20) that are under consideration in this section that are deemed to be crucial, particularly when they are studied from God’s perspective, wherein He instructs the angel to challenge His people to take a decisive stance against Babylon so that they should not suffer the same fate with her. When His people have taken a stand for God, God in turn invites them to rejoice at the judgment of Babylon.

The angel, with a great proclamation, invites all to sing a song of praise seeing that Babylon is now receiving judgment which is in proportion to her evil acts - as recorded in Rev. 18. John, in Rev. 18: 4, 5, 20 writes:

\textsuperscript{554} W. Leon Tucker, \textit{Studies in Revelation: An Expositional Commentary}, p. 323.
“Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities… Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”

Firstly, the figurative or mystical Babylon, as represented by an impure woman of Rev. 17, stands in an antithetical position with the New Jerusalem. John, in Rev. 18, points out that the figurative or mystical Babylon plays a crucial role in the same chapter, and also in Rev. 19. The mystical Babylon is an antitype of the literal Babylon which was located in the Euphrates.555

The mystical or figurative Babylon of Rev. 18 points to or symbolizes a historical religion that not only falls short of God’s standards of righteousness, but also actively involved in misleading and persecuting God’s faithful ones to the end of time. Rev. 18, in particular, addresses the plight of those who would be persecuted to the point of death prior to the end of time, and also of those who will suffer severe persecution, but not death.556 In prophetic or emblematic language, the pure woman represents the pure Church, and the harlot or impure woman represents an impure church.557 The destruction of the figurative Babylon will be accomplished after the falling of seven plagues.

556 See Rev. 17: 6; cf. Isa. 47: 6; Jer. 51: 47-49
557 Jer. 6: 2; 1 Cor. 11: 2; Rev. 12: 1, 17.
Secondly, God’s people are invited to make a stand against Babylon because of her sins, deception and persecutions meted on God’s saints. It would seem that the key text of or focal point of Rev. 18 is the destruction of Babylon because of the atrocities she would have committed against God’s saints, in general, and in particular – against God’s character.

From God’s perspective, the destruction of Babylon is directly linked or connected to a call for rejoicing which the angel extends to those who are populating heaven, to the saints, apostles and prophets because God would have finally vindicated His character by passing judgment on her.

Ballinger\textsuperscript{558} has observed a chiastic, symmetrical structure of Rev. 18 which is worth noting. The following is his structure:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \text{F}^1 | \text{m}^1 | 1, 2. Babylon's judgment. Announcement of it.
  \item \text{n}^1 | 3. Babylon's associates. Their sin.
  \item \text{G}^1 | 4. God's people. Their call to "Come out of her."
  \item \text{F}^2 | \text{m}^2 | 5-8. Babylon's judgment. Reasons for it.
  \item \text{n}^2 | 9-19. Babylon's inhabitants. Their lamentation.
  \item \text{G}^2 | 20. God's people. Their call to "Rejoice over her."
  \item \text{F}^3 | \text{m}^3 | 21. Babylon's judgment. Manner of it.
  \item \text{n}^3 | 22, 23. Babylon's inhabitants. Their silence.
  \item \text{G}^3 | 24. God's people. Their blood "found in her."
\end{itemize}

In his explanation of his structure, Ballinger\textsuperscript{559} points out the following interesting features, namely, that it is constructed on

“… Repeated alternation of six members; three concerning Babylon and its people (F); and three concerning God and His people (G). The three concerning Babylon's judgment are (1) The Proclamation of it, (2) The Reasons for it, and (3) The

\textsuperscript{558} Ballinger p. 295.
\textsuperscript{559} Ibid.
Manner of it. The three concerning Babylon's people are (1) Their Sin, (2) Their Lamentation, (3) Their Silence. The Three concerning God's people are (1) Their call to come out of her, (2) Their call to Rejoice over her, (3) Their blood found in her.”

Once more we need to attest to the fact that that the Apocalypse of John flows in a smooth, theatrical fashion. When one analyses the above-mentioned extract from Ballinger’s work, one cannot help but be tempted to conclude that the Apocalypse of John was intended to be memorized and recited by its readers, hence it was given orally in a worship setting in order to provide spiritual healing and hope for John’s audience. We are now ready to look into the invitation to praise God.

Firstly, in Rev. 18: 20, we noticed a somewhat parallel to or an allusion to Jeremiah 51: 48 wherein Jeremiah reports that “… the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon,” and the reason for this celebration is that “the destroyers shall come against them out of the north, says the LORD.”

Secondly, we gather that when, on one hand, Babylon and her followers, namely, kings, merchants and sea captains, cry in agony because they have shared in the sins of Babylon through refusing to heed a call to come out of her; on the other hand, the people of God, namely, the saints, prophets and apostles, are invited and summoned to celebrate the demise and judgment of Babylon.

The saints are invited to celebrate because they were the recipients of the harsh, deadly persecutions from the great city, Babylon.\footnote{Cf. Rev. 6: 9; 19: 6.} Throughout
centuries God’s prophets had been targets of evil, political powers and secular kingdoms, hence God invites them through His angel to witness when He avenges their blood.\textsuperscript{561} The apostles did not have it easy, too.\textsuperscript{562} It is also interesting to note that apostles are mentioned for the first time in the Book of Revelation. A call to celebrate was also made when the Devil was expelled from heaven in Rev. 12: 12, marking the first phase of Jesus Christ’s victory, and the first phase of Devil’s defeat.

John mentions the reason for the judgment that is meted out on the great city, Babylon:

”Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!” (Rev. 18: 20).

Notice that the accent is placed on heaven, saints, apostles and prophets as the reason for judging Babylon. God is actually and permanently taking care of the “bully” which has, for many centuries, made life unbearable for His people. God is responding to a figurative cry for intervention from the souls under the figurative altar (Rev. 6: 9).

In fact, the primary purpose of persecuting God’s people, on Babylon’s side, will not only be to cause physical pain on them, but also to hurt God’s heart through causing pain in or to His saints. Satan knows that God’s people are the “apple of His eye.”\textsuperscript{563} On the road to Damascus,  

\textsuperscript{561} Cf. Matt. 5: 12; 23: 37; Luke 11: 49; Rev. 18: 24.  
\textsuperscript{562} Cf. Luke 11: 49; Rev. 18: 24.  
\textsuperscript{563} Zech. 2: 8; cf. Deut. 32: 10; Psalms 17: 8.
Jesus Christ told Saul (who became Paul) that he was not just persecuting His people, but Saul was virtually persecuting Jesus Christ, Himself (Acts 9: 4-6). The issue was not about God’s people, but about God Himself. Jesus Christ takes the act of persecuting His children very personal.

The main issue in denying God’s children of the basic needs, such as, not visiting them in prison and hospital, not providing food and water for them, allowing them to go naked when we have abundant clothing in our wardrobes, and not welcoming them simply because of the origin of their birth or different colour of their skin – the issue is not about His people, but about God Himself, (Matt. 25: 34-46).

In conclusion, the heavens, saints, prophets and apostles are invited to celebrate and rejoice, but the actual rejoicing and singing will take place in the next chapter, that is Rev. 19. Rev. 19 is a continuation of Rev. 18. Rev. 18 prepares a stage for Rev. 19. The cry to rejoice is made in Rev. 18, but the actual rejoicing takes place in Rev. 19. Judgment is promised in Rev. 18, and the promise is delivered in Rev. 19.

