

# **HOW GOD TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS CHURCH IN THIS WORLD WITH REFERENCE TO REVELATION 11**

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### **NOTE:**

The Greek used in this thesis does not have accent.

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## SUMMARY

The book of Revelation is a book that has continually received attention from many who have studied it. Many different views have been expressed on it. There are areas where there are agreements on some issues, while there are also other areas where there are disagreements. Among those areas where there are agreements concerning the book of Revelation are the following : that this book is an Apocalypse, it is a letter from the seer to the people who were experiencing a crisis and it is also a prophecy.

As an Apocalypse, it involves visions of two types namely : symbolic visions and visions of heavenly beings. As apocalyptic writing it deals with the ideology that existed within a particular society. It seeks to balance the situation which has become unbearable to those who live within that society in crisis. In its attempts to re-dress the imbalance, it engages the hearer/reader in an intellectual battle rather than a physical one in order to get out of the undesirable condition. Its letter form makes it to communicate its message in an understandable way to the hearer/reader because its message is directed to a specific people at a specific place at a specific time. This status makes it real to the people of all times. As a Prophecy, it is prophesying into the present needs of a community in order for both the present and the future to be meaningful to the living community in crisis.

To date there is no common date which all researchers agree upon as the date of writing of this book. Some hold the view that this book was written between 64 and 70 AD while others hold the view that it was written between 81 and 96 AD. I hold the view that Revelation was written between 81 and 96 AD because of the internal evidence in the book itself.

The Book of Revelation uses mostly symbolic language in expressing its message. This is the author's chosen method in order to express the heavenly message given to him in a way that earthly beings could be able to understand and make sense of it. Without the symbolic language, the message would be almost impossible to express to humans because of its mysterious nature. Symbols in Revelation are so powerful "...that it is impossible to find absolute realities behind each symbol" Du Rand ( 1994 : 254 ). Some scholars argue that the strength of the Book of Revelation does not lie in its theological meaning nor its historical information but rather in the evocative, persuasive power of its symbolic language which compels imaginative participation by the hearer/reader.

The Book of Revelation came into existence because of the crisis situation that existed within the Johannine community at that time. Schussler Fiorenza calls this a 'perceived crisis'. In that situation, life had become meaningless to the members of that community because of the oppressive system which was practiced on them. The author seeks to help the hearer/reader to deal with the situation in a way that will bring honour to God. The Christians in the first century were faced with challenges from both within and outside the Church. From within the, there were those Christians who were beginning to live an unacceptable moral life. From outside the Church there were those who were bringing wrong teachings into the Church.

These challenges were causing some of the Christians to become unfaithful to God. There was pressure exerted upon the Christians to do what was contrary to their faith in order to be acceptable to their non-Christian counterparts. Such pressure was not necessarily verbal nor official. The seer was writing to encourage the members of that community to remain faithful to their God and refuse to be affected by these challenges.

The author of the Book of Revelation wrote specific letters to the seven different Churches to address the specific situations that existed then within the Churches in Asia Minor. These seven Churches are understood to be representative of the



Church as a whole today. In all these different Churches, the author exhorts the Believers to fight for the cause of their faith to the bitter end, whatever it may cost them. They are called upon to focus their minds on overcoming, even if it meant death for them. They were to see martyrdom as victory. Those who were to overcome these challenges were going to receive their rewards from their Master.

The Book of Revelation makes it very clear to the Christians that opposition is facing them at all times because their Master was also opposed while He was still in the world. They are therefore called upon to be His witnesses throughout their lives. It is this witnessing for Jesus Christ which would bring them into conflict with their opponents. The picture of how the Church is going to be treated by the world is provided in the story of the two witnesses. The witnesses are given power to witness for Jesus Christ for a limited period on earth. During that predetermined period, God protects them from any kind of harm from the Devil. Even when the Devil wants to harm them he is unable to do so. At the end of this period, God removes His hand of protection upon them. It is at this moment that the enemy attacks them and kills them.

The Church's witness is therefore only for a limited period in this world. The Church will be hated because Jesus Christ was hated by the world too. During the Church's period of witness, she is fully protected by God, nothing can harm her, no matter what happens. But after the Church shall have completed her witnessing task, God will remove His hand of protection from her and the enemy will attack the Church. The enemy's attack on the Church will be so severe that it will look like it has been defeated by the Devil for a little while. During the period of 'apparent defeat', the world will rejoice over the ineffectiveness of the Church. The reason for that is because the Church's message of sin and judgement has been tormenting the inhabitants of the earth. This points to the fact that the preaching of the true message of the Gospel offends the non - repenting opponents of God. After God's own predetermined time has passed, God will instill new power and life into His Church. The Church will come to life again, and this to the surprise of the enemy.

In the midst of all this, God is actively present in every situation which His Church finds itself in. All that happens to and through His Church is in accordance with God's salvific plan. God allows whatever he wants to allow to happen in order for Him to demonstrate His power over His Creation. Included in God's plan is that He will not let His opponents go unpunished. All those who oppose Him are going to be judged when the time comes. God will destroy the Devil and all his followers. However, nothing will force God to change His plans, not even the cries of His saints. The unbelieving inhabitants of the earth are given enough time to repent in order to escape God's wrath.

Victory is promised to all those who follow the Lamb, provided they remain faithful to their calling. From God's side, the protection of their faith is guaranteed, hence they are called upon to actively witness without fear. After victory has been attained, whether through martyrdom or otherwise, all the victors will be rewarded by living permanently with the Lamb in the new heaven. God's Church cannot be defeated, after everything has been said and done, the Church will come out the victor.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **ORIENTATION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTORY MATTERS**

#### **1.1.1 REVELATION AS AN APOCALYPSE**

The Book of Revelation in 1:1 calls itself an Apocalypse. It is now generally accepted that this book belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature. An Apocalypse is thought to have a relationship to prophecy, though it is not the same thing. The author himself calls this book a prophecy in 1:3. “Both genres are part of a text type we usually call ‘revelatory writings’, thereby indicating that they contain certain messages from a supernatural world, relayed to people on earth”. (Botha, 1988:13). Yet, there is a distinct difference between an Apocalypse and a Prophecy.

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An Apocalypse, which is what Revelation is said to be, is best defined by Collins (1996:7) as he says:

“Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world; such a work is intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and behaviour of the audience by means of divine authority”.

The definition presupposed here suggests that there are three important bodies of literature which provide the context for interpretation. The concern of the genre with temporal matters, the interpretation of history and salvation in the future, indicates a link with the prophetic literature of Israel and Judah (Collins, 1996:8). Collins further suggests that each Apocalypse contains a “program for life” which has two major dimensions, viz.: how to live in the material world and how to transcend that world.

According to Collins (1996: 11-12), Apocalypses have to do with visions. These visions are of two types. The one type is the symbolic vision whose images are not intended to be literally true, but whose interpretation refers to heavenly and earthly beings and events. The other type involves visions of heavenly beings, places and events, usually revealed in the course of a journey.

An Apocalypse seeks to answer questions such as the following : Who reveals? To whom is the revelation made? And how (under what circumstances)? These questions have to do with the form that the Apocalypse takes. Content should answer the questions : What is revealed? What is the declared purpose of the revelation? Function deals with questions that should answer the questions : For what purpose is the literature text designed? Are there indications of early response to the text? Du Rand (1994:81). Answers to these questions help the reader/hearer to understand what the Apocalypse is all about or the reason for its existence.

### **1.1.2 REVELATION AS AN APOCALYPTIC WRITING**

Apocalyptic writings have their own thought pattern. It is on the basis of this thought pattern that an apocalyptic language has come into being. But it is also known that “Not all scholars use the terminology in the same way...” (Boring, 1989 : 35 ). He suggests answering the questions in three different ways thus:

Apocalyptic as literary genre, Apocalyptic as a social movement, and Apocalyptic as a particular kind of thought. To him the latter is the most important since it alludes to the understanding of the message of Revelation.

“Apocalyptic is a particular kind of eschatology, which in turn is a particular understanding of the doctrine of providence”. According to Du Rand (1994:195), an apocalyptic writing deals with a thought content. It describes the ideology or crisis which originated and flourished when values and structures of a society became meaningless for a minority group in that society, and were replaced with a new symbolic system of meaning. Such a group of people then becomes alienated and a subculture develops which comes into conflict with the majority group as society develops. The so-called majority try to maintain the status quo with all its institutions and values, while the minority see a radical break as the only solution to their conflict. The minority group starts interpreting the present and future from a viewpoint of a totally new future. The status quo is treated pessimistically by the newly found members of the minority group because it is no longer meaningful to them. To them the new future is not ‘here’, but has to come from ‘elsewhere’. In the new world, God will judge the evil majority and justify His faithful minority. Judgement and salvation are portrayed by various representations and projections in a visionary and symbolic-speculative way.

The Book of Revelation fits well into the above description of an apocalyptic writing. The author of this book is writing to his readers who are in a crisis situation. Because of the circumstances that prevailed in Asia Minor at that time, Christian values were being undermined, and somewhat becoming meaningless in that society. The non-Christian community did not want to recognize Christianity for what it was and tried to sideline it, and maintain the status quo. This caused the minority Christian group to feel threatened. John’s message to the Christians in Asia Minor is to help them reinterpret their present and future differently. They are encouraged to see their present situation as a step towards their future.

Revelation as an apocalyptic writing seeks to help the readers to deal with their present life in such a way as not to allow the circumstances around them to distract them from their intended course. They are to refuse and oppose any attempts to change them from their Christian lifestyle despite what it may cost them; even the fear of death should not be allowed to derail them. One needs to note that in the Book of Revelation, this is supposed to be an intellectual battle and not a physical one.

There are good reasons why Bible scholars and commentators classify Revelation as an apocalyptic writing. This book abounds in symbolism of typically apocalyptic character. But this book also has some marked differences from typical apocalyptic literature which we should not overlook. Leon Morris agrees with this view (1988 : 25). Among the differences that Morris mentioned are the following:

1. "The writer repeatedly calls his writing a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19). Apocalyptic is usually distinguished from prophecy, but this writer claims to be in the prophetic tradition...
2. The pessimism of the apocalyptists does not seem to be found here. This age is not seen as being hopelessly dominated by evil, though the writer does look for an outbreak of satanic activity at the last time...Though evil is depicted realistically, the book is fundamentally optimistic...
3. The apocalyptists characteristically trace history in the guise of prophecy. From the standpoint of someone in the remote past they forecast what will happen up till their own day. There is no trace of this in Revelation. Rather, in the manner of the true prophet, John takes his stand in his own days and looks resolutely to the future...
4. In general, it is the case that apocalyptists look forward to the coming of God's Messiah. He would introduce a new thing into human history. But for John the new thing has already appeared. He writes of a Messiah who will come indeed, but who has also already come and won the decisive victory."

There are certainly clear differences between the Apocalypse of John and other extra-biblical Apocalypses. While John's Apocalypse shares this common name and classification with other Apocalypses, Revelation enjoys a special standing that is not enjoyed by the others. Du Rand (1994 : 209 – 210) testifies to this as follows :

1. "Revelation is not presented as a pseudonymous work such as the other apocalypses. The author calls himself John. The authority and reliability of the message are linked to Jesus Christ who received the message from God and gave it to John by the mediation of an angel as go-between... Revelation presents it in such a way that this John stood in a particular relationship to the congregations and therefore was the letter form and conclusive to express this personal link.

The skilful way in which the author of the Book of Revelation writes, he was able to write history in the form of prophecy.

2. It is very important that in apocalyptic thinking that the visions of the seer do not merely arise from his experience ... but have a divine origin. The transcendent is emphasized in such a way that it gives the seer his message divine authority. It carries divine sanction.
3. The seven messages in letter form in Revelation 2 – 3 are unique. They indicate the particular intimate nature of the relationship between Christ and His church and once more place the Christological point of departure for the understanding of Revelation in the foreground...
4. The message of Revelation should not be kept secret (cf. 22:18f) such as is the case in other typical apocalypses... The message of Revelation, in contrast, was intended for the congregations of Asia Minor at a time when they needed it most ...

5. The general pattern in apocalypses is that visions are explained by means of a mediator. In Revelation the visions are merely described and the reader should construe the meaning for himself (except in a few cases, cf. 17: 7ff).
6. Revelation is embedded in the spirit and atmosphere of the biblical message. In spite of the apparent strangeness of the apocalyptic material, Revelation is mainly in line with the general biblical message and traditions”.

To this end Kümmel (1975:459), testifies that John “...does not hide himself behind the mask of some worthy from the past in the manner of Jewish apocalyptic. Presumably he was actually a visionary, but if he portrays what he has experienced, he does not write secret wisdom allegedly stemming from primitive times; rather, he gives clear eschatological prophecy and exhortation related to the present (22:10)”. Kümmel further adds that “...apocalypses proper, however, offer complete books of prophecy in pseudonymous form. The first and most important of these which has survived in the book of Daniel, written in 165/164 B.C. at the time of the Maccabean revolt... The Jewish apocalypticists conceal themselves behind the authority of some great, pious man of early times, such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, the twelve patriarchs, or Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Baruch, Ezra, etc. In predictive form, they write history from the time of the alleged author until the end of the world” (1975:453-454).

What is new in Revelation is a total recasting of the apocalyptic view of history out of the Jewish and into the Christian mold. The apocalyptic view of history has received a new sub-structure through the historical appearance of Jesus. On this the entire weight of the sub-structure rests. In distinction from Jewish apocalyptic, there is lacking here any look back into the past and any forward-view out of that fictional past into the present. For John the point of departure for his eschatological hope is rather the belief in the saving act of God in Jesus and in His redemptive work which signifies victory.



The Book of Revelation “is concerned with heaven; but it also connects very closely with earth. It does describe the future; but it also provides a prophetic challenge within the ongoing, contemporary scene” (Smalley, 1994 : 28). Smalley further suggests that if the essence of apocalyptic is direct access to the heavenly world and its divine truths, with angels often acting as intermediaries, then the Jewish Dead Sea Community seems to have participated in that religious point of view. He also cites that apocalyptic writings have a dualism characteristic because of its contrast between heaven and earth as they exist now, and the new heaven and the new earth as they will be revealed in the future. The Book of Revelation exhibits this characteristic.

An important dimension to Qumranic theology was the ability to know and understand divine secrets. His observation that the rediscovery of apocalyptic in recent times has reminded us not only of its relevance to the political, social and religious crises of our own day, but also of the great complexity belonging to what we have broadly described so far as ‘apocalyptic literature’, is helpful to give / shed more light on the value of apocalyptic writings.

From the above cited differences, it is clear that Revelation is an apocalyptic writing with a difference. It stands out as a special apocalyptic work of a Christian prophet. God, through this Book, intended to break into His people and bring a relevant message at the right time, a message whose authority would not be doubted by both its original readers and subsequent readers. While the Book of Revelation can be compared with other works, it has its own special nature. It should therefore be understood as such.

Revelation is a book of its time, written out of this time and for this time, not for later generations of the future or even for the End-time. It is as much an occasional writing as are the letters of the New Testament, as how to be understood basically in its own historical setting. While we accept that it was

written for the people of its day, Revelation is still very relevant to the people of today in the present historical setting.

Having said that, it must, however, be mentioned that “not for later generations of the future” does not mean that the Book of Revelation does not have a message for today’s generation also. It certainly has a message for all generations but it must be understood with reference to the generation of people it was originally written to.

There is general agreement that there is apocalyptic dualism in the Book of Revelation. Among those who subscribe to this view are Boring, Kummel and Mounce. This dualism is not metaphysical but historical and temporal. There exist two opposing supernatural powers, God and Satan. There are also two distinct ages : the present one that is temporal and evil, and the one to come that is timeless and perfectly righteous. The first is under the control of Satan and the second under the immediate supervision of God. Closely related to the teachings of the two ages is the idea of two worlds, the present visible universe and the perfect world that has existed from before time in heaven.

According to this view, apocalyptic is dualistic in that it typically deals with God and angels on the one hand and satan and the demons on the other. Human beings live their lives at the intersection of these two worlds. Human experience of, and responsibility for, good and evil, is seen in the context of the cosmic struggle between God and the powers of evil. For the apocalyptists, the evil of this world is too big to be merely of human doing, and too big to be overcome by human effort. But the dualism is not ultimate, and the outcome of this struggle is not in doubt. God will still be faithful. If there is no way for God to fulfil His promises in this world, He will bring this world to an end – not as a gesture of cosmic frustration but as the means to the redemption of the whole creation.

Apocalyptic literature can also be seen as being always eschatological. It treats a period of time yet future when God will break into this world of time and space to

bring the entire system to a final reckoning. From the above views on dualism, we can see that there is more than one way of looking at this idea.

“Apocalyptic is also characterized by a rigid determinism in which everything moves forward as divinely pre-ordained according to a definite time schedule and towards a predetermined end” Mounce (1977 : 3). Mounce also points out that for the apocalyptists the present age is evil and without meaning. It is only a passing interlude on the way to the all-important final period preceding the end. But the Book of Revelation takes the redemptive activity of God in history as its starting point.

The author of the Book of Revelation does not present a survey of world history as a prelude to God’s eschatological intervention, but interprets the period bound by the two advents of the Lamb in which all the forces opposing righteousness will be destroyed. The Book of Revelation as an apocalyptic work simply narrates visions and leaves the interpretive task to the reader.

The following statement by Eugene Boring ( 1989 : 42 ), concerning apocalyptic literature is worth paying attention to : “Apocalyptic is an expression of the faith of the politically powerless and oppressed in a situation where the imperial evidence of God’s goodness is not to be seen. This is one reason why Revelation has continued to speak directly to the Church in times and places where Christians with no political or economic power have experienced inhuman cruelty...” For apocalyptic thought, the intensification of evil experienced in the present world is itself an indication that eschatological salvation is near.

### **1.1.3 REVELATION AND PROPHECY**

As already cited above, there is a definite relationship between revelation and prophecy. The question is not whether revelation is prophecy or not ( this question

has already been answered in chapter 1 : 3 ), but rather what kind of a prophecy is it? In answering this question, Schussler Fiorenza ( 1989 : 135 – 141 ) argues that in Revelation John was not trying to add another ‘inspired volume’ to the traditional prophetic corpus nor was he interested in proving that the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the events in which he and his fellow Christians were involved.

Revelation does not even once quote the Old Testament. John uses Old Testament texts as he uses Jewish Apocalyptic, pagan mythological or even early Christian materials...He does not interpret the Old Testament but uses its words, images, phrases, and patterns as a language arsenal in order to make his own theological statement or express his own prophetic vision.

She further observes that the use of the Old Testament in Revelation links it to Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian prophecy. It is precisely in using the Old Testament in such an apocalyptic ‘anthological’ fashion that Revelation proves to be a genuine early Christian prophecy. John’s authority as a prophet is derived precisely from his apocalyptically conceived Christology. The understanding of prophecy in Revelation is apocalyptic in so far as it is bound to the imminent return of the Lord who now speaks to the Christian community through the prophets. This apocalyptic-prophetic conviction of Revelation is expressed not only in the content but also in the formal structure of the book.

In trying to bring her point home she says :

“The prophetic visions and auditions of Revelation are not predictions of future events nor are they calculations of the end time. Eschatological vision and apocalyptic prophecy have the function of strengthening and consoling the Christian community as it experiences persecution and suffering for its witness to God’s and Christ’s power and kingship in this world... The claim of Revelation to be early Christian prophecy, must be taken seriously. Its main objective is not the reinterpretation of the Hebrew

Scriptures..., but the prophetic communication of the revelation to the communities in Asia Minor. The book's goal is not instruction in Old Testament classical, Jewish apocalyptic, or early Christian traditions but prophetic proclamation..." (1989 : 138, 140).

About the prophecy of the Book of Revelation, Smalley (1994 : 29) says :

"Nevertheless, other elements in the Apocalypse suggest that this document may also be classified, in some sense, as prophecy... the letters to the seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3, which exhort the communities of Asia to listen to the word of God and the commands of the Spirit, in so far as they relate to life in the present and immediate future, have a prophetic ring about them, and this suggestion is supported by the occurrence of the repeated phrase, 'he who has an ear, let him hear'".

A final statement by the same writer says that the Book of Revelation, therefore, may be identified as apocalyptic deepened by prophetic insight, and also as prophecy intensified by apocalyptic vision.

From a Jewish point of view, it is believed that prophecy was handled differently from the Christian way.

"In traditional Jewish apocalypticism, one did not openly prophesy the future from the perspective of the present, rather, one pretended to convey an already-revealed message about what was to come. John, however, speaks as a prophet, one who asserts that he is the present recipient of a message found in a heavenly, not an earthly book." Emmerson and McGinn (1992 : 12).

This is one big difference between the Book of Revelation and other apocalypses. He gives a true and direct prophecy. John does not record history, but rather concentrates on the present and future.

According to Du Rand, there is a healthy relationship between revelation and prophecy. He says in his book "Johannine Perspectives" :

"Although the use of the Old Testament in Revelation agrees with that of the Qumran, it may not be placed on the same level as that of the Old Testament prophecies...Revelation is not merely didactic but prophetic in a Christian sense" (1994 : 210 – 211).

Du Rand postulates in the same book that Revelation be classified as prophecy since the author addresses his own times but that it is also apocalyptic since the end events and those which precede the latter function prominently in Revelation. "To then designate Revelation as purely Christians apocalyptic or Christian prophecy is an oversimplification of the issue" (1994 : 211).

There is general agreement that the Book of Revelation falls under the genre of apocalyptic literature, but it should be mentioned that there seems to be something more to it than in other apocalyptic literature. God has a special purpose for the Christian community through this book.

From the above facts we understand that the book of Revelation is a different kind of prophecy from the Old Testament prophecy. It is prophesying into the present needs of a community, in order for both the present and the future, which is already here, to be meaningful to the living community in crisis. The Book of Revelation is therefore both an apocalyptic writing and it also brings a prophetic message to its reader/hearer. It is a true apocalyptic writing, having been written by a real author and dealing with things of this world as well as those of the other world. It also demonstrates the power of prophecy because it deals with what the church needs to know in order for it to prepare itself well before the end of the period of witnessing that has been granted to the church.

### 1.1.4 DATE OF WRITING

There are at least two major schools of thought with regards to the dating of the Book of Revelation. The one school suggests an earlier date of between 64 and 70 CE, while the other school argues for a later date between 81 and 96 CE with 95 and 96 CE being the closest date.

According to Wainright (1993 : 118), “the majority of options suggested are within the possible lifetime of John the Apostle”, for those who hold the view that the book of Revelation was written by the apostle John.

We shall now turn to the discussion of the arguments for an early date and those for a late date :



#### 1.1.4.1 Early Date Arguments

Those who hold to the early date are of the opinion that this date should fall within the Nero era of reign. They support this argument from Revelation 11 : 1 – 2. These verses refer to the measuring of the temple. The proponents of this date suggest that this points to the existence of the temple in Jerusalem which must be before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. These include names like Robinson, Gentry, Smalley and Guthrie. This reasoning implies that the temple is a physical one in Jerusalem. Guthrie (1990 : 957) suggests that the king referred to in Revelation 17 : 10, who is, is Nero. Gentry (1997 :115) suggests that the use of Greek in the Book of Revelation points to a younger John before he mastered the Greek language. This argument presupposes that the author is John the Apostle during his earlier years.

Guthrie (1990 : 959) also suggests that the calculation of the number 666 in Hebrew in recent times points further to an earlier date. However, he notes that this is not without difficulties.

These arguments are not without problems though. A.Y. Collins (1984 : 66) questions the literal interpretation of the temple by the proponents of this theory. A symbolic interpretation is a better one in this instance. The use of Greek to be attributed to a young inexperienced John is to neglect the beauty of the work of the Book of Revelation.

#### **1.1.4.2 Late Date Arguments**

The proponents of the late dating of the Book of Revelation argue for a date between 81 and 96 CE. Many of those who argue for this date sight Irenaeus' writing as a significant pointer to the dating of the book of Revelation because he claims that this book was written during Domitian's reign. What Irenaeus says seems to be acceptable because he was one of the early writers. Another argument is that the book was written during the time of emperor worship. It is suggested that this emperor worship refers to the period of Domitian's reign which led to the 'persecution of Christians'.

From the internal evidence of the Book of Revelation, there are suggestions that the book was written during the time of the persecution of the Christians. This may not necessarily mean official persecution as such. This can be deduced from 1 : 9; 2 : 10; 2 : 13; 3 : 10 and 6 : 9. According to these verses, there was a conflict between the state and the Christian community who refused to honour the emperor. It is believed that the emperor Domitian wanted to be called 'lord and god' during his reign, a title which would have been unacceptable to the Christians of that time to bestow it upon Domitian instead of the Lord Jesus



Christ. This could have seen the Christians in a collision course with the authorities, even if it may not have been compulsory. Therefore it is possible that Christians were persecuted during the reign of Domitian.

Botha (1988 : 2), says :

“This type of persecution was, from a historical point of view, most probable in the time of emperor Domitian, who demanded honours for himself. This resulted in persecution for those who opposed such a practice, especially in Asia Minor, where the imperial cult was practiced vigorously”.

Botha’s statement sounds too strong and conclusive. There is nowhere we get an indication of forced honours by the emperor Domitian. We should rather speak of perceived persecution or at least unofficial persecution of the Christian community.

Other writers regard the mention of the city of Babylon as indicative of a late date since Babylon was only destroyed in the sixth century. Again this argument is based on literal interpretation of the name Babylon. Revelation being a book full of symbolic language, such interpretation should be discouraged.

Rotz (1998 : 21) says that, “perhaps in the wisdom of God we cannot date Revelation with total accuracy because it represents the world of all times. Its truth cannot be captured in a single historical moment. Like all narrative, Revelation is essentially open-ended and tangentially referential”.

Perhaps the fact that there are so many possibilities regarding the king who was ruler during the time of its writing may suggest that the more important issue is that this persecution is not to be limited to a certain individual at a certain time and space. However, Rotz further argues that

“the political social realities of Christian communities form but part of the author’s overall program, which concerns Christian existence in its totality... God’s message...is cosmic and universal, but the messenger was bound within time. The realities of his world of Roman domination, Hellenistic ideology and Hebrew heritage influence the form of the message”.

In his support for a late date, Thompson (1990 : 15), suggests :

“The identification of Rome with Babylon and the reference to Nero as returning from the dead argue for a post 70 date; the list of kings does not justify any precision beyond that...when the weight of internal and external evidence is taken together, we may conclude with many scholars that Revelation was written sometime in the latter years of Domitian’s reign, that is, 92 – 96 CE”.

From the foregoing statements, we understand that the date and occasion of the writing will therefore influence the message. Revelation is thus influenced by the time at which it was written and what was going on at that time. The language used was also dictated to by the need at that time. This makes a strong case why dating a literary work is of great significance. Even if an exact date cannot be determined, at least an idea of a possible period is desirable.

The intention of dating “is not merely to determine a specific date but to indicate a period as possible relief against which the message of Revelation can be understood”. Du Rand ( 1991 : 228 ). Let us conclude this discussion by borrowing Du Rand’s words :

“Taking everything into consideration, a dating of Revelation ( 95 – 96 CE ) during the reign of Domitian, according to the testimony of Irenaeus in Asia Minor, offers a suitable framework within which the message can be read and understood” ( 1994 : 234 ).

## 1.1.5 SYMBOLISM IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

### 1.1.5.1 What symbolism is

The author of the Book of Revelation who is also the seer, had a message to convey to the recipients. According to chapter 1 : 1, the message came from Jesus Christ through an angel to John. This was an ‘other-worldly’ message to be given to ‘this-worldly’ people. The difficulty of expressing that ‘other-worldly’ message in a way that could be understood by human beings caused John to choose symbolism as a means of expressing such truth. Boring (1989 : 58), expresses this idea thus : “To a degree greater than other apocalyptic texts, the language of Revelation is visionary language that deals with pictures rather than propositions. Pictures themselves are important to John as the vehicle of his message. They are not mere illustrations of something that can be said more directly. A picture makes its own statement, is its own text”. Du Rand calls this “apocalyptic symbolism” (1994 : 249).

When symbols are used in the Book of Revelation, they are meant to help the hearer/reader to understand the other-worldly message that John was assigned to give to the servants of the Lord.

“Symbolism is an attempt to present the divine communication in an understandable way. Symbolism elicits meaning... The symbol has an openness which implies a multiplicity of meanings. It calls the participant ( reader ) to become involved in determining meaning. Symbolism leads the reader to the treasure stores of reference and knowledge which are not easily accessible to discursive thinking. Thus the symbol simultaneously reveals and conceals meaning” Du Rand (1994 : 250).

In shedding light to a better understanding of symbolism in Revelation, Beale (1998 : 296), says :

“...the likely reason that the LXX translator did not choose γνωριξω but σημεινω to render the Aramaic verb ‘make known’ was to underscore the precise kind of communication under discussion...However, its concrete and, at least, equally used sense is that of ‘show by a sign’...It is this idea of symbolic communication which σημεινω typically has when it is not used with the general sense of ‘make known’”. Beale goes further to say that John’s choice of σημεινω over γνωριξω (make known) is not haphazard but intentional. “...here it refers to a revelation through the medium of symbolic, heavenly visions communicated through an angel” (1998 : 297).

From the above statements and explanations, we understand that symbolism is a deliberate method that the seer chose to use to help him in transmitting the message to his hearers/readers. It is a way of simplifying yet making the message more meaningful to the recipients. It enriches the message being transmitted.



### **1.1.5.2 Reasons for using symbolism**

“Disclosures concerning the present world with regard to its past, present and future come from the supra-worldly realm. These disclosures require symbolic language because of their mysterious nature. The seer who writes these disclosures down, in fact cannot cast the full meaning into words, hence the symbolic representation” Du Rand ( 1994 : 256 ). Without the use of symbols, it would be difficult if not impossible to express the supra-worldly disclosures. The symbols help simplify the message to the human mind. Du Rand explains that the unfolding of the future is all-comprehensive and all-embracing. “Only symbols

can express this comprehensive unfolding because the seer is a mere human who cannot even cast the full scope of the events into words” ( 1994 : 256 ).

John used symbols in order to communicate that which cannot be expressed in any other way, not to conceal something that could be said more straightforwardly. Symbols are there to expose the truth that is contained in the message, not to hide the truth. They are intended to benefit the hearer/reader, not to disadvantage them. Boring also says that “John regards the conflict that rages between the values of the Roman religion and culture and those of the Christian faith to be a clash of transcendent realities : God versus satan, which can be adequately expressed only in mythological language” ( 1989 : 59 ).

As further proof that symbols in the Book of Revelation are for the good of the hearer/reader, Fiorenza expresses her opinion thus :

“As a Christian seer, the author gives not simply more injunctions and prescriptive admonitions, but he constructs a symbolic universe and ‘plausibility structure’. He does so in order to speak to the experience and predicament of Christians of his own time who are a powerless minority vis-à-vis the dominant majority power of their own culture” (1991 : 29).

Symbolism therefore seeks to enhance the position of the hearer/reader by helping them deal with their present position with confidence because they now understand their present world in relation to the depicted future world. In interpreting Revelation it must never be forgotten that the letter was written to be read in worship.

### 1.1.5.3 Using symbolism in Revelation

It is important to recognize the fact that the symbols that the author of the Book of Revelation uses were not unfamiliar to his hearers/readers. He was familiar with their situation and therefore spoke to them in a way they would understand him.

To this end, Schussler Fiorenza testifies thus :

“In creating this mythological symbolization, John does not freely invent his images and symbols but derives them from Jewish and Graeco-Roman literature and religious-political traditions, he appeals to the imaginations of his audience. He does not invent his images...but employs them utilizing apocalyptic language as traditional language” (1991 : 29).

The understanding of the symbols and the pictorial language of the Book of Revelation is of great significance. The proper understanding of symbols leads to a better interpretation of the message. According to Boring Revelation is not a code-language. For code language all one needs is a key. Code-language intentionally does not say what it means in order to conceal the meaning from those who do not know the code. This is not the same with John's symbolic language. John's symbolic language is polyvalent. This open-ended polyvalent nature of John's language means that although the particular referent of John's imagery in his situation can often be identified with some probability , the significance of his language is not exhausted, for example, when the beast is identified with Rome, Nero or Domitian. It is this evocative polyvalent potential that allows his imagery to speak powerfully in more than one way.

The symbols that are used in the Book of Revelation are of different types. Some of them may be understood as simple symbols. Du Rand speaks of another type which he calls compounded symbols. He says that these contribute to the intensification of the meaning to be conveyed, for example, when the locusts are

described as horses ready for war in chapter 9 : 7ff. The meaning of such a symbol can only be found in that context. He put it thus : “The meaning of certain symbols are in a one to one relationship to their referents. This means that their meaning is realized when their referent is determined” (1994 : 254).

An example of such a symbol is the temple in chapter 11 : 1ff which is in a one to one relationship to the Christian community when it is determined that the temple refers to the Church. This is also referred to as a ‘steno’ symbol. A symbol whose meaning is not determined in a one to one relationship is referred to as a ‘tensive’ symbol. An example of such a symbol is the meaning of the number 666. “A tensive symbol,...sets up tension in the mind,...and by involving the hearer-reader in the act of communication conveys a surplus of meaning that cannot be reduced to propositional language, or even to one level of meaning” Boring (1989 : 57).

According to Du Rand (1994 : 254), “The power of apocalyptic symbols is of such a nature that it is impossible to find absolute realities behind each symbol” This means that for most of the symbols in the Book of Revelation there is a plurality of meaning, they are not restricted to one meaning only.

In order to understand symbols better, there should be a study of the background of that symbol done by the exegete. Beale (1998 : 298), argues against the notion of literal interpretation of symbols proposed by some scholars and says : “... this rule should be turned on its head : we are told in the book’s introduction that the majority of the material in it is revelatory symbolism...the predominant manner by which to approach the material will be according to a non-literal interpretative method”. Of course this excludes those parts that are not symbolic.

Some scholars/writers advocate that each symbolic picture should be allowed to speak for itself. Because no one picture/symbol can convey the full meaning of a subject matter, it is suggested that more than one symbol/picture is necessary to

be able to communicate a transcendent truth. Each symbol should carry its full message even when it cannot be harmonized with other pictures/symbols.

Fiorenza advocates that the Book of Revelation “...must be read and contemplated as a symphony of images if one wants to experience the book’s full emotional impact” (1991 : 31). She also comments thus : “The strength of Revelation’s mythic symbolization and world of vision thus lies in neither its theological meaning nor its historical information but in the evocative , persuasive power of its symbolic language compelling imaginative participation. The multivalent images and tensive symbols of Revelation elicit emotions, feelings, and convictions that cannot , and should not, be fully conceptualized”. The proper understanding of the message of the Book of Revelation therefore lies heavily on the understanding and interpretation of the symbolism that is deeply embedded in this book .

An important method of understanding the symbols of Revelation is to relate them to the rest of the book. They have to acquire meaning not only in terms of the situation in which they were first used, but one has to go even further back. To determine their meaning in the situation of the book, it is important that every symbol must be understood in terms of other symbols in the book.

#### **1.1.5.4 Numerical symbolism**

Numerical symbolism is employed in the Book of Revelation. According to Yarbro Collins, (1996 : 56), “...numerical symbolism is part of the activity of discovering order in environment and experience. Such activity is a basic human impulse which finds expression in most of the world’s religions...Numerical order creates order in two different ways. First, it is used to order the experience



of time...Numerical symbolism also expresses order in the experience of space". Beckwith (1919 : 250), adds his wait on this subject when he says : "Numbers, except as determined by definite reference in the context, are generally symbolical..."

Let us look at some numbers that are often used in the Book of Revelation :

3 ( Three ) : This number is regarded as denoting adequateness or sufficiency by Beckwith (1919 : 251). Du Rand (1994 : 25) looks at it as the "number of God. It is usually applied hen describing the fulness and completeness of God and Christ".

3.5 ( Three and half ) : It is used as "3.5 or 'time , times and half a time".

It is used to denote the last period of the triumph of evil and the oppression of God's people. Examples of its occurrence are chapter 11 : 9,11 and 12 : 14. This can be measured in days, months or years. The equivalentents are as follows : 3.5 = 42 months = 1260 days ( 11 : 2, 3; 12 : 6; 13 : 5 ). But in all places the meaning seems to be the same, the period of the last terrible sway of Satan and his agents in the world before the second coming of the Lord. Beckwith (1919 : 252).

- 4 ( four ) : 4 is the number that is traditionally equated to the corners of the earth. Du Rand (1994 : 252) says that it "...indicates the creation of the universe. The four living creatures symbolize humankind as the creation of God; there are four angels which take up their positions at the

four corners of the earth. They control the 4 winds”.

- 6 ( Six )                      The number 6 is one unit less than perfect. It is thought to be man’s number. Chapter 13 : 18 says : “If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number”.
- 7 ( Seven )                    : 7 is the number that is mostly used in the Book of Revelation. It is said to be “the pre-eminently sacred number with the Hebrews and found also among other peoples...” Bechwith (1919 : 253). There are the 7 Churches with their 7 angels, 7 stars and 7 lampstands; the 7 spirits with their 7 lamps; the Lamb with 7 eyes and 7 horns, etc. It denotes ideal completeness, entirety and sufficiency.
- 10 ( Ten )                      : 10 is found frequently as a round number for fullness and completeness. The number 10 is not charged with symbolic meaning as the numbers 7 and 12.
- 12 ( Twelve )                 : This number is of great significance in the Book of Revelation. Beckwith (1919 : 254) , says it “...possesses pre-eminently a sacred character with the Hebrews and is applied typically to a great variety of objects in both civil and religious matters. In most cases this is probably traceable directly to the number of tribes. Twelve thus becomes especially appropriate as a symbol of completeness in whatever pertains to the theocratic people as such...”

With this understanding of the numerical symbols, we need to understand that there is no specific meaning to be attached to a specific numerical symbol. We should neither take the number literally nor seek to find in it a ‘difficult to understand’ meaning.

The symbolism that is used in the Book of Revelation is therefore an asset to the hearer/reader of the message of this book. The more the hearer/reader understands the meaning of the symbol, the more meaningful the message becomes. The wealth that is contained in the message is embedded in the symbols, whether figurative or numerical. As often as the message symbol is well understood, the easier it is for the recipient of the message to interact with the message. Proper understanding of the symbols is therefore key to the understanding of the message. While it may not have been difficult to understand these symbols to the first century recipients, it may be necessary for today’s recipients to make an extra effort to understand what the intended meaning was. The symbolism of the Book of Revelation is of paramount importance to be understood by all hearers/readers of this book.

A proper interpretation of the symbols will aid the followers of Jesus Christ to be true to their calling of being true witnesses of Jesus Christ in this world. It is the intention of the message of this book to stimulate every believer to action.

## **1.2 THE PROBLEM**

Holwerda D.E., in his article, “The Church and the Little Scroll”, says :

“Millennial fever has produced some strange visions. Impressed by the near arrival of the year 2000, some Christians are scurrying about with a siegeliike mentality, purchasing property in remote places and storing foodstuffs...Others are preparing travel plans to

stand on the Mount of Olives in order to greet the Lord when He returns or even to be killed on the streets of Jerusalem, as a sect leader recently announced. Is this travel to go from where one's life is lived to where one thinks Jesus will return? What is the Lord's assignment for the Church until He comes?" (1999 : 148)

The Book of Revelation repeats the great commission in the context of tribulation and suffering. From the way it is presented, it seems that this suffering is necessary for Christ's witnesses. It must happen in order for the kingdom of God to come. Not only are Christians faced with suffering, but such suffering may be accompanied by martyrdom.

The question that arises is : "Why should Christians suffer when they have been released from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, from the control of the god of this world to be under the control of the God of heaven, the Almighty?" Christians are supposed to be conquerors of the evil one. Christ their Master has conquered the world. They therefore ought to be enjoying the benefits of their faith in Him, because they have entered into His rest. But with the promised tribulation and suffering, where is their rest? Instead they seem to be faced with more work now that they have become Christians than before they believed in Him. From a distance it looks like they are the losers instead of being winners. How does their faith in Christ benefit them?

One other problem that seems to be linked to the above question(s) that stands out is why the holy city is allowed to be trampled upon. Being a holy city, it is supposed to be under God's protection or control. We need to understand why God's servants or witnesses have to go through this suffering. Perhaps the following question ought to be asked at this stage : "Does this suffering/persecution have anything to do with the fulfilling of Jesus' words in John 15 : 18 – 25?"

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you

do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I have spoken to you : ‘No servant is greater than his master’. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law : ‘They hated me without reason’”

The above passage seems to confirm that the Lord Jesus had already predicted the fate of all His followers even before they believed in Him. Is this what Jesus meant though?

In the passage that is the main focus of this study, Revelation 11 : 1 – 14, only two witnesses are said to be involved in the witnessing to the world around them. There is a need to find out who these two witnesses are and the reason for them being two and not more. We also need to link this to the question whether the two witnesses are actually two individuals, and if so, who they are, or whether they are a symbolic representation of something else or the Church as a whole. If it refers to the latter, we need to answer the question why only two witnesses instead of the usual number seven which represents completeness.