5.10 Rev. 19: 1-10: The Vindication of God’s Kingship and that of His Saints

The events of chapter 18 of Revelation are continued in the 19th chapter of the same book. In Rev. 12: 12 the inhabitants of heaven are invited to rejoice because of victory through Jesus Christ’s blood because the Dragon, together with his followers, no longer has power and chance to challenge the Kingship of God in heaven, but a “Woe” is declared on the inhabitants of the earth because the of Dragon’s wrath on them. The comforting story
is that the saints of God face the wrath of the Dragon from the standpoint of victory already anticipated and secured through the blood of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 18 of Revelation, the angel invites saints, prophets and apostles to rejoice because God has just fulfilled his promise which He made to Adam and Eve at the garden of Eden – the promise that mentioned that the head of the snake would finally be crushed (Gen. 3: 15, 16) – not only at the Cross, but also at Parousia.

The last song or hymn as recorded by John in his Apocalypse marks the climax of the Book of Revelation, and the ultimate establishment of the Kingship of God on earth and in heaven; it marks the end of the war that started in heaven between Jesus Christ and the Dragon; it marks the end of history of torment and suffering for God’s people in order to usher in a time of eternal bliss; it marks the end of wickedness and rebellion; the end of death and sickness; the end of darkness and evil; and the very consummation of promises. The events recorded in Rev. 18 and 19 are the very and direct response of God to the figurative cry of souls under the alter, (Rev. 6: 9, 10).

It appears that the gist or theme of the proclamation and/or song of Rev. 19 is “Theodicy” or is the vindication of the Kingship of God and the

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564 For a discussion of “Theodicy,” see G. R. Osborne, “Theodicy in the Apocalypse,” Trinity Journal 14 (1), 1993, pp. 63-77. Osborne maintains that “Theodicy” primarily puts its accent on and summarises God’s justice, mercy, love, and wrath and righteousness. “Theodicy” in the Book of Revelation is expressed largely in themes such as God’s judgment (a disclosure of God’s righteous character, (2) mankind’s depravity and final rejection, (3) execution of God’s righteous punishment, and (4) vindication of God’s righteousness.
vengeance of the blood of the saints, and ruling, executing righteous judgment on the great harlot.

We need to recognise that there are debates pertaining to the relationship of Rev. 19: 1-10 with Rev. 19: 11-21. The debates are based on different understanding and interpretation of various millenarian views – interpreters go to the extent of suggesting various sources for material in Rev. 19-20. Some, in an attempt to resolve this tension, demonstrate harmony between Rev. 19-22 with the entire Apocalypse of John. We will now delve into the study of Rev. 19: 1-10.

5.10.1 Rev. 19: 1-10: The Last Hallelujah Song of Apocalypse of John

This song marks the last of the songs captured in the Apocalypse of John. The context of this song does signify the end of a tragic history of fall and redemption, but it is not the closure of the story. It would seem that the

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566 Ibid. p. 208.
568 M. E. Boring, “Revelation 19-21: End Without Closure,” Princeton Seminary Bulletin Supplement 3, 1994, pp. 57-84. Boring sees in Revelation the end coming soon, but without closure, but calling us to ethical responsibility and care for the world. John highlights the end of the world and history, but the Book concludes with the return of Jesus Christ (19:1-16); the last warfare (19: 17-21); Satan being bound by chains (20: 1-3); Saints reigning 1000 years (20: 4-6); Satan’s last attempt – Gog and Magog (20: 7-10); the last judgment (20: 11-15); the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of the redeemed (21: 1-22:5); and the conclusion of the Book of John, but not the closure.
events that John recorded in Rev. 19: 1-10 would take place in heaven after Parousia. The proceedings recorded in Rev. 19: 1-10 are preceded by and link up with those in Rev. 17 and 18. The song of Rev. 19: 1-10 celebrates God’s judgment on the city of Babylon that would have taken place under the seventh plague (Rev. 16: 19; 17: 1). The judgments of Rev. 17-20 would culminate in the Parousia, but it is not clear from the text as to when and where the song is located.\textsuperscript{569}

John heard what seemed to be a voice of many people responding with singing for the purpose of rendering praise to God for judging the harlot or Babylon (Rev. 19: 1-3; cf. 18: 10). The invitation does not fall on deaf ears in that the 24 elders and 4 living creatures also heed an invitation to praise God, and they in turn, kneel to worship God (Rev. 19: 4). Yet another voice of invitation proceeds from the throne, and this voice is obviously louder than that of the many people (Rev. 19: 5).

Some have interestingly and rightly noticed “an antorio”\textsuperscript{570} or “an antiphonal choral arrangement of the two anthems and two responses” within Rev. 19: 1-8 in “which different choirs call out to hail and answer on another around a single – hallelujah.”\textsuperscript{571} “An antorio” and “an antiphonal choral arrangement” seem to have been patterned after Psalms 24: 7-10.


\textsuperscript{571} Nichol, “Revelation,” p. 871
Hendrickson,\textsuperscript{572} in analyzing the events in history leading to the wedding of the Lamb, has this to say,

“In Christ the bride was 	extit{chosen} from eternity. Throughout the OT dispensation the wedding was 	extit{announced}. When Christ assumed our flesh and blood; the 	extit{betrothal} took place. The price, the 	extit{dowry} was paid on Calvary and now after an 	extit{interval}, the Bridegroom 	extit{returns} and the wedding supper of the Lamb begins. Even now Jesus is preparing a place for his bride who he will come back for and who will be with him forever (John 14:2-3; 1 Thess 4:17).”

The song or hymn of Rev. 19: 1-10 can be divided into the following categories:

1. The Hymn(s) of Victory (Rev. 19: 1-7);
   1.1A hymn of the Great Multitude (Rev. 19: 1-3);
   1.2A hymn of the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures (Rev. 19: 4);
   1.3A hymn of the Great Multitude (Rev. 19: 5-6).

\textbf{5.10.1.1A hymn of the Great Multitude (Rev. 19:1-3)}

John writes,

“After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants, Once more they cried, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever,” (Rev. 19: 1-3).

It would seem from the above-quoted passage of Scripture that John is not sure or certain of what he is hearing – that which “seemed to be the loud voice of the great multitude.”

Lehmann has also noted some “abnormalities” in the language of John, such as the usage of indirect speech in Rev. 19: 2, “he has judged… he has avenged,” - when he actually used direct speech earlier on (Rev. 4: 11; 5: 9), “You are worthy,” and also the a lack of “preciseness” on the side of John as to the one seeing or offering praise. In Rev. 5 angels are singing, but in Rev. 19: 1, 6 John employs the word “what seemed to be.” Notice also that the word “voice” in Rev. 19: 1 is in singular, but in Rev. 19: 3 John uses plural for “they cried.”

It is doubtful that John intends to reveal some hidden truth through his inconsistencies in the usage of the language, but that the nature of the song warrants for the unison in the first stanza (Rev. 19: 1), and then several parts in the next stanza (Rev. 19: 3). The other explanation to John’s usage of the language is his Jewish or Hebrew background. It is also possible that the great multitude was singing in harmonious unison. The voice was so loud that it became clear to John that there were many persons, but singing in one voice and tone. The accent in Rev. 19: 1 is on the voice or unity of the multitude, and in Rev. 19: 3 the emphasis is on their different experiences or degrees of encounters with the harlot or the great Babylon.

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The content of the song determines the nature of the response. The great multitude experience salvation in unison, but they experienced tribulations differently – some suffered severely than others. The content of their praise is almost similar to that of Rev. 5 [salvation or swthriva, glory or dovxa, and power or duvnami], except that it is in relation to the judgment of mystical Babylon. God gloriously saves His people through His power, but He accomplishes that in a non-questionable and righteous fashion, hence “His judgments are true and just,” (cf. Rev. 16; 18).

The new word that has just been introduced in John’s vocabulary is aJllhloui>av or “hallelujah.” The word aJllhloui>av is not derived from English or Greek language. It seems that it is a Hebrew-borrowed word, Hy:AWll]j' which means “you praise Jehovah,” or “give praise to Jehovah.” It is a combination of Hebrew halal and Yah, and is in imperative mood. The word or phrase “praise Jehovah” is often employed as a response whenever there has been a significant, miraculous deliverance of God’s people.574

The following is a further elucidation with regards to the word aJllhloui>av:

“The Hallel is the name especially applied to Pss 113-118 (also called “The Hallel of Egypt” because of the references in them to the Exodus). They had a special role in the Feast of Passover. Most Jewish sources associate the Hallel with the destruction of the wicked, exactly as this passage in Revelation does. These psalms were what Jesus and the disciples sang after the Passover-Eucharist celebration, before going out to the Mount of Olives the night before his death (Mt 26:30). This close connection between the Hallel, Passover Lamb, and the death of Jesus no doubt explains why all the

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574 Rev. 19: 1-10; Ps. 111 – Egyptian deliverance;
early church liturgies incorporated the Hallel into the Easter and Easter Week liturgies, which celebrate the gospel of redemption from sin, Satan, and death in the victorious triumph of Christ, our Passover. Two texts in the great Hallel (Pss 113:1; 115:13) are unmistakably cited in 19:5.”  

Notice from the above-quoted statement that the word *aJllhlouï>av* or “praise Jehovah” is employed whenever there has been a dramatic, providential deliverance such as deliverance from Egyptian slavery (Passover), and also that it is a symbol or remembrance of deliverance from death-causing spiritual slavery to sin (Eucharist). The first *aJllhlouï>av* of Rev. 19:1 points to eternal, irreversible, completed salvation of God’s saints, the end to the long controversy over the Kingship of God, and the ultimate establishment of God’s un-controverted Kingdom.

The second *aJllhlouï>av* of Rev. 19:3 points to the eternal solution to sin, wickedness, rebellion, and persecution together with their roots. The process of punishment cannot be reversed – ashes cannot go back to their original form. Babylon will never revive or resurrect to her original form. The smoke suggests that fire has already done its work – that of consuming, and smoke is an aftermath of judgment. Burning will not be eternal, but the effects of fire (ashes) will be eternal on Babylon. The peace and tranquility of the new earth and new heaven will not be harassed by the scene of an eternally burning of Babylon, because Babylon will be no more forever. This hymn demonstrates God’s Kingship in forever saving His followers, and also eternally solving evil and its cause.

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5.10.1.2A Hymn of the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures (Rev. 19: 4)

The hymn or song of a great multitude triggers worship-response to the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures. The 24 Elders, representing the first phase of resurrection and first fruits of the harvest (Matt. 27: 52, 53) heard the content of the song which described the means and mode of their redemption – “salvation” or swthriva, “glory” or dovxa, and “power” or duvnami", and could not help, but echoed the same ajllhloulı>av. The 4 Living Creatures, too, followed suit. One could say that the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures represent the two dispensations – state of sinless-ness (4 Living Creatures) and redemption state (24 Elders).

The 4 Living Creatures did not experience a moral fall, but they also participate in a song of redemption. This act of praise by the 4 Living Creatures demonstrates that salvation does not only salvage a fallen, but it also keeps one from falling. The 4 Living Creatures attest to the true and righteous judgment of God because they had been observing the fall of humankind, the wickedness of Satan and his followers, the plight of the saints and the ultimate judgment of Babylon. The 4 Living Creatures, in a way, had been observers in the grand drama of redemption, and they also acquit God and approve His true and righteous way of executing judgment. They express their approval by their ajmḥvṇ or “AMEN.”

The universal controversy between the powers of good and evil hinged on the issues of worship and kingship. The issues are: Who should receive or be the object of homage? God, the Creator? Or the Sea beast? The 24 Elders and the 4 Living Creatures weigh the facts on the basis of the
content of the song or hymn of a great multitude, and as a way of responding, decide to demonstrate their answer by falling down on their knees, in front of God who is continuously sitting on His throne. They then join in the αλληλουϊα chorus, and declare their acceptance through their αιμήν or “AMEN.”

Notice that the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures “worshiped God who is seated on His throne,” (Rev. 19: 4). The Greek translation of the phrase, καὶ προσκυνήσαν τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ τρόνῳ, can be translated as follows, “and they worshipped the God, the One who sits continually upon the throne (or continually sitting on his throne).” This rendition provides comfort and security for the saints throughout the history of the Christian Church - that rebellion and tribulations did not usurp God’s Kingship. He was seated on His throne at beginning of rebellion; He continued to sit on His throne during the saints’ pilgrimage and tribulations on earth; He will continue to sit on His throne even after the smoke of the harlot Babylon had disappeared. God has been reigning in the universe and in the hearts of His witnesses and saints from His throne.

The 24 Elders, together with the 4 Living Creatures, in their worshipping posture render adoration to God (Rev. 4: 10-11), and glorify Jesus Christ (Rev. 5: 8-10); teach us to discern an acute distinction between the Creator and His creatures. It is only in the context of worship where a creature or worshipper is distinguished from the Creator or the Object of worship.

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576 Richard Lehmann, in his work titled “The Two Suppers,” in the Symposium on Revelation - Book II, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, Maryland: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), p. 209, footnote 11, mentions that the word “Amen,” “does not only mean that one has understood and
After the 24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures have demonstrated both physically (falling down to worship) and verbally (their resounding “Amen”) their preferred object of their worship and obedience, they disappear from the scene. In summary, we can but say, “The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all,” (Ps. 103: 19).

5.10.1.3A hymn of the Great Multitude (Rev. 19: 5-6)

John writes,

> And from the throne came a voice crying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.” Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns,” (Rev. 19: 5-6).

John, a Hebrew who would not look nor call the name of God, once more not only saw the “One seated on the throne,” (Rev. 4: 2) or a Presence on the throne, but also heard a voice from the same throne (Rev. 19: 5). No doubt, the voice came from Jesus Christ, Himself. Jesus Christ invites the universe to join Him in rendering homage to God.

We need to recognize that some have argued that a possessive “our” in “Praise our God, all you his servants” (Rev. 19: 5), points to the view that it agreed with the expressed wish, but also that as much as possible one commits himself to contributing to its accomplishment.”
is not God speaking, but an angel’s voice. Some are ambiguous about the voice from the throne – settling on either God’s voice or His spokesperson or representative. It is doubtful that creatures could speak from the throne – a seat of rulership. We are not aware of any substantive evidence to prove that creatures could speak from the throne.