- The witnesses are defeated by the beast after a period of success in their witnessing. We need to find out why the defeat and what it signifies either in the life of the two witnesses or that of the church universal. What suddenly makes them to lose their supernatural power to harm their opponents with fire and to strike the earth with every kind of plague? Is this a fulfillment of prophecy?

“... for many people the Book of Revelation is canonical in theory only. They seldom, if ever, read and study it. Its relegation to last place in editions of the N/T signifies its importance to much of Christendom.” Reddish (1982 : 1). It is because of this importance of the Book of Revelation that this research seeks to understand God’s purpose for His church and how He takes responsibility for it through all ages and under what circumstances.

From the internal evidence of the Book of Revelation, it is clear that the book was written at a time when the readers to whom it was written, seriously needed some encouragement or support or assurance of their future and faith. As already cited above, they were supposed to be conquerors, yet they seemed to be the ones absorbing the pressure of persecution or severe testing – the opposite of the promised result of their faith in the living God. Besides that, the author was apparently himself removed from his believing community because of his faith in Christ.

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was at the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 1:9). Rev. 2:13 confirms that during the readers’ life-time some form of persecution was already taking place. “... You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city...”

To one of the churches, there is even a promise for future persecution. “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful even to the point of death ...” (Rev. 2:10). These statements from the Book of Revelation show that faith in God was not in itself guaranteeing immunity to suffering by the Believers in the living God. These sufferings/persecutions were happening in God’s full knowledge about them.

According to Reddish (1982:4), “God has not abandoned them, but instead has called them to share in the sufferings of Jesus. Because they have a special calling, John assures the martyrs that they will have special privileges”. While one agrees with this statement, one is left with the question of how such a calling benefits the Church today in the here and now.

From the historical writings, it is reported that after the Book of Revelation had been written, people became more devoted to their faith to the point of wanting to be persecuted such that they would be martyred. The question is: Was this devotion because of the personal benefits the individuals were looking for or was it for the course of the gospel of Jesus Christ? “... Are Christians called to endure ... simply as an imitatio Christi or by ‘repeating his own sacrifice’ do they ‘continue His redemptive work?’”

In this research we also need to deal with the bigger issue of the role which the two witnesses play within the church at large. We need to understand how God wants to deal with His Church under these worldly persecutions while the latter does not lose its position of being conqueror or victor over God’s enemy. The position that the Church occupies, as depicted in the Book of Revelation, needs to be cleared.

Le Moigman (2000:106) puts it right when she says: “Many Christians want to live out their faith in the world but feel helpless in the face of the world problems that are just too big to make any impression on.”

### 1.3 THE PURPOSE

The main purpose of this study is to understand the meaning of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 and how these witnesses relate to the Church throughout the Apocalypse in the past, present and future. It also seeks to understand the way God deals with His church in the present i.e. during the Church's life on earth, and what His plans are for the church in the future. The way the Church conducts its business in the present time affects its relationship with its Founder both now and in the future, and conversely the way God deals with the Church affects the way the latter responds to God's invitations, commands and promises for future life here on earth and life hereafter. It is therefore critical that the contents and implications of such relationship be crystal clear to those concerned.

John does not directly deal with the question or theme of witnessing in detail in the Book of Revelation but the writer contends that this theme runs through the whole book. It is therefore going to be important to look at specific passages in detail in order to link such passages to the rest of the book, leading hopefully to good conclusions. An attempt will also be made to understand the reasons that led to the inclusion of this theme in the Book of Revelation.

This research seeks to clarify all the related matters with the two witnesses such as the reasons for the two witnesses' defeat by the beast, the reasons for the inhabitants of the earth to refuse them burial ( coupled with their rejoicing over their death ), the meaning of the witnesses' resurrection from the dead, the meaning of their ascension into heaven , the fate of the two witnesses, and other related matters. After these questions shall have been answered, an attempt will be made to relate those answers to the Church as a whole, how they impact the Church and how the Church should respond to these challenges. We want to know whether the message of the Book of Revelation has got any meaningful relationship with today's Church.



We also need to deal with the question of witnessing in the Book of Revelation. This research will also seek to answer questions like : Does the Book of Revelation deal with the notion of witnessing in the same way other books of the Bible deal with it? Does John's witnessing have any bearing on the way the Church today should do its business here on earth? How does the Church's witnessing affect its dealings with the world around it? Does the kind of witnessing that the Church exhibits influence the Church's existence on earth both in the present and in the future? This research will be interested in finding answers to these questions as well.

#### **1.4 METHODOLOGY**

In this research, the historical – critical method shall be used. We shall seek to understand the background of the Book of Revelation as well as the relationship of the same to today's readers. It shall be at the forefront of this study to understand what witnessing meant to the original readers or intended readers and what it should mean to the readers of any historical time frame. This shall necessitate grammatical and exegetical studies of passages with the view to discovering better understanding of the theme. It goes without saying that the relevant chapter (i.e. Rev. 11) shall be given detailed attention. The context within which this chapter is found shall play an important role in this study. The socio-cultural situation of the readers shall be of great significance.

The historical setting of the Book of Revelation shall be looked into. The same shall apply to specific passages and / or verses that shall be considered. This should help to arrive at a better and more accurate conclusion at the end. The reason for this is because there is a big gap between the context of the author's readers and today's readers. What we are going to be more interested in, in the final analysis is the principle that applies to those different communities.

We shall also take cognizance of the fact that the Book of Revelation is fully laden with symbolism. The message carried by the passage in question shall be interpreted in accordance with the conclusion drawn whether such a passage should be taken literally or symbolically. In the event of the latter case, proper care shall be taken to be as practical as possible and as accurate as possible to give the desired interpretation. Where necessary the meaning of specific words / phrases shall be properly explained. Such words and phrases shall first be explained in their original context (meaning) and then explained in the latest context (meaning). Care shall be taken, however, to draw the timeless conclusion leading to an interpretation that is not time bound.

## **1.5 STRUCTURE**

In this first chapter, we have so far discussed the introductory matters that are related to this study. We have also discussed the problem statement, the purpose of this study as well as the methodology that will be used in conducting this research. We shall now deal with the structure that will be used in the lay-out of the whole research work :

Chapter 2 : In this chapter we shall deal with the context of Revelation 11. It shall cover the socio-historical situation, the socio-political background, the imperial cult and Christian persecution and other issues affecting the community. These issues deal with the situation within which the chapter takes its shape and meaning. In other words, chapter 11 is affected by what happens around it, the circumstances around the happenings of that chapter.

Chapter 3 : This chapter shall deal with the co-text of Revelation 11. We shall concentrate on the issues that happen in all the chapters before chapter 11 in detail. These shall include the prologue, salutation and the inaugural vision; the messages to the seven Churches; God the

Father and God the Son being glorified; the judgements of the seven seals; the little scroll and the two witnesses. This information should shed light on the significance of what takes place in chapter 11.

Chapter 4 : Here we shall deal with the exegetical analysis of Revelation 11. This will be done on a verse by verse basis and should hopefully lead to a much clearer understanding of the chapter in relation to the rest of the Book of Revelation. This exegesis will be done under the following sub-headings : The importance of measuring the temple; The exegesis of revelation 11 : 3 – 13; The identity of the two witnesses; Conclusion.

Chapter 5 : This chapter deals with witnessing within the theology of the Book of Revelation under the following sub-headings : The true requirements of witnessing; Witnessing in the Book of Revelation; God's presence in the witnessing Church; Overcoming through faithful witnessing; Witnessing till death. It is in this chapter that we shall also make our conclusions concerning the discoveries and / or the revelations contained in the passages that were studied. The proposal will also be given in this chapter.

## **1.6 CONCLUSION**

From the discussion above, it is clear that there are some unanswered questions in the Book of Revelation which need to be dealt with. While I recognize the fact that there may never be a unanimous or single answer to these questions, I do hope that this research will contribute towards finding possible answers to these questions, and that where there are no outright answers, I will try to make my stand or preferred view known.

As already mentioned above, the Apocalypse is regarded as an apocalyptic writing as well as a prophecy. This kind of writing was probably used in order to help the reader/hearer to fully realize his or her position in Christ here on earth and even their future position in Christ. A good and clear understanding of their position in Christ would help them to stay focussed on their calling. The Christian, through the nature of the writing itself, is challenged to be faithful to God. Revelation helps the Christian to look into the future with hope. It is this hope which helps them to want to remain faithful to their calling because there is reason to do so.

The use of the symbols in this book draws the reader/hearer into the scenario and get them interested to partake in the activities that are being related to them. A good picture is painted of how things will look like for those who will remain faithful to their calling. We hope to see and say more about this calling in the later chapters.

Having dealt with the orientation of this study, it shall be followed by the study of the context under which Revelation 11 was written. We shall now turn to the study of the context of Revelation 11 in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONTEXT OF REVELATION 11

#### 2.1 THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SITUATION

Any community that ever existed in this world can and will always point to some socio-historical background which has shaped that community to become what it became. So it was with the Johannine community. It had some social as well as historical background which shaped it or gave it its form. Court(2000: 7) says: “It is important to see the book of Revelation in the particular historical context of the believing community which created it, because Christianity and its documents and doctrine relate to specific moments of history. But it is also important to see the book as a visionary interpretation of the church and its future...”

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, an apocalypse arises out of a situation of crisis. It is generally agreed that the Book of Revelation, as apocalyptic literature, also arose out of a crisis situation. It is a response to a specific social context. Schussler Fiorenza prefers to refer to the situation that existed in the Johannine community as a perceived crisis. By this she means that the author perceived that the situation was a crisis.

According to Schussler Fiorenza’s definition, the seer in the Book of Revelation perceived a crisis in the Johannine community which led him to write the Book of Revelation. In such a situation, it therefore means that the values and structures of that society had changed, leading to an experience of meaninglessness of life to the members of that society. Because of the withdrawal and alienation which would have resulted from such a crisis, the author was prompted to write to his readers in order to ‘normalize’ their situation.

Thompson (1990 : 28), explains what a perceived crisis is, thus : “It is a way of saying that the author of the apocalypse considers the situation to be a crisis but that the crisis dimensions of the situation are evident only through his angle of vision”. In such a case the problem or crisis becomes visible only through the revealed knowledge in an apocalypse and it is not viewed simply in terms of the historical factors available to any observer. An apocalypse is therefore there to help the reader recognize the situation for what it is but being given hope, assurance and support to be able to deal with the situation or crisis faithfully.

In an apocalypse there is therefore hope for a good future even though one is experiencing a crisis in one’s life. In an apocalypse the status quo is replaced by a symbolic universe which seeks to offer something better than what was previously experienced. The first century Christians seem to have been in such a situation.

In order for us today to understand the situation that the first century Christians were in, we need to try and bridge the cultural gap that exists between the Christians that lived in Asia Minor during the first century and the social context the present reader lives in at the time of interpreting the apocalyptic writing. If this is not faithfully done, the message of the apocalypse would be missed. It must be mentioned that the first century Christians were badly despised by their Gentile neighbours. They also ran into trouble with the Jewish religion of that time. Their political life, social life, economic life and even their cultural life was directly affected by the circumstances around them. These two factors will be discussed in more detail later, for they contributed a great deal in the situation in which these Christians found themselves in Asia Minor.

The Christians of the first century were gradually losing all they could depend on such as their nationhood and their prophetic and priestly offices. Their social and religious institutions were no longer under their control. Their view of the future was gradually changing. The fact that God guides all things in order to bring everything to its intended end within His will was becoming a myth to them. Members of the

Johannine community must have started to resent the pagan Roman authorities because they felt oppressed by them. The Roman government had become a foreign rule to them. The author of the book was therefore making an attempt to help the members of that community to keep faith and hope. (Thompson, 1990 : 226 – 27).

However bad the situation was, the people had to live with it, they could not wish it away. In trying to give an answer on how they could have dealt with this situation, Du Rand, in his article *An Apocalyptic Text, Different Contexts and an Applicable Ethos*, says: “The answer rather lies in the functional rhetorical language of the Apocalypse of John through which the deprived reader is taken on a cathartic journey, not to remove the social-political exigency or religious tensions or economic discrimination, but to control the destructive effects of such realities and to fasten their belief to the conquering Lamb of God”.

We therefore understand that the author of the Book of Revelation wrote to his colleagues with a good and clear understanding of their circumstances. He wrote to challenge them to come to terms with their unfavourable living conditions. He does not want them to move out of that situation, but rather that they should serve their God faithfully under those conditions. His writings therefore become medicinal to them. He seeks to demonstrate to them that it is possible to remain faithful to God irrespective of one’s unfavourable living conditions. Opting out of the situation or becoming unfaithful to their calling was not an option.

For John to have called himself their brother and companion in suffering, he wanted to prove a point. The point he was driving home was that he was also involved in the suffering that they were also involved in, yet he remained faithful to his God. It was this faithfulness that led him to the point of being banished to the island of Patmos. John’s message to these people was to have a very big impact on them since they could see him as a living example of God’s faithfulness to those who are faithful to Him.

According to Revelation 1 : 9, the author of the Book of Revelation clearly identifies where he was as well as where his readers were at the time of writing the book. He was on the island of Patmos and his readers were in Asia Minor.

“Asia Minor, especially the western part of Asia Minor where John and his audience were located, was one of the most significant geographical areas in the development of Christianity. In the fifties of the first century the apostle Paul carried on missionary work in this area...Letters and tracts such as Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and the Pastoral Epistles indicate the continued influence of Paul in this geographical area” (Thompson, 1990 : 11).

The language that an apocalypse uses, is of paramount importance since the message in the Book of Revelation reflects a specific life situation of crisis for Christians in Asia Minor at the end of the first century AD. This language can be described as apocalyptic rhetoric, a symbolic response to a specific social situation. It is formulated in such a way that when heard by the intended hearer/reader, it would elicit a response that would result in a commitment by the hearer/reader. This use of evocative language is accompanied by the use of relevant symbols.

With regards the language of the Book of Revelation, Du Rand (1990 : 352 – 357), proposes dealing with it in a particular manner. Because of the importance that language plays in the Book of Revelation, we shall give attention to it using Du Rand’s proposal:

1. To arrive at a general characterisation of the language.

(a) Linguistic form and theological content

By this Du Rand points to how we are to understand the Apocalypse in general. Every interpreter of the Apocalypse should be careful to reduce imaginative symbolic language to abstract philosophical language.

(b) Ontological interpretation

Here the idea is that care should be taken not to understand the language of the Apocalypse as a system of signs in need of decoding but rather to view it



as a historical reality of Roman power and its oppressive effect on Christians in Asia Minor.

(c) Informative, expressive and performative functions

The hearers and readers of the Apocalypse experience its language as a social experience with functions of performance and cohesion and they participate dynamically.

2. Rhetoric in a rhetorical situation

(a) Language in a historical situation

The exigency of the Apocalypse lies in the reality that the Christians are economically and socially threatened, deprived and destitute because they refuse to take the mark of the beast.

(b) Language in a crisis

Apocalyptic literature is often evoked by some kind of crisis.

(i) Persecution

The basic contextual issue that determines the rhetoric of the Apocalypse is probably Roman persecution because of the emperor cult. A possible persecution of Christians at the end of the first century AD probably took place during the reign of Domitian.

(ii) Conflict with Judaism

Christians were not rooted in an ethnic tradition of their own like the Jews. The awareness of such differences created a crisis, particularly for those Christians who were Jews by birth.

(iii) Conflict with the Gentiles

The Christians were discriminated against and even hated by the Gentiles. Their lifestyle was interpreted as a demonstration of their exclusiveness. This was so because they avoided Gentile political and social life.

(iv) More conflict with Rome

The feelings of the Christians against the Roman government is clearly reflected in the language of the Apocalypse. According to Revelation 2 : 13, there is a very great possibility that Antipas was killed because of his Christian stand. The banishment of John to the island of Patmos was probably for the same reason.

## (v) Social deprivation

A definite problem in the Christian community was that of social deprivation. The expulsion from the synagogue caused a feeling of animosity towards the Jews as well as social insecurity. The Apocalypse is not just a simple response to a certain social situation, but a particular interpreted religious view within a specific situation.

## 3. More socio-psychological aspects

## (a) Functional language

The function of the language is to overcome the tension between the expectations of the believers and reality. This does not however remove the socio-political exigency or religious tensions or economic discrimination, but helps to control the destructive effects of these realities.

## (b) Informative, cognitive, expressive and evocative types of language

It is important to note the types of language we are dealing with in the Apocalypse, namely: informative language – which helps us to gain information about people and things; cognitive language – which helps us to think interpretively about things and people; expressive language – which helps us to display attitudes and feelings and evocative language – which helps us to elicit feelings and attitudes.

The effect of this is that the hearer/reader shares responsively in the interpretation.

## (c) Mythic therapy or symbolic transformation

Du Rand says that he prefers to see John's use of symbolic language as transformations intended to fit into the symbolic universe. For example, in chapter 5, the seer sees 'a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain'. The strong symbol of a lion is transformed into the 'weak' symbol of the Lamb.

## (d) A symbolic universe

By constructing a symbolic universe, the language of the Apocalypse persuades the reader to participate. The community of Christians is

motivated and encouraged in its historical situation of persecution and humiliation at the end of the first century in Asia Minor.

(e) A cathartic journey

The readers / hearers of the Apocalypse are confronted with a language which is not only the vehicle for the alleviation of the stress, but a catharsis in itself. Through it, that which was not easy to comprehend can now be understood. The readers understand that through their everyday suffering as martyrs, they are partaking in the process of bringing salvation and judgement to the world.

With regard to the language of persuasion, Malina (1994 : 27) says that most persuasion seeks to immunize, to induce resistance to persuasion, to shape stable response patterns where no stable patterns previously existed. About the author of the Apocalypse, John, he says: "...it would seem that he directed his persuasion at reinforcing the prevailing response of his audience".



“Through that network of language humans are situated – given a place on which to stand – in the expanded world. Apocalyptic language, thus, not only discloses an expanded universe but also orients humans in that larger world” (Thompson, 1990 : 32). This is intended to interpret the circumstances which the members of that community find themselves in. This is done in the light of the supernatural world and their future expectations. Thompson also argues that the language of the seer does not form a separate symbolic universe apart from social, political realities nor does his apocalyptic message address conflicts, tensions, and crises in the world of his audience; but rather that the seer offers a particular understanding of what the whole world is like, including the understanding of how Christians relate to other Christians, to other groups in the cities around them as well as to public social events.

Slater (1998 : 242 ), says : “First and foremost, several writers record that Christians suffered simply because they were Christians, i.e., because of the name ‘Christ/Christian’ which they confessed and not because of any criminal act”. This suggests that their suffering was not because of wrongdoing but because of their witness for Christ. This was in line with the Lord’s promise/prediction that those who were to be His followers were going to be hated by the world.

Some theologians like Du Rand suggest that this book should be read as a dramatic narrative which tries to interpret the incarnation of Christ symbolically. “Within their constraining social circumstances, the Christians are to partake intellectually and theologically in a symbolic framework of thought where a Lamb and martyrs reign”. Thompson has a different view, and to him : “The language of Revelation is more like that of poetry than that of a set of directions...; the language plays through a range of meanings rather than having only one meaning” (1990 : 34). Malina, with his astronomical/sky language approach says : “...as a genre or type of writing, astral prophecy like that in the book of Revelation is a type of astronomic writing with a narrative framework which sets forth information derived from the prophet’s interaction with celestial entities” (1994 : 32).

Malina further argues that the outstanding feature of the Book of Revelation is that it deals “with the sky”. This thinking cannot be accepted without questioning. Is Malina assuming that everything that is recorded in the Apocalypse of John represents sky happenings? Is he deliberately ignoring all those sections in the book that speaks about earthly scenes? In his attempt to justify his astral deductions, Malina says about the Book of Revelation : “Consequently by his own estimation, his writing would be a subset of the genre or type of astronomical and/or astrological literature, but of a prophetic sort” (1994 : 31).

In the Book of Revelation, the author seeks to bring his readers to a point where they will see or perceive their situation in the way that he sees and understands it, in order for them to successfully deal with it. The author created a symbolic universe through which he would encourage and educate the discouraged and suffering

community in order to enable them to deal with their situation in a manner that would see them come out of it as winners. These Christians were living in a state of disappointment because they had hoped to live a fulfilled life after turning their faith to Jesus Christ. But this was not the real situation they found themselves in. They instead experienced the opposite. We can therefore say that the Book of Revelation was written because of perceived crisis during that time in Asia Minor.

The language used by the author of the Book of Revelation suggests that it was written during a difficult time. At the time of writing, the author was on the Island of Patmos, probably because of banishment because of the Word of God (Rev. 1 : 9). The author also reveals that he was a fellow sufferer with the Johannine community.

The seven Churches that the messages were addressed to were found in Asia Minor. They were founded by the missionary activity of the Church. Larkin & Williams (1998:228) describe them as “spiritual oases in a hostile environment, the objects of both persecution and seduction by their religious counterparts”. The circumstances around them were not favourable for a free Christian testimony. They were subjected to unusual living conditions. The setting of this community is described by Resseguie (1998:18) as one that “uses physical props, spatial markers and temporal indicators to establish atmosphere, to develop character and theme, to symbolize epochal moments and events, and to interpret earthly events in terms of a heavenly perspective”.

Nero and Domitian are two emperors of the Roman Empire who lived and served during the possible time of the persecution of the Church. Some of the emperors e.g. Domitian, wanted their subjects to worship them. This situation must have caused incalculable stress on the Christian community as they could not worship both God and the Roman emperor. They needed to choose to be loyal to one and neglect the other. Though there is no known persecution of the Christian

community from the capital city of the Roman Empire, individuals would have felt alienated when they did not partake in social activities within their own community because of their allegiance to their Christian faith.

At the time of writing the Book of Revelation, there seemed to have been a crisis within the Christian community in Asia Minor because of the persecution or perceived persecution which the author was addressing. This crisis will be discussed below.

### **2.1.1 CONFLICT WITH JUDAISM**

The Christian community also ran into trouble with the Jewish community. This was true for both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. This community was excluded from the activities of the Jews because they were seen to be outcasts. They were even thrown out of the synagogue --- a place of value to all true Jews. “The controversies between followers of Jesus and other Jews brought more and more to public attention the differences between them. The awareness of difference probably created a crisis of identity for at least some believers in Christ” (Fiorenza, 1984 : 85).

Fiorenza goes on to say that Revelation contains evidence that controversies between Believers in Christ and local Jews had created a social crisis for at least some Christians in Asia, probably especially for those, like John, who were Jews by birth or who had earlier become proselytes. The following passages attest to this : John 9 : 22, 34 ; 12 : 42 and 16 : 2. The problem between the Jews and the followers of Jesus Christ was predicted by the Lord Himself during His time on earth. Jesus said “ They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think that he is offering a service to God” (John 16 : 2). This was to be a pattern of life for the Christians because their Lord’s commands and principles would clash with those of the Jewish religion. Jesus predicted that the Jews would not accept this kind of opposition to their religion.

In John 12 : 42 we have this record :

“ Yet at the same time many even among the elders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue”.

The synagogue was a place of value to the Jews. No true Jew wanted to be separated from it. Its importance for Judaism cannot be over-estimated. It gave character to the Jewish faith. It was in the synagogue where Jews learnt the interpretation of the law. It therefore comes as no surprise to hear that some Believers in the Lord Jesus could not publicly confess their faith for fear of being put out of the synagogue. To them, being put out of the synagogue was like being stripped of their Jewish status, and almost reduced to the status of a Gentile. It should be noted that this was before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

In John 9 : 20, 21, 22 and 34 we hear of another situation involving the synagogue:

“We know he is our son ... and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, and who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him, he is of age; he will speak for himself. His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue ...”

After the man who was healed by Jesus was asked to account for his healing he answered and said :

“Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!...I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?”

To this they replied :

“You were steeped in sin at birth how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

The parents of the man born blind did not want to risk their positions in the synagogue for fear of banishment. This fear was not far-fetched. Verse 34 is proof that it was real. After the man confessed that Jesus Christ healed him, he was thrown out of the synagogue – a confirmation of his parents’ fear. So, confessing faith in Jesus did cause banishment from the synagogue. Jews would not accommodate a rival faith to theirs. Those who were determined to confess their faith in Jesus Christ suffered the ‘loss’ of the synagogue.

This is proof that people were forced out of the Jewish circle if they did not toe the line. This clearly disputes the suggestion / question cited by Conway whether the Johannine Christians were in fact cast out of the synagogues or whether they opted out of the synagogues themselves (Conway, 2002 : 490). Even if the Johannine Christians would have opted out of the synagogues themselves they would have done so because of the unbearable conditions which they were living under. It would certainly not have been a voluntary exit.

One of the reasons the Christians were discriminated against, according to Du Rand (1991 : 236) was that “the Jews of the synagogues maintained that the Christians made a ‘cheaper religious presentation’ to the heathen because they did not demand the requirements of the law and circumcision”. The Jewish religion demanded that the law be part of Christianity for it to be acceptable to the Jews. This was in contrast to the law of Christ. Those who stuck to the law of Christ had to suffer the consequences (being thrown out of the synagogue). Because of their understanding of the Old Testament, the Jews regarded Jesus Christ as part of Judaism. The author of the Book of Revelation disproves this notion and presents Jesus Christ as one above Judaism.

The author of the Book of Revelation was concerned with internal as well as external opponents. He was trying to address the problems that pressurized the church from outside as well as those that were occurring within the Christian community itself. Carey also expresses this view. (1999 : 8). John’s concern about



the conditions that existed within and outside the church was that such conditions made the Christians to move away from their witnessing positions. His desire is that they may disregard these conditions and rather concentrate on what is significant. It is the devil's tactics to disturb Christians from doing what God wants them to do by introducing extra things that would attract their attention.

The differences between the Jews and the Christians practices were used by the Devil to saw enmity between these two groups. It is John's intention to bring this to the Christians' attention in order to fight against this divisive spirit. Frankfurter, in his article, "Jews or Not? Reconstructing the 'Other' in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9" says the following: "John of Patmos describes his opponents in both Smyrna and Philadelphia as 'those who say that they are Jews but are not, but are a synagogue of Satan' ( Rev 2 : 9; 3 : 9 ). But when the historian of early Christianity tries to give some historical dimensions to these opponents, there unravels one of the signature conundrums of ancient labelling : are the opponents Jews? Non Jews? Which interpretation is simplest..." (2001 : 403 ). He says that the people that John, the author of the Book of Revelation, refers to as being not Jews, are not to be identified with the Smyrnian and Philadelphian Jews outside the Jesus movement, but rather with a constituency within the Jesus movement who were claiming the label "Jew" in a manner that John finds to be illegitimate. He argues against the notion that these people were called the synagogue of satan because they reject Jesus, they hate Christians, they compete with Christians for Gentile God-fearers and that they had incited the Roman authorities to persecute Christians. His argument is : "...is there evidence for any of this scenario? We know nothing about the Jews of Smyrna..." ( 2001 : 405 ).

The fact that there is no reliable external evidence for the persecution of John's church at the hands of local Jews, makes people like Frankfurter to query whether we can we depend on the Apocalypse for this scenario. We certainly need to take John's remarks very serious. They are the reasons that led him to write the Apocalypse. But Frankfurter admits that we must place John's warnings about suffering and imprisonment within the overall context of tribulation imagery in the

Book of Revelation (2001 : 407). He goes on to support his argument by saying that the term 'Ioudaios' is a slippery term in its usage and can therefore mean different things at different times. In an effort to try and come up with a solution to the problem of the so-called Jews, Frankfurter suggests that "The most useful approach is to ask who are the 'so-called Jews' from the perspective of John of Patmos. Thus one must have an accurate gauge of that perspective".

From the internal evidence of the Book of Revelation, we can say that John has two groups of people whom he calls 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. The former refers to those that he is in agreement with within the churches while the latter refers to those that he is in disagreement with. To the latter group belong : 'Jezebel', 'Nicolaitans', 'neo-Balaamians' and the 'so-called Jews' as well as the 'so-called apostles'. About these Frankfurter says : "In the cases of 'Jezebel', 'Nicolaitans', and the 'so-called apostles', most scholars now take the opponents as promoters of Jesus who differed from John on some issues of practice and purity. These might be minor points to an Atargatis devotee or a rabbinic Jew, but were fundamental to John, whose primary concern was with the boundaries of the Jesus sect".(2001 : 414 ).

Indeed John is mainly concerned with the purity of the followers of the Lamb. What leads him to say what he says is to try and stop those who are on the way to being lost from continuing and also to prevent those who would join the lost group not to even consider joining them. Frankfurter himself confesses to be arguing "...that John's great concern with the 'degree of halakhic observance' of the people who were also focused upon Jesus, that is, who claimed the same sectarian identity, typifies internecine conflict, both from a sociological (intra-sectarian) and from an historical (intra-Jewish) perspective...it is entirely consistent with the scenario that John, in encountering insufficient degrees of observance among some of those who were devoted to Jesus, would denigrate their authenticity as observers of Jewish purity, just as he denigrates the authenticity of some of those who were 'apostles' in Ephesus ( 2 : 2 )".

From listening to what Frankfurter says in making a case for his argument, he sounds like someone who comes into the discussion with an already determined chosen side to belong to. To me he seems to be defending the position of Judaism, that John of Patmos had no case to make against the Jews but that the problem was with him. He seems to be of the opinion that what was important to John should not be taken seriously if it was not regarded as equally important by those that John calls 'so-called Jews'. By Frankfurter's own admission, these were people who were found to display 'insufficient degrees of observance' in their devotion to Jesus. Surely if they did not make the grade why was it not right for John to pronounce them as such? Was John to embrace them as his fellow soldiers even when they fought against him as long as they still called themselves those who belonged to his group?

At some stage, the Christians had sort of withdrawn themselves from their opponents as a means of protecting themselves. This was not necessarily the best solution. Withdrawal was not to be accepted as a means of self-protection. Conway, in the article, "The production of the Johannine community : a new historicist perspective", argues thus : "As the Johannine community is introduced via the dramatic production, the twentieth-century audience is stirred to sympathy for this community's alienated status...After all, what weapon did the community have except to lash out as 'the Jews'" (2002 : 488). From this view point John was using the language that he used in order to make his readers/hearers understand the seriousness of the situation they were faced with. This language had to be serious enough that even when heard by those people that it was making reference to, they would also understand it to be equally serious. It was a matter of death or life for the Johannine believing community.

The Christian community faced ostracism and social contempt. They felt threatened and insecure, and had to contend with religious as well as social stress. This stress was produced in the first place by the externally enforced worship of the Roman Emperor, with social and economic sanctions applied against non-conformists. Even though there was no known official enforcement of Emperor

worship, the penalties for not doing so was an indirect enforcement of the same. Christians who refused to participate in emperor worship exposed themselves not only to the charge of being unpatriotic, but also of being subversive and enemies of the state. This could have caused psychological persecution beyond the exclusions that went with it. The problem of being thrown out of one's own community was therefore not just a mere threat but something that was effectively practiced. The then Christian community was definitely facing opposition from the opponents of Christianity.

After the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, the Jews had nowhere to offer sacrifices. The synagogue became the only alternative place. It was a gathering place and a meeting place where the people could congregate whenever it was necessary to take counsel on important community affairs. The synagogue became the cradle of an entirely new type of social and religious life and established the foundation for a religious community. Their common life was once more to be experienced through the synagogue.

Those Jews that were to be banished from the synagogue were going to be without any contact with their own community. Christians had to choose whether to be without this social contact and be with Christ and their fellow Christians, or try to be everywhere, which was not possible. This definitely exerted a lot of pressure on the Christians for they wanted to be with their fellow Jews in society but had to be loyal to the Lord. To choose to be excommunicated from the synagogue was a sign of true commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what John would have preferred his hearers/readers to do. Those who would behave like that would be seen as the true witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ. John's stand was one of not compromising, whatever the consequences. This is the message that John trying to spread all over the province of Asia Minor.

"...The Jewish war (66 – 70 CE), the destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE) and the banishment from the synagogues...caused a fierce rift between Jews and Christians" (Du Rand, 1994 : 235). Du Rand brings in the question of ambivalence

here. He says that according to the message of Revelation John's attitude to the Jews was in a sense ambivalent because Jews were on the one hand regarded as the opponents of Christendom and on the other hand a bed from which Christendom had grown. This affected mostly those Christians who were Jews by birth or who had become proselytes before they became Christians. Gentile Christians were not directly affected in this regard.

From this we can see that it was more tempting to some of the members of the Christian community to relax in their spiritual purity because of their close association with other people who are not Christians. Those who still had relations with non-believers were faced with the challenge of being faithful to their Master and unfaithful to their earthly friends. True witnesses would choose to be with their Saviour instead of being with their opponents.

“The juxtaposition of the attack on the Jews with the exhortation about persecution suggests that the Roman authorities were being pressed by certain representatives of the local Jewish community to take action against Christians...If that inference is correct, it is probable that followers of Jesus who were also Jews had already been excluded from the synagogues...in one way or another. Christians ...thus no longer enjoyed the social, economic, and political security afforded by association with attachment to the local Jewish community” (Fiorenza, 1984 : 85 – 86).

Where this is applicable, the author of the Book of Revelation seeks to make them aware that Christ has given them access to God and that despite their exclusion from the synagogues, they are still in relation to God. Rejection by the Jews was especially threatening to Christians because they had little identity apart from Judaism and because their Gentile neighbours despised them too. Despite all this, God expected each Christian to be faithful to God. It was through this kind of witnessing in suffering that Christians could please God.

That there was a tension between the Christians and the Jews is seen in Revelation 2 : 9 and 3 : 9 where the author of the Book of Revelation refers to Jews as a synagogue of Satan. This is a highly distasteful reference to the non-Christian Jews. These two groups did not relate well at all; there was in fact a great deal of animosity between them. The break between church and synagogue brought insecurity and religious isolation with cultural, social and political excommunication. In the midst of all this, John wanted the Christians to know that Jesus Christ was with them. If and when they were rejected by their opponents because of their faithfulness to God, they were promised to have the abiding presence of God.

In Galatians 1 : 13 – 14 Paul says :

“For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the Church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the tradition of my fathers”.

Here Paul tells us very clearly that he persecuted the Church of God and that he was not the only Jewish persecutor of the Christians. However, he does not indicate that this was an empire-wide persecution, yet it was sanctioned by the authorities in that region. Perhaps one of the reasons for their persecution was that the Christians saw themselves as the only true Jews because of their faith in Jesus Christ. They considered non-believing Jews in Jesus Christ not to be true Jews ( cf Revelation 2 : 9 ).

### 2.1.2 CONFLICT WITH THE HEATHEN ENVIRONMENT

The setup of the communities within which the readers of Revelation found themselves was of such a nature that it caused a separation between them and the society within which they lived. This was dictated by the way their social lives were organized. Christians were mistreated by their non-Christian neighbours. These mistreatments were periodical and often escalated to different degrees in different regions Slater (1998 : 244). They were however not sanctioned at national government level, they occurred regionally. Slater further says that because of this situation, "...Christians kept to themselves, pagans knew little about their religion ( 1 Peter 2 : 15 – 16 ). As a result, Christians became sorrowful and fearful due to the public ridicule which they had to endure ( 2 : 19 – 20; 3 : 14, 17; 5 : 9 – 10 )".

The environment around them was of such a nature that they were under a lot of pressure to act and behave differently. This is what Du Rand (1994 : 237) means when he says that the "symbols of the old fertility cults and emperor veneration were seen daily on coins, against public buildings, in courts, the theaters and at the games". Living a social life that ignored those things was not only difficult and challenging but was to bring a conflict between such opponents and the opposing community.

It was this situation that made some of the Christians to start thinking of taking a more accommodating stance with regards their participation in pagan activities. Though there was no official position taken with regards the treatment of Christians, Christians were held in low social esteem in the empire. There was a general lack of respect for the Christian community, probably because of the anti-Christian sentiments which prevailed.

The fact that the Christian community was in the minority caused more pressure to bear on them. They were powerless to do anything about this situation that they faced. The Christian community was easily blamed for things they had nothing to

do with, like the blame put on them for starting the devastating fires during Nero's reign.

The author of the Book of Revelation, having founded and nurtured these Christians, he is now writing out of responsible concern for them in a time of general anxiety and tension. The Book of Revelation therefore came at the right time for that believing community—from the God who cares for and about His faithful followers. God's faithfulness is not hindered by anything that happens in and around the lives of His followers. His faithfulness endures forever, thus He expects all Christians to reciprocate this virtue.

In backing his argument for a rough social environment for the Christian community of John's time, Du Rand (1994 : 237) says that according to the message of Revelation, the Christians are often exhorted not to have part in cultural assimilation through the practice of immorality and religious accommodation in the pagan environment of Asia Minor. Instead they had to avoid membership of heathen guilds dedicated to idols. The implication of such a stance had far reaching effects on them in return. Life was to become a burden to them instead of it being a joy to live for Christ here on earth. Yet God, through John, encourages all His followers to bear the pain of rejection, persecution and embarrassment in order to bring glory to His name.

According to Revelation 13 : 17 those faithful followers of Christ who refused to have the mark of the beast on them, could not trade the very communities where they lived – i.e. they were economically strangled. This could have caused some followers of Jesus Christ to become unfaithful to Him or become disillusioned, seeing no value in being a faithful followers of Jesus Christ. This could have given rise to the emergence of the internal problems that the author deals with in the Book of Revelation. During that time the Christian community could have been easily attacked and found to be very vulnerable to error. But even so, Revelation seeks to give support to those who want to be faithful to their calling to true witnessing even in the midst of economic strangling by the society within which they live. God



wants them to see more value in being faithful to Him than to those who control the economies of this world. He wants them to know that He is in control of the whole of His creation, including its wealth.

In his article “ An ethical response to an applicable apocalyptic situation”, Du Rand (1994 : 343) writing about the situation that the Christians faced during the first century CE, says:

“Their Gentile neighbours also despised the Christians, addressed in the Book of Revelation. They were totally misunderstood by them. The Christians were accused of hating the human race because of their exclusiveness and their refusal to accommodate or assimilate with the pagan customs, guilds or idols. They were also accused of arson ( the burning of Rome in AD 64 ) and cannibalism (the eating of the body and blood of Christ ) as well as atheism because they refused to accept any god but their own”.

The situation described above added to the one that already existed between the Jews and the Christians. It certainly made matters worse for the Christians. They were now found to be in no man’s land. They were unacceptable to both Jews and Gentiles. True isolation indeed! They were living like orphans and aliens in the country of their birth. None of the two groups would identify with Christians. This situation between Christians and Gentiles led to further economic and social isolation and serious tension. “ Christians had a very precarious legal position especially as they were perceived to be against Rome’s political views” Du Rand (1994 : 343).

### **2.1.3 OPPONENTS WITHIN THE CHURCH**

The writer of this study adheres to the view that John, the author of the Book of Revelation, was an itinerant prophet during his time in Asia Minor, probably

originating from Palestine. Arguments or discussions that follow below are based on this viewpoint.

At the time of writing, John and the other Christians were faced with, among other things, the problem of opposition teachings within some of the churches in Asia Minor. John wanted to deal with this perceived crisis within his community. The proponents of these teachings were possibly itinerant preachers themselves. There were therefore different problems in the different congregations. Rowland & Fletcher-Louis (1998 : 203-204) discuss the situation that existed in Asia Minor. The church in Ephesus was praised for its rejection of “ those who claim to be apostles but are not” (Revelation 2 : 2), as well as for hating “ the practices of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2 : 6). The problem with the Nicolaitans was also experienced in the church at Pergamum. “ Likewise you also have those who hold to the teachings of the Nicolaitans” (Revelation 2 : 5). This problem was experienced in both these churches.

The author of the Book of Revelation also records that there was another problem with “ people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols (ειδωλοθυτα) and by committing sexual immorality (πορνειουσι) (Revelation 2 : 14). A similar charge of teaching Christians and misleading them “ into and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2 : 20), is laid against the prophetess Jezebel in Thyatira.

Smyrna and Philadelphia are praised for their endurance and fidelity, in the face of apparent hostility from “ those who say they are Jews and they are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2 : 9; 3 : 9). In the case of Smyrna, the latter’s slander (βλασφημια) may have contributed to the temporary imprisonment of some Christians (Revelation 2 : 9 – 11). The “ synagogue of Satan” language may suggest an intra-Jewish polemic we find for example, in the Qumran scrolls : a polemic of a community which still considers itself Jewish and seeks to deny that title to other Jews. The ‘so-called’ Jews were cast in the role of persecutors and

slanderers. These ‘opponents’ in Smyrna and Philadelphia, then, are almost certainly non-Christian Jews.

From the above we can conclude that this problem was not a local one. This is confirmed by A.Y. Collins (1984 : 137) when she says : “This opposing movement was not a purely local phenomenon, but evidently was spread by itinerant leaders”. Probably John was familiar with these churches as an itinerant prophet himself. This situation within the believing Christian community brought a crisis which John wanted to deal with through the Book of Revelation. If the situation was left unchallenged it would probably cause more problems even to the point of affecting those churches that were not yet affected by it at the time.

In his article “On The Social Setting of The Revelation to John”, Slater (1998 : 232) argues thus : “...the absence of an empire-wide persecution of Christians in the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2 : 1 – 3 : 22) indicates that the book was not written as a response to Christian suffering but as a response to various forms of religious laxity within the congregations themselves”. But Slater gives the correct response to his own statement when he says on page 233 that during the time of Domitian’s reign “there would have been considerable social pressure for Christians to conform to religio-political traditional practices. Such pressures might have led some Christians to consider a more accommodating stance to regional religio-political traditions”. Such religious laxity would have been practiced unwillingly, compromisingly and for the sake of survival under the circumstances the Christians found themselves. The author of the Book of Revelation wants to help those Christians overcome that temptation, whatever the consequences.

## **2.2 SOCIO – POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

There is still no agreement among biblical scholars on whether there was once persecution of the Christians during the first century. Among those who believe that

there was persecution of Christians during the first century, there is no agreement on the date or the period of that persecution. Some argue for a date before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem while others argue for a post temple destruction date. It is interesting though to note the reasons that each group advances to support its argument. Botha (1988 : 87), in his article “God, emperor and society: Contemporary experiences and the book of Revelation”, suggests that the debate on the persecution of Christians should be approached with the following obstacles in mind:

1. There never was such a thing as the imperial cult.
2. There is a lack of complete and unambiguous literary texts about imperial rituals. However, the value of the sources we do have should not be underestimated.
3. Of the most difficult problems to overcome are our prejudices modern assumptions. Imperial cults were much more than simply honouring someone special. As religious activities they articulated the complexities of symbols making up the inter-subjective world of common understandings. The hermeneutical aspect of historical research deals with two problems: on the one hand the irreducible strangeness of the past and on the other the fact of continuity in history.
4. Emperor worship was not enforced with Rome as an official persecutor, but the imperial cult had an incredible vitality and persisted well into the Middle Ages.

Botha’s stance on the issue of Christian persecution is that it did exist because of the imperial cult that was practiced during the first century AD. In support of this stance he has this to offer: “In Ephesus there were four imperial temples ( and in the second century a massive Antonine altar was built ), a  $\sigma\tau\omicron\alpha$  βασιλικη and four gymnasia associated with the emperor...” (1988 : 91). The building of temples for the cult was a sure way of incorporating the cult into the everyday lives of the people. The availability of the temples would cause them to be used.

“The imperial cult was an expression of redefinition, of connecting new facts with old interpretations. This is probably why the emperor as god was associated with the traditional gods in their temples, but never replaced them...The physical setting of imperial rituals was the temple, the *Καίσαρειον* or *Σεβαστεϊον*. What exactly the functions and values of the temples were, we today no longer know” (1988 : 92). These temples reflected the relationship and interaction that existed between the emperor and his subjects. There was a temple dedicated to Domitian in Ephesus.

The key manifestation of the cult in action was the imperial festivals which were conducted from time to time. Botha goes on to say that the ambiguous range of ritual practice and language used for honouring the emperor reflects the conviction that the emperor stood at the focal point between the divine and the human.

The Book of Revelation is therefore a polemical reaction to the imperial cult. Chapter 13 vividly portrays the author’s perception of the all-encompassing influence of the imperial cult. It also clearly indicates that to the author the only permissible action for Christians is withdrawal, total rejection of contemporary society. To question the cult was therefore the same as rejecting the very structure of its experienced reality. The hostility and persecution reflected in Revelation is an attempt at making sense of being rejected. This rejection was not so much by an official programme as by neighbours protecting what was important to them.

In arguing for a difficult socio-political life for the believing community, Botha et al (1988:4 ) says : “In Asia Minor,...cultural syncretism and polytheism were the order of the day, due to Hellenistic influence. Many gods were honoured , as many religions were spreading over the region”. Botha et al also argue that the situation that existed when Domitian’s “demand to be acknowledged as ‘lord and god’ created social and political tribulation for Christians”.

This is exactly the point that the author of the Book of Revelation is bringing to his readers/hearers, that while they find themselves in the middle of this puzzle, they should not try to change the situation, but to live in such a way that their lifestyle will be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. John wants them to make Jesus their central focus, no matter how difficult it may be. He also wants them to know that it is possible to live a witnessing life in the conditions they find themselves because God will supply them with the power to live such a life.

Having heard what other writers have said about Domitian, Thompson decided to approach this debate from another angle. He argues that the persecution of Christians could not have occurred during the reign of Domitian. Thompson defends his stance thus :

“ Under Domitian the provinces flourished. Domitian, like his brother and father before him, built and maintained roads in Asia Minor, established cities in the interior plateau, and created new offices to oversee municipal administration. More especially, Domitian’s reign brought new privileges, a heightened status, and economic prosperity to the cities of the province of Asia” (1990 : 164).

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With these statements about Domitian in mind, and if Thompson is correct, one can appreciate the dilemma the Christian communities found themselves. They were faced with an emperor who had brought good governance in their country, one who had lifted up their lifestyle. Such a person surely needed to be given due honour and respect by any civilized standards within the human race. Yet it was the same man, Domitian, who wanted his subjects, including the Christian community to call him by the title ‘lord and god’, thus elevating himself to the level of their god.

The Christians had to make a choice to either honour God and refuse Domitian such honour or compromise and give Domitian such undeserved honour. To those who wanted to be politically correct, this must have been a difficult test which they probably failed. Having to separate themselves from the gods of their country in

favour of the living God could have jeopardised their political standing in their cities, even if not to the emperor.

Thompson mentions that “the provinces prospered under the Flavians, and Domitian in particular seems to have had special concern that all the provinces and all the classes of people on a province should be protected so that no one class or province oppressed the others. He hindered governors and upper-class provincials from jointly exploiting others in a province. He sought to be just and fair to all his subjects”(1990 : 166). Indeed such an emperor needed to be given his place in society. This caused a lot of anxiety for the believing Christian community.

In response to Thompson’s arguments, Slater (1998 : 236), has this to say :

“Thompson’s work is the most thorough re-examination of the depiction of Domitian to date. With the classicists, he calls into question the unproven assumptions concerning Domitian as an emperor, assumptions which have had significant influence upon biblical exegesis. Biblical studies owe much to him for this significant contribution. However, as helpful as this new perspective is, a closer examination of the classical texts themselves show that Thompson's revisionist case is not as strong as it appears initially”.

Slater notes that Thompson relied too much on the work / writings of Statius and Quintilian. These two men may have been biased towards Domitian since they found employment with Domitian’s assistance, with Quintilian as the tutor of Domitian’s great-nephews. It can further be added that Domitian’s work should be accepted with appreciation but with caution.

Thompson seems to argue his case from a position of bias, as though to disprove the case of Domitian persecution at all costs. We would like to concur with Slater and conclude that “...two aspects of Thompson’s revisionist programme, that Domitian did not receive divine honours and that Quintilian was an unbiased commentator, are found to be less than satisfactory...Thus the evidence is not as clear cut as

Thompson argues...However, because an empire-wide persecution did not occur does not necessarily mean that Christians lived free of harassment or repression in Roman Asia” (1998 : 237 – 238).

The situation that existed between Rome and the provinces at that stage is worth taking note of and to give consideration would add value to our study. Let us take a look at Du Rand’s comment : “In the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, including Asia Minor where John, the author of the Book of Revelation, and his readers also lived, there was tension with Rome as a result of taxes levied...The distinction between the rich and the poor did not only cause economic, but also social and cultural tension among Christians. Rome was accused of enriching herself at the cost of the province”(1994 : 239). The gap between the rich and the poor was getting worse by the day. This brought a lot of dissatisfaction within the poor community.

From what Du Rand says and what Thompson alluded to earlier, we can draw the conclusion that Domitian might have fought to bring back a good political climate during his rule, while at the same time he could have taken advantage of his good deeds to bring pressure to bear on the Christian community that lived during his time, whether directly or indirectly.

The author of the Book of Revelation is writing into a situation that needs urgent attention. The political situation at that time was not conducive for faithful Christian living. He encourages Christians to remain loyal to their God and not to capitulate to their opponents and the circumstances around them. He does not, however, encourage them to fight back, rather, he advises them to abstain from anything evil. He wants them to persevere through any form of pressure or persecution because of the future that God promises those that shall not retreat from their commitment to Him, even if it may mean death. They should not compromise their faith. The Book is therefore written in a context of a destabilised living Christian community, but living in a real place at a specific historical time. Chapter 11 which we are going to



look at in detail later, should be understood to have come into existence in that context.

John, through his writing, addresses the situation in which his readers/hearers are. He wants them not to give in to anything that is of this world because they are not of this world but belong to the other world while living in this world. His message to them is faithful Christian living at all costs.

According to normal human standards, when people share a common point of view, they would tend to club together. This must have been the situation that existed among the Christians of John's (the author of Revelation) time. Their common situation of exclusion from the synagogues, exclusions from social guilds, exclusion from the economic sphere---all this because of their faith in God, made those people to be grouped together. Even without it being officially orchestrated, it would happen naturally in order for their common cause to be furthered.

### 2.3 IMPERIAL CULT AND CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

Leonard Thompson, in his book "The Book of Revelation", argues a case for the non-existence of Christian persecution in Asia Minor and attempts to prove that Domitian was not the emperor that many writers portray him to have been. First of all Thompson accepts the existence of imperial cult before Domitian's reign and its continuation after his reign. Concerning the use of the title 'lord and god' by Domitian,

Thompson says : " If the statements of these authors writing after Domitian's reign reflect accurately the situation at the time of Domitian, we should expect to find the 'dominus et deus noster' title in writings from his time". Thompson argues on the basis of his own research that it cannot be proved today that Domitian ever used the title. He says that there are no records to support those claims:

" A critical examination of the standard post-Domitian sources on Domitian's demand to be called dominus et deus noster in light of

evidence from Domitian's reign suggests that the post-Domitian sources do not reflect political realities from the time of Domitian accurately. Domitian did not encourage divine titles such as *dominus et deus noster*, nor is there evidence that Domitian had become a mad tyrant seeking divinization". (1990 : 106-107).

About Thompson's work Slater (1998 : 236) says: " Thompson's work is the most thorough re-examination of the depiction of Domitian to date...Thompson's revisionist case is not as strong as it appears to be initially". Thompson's work is by no means inferior, except that it leaves us with further questions. While he gives the results of his research, he seems to be biased towards presenting Domitian as one completely different from whom he has been painted to be at all costs. The fact that he could not find proof that Domitian used the title 'lord and god' is no proof that he never used it.

Concerning persecution of Christians, Thompson says: "...I offer a plausible reconstruction of Domitian's reign, social organization in the province of Asia, and the place of Jews and Christians in that province. This social order, reconstructed almost entirely from sources other than the Book of Revelation, will provide further evidence that the seer and his audience did not live in a world of conflict, tension, and crisis. Christians lived quiet lives, not different from other provincials". It is clear from the above that Thompson decided to ignore what the Book of Revelation has to say concerning the situation that prevailed in Asia Minor at the time of writing. This is rather unfortunate, as it is one of the important pointers to the background.

Slater (1998 : 238) comments thus: "...because an empire-wide persecution did not occur does not necessarily mean that Christians lived free of harassment or repression in Roman Asia...While Domitian might not have demanded worship or even expected it, Asian pagans themselves promoted the imperial cult and would have been adamant concerning its observance. This is one of the factors which has put pressure upon Christians to modify or change their religious practices". Indeed

the Christian laxity that was there in the Asian churches was probably caused by such pressures.

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

In the above discussion we have deliberately looked at length at the social environment within which the first century Christians lived. This is meant to help us understand their situation better as the author of Revelation addresses it through his writing. We have seen therefore that John does not give room for any kind of laxity in the Christian living standards. John challenges his companions to remain faithful to God despite the economic problems, social rejections, religious exclusions, opposition within the church, or any other negative force that prevailed within that community.

The fact that people who did not have the mark of the beast could not do trade put pressure on Christians to review their stance. Not belonging to social guilds put pressure upon them because they were excluded from other activities and privileges. Even if there were no verbal pronouncements over their non-participation, it was done in action. Christians were held in low social esteem in the Roman empire during the latter part of the first century. For instance the fact that Nero chose to blame the Christians for the fire even though there was no evidence for that, it is a sign of how they were regarded in their society.

Whatever arguments there may be, the Book of Revelation itself in chapters 2 and 3 “demonstrates that the only external factors discussed in them refer to the suffering of Christians. This local action against Christians was probably initiated by local Asian pagans whose religio-political sensibilities were offended by Christians”.

Slater (1998 : 254).

Having listened to the various views on the situation that existed in Asia Minor during the first century, it seems that the situation under which the first century

Christians lived was not conducive for free witnessing. The Christian faith was not encouraged by the authorities that be and even by society at large to be freely embraced by those who chose to do so. Those individuals who continued to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ were doing so under pressure from those quarters already identified above. Admittedly, some of these pressures were non verbal, only seen in action, which was most probably deliberate.

It is therefore safe to assume that the first century Christians lived under a situation of a perceived crisis, to use Collins' words. It was these circumstances under which the first century Christians lived which contributed towards their behaviour which prompted the author to write them this letter. It is in the midst of, and from this background that the seer calls for faithful witness from his companions. From his point of view, hardships are not an excuse not to live faithfully before God, for God Himself will ensure safe passage through it all.

Now that we have looked at the situation that prevailed within the environment of the first century Church, which has opened our eyes and minds wider, we shall then turn our focus towards those issues that are contained in the chapters that are around Revelation 11. The next chapter deals with the co-text of Revelation 11, to which we shall now turn.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE CO-TEXT OF REVELATION 11**

#### **3. INTRODUCTION**

The message of the book of Revelation was given to the Church of Jesus Christ that existed during the first century in Asia Minor. This message is directed to the Church of Jesus Christ living in this day and age. But just what is the Church? Let us try and have a common understanding of what the Church is.

Emil Brunner says :

“The church is in the first place merely the instrument, the bearer, of the proclamation. Everything that serves this proclamation is church, and it is this function and nothing else which makes the church the church : a ‘proclamation existence’ as the historical continuum of the revelation...It is not a mere matter of uttering words, but of passing on the life in which God has communicated Himself...we must regard as church every form of historical life which has its origin in Jesus Christ and in which God’s self-communication is continuously active.” The Church is the company of the Elect, the Body of Christ, the communion of Saints.

Hodgson & Williams define the Church as follows :

“Ecclesia is a transfigured mode of human community, comprised of a plurality of peoples and cultural traditions, founded upon the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, constituted by the redemptive presence of God as Spirit, in which privatistic, provincial, and hierarchical modes of existence are overcome, and

in which is actualized a universal reconciling love that liberates from sin, alienation, and oppression.”

Littlejohn says that:

“The church consists of those called out by God from among the mass of humanity to represent His purpose. It is the family and household of God, sustained and disciplined by the Father through the Son and led by Him as it is nurtured toward maturity. It is the pilgrim people, led by God out of slavery through the wilderness of the world’s life on the way to the promised land of the kingdom with Christ as its expedition leader.”

From the above definitions, it comes out clearly that the Church is an organized group of people, united by a common belief system, set out to achieve a common purpose – the proclamation of the Gospel message through word and action. The Church is therefore the chosen means/vehicle, which God seeks to use to achieve His purposes. It is on the basis of this understanding that the following discussion is going to take place.



### **3.1 THE PROLOGUE, SALUTATION AND THE INAUGURAL VISION**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a textual background to chapter 11, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. This chapter seeks to help the reader understand the relationship that the first ten chapters of the Book of Revelation have with chapter 11 as well as chapters 12 – 22 (in brief). As the main emphasis of this dissertation is on chapter 11, it is necessary to understand it in the context of the texts around it. Let us now look at chapter 1.

#### **3.1.1 THE PROLOGUE (1:1-3)**

Verse 1 introduces the Book of Revelation as a revelation of Jesus Christ. By this we may understand this verse to mean that the Book of Revelation is a revelation

that belongs to Jesus Christ. Morris (1988:46) says that the word ‘apocalypsis’ means the uncovering of something hidden, the making known of what we could not find out ourselves. It makes plain that the book it introduces is not a book of human wisdom nor, for that matter, a discussion of philosophical or theological problems. It is revelation. It is therefore Jesus Christ who revealed what is written in the Book of Revelation. Strictly speaking, John did not function as the author of this letter but as scribe, as an instrument of Jesus. It is revelation made possible by Jesus.

Krodel puts it this way:

“In his preface, John carefully noted five links in a communication chain: One, the ultimate source of the revelation is God; Two, God gave the revelation to Jesus; Three, Jesus made His revelation known through an angel as His heavenly agent; Four, the angel communicated it to John, his earthly agent and ‘servant’; Five, John ‘bore witness to the Word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw’ by communicating the revelation to Jesus’ servants”. (1989:79).

Verse 1 further says that Jesus made the revelation known to John through an angel. The word ἔσημασεν’ used here means that Jesus signified the revelation. This means that the revelation came to John by means of symbolic representations. It was not a spoken revelation. “The revelation from heaven is not simply a straightforward report, for heavenly things cannot be so simply spoken about, but neither does it conceal the transcendent realities; it points to them in a series of evocative images which involve the hearer-reader in the interpretative process” (Boring, 1989:64). This required John to translate the symbols he saw into human language that could be understood by his hearer-readers of his day. This was not to be an easy task.

This revelation that is being given to John communicates to him what must soon take place. Revelation is therefore concerned with things of divine origin. Boring

further says that this revelation is communicated by Jesus, “who died at the hands of the Romans, not as a tragic victim, but as the act of God for our salvation.” (1989:65-66).

“A theme of John’s prophecy is the expectation of the imminent judgement and salvation.... The expectation of the imminent end underlines the urgency to gain a new all-embracing perspective on God, Christ, the world, the church, the present, and the future – to allow oneself to be drawn by Christ into the revelation which John seeks to mediate to the churches, that they may be strengthened or changed by it.” (Krodel, 1989:79). It is this judgement and salvation that must soon take place.

The meaning of what must soon take place is not explained. According to Morris, this may mean “that the fulfillment is expected in the very near future. But we must also bear in mind that in the prophetic perspective, the future is sometimes foreshortened.” (1988:46). Boring’s comments on this issue are helpful, and he says: “... we must face this issue of the expectation of the nearness of the End squarely and early on, for it is fundamental to interpreting not only the Apocalypse, but much of the New Testament ... We may first note that this motif of the nearness of the End is woven throughout into the fabric of the Apocalypse.” (1989:68).

We may also understand the meaning of the “soon” in the light of II Peter 3:8 which says that with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. This may therefore refer to God’s theme, not ours.

The importance of this book is registered in verse 3, which pronounces blessing upon the one who reads these words and the one who takes to heart what is written in the book. This is a sign of great significance that is in this book. It was obviously supposed to be read aloud at a worship gathering by someone. “This beatitude makes clear that Revelation is conceived as a rhetorical work to be recited in the assembly of the community. Anyone who has ever really listened to the whole book



will agree that it comes to life only when read aloud to an audience” (Fiorenza, 1991:40). This tells us that it was intended to be heard by its original recipients. By saying what he says in verse 3, John intended to influence his hearers to act on what is written in this prophecy / revelation. It is because of the importance that was attached to the Book of Revelation that a strong warning is sounded in chapter 22:18. The readers and hearers of the message of this book were seriously warned against adding or subtracting anything from it.

### 3.1.2 THE SALUTATION

In chapter 1:4, John addresses the seven churches in letter form. He starts by introducing himself as John. He uses a similar letter formula as Paul uses in most of his letters. It is assumed that the seven Churches that he addresses are probably representatives of the Churches in Asia Minor during that time. These were not the only Churches in that region, there were other churches as well. How these seven were selected, is not known.

The question ‘why these specific seven churches?’ cannot be satisfactorily answered, since there were other churches within their vicinity. But we can agree that these Churches were representative of a convenient route to use in sending the messages and also that they were a representation of the general situation that prevailed within that region at that time and was to be representative of the universal Church as well.

In trying to offer a solution to this puzzle, Ramsay (1994:127-128) says: “There are seven groups of Churches in Asia. Each group is represented by one outstanding and conspicuous member. These representatives are the seven Churches. These seven representative Churches stand for the Church of the province, and the Church of the province, in its turn, stands for the entire Church of Christ. Corresponding to this seven-fold division in the Church, the outward appearance and envisagement of

the divine author of the seven letters is divided into seven groups of attributes. And one group of attributes is assumed by him in addressing each of the seven Churches, so that the openings of the seven letters, put together, make up his whole outward and visible character.” We can see in the number of churches a symbol of completeness – God addressing His entire church.

If Ramsay is correct, and assuming that the character of the Churches of Asia Minor during the first century is similar to the Church universal today, we can say that the seven Churches represented even the Church of today, thus making the messages to the seven Churches applicable to today’s Church as well.

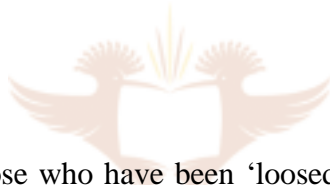
The greeting that John sends to the churches is from the one who is and who was, and who is to come. John here is using an unfamiliar title for God. About this title Morris says: “This most unusual expression refers to God the Father. The Greek is not grammatical, ... but it is an arresting way of stressing the changelessness and the eternity of God.” It expresses the special nature of God and hence the special nature of His revelation. It also suggests a new look and understanding of God.

The seven spirits, from whom grace and peace also come, may be understood to refer to the representatives of the seven churches. Giblin (1991:41) expresses it better when he says: “...the phrase fits better with apocalyptic imagery when construed as ‘the angels of the presence’, that is, as presenting God’s heavenly court and his omniscient and effective contact with the whole of his creation. They stand obediently in the service of God and become the instruments of Jesus. Christ as well. Perhaps Giblin’s explanation or view is attractive because at the time of writing of Revelation, there were probably no overseers of all the churches in Asia Minor. Thus, a physical representative of each church was unlikely to be in John’s mind at the time of writing.

John describes Jesus Christ as “the faithful witness” in verse 5. This is a significant title since it will affect the function of the church at a later time. Jesus went to the cross because of His witness, which He carried faithfully to the end of His life. His

death on the cross was a result of His faithfulness in witnessing. The church was later to be charged with a similar responsibility – witnessing faithfully. John further describes Jesus as “the ruler of the kings of the earth”. To this title Boring (1989:76) comments thus: “The phrase ‘ruler of kings on earth’ attributes to Jesus the title claimed by the Roman Ceasars, whose claim to sovereignty John wants his readers to see as a false caricature of the real lordship of Christ.” Jesus is thus described as the figure of majesty. He is also described as the firstborn from the dead.

Christ is the inaugurator and representative of the new creation. He is the sovereign exercising full kingship and power. The three christological titles characterize Jesus Christ in relationship to the Christian community. Fiorenza sees the latter part of verse 5 and verse 6 as portraying the activity of Christ. Christ is further described as one who has freed sinners from their sins and made them into a kingdom of priests. (1991 : 41).



The kingdom consists of those who have been ‘loosed’ from their sins. “The royal power of ‘kingdom’ describes here the present status of the faithful on earth.” (Giblin, 1991:42). The priests referred to here are ordinary Christians. “Now a priest speaks to God on behalf of men and to men on behalf of God. Believers are assigned this responsible task by their God. They are to pray to God for the world, and they are to witness to the world of what God has done.” (Morris, 1988:50).

The description of the coming of the Lord in verse 7 is a scene of divine majesty as the Lord returns to earth in triumph. This signals the final salvation of the elect. Here Christ’s future coming precipitates the universal judgement. This is affirmed by the statement: “and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him”. This mourning shall not be for repentance purposes, but because of the judgement and calamity that man will be faced with because of sin. They will mourn because their destruction shall have come upon them. Jesus shall demonstrate His majesty in that even those who pierced Him shall see Him, yet this time subject to Him. Contrary

to His first coming, His Second Coming shall not be in obscurity but He will come with the clouds, visible to all.

As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians (the people who have been freed from their sins), are expected to follow in the footsteps of their Master. Jesus Christ is introduced to the readers/hearers as the *faithful witness*. This title is of great significance to all the recipients of this message. They need to know who sent the message to them. The other importance of this announcement is that it is done very early in the message, right in the beginning. This will help whoever would be listening to keep focussed. All Christians are charged with the task of becoming witnesses. Beyond that they have to be like their Master and be faithful witnesses. They must be witnesses to those still in darkness – as a kingdom of priests. They were freed from their sins for this very reason. Christians must share in Christ’s ministry.



The salutation concludes with a powerful self-declaration of Christ as “the Alpha and the Omega, ... who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty”. He is the One on whom everything depends, the unchanging God. What He has said will happen at His Word. As the “παντοκράτωρ”, He has the power to cause anything to happen, whether good or bad. This is a stern warning to the people of the world that He is going to do what He promises to do. The whole of creation is under His control; nothing is outside His control. This is a promise that His church can rest assured that God is at all times in charge of His church, during good times or bad times. With God by its side, the church will be able to do anything. Under attack, the Church will survive.

The importance of the salutation is that it awakens the reader/hearer to the fact that the Christ came as a witness into the world and that He has successfully completed His witnessing function. He is the One who inaugurated the function of witnessing

into this world, and He is also the representative of the new creation. This salutation throws a big challenge to those who are and those who would be Christ's followers to know that successful and faithful witnessing is possible. It is not only possible but it is expected of them as Christ's disciples.

### 3.1.3 THE INAUGURAL VISION

In introducing himself to the hearer-readers, the author simply gives his name John only – no title attached to it is given. This suggests that he was so well known to them that he did not need more explanation of who he was. This could also be that John wanted to exhibit his lowliness, speaking of himself only as “your brother and companion in the suffering.” The fact that he mentions that he is their companion in suffering further alludes to his acquaintance to them. “... he again declares his solidarity with his readers. He is their brother, united with them in Jesus. ...Tribulations are a sign of the end, according to apocalyptic thought. They include a variety of pressure ranging from ridicule, slander, social ostracism, and harassment, to poverty, violence, imprisonment, and possible martyrdom.” (Krodel, 1989:92).

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Boring expresses John's position thus: “John writes with the authority of a prophet, but John's prophetic role does not have for him the dimension of over-againstness, does not separate him from the members of his churches. He writes as a pastor who shares the life of his congregations” (1989:80-81). By saying that he is their brother, the seer suggests that he knows these people fairly well. It is possible that he had lived among them for a while or all his life but was now, because of circumstances beyond his ability to control, separated from them. We can assume from this expression that what affected them as his hearer-readers affected him as well. Their pain was his pain, their suffering his suffering.

By further alluding to partaking in patient endurance, John is suggesting here that the Christian life is marked by “patient endurance”, that is, by holding on to the

faith in the confidence that Christ's Lordship is real, though at present it is invisible to the human eye.

John relates his experience and presence on Patmos as being "because of the Word of God". This suggests that he was there because of his involvement with the Word of God. He was probably disturbing the Roman imperial cult practices because of his teachings. He was therefore sent to Patmos as a place of banishment or punishment. We are aware of the view that some scholars hold that John could have been to Patmos to preach the Word of God, i.e. he went there willingly. But in the context that John is writing, this view is unlikely. "The grammar prohibits our understanding this phrase to mean that John had gone to Patmos for missionary preaching or in order to seek solitude to prepare for prophetic visions. The phrase 'on account of' is always used in Revelation for the result of an action, not its purpose." (Boring, 1989:82). His ministry of proclamation had probably led to his exile.

This is immediate support for the statement that John is a partaker in suffering together with other Christians. John was therefore busy experiencing this suffering at the time of his writing. Later, Christians were to expect similar experiences as faithful followers of Christ.

The occurrence of the vision is said to be "on the Lord's day". This phrase is only found here in the Book of Revelation. The author does not explain its meaning. It is therefore left to the hearer-reader to find its meaning. Some writers like Krodel, Morris, Boring, etc. are aware of the opinion that "the Lord's day" means a Sunday. Krodel (1989:93) says that John "... did not refer to a heavenly journey of his soul ... but to an ecstatic experience that took place on a Sunday, the day of the resurrection, when the communities gathered for worship." Morris says: "Some see a reference to the day of judgement or to Easter, but the best suggestion is that this is the first use of the term for a day of worship, a weekly commemoration of the resurrection" (1988:52).

“Though ‘the Lord’s day’ has been interpreted as Easter and the eschatological Day of the Lord, it most likely refers to Sunday, the first day of the week, the new holy day of Christians...” (Boring, 1989:82).

This view does not, however, exclude other views on the meaning of this phrase. I think that “the Lord’s day” is open to other interpretations. It should be allowed to speak wide. “The Lord’s day” could mean more than the first day of the week. It should not be restricted to Sunday only. The Lord could have chosen to reveal this vision to John on any other day of the week. Because God was in charge of all that was happening which John was experiencing on that day, he could have referred to that day as “the Lord’s day”. The Lord’s day should not only be defined by what people do in remembrance of the Lord, but can also be defined by what the Lord Himself does on that day, i.e. how He controls the day’s events. On the day of his vision, John had no control over the events of that period, but the Lord did. Nothing could have stopped John from understanding and referring to that day as “the Lord’s day”. “The Lord’s day” could have been any day of the week which the Lord chose to give the revelation to His servant John; it is therefore more likely a symbolic representation of that day than a specific day of the week.

The following phrase: “I was in the Spirit”, can be seen to be linked to the above argument. The author did not decide to be “in the Spirit”, but the Lord did. This was something beyond John’s ability to control. God took control of John’s mind and gave it the ability to grasp other worldly happenings on that great day. Morris (1988:52) explains: “It is certainly a state in which the Seer is open to the Holy Spirit and ready to see visions.” Krodell calls it an ‘ecstatic experience’. “To be in the spirit means to be caught up in meditation about the things of the Spirit.” (Mounce, 1992:3). I think that in the context within which this phrase is used, it means more than just meditation about the things of the Spirit. It touches on deep spiritual experience by the person.

According to Robbins (1975:41), being in the Spirit means:

“ ... being in an elevated state of mind, a kind of ecstasy in which a man is lifted out of himself ... It was the Holy Spirit who gave this power of spiritual insight, but it was through John’s natural abilities that the power was bestowed. He was open to the Holy Spirit and ready to hear and see. In this unusual state of ecstasy, through faith, he was able to look beyond the present suffering and tragedy to God, revealed in Jesus Christ, who is stronger than the forces of evil at work in the world. Earthly limitations were removed...” Ladd interprets being in the Spirit as entering into a trance.

Kistemaker (2001:92) explains being in the Spirit by saying that John was at that time not asleep, but wide-awake when he was addressed by the Lord. He was in his full senses and with a clear mind. He was able to see with his eyes and hear with his ears, thus being able to assimilate everything that was revealed to him, and was able to record this information at some later time. Malina and Pilch (2000:41) explain being in the Spirit as being in an altered state of consciousness by means of divine power, which is the Holy Spirit. They further suggest that a person in such a state is standing outside of oneself. Roloff (1993:32), speaking of being in the Spirit says:

“It involves an ecstatic out-of-body experience caused by the Spirit of God during which John had glances into the heavenly realm and received instructions and revelations from God and/or from the exalted Christ ... with John it was not a case of the soul’s heavenly journey as Paul experienced it (II Cor. 12: 1-7), that is, not a departure from the earthly realities of time and place ... Rather, it was the reception of a message, experienced in the condition of full consciousness, which proceeded from heaven to him in words and pictures”.



Malina's argument concerning being in the spirit is more acceptable to the author of this study. Indeed John must have been in an altered state of mind more than a physical change. Whatever he has recorded in his writing must have come to him during that state when he was not in control of his state of being but under the power of the Holy Spirit.

The next event that takes place is John hearing the voice of a trumpet behind him. This reminds us of the trumpet voice of God in Exodus 19:16, 19 and 20:18. When God visited His people, He spoke to them in a trumpet voice. The mention of the trumpet in Revelation 1:10 suggests that it was God speaking. This voice that speaks to John must be the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Roloff (1993:33) says: "In the Old Testament the trumpet announces the epiphany, the coming-in-appearance of God."

At this stage of his writing, John gives the background to his vision which would assist all the followers of the Lamb to stay focused. It confirms God's involvement in the vision from the beginning of the process. Malina and Pilch (2000 : 37) say :

" ... John's opening experience is that of hearing a loud voice, a sort of incomprehensible yell, that sounded much like a trumpet ... In the first century, trumpets were used in temple ritual to signal various stages of a rite and to signal the onset of certain festival times ... and in war to signal a battle ... Such sounds from the sky ... consisted of thunder perceived as articulate, as utterance. Since God and other celestial beings were responsible for thunder, such voices were considered communication from them."

About the voice like a trumpet, Robbins (1975:42) says: "This means that the voice was clear, distinct, intelligible, and compelling. Because of its clearness, the trumpet is often referred to in the Old Testament as the instrument to summon people together ... The trumpet was used to emphasize authority for solemnity, alarm, or gladness ... John being in the Spirit was so delivered from the dominion

of the senses that he could hear spiritual voices and see spiritual forms.” The use of the word “like” indicates that the voice was not actually a trumpet, but it was similar to a trumpet. He says: “Heavenly things can only be communicated by analogy, and the associations of a term are more important than its literal meaning.” “It is difficult to decide whether the experience described in verse 10b (I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet) denotes a frequent or an exceptional experience of revelation, but perhaps the latter is more likely” (Knight, 1999:38). Indeed this phrase denotes an out of ordinary or once-off occurrence in the life of the seer. It was not a usual event.

One might ask oneself why the need for relating such details. I see this as a good means for John to start building up his case right from the beginning. This would help his audience to keep track with what is to come later in the book.

It is difficult to understand or to agree with Grimsrud (1987:29) when he says that the happenings of verse 10 took place at a time when John was actively seeking the Lord. There is nothing in this verse that seems to support this idea. It is rather unlikely that this vision was God’s response to John’s desire to meet with God. But it should have the Master’s decision to address the need that was prevailing within His Church through His servant John. Beale (1999:203) in interpreting this passage says: “The introduction of the commission uses the language of the prophet Ezekiel’s repeated rapture in the Spirit, this giving John’s revelation prophetic authority like that of the Old Testament prophets. This identification with prophetic authority is enforced by the description of the voice that John hears as ‘a great voice as a trumpet’ ”.

Kistemaker (2001:92), in connection with the trumpet voice says: “ ...the sound of the trumpet introduced the advent of a new interval. The trumpet sound in Revelation calls attention to an important message and the intensity of the voice demands alertness and obedience.” This is an important statement because it makes us to understand that what is about to be said is of such significance that the hearer(s) ought to pay special attention to it. Indeed the message of Revelation

needed special attention. It was not only calling for special attention from John the seer, but was calling for special attention from all its subsequent hearers.

The message from the trumpet voice directs John to write and send messages to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. The order of these churches perhaps did not have a great significance attached to it. However, some authors shed some light on possible reasons for the sequence. Kistemaker sees in this a possibility of a postal route, starting from Ephesus via Pergamum to end in Laodicea. “These seven letters, however, are for the church universal. It is more likely then, that John is using the number seven symbolically to convey the idea of completeness. Hence, no church is ever left out, for Jesus has a message for each one.” (2001: 93).

The vision begins at verse 12, when John turned around to ‘see the voice’ that was speaking to him. What he saw was the seven golden lampstands and someone like a Son of Man standing among the lampstands. John now gives the symbolic representation of the character of Christ (Son of Man) who was standing among the lampstands, i.e. the churches. “Only as Christ is seen for what He really is can anything else be seen in true perspective...The whiteness of his head and hair suggest the fact of His purity and the fact of His eternity...The symbolism, eyes...like a flame of fire, means that He has power to search the hearts of men. His eyes are penetrative...The feet...like burnished bronze, probably symbolizes strength, might, firmness, durability, stability and splendor. It symbolizes the ability to progress and advance...His voice...like the sound of many waters seems to signify the majesty and authority of His voice over peoples and nations.” (Robbins, 1975:45).

Christ is seen holding seven stars in His right hand. The right hand is a symbol of power and authority. The sharp double-edged sword that proceeds out of His mouth is representative of His speech / Word, which is all powerful bringing either salvation or judgement depending on man’s response.

The final description of the Son of Man is that His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. This symbolizes a revelation of the essential duty of Christ. His majesty and glory are compared with the overpowering splendor of the sun. Robbins (1975:47) sums up the vision of Christ thus: “In this mental and spiritual vision, John ‘saw’ the victorious, glorified Christ dwelling in and ruling over the churches. He ‘saw’ in those seven churches, in their sevenfold diversity and unity, the whole church in the End time. It is the actual Church on the earth. It is in this Church that Christ is to be found in the world.”

“There in the midst of seven golden lampstands, stands one like a son of man, clothed in a long robe, with a sash across his chest, and his head and hair like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes like fire, and his feet like bronze, and his voice like the sound of many waters. He held in his right hand a scroll written with seven seals, and he stood on the sand of the sea. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. He laid his right hand on my head, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, but now I am alive, and I will live for ever and ever. Write, therefore, what you have seen, and what has happened to me, and what I saw, and what I heard, and what I saw, and what I heard, and what I saw, and what I heard.’” (Mounce, 1992:4).

Grimsrud (1973:29-30), explains the inaugural vision thus: “The images are impressionistic, not precise. They show things like Jesus’ closeness to the churches (walking in the midst of the candlesticks, 1:13), dignity (wearing a long robe, 1:13), purity (white head and hair, 1:14), power (voice like the sound of many waters, 1:15), and his identification with the discerning word (the two edged sword coming out of his mouth, 1:16) ... The first characteristic of Christ revealed to John in the vision is that Christ is present among the earthly congregations of Christ’s people.” According to Michaels (1997:61), “Despite this rich background, nothing in John’s account suggests that he recognized the figure that stood before him or that he identified it with any of these figures out of Daniel or Ezekiel...Such a figure in Jewish or Christian tradition is commonly called an angel...and it is a fair conjecture that an angel is what John would have called it too if words had not failed him.”

“Whatever John actually saw, the details of the vision are drawn mainly from Daniel and Ezekiel, and build up on an impression that is not visual so much as auditory and dynamic...the Hebrews were interested not in the photographic

appearance of things but in the dynamic impression which description of them conveyed, through ear rather than eye.” (Sweet, 1990:70).

With regard to the lampstands, Ladd (1972:33) has this to say: “In John’s vision, the lampstands represented the church, which had now become the light of the world...In the New Testament times the church was not, like the nation of Israel, outwardly a single people. In the New Testament view, each local church is to be viewed as the church universal in all its fullness. That the unity of the church is not found in organization but in its relationship to Christ is pictured in v.16, where Christ held seven stars in his right hand.”

To Ladd, the description of the one like the son of man represents Jesus’ characteristic. The white head and hair points to His deity. The eyes like a flame of fire symbolize His all-searching omniscience, while the double-edged sword refers to the powerful Word of God, which speaks and things get done. His face like the sun shining in full strength refers to the glory of the exalted Christ. Concerning the seven stars that He had in His right hand, Roloff (1993:36) says: “In the ancient world the stars were viewed as powers that determine the cause of the world and control human destiny in a variety of ways. Dominion over them thus means supreme power and authority that encompasses everything.” Assuming this to be true, then Jesus was demonstrating His sovereignty over the Churches and His creation.

After seeing the vision of the One like a son of man, John’s response was unusual – because of the unusual vision he saw. Boring (1989:85) says: “John’s initial response (1:17) was to be struck down as one dead, overwhelmed with dread at the holiness of the awesome mystery he experiences...the response is of one who recognizes that he cannot traffic casually with the Almighty.” Ladd (1972:34) comments thus about John’s response: “We are reminded of the basic biblical truth, which we so easily overlook and forget, that none but the pure in heart can see God and live. However, John was revived by a hand laid upon him and given the assurance that he had nothing to fear.” (Knight, 1999:40). The seer’s prostration

implies the offering of respect but also the experience of awe and wonderment that undergirds the numinous experience.

“John has not only ‘seen’ the voice, but found it to be the voice of Jesus. There is no explicit acknowledgement of this on his part...yet the reader now knows, and John knows, that Jesus is indeed the Speaker.” (Michaels 1997:62). The risen Christ declares Himself to be the Living One who was dead but is alive for ever and ever, and holds the keys of death and hades. “Keys in Jewish thought were a symbol of authority...Death has now lost its terror, for Christ has gained the keys so that He can unlock the gates of the grave and lead the dead into eternal life.” (Ladd, 1972:34). He is the Christ who not only has life in Himself, but is also the source of life in others and is the conqueror of the restless foe. He has therefore authority over all foes.