There is a reasonable case for concluding that Jesus Christ is the very One who invites the universe to worship God, because Jesus Christ, Himself, shares a throne with God (Rev. 22: 1, 3). The voice speaking from the throne in Rev. 19: 5 is not different from the one found in Rev. 21: 3, 5, and it is Jesus Christ’s voice. Jesus Christ serves as an agent of establishing God’s Kingship, and He speaks for the God-King.

At other instances God and Jesus Christ change or swap roles. In the Book of the Hebrews, as mentioned earlier, God assumes a role of a spokesperson for Jesus Christ. For instance, in Hebrews 1: 8-10, God the Father not only introduces Jesus Christ, but He also offers homage to Him as a sign of God’s greatness expressed in humility.

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577 For example, R. H. Charles, in his *The Revelation of St. John With Introduction*, as quoted from the work of Richard Lehmann, “The Two Suppers,” in the *Symposium on Revelation - Book II, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 6, edited by Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, Maryland: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 212, 213, mentions that “This voice could be attributed to God if it did not use the possessive “our” (Praise our God, all you his servants”).


“But of the Son he says, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades.” And, “Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands;”

Notice that God the Father addresses Jesus Christ as “God,” and “Lord.” The homage that God offers to Jesus Christ does not in anyway detract from His Deity, and the fact that Jesus Christ addresses God as “our” or “Praise our God” does not in anyway demean His position to that of a human being. In fact, Jesus Christ is closer to humankind because of creation and re-creation (redemption), and He identifies Himself with us because He became one with us because of incarnation. Jesus Christ would not have a problem in joining us or inviting us to Praise “our” God.

Lenski\textsuperscript{580} contends that the view that purports that the voice belongs to Jesus Christ is “contrary to the analogy of the Scripture.” He continues to say “Christ never combines himself with us by saying “our God.” He then cites John 20: 17: \textit{My Father, Your Father – my God, your God.” Lenski argues his position in an interesting fashion. According to him, “My Father, Your Father – my God, your God” do not mean “Our father and Our God.” Lenski’s argument is based on the premise that usage determines or alters meaning. There is no significant value in the usage of \textit{Your Father}, \textit{My Father}, and there is not substantial evidence to prove that Lenski’s \textit{Your Father, My Father} does not mean \textit{Our Father}. Jesus Christ, through His incarnation, sacrificed His Omnipresence by becoming one of us.

Jesus Christ shares common humanity with us although His Humanity was not “infected”\textsuperscript{581}, but “affected”\textsuperscript{582} by sin. That’s precisely what Jesus Christ’s model prayer teaches us – that God is “our” Father. Jesus Christ, while fully God, relied entirely upon God for His sustenance. He taught His disciples to pray, and His model prayer has four possessive nouns, and the first one is “Our Father,”\textsuperscript{583}

Jesus Christ instructs the entire creation, young and small, to give honour and worship God (Rev. 19: 5), and the entire creation responds and does exactly what Jesus Christ commands them to do, and also adds that God has already taken His Kingship on earth – His Kingship was not contested in heaven (Rev. 19: 6). Notice that the Kingship of God is not a mere event in future, but has been realised in the past. The Greek aorist word έβασιλεύσεν or reigned points to a past event. The destruction of the beast, Satan and their followers have not taken place – so that the earth is joining the heavenly hosts in giving praise to God, but the inhabitants of the earth praise God in faith.\textsuperscript{584}

\textbf{5.10.1.4 The Marriage Supper (Rev. 19: 7-10)}

\textsuperscript{581} Ps. 51: 5; Rom. 3: 23; 1 Cor. 15: 21, 22 – The humankind inherited the sinful nature from Adam. Jesus Christ was not conceived in sin like us. We [both infant and adult] are born separated from God, but are all reconciled to God in the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. Our nature is infected by sin. We inherited sinful nature from Adam.

\textsuperscript{582} Luke: 1: 30-35; Heb. 2:14-18 – Jesus Christ’s birth is different from our birth in that He inherited the humanity that was already affected by sin - the body that was subject to fatigue, hunger and diseases. Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Spirit unlike us. His nature was affected by sin in that he inherited the results of sin.


\textsuperscript{584} Richard Lehmann, “The Two Suppers,” p. 215
This section is intended to highlight similarities between African and Hebrew culture with regards to marriage, and on the basis on this - we will limit our discussions to those parallels and allusions. Rev. 19: 7-10 is a continuation of the song of the multitude. The Marriage Supper seems to allude to the Eucharist. The central figure or the focal point of the light in this passage seems to be on the Lamb’s Bride, the Church.

John wrote,

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” (Rev. 19: 7-10).

Firstly, we need to mention that the song or hymn of joy as recorded in Rev. 19: 7-10 rests on the Jewish or Hebrew background of marriage. For example, Hendriksen has looked into the matrimonial traditions of the Hebrew people. The first stage of marriage begins with the betrothal. Betrothal is deemed to be more obligatory than the common and current western practice of engagement. The requirements or provisions of marriage are acknowledged in the presence of witnesses, and God’s

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585 Matt. 26: 26-29; Cf. 1 Cor. 11: 23-26. The concept of the Bride and Bridegroom is found in the Old Testament (Isa. 62: 5) wherein God is depicted as rejoicing over His people just as the young man rejoices in marrying his bride. Jesus Christ refers to Himself as the Bride in the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). John perceived himself as the friend of Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom (John 3: 29).
blessings are pronounced upon the couple. From this day on the couple are lawfully husband and wife (2 Cor. 11: 2).

In the second stage there is an interim period between betrothal and the wedding-feast. This interim period is characterized by the activities wherein the prospective husband pays the dowry to the father of the bride (Gen 34: 12). In the case wherein a person does not have enough means of paying the dowry, there was an option of rendering service as a form of payment (Gen 29: 20).

The third stage is marked by the procession at the close of the interval. The prospective wife gets ready and decorates herself. The prospective husband, on the other hand, dressed in his best garments and escorted by his friends, who chant and carry torches, makes his way to the home of his prospective wife. He receives the bride and takes her, with a returning procession, to his own home or to the home of his parents (Mat 9: 15; cf. also Mat 25:1 ff.).

In cases where the prospective husband had to travel a longer distance to the prospective wife’s home, the feast was at times extended to the home of the bride. The third and last stage included the wedding-feast, which climaxed in the marriage supper. The feast lasted for about seven days, and in some cases, it (feast) went beyond seven days.

Africans are at home in the Book of Revelation, especially in the area of marriage. There are some parallels and allusions with regards to marriage

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ceremony that render the Book of Revelation friendly, accessible and usable. The Hebrew mode of consummating a marriage contract is almost similar to that which is found among or in many African traditions. Apart from parallels in marriage practices between Africans and Hebrews, there are also other practices among Africans and Hebrews, which, if rightly handled, might throw more light to the meaning of the Gospel.

For example, the practice of Christian baptism. Among the Africans, the circumcision rite marks a departure from youthfulness, and the beginning of adulthood. A circumcised person no longer wears clothes he used to wear before; he changes company; he develops graces and courtesies that were unheard of prior to circumcision. He becomes a new creature. Baptism marks such a new beginning in the life of a believer. African culture is rich with lesson material to explain hidden truths of the Bible. The gospel will become meaningful and clear if we explained it from the standpoint of the known (what transpires in the African culture), and proceed to the unknown (the profound truths of the Scriptures).