Robbins (1975:50) gives a summary of chapter 1 as follows: “In the preceding majestic vision, the prophet ‘saw’ the glorified Christ in the church. He saw that Christ is in her midst; seeing, knowing, judging and rewarding. He saw that Christ is the center of her unity and life, the source of her authority and power. He saw that Christ’s guidance, power, and discipline guarantee the church’s victory.”

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“This portrait is, then, the key to the section. As the various churches are weighed and discussed, one can see the living Christ in action among His own people. He does not appear to them as the terrible sovereign on the throne nor as the conqueror riding to battle. He walks among them as a Lord who seeks to command their virtues even more than to expose and punish their faults.” (Tenney, 1985:54).

As the vision unfolds when John, the servant of the living God, saw the One who was speaking to him, he fell at His feet as though dead. “ ‘As dead’ shows that it is not an oriental prostration designed to show respect, but the physical effects of the tremendous vision. John was confronted by Christ Himself...” (Morris, 1988:53). Boring expresses his opinion thus: “Here is no frivolous, superficially happy

response, the response is of one who recognizes that he cannot traffic casually with the Almighty.” (1989: 85).

This reaction is probably in line with Exodus 33:20, which says: “...you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” He, John, was seeing what the human race is not allowed to see while still in the human body, no matter what form Christ had taken. It was a special concession for John, thus he was allowed to live. Jesus placed His hand on the ‘dead’ John to wake him up. “The Lord of the universe, the One who holds the seven stars, touches His frightened servant in love.” (Krodel, 1989:96).

John is admonished not to be afraid by Christ Himself who gives John three reasons not to be afraid:

1. Christ is the First and the Last;
2. Christ is the living One and is alive forever and ever;
3. Christ holds the keys of death and hades.

Jesus could boldly give these reasons to John because He has defeated the enemy, and nothing can defeat Him. He has power over death and the place of the dead.

Giblin puts it in this way:

“For pagans, as even for the ancient Hebrews, there was no hope of a real, fully human life after death; at best, one could hope for a shadowy spiritual existence which was more consoling than the fate of the wicked. Christ has, however, conquered death and its apparently inevitable result, the mouldering grave. Although John does not seem to develop the point in Pauline sense, one may reflect that Christ conquered death not by avoiding it, but by going through it and passing beyond it to fully human renewed existence. Hence, death can do no more than what it did to Jesus, nor can those in Christ remain entombed. Jesus Christ’s power as

the risen Lord supplies further assurance and insurance to the churches to which John is commanded to write.” (1991:49).

This statement is important because it gives hope to the hopeless and certainty of continuous life and victory. Believing in Jesus therefore is an important act as it provides for the present as well as the future of the believer. There is in them new hope for life hereafter for the One they believe in lives forever and ever. Besides that, He has earned His victory since He Himself experienced death, yet He defeated death, the last enemy.

The inaugural vision occupies its rightful place where it is placed in that it puts Christ in His place. Christ is portrayed as the source of all that is happening in this vision. He has already been described as the One giving the messages to be sent to the seven churches. His stature has been fully described to the hearer/reader in order for them to form a picture of who John is getting his message from. Christ also described Himself in terms of His qualities, abilities and function. With all this information the church(es) that receive this revelation from John are in a position to comprehend the magnitude of the challenge that they are faced with.

This is the Christ that the Christians are being challenged to imitate and bear witness to. It makes good sense by any human standards to want to follow someone like Jesus. Before the seven messages are even written or read by them, they have full information and a picture of the source of this message. The inclusion of this inaugural vision in the Book of Revelation is therefore one of the backbones of this book. The recipients of this message are therefore called upon to bear witness to this King who has already demonstrated how this can be done. When they are admonished not to fear, they have a reason to believe such an admonition. The messages that are to be written to the seven churches are to be understood against this background. The hearers-readers are to receive them as coming from such a credible Author.



### 3.2 THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

In starting the discussion on the letters to the seven Churches, let us do so by citing Robbin's statement in his book "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". He says:

" In the vision of the seven churches, John saw the church as it is. He knew the churches. There was much in common that confronted each of them; and yet, each church had its own peculiar problem. He knew that the churches were loveless, unfaithful, weak, immoral, indifferent and compromising. He also knew that the churches were loving, faithful, strong, moral, compassionate and steadfast...He knew that the churches must become the church if they were to fulfil their mission in the world. The only way that the churches could become the church was to receive Christ more into their life. Only He could enable them to maintain pure doctrine and practice. In order to encourage them to become the church, he wrote seven literary creations designed for this purpose." (1975:50).

There is a lot of truth in the above quotation. In our discussion of the letters to the seven churches, we shall endeavour to find or focus on the common purpose these letters have or seek to achieve. Ramsay (1994:15), in supporting the idea of letter writing says: "The communication by letter supplemented more travelling. Such communication is the greatest factor in the developing of the church; it kept alive the interest of the congregations in one another, and strengthened their mutual affection by giving frequent opportunity of expressing it. It prevented the strenuous activity of the widely scattered local churches from being concentrated on purely local matters and so degenerating into absorption in their own immediate surroundings. Thus it bound together all the provincial churches in the one universal church.

Now concerning the seven Churches and the seven letters, Ramsay has the following to say: “...the seven churches stood as representative of seven groups of congregations but the seven letters are addressed to them as individual churches, and not to the groups for which they stand”. (1994:28). But with regard to the relationship of the letters to the seven Churches, Robbins (1975:51) states:

“These letters are not merely separate exhortations addressed only to each particular church, but all the letters were meant for all the seven churches, i.e. the whole people of God. The meanings were intended for all...In the ‘letters’ to the churches in Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira, commendation and blame are mingled. In the ‘letters’ to the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, there is no blame for anything in doctrinal discipline and manner of life. In the ‘letters’ to the churches in Sardis and Laodicea, there is no commendation.”

Ladd (1979:36) testifies to the intention of the letters when he says: “ Furthermore, the phrase repeated seven times, ‘He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’, suggests that the message in each letter is intended for a wider audience than for the local church alone.”

The messages that John was commanded by Christ to write to the seven churches are contained in Revelation 2:1 – 3:22. There are different interpretations concerning these messages pertaining to their meaning and significance. Commentators like Kiddle take the letters to the churches as a purely literary device. They see the message as one meant for the church at large. They see the individual letters as artificial. But such a view would be tantamount to rejection of the command to write to the seven churches by Jesus Christ, for this is a very specific command to John by the Author of the vision.

There are still other commentators who choose to give an allegorical interpretation to the seven messages, thus linking each message / letter to a specific period in history. Examples of such an interpretation is Ephesus referring to the first century, Smyrna to the period of persecution, Pergamum to the period of Constantine, etc. I think that such views should be rejected and rather accept that these letters were written to existing churches at the time of their writing. It has been shown that those seven churches actually existed and were real churches in Asia Minor during the first century.

In the light of what has been said above, we can now go back to verse 19 of chapter 1 which says: "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later." This is a very important verse in the Book of Revelation. It makes the hearer/reader aware of the fact that what is to be told the seven churches takes into consideration the past, the present and the future. This then tells the reader / hearer that the message of this book is all-encompassing, thus rendering this book very important to the reader / hearer. This book gives full information of the glorified Christ as seen by John, the present status of the seven churches as well as the future of the churches. This is the complete picture of the church of God. The accompanying explanation of the meaning of the stars in verse 20 sets the stage for addressing the seven churches in their present status.

There seems to be a general pattern that runs through the seven churches, though each letter carries a different message. Commentators such as Talbert, Morris, Kealy, Boring and others propose a somewhat similar pattern in the writing of the messages as follows:

1. A greeting to the church.
2. A title of the risen Christ.
3. A section headed "I Know".
4. Words of rebuke or encouragement.
5. A command or warning of the risen Christ.
6. A general exhortation. "He who has an ear, let him hear"

## 7. A promise of reward for those victorious.

According to Boring (1989:85): “Each ‘letter’ reflects the particular geographical, cultural, and religious situation of the city to which it was written, as well as the current conditions in the congregation of that city.” Even though Boring views the situation like this, he also sees interdependence in the letters to the seven churches when he says: “ ...none of the messages in chapters 2-3 are independent letters addressed to a single church. Revelation is one unitary composition addressed, like all the messages, to all the churches, as is made clear by 1:4 and 2:7 and the identified note at the end of each message.” Boring proposes that these letters be called “prophetic messages” because they share the same apocalyptic thought-world, as the rest of Revelation, but are written in a more straightforward language, speaking to the this-worldly situation and concerns of the hearer-readers.

According to Boring, these letters “set the parameters for understanding the visions to follow and to involve the hearer-readers in the apocalyptic message of Revelation as a whole...” To this effect, Talbert says: “The inaugural Christophany (1:9-20) lays the foundation for what follows” (1994:15). Boring and Talbert seem to have a similar view with regard to the relation between the seven letters and the rest of the Book of Revelation.

A closer look at the pattern of the seven letters seems to reveal the following:

### 1. A Greeting to the church: and the title of risen Christ:

Jesus Christ reveals Himself as the risen Lord and Saviour of the church(es). He is the One who holds them in His hands. He portrays Himself as the Master who has conquered the enemy and gives rewards to those who persevere. He is full of love for His church and will reign with His church.

### 2. The section of “I know”, and words of rebuke and encouragement:

Jesus Christ reveals Himself to the churches as the One who knows what is happening in His churches. He is the all-knowing God; i.e. He knows the past, the present and the future status of each church. He is therefore in a position to rebuke or encourage the churches accordingly. The churches are in a state of nakedness before their Lord. Christ is the One who can best deal with the prevailing situations in the various churches – He has conquered the enemy, thus He can help those who are struggling with the enemy's tactics to retard their progress.

### 3.. The sections on warning, exhortation and reward:

With Christ being the omniscient Lord, He gives warning or encouragement to the churches, thus guiding them to the road to success. This is indication of His love and care for His church. He wants to see His church overcome the enemy and He is there to help the church reach its goal. Christ further shows His commitment to His church by giving the exhortation “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”, thereby indicating that these messages are meant for all the churches in various locations. Christ's commitment to His churches culminates in His promise for a reward to each person who overcomes. Naturally, this is expected by anyone who worked hard.

With regard to the question of reward for a Christian who has been saved by grace, there are questions that arise that need to be answered, to which we shall now turn:

Goldsworthy tries to make sense of the fact that God is sovereign over His creation while man is supposed to have full responsibility for his actions. He asks the question “How can God be absolutely sovereign at the same time as man is absolutely responsible?” Goldsworthy goes on to say:

“The problem of sovereignty and responsibility is the problem of how a truly sovereign God can go on being truly sovereign while relating to truly responsible man. The gospel does not solve the

problem in the sense of telling us ‘how’ in a way that is able to be fully understood by the human mind. Rather it shows us that the mystery is characteristic of God Himself.” (1984:79).

By this we understand that in His sovereignty, God gets man involved in His plans – God working through man’s willing mind and will. For this to be possible, the sovereign God needs man’s full cooperation. There is a need for God and man to work together to achieve God’s plan. Not that God needs man to do what He wants to do, but rather in His wisdom, God decided to involve man in His plan. In the seven letters to the seven churches, God shows that He is interested in dealing with responsible people who are answerable for their actions.

These letters show that man must make an effort in working out his salvation. Good works, which spring out of the human effort, go hand in hand with God’s sovereignty. Goldsworthy (1984:80,81) comments thus:

“ The distinctive contribution of the seven messages in Revelation is to show that the good works of the people of God are part of the apocalyptic struggle between the reigning Christ and the powers of darkness...The struggles of the local churches to live out the gospel, to resist the impact of the non-Christian values and ideas, and to stay true to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, are all part of the conquest of the world through the gospel.”

With the above in mind, we need to reconcile the doctrine of justification by faith alone with Christ’s promises to the seven churches, that those who overcome will be rewarded, since this promise is given to all the churches. The question that needs to be answered is: “How and where do rewards fit into the above-mentioned doctrine?” There is no question on the doctrine of justification by faith alone – it is well accepted. What needs to be understood is that justification by faith comes first. After justification, God expects each Christian not to fold his hands and do nothing, but to roll up his sleeves and produce works that are based on his faith in Christ. He

must defend his faith by doing good works which oppose the works and values of his enemy.

It is the presence of these works based on faith that will lead to the demise of the enemy whom Christ has already conquered. While the individual struggles to conquer the enemy, he/she is given the ability to do good works by God Himself, though the choice to do the good works lies in the hands of the Christian. When the Christian resists the struggles, temptations and opposition from the enemy to the point of conquering, glory and honour goes to God.

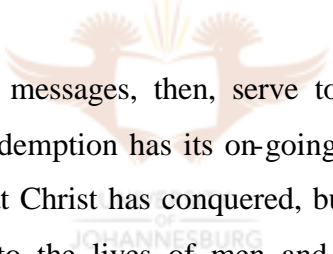
The Christian can choose either to fight and win or to give in to the opposing forces and be defeated. In the latter case, God's name is dishonoured. It is therefore understood that it is on a basis of a deliberate and willing conquest that Christ rewards the responsible Christian, who has represented the Lord well in the fight against God's enemy. In that we can find common ground with John Calvin that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since, in our sharing with Christ, sanctification and righteousness are both included. Let us close this discussion by citing Goldsworthy (1984:83) when he says: "...because...good works both follow justification and also precede final glorification, the inheritance of the saints may be spoken of as a reward. But since it is God's purpose to bring us to our inheritance by way of race (of good works), the term 'reward' appropriately emphasizes our human responsibility in this race."

With regards to the function of the seven letters, Goldsworthy says that:

"...they are written as letters and deal with pastoral problems in real congregations of Christian people, (and) puts them in the same general category as all the other New Testament epistles. Despite some distinct characteristics which mark them out from the other epistles, they employ a familiar technique of exhortation...It is quite possible, in view of the repeated use of seven, that the seven churches are representative of the total number of churches in

western Asia Minor. In this case, Revelation is a kind of general epistle to all the persecuted and struggling groups of Christians with which John could so easily identify in his own suffering and exile.” (1984:75).

On the basis of what has been said above by different commentators, one can say that the letters to the seven churches were directed to the original real seven churches as mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. But their messages were not only applicable to them only, they were also applicable to other churches in Asia Minor. We are also aware that the situations that were true in Asia Minor were similar to other churches outside Asia Minor. From this we can draw the conclusion that those seven letters were not only to be applicable to Asia Minor, but to all the churches that existed then. Since it is true that the situations in the churches then are still generally found in today’s churches, we can say that the seven letters are meant for all generations, and this is true with the whole book of Revelation.



“The seven messages, then, serve to remind us that the drama of redemption has its on-going effects in the world. The fact that Christ has conquered, but wills to extend His conquest into the lives of men and women through the preaching of the gospel, puts the church in the midst of the apocalyptic war. Furthermore, this warfare is not purely external, for it is also within each individual as the old nature struggles against the new, the flesh against the Spirit.” (Goldsworthy, 1984:77).

We therefore understand that the seven letters/messages help translate the cosmic and spiritual warfare into the present human existence of the people of God. Without the seven messages, the Book of Revelation would lose the valuable point of contact with our present human experience. It would have less contact and therefore less meaning to today’s hearer-reader. It would not be applicable to the problems that real-life situations have to deal with today.



### **3.2.1. A PRACTICAL, PERENNIAL AND PROPHETIC VIEW OF THE CHURCHES**

Let us now look at the seven churches from different view angles in order to make sense of the message to each of the seven chosen churches. In doing so we shall interact mainly with John Phillip's arguments, but of course not to the exclusion of other commentators.

#### **3.2.1.1 Ephesus**

The city of Ephesus was once the chief part of Asia Minor. There were certain changes to the city itself because of its continuous silting. It is reported that parts of the city which were at some stage water became land and what was land became water. The message to the Ephesian church, located in the city of Ephesus, seems to point to the fact that the church had shifted away from its original state of strong love for Christ. "Ephesus sets before us the issue of fundamentalism. The picture is that of a church busy and outwardly sound but notably lacking, especially in love for Christ" (Phillips, 1974 : 44 ). This means that there was a gradual move away from their original position in Christ, which led to tolerating wrong teachings.

#### **3.2.1.2 Smyrna**

The Smyrnian city was well known for its wealth. It was faithful to Rome. The Smyrnian church was addressed to deal with its fearfulness. As the city was faithful the church also became faithful. But the church was faced with the problem of ritualism, like the Judaizing of Christianity—yet Jesus had dealt with this problem at the cross. The letter to the Smyrnian church suggests that persecution was facing the church. Their Master wanted them to face persecutions with courage and determination since it was only temporary.

### 3.2.1.3 Pergamum

The city of Pergamos was famous for its medical center and pagan temples. The god of medicine, Asklepios, had a temple dedicated to him in Pergamos. The altar of Zeus was also found there. Phillips argues a case for clericalism – setting up a separate castle in the church to officiate in matters religious, which was at the root of Nicolaitanism.

“John’s first charge against the Nicolaitans is that they eat ‘ εἰδωλοθῦτα ’, idol meat ( 2 :14, 20 ). This might refer either to participation in sacrificial meals in pagan shrines or to eating privately such meat as had been sacrificed to pagan gods before being sold, or both. Almost all available meat had, of course, first been sacrificed in a temple...John’s criticism, then it is likely that he is not only offended by meals held at pagan temples, but also by consumption by Christians of meat purchased in the market-place, for ‘idol meat’ in any form seems to be prohibited by the Decree ” (Raisanen, 1995 : 156 ).

The Church at Pergamum was patronized. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who taught Balak to unite the men of Israel with the women of Moab. The essence of his doctrine was to corrupt them if he could not curse them. Constantine corrupted Christianity by placing Christians in high positions in the empire and began the unholy marriage between Church and state which destroyed the Church’s proper character.

If John seems to recommend harsh measures, the justification for this is universally found in the severe situation he faced.

### 3.2.1.4 Thyatira

Thyatira was once a great military city. Its tutelary God was Tyrimnas. It was founded by Seleucus I at about 311 – 280 B.C. It was noted for its many trade guilds. Christ presents Himself as militarily stronger than Tyrimnas. The letter to the church of Thyatira deals with the issue of sacerdotalism. Phillips argues that the Jezebel of Thyatira was the wife of Israel's worst and weakest kings who was the secret power behind the throne. Through her, the true people of God were persecuted and paganism became a national religion thus incorporating it into Christianity.

Fiorenza suggests that the adultery mentioned in Revelation 2 : 22 should be regarded as a metaphor. To this end Raisanen comments thus :

“The probability , then, is overwhelming that the conduct attacked by John consists simply of eating sacrificial meat. If so, John may be opposed to any kind of contact with such meat. The harsh collective condemnation of the prophetess and her circle could indicate that these people sin together, i.e. they eat sacrificial meat also in their congregational gatherings. This would suggest that the Nicolaitans of Thyatira were relatively well-to-do members of the congregation who could afford to buy meat, a privilege few had in antiquity” (1995 : 158).

### 3.2.1.5 Sardis

Sardis was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It was a city of great wealth and fame. When seen from a distance, this city looked like an unconquerable, broad valley. A close look showed that it was actually nothing but mud. Its history was one of glory, yet spoiled by unreliability and failure. Its lack of carefulness or watchfulness led to its fall in the hands of enemies. The Lord

Jesus likened the church at Sardis to one having a great name but actually being dead, thus giving a false picture of itself when looked at from a distance, just as the city itself gave a false picture of being strong yet being weak and vulnerable. The church at Sardis therefore had a problem of liberalism. Its reputation was no longer in line with the practical life within the church. It looked dynamic yet was divorced from the truth of God.

### 3.2.1.6 Philadelphia

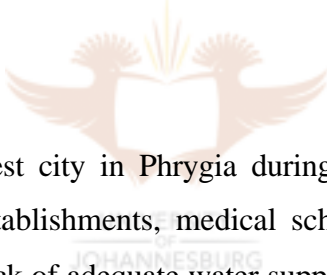
Philadelphia was a city of commercial importance, conveniently located as gateway to the high central plateau of the province of Asia Minor. It was founded by Attalus, king of Pergamum. His intention was to make it a center of Graco-Asiatic civilization and a means of spreading the Greek language and customs in the eastern part of Lydia and Phrygia. It was a missionary city – dedicated to the spread of the gospel. According to Phillips: “Philadelphia commanded a key situation on the main line of communication between Rome and the central plateau of Asia Minor.

Its strategic location made it possible for it to open or to close these lines of communication” (1974:43). This statement makes one think why the Lord Jesus introduced Himself to the church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7) as One “...who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open”. Christ shows the Church that He is the main door of true communication – thus the church should rely on Him for the true communication of the truths of the gospel. There was revivalism in the Church of Philadelphia – a true practical Church. No one was going to stop God’s actions through His church. God was to reach out to the lost world through the open door He had placed before His Church.

There is, however, the promise that the Lord is giving to this Church that whoever overcomes He will make him a pillar in God’s temple. The pillar should be viewed as a symbol to help the reader to visualize the truth by analogy and thus

more readily grasp the spiritual reality. “The prospect of being a pillar in the temple of God, then, probably suggests security. Just as the kingdom the overcomers will inherit cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12 : 28), neither can they themselves be shaken. This blessing fits every saved person” (Wong, 1999 : 301). In the same article “The pillar and the throne in Revelation 3 : 12, 21”, Wong highlights the significance of the name of God being written on the overcomer. He says that the writing of the name of God on each overcomer signifies the fullness of the glory of God Himself will manifest in each overcomer, and this is probably the Lord’s way of laying claim to His possession. To possess these names, then, is tantamount to forever belonging to and being identified with God, the city of God, the Son of God, and all that is consistent with their names.

### 3.2.1.7 Laodicea



Laodicea was the wealthiest city in Phrygia during Roman times. It was well-known for its banking establishments, medical school and textile industry. Its major weakness was the lack of adequate water supply – though a prospering city. When it ran into problems like natural disasters, it refused financial aid from the imperial government because it boasted self-sufficiency. It also manufactured a special eye ointment. There were obviously wealthy Believers in the Church at Laodicea. This is indicated by the Lord’ instruction to them in Revelation 3:18 “I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see”.

The above phrase of counsel points to the problem of materialism which was in the church of Laodicea. The Lord points the church to Himself, where true riches are found. Materialism had a negative spiritual influence on this church, it had drowned in materialism. The church’s status at that time was described by the

Lord as being ‘lukewarm’ – neither hot nor cold. This was unacceptable to the Lord, promising to spit it out of His mouth. The church at Laodicea was seen to be affected by the circumstances around it, just like the other six churches were affected by the circumstances around them. Koester (2003 : 407), argues against the interpretation of the message to the church in Laodicea as outlined above : “Leading images in the message to Laodicea (Rev. 3 : 14 – 22) are often thought to allude to the Laodicean water supply, banks, textiles, and medical school. Re-examination of available evidence, however, shows that this is unlikely. Instead, the references to hot, cold, and lukewarm draw on common dining practices”.

Koester starts by arguing his case against the problem of hot, cold, and lukewarm water sources which claim that Laodicea was being compared with the nearby Hierapolis which boasted the supply of hot water from its hot springs, and Colossae which enjoyed ample supply of fresh water from a nearby spring, while Laodicea itself had neither of those but only had lukewarm water. Koester disputes this interpretation and rather offers an alternative interpretation. “An alternative interpretation of the imagery can be developed by shifting the frame of reference from special knowledge of local topography to more common practices that would have been familiar with the readers” (2003 : 411 ).

According to Koester, “The wider literary context also bears out that η αρχη της κτισσεως θεου points to Christ’s rule” (2003 : 412). By introducing the theme of Christ’s sovereignty in Rev. 3 : 14 and developing it in Rev. 3 :21 – 22, the author creates the understanding that Christ is ruler of the church of Laodicea. Koester says that when Christ says that He is about to vomit them out of His mouth in Rev. 3 : 15 – 16, and that in Rev. 3 : 20 He promises that He will come and dine with everyone who opens to Him, this should be interpreted as drawing imagery from dining practices. Here Christ’s vomiting is a graphic image of rejection that comes from the field of meal practices, just as sharing a meal with someone is a common way to depict acceptance and fellowship. “In the message to Laodicea, Christ says that He wishes they were cold or hot, and the context makes it clear

that one might desire to take something either cold or hot into one's mouth" (2003 : 413). It was understood that when one's thirst was accompanied by heat, then the desire is for a cold drink, but that if the thirst was accompanied by cold the person would prefer to drink something hot.

"Various methods were used to prepare hot water for the wine. The wealthy favoured self-contained water heaters, which had their own chambers for charcoal to heat the water. Some styles had taps near the base that enabled people to draw out hot water for mixing with their wine... The Romans also developed the practice of allowing guests to choose whether they wanted to mix their wine mixed with cold or hot water...As a contrast to cold and hot, Revelation identifies what is lukewarm ( χλιαρος ) as objectionable and something to be vomited out of the mouth. This too would have been broadly understandable to readers... " (Koester, 2003 : 414 – 415).

If Koester's submissions are correct, then his argument would be more meaningful to the readers of the Book of Revelation. The message to Laodicea rebukes the congregation by declaring that its works are lukewarm rather than cold or hot. When applied to the Christians at Laodicea the imagery suggests that their works in no way distinguish them from others in their society. Koester concludes by saying :

"The call for works that are cold or hot summons readers to actions that are distinguished from the familiar patterns of wealth breeding complacency, and instead express the relationship with the risen Christ that sets the Christian community apart. The vulgar image of Christ vomiting the lukewarm Christians out of His mouth is designed to startle

the readers into an awareness of the danger of being rejected unless there is a change”.

With regards to counsel that Christ gives to the church in Laodicea, Koester suggests that it should be considered in the light of common idioms rather than specifically local allusions. According to this understanding, verse 18 therefore suggests that these Christians are economically well situated but poor in relation to Christ. The Laodiceans are called blind in a figurative sense because their prosperity has generated a false sense of security. “Calling someone who lacked understanding ‘blind’ was common” (2003 : 421). The eye salve is an image of what will enable the Laodiceans to clear up their vision. These salves were not necessarily produced in their own city. Concerning their nakedness, the contrast is between white garments and nakedness. Koester says : “The word ‘naked’ ( γυμνος ) challenges the idea that the Laodicean Christians are rich and need nothing. Underlying the reproof is the assumption that God and the risen Christ see things in a way that human beings cannot...they are completely known to God”(2003:423). The white garments convey a sense of honour, which is opposite to shame. White garments did not have a single well-defined meaning, but they did have connotations of honour and holiness that suited the message to Laodicea. In another sense the honour of wearing white robes is the reward given to the faithful.

Wong suggests that the reward of sitting with Christ on His throne seems to be that of sharing royal honour, victory, and authority with Christ in His future millennial kingdom and eternal order. He sees this as a future blessing where believers will be engaged in judging, serving or reigning (1999 : 306).



### 3.2.2 OVERCOMERS IN THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The requirement to overcome runs through the letters to the seven churches. Every church is made aware of the need to overcome by the Lord Jesus Himself. We should remind ourselves that the use of this word ‘overcome’ involves or invites the idea of wrestling or struggling with an opposing force. By merely mentioning it, one understands that a direct or indirect battle is being inferred or suggested. Overcoming needs both determination to win and a focussed mind. Overcomers need to set their priorities right, spending all their energy on attempting to conquer the opposing forces.

The Lord Jesus says to all the churches, “He who overcomes” will receive a reward from the Lord Himself. This phrase, suggests that not all those who desire the reward will get it, but only those who really manage to overcome. These are the people who are prepared to face conflict squarely in the face and finally come out on top.

All seven letters are seemingly written to believers in those respective churches. The questions that arise are “Are the words ‘he who overcomes’ referring to the believers already in the church or does it also refer to those unbelievers who are within the perimeters of the church?”. The easy answer would be that it refers to the latter. But in the light of Revelation 1:11, we understand that the letters were intended for the seven churches. Our understanding of churches is that they are made up by believers only. No person would be counted as part of the church of Jesus Christ, unless he is a Christian. “If the intention is to address the believing community only, how do we reconcile this to verses like I John 4:4; 5:4-5 and I John 2:13-14?”.

According to the above verses in I John, any person who has repented from sin has overcome the devil. Is this what Jesus Christ is referring to here? Is Christ

calling for people to have faith in Him so He can pronounce them as overcomers or is He putting a challenge to those who already believe in Him to go a step further to thwart the challenges that lie ahead of them? While this work is not intended to criticize other people's ideas, I think that the questions asked above ought to cause us who study the Book of Revelation to think further than the overcoming referred to in I John. It seems to me that the Lord Jesus Christ's concern about His churches goes beyond the pronouncement in I John.

Having listened to the messages of the seven letters, it seems clear that the Lord Jesus was or is concerned about the negative influence that the respective cities had on the Church life there. The Churches or Believers in those cities were going astray from their way of faith i.e. those who had already been pronounced overcomers according to I John. Christ was therefore calling on the same believers to stand up to these new challenges that they were faced with. In my opinion, overcoming is not completed on the day of conversion, like Strauss (1982:110) says: "From the very moment of our conversion we were overcomers", but it is a process which the believer has to go through. If it were not a process but an event, as Strauss' argument seems to suggest, then why would the Lord Jesus express His unhappiness or dissatisfaction about the status of each church or believer when they had already 'become' and 'overcomer'? But the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has so much against His saints, so much that He sends these important messages to the seven churches, suggests that their overcoming is still being processed. While Jesus Himself is the author of it, the believers are active participants in that glorious process. A suggestion to the contrary would be tantamount to saying that the Lord Jesus Christ does not understand Himself – which is far from the truth.

Another important factor that needs consideration is the fact that it should be regarded as a package concept. It becomes a complete process when all the facets of overcoming are involved i.e. everything that is mentioned from the first church, Ephesus, to the last church, Laodicea, are found in each individual believer or church. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ says to all the churches: "He who has

an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Even though the messages are sent to the seven different churches, all messages apply to each individual believer or church, in order for the overcoming package to be complete.

It is true that overcoming starts or begins from the moment of conversion but it goes on during the lifespan of the individual believer or church, thus calling on each individual believer or church to partaking in this godly process under the enabling hand of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who ensures that the willing believer or church overcomes until the end. Overcoming takes place both in the present and in the future of the individual believer or church. It should be experienced on a daily basis by all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Overcoming by the individual believer or church brings honour to the Lord Jesus Christ because He has already overcome the devil. When His followers live diligent and faithful lives, they confirm Him as the founder of overcoming thus confirming that He is Lord of lords and King of kings.

On the basis of what has been said above, we can conclude that one of the reasons for writing the seven letters to the seven churches was to help the individual believer or church to become true overcomers. In the light of this statement, producing overcomers is therefore the main focus of these letters. Such overcomers are the ones who will eventually inherit all that the Lord Jesus has prepared for them.

As we have been listening to what God was saying to the churches through the letters, one main message seems to come out loud and clear. The common message is that all of them have to work hard to reach the goal of their salvation. In the course of their life, they have to face challenges. These challenges are different from church to church, but they are all expected to win the battle. The challenges that these churches face, both from inside and from outside, have to be

fought with determination. The only way that they have to fight back is through faithful witnessing. As Christians they must live out the Christian life without any apology to the hostile world.

Those churches which have been infiltrated by heresies have to work hard to root out these heresies, no matter what it may cost them. Even those Churches which have problems from outside the church have to work hard to prevent the wrong teachings from entering into the church. This they can only achieve by teaching the right doctrine inside the church, thus grounding the Christians in the truth. There is no promise for an easy battle ahead. The author makes each congregation aware that it is its responsibility to deal with the unacceptable situation within it. Jesus Christ wants the churches to continue with the work that He started during His earthly ministry.

The Christians are made aware that it is not just a matter of bearing witness when conditions are right, but that witnessing must continue even when conditions are unfavourable to them. They must witness to the point where they overcome whatever was there to challenge their faith in Jesus Christ. Witnessing by the Church of Jesus Christ becomes true witnessing when the Church refuses to stop witnessing even in the midst of challenges. The fact that the author of the Book of Revelation speaks of overcoming suggests that it is possible to witness faithfully in this world. Witnessing which culminates in overcoming is possible to them that have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **3.2.3 SUMMARY ON THE SEVEN LETTERS**

From what has been said above, it is clear that each letter to the seven churches was written in relation to the circumstances that affected each church. The Lord Jesus Christ, who knew each church well just as it was, addressed each from a position of strength:

1. He was aware of the true picture of each church

2. He offered a solution to each church, recommending what not to do and what to do

“In each letter, distinctive features of His glory as described in chapter 1, are chosen by the Lord and are applied to the spiritual condition of the church addressed” (Phillips, 1974:44). This makes each letter to fit well into that specific situation. It is clear that the condition in which each church finds itself is similar to the historical background of that city. Each church’s present state of affairs was shaped by the state of affairs in that city.

For those cities which were not negatively affected, thus no criticism from the Lord, the counsel given to them is along the lines of the city’s state of affairs. This is indicative of the fact that the Lord Jesus was concerned about the way each church behaved or ran its business within its geographical territory. The Lord Jesus Christ indicates in these letters that His interest is to find every church living above the demands of the society around it. The church should rather be unpopular with the people around it and be popular with the Head of the Church.

Goldsworthy (1984:85) sums up the message of the seven letters thus:

“The seven letters to the churches serve to introduce the main themes of Revelation by dealing with them at the outset in the down-to-earth context of the daily life of the local congregations. The drama of redemption is thus shown to have ongoing effects in the world of human existence. Christians are not onlookers while a cosmic conflict rages in spiritual realms, but rather they are participants. The letters prevent the apocalyptic descriptions of this spiritual struggle from being detached from our daily struggle. The risen and glorified Christ calls upon His churches to be faithful to His gospel and to persevere in well-doing.... The good works which are demanded are part of the apocalyptic struggle with the powers of darkness”.

### 3.3 GOD THE FATHER AND GOD THE SON ARE GLORIFIED

#### 3.3.1 THE RELATION OF CHAPTERS 1 – 3 TO CHAPTERS 4 – 5

In chapter 4, the seer is introduced into the heavenly throne room. This is where most of the contents of the Book of Revelation is shown to him. It is the engine-room of this book. According to Beale (1999:311), the main point of chapters 4 to 5 is God's punitive and redemptive purpose for the world, beginning to be accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, through whose reign God's purpose for creation will be consummately executed and divine glory accomplished. The pastoral purpose is to assure suffering Christians that God and Jesus are sovereign and that the events that the Christians are facing are part of a sovereign plan that will culminate in their redemption and the vindication of their faith through the punishment of their persecutors.

There seems to be a relationship between chapters 1 - 3 and chapters 4 - 5 of the Book of Revelation. To this effect, Beale says:

“The picture of Christ in 3:21 presently sitting on the Father's throne leads into the vision of chapters 4-5, where John explains in more detail and imagery the past act of Christ's exaltation on His throne as ruler over the church and the cosmos which was accomplished by His death and resurrection. This is supported by a similar wording used to describe Christ's reception of authority in chapters 2 – 3 and 5 (see the use of λαμβανω ['receive'] in 2:28; 5:7-9, 12 and νικω ['overcome'] in 3:2 and 5:5) and from similar descriptions of the seven spirits of God (3:1; 4:5; 5:6), the saints' white clothing (3:5, 18; 4:4), the saints

seated on thrones (3:21; 4:4), their crowns (2:10; 3:11; 4:4), and the image of an 'open door' (3:8, 20; 4:1)" (1999:311).

We saw that in chapters 2 and 3, the theme of overcoming is well established or developed. This same theme is developed in Revelation 5. Revelation 3:21 acts as a transition from chapter 3 to chapter 5. This 'overcome' is a reference to perseverance while experiencing suffering because of the believer's faith in Christ. Overcoming does not come easy because of the temptation to want to compromise. Christ was able to overcome because He did not compromise during His suffering. The Christian is therefore challenged to be like his/her Master in remaining faithful to his faith all the time. In 3:21, Christ promises that overcomers will be made to sit with Him on His throne and in 5:11 those that have overcome are encircling the throne, this being a sign of their acceptability to God and to other men or women.

We can say that the challenge to 'overcome' is seen as one of the key purposes of the life of faith in Jesus Christ. It is also a basis of assurance to Christians suffering because of their faith in God. Their Master serves as an example for them because He was rewarded with kingship after He triumphed. If they also triumph, they are assured that the kingdom is also theirs. This promise is further strengthened in that it is not something that will start in the distant future, but it has already started here on earth during the persevering process. Their future reward is already realized in the present. This brings courage to the suffering Christians to keep going on in the faith.

### **3.3.2 CHAPTERS 4 –5 AS A HEAVENLY LITURGY AND PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH'S LITURGY**

The author of the Book of Revelation does not announce his intention of writing this book. We therefore have to make our own deductions from the reading of the book. Beale (1999:312) proposes that the intention of John in writing the Book of Revelation to his readers was that they should see what was told in the vision as a

heavenly pattern that the church is to reflect in its worship. To this effect, Beale traces the use of the Old Testament in the apocalypse to support his view. To him the use of the Old Testament and the relationships among the Old Testament allusions, are essential to the understanding of Revelation 4 – 5. He proposes the following overview of structure for the two chapters, linking them to the book of Daniel

1. Introductory vision and phraseology (Daniel 7:9 [cf. 7:2, 6-7]; Revelation 4:1)
2. A throne(s) set in heaven (Daniel 7:9a; Revelation 4:2a [cf. 4:4a])
3. God sitting on a throne (Daniel 7:9b; Revelation 4:2b)
4. God's appearance on the throne (Daniel 7:9c; Revelation 4:3a)
5. Fire before the throne (Daniel 7:9d – 10a; Revelation 4:5)
6. Heavenly servants surrounding the throne (Daniel 7:10b; Revelation 4:4b, 6b-10; 5:8, 11, 14)
7. Book(s) before the throne (Daniel 7:10c; Revelation 5:1 ff.)
8. The book(s) opened (Daniel 7:10d; Revelation 5:2-5, 9)
9. A divine (messianic) figure approaching God's throne to receive authority to reign forever over a kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14a; Revelation 5:5b-7, 9a, 12-13)
10. The kingdom's scope: "all peoples, nations, and tongues" (Daniel 7:14a [MT]; Revelation 5:9b)
11. The seer's emotional distress on account of the vision (Daniel 7:15; Revelation 5:4)
12. The seer's reception of heavenly counsel concerning the vision from one of the heavenly throne servants (Daniel 7:16; Revelation 5:5a)
13. The saints given divine authority to reign over a kingdom (Daniel 7:18, 22, 27a; Revelation 5:10)
14. Concluding mention of God's eternal reign (Daniel 7:27b; Revelation 5:13-14)

A close look at the above overview structure reveals that Revelation 4-5 contains fourteen Danielic elements. These elements are found in the same basic order as in the book of Daniel 7:9 ff. It should be noted also that the Book of Revelation



also alludes to other Old Testament books like Ezekiel 1-2, but Daniel seems to be the dominant book.

### **3.3.3 GOD IS GLORIFIED BECAUSE HE IS SOVEREIGN JUDGE AND REDEEMER OVER CREATION**

It is good to recognize that in chapter 4 and 5 of the Book of Revelation, God is being glorified by His creation. Verse 1 of chapter 4 begins with the words: Μετα ταυτα (after these things). It is worth noting here that the use of this phrase does not necessarily indicate that what is about to be related comes after what has already been said in the first three chapters. The events recorded in the Book of Revelation do not follow a particular chronological order. The phrase rather indicates that a new vision is about to be related. The use of the words “and the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet...” in 4:1 help to link this vision with what has already been related to the readers. “This link to chapter 1 shows that John is continuing to fulfil the prophetic commission to write by recording the following visions...” (Beale, 1999:317).

It is generally agreed that the use of the phrase “After this I looked...” is a formula which, with slight variants, always in the book (of Revelation) introduces a new vision.

Indeed Aune agrees that a new stage of John’s revelatory vision begins in chapter 4:1 where the scene shifts from earth to heaven. But Aune asks the question whether chapter 4:1-2a serves as an introduction to the entire central section of the Book of Revelation or merely an introduction to the seal narrative in 4:2b – 6:17. Aune proposes that this section be regarded as an introduction to both narratives (1997:275).

Beale's opinion (1999:318) is: "...the concluding phrase of 4:1 affirms only that the subsequent visions of the book are further visions concerned with an explanation of the 'latter days', which are both 'realized' and 'unrealized', set in motion but not consummated...including the eschatological past and present as well as the future. The significance of the Daniel 2 allusion is that suffering Christians can take heart that God not only has all knowledge of historical affairs, but has decreed them and guides them".

Revelation 4:1-2 does not give the reader the exact time when these visions are occurring, but only introduces him or her into the heavenly counsel. According to Beale, these visions would have a mixture of past, present, and future elements in them. Caird (1971:61) says:

"We need not be surprised, then, to find that the heaven to which John is summoned turns out to be more than a military headquarters – a throne room where the heavenly king holds court, a synagogue in which the scroll of God's Word is opened and read, a temple with an altar on which the incense of prayer is offered and a law court from which the accuser is drummed out in disgrace. The very fluidity of John's images strongly suggest that he was aware of the inadequacy of all forms of religious language to express the ineffable being of God". Aune (1997:278) sees in chapter 4:1-2a a heavenly ascent motif.

'After this' (4:2) does not imply that the remainder of the book will deal only with the future (chapter 12:1-6 refers to the past). 'After this' points to further visions and auditions after the commission to write the seven messages has been completed. But more, what must take place after this is the future judgement and the future salvation promised in the seven messages and envisioned in chapters 6 – 22. Revelation 1:19 as well as 4:1 is dependent on Daniel 2:28, 45.

Revelation 1:19 introduces the seven messages; 4:1 introduces part 2, which will focus especially on the future manifestation of God, who is to come (1:8; cf. 21:5-8) and Christ who is to come (1:7; cf. 19:11-16; 20:4-6). In so doing, John extended the realized eschatology which he shares with his audience (cf. 1:5-6) into the future, for it is out of the future that God and Christ will come in judgement and salvation.

“The fourth chapter is a call to the church for the conflict – a call to believe in God. It provides a brief vision of the transcendent greatness, majesty, power and kingly authority of God. To John, sovereignty and greatness go together. This chapter stresses the revelation of God as Creator, the ultimate source of all existence, and the sovereign over all the universe...This chapter is intended to impress the reader with God’s comprehensible plenitude of power, a potency that is absolute. John has the same faith as the psalmist who says ‘Power belongeth unto God’ (Psalm 62:11), and as Paul who declares that nature itself gives evidence of the eternal power of God (Romans 1:20). The writer’s faith sees God as having limitless power and as being the source of all the power...This vision is closely related to the letters to the churches. It shows what power is available for the church in the struggle. These Christians could feel safe only if they were under God’s protecting care. This chapter makes us vividly conscious of the sovereignty of God which is the comfort of the believer in every trial” (Robbins, 1975 : 82-83).

An analysis of the above discussion leads us to certain conclusions. There seems to be a systematic development of the theme of witnessing and overcoming that started as early as the first chapter of the Book of Revelation. At this stage we see the throne room being displayed in heaven. What happens in the throne room is of

great significance in the development of the witnessing/overcoming theme. Earlier on Christ was introduced to the churches as the One who Himself is a witness and being in charge of the whole of creation. Now He is portrayed as One seated on the throne in heaven. The picture of a throne is one that gives one confidence and hope. It shows that there is someone who is in charge of the place.

This scenario gives credibility to what Christ claimed to be in the first chapter of this book. He is now seen as One who lives to what He announced Himself to be. The activities that are taking place in heaven, and in particular around the throne, call upon the hearer/reader to behold the One who calls on His followers to enter into a relationship of trust with Him. Having already given the churches their individual messages, these churches are being assisted to move on towards their destination. The throne room can be likened to a field or laboratory where all the learned theory can be put into practice. Just as any theory is not complete before it can be proven by demonstration to be true, so the truthfulness of Christ being who He has made Himself known to be is being publicly displayed. The living creatures around the throne are in support of who Christ / God is.

Glory and honour is being showered upon the sovereign God in chapter 4. It is in this chapter that the seer is called up to heaven to see who the sovereign God is and indeed he sees the sovereign God sitting on a throne (v. 2). In the Book of Revelation, 'throne' represents authority. God is in control of all of earth's affairs – even though God's realm is separated from the earthly. Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run and cause God's people to suffer, they can know that His hand superintends everything for their good and His glory. "All heavenly beings find significance only in their various placement around the central throne. And all earth's inhabitants are appraised on the basis of their attitude to God's claim to rule over them from His heavenly throne" Beale, 1999:320).

Munoa, in his article, "Jesus, the Merkavah, and Martyrdom in Early Christian Tradition", says :

“Revelation’s throne room scene has a setting and structure similar to Dan 7 : 9 – 14. Along with Dan 7, Rev 4 and 5 describe a captive visionary (Rev 1:9) who is given a vision of a heavenly throne-room scene...There is also a threatening situation that must be overcome. In Dan 7 : 11 – 12 it was the beast with the horn. In Rev 4 and 5 it is the absence of someone worthy enough ‘to open the scroll or to look into it’ ( Rev 5 : 1 – 4 )” (2002 : 315 ).

It is here again where the problem is solved by the slain Lamb who is able to open the scroll and look into it because He is worthy. Munoa states that Revelation 5 : 6 is most important for understanding how Dan 7 : 9 – 14 was recast in Revelation. In Daniel the ‘one like a son of man’ is interpreted as the ‘slaughtered Lamb’ in Revelation.

“Revelation ,... teaches that the success of Jesus, the ‘one like a son of man’ (Rev 1 : 13), is due to his suffering death. It is only when the slaughtered Lamb appears ‘standing’ in Revelation that the dilemma of who can take and open the scroll is resolved. In Revelation the means of Jesus’ ultimate conquest of the dragon and the beasts,...is his death...the significance of the Lamb ‘standing’ in Revelation is that the Lamb has been resurrected and raised from the dead” (Munoa, 2002 : 316).

In chapter 4 we can see the throne room as the theological fountainhead and anchor for the whole document i.e. the Book of Revelation. Boring further comments thus:

“John’s description turns immediately to the throne (4:2). In contrast to other apocalyptic literature, he spends not a syllable on curiosity – titillating descriptions of the heavenly journey itself (cf. Paul’s similar reticence in II

Corinthians 12:1-4). All attention is focussed on the throne. Three of every four occurrences of the word 'throne' in the New Testament are found in Revelation (47 of 62)" (Boring, 1989 : 102-103).

The manner in which throne room imagery and vocabulary dominates John's vision, indicates that he is influenced by the stream of tradition that began with Ezekiel's daring vision of the throne – chariot of God (1:4-28), with which Revelation 4:3-8 has many contacts: the description of the throne, the living creatures, the rainbow, the thunder and lightning, the figure on the throne...The repeated references to the throne serve as a reminder that some of John's hearer-readers live in the presence of 'Satan's throne', as he has already mentioned (2:13), the imperial claims of Rome expressed especially in the creator cult" .

God's enthronement implies His supremacy. His rulership is over the world as a whole. The appearance and description of the throne is one way to emphasize God's all-controlling authority (Revelation 5:13; 7:10; 19:4). The descriptions of the one sitting on the throne in verse 3 should be understood as only describing the deep spiritual realities which they represent, for God is indeed invisible. The signs are figures of speech for spiritual facts which are beyond description or explanation. "However, these symbols describe the truth in terms which our frail minds are able to comprehend, but they are only visual metaphors from the language of the earth. These symbols seem to express the truth that the Almighty, omnipresent, sovereign Ruler of the universe is able to overrule the trials and tribulations of His Church here on earth to His ultimate glory" (Robbins, 1975:85)

The placement of "jasper" at the beginning of the list in 4:3 underscores the association of divine glory. God's glory cannot be described adequately in human language. Jasper is linked to glory. The stones used to describe the one who sits on the throne are there to intensify the light around the throne which is surrounded with the unapproachable brightness, hence the glory surrounding God Himself. He is a holy God, as well as a God of justice, judgement and wrath. "The precious

stones together with the rainbow are an incipient hint, not only that this vision eventually will issue into a new creation, but that it already actually portrays the beginning of the new creation...That the new creation is inaugurated with Christ's redemptive work is apparent from 3:14" (Beale, 1999:321).

There are various views offered with regard to the twenty-four elders sitting on the twenty-four thrones. Some commentators suggest that these are a superior order of angels. Others argue that the number twenty-four is to be seen as the sum of the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament who are thus seen to form a unity. Still others derive the elders from the twenty-four star gods of the Babylonian pantheon. Whatever the explanation can be, we can safely suggest that these twenty-four elders are not necessarily the Old Testament patriarchs of the New Testament saints. They should rather be seen as a collective symbolic representative of all the true people of God's i.e. the entire community of the redeemed of God throughout the period of human existence on earth. "But these elders are not human beings who have been exalted to heaven. John clearly distinguishes between the elders seated on the thrones and the believers who stand before the throne (7:19, 13-14)" (Krodel, 1989:155).

It should also be noted here that 'elders' does not necessarily refer to the age of the twenty-four, but rather to their authority. They are sitting around God's throne of authority, to partake in God's rule.

The twenty-four elders possess triumphant authority. The general message of the seven letters is one of promised authority after triumph. This could be the picture of those who join in the heavenly reign after overcoming. The triumphant authority of these twenty-four representatives is signified by their crowns and white garments. The Church of Jesus Christ has been called upon to reign with their Lord through faithfulness to Him. When they fall down before the one sitting on the throne and take off their crowns and lay them before the throne, they are giving glory to the One who sits on the throne. Taking off their crowns signifies

that their triumph is directly dependent on the one who sits on the throne – they owe it all to Him.

Krodel (1989:155) refers to the thrones and golden crowns as indicative of their royal function. But Morris (1988:64) thinks that the ‘stephanos’ was the trophy awarded to the victor at the games. He advocates that a differentiation be made between the royal crown and a victory wreath. The twenty-four elders are wearing the victory wreath rather than a royal crown. It sounds more accurate to look at the crowns as victory wreaths rather than royal crowns in this context.

Their song, which is recorded in verse 11, bears witness to this: “You are worthy our Lord and our God to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things and by your will they were created and have their being”. When they sing of all things being created by Him, they actually include themselves in that number of creation, hence the need to give glory to God. God’s worthiness includes being worthy to be followed faithfully by His subjects. It is usually easy for someone who believes in his/her leader to follow that leader. The Christians of John’s time were being exposed to a situation that would make it possible for them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This would aid them to become faithful witnesses for Him. Those who have already experienced His worth cannot even stop worshiping Him, they do it day and night.

In Revelation chapter 4, proof is given to the Church that what has been promised to it is possible to happen. The readers are given an opportunity to look into heaven to see that the saints who persevered have indeed received their reward of crowns, white clothing and kingship (Beale, 1999:322). Readers can be assured that they too will receive a similar reward if they are faithful to the end. The intensity of this vision is high in that it portrays the reward of saints of all ages, including those who are yet to die.

Beale (1999:323) sums it up nicely when he says:



“As in chapters 1 – 3, the church is pictured in angelic guise to remind its members that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving earth-dwellers, and that they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle to obtain their reward and not to be conformed to their pagan environment. One of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings (as in chapter 1:3, 9) is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity, by modelling its worship and liturgy on the angels’ and the heavenly church’s worship of the exalted Lamb, as vividly portrayed in chapters 4 – 5. This is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven throughout the Apocalypse”.

It can also be observed that the One who sits on the throne is separated from His creation below by something that looked like a sea of glass. According to Beale (1999:327), the sea of glass may refer to God’s holy separateness and splendor in heaven. Caird (1971:65) argues that the sea here refers to cosmic evil:

“The sea of glass is the reservoir of evil, out of which arises the monster (8:1). It is the barrier which the redeemed must pass in a new Exodus, if they are to win access to the promised land (15:2-3). And in the new heaven and earth, there is no more sea (21:1). This last passage reminds us that in John’s cosmology, heaven and earth belong inseparably together...It is significant that, when John comes to speak of the new heaven, and earth, the first thing he has to say is that ‘the sea was no more’. The sea, whether on earth or in heaven, belongs essentially to the old order and within that order it stands for everything that is recalcitrant to the will of God”.

Concerning Caird's argument for cosmic evil of the sea of glass, Beale (1999:327) says that this speculation receives support from the modelling of these chapters on Daniel 7, since the sea as a picture of the beasts' origin is a significant feature in Daniel 7, and the scenes of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1, have integral and literary links, the former usually seen as dependent on the latter. The portrayal of the Red Sea in the Old Testament as the abode of the evil sea monster confirms that this setting is also included in John's thought (Psalm 74:12-15). Caird himself says that the glassy sea stands before the throne as a mute reminder that the whole creation is affected by the taint of evil. He further asks the question: "Is God then to vindicate His holiness by destroying all that He has made?"

Beale reasons that this is the calm brought about by the cosmic "D-Day", wherein the saints' redemption from the devil was accomplished, but his final complete defeat awaits mopping-up operations by the saints and Christ's final coming in judgement at the end of history. The Lamb's 'overcoming' has also paved the way for the saints' 'overcoming' of the beast at the same sea, as pictured in 15:2-4. When John later says that "there is no longer any sea" (21:1), he means that all evil on the earth will not only be defeated, but also eradicated when Christ's kingdom is established consummately on earth.

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"In fact, the sea of glass like crystal before the throne in 4:6 may be an intentional contrast with a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne in 22:1. The sea as the source of satanic evil opposing God's throne has been eliminated and replaced by the river of redemption, which has its source in the throne" (Beale, 1999:328).

The One who sits on the throne is the One who is being glorified because He is the One who makes it possible for the sea of glass to be eliminated in order for His people to come and share the kingship with Him. Without His involvement in their struggle with sin, there is no overcoming.

The appearance of the four living creatures around the throne has different meanings attached to them. The phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου' suggests that the living creatures are within the space taken up by the throne. They are in close proximity to the throne. Morris (1988:88) says that the description of the position occupied by these living creatures "indicates special closeness to God, perhaps also a place of honour and their conformity to the divine will. They are also around the throne , a fairly common description which signifies that they attend on God".

These four living creatures are there for a special purpose. They symbolize the fullness of life and power inherent in the divine nature. Each of the creatures mentioned is regarded as the head of its species. These creatures are there to worship, do service, and instruct John. In other words, the whole of creation is represented in the giving of glory to the Almighty God in the throne room.

Robbins (1975:88) says:

"It seems best to interpret this exotic imagery in accordance with the symbolical use of numbers to mean the fullness of inanimate creation in its energy and variety...The whole chapter relates to the majesty of God, so it seems more natural to suppose that the figure is symbolic of all creation fulfilling its proper office; waiting upon God, fulfilling His will and setting forth His glory. It seems to be a picture of all nature praising God (Psalm19:1-2; 103:22; 145:10; 148). The language used to describe things and movements in this passage is not intended for us to make a mental picture...the passage is thus a personification of the works of God as Creator, Preserver and Mover. It shows forth the imminent power and wisdom of God, so active in all created nature offering to God the homage of nature as its Maker, and Preserver, its Source and its End".

From the description of the four living creatures, it can be suggested that John's images are meant to be heard rather than imagined as pictures. The hearer would understand that nothing is hidden from these all-seeing, omniscient creatures, whose attention is focussed on God, their Master. Their function is to give glory to God by leading the heavenly worship continually without sleeping. They are a symbol of harmony and worship yet to come, when God shall dwell among His people (21:1 – 22:5).

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders have a continuous and permanent job to perform, which is to worship the One who sits on the throne. Nakhro, in the article "The Meaning of Worship according to the Book of Revelation", says : "Worship in the Book of Revelation... is the proper response of created beings to God...Adoration of God's unique being and divine character is seen in the worship given by the four living creatures in heaven, as recorded in 4 : 8 : 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was, and who is and who is to come'" ( 2001 : 75 ).

Nakhro discusses the subject of worship in the Book of Revelation, particularly in chapters 4 and 5, in detail. We shall now look at these details as outlined by Nakhro :

Worship is to be understood as an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. Worship is not passive, but it is participative. It is not a mood but a response, not a feeling but a declaration.

1. Worship as adoration of God's being.

God is worshiped as the Holy One. Here holiness refers to God's attribute of moral purity.

The four living creatures acknowledge God's sovereignty, as they refer to Him as "the Lord God, the Almighty".

God is worshiped by the four living creatures as eternal. This is confirmed by the phrase "who was and who is and who is to come".

2. Worship as Declaration of the Lamb's Worthiness

Worship as declaration is evident in the usage of the word ‘λεγω’ (“say”), which occurs often in the context of worship. Its frequent occurrence ( more than ninety times ) shows that it is the theme of the Book of Revelation. He is uniquely qualified for a special position and task. His worth is merit based.

### 3. Worship as Celebration of God’s Glory

It is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and promises to do.

### 4. Worship as Submission to God’s Authority

The verb ‘ προσκυνεω ’ which occurs twenty-four times in the Apocalypse refers to the showing of respect toward a person of higher rank by kissing. It is the inward attitude of one’s submission and respect to God. This is demonstrated by the laying down of the crowns before the One who sits on the throne, as the rightful King.

### 5. Worship as Fear of God

True worship is reverential fear that discourages disobedience and encourages obedience to God. To fear God is to turn away from evil. The word ‘fear’ can sometimes stand as a synonym for ‘worship’. Those who have turned from idolatry to the worship of Yahweh are called ‘God-fearers’ The word ‘ φοβεομαι ’ in worship contexts in Revelation is never used in the sense of dreadful fear; it is always used in the sense of reverential fear of God.

### 6. Worship as Service to God

The idea of worship as service is conveyed by the word ‘ λατρευω ’. Even though it only appears twice in the Apocalypse, its many occurrences in other New Testament passages is a sign of its significance.

In another article, “The Manner of Worship according to the Book of Revelation”, Nakhro outlines five reasons for worship :

- ❖ Worship for God’s creative works: The twenty-four elders in heaven ascribe worthiness to God because He created everything there.
- ❖ Worship for Christ’s redemptive work : He provides redemption for people from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation.

- ❖ Worship for God's realized design : When the tribulation will end, the heavenly hosts will shout in praise to God for His ruling over what is rightfully His.
- ❖ Worship for God's righteous judgement : God's true and righteous judgement against the wicked is associated with His holy character.
- ❖ Worship for consummated union : Another reason for worship in heaven is the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, the church.

### **3.3.4 THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE GLORIFIED BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEGUN TO EXECUTE THEIR SOVEREIGNTY – JUDGEMENT AND REDEMPTION**

The scene in chapter 4 continues uninterrupted into chapter 5:1. Chapter 5:1 depicts the picture of One sitting on the throne with a book or scroll in his hand. The truth declared in this vision is an addition to the truth revealed in the previous chapter. Chapter 4 and 5 should therefore be read together in order to have a better understanding of the message they carry. They demonstrate the inseparable unity between the Father and the Son. Both creation and the church are seen to be giving glory to both the Father and the Son in an equal manner. Aune (1997:332) says: " Revelation 5 is often interpreted as depicting the enthronement of the Lamb, based on the assumption that the text reflects the pattern of ancient enthronement ritual". This view has not gone unchallenged.

Other commentators like Van Unnik have argued against it. Aune also supports the argument that Revelation 5 should be construed as the investiture of the Lamb. He argues that it is based on an analysis of the text of Revelation 5 as an adaptation of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1-2 and by analogy with the investiture features of other visions of the heavenly court, particularly I Kings 22 and Isaiah

6. According to him, the term ‘investiture’ is a more appropriate designation for the narrative than ‘enthronement’, since ‘investiture’ refers to the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds informally. Aune concludes his argument thus:

“The narrative in Revelation 5 centers on the recognition of the Lamb as the only one worthy to open the scroll sealed with seven seals. The focus of the action is the taking or reception of the scroll from the right hand of God by the Lamb, for it is this act that is immediately celebrated by the two narrative hymns in 5:9-10 and 5:11-12, followed by the doxology sung by all the living beings of the cosmos in 5:13-14. It is clear that the act of ‘taking’ or ‘reception’ (ειληφεν) of the scroll from the right hand of God (v. 7) signifies the ‘reception’ (λαβειν) of the honours mentioned in verse 12: power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and promise...It is precisely the Lamb’s reception of this scroll that symbolizes his investiture”.

The idea of recognizing Jesus Christ as the Lamb appears for the first time in Revelation 5. “The Lamb is the key figure in the visions of Revelation. His first appearance is here, approaching the heavenly throne where He is worshipped by the living creatures and the elders” (Barker, 2000:129). Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist in His early days of ministry as the Lamb when he says of Him: “...Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

It is this Lamb that is also referred to as the servant. Isaiah refers to Him as the suffering servant at the hands of His tormentors (Isaiah 53:11-12). Peter, addressing the crowd in the temple after healing the lame man said “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus...” (Acts 3:13). Philippians 2 also depicts Jesus as the servant.

In Revelation 5, the Lamb-Servant has been slain and taken up to heaven. He approaches the throne and takes the book with seven seals. This chapter describes the moment when the Lamb entered heaven and became God and King. Barker (2000:141-142), in comparing Philippians and Revelation says: “In Philippians 2, the servant is exalted after his death and receives the name. Then he is worshipped as the Lord. In Revelation, this worship of the Servant or Lamb as the Lord is confirmed by the pattern of the doxologies.

When the elders around the throne worship Him who lives forever and ever, they sing: ‘Worthy art Thou our Lord and God to receive glory and honour and power, for Thou didst create all things and by Thy will they existed and were created’ (4:11). When the host of heaven worships the Lamb, they use similar words:

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing’ (5:12). When the whole creation joins in worship, they say: ‘To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever’ (5:13). The two, now one, are worshipped”.

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The question asked by a mighty angel: “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” (5:2) is of great significance to what will happen afterwards. All other actions that take place afterwards depend on the correct answer to this question. We need to understand what the seer means by being ‘worthy’. Malina and Pilch (2000:88) comment thus:

“ ‘Worthiness’ is not a moral reference but a social reference. To be ‘worthy’ means to have the appropriate status, to be recognized as appropriately honourable due to ascribed status. Thus only persons who because of their social standing clearly indicate that they tower above ordinary mortals are ‘worthy’ to receive revelations”. The



state of worthiness is one that says that someone deserves something or to do something.

Using Malina and Pilch's description of 'worthiness', we can understand that the question posed by the angel was expecting an answer that would demonstrate that that person was above all others in their social standing. Humanly speaking, this is very difficult, to find a human being who outclasses others in their social standing. Human beings are generally found within the same social category. It is therefore not surprising to see the seer weeping because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

The required standard was too high, hence the words: "But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it" (5:3). "John is in despair particularly because it appears to him that the book's seals cannot be broken, and that God's glorious plan will not be carried out. This grief must have been intensified by his momentary initial impression that even the Saviour, Jesus Christ, is not worthy to unlock the book's secrets and power" (Beale, 1999:348).

Among all of God's creation, no one was found who could satisfy the qualities to do this very important job, even though the hand of the One sitting on the throne was extended in the act of offering the scroll to anyone who should be able to open and read it. Someone with authority to take possession of the book was sought. In the absence of any, man's future would therefore remain a closed book.

The scroll itself was not usual, hence and unusual person required to open it. Usual papyrus scrolls were inscribed on one side only. But this special scroll was written or inscribed on both sides.

"Such documents were used for marriage contracts, purchases, loans and similar social contracts. However, this kind of doubly written document was not used for testaments, which were supposed to be secret and therefore sealed with seven seals by seven witnesses...It was more

difficult to write on the back side of the papyrus leaf, because its fibers run vertically. That this scroll had writing on both sides may point to the completeness of God's plan or to His acts of judgement which are the reverse side of His acts of salvation" (Krodel, 1989:161-162).

This is another possible demonstration of the power of God, that nothing is impossible with Him. It may be difficult for man to write on both sides of a papyrus leaf, but not difficult for our God. Once more He demonstrates His superiority over nature, for which He needs to be glorified.

The seer gets a comfort from one of the elders concerning his weeping over the seemingly dark future of the human race, who says: "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:5). "ἀνοιξαι" = 'to open', is an infinitive expressing purpose or result. "νικῶ" = 'overcome', serves as an introduction to the Old Testament titles and brings out their conquering significance. The answer suggests that only one with 'lion-like' strength is able to break the seals of the scroll.



The right to open the scroll is made to turn upon Jesus' victory over sin, death and the grave. "The powers of darkness, which have held sway over this world age, have been defeated. In Christ's death and resurrection, the ultimate triumph of good over evil was potentially achieved. He conquered yet the victory is a continuing process" (Robbins, 1975:94). Only Jesus Christ was found to be able to have authority to take possession of the book and open the seals. His task was greater than just opening the seals to reveal God's purpose, but also to carry out God's will after revealing the purpose. Jesus, or the one opening the seals, was to reveal and put into effect God's plan of history. No wonder, no one could be found who was suitable to do this in heaven or on earth or under the earth except the Root of David.

The irony of this vision is that instead of the seer seeing a lion when he looks, he sees an lamb looking as if it had been slain – a dramatic symbolism indeed. The introduction of the Victor as the Lion seems to contradict the description of what John sees – a lamb slain. This raises the question “How does a slain lamb stand?”. Perhaps if we employ Robbins’ view we may find the answer.

“This title Lamb, for Christ explains nothing; it merely states something. It symbolizes His boundless love which prompts His self-sacrifice to the uttermost. The living Lord is also the slain Lamb. He has suffered death to redeem the people of God. Men look to strength and power to win victories, but it is the self-sacrificing love that wins” (1975:94). Christ the victim is now the Conqueror.

The Lamb is further said to have horns. Horns are an emblem of power throughout the Bible (Deuteronomy 33:17; I Samuel 2:1; Psalm 89:24; etc.). The fact that the horns are even seven means that He is the All-powerful One. He is the conquering messianic Lamb. Christ continues to exist as the slain Lamb. This is strengthened by the participle “ἔσφαγμενον” = ‘having been slain’. He continues to be slain even though resurrected, and alive forever. His conquering is one that came through suffering. This paradox of conquering through suffering needs to be understood. Christ willingly submitted to the unjust penalty of death which was imposed on Him ultimately by the devil. His overcoming began even before the resurrection. While He was on earth going through the suffering, He was already in charge of His kingdom. That is why His followers overcome in the midst of suffering and persecution by persevering in faith here on earth, and hence already participating in Christ’s kingdom (1:9; 2:7).

“The Lamb represents in His person the solution to the two fundamental problems of human existence – the problem of sin in the form of idolatry and the problem of power. By His sacrificial death, He brought about God’s solution to both”

(Krodel, 1989:164-165). With regards to the seven eyes which the Lamb has, Robbins says that they are symbolic of the Lamb's all-inclusive and searching vision from which nothing can be hid. "...The Lamb possesses fullness of power, omniscience and the Holy Spirit. His power is available to the believer through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings the living Christ to the believer. (1975:95).

Bauckham comments on this phrase from another angle and he says: "It is important to realize that the eyes of Yahweh in the Old Testament indicate not only His ability to see what happens throughout the world, but also His ability to act powerfully wherever He chooses (1993:164).

Verse 7 now introduces us to the Messiah-Conqueror's act. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne (5:7). His action is a public declaration of His divine authority to possess the scroll, taking it from the One who sits on the throne, as confirmation of Jesus' own words when He said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to Me" (Matthew 28:18). Only Jesus qualified to take the scroll and open its seals and only the Lamb wants to take it from the right hand of him who sits on the throne. The divine government of the universe and the realm of heaven, have been given to the Lion-Lamb, who reveals God and His will. Kiddle (1963:102) sees the action of the Lion-Lamb as a "thought impossible to visualize, but magnificent as a symbol of death of Christ and its results. In his own way, John is expressing the perfect harmony between the will of God and the will of Christ...". And we can say that in this act, God's will becomes Christ's will. Christ's actions reflect God's will and purpose. The Father and the Son are seen as one.

The proximity of the Lamb to the throne is not the important issue here, but rather His action is. Beasley-Murray (1983:126) sums it up this way:

"The important feature on any understanding of the picture is that the Lamb 'took' the scroll. This is what causes the acclamation of the living creatures and elders in verse 8 ff. The Christ is authorized to execute the judgements that will

conclude this age (cf. 6:1 – 8:5) and to initiate the kingdom which belongs to the new age (19:11 – 22:5). This element of the vision represents the exaltation of Christ...”.

Christ came before God’s throne to receive authority to reign after the scroll has been unsealed.

The contents of verse 7 are largely a fulfillment of Daniel 7 : 13. As already mentioned that the book of Daniel is the main contributor of the contents of chapters 4 and 5.

According to Barker (2000:144) : “The Lamb takes the book with the seven seals and immediately the elders and the creatures worship him. Taking the book must be the moment when he becomes divine”. This statement suggests that the Lamb/Christ was not divine all this time, He only attains His divinity at the moment of acceptance of the book with seven seals. This is inconsistent with the Scriptures. Barker’s own cross reference of Isaiah 9 : 6 does not support her standpoint. Christ’s divinity does not at all start at this moment. It must have started in eternity. Barker’s statement also suggests to the reader that when Christ was incarnated He lost His divinity, which He now regains at the acceptance of the book with seven seals. This is not true because Christ was fully divine during His earthly life. It is rather because of His divinity that He is capable of taking the book with the seven seals from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

Verse 8 gives a picture of the situation after the Lamb had taken the scroll. In chapter 3 : 21 Christ says : “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne”. Chapter 5 : 8 seems to be the moment at which Christ takes His place on the throne. It seems logical that after the Lamb took the scroll from the One sitting on the throne, He took His place on the throne next to the Father. Beasley-Murray ( 1983 : 126 ) says : “The enthronement ceremony , therefore, now reaches its climax. Having taken His place on the throne with God, the Lamb receives the worship of heaven”. “ The Lamb’s action evokes an outburst of praise and worship. Though the

seven-sealed book is not yet opened the hosts of heaven discern that it will be and in anticipation break into a mighty chorus of praise” (Morris, 1988 : 96).

By falling down before the Lamb, the four creatures and the twenty-four elders were rendering Him the same adoration that they gave to God in chapter 4.

The appearance of the prayers of the saints before the Lamb shows that though the saints on earth are despised and counted as of no importance, in heaven their prayers are precious, and are brought into the very presence of God. They are so precious to God that they are offered to Him on golden bowls. They are so important to God that among all of creation He has chosen the saints to be His witnesses in this world, only man can have a living relationship with God.

The response of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in song is a sign of celebration of the completion of the emancipation of God’s creation from sin. All these years the whole of creation was anxiously waiting to be freed from bondage. That is why they sing a new song. It is a new song because they sing it in a new environment under a new dispensation, it suits only this occasion they are celebrating. The song is meant to glorify Christ because of His well deserved position He has now assumed. It is raised in thanksgiving for the accomplishment of the promised redemption and the advent of the new age.

The phrase “ You are worthy”, used for Christ in 5 : 9 is identical to the one used for God the Father in 4 : 11. Speaking of Christ, Beasley-Murray says that:

“He who has taken the scroll and undertakes to put into effect its decrees carries out the divine function of judgement and sovereignty, and is to be acknowledged as divine. Inasmuch as the exaltation of the Lamb initiates the new age, the privilege of being kingly priests for God belongs to the emancipated people even now. Nevertheless, as the revelation of Christ in His kingdom takes place at His parousia, so the full exercise of their royal priesthood

belongs to the time of His triumph. Hence the song ends with the words, ‘they shall reign on earth’” ( 1983 : 127 – 128 ).

About the latter phrase Caird comments thus:

“ In the closing phrase of the song some MSS have a present tense instead of a future : ‘they reign on earth’. Whichever reading we adopt, the sense will remain unchanged. For if we accept the future, it must be future immediately consequent on the act of ransom and appointment as kings and priests ...Any suggestion that the reign of Christians belongs to the future is, however, besides the point, since we have now been twice told that they are already kings and priests” ( 1971 : 77 ).

The living creatures play a significant role before the Father who is sitting on the throne. The role that they play in heaven is supposed to be played here on earth as well. Kistemaker ( 2001 : 208 ) citing the response of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders says : “ And when He takes the scroll and presumably breaks the seals to open it, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders as representatives of the angel world and redeemed humanity fall in worship before the Lamb”. He goes on to say that although the text leaves out the verb “to worship”, the word is implied as is evident from verse 14 where it is used in combination with “to fall”.

Kistemaker agrees that the Lamb is being exalted because of His redemptive work on the cross, but argues against the proposed reading of “you bought us for God” in the place of “you bought men for God”. He cites that this reading would exclude the four living creatures because they were not redeemed. But the four living creatures are part of the number that falls down and worship the Lamb. The song they sing shows that “the Lamb is worthy because of His willing sacrifice of His own life on the cross. His death was not a random casualty or an unavoidable tragedy. He voluntarily gave up His life to pay the penalty for sin...Christ Jesus

bought His people with His blood shed at Calvary. He did not pay Satan to redeem them, but with His death on the cross He satisfied the justice of God. He paid the penalty that God had placed on Adam and Eve and their descendents ( Genesis 2 : 17) and set them free”.

The second group that sings praises to the Lamb are the angels. Their song differs from the first one in that they were not redeemed by the Lamb. They took part in His salvific work in that they sent messages to the people from God and always rejoiced when sinners repented on earth, as well as serving the saints. They therefore sing to the Lamb and give Him glory. The angels give seven attributes to the Lamb to express their wonder.

The sevenfold blessing is probably indicative of its complete and perfect nature. Christ has won this honour of such praise, because His self-giving self-sacrifice is at the very center of the being of God. Here again, like in the first song in vv 9 – 10 “...so there also a hymn further interprets the slain but risen Lamb’s reception of the book to mean that his death and, implicitly, His resurrection made Him worthy to receive honour and glory” (Beale, 1999 : 364).

After the second group sung its song of praise to the Lamb, the third group sums up the rest of God’s created beings. God the Father is mentioned as being glorified together with Christ to highlight that the Son is in the same divine position as the Father. “ The triumph of the Lamb reaches its fitting climax in the acknowledgement of His worth by every creature in the universe, not only by the ‘living’ but also by those in the realm of the dead. Here, however, the worship is offered conjointly to God and to the Lamb...In vision the end of history has been reached, the doxology anticipates the rule and the glory of God and the Lamb in the city that descends from heaven ( see 21 : 22ff; 22 : 1 – 5 ). Indirectly the song throws light on the nature of the Messiah who initiates the new order” (Beasley-Murray, 1983 : 128).



This discussion can be summed up by saying that the overwhelming chorus of all these voices in praise to God and the Lamb, defies human imagination. All intelligent beings in the entire universe sing praises to ‘the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb’, a phrase showing respect to the deity. The final word is with the four living creatures, as they utter their ‘Amen’ to the song of adoration given by the whole universe. As representatives of creation, in their ceaseless adoration of God, they fittingly conclude the worship offered to God and the Lamb by the whole creation at the close of history for it is them who started the worship in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 and 5 proclaim in vivid and confident terms that the world’s destiny is not under the control of some blind fate. We are all in the hands of a loving Father and a Saviour who died for us.

### **3.4 THE JUDGEMENTS OF THE SEVEN SEALS**

Reading through chapter 6 : 1 – 17 sets before one a dim picture of the future of mankind. One is faced with a picture of war, conquest, famine and pestilence. Such a picture is not unique to the Book of Revelation, it is also found in other apocalypses. There are many different views on when these events are taking place. Some commentators like Caird suggest that these would take place in sequential order. Kistemaker advocates for a simultaneous time element in the unit of the four horses. He argues that conquest, famine and death are concurrent events in any given age or era ( 2001 : 220).

In world history, the church occupies a central position and its people repeatedly suffer the brunt of injury and injustice for their witness to the Lamb. The opening of the seals implies that the saints on earth suffer from the anti-Christian forces until the day of Christ’s return. This is the time when the Lamb inaugurates God’s plan and reveals what must take place in the times before and at His coming.

Beasley-Murray (1983 : 129 ) says the following with reference to the seals : “The opening of the seven seals of the scroll by the Lamb provides the occasion for

John's first presentation of the messianic judgements, which are so characteristic a feature of the Revelation. Despite the concentration of attention on the judgements, to which the opening of each scroll leads, it is not to be doubted that John steadily bears in mind the nature of the book to which the seals are affixed, namely God's disposition of the kingdom of man. The judgements of the seals are the precursors of the salvation of the world". The New Testament parallel of Revelation 6 is Mark 13 : 7ff, Charles has presented it as follows :

### **Mark 13 : 7ff; 24f**

1. Wars
2. International strife
3. Earthquakes
4. Famines
5. Persecutions
6. Eclipses of the sun and moon, falling of the stars, shaking of the powers of heaven

### **Revelation 6**

1. Wars
2. International strife
3. Famines
4. Pestilence (=Death and Hades)
5. Persecutions
6. Earthquakes, eclipse of the sun, ensanguining of the moon, falling of the stars, men calling on the rocks to fall on them, shaking of the powers of heaven.

"Revelation 6 : 1 – 8 is intended to show that Christ rules over such an apparently chaotic world and suffering does not occur indiscriminately or by chance. This section reveals, in fact, that destructive events are brought about by Christ for both redemptive and judicial purposes. It is Christ sitting on His throne who controls all the trials and persecution of the church...the opening of the seals begins the actual revelation and execution of the contents of the scroll of chapter 5" Beale ( 1999 :370 ).This is what led to Christ being glorified in chapter 5 as He approached the throne and took the scroll from the One who sat on the throne. This moment was anticipated by those who watched Him take the scroll.

Robbins calls the events of Revelation 6 historical-prophetic. His reasoning in this is that they happened in history and will happen any time when circumstances are the same or similar (1975 : 101). To Robbins the breaking of each seal is revealing the means of divine judgement. This is the way by which God deals with rebellion against His purpose ( cf Leviticus 26 : 18, 21, 24, 28 ). What we notice though, is that the message written in the scroll is not read out, yet the events take place with the breaking of the seals. This suggests that the contents of the scroll, instead of being read, it gets acted on.

### 3.4.1 THE FIRST FOUR SEALS

The background of Revelation 6 is traced back to the prophet Zechariah 1 : 7 – 17 and 6 : 1 – 8. The symbolism used here is modified from the Old Testament counterpart in order to give a radically new meaning to it. Whereas in Zechariah the horses go out to survey, in Revelation the horses go out to execute judgement. The number of the horses remains the same (four) in both instances.

Some scholars think that Revelation 6 : 1 – 8 describes the operation of the destructive forces that were unleashed immediately in the world as a result of Christ's victorious suffering at the cross, His resurrection, and His ascent to a position of rule unconditionally. On the basis of this thinking, we may assume that judgement has already started being executed by the Lamb, therefore we are already going through that period presently, perhaps to a lesser degree (some may not have been executed yet).

One of Beale's thought provoking statements is when he says that the horsemen represent sufferings that are decreed to fall on all of Christ's followers (1999 : 371). This suggests that such sufferings are decreed by God. This does not agree with our understanding of judgement. Would God join His opponents to inflict suffering on His followers? Is He not there to help them persevere in the sufferings imposed on them by His opponents?

There is agreement in the understanding that the first four seals belong together. They form a unit that features the symbolical figures of four coloured horses. Their belonging together is also confirmed by the fact that they have the same structure. In each of the visions, the opening of the seal is followed by the command “come”. After the command, a horse with a particular colour appears. The colours of the horses correspond with the nature of the disasters which their riders bring. In ancient times, horses were primarily used for the purposes of war. The first and second riders were given a bow and a sword respectively. In both cases the idea of conquering is ascertained. The bow would bring instant conquest whereas causing men to slay one another brings confusion which also leads to conquest. The third and fourth horses which are black and pale appear each at its due time when the command to “come” has been announced after the opening of the third and fourth seals.

The scales in the hands of the third rider refer to the scarcity of food and the expense it would cost. But God would limit the disastrous effects of the food shortage for He commands that the oil and the wine should not be damaged. God is gracious even in judgement. The fourth rider is death followed by hades. God allows large numbers of men to be killed through wars, famine and plagues and wild beasts as a form of judgement. Yet God restricts this only to a quarter of the earth's population. This is a warning of God's forthcoming judgement.

### **3.4.2 THE FIFTH SEAL**

The first four seals have had to do with happenings here on earth. Now we are transported to heaven. The opening of the fifth seal depicts the reaction of deceased and glorified saints to the trials inflicted on them by their persecutors. There is no angelic decree of suffering from the throne. The seal differs from the

first four in that it only applies to those who are followers of the Lamb, non-believers are excluded. They appeal to God to demonstrate justice by judging their persecutors. They want Him to reverse the judgement of their oppressors. These oppressors of God's people are called the "inhabitants of the world" i.e. unregenerate mankind as a whole. The martyrs are said to be under the alter in heaven. Their souls may be under the altar because they died sacrificial deaths ( cf Phil. 2 :7 – 8 : 5; 2 Tim. 4 : 6 ). This seems to be a place of safety – meaning that the Lambs followers, even though they may be killed by their oppressors they are safe in God's hands. They address God as “ ο δεσποτης”. It is a word used for a master of slaves and it thus emphasizes God's complete power. They know that He is able to avenge for them, and He will do it. But God is also “ ο αγιος και αληθινος” (holy and true). “ The expression stresses God's goodness and reliability” (Morris, 1988 : 106).

It would sound like the martyrs are not asking God to administer indiscriminate revenge, but that justice should be done by Him since He is the God of justice. They are asking for the vindication of the right and truth of the cause for which they gave their lives. The martyrs request should not be viewed as an non-Christian spirit of wanting revenge on their oppressors, but that they recognize God's power to act against His enemy, because their death was not for their own sake but for Christ's sake – their faith in Christ. If God did not act against sin He would be regarded as an unjust God.