The first stage of marriage, among many traditional Africans, is that of prospective husband's parents arranging a marriage for their son with or without his knowledge because they prefer to have a say in choosing their in-laws. In many cases the son reveals to the parents (especially to the mother among the traditional Sesotho speaking, and to the father among the traditional Xhosa and Zulu speaking Africans) his intention to get married.

For example, among the Sesotho speaking Africans, if parents chose not to arrange a marriage for him, the young man would release the livestock
from the kraal without extracting milk from them - as a way of communicating his intention. The mother, simply because she receives a can or jar of milk every morning after such milking, often discovers that there is no milk, and that the livestock is already grazing in the fields. She will then communicate the event or act or incident to her husband, the father to the young man.

That act has its Southern Sesotho idiomatic description – “O rahile moritshwana,” – to kick a bucket or can of milk causing the milk to spill out – meaning, the young man has caused or created a problem or crisis. This act is intended primarily not to cause crisis, but to call for attention of his parents, and also to communicate his intention to get married through an act. This act or event will trigger several reactions from the family – ranging from inviting the young man’s uncle, discussing with him (the young man) concerning the family of the prospective wife, choosing of mediators or family representatives who are led by the young man’s uncle, to arranging a dowry.

After a larger part of dowry has been paid, a ritual aimed at uniting two families is performed – wherein a sheep or goat is slaughtered whose blood is intended to seal a blood-covenant between two families (the bride and bridegroom’s) that they are now related and they are one. The main issue in many traditional African societies is not the prospective wife, but her family because in the African context marriage is primarily intended to join together two families.

Marriage between the couple is secondary. Marriage is a communal issue rather than a private matter between the two persons intending to get
married. After the communication has been established with the bride’s family through formal visits and dowry negotiations, then the entire process climaxes in a wedding feast. Long before the actual wedding feast, but after the payment of dowry, two white flags will fly on both the bride and bridegroom’s houses - as sign that there is an anticipated wedding. The white flag serves also as a means of communicating to the rest of the community, and also as a means of inviting the members of the community. The chief or king of the village should also attest or consent to the same marriage because marriage of his/her subjects is not a private matter.

During the actual wedding, songs from both the bride and bridegroom’s families characterize the event. In fact, rehearsals (from both the bride and bridegroom’s houses by their friends) take place months before the wedding day. Most of the songs that are sung during the wedding feasts communicate various messages. For example, the bride’s family might sing a song that cautions the bridegroom that if he is not happy with the bride, he needs to remember that she has a home – and consent to marriage does not mean that her family has abandoned her.

Some songs praise both the bride and bridegroom; some warn others (including both families) to let go and stay away from the new couple; some thank God for allowing the couple to get married and also entreat for God’s mercies and protection against bad spirits which might want to disrupt and cause disharmony to the family of the newly wedded couple.

Just before the end of time Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb (in idiomatic Sesotho) “o tla raha moritswana,” or its transliteration – “he will kick the
milk can or jar” in order to cause crisis, and as a way of communicating an eschatological event – Parousia, and as an indication to God the Father that He is now ready to marry His Bride, the Church.

He (Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom) has already paid His dowry or lobolo (in Zulu and Xhosa languages) or bohadi (in Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi languages) at Calvary where He had publicly demonstrated His eternal agape for His Bride. The Lamb has already been slaughtered to seal a blood-covenant - uniting both the Celestial and Terrestrial Families. The two white flags (a sign of an anticipated wedding and an invitation to all) have been flying in the passages of the Old and New Testament, in the witness of the saints’ lives and in the testimony of their proclamation, and in the witness of Jesus Christ life and death – announcing an eschatological wedding of the Lion-Lamb, together with His Bride, the Church, and also inviting others to join the wedding procession.

The Celestial Family (the Bridegroom’s Family) has started singing songs of victory, but the Terrestrial Family is still rehearsing the songs of hope and faith. The songs that will be sung during the marriage supper of the Lamb will be songs of praise for the reason that the earth has ultimately come under the Kingship of God. The Creator-King has already approved of the marriage between His Son, the Lion-Lamb, and His Bride, the Church. His Kingship has now been restored on earth, and there is no reason for not celebrating the great re-union between the Celestial and Terrestrial Families. The marriage of the Lion-Lamb takes place after hostility against God’s Kingship has been destroyed. This event climaxes in songs of praise.
In summary, it has been demonstrated in this chapter that the songs or hymns of Revelation exalt God as the Creator and Eternal One – sitting on His throne. God is the Creator-King Who is calmly sitting on His throne, revealing and interpreting history *theothronicly*. We have seen that the song of the 24 elders and that of the 4 living creatures (in Rev. 4) highlighted the Being and Wonderful Actions of God as displayed in creation. The song reveals Him as a Creator, and this Divine attribute challenges and cast a doubt on the theories of pantheism, atheism, humanism and idolatry.

The songs of Rev. 5 exalt Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb, God’s agent of destroying any opposition to God’s Kingship, the agent of securing, redeeming and saving humankind, and establishing God’s Kingship so that it remains unchallenged and un-controverted throughout eternity. The Lion-Lamb accomplishes His mission, not by physical-military conquest, but through His meritorious death and resurrection. The “new song” points to a new content in the redemption song. The new content is the inclusion of Jesus Christ as the object of worship in the song of redemption.

In Rev. 15, 16, 18, 19 God’s saints, the great multitudes, the 144, 000, the 24 elders, the 4 living creatures, the angels, and the entire universe watch and experience the great drama of salvation as it unfolds, and observe God’s means and ways of dealing with the problem of evil and wickedness; how He patiently and calmly brings to an end the ruthless history of tribulations, deceit and cruelty that were perpetrated by the beast, the harlot, Satan and his followers towards His followers. They watch Him meting judgment on the followers of the beast, on the harlot, on the beast in the process of saving His children. After assessing His methods and
means, they cannot help but declare that God’s ways and means are just and righteous. God is then acquitted in the way He handled the sin and rebellion, and how He saved His children.

His judgments are deemed fair and true. As a response, the entire universe join in giving honour to God, and also worshipping Him not only because He is a Creator, but also because He is the righteous and just King who reigns forever. God was still reigning during the inception of sin; God was still reigning during rebellion; God was still reigning during the tribulation of His saints, prophets and apostles – as inflicted by the harlot or mystic Babylon; God was still reigning when the figurative souls were calling for intervention under the alter; God was still reigning when His saints were martyred; God was still reigning when His Son, the Lion-Lamb, hanged between heaven and earth in order to atone for and pay the debt incurred during the fall; and God is still in charge in the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

The Kingship of God is seen and recognized in His silence, in His actions, through His agent (Jesus Christ), and also in His calm and peaceful decorum in the midst of rebellion. We have tried to demonstrate that Africans should feel at home in the terrain of Revelation because there are several parallels between the African culture and the Hebrew traditions or practices.

As a way of summing up this work, Hastings\(^\text{587}\) related a story of Peter Mackenzie, Durman miner, who converted and became a reputable

Wesleyan preacher and lecturer. When Peter Mackenzie had just started in his career as an evangelist, he enjoyed organizing people together for others to preach to them. One day after Peter Mackenzie had organized people, he could not get a preacher, and people forced him to preach. He said, “If I must preach, give me my subject,” and they said, “Preach about heaven.” “Very well,” said Peter Mackenzie, and he then started his sermon by describing heaven.