The reply given to the martyrs that they should “wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed”, suggests that their request has been granted or that it is in line with God's will. The revenge will be executed at the right time appointed by God. This calls for patience on the side of the martyrs to give God the space to work out His plan. God works according to His plan and nothing will hasten Him or delay it.

It is possible that only literal martyrs are in mind, but more likely ‘slain’ is metaphorical and those spoken of represent the broader category of all saints who suffer for the sake of their faith (so 13 : 15 – 18 and perhaps 18 : 24; 20 : 4). This all-inclusive identification is clear from the use of ‘overcomers’ in chapters 2 – 3 and throughout the book not only those who undergo execution for their faith but primarily of believers who conquer temptation to sin and compromise in the face of various kinds of sufferings.

Beale’s argument of ‘overcomers’ being an all-inclusive term is correct. But the reference to “ the souls of those who had been slain” should be allowed to speak for that specific group of ‘overcomers’ since they went through a different kind of witnessing than the other ‘overcomers’ who did not have to be slain. If the ‘slain’ refers to all ‘overcomers’, then we have a problem to explain “until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed”.

Those who are slain may be understood differently by different interpreters. Kistemaker comments in this way :

“...the phrases ‘fellow servants and brothers about to be killed’ can be interpreted that not all Christians meet a violent death in time of persecution. All true believers are God’s servants and endure hardships. John, exiled to the island Patmos but not killed, is called a ‘servant’ (1 : 1). Many Christians suffer in one form or another for their faithfulness to God and His Word, while others pay the ultimate price of being killed” (2001 : 235). This argument is more in line with the message of the opening of the fifth seal.

It is important that this picture of martyrs be painted at this stage of the vision story. This would serve as an encouragement to the living saints not to shy away from true witnessing for fear of being killed by their opponents. Here the picture

given is that of Christians who were so faithful to their calling that they allowed themselves to even die for this faith. Their true witnessing has caused them to be eternally with their Master Jesus Christ in whom they have believed. This would be a recommendation for them to do the same.

### 3.4.3 THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH SEALS

“The vision of the sixth seal describes the time immediately before the Day of the Lord, and the great detail added to the time of the sixth seal in chapter 7 shows that the writer believed himself to be living in that time” (Barker, 2000 : 156). This view is taken by other commentators like Beale and others. It is regarded as being apocalyptic in nature. “In contrast to the tribulations and persecutions of the first five seals, these cosmic cataclysmic upheavals, initiated by the opening of the sixth seal, are wholly future” (Krodel, 1989 : 179).

Malina and Pilch see the sixth seal as one that “unleashes upheaval in the environmental appurtenances of human existence : the sky and the land” (2000 : 102). Beale says this about the sixth seal : “...the calamitous scene in 6 : 12 – 17 assumes that the persecution of all Christians who are to be persecuted has run its course and all that remains is to execute final punishment on the persecutors...” (1999 : 396). There is general agreement that the events of the sixth seal are directed toward the unregenerate people of this world, who will have nothing to do with the living God.

In this vision, the One sitting on the throne uses the forces of nature as instruments of executing judgement upon the inhabitants of the earth. After the opening of the sixth seal, there is a great earthquake, in which every mountain and island is removed from its place, the darkening of the sun, reddening of the moon, falling of stars, vanishing of the sky, and terror of men at the arrival of the great day of

wrath. Beasley-Murray proposes that the events of this vision should not be taken literally. There is a debate whether the description is literal or figurative.

Beale puts his view this way : If it is literal, then the scene is that of final dissolution of the cosmos, though some taking a literal view see the breakup of the earth as part of a long-drawn-out tribulation period...But if the scene is figurative, it could denote some temporal judgement or the last judgement. The likelihood is that the portrayal is figurative..." (1999 : 397). It is more fitting to take it as figurative because this vision depicts figuratively the inauguration of the last judgement.

Beasley-Murray traces the origin of this passage to the following Old Testament : Isaiah 2 : 10ff, 13 : 9ff, 34 : 4 ; Ezekiel 32 : 7f; Hosea 10 : 8; Joel 2 : 10,30f. But as already observed earlier in this chapter, the events of the Book of Revelation are not new to the readers. They have already been taught by Jesus during His earthly ministry in Mark 13 and its parallels. It was therefore a restatement of beliefs.

The darkening of the sun and moon signifies the stopping of cosmic time and the taking over of eternity. According to Genesis 1 : 2, darkness ruled in the beginning of creation. In verse 7 we see the seven different categories of men, ranging from the highest to the lowest ranking. All these are faced with the wrath of God because they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. They wish to run away from the face of the One sitting on the throne but they can't. They do not show any signs of repentance from their sinful ways. Verse 17 sums it up well when it says : "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?". On that day, there is no distinction between king and slave, rich or poor. These distinctions have become meaningless. None of these people can withstand the power of the One sitting on the throne and of the Lamb. Only the innumerable multitude of 7 : 9 who follow the Lamb. God is in full control of all His creation.

The seventh seal is the last one to be opened. Its opening results in "silence in heaven for about half an hour". According to Robbins, "Half an hour" may refer to



a very short period of time as an hour is a Hebrew idiom for a brief period of time. It is an anti-climatic silence. Instead of the expected culmination of all that had gone before, there is no action at all. Clearly, it was a solemn and impressive moment. Morris suggests that this silence could be connected with the offering of the prayers of the saints. The saints may appear to be insignificant before man but they are precious to God. “In the Old Testament, silence is enjoined as awe of the Lord (Habbakuk 2:20), especially at His forthcoming judgement (Zechariah 2:12) on the day of the Lord (Zephaniah 1:7)” (Giblin, 1991:93).

The sixth and the seventh seals have a common purpose, viz. the portrayal of God judging unbelievers. The seventh seal is a continuation of the sixth seal. Kistemaker, says that the silence in heaven is an awed hush while God executes justice. He regards the half an hour as the time for the outpouring of God’s wrath. The time references that John mentions have little relevance in Revelation, because not chronological time but the abiding principle of time is significant (2001:266). Another view is that the sixth and seventh seals seek to answer the request of the saints for judgement against their persecutors. They are therefore seen as the logical climax of the seal series. The final judgement is therefore the main point in 6:1 – 8:1. Caird regards the silence in heaven as a special interval in order for the prayers of the people of God to be heard i.e. both the martyrs and all other followers of the Lamb. Beale comments that the silence in Revelation 8:1 cannot be taken as ‘emptiness’, but that it should be taken to represent judgement. He says that some commentators agree but see this silence as the silent calm before yet more tribulations before the parousia. But this is unlikely.

“Half an hour” could not so much refer to the precise temporal duration of the silence as it would figuratively emphasize the suddenness and unexpectedness of a decreed judgement and the crisis that it introduces. Silence underscores the gravity of the crisis. Even though the silence takes place in heaven, the judgement it ushers in takes place on earth.

Beale further argues that this silence is indicative of the horror of divine judgement, which has such an awesome effect that no human is able to verbalize response. The seal should not be seen or viewed as ‘empty’ and needing to be filled with content from the trumpet. Silence has no connotation of emptiness at all, even in the relevant Old Testament texts. One point that needs to be noted is that this last judgement seal takes place in God’s heavenly temple. The silence itself occurs in heaven and not on earth. The metaphorical point is that the origin of the divine judgement is the heavenly temple. But in Habbakuk 2:20 and Zechariah 2:13, the silence is focussed on those on earth, as they stand before the Lord who is in the heavenly temple.

According to Krodel, God reveals His glory not only with lightning, thunder and earthquake, but also in “a still, small voice”. Thus the silence may indicate that nothing can supercede the glory of the last vision. It is also a dramatic contrast to the events of the sixth seal. After the opening of the seventh seal, it means that the scroll in the hands of the Lamb has now been fully opened and its contents revealed, yet these contents are never read. Since there are other events that take place after all the seals have been opened, it is probable that they are only an introduction of what is still to come.

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Krodel’s model of the seals is as follows:

<b>Seals (6: 1 – 7)</b>	<b>Synoptic Apocalypse</b>
1. White horse, bow, crown, conquest	False Christ(s): “Many will come in my name”, Mark 13:6; wars, Mark 13:7
2.Red horse Sword	Nation against nation, Mark 13:8
3.Black horse Scales (famine)	Famines, Mark 13:8
4.Pale horse Death and Hades	Pestilence, Luke 21:11

5.Martyrs	Persecution and witness, Mark 13: 9 -
13 “How long?”	20; shorten the days
6.Great earthquake	Great earthquakes, Luke 21:11 (Mark 13:8)
Sun, moon, stars	Sun, moon, stars, Mark 13:24 - 25
Like “the fig tree”	Fig tree, Mark 13:28 – 29
“The sky (heaven) vanished”	“The powers in the heavens will be shaken”, Mark 13:25

#### 3.4.4 THE INTERLUDE

Having had a series of six seals being opened one after another, without any recorded interruption, one expects to have the seventh seal opened after the sixth seal was opened. “But John is more creative with his interpretation of apocalyptic traditions. Instead of the anticipated breaking of the seventh seal, his vision lets us see the sealing of God’s servants.” (Boring, 1989:127). In simple terms, we can say that what follows the sixth seal was unexpected in the church – not as a substitute for the act of God, but itself a dimension of God’s saving activity. This is a device that John uses to portray the servants of God as being under special care. The interlude seeks to answer the question which was asked in 6:17: “Who can stand before the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb and survive” the great day of their wrath? When put differently, the question seeks to know how will the people of God fare on that day and before the great day”. John’s “...concern at this point is to show that the followers of the Lamb have no cause to be in terror of the great day of wrath, any more than they have of the judgements which precede it” (Beasley-Murray, 1983:139).

This question is answered in detail in two parts. The first part (7:1-8) deals with the angels’ preventing the evil forces from commencing their destructive activity on earth until believers are given spiritual protection against losing their faith. The second part (7:9-17) deals with the manifestation of the redemption of

multitudes by protecting them through a purifying tribulation by the Father and the Son.

According to 7:14 and 9:4, it is promised that the followers of the Lamb, even though they may be persecuted or even martyred, shall be protected against the plagues that shall befall the inhabitants of the earth, because they have been redeemed with the blood of the Lamb. The church's tribulations and martyrdoms yet to come do not herald the church's end. The church has a future, but the earth dwellers are awaited by a dark and horrible tomorrow.

According to Robbins, chapter 7:1-17 is a complement of the incidents narrated in the closing events of the preceding chapter. It seeks to disclose the fate of the church during the terrible judgements just described. It is intended to reassure the church that, for the sake of His servants, it is under special care. It is intended to answer the question asked at the end of chapter six: "Who can stand?". Despite all the persecution that surrounds the saints, God assures His church that He is going to judge the world, and that He will keep them safe: "But not a hair of your head will perish". (Luke 21:18). There are different views on the reasons for sealing the saints, but the writer adheres to the view that the sealing protects the righteous against the plagues which come upon the wicked. The righteous are secure because God has enabled them to overcome the sins which produce these judgements.

We should also mention that the writer says that the seal is of the 'living God'. The significance of this phrase is that in sealing the believer, life is imparted on him. "...uppermost in John's mind is certainly not physical security, but protection of the believer's faith and salvation from the various sufferings and persecutions that are inflicted on them, whether by Satan or by his demonic or earthly agents (Beale, 1998:409).

The sealing enables the believers in Christ to respond in faith to the trials through which they pass, so that these trials become the very instruments by which they

can even be strengthened in their faith. This fact is further strengthened by Revelation 9:4: “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Contained in the sealing is the idea of identification, protection and security. The life of the sealed ones is hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3).

#### **3.4.4.1 ANGELS PREVENT EVIL FORCES FROM COMMENCING BEFORE THE SPIRITUAL PROTECTION OF SAINTS**

The situation before us is one that depicts four angels standing at the four corners of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or sea or on any tree. Another angel appears giving orders to the other four angels who were ready to harm the earth and the sea. They are instructed not to harm the land or the sea or the trees until a seal is put on the foreheads of the servants of God. John hears the number of those who were sealed to be 144 000 from the tribes of Israel (7:4). But in 7:9, he sees a great multitude that no one could count, and not the 144 000.

Bauckham (1993:215-216) makes an attractive observation. He draws a link between what the seer heard in 5:5 (which was the “Lion of the tribe of Judah”), and what he saw in 5 : 6 (a “Lamb looking as if it had been slain”). The “Lion of the tribe of Judah” represented the ‘Lamb’. He concludes that the 144 000 is a figurative representation of the multitude that no one could count. This sounds a plausible observation and explanation. This observation means that those who are sealed are not only a limited number, but the whole church from every nation, tribe, people and language – the church universal. 144 000 should be understood as a symbolic representation of perfection of 12 x 12000. It is also regarded as Israel’s army formation (1993:218).

We may understand to be ‘sealed’ here to mean protection of their faith in Jesus Christ.

“So far as John is concerned, the church of his day is the church of the last day. He writes in expectation that the four winds are shortly to blast the earth, and his object in writing is to assure his fellow believers that neither these destructive winds nor any other power in heaven or earth or hell can rob them of their part in the promised kingdom...John’s inclusion of this point serves to inspire his contemporaries with faith and courage. When that day comes, they will be there. Naturally the like applies to God’s people of all ages” (Beasley-Murray, 1983:140).

This is the answer to the question “Who can stand?” raised in 6:7. All the Lamb’s followers will be able to stand before the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb because their faith will be protected from failing and will therefore persevere in all the persecutions and sufferings. But not so with the inhabitants of the earth.



#### **3.4.4.2 THE NEW-FOUND POSITION AND FUNCTION OF THE REDEEMED**

John records that when he looked, after hearing that 144 000 people were sealed, he saw a great multitude that no one could count. The great multitude therefore represents all the redeemed – all the followers of the Lamb who have overcome. The words used to describe the multitudes, viz. nation, tribe, people and language appear seven times throughout the Book of Revelation in different orders. We can perhaps read into this that this multitude is a complete one as predetermined by God before the world was even created. These are the same people as those of 5:9. In Genesis 32:12, Abraham was promised to have descendents who would be so many that, no one could count them. We are also taught that all believers in the

Lord Jesus Christ are children of Abraham. Is this great multitude perhaps not the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise?

This multitude celebrates its total deliverance from everything that could limit life. Fears and tears, hunger and thirst, sin and death are past. By saying “Salvation belongs to our God” (7:10), they are saying that “we owe our salvation to God and the Lamb. They join in the praising of the One sitting on the throne and the Lamb. Salvation is not just deliverance from diverse evils, but wholeness of life in God’s presence and participation in His life and reign (cf. 1:6; 5:10; 7:15-17; 20:4-6; 21:7; 22:1-5)” (Krodel, 1989:185). The salvation of His people is the ultimate purpose of God, the Creator, and it has been accomplished at last.

In 7:14, the angel explains who the great multitude are: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation...”. There are different views on the interpretation of the “great tribulation”. Some, like Beasley-Murray (1983:147) say: “It refers not to trials to which Christians are always subject (John 16:13), but to the tribulation which forms the climax of history prior to the revelation of the kingdom (cf. Daniel 12:1; Mark 13:19), ...” This view has a weakness in that it excludes those who shall not have experienced that period at the end of history. 7:9 has room to include people of all times.

The other view, which is supported by people like Kistemaker, says that this expression includes all Christians who have experienced opposition and persecution everywhere throughout history. It is a universal and collective expression that encompasses all the saints throughout the ages. Everyone who has experienced the hatred and opposition of the evil one is included. Scriptures do teach that God’s people of all places and of all times have encountered, do encounter, and will encounter persecutions, dangers, and hardships. Tribulations are the pressures of the world against those who witness to the Word of God. They are signs of the church’s faithfulness.

Chapter 7:15-17 describes the new position in which the saints find themselves. They are before the throne of God like the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. They have finally come into the presence of God. This is what they have been working towards during all their Christian life on earth. Their function has become one of serving God all the time (day and night). They now serve God in His presence. His temple must refer to His glory for there is no literal temple in heaven. Probably the whole of heaven is the sanctuary.

To be before the throne of God “implies the possession of direct access to God Himself, and so to dwell with Him” (Beasley-Murray, 1983:148). Because they are before His throne, God grants them security with His personal presence. It is God’s desire to dwell with His people and to have them acknowledge Him as their God. The following scriptures testify to this:

1. “I will make a covenant of peace with them: it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God and they will be my people: (Ezekiel 37:26-27).
2. “I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be My people.” (Leviticus 26:11-12).
3. “I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be My people and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God”. (Zechariah 8:8).
4. “...Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God”. (Revelation 21:3).

By dwelling with them in the same sanctuary, God expresses His desire for intimate communion with His people. This is the goal of salvation, and all His faithful followers are assured of sustenance and solace at all times.



### 3.5 THE LITTLE SCROLL AND THE TWO WITNESSES

#### 3.5.1 THE RECOMMISSION TO PROPHECY ABOUT JUDGEMENT

Chapter 10 is the second interlude that the author of the Book of Revelation uses to break the continuation of the judgements being executed against the human race which is unrepentant. The first interlude was observed after the sixth seal but before the seventh seal was broken. This time it appears after the sixth trumpet has been sounded, but before the seventh one sounds. The sounding of the sixth trumpet depicts the unbelievers who refuse to repent from their evil works; even though they have witnessed divine judgement in a series of plagues. “In short, this interlude of chapter 10 is not an interval of ease but a time to receive and proclaim the gospel” (Kistemaker, 2001:305). There is no interlude between the sixth and seventh bowl judgement. This signifies that in addition to the church preaching the gospel to the world, there is nothing else the believers can do as they await the consummation that ends in the final judgement.

“From the beginning of chapter 4 through the end of chapter 9, John has watched the visions unfold from his position in heaven. Now he is back on earth, for the angel of light comes down from heaven (v.1) and it is from heaven that the voice is heard (v.4, 8) ... John views the angel as he descends from heaven to earth. Coming directly from the presence of God, he arrives on a mission of crucial significance for the persecuted church” (Mounce, 1998:201).

Though the Church was given the assurance of spiritual security in the first interlude, that did not mean that the church was given immunity from suffering. This same interlude seeks to answer the perennial question of the saints of God:

‘How long?’. With the most emphatic declaration possible, it is affirmed that when the last trumpet sounds, the last day comes, and God’s purpose for the world and its history comes to its fulfillment (10:7).

This interlude also seeks to answer the unasked question: ‘What is the task of the church in these turbulent times?’. According to John, the church must bear witness to the last breath” (Beasley-Murray, 1983:168). As the readers are almost ready to hear about the end, this interlude delays that climax. It shows the reader that no man can predict how God’s judgements will work out. They take unexpected courses. There are delays which give opportunity for repentance. This interlude enters on an open book which is surely the Word of God (10:3) (Morris, 1988:133). According to Krodel, this interlude plays a pivotal role in the structure of the Book of Revelation by connecting section A (4:1 – 11:19) with the center section B (12:1 – 16:21).

John is commissioned to prophecy again in 10:11: “Then I was told: ‘You must prophecy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings’ ”. John’s prophetic role will not be completed with the blowing of the seventh trumpet which announces the end. This new commission directs our focus from heaven to earth. The seer himself is presented as being on earth. “The vision differs from the earlier numbered vision because John himself becomes involved in the action. The dramatic appearance of the resplendent angel could provide encouragement for the church about to enter the final period of hostility from the unbelieving world” (Mounce, 1998:200-201).

It can also be mentioned that this interlude is connected to chapter 5 through the mighty angel of 10:1 and 5:2. Both angels are introduced as “αγγελον ισχυρον”. The use of the adjective ‘αλλον’ can be taken to be meant to refer to the angel of 5:2. According to Aune (1998:555), since both narratives deal with mysterious scrolls, it is apparently the intention of the author-editor to remind the reader of this previous narrative. The focal narrative segments, however, are the oath of the

mighty angel, in which the imminence of the end is predicted to coincide with the sounding of the seventh trumpet and a symbolic commission to prophesy.

The one difference between the scroll of 5:2 and that of 10:1 is that the scroll of 5:2 is sealed sevenfold, while the little scroll of 10:1 is open. By taking the sealed scroll, the Lamb that was slain was found worthy, qualified and authorized to enact the end-time events. By taking the little open scroll and eating it (10:10), John is authorized to continue to prophesy. When the fifth seal had been opened, the martyrs were told to wait ‘a little longer’ (6:11). But in 10:6, we hear that ‘there will be no more delay!’.

This interlude serves as an introduction to the further tribulations and to chapters 12 – 14. It is thematically connected with the seventh trumpet because at its sounding, the mystery of God will be accomplished (10:7). It also refers to the same time span as is referred to in chapters 12 – 14, i.e. the 12 months 42 months or 1260 days mentioned in the interlude are repeated in chapter 12:6 and 12:14 as well as in 13:5.

Beale sees chapter 10 as the introduction to the main content of the parenthesis in 11:1-13. Like others, he sees the main point of this introduction as the re-commissioning of the seer for the prophetic task, which, according to him, is twofold. The “prophecy is about the persevering witness of Christians ... and about the lot of those who react antagonistically to their witness”. (1999:521). He also notes that this interlude does not cover or narrate future events but instead it deals with the same event as that covered in chapters 8 and 9. “Whereas the first six trumpets have focussed on judgements that the godless suffer throughout the church age, the parenthesis in 10:1 – 11:13 explains the relationship between the godless and the godly during the same time: the godless persecute the godly. Non Christians are punished by the trumpet judgements throughout the church age because of this relationship.” Thus we can say that the events of this interlude are focussed more on the judgements of the ungodly than on the reward of the godly.

There is something different about the little scroll in the hand of the mighty angel: it lay open in his hand. 10:2 signifies that the Son has taken over the reins of the Father's plan – which is the Son's inheritance. The angel is standing both on the sea and on the land to signify that Christ now has control over the whole cosmos. Placing one's foot on top of something may mean that one has total control over it. (Joshua 10:24).

While the message of the little scroll was available to all persons (because it lay open), the words of the seven thunders were not for men to know – hence the command to 'seal' them or not to write them down. Perhaps the seer's reason to put on record that he was prohibited to write what the seven thunders said was to make the reader aware that what is recorded in the Book of Revelation is not all that can be known about the end. The Book of Revelation is therefore not an all-embracing prophecy.

As previously noticed, Malina interprets the 'mystery of God' differently from the majority of commentators. He sees this mystery as something standing for everything that the sky servants reveal. "Given the locale of all the activity in this section of Revelation, it would seem that our seer is to announce that year of mystery as now arriving" (Malina and Pilch, 2000:143). According to Mounce, the drama has now moved to that moment immediately preceding the final scene. From this point on, the Apocalypse becomes a multidimensional presentation of the final triumph of God over evil (1998:207).

"The angel solemnly proclaims the imminence of the fulfillment of what he calls 'the mystery of God' (v7). This stands for the whole divine purpose and conveys to John's readers that there is an answer to the perplexities of history. The mystery of God will be completed. Prophecy will be fulfilled. The angel solemnly confirms this with an oath" (Morris, 1988:136). This oath may derive from Daniel 12:4 – 9. The mystery of God here could refer to the revelation of Christ in judgement and in salvation. God's purpose in creation and the redemption made

possible by the blood of Christ will be brought to fulfillment, and that purpose is the kingdom of God on earth.

The little scroll is referred to as a “βιβλίον” in verse 8 as it is so referred to in chapter 5. It is called a “βιβλαριδιον” (little scroll) in 10:2, 9, 10. This interchangeable use of the two words suggests that reference is being made to one and the same scroll. But it should also be noted that the little scroll of chapter 10 could be on a smaller scale but modeled on that larger book of chapter 5.

Yarbro Collins argues that chapter 10 was composed as a parallel to chapters 1 and 5. “The first indication is the fact that the angel who appears to the seer in chapter 10 is deliberately linked to the angel in chapter 5 who asks, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals’ (5:2). The latter is called *aggelon ischyron*; the angel of chapter 10 is introduced as *allon aggelon ischyron* (10:1).

The second indication that chapter 10 is meant to be a parallel to chapter 5 is the fact that both visions involve a heavenly writing. In both cases the scroll is at first in the hand of a heavenly being. In chapter 5:1, the scroll is in the hand of the enthroned deity. In 10:2, 8 the scroll is in the hand of the angel. There also seems to be a deliberate contrast made between the *biblion...katesphragismenon* of 5:2 and the *biblion to encogmenon* of 10:8. In chapter 5 the action of the Lamb is described: ‘And He went and took [the scroll] from the right hand of him who was sitting on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll...’ (5:7-8). In chapter 10 the action of the seer is similar: ‘And I went to ...and when I had eaten it...’ (10:9-10)” (1975:21).

According to A. Collins, the question that arises after the commissioning of 10:11 is ‘when does the seer begin to fulfil this new commission?’. But Collins also argues that the eating of the little scroll (10:8-10) and the command to prophesy belong together. The scroll is the image of the transmission of the message which is to be announced by the prophet. This suggests that the prophesying should

commence shortly after the message has been digested by the seer, because he can't keep it within himself as it will turn his stomach sour, thus forcing him to prophesy.

Kistemaker (2001:316) says that John mentally appropriated the message of the little scroll so that he completely mastered it. He tasted its sweetness in his mouth when he proclaimed the message; but noticing the opposition this word created among the people, he has to endure the bitterness in his inward being. Witnessing for the Lord calls for unflinching courage and gracious tact. Anyone who speaks the Word of God in a hostile world will be opposed, scorned and ridiculed.

About the events of 10:8 – 11, Giblin (1991:110) says that it is not a distinct 'inaugural experience' introducing a new major portion of Revelation. Rather, it is a dramatized interpretation-scene. In Beale's words, the emphasis in chapter 10 is on the significance of John's possession of the book. What is true of John as a prophet and of his reigning through suffering is true of all Christians in general. That is why both John and the two witnesses of chapter 11 are referred to as prophets.

“As the great scroll of chapter 5 outlined the destiny of the entire human race, so the little scroll unveils the lot of the faithful in those last days of fierce satanic opposition” (Mounce, 1998:210). Mounce sees in 10:11, a sense of divine compulsion in the charge given to John for it says he 'must' prophesy. He had no choice. It is the final act in the great drama of God's creative and redemptive activity. The meaning of history comes into sharp focus at the end point in time. John's mission is to lay bare the forces of the supernatural world that are at work behind the activities of people and nations. His prophecy is the culmination of all previous prophecies in that it leads on the final destruction of evil and the inauguration of the eternal state.

### 3.5.2 GOD'S ENSURED PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THEIR WITNESS

In this section, we shall deal with chapter 11:1 – 13. This is part of the interlude which started from 10:1. Many commentators such as Mounce agree that this portion of the Book of Revelation gives the contents of the little scroll of chapter 10. Mounce goes even further to call it a message for the believing Church. Revelation 11:1-13 is generally regarded by many commentators as difficult to interpret. Kiddle (1963:174) says this: “Chapter 11 is at once the most difficult and the most important in the whole Book of Revelation. Its difficulty has been generally recognized – so clearly, indeed, that the failure to find a solution has induced most commentators to assume that it is of relative importance,...”.

Our approach in dealing with this chapter would be a symbolical interpretation rather than literal, even though there are those who prefer to use literal interpretation of the same. We would prefer to regard the term ‘temple’ not as a literal temple but a spiritual one (the people of God). We understand that God does not reside in man-made temples. “Not the temple but the Church is the place where God dwells” (Kistemaker, 2001:323).

Paul’s teaching to the Church is that they themselves were the temple of the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 3:17; 6:19). God dwells in the hearts of Believers so that their bodies are sacred temples. This reasoning is in line with our belief that the Book of Revelation was written towards the end of the first century. By that time, the temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed; suggesting that the seer could not have been writing with the Jerusalem temple in mind. Its measuring would be related to preserving or protecting it. To John the temple would have been the Christian community. Krodel argues that Jerusalem is no longer the holy city, but that it is symbolic of the world hostile to God and therefore equal to Sodom and Egypt.

According to Beale, the measuring of the temple connotes God's presence which is guaranteed to be with the temple community living on earth before the consummation. It means that the promise of God's eschatological presence begins with establishment of the Christian community. Even before the church age, God had already secured the salvation of all people who would have become genuine Believers. It is generally agreed by many commentators that the two witnesses refer to Christian prophets. They are referred to as lampstands and olive trees. As lampstands, they represent the whole believing community.

Kiddle (1963:183) says the following about the two witnesses: "...the two witnesses stand for that proportion of the sevenfold church which must suffer martyrdom...John did not imagine that certain communities would be massacred and some spared; but that out of each community there would fall a certain number of martyrs...".

The difficulty with this interpretation is that it assumes that all genuine Christians would have to be martyred. This could not be the case without exceptions. The use of the number two can best be linked to the idea of two witnesses in giving testimony acceptable as true (Deuteronomy 19:15). The power of the two witnesses is likened to that of Moses and Elijah, who performed Godly miracles. As further proof that the two witnesses refer to the Christian community after they have been attacked and killed by the beast, the whole world celebrates their death: "The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two tormented those who live on the earth" (11:10).

The whole world did not come to one place to witness this death, but it happened wherever they were, since the Christian community is all over the world. All this happens after prophesying the message from the little scroll which John took from the hand of the mighty angel and ate.



God's Christian community would, however, not be defeated, because after three and a half days the two witnesses rose from death, and are taken up to heaven. This is an eternal assurance that the Christian community is indestructible even in the midst of the most severe persecution by the devil, his demons, or his human agents. "While the church outwardly would suffer persecution and martyrdom, God will preserve His people and assure their ultimate triumph" (Ladd, 1979:150).

"That the language of prophecy is highly figurative has nothing to do with reality. Symbolism is not a denial of historicity, but a figurative method of communicating reality. Apocalyptic language has one of its basic characteristics the cryptic and symbolic use of words and phrases" (Mounce, 1998:212).

### 3.6 THE BATTLE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND THE ENEMY

Until now the conflict between the kingdom of righteousness and the kingdom of darkness has not been fierce. It is here in chapter 12 where we see a change into a deeper conflict between the two kingdoms. As was noted in chapter 11 that God has guaranteed the security of His faithful followers, we now see this being proven in this section. Chapter 12 is the beginning of the second part of the Book of Revelation. Kistemaker calls the first half of the book (Chapter 1 – 11), 'Christ's Church persecuted by the world' and the second half of the book (Chapter 12 – 22), 'Christ with the Church persecuted by Satan'.

According to Beale, Morris and Kiddle, chapters 12 – 22 tell the same story as chapters 1 – 11 but explain in greater detail what chapters 1 – 11 only introduce and imply. In chapter 12 it is now revealed that the devil is the deeper source of

evil. The devil's powers to persecute the saints are however not unlimited, he can only do so as long as he is permitted by God (12 : 6, 14; 13 : 5).

The beginning of chapter 12 depicts a dragon trying to destroy the woman and her son. "The figure of a woman may symbolize people, a nation or a city. The woman figure could therefore be seen as alluding to the people of God...first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament" (Botha, 1988 : 94).

The devil attacks Christians because his decisive defeat has already been set in motion by the resurrection of Christ.

"Vv 2 – 6 reveal that this woman is a picture of the faithful community, which existed both before and after the coming of Christ. This identification is based on the OT precedent in which the sun, the moon, and eleven stars represent Jacob, his wife, and the eleven tribes of Israel...,who bow down to Joseph, who represents the twelfth tribe" (Beale, 1999 : 625).

The flight into the wilderness is a collective allusion primarily both to Israel's exodus from Egypt and the anticipated end-time exodus. It also recalls the restoration, when Israel was expected to return in faith to the Lord and again be protected and nourished by Him in the wilderness. "The wilderness is another image essentially identical to the sanctuary in 11 : 1 and the tabernacle in 13 : 5 – 6, since all three are attacked during the 'three and a half years' and all three are metaphors of spiritual protection" Beale 1999 : 645 ).

The dragon's attempt on the life of the woman is foiled by the Almighty's protection. The dragon is defeated in a real world. Having failed to harm the woman as planned, the dragon resorts to persecuting the woman's offspring, those who obey God's commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus (De Gruyter, 1987 : 72). De Gruyter also notes that the practical implementation of this attack seems to be described symbolically in the following chapter, in the account of the

activities of the two beasts. John's imagery is to be understood from its use in Revelation, not from the imagery of the myths. The woman clothed with the sun, for example, is to be understood in contrast to the great prostitute. The idea of linking these images should not be taken serious in the attempt to understand this mystery.

Some scholars argue against the interpretation that the woman represents the Church, saying that the woman is a complex symbol. Even though the dragon failed to achieve his plans, he does not give up trying. Death and resurrection result in the victory of Christ and the saints over the satanic accuser in the inaugurated Messianic Kingdom. The devil was previously able to 'accuse' God's children of sin, but now the situation has changed. The death and resurrection of Christ have banished the devil from this privilege. As a result of Christ's victory over the devil, God protects the Messianic community against the devil's wrathful harm. ( 12 : 13 – 17 )

The followers of Jesus Christ are therefore encouraged to be vigilant and to beware of the lies of the devil. They are warned not to take part in what may look like the worship of God when it is not, but rather an imitation by the devil and his servants. This is the way he goes about deceiving people. Christians are to remain faithful to their Lord at all times. The devil uses the state as his agent to persecute the followers of Jesus Christ and to deceive the inhabitants of the world. As Kistemaker points out, the devil does not work alone, he uses the services of those willing to carry out his plans, which may be governments or individuals. He does so because he desires to take the place of Christ. The strategy that he uses is that of power and deceit. "The one attacks the external part of the human being, that is, the physical body, with destruction and death; the other influences the inner part of a person, namely, the mind. The second is even more fearful than the first..." (2001 : 387).

"Satan having been foiled in his attempt to destroy the Church concentrates his efforts on an endeavour to annihilate the Church of Christ, and to this end he calls

to his aid two helpers” (Beasley-Murray, 1983 : 206). This is confirmation that he does not give up, when one plan fails he employs another strategy. It is worth noting Fiorenza’s comment here : “It is important, however, to keep in mind that John repeatedly insists that the cruel war waged by the anti-divine powers does not prove the powerlessness of God and Christ. It also does not express the positive will of God...God permits and tolerates this life-destroying war, but only for a very short time” (1991 : 82).

In chapter 14 the scene changes. The author of the Book of Revelation shows his readers/hearers the picture of God’s people being the victors over the devil. In the face of the threat of total annihilation of the Church, an assurance is here given that God’s followers will be vindicated and that the followers of the beast will be judged by God. “The segment depicts the alternative community of the Lamb as living in the midst of the worshipers of the beast. At the same time it serves as the introduction to the succeeding series of eschatological judgement visions” (Fiorenza, 1991 : 88).

It is clear that even though the devil wages war against the people of God, and employs every possible strategy for battle, victory and vindication for God’s followers is guaranteed. John assures them of their victory and security. He paints a picture of the joy and happiness the saints express in following the Lamb and being in His presence.

### **3.7 THE SEVEN PLAGUES, SEVEN BOWLS AND THE BEAST**

From chapter 15 : 1 to 17 : 18, we see the visions of judgement. According to Krodel, this vision “...forms the climatic conclusion of the Church’s struggle with the beast which was introduced in the interlude 10 : 1 – 11 : 13 . This struggle is framed by ‘portents’ in the sky (12 : 1, 2; 15 : 1) which mark the center section (12 : 1 – 16 : 21) as a unit” (1989 : 276 – 277). This unit concludes with a distinct reference to God’s judgement on the unbelievers. “The Fifth Act of the

Apocalypse recounts a further series of visions in which ‘the seven bowls of the wrath of God’ are poured out on the earth” (De Gruyter, 1987 ; 84). This section begins with a victory celebration in heaven. Those who fought the beast are now enjoying their rest with their Master-King.

“John has often used the exodus story as a model for God’s eschatological deliverance from the oppressive ‘Egypt’ of his own day. This section (15 : 1 – 16 : 21) represents John’s most thorough use of this motif in Revelation...As at the Red Sea, there are only two groups pictured in this section : those who have the mark of the beast because they participate in the idolatrous worship of Rome and those who have conquered/been martyred because they live according to the call of discipleship set forth in John’s revelation” (Boring, 1989 : 173).

The exodus motif that Boring advocates here is well placed in that the victors have moved out of the persecution into the freedom they won through Christ’s victory and their perseverance in persecution. “There are some clear resemblances between the plagues in Egypt and the judgements set in motion by the bowls, as also between the latter and the trumpet judgements” (Morris,1988 : 186). These resemblances may point to the similarity that exists between the Church and Israel being guided by Yahweh. This is exodus from the oppression of Babylon or Rome.

“It is this dominant motif of the exodus which caused John to reflect, in a manner not elsewhere observable in his prophecy, the meditations in the so-called Wisdom of Solomon relating to the plagues and blessings of the exodus...A further motif in the bowl-judgements probably owes its place to the second- exodus theme, namely, the perpetual refusal of men to repent in spite of their

experience of the divine judgements. Three times it is mentioned (after the fourth, fifth, and seventh bowls, vv. 9, 11, 21) that far from repenting, they who felt the weight of the messianic judgements cursed God for their pains" (Beasley-Murray, 1987 : 240 – 241).

The trumpet plagues destroyed one third of the earth but the bowl plagues bring about total destruction, because this is the last judgement. The people's reaction resembles that which was evoked by the trumpet plagues. The people repeatedly fail to repent, reminding us of the Egyptian plague pattern when Pharaoh and the citizens of Egypt failed to repent. The followers of the beast become the objects of God's wrath.

### **3.8 THE REVELATION OF THE CLIMACTIC END**

The section from 17 : 1 to 22 : 21, represent the last part of the Book of Revelation. It is here where the book enjoys its climax. John skillfully brings the apocalypse to an end. "Moreover, his last section balances the first (chaps. 4 – 11) and narrates the consummation of the sovereign reign of God and Christ on earth in judgement and salvation" (Krodel, 1989 : 289). The love-hate relationship between the city and the beast compels the prophet to concentrate on the beast rather than the city, since it is the beast which becomes the agent of the city's destruction.

In this section an image is created of Babylon as a degraded woman, who is lavishly dressed and sitting on a beast. Botha et al say that the choice of the name Babylon to indicate Rome can be explained by the fact that Babylon was involved in one of the most traumatic incidents in the history of God's people – the exile. Chapter 17 depicts Babylon as the great harlot , interprets the identity of the beast

and climaxes in the destruction of the harlot by the beast. Chapter 18 brings laments and reflections of different groups on the doom of Babylon.

“The two figures of monster and woman are really alternative representations of a single entity, but in this context they yield an appropriate means of depicting the antichristian city in relation to the antichristian empire. The beast is therefore the empire” (Beasley-Murray, 1987 : 249).

The lengthy explanation of the beast in chapter 17 is of interest to the reader/hearer since it seems to shed light on the time when the book is likely to have been written. But so far there is no common agreement on the exact meaning of the seven kings representing the seven hills. The one way of interpreting this is to take it to be symbolic rather than allegorical. The power these kings use against Christ lasts but for a brief period of time. They readily make themselves and their influence available to the Antichrist. In chapter 18 the great prostitute Babylon has fallen. This refers to the economic downfall of Rome. The rejoicing over her downfall is an indication that she was a burden to some people. Babylon’s fall has been engineered by the Almighty God.

From chapter 19 the picture has changed completely. “This part consists almost entirely of antiphonic doxologies on the part of God’s servants, celebrating the completely altered situation on earth after God’s action in judgement” (Botha, 1988 : 129). The first part of the thanksgiving refers to the fair judgement of God which is prominent in the preceding chapters. The second part of the celebration looks forward to the permanent union of the Lamb with His followers in the new heaven. By His victory God’s reign is finally restored over creation thus evoking the eschatological praise of God’s people.

These hallelujahs are ecstatic exclamations of praise befitting the arrival of the eschatological salvation. They are distinct from the general praise and thanksgiving given for God’s goodness, manifested daily in food, drink, and health. Rather they are sung in response to the admonition of 18 : 20.

### 3.9 THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Many different structures of the Book of Revelation have been proposed by different scholars. To date there has been no single structure that is the generally accepted by most scholars. Many scholars like Fiorenza, Lee, Strand and others have proposed chiasmic structures. The chiasmic structure proponents do not however have a common structure that is acceptable to all concerned. Because there is no standard way of determining how a particular book is structured, there tends to be as many structures as there are scholars or commentators.

Structure is however useful in the understanding of the message that any book is bringing to its readers. Lee, in her article, “A call to martyrdom : function as method and message in Revelation”, says :

“...one way to understand the function of Revelation involves a combination of method and message and that this is revealed through an examination of its structure...The message is that through God’s sovereignty over the universe, Christ’s death and resurrection provide the model in which the saints understand their own deaths as the prerequisite to eternal life. The method is provided through a structure which allows the audience to participate in the revelatory experience and also compels them to choose sides in the battle between good and evil” (1998 : 164).

This is an important statement because if what Lee says is true, then it means that the structure that any interpreter of the Book of Revelation adheres to, will accordingly affect his or her interpretation of the message contained in the book. There is an element of truth in this view because the various interpretations of the



book of Revelation tend to follow the type of structure the interpreter subscribes to.

One observation that can be noted here with regards to chiasmic structures is that in some cases there seems to be some way of forcing divisions even where they would not normally be realized in order to be able to find some similarity with what has already been found or proposed on the one side of the chiasmus. This might distort or even change the message that the author intended to bring to his or her readers. As the chiasmic structure tends to generally seek to divide the structure in the center, this might also tend to bring about forced divisions where there would normally be none in order to produce a presentable and symmetrical structure appealing to the eye. According to Strand, the center of the chiasmic structure should be the turning point in the account.

To this end, Lee proposes "...that for a work as long as Revelation, a chiasmus containing a greater number of units would be more persuasive" (1998 : 167). While we appreciate Lee's reasoning, this may even cause more artificial divisions of the text in order to build a strong case for one's argument. But if the divisions come with the natural flow of the events in the book it would surely give more clarity to the reader of the Book of Revelation.

One would agree more with Lee when he says : "The structure of Revelation may be theologically conceived as opposed to chronologically ordered. This means that the work may be something other than an event – driven, forward moving narrative" (1998 : 168). This suggests that when considering a structure for the Book of Revelation, one should allow the flow of events to dictate what kind of structure this book has. The following question therefore arises : Is the structure of the book contained in the author's intended message to his or her readers or is it dependant on the reader's ability to reconstruct the author's written message? In his defence for the chiastic structure, Lee argues that the chiastic structure does a double function : that of interpreting the revelation for the reader(s) as well as allowing them to become part of the revelatory experience.

“Through a chiasmic structure it exhorts the audience to follow the example of Christ to martyrdom in order to obtain the promised resurrection. The chiasm interprets John’s visions as an explanation of a transcendent reality in which the true battle happens not here on earth, but in heaven between God and Christ against satan and the beast. The believers then understand their roles in terms of this cosmic drama,...The chiasm allows the believers to take part in the cosmic drama...” (1998 : 192 – 193).

We do not dispute Lee’s argument for the chiasmic structure, but one is left with the question whether this dual function that the chiasmus provides cannot be provided by any other method except the chiasmus.

In discussing the structure of the Book of Revelation, Hall, in his article, “The hook interlocking structure of Revelation : the most important verses in the book and how they may unify its structure”, proposes that the two verses : Revelation 10 : 11 and 11 : 1 play a critical role in the building of the structure of the Book of Revelation. He calls them “the key to the outline of the book, pointing to the division of two primary cycles held together by an interlocking center” (2002 : 27).

Hall sees the importance of these verses in that they are situated in the approximate middle of the book of Revelation, being where the re-commissioning takes place, around the place where the strong angel is seen. Hall argues that there is a change from the previous initiator of action, and that the angel is seen in Rev 10 : 1 and heard in Rev 11 : 1. To him these verses are the ones that unite or join closely as by hooking the two halves of the Book of Revelation. To him these verses are part of a transition that should be understood as something similar to a bridge section. “The nature of the section from 10 : 1 – 11 : 18 goes further than just a mere bridge section...to the extent that it should be called a hook interlock...(it) is not just a bridge or transition linked by common elements to

parts before and after, but...the overlapping or hooking of initiative of action that locks two parts together. As such, it involves an initiator of action. It is in this way that it acts as a transition, a conclusion to the first cycle and an introduction to the second cycle” (2002 : 285 - 286). Hall sees the importance of the use of the words ‘δει’ and ‘παλιν’ together. He says that their use together “modifies the verb and argues for a greater distinction than most commentators give it. The translation then is ‘It is necessary that you prophesy a second time’.

If Hall’s understanding is correct, then it would make more sense to regard this as a turning point in the Book of Revelation, since the first half of the book was also prophecy-filled, but now an additional prophecy with probably more important message is on the way to the reader/hearer. The seer himself is no longer commanded to write but to measure.

In strengthening his case, Hall further says : “To restate the argument in another way, 10 : 11 – 11 : 1 are still in the context of the trumpets, or more specifically the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet or the 2<sup>nd</sup> woe”.

Malina proposes a different way of structuring the Book of Revelation based on what he calls astral prophecy. In his article, “The Book of Revelation and Religion : How did the Book of Revelation Persuade,” says : “From the perspective of astral prophecy, I would like to break down the book of Revelation into various sectors of the sky that the prophet experienced. Such a sector approach enables one to become more familiar with the scenarios in the book” (1994 : 40).

In accordance with the above, Malina proposes that the Book of Revelation be structured as follows :

Sector 1 : The Cosmic Role of Jesus the Messiah

Sector 2 : How God Controls the Universe and Deals with Israel.

Sector 3 : The Cosmos Before the Flood : Why the Present Condition.

Sector 4 : Humankind's First Post-Flood City : Babel and Its Fate.

Sector 5 : The Final City of Humankind : Celestial Jerusalem.

Malina goes on to say that the Book of Revelation, through his proposed structure we would assume, persuades its readers

“by revealing what God has set in the sky at creation. Since that is when the arrangement of the sky had been completed, the skylscapes and their impact have the certainty of inevitability. Secondly, the work would persuade by informing its readers and listeners of the celestial indicators controlling the destruction of ‘the city in which their Lord was crucified,’ Jerusalem. Thirdly, the persuasive force in revealing the fate of the first post-diluvial city consisted in the understanding it provided about what to expect from cities and city-empires,...Fourthly, the work persuades by authoritatively informing about the ancient inevitable roots of contemporary social unrest, thus providing both assurance of the demise of that unrest and confidence in the positive outcomes of it all” (1994 : 47 – 48).

Malina's proposed structure and his defense or support for it are not very convincing. His division of the Book of Revelation seems to be more of an abstract or even philosophical exercise than realistic. That everything contained in the Book of Revelation can be explained by linking it with a celestial event is hard to prove. This proposal seems to ignore those events that are related and are occurring here on earth. This does not seem to agree with the spirit of the Book of Revelation which is more inclusive. Malina's explanation wants to force everything into one basket.

Pohlmann suggests that the Book of Revelation displays the ability to develop its own structure naturally. To this end he proposes the following structure (1997 : 102):

- 1 : 1 – 8            Prologue
- 1 : 9 – 3 : 22     The inaugural vision of Christ in relation to the Church.
- 4 : 1 – 5 : 14     The inaugural vision of heaven with Christ being the representative of God's throne.
- 6 : 1 – 11 : 19    A demonstration of God's sovereignty over history through Christ
- 12 : 1 – 16 : 21   An inaugural demonstration of God's sovereign power of Satan through Jesus Christ.
- 17 : 1 – 19 : 10   Babylon the harlot finally falls after a demonstration of God's power through Jesus Christ.
- 19 : 11 – 21 : 8   The transition from 'Babylon' to the 'New Testament'.
- 21 : 9 – 22 : 5     The inauguration of eternity.
- 22 : 6 – 21        Epilogue.

One other method that can be used to structure the Book of Revelation is one that uses what Korner calls a 'vision episode.' In his article, " 'And I saw...' An Apocalyptic Literary Convention for Structural Identification in the Apocalypse," Korner says : "The phrase *μετα ταυτα ειδον* is used as a literary device for the textual identification of major visions within the parameters of a vision episode. The phrase *και ειδον* is used for the differentiation of minor visions within the textual boundaries of a major vision" (Korner, 2000 : 164). This means that the book is thus structured according to the visions that are contained in that book.

The phrase *μετα ταυτα ειδον* occurs less frequently than its counterpart *και ειδον*. The former occurs about five times while the latter occurs about forty times. Where the phrase *μετα ταυτα ειδον* occurs, it is regarded as an introduction of a new vision. Sometimes this phrase has its minor variations, like the use of *τουτο* in the place of *ταυτα*. This phrase occurs in the following places or verses : Revelation 4 : 1; 7 : 1; 7 : 9; 15 : 5 and 18 : 1. This method

therefore produces six vision episodes. It is the seer's seeing that demarcates or identifies the beginning and the end of a particular vision. It should be noted that in these phrases the seer chooses to use the verb 'οραω' instead of 'βλεπω'.

“The use of βλεπειν could indicate that John, although being ‘in the Spirit’ already ( 1 : 9, 10 ), initially expected to see the source of the voice with his physical eyes. However, the next phrase indicates that upon turning John actually saw in the form of a vision instead” (Korner, 2000 : 174).

Based on the above understanding as a method of structuring the Book of Revelation, Korner proposes the following literary structure :

1. Prologue ( 1 : 1 – 8 )
2. The seven letters ( 1 : 9 – 3 : 22 )
3. The six seals ( 4 : 1 – 6 : 17 )
4. The 144 000 Sealed ( 7 : 1 – 8 )
5. The Seventh Seal/the Six Trumpets/the Seventh Trumpet/ the Seven Bowls ( 7 : 9 – 15 : 4 )
6. The Seven Bowls and Babylon Described ( 15 : 5 – 17 : 18 )
7. Babylon Falls and the New Jerusalem Descends ( 18 : 1 – 22 : 21 )

In defending his proposed structure, Korner argues thus : “...the phrase ‘After these things I saw’ does not indicate that the imagery within the different vision blocks occurred at different intervals throughout John's life. Rather, the phrase μετα ταυτα ειδον simply indicates the chronological order in which the Seer ‘saw’ each block of individual visions occur... with the underlying assumption being that he experienced all of those vision blocks within the same historical timeframe in his life” (2000 : 176).

Korner's structure is attractive. The divisions that he proposes are reasonable and are in general agreement with the way the author of the Book of Revelation laid out his case when he wrote the book. The divisions that are brought about by the introduction of the 'μετα ταυτα ειδον' phrase cover the message of the whole book in an understandable way. These divisions are also not artificial, but occur naturally, being in agreement with the author's style of writing, but not compromising the author's intention.

Concerning this structure, we feel that while Rev 1 : 9 – 22 : 21 should be regarded as one vision episode, Rev 22 : 7 – 21 should be separated from the rest of the body. It is more suitable as an epilogue than being part of the previous section. Though Korner argues that there should be no literary epilogue for the Book of revelation because, he argues, "...the content of 22 : 6 – 21 is more reflective of the vision episode than it is of the literary epilogue" (2000 : 177). There is a definite change of tone from Revelation 22 : 7 which points to the ending of the story. It is therefore fitting to have a literary epilogue even though the μετα ταυτα ειδον' phrase is missing, just as the literary prologue was neither introduced by, nor terminated by this phrase.

Our proposed structure, based on the literary analysis of the Book of Revelation is as follows:

1. Prologue, Salutation And Inaugural Vision ( 1 : 1 – 20 )
2. The Messages To The Seven Churches ( 2 : 1 – 3 : 22 )
3. God And Christ Are Glorified – Seals Opened ( 4 : 1 – 6 : 17 )
4. The 144 000 Sealed Saints ( 7 : 1 – 8 )
5. The Multitude, Trumpets, And The Battle Between Heaven And The Enemy ( 7 : 9 – 14 : 20 )
6. The Seven Plagues, Seven Bowls And The Beast ( 15 : 1 – 17 : 18 )
7. The Fall Of Babylon, Satan's Doom And The New Jerusalem ( 18 : 1 – 22 : 6 )
8. The Returning Jesus And Epilogue ( 22 : 7 – 22 : 21 )

### 3.10 CONCLUSION

We have been dealing with a vision-oriented way of structural analysis, with the view to get a better understanding of the Book of Revelation. In fact, from the beginning of this chapter, we have been studying related texts which would help us to understand Revelation 11 better. From what has been said above, it seems that there were a lot of factors that impacted on the behaviour of the first century Christians as revealed in the seven letters to the seven Churches. But we can also conclude that the situations that existed in the individual Churches were representative of what was happening in all the Churches in Asia Minor. Therefore the concerns that John raised with these Churches were applicable to all the different individual Churches.

The revelation of what God is doing in His creation was meant to encourage the Christians to live faithful lives before their Creator. This was demonstrated in the chapters that precede chapter 11 as well as in those chapters that come after chapter 11. These chapters deal with the situation in heaven and here on earth. With this information on hand, the Christians were in a better position to endure the persecution which they were experiencing at that time

Having done this, we shall now turn to the exegesis of Revelation 11 in the next chapter in order to gain more understanding of it.



## CHAPTER 4

### EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF REVELATION CHAPTER 11

#### 4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ‘MEASURING’ THE TEMPLE

In introducing the second part of the interlude that started in 10:11, the seer now changes from the use of the phrases ‘ και ειδον ’ (‘and I saw’ in 5 : 1 and 10 : 1) and ‘Μετα ταυτα ειδον ’ (‘after this I saw’ in 4 : 1; 7 : 1 and 7 : 9), which he had been using when introducing new scenes. He goes straight into the new topic without using either of these two usual phrases. This may suggest that the seer regarded this section as part of the previous one (10:1-11). The seer sees himself being a partaker in the events that follow. He is given a measuring rod to measure the temple. Many commentators agree that the idea of measuring the temple has its origin in Ezekiel 40 and the following chapters.

“The act of measuring (which is never actually performed in the narrative) can be considered as a symbolic prophetic action” (Aune, 1998:603). Aune sees this as a link with the prophetic commission of 10:11, and as an allusion to Ezekiel 40:3 – 42:20, as well as Zechariah 2:1-5. In some scriptural passages like II Samuel 8:2a; II Kings 21:13; Amos 7:7-9; Isaiah 34:11 and Romans 2:8, measuring can be seen as a metaphor for destruction. In other passages like II Samuel 8:2b; Ezekiel 40:1-6; 42:20; Zechariah 2:5, measuring can be seen as a metaphor for preservation. But in Revelation 11:1, it seems that the intention here is that of preservation.

In Ezekiel 40:3-5, the intention of measuring was to rebuild. Measuring is therefore the common theme that links prophetic and apocalyptic texts. “The measuring rod is none other but ‘the Word of God’ and ‘the testimony of Jesus’ ” (Krodel, 1989:220).

The use of the word 'temple' in the Greek language helps us understand what the author's intention could have been. There is a difference between the 'temple complex' and 'the holy of holies'. Kistemaker, in his article, "The Temple in the Apocalypse", says : "The term 'ἱερόν' (temple complex) occurs frequently in the Gospels and Acts and once in Paul's Epistles (1 Cor 9 : 13). The word 'ναός' (holy of holies) chiefly appears in John's Apocalypse, a total of sixteen times...A primary look reveals that the author conveys its meaning as the very presence of God" (2000 : 433). This therefore means that the word 'temple' here must be interpreted figuratively. It does not refer to the physical temple here on earth, but the invisible One. This is supported by the language of Revelation 7 : 15 which says : "Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple..."

"The purpose of making these measurements is to delimit the area that is holy from that which is profane; and measuring means to protect God's temple, altar, and people. John's task is to safeguard that which God has set aside as holy and to shield it from intrusion and desecration" (Kistemaker, 2000 : 435). This is a guarantee for God's people in His very presence. The destroyer cannot enter the place that God has marked off as holy. The Temple here acts as a symbol of the true Church of Jesus Christ living in constant union with Him. That is why John never gets up to measure the temple that he was ordered to measure.

Giblin, in his article, "Revelation 11 : 1 – 13: its form, function and contextual intergration", says : "The protectionist measuring of the sanctuary and the altar, plus the characterization of those concerned as the worshipers ( v.1b ) suggest that the area is intended parabolically of the heavenly sphere as the locus of the immune from any assault" (1984 : 438). Giblin believes that this sphere is not temporally delimited, neither here nor in the subsequently, symbolically delimited period of conflict.

With regards the counting of the worshipers in the temple and the exclusion of those that are in the outer court, Kistemaker believes that this is God's way of making "...a clear division between the saints who worship Him in spirit and truth and those people who pay Him lip service but whose hearts are far from Him". The former group are those who worship Him in holiness and are blessed by Him while the latter group are the hypocritical worshipers who are thrown out of His presence. The contrast is that those who are in the temple of God are holy and are alive but those outside are outcasts and are dead.

According to our understanding of the word ἅγιος', the author of the Book of Revelation is referring to the holy of holies in heaven. The redeemed multitude is not serving God in an earthly temple but a heavenly temple. But we know that according to Revelation 21 : 22 there is no temple in heaven "...because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple". The temple therefore refers to the very presence of God. The occurrence of ἅγιος' in Revelation 11 : 1 is therefore that of a celestial nature. This being the case, we see John bringing in the idea of the protection of the Christians. The measuring itself never takes place because the idea is not about physical measuring but to make the saints aware that when they are in God's presence they are safe. When they are said to be in the holy of holies they are meant to be in the very presence of God. This is the safest place that they can be in. Nothing can harm them, no evil can get near to them.

It is an interesting development to notice that the author introduces the idea of the holy of holies as an introduction to his description of the two witnesses. This suggests to us that the security of witnesses is of paramount importance to God. Witnessing is therefore covered with security before it even begins.

The seer is commanded to 'come up' and measure the temple of God and the altar. This refers to the temple proper and its inner court. According to Mounce, biblical prophets commonly employed symbolic action to dramatize their

message. “The protection of believers (symbolized by the measuring of the temple) was not security against physical suffering and death, but against spiritual danger” (1998:213). “...it is necessary immediately to point out that being ‘sealed’ or ‘measured’ for God’s perfection does not mean that Christians will be shielded from suffering and death, but that they are stamped with the sign of God’s security, even if they have to die” (Boring, 1989:143).

The outer court, which is not supposed to be measured by the seer, refers to the spiritually apostate who will fall under God’s judgement (Ladd, 1972:153). Ladd argues that Israel as a whole will be trodden down by the nations. He sees a link between the outer court and the Israelites. This sounds difficult to accept because it seems to exclude those Israelites who are Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. What is going to happen to the other nations? Do they receive automatic acceptance?

Beasley-Murray suggests that the outer court symbolizes the unbelieving world. This is more in line with the tone of the New Testament teaching. It is this unbelieving world that should be left unmeasured or unprotected. It will be exposed to the pains of the period of tribulation and will be exposed to destructive forces. Not everyone agrees with Ladd or Beasley-Murray.

There is a distinction between the sanctuary and the outer court. As Beale puts it: “...the outer court is part of the temple...That it is an essential part of the temple complex is suggested by the assumption in v. 2 that it was formerly under the protection of the temple walls but is now to be ‘cast out’ of that protection...The court and the city thus both represent the people of God who will be persecuted” (1999:568-569).

God’s people are characterized by His presence even, and especially, in the midst of persecution. The pagan world may physically destroy or harm the witnessing Church, but it cannot touch the real life of the Church. This means that there are two opposing forces here. The community of Believers will continue to enjoy

God's shelter, while the unprotected community will be trampled by the enemy. Called upon to be faithful witnesses of and for the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians can then enter into their high calling with the assurance of spiritual security.

“The holy city is here used to refer to the people of God, chosen to point to the church. The trampling of the city is the great tribulation” (Mounce, 1998:214). But even so the believing community will be persecuted for a limited period. The 42 months is the indication of the limited period. This will apply to the whole church universal, not only the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem. It will be during this limited period that evil will prevail on earth. It is during the same time that the mission of the two witnesses will be accomplished. This tells us that these events will happen simultaneously. The true worshippers of God will be preserved at the height of evil here on earth.

“For John, eschatology is not just the consolation of the orthodoxy of all who ‘love the truth’, but it is a call for a new vision in the face of the forthcoming ‘trampling’ of the church by the pagans. In short, the purpose of Revelation is not consolation, but a new vision” (Krodel, 1989:221).

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## **4.2 THE EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 11 : 3 – 13**

### **4.2.1 THE MILITARY TESTIMONY OF THE TWO WITNESSES**

In verse 3, God says that He will establish His presence among His end-time community. This is indicated by the introductory “και δωσω τοις δυσιν μαρτυσιν μου” (And I will give power to my two witnesses). This is to ensure their effective prophetic witness. Even though ‘δωσω’ is in the future tense, it does not necessarily mean that this will only take

place in the future. Beale has noted that in this passage, tenses tend to alternate between past and present, from indicative to subjunctive, just as ἐδόθη τοῖς ἔθνεσιν' (given to the Gentiles) does not necessarily mean that it happened in the past (v.2).

The language used here suggests that the speaker is God Himself. These witnesses are to perform a specific function: to prophesy, which is related to witnessing. To prophesy in Revelation means to bear witness to the Word of God.

The fact that there are two witnesses probably points to the genuineness of their testimony. This may derive from passages like Deuteronomy 19:15 where there was a need for two witnesses for any testimony to stand. Therefore, two witnesses may suggest that their testimony is acceptable and meets the required standards. Their prophetic witness takes place during the same period when the church undergoes persecution. Some commentators prefer to see the two witnesses as two literal individuals who prophesy. Those who hold to this view include scholars like Pohlmann, who sees these two witnesses as pointing to Elijah and Moses.

Pohlmann argues that the interpreter of the Book of Revelation needs to first go to the Old Testament and thereafter return to the Apocalypse to find a fulfillment of the text (1997 : 60). In Pohlmann's view, the New Testament related Elijah with John the Baptist because John came in the spirit of Elijah and fulfilled certain prophecies relating to Elijah. He argues that both Moses and Elijah demonstrated what he calls an 'open world-view'. "The point of \revelation 11 : 3 – 6 is that the Church of Jesus Christ would once again appreciate an open world-view and exercise a ministry at a critical time of world history which would bring them into with the prevailing forces opposed to God's kingdom" (Pohlmann, 1997 : 63).

There is no need to argue the origin of this point of view here. While there is every reason to believe that this takes its form from the similarities that are

evident in this verse and the Elijah – Moses passages in the Old Testament, this thesis takes the view that Revelation 11 : 3 does not point to these Old Testament saints, but that it rather points the reader to the fact that the eternal Church will and has similar powers as those that were in Elijah and Moses. The Church universal has the collective power to do what God wants it to do while it is still on earth. Just as Elijah and Moses did not use their power to perform the miracles that they performed, so it is with the Church today, it does not have its own power to do anything on its own but draws its strength from God.

Ladd seems to take a non-committal position when he says:

“Possibly there is a blending of the symbolic and the specific. Even as the three and a half years appear to represent the entire period of the domination of evil, but with special reference to the last days of this age, so the two prophets may represent the witness of the church to Israel throughout the age, which witness will be consummated in the appearance of two prophets in the time of the end”  
(1972:154).

The two witnesses are not two individual prophets. Neither are they only a part of the Christian community, whether Jewish Christians or Christian prophets or martyrs. Rather, they represent the whole community of faith.

“...the two witnesses represent the church of Christ that by proclaiming the gospel the world is called to repentance. First, the witnesses must address all the inhabitants of the world: peoples, tribes, languages and nations (v.9) which can hardly be done by two witnesses. Second, the pairing of the witnesses is reminiscent of Jesus’ sending out of His disciples two by two (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). The apostles also go out two by two (Acts 3:1; 8:14). Third, in Israel a verdict was confirmed on the testimony of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15) (Kistemaker, 2001:329).

“The number two...may derive from the two faithful churches in chapters 2 and 3 and points to that section of the church which is faithful unto death” (Morris, 1988:143). The special clothing that these witnesses wear points to the type of function they perform. The wearing of sackcloth points to mourning. It was indicative of the sad condition of the person’s heart. In the case of Moses and Elijah, they both went through difficult times during their earthly ministries. They often had times of misery because of the problems caused by the people they were leading. So it is and will be with the present and future Church. It does and will experience painful periods here on earth because of the evil that the inhabitants of the earth are involved in. Morris puts it well when he says: “They are prophesying doom, and their attitude accordingly is sad and penitent. A comfortable, easy-minded church has no power to stir the world either to salvation or to opposition” (1988:144). The witnesses’ clothing is indicative of their preaching, which is a warning call to repentance.

We can conclude from these verses that true witnessing must be accompanied by passion. The witness must have a feeling of sorrow for the lost people. His heart cannot remain in a state of happiness while there are people who are on their way to destruction. Witnessing calls for total involvement from the witness.

“The two witnesses, characterized as prophets, are subsequently presented as quite obviously as Christian figures..., typologically characterized by OT figures. They are not named. It becomes quite unnecessary and disorienting...to regard them as individual personages or communities of persons” (Giblin, 1984 : 440 – 441). He further says that the predication of functions focused on this pair of witnesses, each enjoys the characterization of a Joshua-Zerubbabel-Elijah-Moses-Jeremiah figure. Giblin also argues that the two witnesses are identical twins. “The biblical typology brings out their prophetic function as a pair of witnesses immune to humanly-inflicted injury in the execution of their God-given role. What is more, it represents the witnesses as a new, symbolic entity : Christian prophetic testimony, which accords with the Scriptures...” (1984 : 442 – 443).



In verse 4, the seer now refers to the two witnesses as the two olive trees, and the two lampstands. Again, this verse needs to be seen as symbolic. Here the seer seems to have drawn his language from the book of Zechariah 4. As Moyise says, the Book of Revelation uses the Old Testament more than all the other books of the Bible. Moyise has shown that the Book of Revelation uses more allusions from Isaiah, then comes Psalms, Ezekiel, Pentateuch followed by Daniel, and then the Minor prophets with Jeremiah being the least used.

“The ‘two olive trees’ and the ‘two lampstands’ are reflections of Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the king, of Zechariah 4,...They represent the channels through which God’s power becomes effective and are thus appropriate symbols for the church. That the church is a community of ‘priests’ and ‘kings’, assuming the priestly-royal role of Israel (Exodus 19:6), is one of Revelation’s themes throughout (1:6; 5:10; cf. 20:6)” (Boring, 1989:145).

The olive trees are symbols of the witnessing, royal, priestly, prophetic church during the time of the church’s trials before the end. They represent the priesthood and the kingship which God has given to the church. Beckwith says: “This verse is thrown in the form of a parenthesis descriptive of the two prophets as acting in the power of God” (1919:600). They are not to perform their task of prophesying by their own might, but they would draw their strength from God. The fact that they are olive trees suggests that there is a plentiful supply of oil.

There is a connecting line between the olive oil and the Spirit as indicated in Zechariah :”Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty” (4:6). As a lamp cannot burn without oil, so the witnesses will not prophesy without the Holy Spirit, who is the source of their strength – without whom they cannot utter a single word of testimony. These witnesses are therefore shown to be fully dependent on God the Holy Spirit for their functioning. “...the church, as God’s spiritual temple on earth, is to draw its power from the Holy Spirit, the divine presence before God’s throne in its drive to stand against the world. This continues the theme from 11:1-3 of God’s establishment of His

presence among the end-time community as His sanctuary, which is aimed to ensure the effectiveness of its prophetic witness” (Beale, 1999:577).

Strand, in his article, “The olive trees of Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11”, refers to his observation that the most common interpretation of the Zechariah passage is that the two olive trees represent two leaders among the returned Hebrew exiles after the Babylonian captivity. He says “...it is logical to conclude that the oil – supplying olive trees ... are somehow symbolic of the Spirit or His work” (1982 : 258). “...several lines of evidence converge to indicate that the two lampstands = two olive trees symbolism reflects a two–witness theology that is broadly evidenced in the Apocalypse itself as well as in the NT. This two–witness theology affirms that there is unified testimony of the OT prophetic forecasts and the NT apostolic confirmation...” (1982 : 259).

The seer also sees the two witnesses as two lampstands. According to 1:20, lampstands refer to the church. Again the church is seen to fulfil its priestly and royal function. Beasley-Murray sums it up as follows : “Earlier John had symbolized one church with a single lampstand and the whole church by seven lampstands. He could not introduce the number seven without confusion. Accordingly, the single lampstand of Zechariah is made two, so as to correspond with the two witnesses, but the whole church is thereby represented. The number, moreover, accords with the tradition that valid testimony requires two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15) ”(1983:184).

“In Revelation the two lampstands refer to God’s word in its twofold aspect of OT prophetic forecast and NT confirmatory proclamation. In this connection, it may be noted that Scripture not only designates an administrative leader of Israel as ‘lamp’, but also gives that designation to God’s word” (Strand, 1982 : 260).

The number two could also be said to symbolize the two functions of the church viz. priesthood and kingship. These would be similar to the functions performed by Elijah and Moses respectively. These are two functions that are performed

through the enabling of the Lord of the earth. God is the great God with dominion over the whole world. Whatever the church does, it does it to serve Him. Zechariah 4 is summarized in verses 6-10. There the explanation or meaning of the whole chapter is given. Zerubbabel's efforts to build the temple had begun. There was opposition to the building-making attempts, to stop the work from continuing. God promises His assistance to the builders that even though there is opposition, He will make sure that they overcome and complete the building. But the power to do this work would not come from the builders but from God Almighty.

We can conclude our comment on verse 4 by using Strand's phrase saying that Revelation 11 : 4 and Zechariah 4 provide timely messages.

“In each instance, the constant part of the symbolism – the two olive trees – indicates the presence of the Holy Spirit in His effective power for the occasion at hand. The variable part of the symbolism – the one lampstand flanked by the olive trees in Zechariah, and the two lampstands equated with the olive trees in Revelation – relates to the specific situation itself. In Zechariah's portrayal, the one lampstand supplied with oil from the olive trees fitly represents Zerubbabel receiving the Spirit's unction for the task before him. He was ‘the lamp of Israel’ for that occasion. In the Apocalypse, at a time when a two-witness theology of OT prophetic prediction and NT confirmatory testimony was very much to the foreground in the experience and evangelistic mission of the church, the symbolism of two lampstands provided a fitting manner in which to portray this basic theological motif. The identification of these lampstands with the olive trees aptly depicts the Holy Spirit's central role in providing both the OT and NT divine messages” (1982 : 260 – 261).

Verse 4 therefore teaches that the proclamation of the word of God cannot be performed outside the provision of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is central in accomplishing what God intends to achieve through the proclamation of His word, with man as carrier of the message. Witnessing by individuals or groups of people will only succeed if those who get involved in it will ensure that they rely on the Holy Spirit. This has to be like that because these witnesses are supposed to bear witness to Him. Their message must proceed from Him, He must send them to go and do the work. Witnessing is not a voluntary work in order to gain work experience but a response to God's call to be His witness. That is why the witness cannot have another message from someone else except from the Lord Himself. Anything short of that is not Christian witnessing.

Verse 5 introduces a conditional sentence in which the conditional particle and indicative in the protasis emphasizes the reality of the condition ( και ει τις αυτους θελει αδικησαι = If anyone wants to harm them). This means that when the possibility of attack from the pagans becomes reality, precautionary measures are already put in place. That would not happen unexpectedly or without a reply from them. The second part of verse 5 details what would happen to those opponents of the witnesses when they try to harm them. Instead of the witnesses being harmed, the attackers themselves got harmed by the fire that proceeds from the mouths of the witnesses. The fire could be the power of the Word of God that the witnesses are prophesying against the unbelieving world.

The latter part of verse 5, speaking of fire proceeding out of their mouths, seems to have its origin from Jeremiah 5 : 14 which says :

“Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth fire and these people will be the wood it consumes”.

This is proof that the fire that the two witnesses have power to produce from their mouths is used figuratively and not literally. It should be noted that it is God who makes the words to be like fire. This means that the message that they proclaim makes the hearts of those that hear it to burn, making them restless within.

This is what verse 10 would refer to when it says that “these two prophets tormented those who live on the earth”. They are tormented by the word of God which troubles their consciences because of their refusal to repent from their sinful lifestyle. The two witnesses did not plan to torment their opponents as such, but it was the consequent result of their proclamation of God’s word that brought about the torment. We realize from this that true witness is effective. It will always produce results. It may produce positive or negative results. We speak of positive results when those who hear the message repent from their wicked ways. In this particular case the results were ‘negative’ because they did not repent and they were tormented by the very message that they rejected. The witness himself or herself finds solace in being faithful to the call.

“Moreover, the reference to the two olive trees (Rev 11 : 4) is reminiscent of the prophetic message through Zechariah at the time of Zerubbabel (Zech. 4). And still further, the reference earlier in the ‘interlude’ to John’s eating the scroll (Rev 10 : 8 – 10) recalls a similar experience of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 3 : 1 – 3). Thus, several biblical personages beyond Moses and Elijah are reflected by the symbolisms used in the two–witness pericope and in the interlude in which that pericope occurs” (Strand, 1981 : 130).

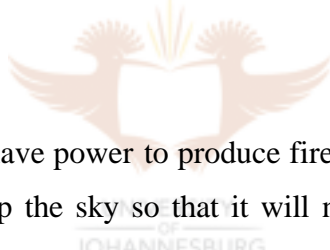
The witnesses are under God’s special protection, no one can harm them. They may undergo bodily, economic, political or social harm, but their eternal covenant status with God will not be affected. One reason that they were measured was so that they would prosper in their prophetic witness despite persecution. Though they may suffer and even die, they will invincibly and successfully carry out the spiritual mission for which they have been measured.

“It is interesting that concern for the two witnesses (v.5) comes before a description of their activity (v.6). The order lends emphasis to the fact that God will certainly keep His people safe from physical harm until their witness has

been completed. They will be protected by supernatural powers for the period of their prophetic activities” (Mounce, 1998:218).

Breathing and fire is a sign of judgement against those who oppose God. The fire is symbolic and not literal in this instance. The witnesses are not concerned with the physical destruction of their enemies. Their concern is their message that they are bringing to them. Fire itself is a symbol of total destruction. The enemies of the witnesses will eventually be totally destroyed.

While the two witnesses are supposed to have these retaliatory powers, they never actually execute them against their enemies. “The suffering of the oppressed Christian community is not merely understood here as mere passivity, a doing-nothing until the End comes. The prophetic ministry of the church, that is, its testimony by its own suffering, is, like their prayers, ... interpreted as an active agent in bringing about the eschaton and the final victory of God” (Boring, 1989:147).



These witnesses not only have power to produce fire from their mouths, but they also have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time that they are prophesying. “...verse 6 consists of two parallel clauses, each introduced with a similar phrase: ‘οὗτοι εχουσιν την εξουσιαν’, ‘these have power’ (v. 6a) and ‘και εξουσιαν εχουσιν’, ‘they also have power’ (v. 6b). The miraculous powers wielded by the two witnesses are, without exception, punitive” (Aune, 1998:615). Shutting up heaven so that it would not rain was a sign performed by Elijah, who caused a drought for three years. Rain is indispensable in any life situation. Its stoppage is a sign of punishment.

The shutting up of heaven and lack of rain is imagery of heavenly intervention, which is a sign to show that people are being judged because they have violated the covenantal and moral order that God has established on earth. As in the Old Testament, so here judgement comes because of idolatry. The closing of a regular

order of the course of nature in the heavens is probably not literal but refers to all those divinely ordained events intended to remind the persecutors that their idolatry is folly, that they are separated from the living God, and that they are already experiencing an initial form of judgement. Such events cause them to live in fear and terror.

Verse 6b continues to show that these witnesses have the ability to change water into blood, and to strike the earth with every kind of plague. This reminds us of the days of Moses' miracle works before the Egyptians. His source of power was God. Again this is a sign of judgement or punishment for the unbelieving persecutors of the Church of God. "This does not mean that Christians control the weather, water supply and devastation caused by natural causes. God controls all these forces, but His people possess the power of prayer as they petition the Almighty to intervene in respect to climate, life-sustaining necessities, and environmental disasters" (Kistemaker, 2001:331).

The Church's witness has prophetic authority (in the 'model' of Moses and Elijah) , and the Church's testimony carries with it judgement in response to unbelief and persecution, and blessing in response to belief. Both Elijah and Moses had a prophetic ministry during their earthly ministries. Their leadership was one of authority as well. The Church today should perform its prophetic function

"John may well have in mind here that the faithful performance of the church's duty is itself one of the ways in which the judgements of God are set in motion against an evil world (cf. 8:5). His imagery here expresses the truth that God's servants in the new dispensation have as great resources as did Moses and Elijah in the old" (Morris, 1988:145).

Fiorenza puts her comment on verse 6 in the following manner :

“The two symbolic figures representing Christian prophets and witnesses have the power ‘to smite the earth with every plague’. This statement appears to imply that Christian prophets participate in bringing about the eschatological plagues (cf. The outcry of the victims for justice in 6:10 and the ‘prayer of the saints’ in 5:8 and 8:2 ff). If so, the symbolic rhetoric of the text asserts that although Christians will be persecuted and oppressed, no one will be able to halt their prophetic witness, nor their call to repentance. Rather, injuries inflicted upon them increase the wrath of God and the eschatological plagues” (1991:78).

“The echoes of the first four trumpets suggest that John’s prophecy of the witnesses be read as a conscious transformation of the entire trumpet series. We have had other such transformations: a lion into a lamb (5:5-6) and 144 000 Jews into a crowd without number from every nation on earth (7:4-9). Here the transformation is that the people of God themselves become the executors of divine judgements. In the trumpet series, their role was largely passive: God sent judgement on earth in response to their prayers (8:3-5) and they were protected from harm by virtue of ‘the seal of God on their foreheads’ (9:4; compare 7:3-4), but otherwise they were out of the picture. Now they are very much in the picture, in the persons of their representatives, the two witnesses” (Michaels, 1997:140).

Robbins (1975:138) sees the power of these witnesses as a spiritual one. He puts it thus: “These witnesses wield a spiritual power which is not safe to provoke. When God’s message is proclaimed, its judgements are God’s judgements (Matthew 16:19; 18:18 f.; John 20:21-23). Those who oppose the gospel witness will thereby be destroyed (II Corinthians 2:15-16)”.



We can draw a parallel from what Jesus said in Mark 14:62 that He (Jesus) would one day be sitting on His judgement seat and that Christian witnesses must use any means available to them to persuade their opponent-enemies to see that they are in fact already on trial before a higher tribunal.

#### **4.2.2 THE RESULT OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE TWO WITNESSES**

From verse 7, the seer now concentrates on the fate of the two witnesses. These witnesses “...do not speak for a given local community or set of such communities; their theater of operations is a worldwide pagan audience for Christian prophetic testimony to the Gospel, to the fulfillment of the law and the prophets” (Giblin, 1991:114). But there is a limit to their exercise of power. This is portrayed in the words: “και οταν τελεσωσιν την μαρτυριαν αυτων” (when they finish their witness). “Finished (telesosin) means that the testimony has reached its end or aim (telos). The witnesses are not cut short. They accomplish their task” (Morris, 1988:145). This is proof that their witness period is predetermined – the symbolic three and a half years eschatological period that the seer uses here.

Until the mission of the two witnesses is completed, the person of the two witnesses is inviolate; but when they accomplish their task they fall prey to the wrath of the beast. The sufferings of the two witnesses follow the pattern of Jesus’ suffering (Matthew 10:24, 25). When He had finished His work (John 17:4; 19:39), the power of evil seemed to prevail. Like Jesus (John 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 8:20), the two witnesses are secure, indestructible and invincible until their work of bearing full witness for God is accomplished (Acts 20:27).

The phrase “το θηριον το αναβαινον εκ της αβυσσον ποιησει μετ αυτων πολεμον και νικησει αυτους και αποκτενει αυτους” (the beast who ascends from the Abyss will wage war on them that he might conquer them and kill them), suggests that at the end of their witness period, these witnesses will become powerless; the protection that God had given them during their period of witness will be withdrawn. The witnessing period is not indefinite.

Only after the withdrawal of their protection will the beast be able to attack them. This means that there is no longer need for their protection because the purpose of their witness has been accomplished. For the first time in the Book of Revelation the beast is introduced here. Aune argues that the use of the definite article ‘το’ before ‘θηριον’ suggests that the beast was familiar to the intended readers.

With regards to the beast Beckwith says that the beast is here introduced as well-known. The beast of Daniel 7:7 ff., the ‘abomination spoken of by Daniel the prophet’ (Matthew 24:15), had become a familiar representation of the Antichrist. “As such it not improbably stood in the source used by the Apocalyptist, and could be taken over without further definition, as well as understood by the readers” (1967:601). By him coming out from the Abyss, it indicates that he has connection with the evil forces. The fact that he wages war against the two witnesses is an indication that the two witnesses are not just individuals, but a big group of people, for war can only be waged against a big group. This is further proof that the two witnesses represent the whole Church. But it should also be understood that because the church is scattered throughout the world, the Christians will not all die on the same day.

The killing therefore happens at different times and different places, during the tribulation. The narrator does not reveal how the witnesses are attacked and killed. Since the witnesses are symbolic of the whole Church, it would probably not be possible for them to be attacked the same way, hence the omission of the method here.

Krodel (1989:225) explains this verse thus: “The question arises whether John sought to convey that the whole church of his day with all its members will suffer martyrdom. Hardly. Even though the impression of total martyrdom could be gotten from 11:7, there are other pictures that clearly show that martyrdom is not the fate of all faithful contemporaries of John (2:24-25; 3:3-5, 10, 11, 18-20). John’s point here is that the martyrs are the church’s foremost witnesses and therefore they are the church’s representatives.