Right in the middle of his sermon he heard someone from the audience saying, “Peter, what do they do in heaven?” Peter Mackenzie paused a second, and then responded:

“One thing they do is to sing. I expect one day to walk along the streets of the eternal city, and come face to face with David playing an accompaniment on his harp to his own great song, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.’ I expect some day I shall lead the choir in heaven, and if ever I do, there are two songs I am going to give out. One is No. 749 in the Wesleyan Hymn-book, ‘My God and Father, while I stray’; but if I ever give out that song in heaven, half the angels in the choir will say, ‘Peter, you are in heaven, and you cannot stray.’”

“Then if I give that out, and they cannot sing it, I will try another, No. 651, in the Wesleyan Hymn-book, ‘Though the waves and storms beat o’er my head’; and then, not half the angels, but the whole choir will be on their feet, saying, ‘Peter Mackenzie, this is heaven; there are no storms here.’ Then I think I shall stand in wander and amazement, and say, ‘What shall we sing?’ and from every angel in the skies will come the answer, ‘Sing the New Song!’ ‘Sing the New Song!’ Then all the redeemed in heaven, from the least unto the greatest, will join in singing an ascription of praise unto Him who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in His own precious blood.”
CHAPTER 6

The Kingship God as a theological motif in the Apocalypse of John: A Reflection

This work sought to study or research on the Kingship of God as the theological motif in the hymns of the Apocalypse of John with the sole aim of stimulating fresh interests in the subject of God’s Kingship as a theological motif in the hymns of John’s Apocalypse. We have seen that there is a thread of the Kingship of God that serves as a systematic, unifying principle that binds the Biblical teachings together, and this thread of God’s Kingship spirals throughout the entire Scriptures - climaxing in the throne room where it first originated, where God is calmly seating on His throne – reigning over the entire universe. The following are observations and proposals from our study:

1. There is a challenge among New Testament scholars to facilitate for a process that will render the Book of Revelation pleasant and homely to the pew, and also provide means and modes of unpacking its profound yet revealed faith-building, cathartic truths. The Book of Revelation is vibrant with liturgical-enriching songs, theology, and symbols. It behooves us to help break codes or find hidden key so as to provide tools to decipher truths veiled in symbolic visions and language. The Book of Revelation is still a terrain of the few at the theological seminaries and universities, and remains a thick bush for the fellow Christians, especially traditional Africans. The Holy Scriptures were primarily written and handed to the Church for practical living. In our journey to theologizing,

588 Ibid. 160.
we need to be conscious of the truth that the Book of Revelation was intended for worship milieu more than to be a bone of theological contention. The Book of Revelation was primarily written for cathartic purposes for its primary, persecuted recipients. It was not intended to be a theological gymnasium hall.

2. The second chapter of this work pointed to the fact that the authorial issues, together with the dating of the Book of Revelation, have not been exhausted nor resolved. One wanders if such issues will ever be resolved. It would seem that the more the Book of Revelation, particularly the authorial and dating matters, remains hidden, the more the scholars will find a fertile field of study and research to stimulate their minds and contribute to knowledge. We also need to mention, with the same breath, that the Book of Revelation constitutes a holy ground wherein all of us need to take off our speculative shoes because we are in the presence and terrain of the Holy One, the very Deity. We may need to be mindful of the fact that God is mysterious - so are His works, as revealed both in the Scriptures and in nature.

It has been demonstrated that the debate on approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation has not been exhausted. We have argued that any approach or interpretation which presents a one-sided perspective, tends to rob the subject of its bigger picture, and other aspects of the truth. Truth is multi-facet. No one, but God, has absolute truth. We are trying to put together pieces of a puzzle - one piece of the puzzle will not constitute the full picture. We have critically evaluated main approaches to interpreting the Book of Revelation, and we also have preferred the continuous-historicist approach for the reason that it takes
seriously the primary, intended recipients of the text, and it also addresses saints in different eras of the Christian Church. We proved that Jesus Christ used the continuous-historicist approach in addressing the prophecies of Daniel. We have also demonstrated that there is a case for employing its (continuous-historicist approach) cousin or tool, the "year-day principle" as one of the keys to interpreting the Book of Revelation and locating the Biblical-prophetic text within history.

The "year-day principle," stems from the Biblical text itself. It is not a foreign tool, but part of the Biblical text - quite instrumental in helping the reader deal with prophetic text and time – especially in locating such prophetic time and events within history. It has been established that most of attention has been concentrated on meaning of symbols and visions, literary structures, language of the Book, role of the Old Testament, sources of John’s thoughts, approaches to interpretation, dating and authorial matters, etc., at the expense of the theology of the Book. The Kingship of God as a theological motif in the hymns of the Book of Revelation has not received adequate attention. There is a need for a fresh attention on the theology of the hymns found Book of Revelation so as to inform our praxis and liturgy - and also encounter the King on His throne.

3. The third chapter of this work sought to prove that there is a reasonable case to argue that the establishment of the Kingship of God, or the Kingdom of heaven (among the Jews), or the Kingdom of God (among converted Gentiles) has been the burden and purpose of the Old Testament Books. The Garden of Eden was God’s Kingdom. God created His own Kingdom and populated it with His creation, (Gen. 1). He then shared His Kingship with Adam and Eve through assigning them
dominion over His created creatures, and the act of naming pointed to and demonstrated shared kingship (Gen. 1: 26; 2: 19, 20).

We demonstrated that the main issue in the Garden of Eden was an attempt to usurp God’s Kingship by the enemy, Satan. The history of the Israelites has been characterized by loyalty and disloyalty to the Creator-King. The phrase “Kingdom of God,” or “Kingship of God” or “Kingdom of heaven” is not central in the Old Testament, but the thought permeates the entire Old Testament text. God demonstrated His Kingship when He liberated His oppressed people from the oppressive Egyptians. He did not only redeem His people, but He also used His power to liberate them. Miracles were a sign of His power to rule and to save.

The Coronation Psalms carry the thought of God’s Kingship. The Kingship of God is highlighted in the Book of Daniel wherein the gods of Babylon are at variance with God, and the captivity of the Hebrews seemed and appeared to be a demise of God’s Kingship. The entire Book of Daniel proves that God is in control, determining the history of all earthly kingdoms, and ultimately the God of heaven will set up and ever-ending Kingdom (Dan. 2: 44)

The formation of the Kingship of God, or the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of heaven was indeed the very mission and burden of Jesus Christ’s preaching. It was the power and content which propelled the witness of Jesus Christ’s disciples, and constituted hope and proclamation of the New Testament or Primitive Church. The intention of the apostolic preaching and witness, particularly that of placing an accent on the
“Kingdom of God” as the aim for the proclamation, was for the purpose of bringing everyone under the Kingship of God.

Although the emphasis of the New Testament Church shifted from the Kingdom of God or Heaven - to life, death, resurrection, and the Parousia of Jesus Christ, it (the Kingdom of God) was a sign that the Holy Spirit was at work in the New Testament Church, helping her to mature in faith, and also providing the New Testament Church with meaning and significance to the question and topic of Jesus Christ, and the Cross. The employment of the Spiritual Gifts as a tool to build and edify the New Testament Church (particularly in the administrative structures of the Church) mirrored the invisible structure of the Kingdom of God or the Kingship of God.

We have attempted to prove that the concept of the Kingship of God permeates the entire New Testament text through its ethical teachings which help saints to comply with the laws of the Kingdom of God; through spiritual, ethical responses to life spiritual challenges; through unpacking the meaning and significance of Jesus Christ-event at the Cross through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit; through miracles performed for the sole purpose of freeing captives from Satan’s kingdom and spell - in order to increase membership or citizenship in the Kingdom of God. It is imperative for us to draw the attention of all believers to the Kingship of God for cathartic purposes, and also as a means of helping saints to prepare and anticipate the full realization of God’s Kingship at Parousia.
4. The fourth chapter concentrated on the Kingship of God in the Book of Revelation. It was shown that the Creator-King created His own Kingdom or terrain or domain because Kingship takes place in the context of a kingdom. The Creatorship of God resolves the issue of origins, and also challenges and cast a doubt on theories such as atheism, pantheism, deism and humanism. The Kingship of God is symbolised and proved by a throne on which He is calmly sitting – controlling the entire universe. The history of this world unfolds theothricly.

The great controversy between the forces of good and evil hinges on the throne as a seat of control. Satan desires to set his throne above that of the Creator-King, and he also coerces everyone to pay homage to him. Jesus Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb serves as the means and instrument of destroying the hostile enemies of God’s Kingship and save God’s throne from Satan’s attacks. While Satan and his beast coerce everyone to be subjects of the kingdom of Satan, Jesus Christ expresses His love through His death and Precious Blood to win the hearts of His followers, and also to undermine the power of the evil one, to free the captives from the kingdom of Satan, and to establish God’s Kingship.

Jesus Christ hanged at the Cross - between heaven and earth in order to reconcile the offending humankind to the offended God. The Kingship of God is not only established through the Blood of Jesus Christ, but also demonstrated through the witness of the redeemed life and death of the saints. Saints witness primarily with their lives – and also they bear the testimony of the Redeemer through their martyrdom. They do not deliberately invite death, but their witness leads them to death.
This work has also reaffirmed that the continuous-historical approach’s “year-day principle” proved to be instrumental in providing a key to interpreting the time frame within which the “two witnesses” of Rev. 11 operated. The “two witnesses” cannot be taken literally since they are part of the prophetic book. The time frame cannot be taken literally because the Book of Revelation is an apocalyptic prophecy – hence there is a need to consider taking the “year-day principle” tool or approach seriously. The Book of Ezekiel provided the key to the identity of the “two witnesses” – the “two olive trees” or “two branches” or “the Word of the Lord,” the Old and New Testaments (Zech. 4: 3-6, 8-14).

5. The fifth chapter sought to study theological function of the hymns of Revelation with special reference to the Kingship of God. We demonstrated that hymns play a major role among the “traditional Africans.” An African sings when he is happy; she sings when she is sad; he sings as a way of communicating his mood; she sings in order to preserve and transmit norms and values; he sings when he is entertaining himself; she sings when expressing protest against oppression and its perpetrators; and he sings and dances when he is worshipping God. Songs unite Africans, and they help strengthen their public opinion. Songs have been at the heart of the struggle of a Black person in South Africa. The content of and reason for the struggle, and means of winning the struggle have been encased in and transmitted through songs.

\footnote{589 The term or phrase “Traditional Africans” should be understood to mean or refer to Africans who can trace the origin of their ancestors back to the continent of Africa. To a certain extent, the term “Traditional Africans” could include non-black persons.}
The Book of Revelation is vibrant with songs that provided meaning and hope for the primary recipients of John’s prophesies, and they also provide courage and anticipation for saints throughout the history of the Christian Church. Rev. 4 functions exactly the same way as Gen. 1 (that creation begins with God) and John 1 (that re-creation or redemption begins with God). It has been demonstrated that the attribute of God as a Creator - challenges the theories of atheism, pantheism, and humanism. The view of deism is challenged by the fact that God is calmly sitting on His throne, controlling the world.

The visions of the Book of Revelation proceed from and end in God’s throne. The songs of Rev. 4 deal with God-King as the Source and end of creation. God-King is worthy of receiving worship because He is Holy. Chapter 4 of Revelation has to do with the enthronement scene, the very revelation and recognition of a Royal Dignitary. The throne is central in Rev. 4 and history unfolds theothronicly. The songs of Rev. 4 serve as a commentary on the “Presence on the throne” or “One seated on the throne.”

The singers (the 24 elders and 4 living creatures) set a pace and tempo for worship around the throne. We proposed that the 24 elders are part of the resurrected saints during the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, (Matt. 27: 52, 53). It is possible that these saints ascended with Jesus Christ since we do not have evidence pointing to the contrary, or a view that purports that they (resurrected saints) died again and went back to their graves.
We proposed that the identity of the 4 living creatures should be allowed to remain mysterious. The 4 living creatures occupy or play a role of *imbongi* in Zulu and Xhosa languages, or *seroki* in Southern Sesotho. An *imbongi* or *seroki* is a person who gives praise to [or sometimes criticizes] royalty or dignitary, and this aspect of the function of the 4 living creatures has its parallel in many African cultures. This similarity with African culture removes foreignness of the Book of Revelation, and makes the Book friendly to Africans. The 4 *imbongs* or *diroki* or 4 living creatures invite us to praise and honour the “Royal Presence on the throne,” Formless, indescribable, but simply referred to as the “One seated on the throne.”

The songs of Rev. 5 ease the tension following John’s weeping because no one was found to match the challenge. John was comforted when Jesus Christ was declared worthy to meet the challenge. We have seen that on an *anthropological level*, John is seen as weeping and moaning because it seemed the solution or the dilemma of the sin-infected universe would remain unresolved. On the *theological level*, after the tension had been eased because of the qualifications of the Lion-Lamb, Jesus Christ, the songs of Rev. 5 function and explain what the role of the Lion-Lamb is in relation to mankind’s redemption, and in relation to establishing God’s Kingship

Jesus Christ, on *theological level*, qualified by His death to open and break seven seals, and was accepted not only as the Redeemer, but also as God worthy to receive worship and praise. Jesus Christ, the agent of establishing the Kingship of God is revealed and introduced within a crisis situation. He has the exclusive right and worth of taking and breaking the
seals of the scroll – the scroll which contains God’s glorious intention and redemptive plan for His saints, and God’s ultimate solution of eradicating sin and its originator.

The antiphonal songs of Rev. 5 function as the explanatory notes for the reasons why Jesus Christ is worth to open the scroll. The “new song,” as argued, points to the new inclusion in the content or lyrics of the song – the inclusion of Jesus Christ as part of the Godhead - worthy to be worshipped. The songs of Rev. 5 reveal Jesus Christ on the alter – shedding His blood in order to establish God’s Kingship, solve sin problem, and purchase, secured humankind’s redemption. The songs of Rev. 4 reveal God seated on His throne. Humankind ought to accept Jesus Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb as a Saviour on the alter, before they can accept Him as God and King on the throne.

The songs of Rev. 7 and 14 point to the Kingship of God in that God will save His saints – “a great multitude” which includes the 144, 000. He will establish His saints as citizens of His Kingdom. It has been argued and established that the relationship of the 144, 000 and “a great multitude” can be explained through the understanding of the biblical concepts the “first fruits” (Rev. 14: 4) and “tithe” (Mal. 3: 8-10). The 144, 000 are part of “a great multitude” just as the tithe or first fruits are part of the whole harvest. The 144, 000 are not separate from “a great multitude,” but their function and role is distinctive – “first fruit” of redemption because of their unique experiences. The song of “a great multitude” celebrates salvation, which should be understood to mean shalom (peace) or healing or salvaging from death. The song of “a great multitude” announces that God-King provides shalom and healing for His saints, and He salvages...
them from the snares and persecution of His enemies. “A great multitude” will give praise to God for assigning Jesus Christ the task of saving humankind.

The unrevealed “new song” of the figurative 144,000 in Rev. 14: 3-5 should be allowed to remain hidden and mysterious. Its content and its newness have not been revealed. Any speculation will introduce alien elements in the Scriptures. Once more, God should be allowed to remain mysterious because God Himself says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts,” (Isa. 55: 8-9).

The song of Rev. 11: 15-18 points to the fact that God has been in control, and He continues to reign forever. His Kingship is confirmed in His regal act of executing judgment in order to vindicate His ways of dealing with the problem of evil and Satan, vindicating His modes of interacting with the world, vindicating His Laws and government, and vindicating the character and witness of the saints. The song of Rev. 11 announces that God will soon settle scores with His strategic enemies, rewarding His followers who remained faithful and loyal in the face of persecution and death, and also saving by grace those who had no clue to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The song of Rev. 12: 9-12 points to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Lion-Lamb, and to the Kingdom of God. The entire heaven rejoices because the first phase of victory against Satan and the beast has been secured in heaven where rebellion first started. The throne of God is now
eternally secure through the Blood and death of Jesus Christ. The first phase of victory in heaven guarantees victory of the second phase of spiritual war and persecutions on God’s people on earth. Humankind engage in war with an enraged and wrathful enemy who realises and mindful of the fact that his time is but limited. The advantage of Humankind is that victory has been secured already through the Blood of Jesus Christ. The Kingship of God is revealed in that God reveals the victory of the saints theothronically.

The song of Rev. 15: 2-4 will mark the continuation of judgment that began in Rev. 12, which will proceed to Rev. 22. We have seen that the framework of Rev. 15 is the Old Testament Sanctuary services or systems in which a means for dealing with sin problem was taught to ancient Israelites and implemented in their personal lives. The song has its parallel in Exodus motif, particularly the crossing of the Red Sea. The saints will cross the spiritual Red Sea at the end of time, and will stand at the Sea of glass triumphantly.

It was shown that the song of Rev. 15 reveals the Kingship of God in that He saved His subjects at the crossing of the Red Sea, and this serves as a guarantee that He will ultimately save His followers from the spiritual Red Sea – in the same event, God will punish His enemies. Judgment (for God’s enemies) is always linked to salvation or new creation (for God’s saints). This song provides hope and encouragement to the saints in every age, and this should be kept fresh in the minds of all saints through sermons and other means as a therapy for their discouragement.
The song of Rev. 16: 4-8 celebrates the fact that the King acts righteously even when He deals with His enemies. His enemies grudgingly accede to the fact that His judgments are fair because His punishments fit the crime committed. His Holiness of character is the basis for His judgments. The fact that He operates under restrain for the sake of His character, wisdom, and Omnipotence, points to His Divine Kingship. His Holiness righteously condemned sin even when He found it on His Son at the Cross, and this is a guarantee that He will not tolerate sin on His enemies and saints. God’s righteous and Holy character in executing judgment evoke praise from His universe.

The song of Rev. 18: 4, 5, and 20 invites everyone to celebrate because God will execute judgment on mystical Babylon for persecuting saints, apostles and prophets. Prior to this celebration, an invitation is extended to all to disassociate themselves from any dealings with the mystical Babylon lest they suffer her fate. Mystical Babylon represents every religious system (including political system) which falls short of God’s standard of perfection as revealed in His Word and through nature. God in Rev. 18 prepares to champion the course of His people.

Once more, Rev. 18 re-affirms the truth that God will not punish or judge anyone before He extends an opportunity to them to make a decision either for or against Him, hence His time schedule is misunderstood by the figurative souls under the symbolic altar. This chapter, Rev. 18, teaches us and John’s audience that God will ultimately avenge and intervene for His followers. A celebration for God’s intervention takes place later in Rev. 19 and following chapters. This chapter, Rev. 18, is a hope-building and encouraging good news which
should be heard by and read to those who are encountering life-threatening situations. Finally, God, at His own time because He is a just, fair and righteous King, caring for His people, will intervene on behalf of His people. This is the burden of the song of Rev. 18: 20, and also that of the call of Rev. 18: 4, 5.

It has been demonstrated that the last songs of Rev. 19: 1-10 vindicate God’s character and means (namely, death and blood of Jesus Christ) of dealing with rebellion by mystical Babylon, the beast, Satan and sin. These songs also vindicate the character and witness of the saints. God’s victory is expressed in “Hallelujah” choruses. The “Hallelujah” choruses celebrate God’s permanent solution to sin and rebellion problems. It was shown that salvation does not only salvage the fallen beings (the 144,000, 24 elders and “a great multitude”), but it also keeps the un-fallen beings from falling into rebellion and sin (un-fallen, loyal angels and the 4 living creatures).

God’s character has been on trial up until Rev. 12-22. God has been found innocent, His actions have been declared righteous, true and just. The figurative souls under the altar, the 24 elders, the 4 living creatures, the heavenly hosts or angels, and the entire creation - all declare their “Hallelujah,” and their “Amen” as an approval for God’s judgment on sin, rebellion and mystical Babylon. God’s acquittal is the burden of the songs of Rev. 19. He is a Righteous, Just and Coming King.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb provides a home and presents a familiar environment for many Africans because of the similarities between the Hebrew traditions with regards to marriage ceremonies. He
(Jesus Christ, the Bridegroom) has already paid His lobolo (in Xhosa and Zulu) or bohadi (in Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi) or dowry at Calvary where He had publicly demonstrated His eternal agape for His Bride, the Church. The Lamb has already been slaughtered to seal a blood-covenant intended to unite both the Celestial and Terrestrial Families.

The two white flags (a sign of an anticipated wedding and an invitation to all to attend the wedding feast) have been flying in the passages and corridors of the Old and New Testament, in the witness of the saints’ lives and in the testimony of their proclamation, and in the witness of Jesus Christ’s life and death – announcing an eschatological wedding of the Lion-Lamb, together with His Bride, the Church, and also inviting others to join the wedding procession.

The Celestial Family (the Bridegroom’s Family) has started singing songs of victory from Rev. 12 in the first phase of victory over rebellion in heaven, but the Terrestrial Family is still rehearsing the songs of hope and faith. The songs that will be sung during the marriage supper of the Lamb will be songs of praise for the reason that the earth has ultimately come under the Kingship of God. The Creator-King has already approved of the marriage between His Son, the Lion-Lamb, and His Bride, the Church. His Kingship has now been invisibly restored on earth through the life, witness and proclamation of his saints, and there is no reason for not celebrating the anticipated and eschatological great re-union between the Celestial and Terrestrial Families.
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