Dynamic prophets, preachers and witnesses will experience not only protection but also death and resurrection, like their Lord. Their witness leads to the apparent triumph of evil, just as it did on Calvary’s hill. Whoever bears witness as God’s prophet has to deal with the satanic opponents of God’s purpose and perhaps suffer visible bodily defeat. Though God equips His prophets, He does not exclude them from suffering, death and execution”.

A similar idea is expressed by Kiddle but in a slightly different manner: “The supernatural protection afforded to the witnesses is withdrawn when they have finished their testimony; when, that is, they have broadcast to all nations on earth their gospel of repentance and their warnings of the approach of universal judgement...Their message pronounced the witnesses must suffer as their Lord had suffered; they must demonstrate by death their devotion to His cause. Christ was the first ‘child’ of the messianic community (xii. 5); but the martyrs were likewise her children – ‘the rest of her offspring’ (xii. 17) – and their fate was to be like His” (1963:198).

Verse 7 “shows that the ‘measuring’ in vv 1-2 guarantees the successful completion of the church’s witnessing task. It includes the protection of Christians’ faith and salvation throughout the church age, since this is a presupposition for their effective witness” (Beale, 1999:587).

This verse compares with 6:9, 11. This can be shown thus:

**6 : 9, 11**

τας ψυχας των εσφαγμενων...δια  
την μαρτυριαν ην ειχον...εως  
πληρωθωσιν και...οι μελλοντες  
αποκτεννεσθαι (the souls of the  
ones who had been slain...on  
account of their witness that they  
maintained ...until [the number]  
should be completed also...[of]  
the ones to be killed)

**11 : 7**

οταν τελεσωσιν την μαρτυριαν  
αυτων...αποκτενει αυτους  
(when they should complete their witness  
...he will kill them)

We can see from both texts that there are two common things viz.: to complete and to be killed. In both instances it is shown that true witnessing leads to losing one's life. But the killing only occurs after the saint's successful witnessing.

Since our conclusion is that the saints get killed at various times during the Church age, we can also conclude that the beast who comes from the Abyss must equally come out throughout the Church age. Beale (1999:588-589), in support of this view says that the phrase 'το αναβαινον εκ της αβυσσου' is temporally vague enough to include the idea that the beast has been characterized as rising from the Abyss throughout the period of the church's witness.

Another way of summing up this verse could be as follows :

“This verse projects a picture of the end times when the church has completed the task of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations in the world (Matthew 24:14). All along in history, the faithful in the church have preached and taught the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. But while they complete their work, the beast declares war on the church...whenever and wherever the

gospel is proclaimed, it encounters opposition. Here and there the evil one has been waging war against the followers of Jesus with intermittent oppression and persecution...The beast's primary attack is on the message and secondarily on the messengers; he kills the messengers to silence the message. When at the end of time the unbelievers reject the message, God withdraws both message and messengers, permitting the Antichrist to kill the saints" (Kistemaker, 2001 : 332-333).

From the events that take place in the Book of Revelation, one has the understanding that what is being related is a depiction of the end times of the Church age. Revelation 11 therefore points us to the last events of the Church on earth. The use of the two witnesses is an attempt to establish a link between the two Testaments and to demonstrate that there is continuity from the Old Testament into the New Testament. Even though this chapter is placed in the middle of the book, that does not mean that these events happen in the middle of the book because the events of the Book of Revelation do not follow a particular order.

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In Bauckham's words we can say: "It is not a literal prediction that every Christian will in fact be put to death. But it does require that every faithful Christian must be prepared to die" (1993:93).

While persecution of the faithful Christians is taking place throughout the church age, we may conclude that the beast will probably increase his onslaught upon the church as his days come towards the end.

After the witnesses have been killed, their bodies lie in the public square of the great city "και το πτωμα αυτων επι της πλατειας της πολεως της μεγαλης ". This is a picture of utter degradation (I Kings 21:24; Jeremiah 8:1-2). To be

unburied is the height of indignity and impiety toward the dead. This suggests that the witnesses are killed in the street and their corpses lie there unburied. The Greek does not, however, use the plural viz.: ‘bodies’ . Instead it uses the singular ‘*πτωμα*’ (body) for the two witnesses. The possible meaning could be that the two are regarded as one. If this be true, it would suggest that their witness is viewed as a single unit, thereby giving the connotation of unity and oneness of the witnesses.

To use Krodel’s words “ Instead of *bodies* (Plural), The Greek text has the singular in vv 8 and 9... It views the witnesses as one corporate entity. Clearly the ‘great city’ consists of the people of the world, that is, of those who dwell on the earth” (1989 : 226).

“The picture of the witness’ bodies lying on the street of the great city probably does not indicate literally that the entire church will be exterminated so that it cannot bear witness any longer. Rather it emphasizes the hyperbole that the true church will seem defeated in its role of witness, will appear small and insignificant, and will be treated with indignity” (Beale,1999:590). This would probably be accompanied by a reduction in true and faithful witness by Christians. But the complete stoppage of the witnessing function of the church will only happen at the end of the age.

The two witnesses’ bodies are allowed to lie unburied in the great city called Sodom and Egypt – “The two names are proverbial for wickedness and oppression (for Sodom, Isaiah 1:9-10; Ezekiel 16:46, 55; Egypt is the place where Israel was a slave. Sodom and Egypt are linked in Wisdom 19:14 – 15, and Egypt is a name for persecuting nations in Gn. Rabbah 16:4). They also both felt the judgement of God. Despite its might, Sodom was destroyed. And despite its might, Egypt was ‘ruined’ by plagues sent by God (Exodus 10:7)” Morris (1988:146).

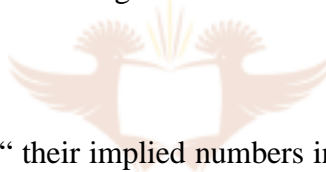
“In Revelation, ‘the great city’ always refers to Babylon / Rome. It is not a geographic place but a symbolic place. Its essential characteristic lies in the allegorical label of Sodom and Egypt. Sodom was the city of fornication, that rejected the commandments of God and was therefore rejected by God. Egypt was the place of the oppression of the people of God. In short, Jerusalem, Babylon and Rome, together with the fornicating, idolatrous and oppressive world, are fused by John into a single entity, the great city. The presupposition of this fusion is that for John the historic Jerusalem has ceased to be the holy city...The ‘great city’ is every city that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence on the Creator, achievement in place of repentance, oppression in place of faith, the beast in place of the Lamb, and murder in place of witness to God” (Krodel, 1989:226). This means therefore that Sodom and Egypt are symbolic of hostility to God and God’s people, Sodom for the way its inhabitants tried to treat Lot’s angelic visitors and Egypt because she had enslaved God’s people. But the witnesses must also witness to Sodom and Egypt. These are the places that need to be witnessed to more than others because of the nature of evil that is there.

Beckwith suggests that the term ‘great city’ here refers to Jerusalem, while elsewhere it refers to Rome. The reason why Beckwith and other commentators take Jerusalem to be referred to here is because of the phrase: “οπου και ο κυριος αυτων εσταυρωθη ” (where also their Lord was crucified) Mounce (1998:221) suggests the following solution: “In view of the consistent use of the term elsewhere in the book as a reference to Rome (as well as such verses as 18:24 “In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints”) it is best to conclude that the witnesses meet their death at the hands of the Antichrist, whose universal dominion was in John’s day epitomized by the power of Rome”.

Aune suggests that the meaning of the phrase “και βλεπουσιν εκ των λαων και φυλων και γλωσσων και εθνων το πτωμα αυτων ημερας τρεις και ημισυ” (For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies), is that the bodies of

the two witnesses are not on universal display, but rather that representatives from all over the world are present in the city where the two witnesses are martyred. “This suggests that the ‘ great city’ has become a symbol for the world” (1998 : 621). This sentence suggests that the seer is speaking of representatives of all mankind, which is another indication that it is not one earthly city that he has in mind. From the seer’s point of view these people that he is talking about are idolaters, fornicators and oppressors of God’s people. These are the worshipers of the Antichrist. They certainly form the greater part of mankind.

According to Ladd’s reasoning, “ This statement leads to the assumption that the Jews of Jerusalem have entered into a sympathetic alliance with the nations round about them, and both Jew and Gentile join in their despite of the two prophets” (1979 : 158). But it should be understood that not all Jews would be involved in the opposing of the Lord’s servants. Only the unbelieving Jews would partake in such a mission because the believing Jews would themselves be part of the group that is being persecuted.



Kistemaker’s view is that “ their implied numbers indicate that they did not come to view two corpses lying in a particular street of Jerusalem : they view the demise of the church in all its worldwide structures. The witness of the church has been completed, God has withdrawn His word and testimony, and the world now views the lifeless frame of the Christian religion”.

“The fourfold enumeration symbolizes the worldwide distribution of the people who are representatives of all ungodly men. This is sufficient to demonstrate that the two witnesses are not two individuals. John emphasizes the indignity and the dishonour shown toward the two witnesses by repeating the fact that they were denied decent burial. This describes symbolically, but graphically, the scorn and contempt to which the church is subjected by the world power” (Robbins, 1975 : 140).



Following on what Robbins says, we can understand this scorn to be in line with our Lord's predictions about the hatred that was to come upon the church. Jesus warned His disciples when he said " All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved " (Matthew 10 : 22). What The Lord told His disciples applies to His church today. Revelation is therefore fulfilling that promise, however bitter it may taste.

Some commentators like Beale view the three and a half days of non-burial that the two witnesses are as a pointer towards the three days that Jesus Christ was in the tomb though the two periods are not exactly the same. Beale goes on to say that Jesus' three and a half year duration of His earthly ministry is similar to the two witnesses' earthly ministry of three and a half years as recorded in Revelation 11 : 2. He further draws our attention on the possible similarity between the end of Jesus' ministry with that of the two witnesses.

"This period corresponds with the three and a half years of the two witnesses ( v.3). But these two are not identical. Three and a half days denotes a brief period compared with the much longer time during which the witnesses proclaim the gospel to the world, after God withdraws His word. The interval of the world's triumph is momentary. Its duration is short, for God determines its length when after three and a half days the witnesses are raised from the dead" (Beale, 1999 : 334 ).

It is by God's providence that the tribulation period is shorter than the period of witnessing. This is certainly to make sure that the church is able to overcome the opposition. If it were too long many Christians would fail to make the grade. When Jesus went into the tomb the enemy thought he had defeated Him. Even now with the two witnesses he thinks he shall have defeated them when he kills them. But this is only happening in accordance with God's eternal plan of salvation.

The words of Psalm 79 : 1 – 4 carry a lot of support to what John is saying in this chapter :

1“ O God , the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.

2 They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth.

3 They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead.

4 We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us”.

While all the four verses in this Psalm bear witness to what Revelation 11 : 1 - 11 is addressing, verse 4 in particular, in combination with verse 1, lends more support to the fact that the church eventually bears the public shame because of what the nations do to it. The way the life of the founder of the church ended here on earth was that of public shame, by being hung on the cross.

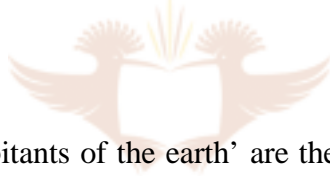
Verse 10 reveals the reaction of the opponents of the two witnesses :

“και οι κατοικουντες επι της γης χαιρουσιν επ’ αυτοις και ευφρανινονται και δωρα πεμψουσιν αλληλοις ” (The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts). The phrase ‘ the inhabitants of the earth ’ is used frequently by the author of the Book of Revelation. It has a negative connotation. It refers to the pagans who have nothing to do with the things of the Lord.

The use of this phrase suggests that all the haters of good rejoiced over the death of the two witnesses. This is so because they do not want to be disturbed when they go about their worldly business. They are so entrenched in this world’s affairs that it has become their permanent home. “Idolaters are labeled ‘earth-

dwellers' they ultimately trust in some aspect of the world and not in God" (Beale, 1999 : 598). Anything that would disturb the status quo would be met with fierce resistance in order to protect themselves. The wicked enjoy to live in a place where there is no preaching of the word of God.

It was customary to send one another gifts during happy times as it still is even today. The two motifs of joy and gift exchange are closely connected. In the Greco-Roman world the exchange of gifts was an expression of mutual obligation and occupied an important role in both public and private life" (Aune, 1998 : 623). This means that the death of these two witnesses had brought happiness which was missing during their life on earth. The Lord Jesus told His Disciples that the world would rejoice at His death while the disciples would be mourning. His death would have brought happiness to his opponents (John 16 : 20). The rejoicing of the witnesses' opponents was in line with what happened to their Master, Jesus Christ i.e. it was the fulfillment of scriptures. The Lord's fate is extended to His witnesses.



Beale notes that the 'inhabitants of the earth' are the persecutors of the witnesses living all over the world. The reason given as being the cause of their rejoicing is because these two witnesses, now called prophets ( because their ministry was described as prophesying in verse 3 ), tormented them during their life on earth. "The message God sent them by way of His envoys pricked their consciences and denied them peace of mind. The Word of God exposed their sins, and they were called to repentance, faith, and a life of service to God. They were told of God's wrath and the Day of judgement" (Kistemaker, 2000 : 335).

"God's truth through the testimony of faithful witnesses has always distressed the consciences of evil men. To Ahab the prophet Elijah was a 'troubler of Israel' (1 Kings 18 : 17), Herod feared John the Baptist, yet heard him gladly (Mark 6 : 20). The world has always shown some hostility to the word of God..." (Mounce, 1998 : 222). Hostility to the word of God is therefore to be expected at all times by those who preach the true message of repentance from sin. The Church must

therefore of necessity be seen by the world as a trouble maker since it keeps on pointing to the world the right way of living which is contrary to the ways that the world wants to follow. It is because of the Church being a trouble maker that the Church experiences the kind of opposition that it experiences on account of witnessing for Christ.

Faithful preaching of the word of God will usually produce hard feelings in some people's hearts. Morris puts it this way : "The faithful preaching of the gospel is never soothing to the impenitent, so that the removal of an outstanding preacher is commonly a matter of rejoicing for those whose consciences he has troubled" (1988 : 146). Aune argues differently with regards the manner of torment : "Here the term *ἐβασανισαν*' *tormented, tortured*, refers not to the effect of their prophesying (the content of which is left unspecified) but rather to the plagues and punishments that they dished out" (1998 : 623).

If Aune's argument for plagues and punishment dished out refers to their spiritual or emotional torment because of the preaching of the word of God, then it is understandable, but if it points to some form of physical torment that they have undergone, then it opens itself for questioning. If the latter is true, it therefore suggests that they have already had their share of punishment because of their rejection of the Word of God. Is this the case?

### 4.2.3 THE FATE OF THE TWO WITNESSES

Verse 11 now gives the story a sharp turn :

“But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them”.

The happiness of the inhabitants of the world was short-lived, coming to an end only after three days. The reference to ‘a breath of life from God’ entering them relates to the passage in Ezekiel 37 : 10 (So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army). “God restores the witnesses to Himself after their apparent defeat at the end of the church age. The restoration consists of an overturning of their vanquished condition. The portrayal of the restoration depicts God raising the witnesses from the dead before the eyes of their enemies” (Beale, 1999 : 598 ).

The phrase ‘ και ημισυ πνευμα ζωης εκ του θεου εισηλθεν εν αυτοις ’ is of great significance to our understanding of this verse. This was not just an ordinary breath, but ‘πνευμα ζωης’, a life giving ‘πνευμα’. This breath comes from only one source – God. It was the life-giving breath that God gave to the breathless Adam that He was now giving to His two witnesses. Only He can give it, by His own choice. God, the source of this life, now causes this life-giving breath to ‘εισηλθεν εν αυτοις’ (enter them ), in order for it to be meaningful for them. The life-giving breath would be valueless outside of the dead bodies of the two witnesses. As God caused the life-giving breath to enter into the lifeless Adam and the lifeless dry bones before Ezekiel, He again caused it to enter into the lifeless bodies of the two witnesses. No other being can do this.

The period of three and a half days has its origin in the Christian tradition. The founder of the church rose from the dead after three days. It would also correspond to the 42 months or 1260 days of Revelation 11 : 2, indicating a

limited or brief span of time. “When this period comes to an end, God as the author of life breathes life into the corpses of these two witnesses (Job 33 : 4; Ezekiel 37 : 5 – 14). As God breathed the breath of life into Adam’s nostrils (Genesis 2 : 7), so He makes the dead come alive (Job 19 :25 – 27)” (Kistemaker, 2000 : 337).

Robbins suggests that perhaps the resurrection that is referred to here is a communication of spiritual power with the witnesses. He says that “there is a resurrection power in every rejected truth for the strength of truth is undying. Truth that seemed dead is found to be possessed of a new power and life. The church has sometimes ‘died’, but it always rises again when *a breath of life from God enters it*” (1975 : 141).

History has often seen the Church oppressed to the very verge of extinction, but it has always seen it rise again from the verge of death. Each such resurrection strikes consternation into the hearts of the oppressors. God did not allow His witnesses to be permanently ‘humiliated’, they were but for a moment. After three and a half days of celebration, the humiliation of the dead prophets ends with their receiving new life from God.

God publicly demonstrates that He is in charge of the events of this world. Only He can create or restore life. The breath of life that enters the dead bodies in from God. This is a clear demonstration that life belongs to God and He gives or takes it away at any time. He was showing the world that the death of these two witnesses was by His permission, it was not the inhabitants of the world who killed them but God allowed them to die so that He would manifest His power in their very presence as He was doing. To further show that this was His plan, the breath of life enters the bodies of the witnesses in the presence of their enemies. The inhabitants of the earth become the witnesses of God’s greatness. The short-lived celebration of the inhabitants of the earth was to be the eternal celebration of the followers of the Lamb.

The ‘suddenness’ of the course of events does not only produce amazement in the hearts of the opponents of the two witnesses, but it strikes them with fear. It’s something that was not expected at all, and even unheard of in man’s history (the coming back to life of the dead).

Aune refers to the phrase ‘great fear fell on them’ as “a Semitic expression for a collective response of awe, either because the Israelites or Jews are invincible...or as a reaction to a display of supernatural power” (1999 : 624). This could have been fear because of beholding something unbelievable happening, or fear because of the possible consequences to them since their plan to destroy these two witnesses had apparently failed. “Since murder is the last resort, what can be done about those who rise from the dead! The resurrection of the church is a sure indication that God possesses the ultimate authority over life and death” (Mounce, 1998 : 223).

In his interpretation of the meaning of this verse, Kistemaker suggests that “It may refer to the general resurrection of the dead when Christ returns (1 Thess. 4 : 16 – 17), namely , to the great and glorious day that precedes the consummation. But it is also possible to say that this resurrection should be understood symbolically” (2000 : 337).

After this miraculous act of God in the seeing of all present,

“Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here’. And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on”

This verse takes our memories back to the voice that was heard by John in 4 : 1 inviting him to ‘come up here’. One thing we are not sure of, is whether their enemies also heard that loud voice when it spoke. There are two possibilities : only the two witnesses could have heard the voice or both the two witnesses and their enemies heard it. But with our understanding of what is happening here, the probability is that the enemies also heard the loud voice, as they had become witnesses of what God was doing. But the directive, ‘ἀναβατε ὧδε’, was only

referring to the two witnesses to the exclusion of the ‘inhabitants of the earth’. This voice must have been the voice of Jesus whose witnesses they were. We could see this invitation to ‘come up here’ as a symbolic representation of the rapture of the Church. These witnesses are invited to go into heaven itself. This is at the end of their witnessing assignment. It is therefore fitting that they are invited to go back to the One who sent them. Even though the identity of the voice is not specified, it is assumed to be that of God. This is a phenomenon that frequently occurs in Revelation in audition reports (Aune, 1999 : 561).

The two witnesses, having heard the invitation from heaven, they responded. ‘και ανεβησαν εις τον ουρανον εν τη νεφελη’ (and they went up to heaven in a cloud). This event is presented as a miraculous divine rescue, a view underlined by the fact that the enemies of the two witnesses observe their ascension. “The cloud in which they ascend and from which ‘they heard a great voice from heaven speaking’ in 11 : 12 is to be identified with the cloud in 10 : 1, in which the angelic Christ ‘descended from heaven’...The acceptance of the witnesses into the cloud shows divine approval ” (Beale, 2000 : 599). This leads us to the conclusion that what is happening here is similar to what happened to Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven He went in a cloud as a mode of transport. It also alludes to Elijah and his chariot ride into heaven. Again Elijah comes into the picture as a forerunner of the Church age. God used Elijah then as He would like to use the Church today. Elijah did not experience death, similarly the Church cannot die because Christ has already died on behalf of the Church. It is true that the Church will experience trouble but not destruction.

But when the Saints are caught up in the air, God’s enemies watch them go up to heaven. Their ascension signifies full and complete victory over the evil one. The inhabitants of the earth looked hopelessly as the two witnesses went up to heaven, there was nothing they could do about it. God had taken over the reigns. God’s enemy has no chance to defeat God’s servants, their victory is guaranteed.



They will go through difficult times but in the end they will be the victors, just as Jesus overcame.

Now we move over to verse 13 which says :

“At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven”.

The first part of this verse which says ‘At that very hour there was a great earthquake’ (και εν εκεινη τη ωρα εγενετο σεισμος μεγας), reflects the proximity with which this event occurs to the previous happening. Aune says that ‘at that very hour’ emphasizes the immediacy with which miraculous events occur or the immediacy of divine retribution (1999 : 627). It is generally understood that the appearance of earthquakes in the Book of Revelation have the theophanic function and are instruments of divine judgement. Kistemaker puts it this way : “This verse speaks about the unbelieving world that faces divine wrath in the form of a great earthquake that shakes the earth to indicate God’s involvement in the Day of judgement” (2000 : 338). God usually uses this phenomenon in nature to indicate an unusual event. Earthquakes occurred when Jesus died and rose from the dead.

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Aune regards the earthquake phenomena not as being punitive but rather that they function as signs that an extraordinary event is taking place. Earthquakes usher in God’s era or the moment of the direct invasion of His kingdom in the activities of this world. They indicate the breaking up of some settled order by sudden providential visitation

The next part of the verse says that a tenth of the city collapsed ( και το δεκατον της πολεως επεσεν ). The use of symbolism in this text is obvious. According to verse 2 the city is the place which the Gentiles will trample under foot and the place where their Lord was crucified. “It is the profane place that contrasts with all that is holy. This profane place, encompassing a worldwide structure set in unbelief and defiance against God, is now stricken with a great

earthquake that vibrates its foundations. So it seems best to interpret the number seven thousand symbolically, as seven signifies completeness and one thousand as ten times ten times ten...indicates a multitude” (Kistemaker, 2000 : 338). Aune suggests that one tenth is usually used to indicate the survivors of divine judgement. But according to the verse under consideration, the tenth is the number of those who succumbed to the divine phenomena – seven thousand of them.

According to the next portion of verse 13, the survivors of this calamity were terrified and they gave glory to the God of heaven ( και οι λοιποι εμφοβοι εγενοντο και εδωκαν δοξαν τω θεω του ουρανου ).

“Those who are not killed are filled with fear and consternation. They realize that the saints’ ascension to heaven is going to be followed by punishment, judgement, and doom for them. It is no wonder that terror fills their hearts and minds, for their time on earth has run out” Kistemaker (2000 : 339). The people here are filled with fear and amazement. The events are so devastating and are happening with such speed that they are not able to cope with. They are in a state of acclamation at the conclusion of a miracle.

There are different ways of interpreting this phrase. Some scholars see in this verse the salvation of the rest of mankind while others do not. Bauckham says : “There should be no doubt that the end of 11 : 13 ( και οι λοιποι εμφοβοι εγενοντο και εδωκαν δοξαν τω θεω του ουρανου ) refers to genuine repentance and worship to God by the pagan world which is symbolized by the great city” (1993 : 278).

A similar view to that of Bauckham is raised by Krodel :

“On one hand, the resurrection of the witnesses unleashes a great earthquake in which a tenth of the city, that is, seven

thousand people, perish...But on the other hand something new occurs. While the plagues of 6 : 12 – 17; 8 : 7 – 9 : 19 did not lead to repentance, the reversal of the fate of the prophetic witnesses, their resurrection/exaltation, does make an impact. The rest were not only terrified but they gave glory to the God of heaven. That means that nine-tenths of humanity, or of the citizens of the Roman empire, turn to God and give Him glory! ...In short, with 11 : 13c John leads us beyond the vision of 6 : 15 – 16 and 9 : 20 – 21. God's triumph in the resurrection of His faithful witnesses brings about the salvation of the rest of humanity" (1989 : 227 – 228).

Beale poses the question : Are the survivors of the earthquake to become genuine Believers, or do they remain antagonistic, though compelled to acknowledge the power of God? He argues that their reaction of fearing and giving glory to the God of heaven could easily be understood positively on analogy with Dan. 4 : 34 because of the similar language. With regards the one tenth of the city which collapsed and the seven thousand who died, he reasons that they "emphasize the totality of unbelievers judged at the conclusion of history...On the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar's response in Daniel 4 may not express true conversion to the faith of Israel" ( 1999 : 603 ).

It can be shown in several passages in the Old Testament that the phrase 'God of heaven' is used to refer to God's sovereignty over events on earth (Genesis 24 : 7; 2 Chronicles 36 : 23). The demise, disgrace, and vindication of the witnesses follows the pattern of the end of Christ's ministry. Matthew 28 : 1 – 4 uses the same language as Revelation 11 : 11 – 13 to narrate the pattern of the conclusion of Christ's ministry.

In this regard Beale argues :

“εμφοβος is also typically translated ‘startled, alarmed, terrified, frightened, in fear, afraid’. It is never used in either the LXX or the NT in any expression analogous to ‘fear of the Lord’, where the noun φοβος is used...In fact, εμφοβος with a form of γινομαι always means ‘terrified’ or ‘frightened’ in the NT, and never includes any sense of faith, though it is applied to both believers and unbelievers...The ‘tenth of the city’ that fell and the ‘seven thousand’ killed suggests that God was beginning to judge a significant portion of ungodly humanity...”

What Beale is saying is more in agreement with what the Scriptures teach. The in-breaking of the earthquake is the indication of the arrival of God’s judgement. The moment the two witnesses were taken away from the presence of their enemies, that was the end of the period of grace. The period of prophesying had come to its predetermined end. When the judgement period was ushered in, nothing could reverse the process. Neither could the great fear that gripped the enemies of God nor their giving glory to the God of heaven. We should not mistake their ‘giving glory to the God of heaven’ for anything less than remorse. This was not repentance, for the period allocated to it had expired.

### **4.3 THE IDENTITY OF THE TWO WITNESSES**

The identity of the two witnesses is interpreted differently by different authors or commentators. The two most common interpretations are the symbolic interpretation and the literary interpretation. The former refers to the fact that these are not human beings. Those who adhere to the latter interpretation “agree that the two witnesses are two individuals, but they disagree on who these people are” Wong (1997 : 346). Some interpreters say that these two individuals are

Elijah and Moses, Elijah and Enoch, Elijah and John the Baptist, Peter and John, etc.

We shall use Wong's view as representative of those who take the two individuals approach. Wong, in his article, "The two witnesses in Revelation", says that he "prefers the view that the two witnesses are two persons, presently unknown, who will minister in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah in the future tribulation period" (1997 : 347). Wong argues that the word 'witnesses' suggests that these are human beings. He bases his argument on the origin of the verb *μαρτυρεω*. He also argues that by saying that they 'shall prophesy', verse 3 therefore points to the fact that they are human beings. Another of his arguments is that the overall context in which "the activity of the two witnesses is described (11 : 3 – 12) supports the preferred view. In these verses witnesses, depicted as individuals, speak (vv. 3, 6); are given power to kill their enemies (v. 5); are heard, handled, and hated (vv. 3, 7, 10); have mouths, ears, and feet (vv. 5, 11 – 12)..." (1997 : 347).

The other group may be represented by Strand. He says in his article, "The two witnesses of Rev 11 : 3 – 12", says : "Another fairly common approach among recent exegetes is to see the two witnesses as somehow representing the Christian church, or at least some segment or aspect of it and its mission. This might be the prophetic vocation of the church, the Jewish and Gentile segments of the early Christian community..." (1981 : 127). "Now in the Christian context of Rev 11, the two witnesses are also a source of warning - to a 'new Egypt' / 'new Babylon' that is oppressing God's people" (1981 : 129). According to this explanation by Strand, the two witnesses can be understood to be that process that the church could be using, under the directive of God the Holy Spirit, to make God's opponents aware of the danger that they are facing if they not repent.

Strand argues that the two witnesses do not function as two individual entities, but as one entity – always in unity and in absolute union with each other. Therefore "the two witnesses constitute a symbolism drawn from several prophetic

backgrounds beyond the obvious allusions to Moses and Elijah, just as in Rev 11 : 8 ‘the great city’ also embraces a blend of symbolic references” (Strand, 1981 : 130). The unifying element which drew together the various prophetic personages used as a basis for the two–witness symbolism was their proclamation of God’s word of warning.

There is however, no way of verifying who the two individuals are from the context in which it was written. In this very uncertain situation, Wong suggests that the names of these two individuals are Elijah and Enoch because they both did not see death but were translated to heaven. He says that these two will come back in order to experience death before the Lord Jesus Christ comes and takes His church home.

These two witnesses face opposition from the beast which will come out of the abyss having a satanic and demonic character. This beast could be the anti-Christ.

The two witnesses, as their title already tells, are there to perform the function of witnessing. Their witnessing is not restricted to one area, but it is for the whole world. Because of this requirement to witness to the whole world, it is logical to conclude that the two witnesses are therefore not two individuals. They are a symbolic representation of the whole church. God would not only need the services of two individuals to the exclusion of everyone else.

These witnesses were doing their witnessing job within an environment that was not conducive for witnessing. They were witnessing to people whose economic circumstances left much to be desired. Their economic estrangement contributed a lot to the way they responded to the events that were happening around them. Economic conditions have always affected any people group throughout all the ages.

The author of the Book of Revelation wrote to encourage his readers to remain faithful to God even in the midst of the economic pressures that they were faced with. God wants all His followers to be faithful to Him despite the conditions they live under. God is able to help His faithful followers to bear the pressures that they face in order to give glory to Him.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

The measuring of the temple is an important feature in the study of the Book of Revelation. We saw that the temple refers to the spiritual temple which is the very presence of God or His Church. John is charged with the responsibility of measuring it but he never gets down to doing it because he cannot literally measure it.

There are a number of truths that have been exposed during the exegesis of the passage above. We shall take a brief look at them :

The measuring here has to do with protecting the Church, the holy ones of God from any spiritual dangers / the enemy's attacks. Measuring the temple therefore tells us that the Church is guaranteed of spiritual security at the height of evil, even if they may die.

Those that are not to be measured are the unbelieving pagans who are not to be protected because they are hostile to God and His followers.

The two witnesses are to bear witness to the unbelieving world. The use of the number two is only for convenience. They are not literally two individuals as it is impossible for two people to witness to the whole world alone. The number two could also be seen as representing the dual Church functions of priests and kings. These two are wearing sackcloth as an indication of their mourning and repentance preaching. They are able to do their work with the help of God the

Holy Spirit as their source of power. The Holy Spirit is central to their functioning.

The two witnesses represent the whole Church. The torment that the two witnesses bring to the inhabitants of the world bring is through the preaching of the word of God which challenges them to repent of their sins and threatens judgement if they do not repent. It is the word of God that they preach which is like fire out of their mouths, bringing total destruction. The powers that the two witnesses possess are of a punitive and judgemental nature. Christians have the power to pray to God to ask Him to change the forces of nature.

During their time of witness, these witnesses cannot be stopped by anyone from their God-ordained function. But when they have finished their witnessing, their protection from dangers is withdrawn and the beast is able to wage war against them and kill them. This happens with God's permission because their assignment has come to the end. The fact that the beast can wage war against them is an indication that they represent the whole world for no war can be waged against two individuals.

Faithful witnessing can cause one to lose one's life. The reason for the beast to fight them is to stop them from preaching the message they have. Every Christian must therefore be prepared to die for his or her faith.

After the two witnesses have been killed by the beast, they are refused burial for three days and their bodies are left in the street for as many days. The fact that the Greek text uses the singular 'body' instead of the plural 'bodies' may suggest that the witnesses are viewed as a single corporate entity. These things take place in the 'great city' called Sodom and Egypt. This may refer to those who do not depend on God for their survival. Sodom was known for its sexual immorality while Egypt was known for its oppression practices.

The persecution that the witnesses go through only lasts for a limited period (three and half days) because of God's mercy. The inhabitants of the earth do not want



to see a change in the status quo, hence the waging of war. The death of the two witnesses brings happiness in their lives of the inhabitants of this world.

After three and half days, God intervenes on behalf of His servants who were killed by the beast. He sends a life-giving breath to enter them and they are resurrected from death. Here God demonstrates that He is the Creator of all things. He is able to give or take away life, for life is in Him. God is fully in charge of the events of this world. He not only makes them to rise from the dead, but he also takes them away from the face of the earth, straight into heaven. This is proof that their home is not in this world but in heaven where God is.

It is therefore not surprising to see the fear that grips all those who survive the earthquake as the two witnesses are taken up into heaven in the clouds. Their response of giving glory to God can be understood to be referring to them honouring God for who He is as He displays His power before all men. The glory that they give to God is not motivated by love for God and reverence for Him. They are forced to give glory to God, for they cannot do otherwise.

From the above discussion, we can see that God is in charge of His creation and He controls all the events that take place in the lives of those who serve Him. He guides the lives of all those who faithfully serve Him. Whatever course a person's life take, it will eventually end where the Creator wants it to end. All God's witnesses can rest assured that their path is predetermined even before they start it. Those who serve God must do so with the understanding that while their security in Him is guaranteed, they may and will most likely suffer persecution from those who oppose God. Such persecution may even lead to death. But this does not mean that all those who faithfully witness for Jesus Christ will be martyred.

One thing should be clear to all faithful witnesses however, that their faithfulness to their witness will certainly attract persecution, but God has promised that He will make sure that they are protected spiritually as long as their period of

witnessing has not yet come to its prescribed end. What happened to the two witnesses is a model of what is going to happen to the whole Church when it witnesses faithfully.

In the next chapter we shall look at the theology of the Book of Revelation. Let us now turn to it.



## CHAPTER 5

### **WITNESSING WITHIN THE THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

#### **5.1 THE REQUIREMENTS FOR TRUE WITNESSING**

The Lord Jesus, in Acts 1 : 8 says : “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. Jesus’ desire and charge to His disciples was that they should be **‘His witnesses’**. According to Jesus, witnessing must be for Jesus.

Witnessing therefore requires that the person concerned must have seen that which they bear witness to. A witness is one who testifies or bears testimony. First and foremost, a witness is someone who has first hand experience about something. The people that Jesus assigned the job of becoming His witnesses had been with Him. They knew Jesus personally. When a replacement for Judas was sought, Peter said in Acts 1 : 21 – 22 : “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who had been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection”.

From the above citations, it is clear that a witness was understood as someone who had personal experience of what they would be called upon to bear witness to. True witnesses must therefore meet this requirement. The same requirements were expected of those who would be witnesses in lawsuits. Deuteronomy 19 : 15 says : “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of

two or three witnesses". Again it is understood that the witnesses here referred to those who had first hand experience of the matter in question.

It therefore follows that those who would be called witnesses in the Book of Revelation would have to have had first hand experience of what they were to bear witness to. Witnessing for Jesus Christ therefore meant that such individuals had to have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ as a way of meeting the requirement for first hand experience. Witnessing for Jesus did not end with the Disciples who had been with Him during His earthly ministry, but it continues even today through the same method of having a personal relationship with Him as an individual. Witness is therefore not meaningful unless it can be proven that the person has seen or experienced what they bear witness to.

The two witnesses of Revelation 11 are therefore those who met the requirements for being admitted in the realm of witnesses. As already mentioned above, those members of the Church that would bear witness to Jesus Christ must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship is introduced through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of that individual, and it is the same Holy Spirit who enables the witness to bear the witness or testimony about the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the basis of what has been said above, it is understandable why it would be difficult for someone who has no first hand experience or a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ to bear witness for Him. It would be difficult if not impossible, to testify on something one does not know. God does not therefore expect anyone to become His witness without having a personal relationship with Himself.

In the event of persecution, the person who has personal experience on the matter in question is more likely to endure the pressure that may be exerted upon them while it would be difficult for someone who does not have that relationship to

endure the pressure. Witnessing is therefore part of the responsibility of the Christian. Christianity is not complete without being God's witness.

## 5.2 WITNESSING IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The message of the Book of Revelation hinges on witnessing as one of its pillars. Right from the beginning of the book in chapter 1, the author of the book reveals that he has been banished to the island of Patmos because of the Word of God. We understand this to mean that he was sent there as punishment for his involvement in the spreading of the message of the gospel. He could have only done so as a witness to what he knew or saw.

As already cited in the earlier chapters, the readers/hearers were written this letter in order to encourage them to continue in their witnessing function as Christians. The Christians in the first century were experiencing persecution from their opponents because of their witness. Their witness about the Lord Jesus Christ was not acceptable to their fellow citizens. It was because of this unacceptable message that they were spreading that they were rejected by those who did not believe in Jesus Christ.

The author of the Book of Revelation wrote this Apocalypse to help them come to terms with the situation they were faced with. The difficulties they were facing were beginning to take their toll amongst the Christians. Some of the Christians were beginning to be unfaithful to their witness because of the pressures that they were experiencing within those communities. Their exclusions from certain activities or functions were making life difficult for them. The Christians were denied certain privileges which were generally enjoyed by all other citizens because of their Christian witness.

To the Christians, witnessing was therefore an expensive commitment. It not only deprived them of their lawful privileges, but it also made them to stand out from among their non-believing counterparts. It was through the withdrawal of the basic necessities of life that they were indirectly forced to stop their witnessing function, if they were to live a 'normal' life like other people. They therefore had to make a clear choice whether to continue witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ but be without what they needed in their daily life or give up their witnessing and receive their daily needs. In such a situation, they would be happy to receive what they need but their Lord would be disappointed.

From what has been said above, we can see that witnessing could only be carried on by someone who was fully committed to the course of the Christian faith, including its hardships. One could not accept the one part and live out the other part, one had to accept it as a package.

The author of the Book of Revelation was writing to his readers/hearers to make them aware that there is a reward in continuous witnessing even if it meant loosing some of those earthly privileges for now. Those who would continue being faithful to their covenant would be rewarded by the Lord Jesus Himself for their faithfulness. They would spend their eternity with Him. When the author of the Book of Revelation speaks of overcoming he refers to those who would be faithful in their witness until the last day, those who would not succumb to the pressures exerted on them by their opponents and the opponents of their Lord Jesus Christ.

John also seeks to make his readers/hearers aware that they are not alone during their witness here on earth. God is with them, giving them the protection they need so that their enemy would not harm them. Their security in God's hands is guaranteed, they should not fear anything. God is not only interested in their good work but He is directly involved with them in their daily struggles in this world. Their importance to God starts here and continues into the future. Their victory

here on earth is Christ's victory in heaven and their disappointment here on earth is Christ's disappointment in heaven.

Christian witness is therefore the continuation of the work that Christ started while He was here on earth. The Church is the institution that God chose to propagate the Gospel in the world. As Christ was subjected to opposition while He was still in the world, so would the Church be treated by those who opposed Him. Jesus predicted this kind of an opposition for His followers before He left this world. Christ's witness about the Father was never accepted by the non-believers of His time.

### **5.3 GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE WITNESSING CHURCH.**

The message of Revelation 11 is understood to be directed to the believing community. It is a message that seeks to confirm God's presence among His people. In the Old Testament God used to visit His people through the prophets. In this chapter God takes the Church back to those times by using the figures of the two witnesses which point to the figures of Elijah and Moses. God is involved with man in witnessing, man is not alone. By describing Himself as the Alpha and the Omega, God points man's attention to Himself as the One who exists before all of creation as well as One who exists after all creation has passed away. "The purpose is to emphasize God's sovereignty over all history" (Beale, 1999 : 199). God precedes all things, as Creator, and He will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. God has called all His followers to be His witnesses.

He wants His followers to know Him as the bearer of life. As witnesses, they need to have all the confidence in Him. They can only tell others about Him if they themselves are convinced of who He is, what He is capable of doing and how they relate to Him. The very task of witnessing that they are faced with, has to start with God. Without God there is no witnessing. Those who go to witness they go to tell others about who this God is and what He expects of them. This has to

happen because all mankind is subject to Him. God is the One who sets the rules of life. Witnessing therefore begins with God and ends with God.

As they bear witness, Christians ought to remain focussed on God. He is the center of all that happens in this world. God ought to be made known to others as such. Witness will be true witness when it is in the hands of God. Those who witness for God must willingly put God in the center of their lives. God therefore wants the reader/hearer to put all his attention on Him and Him only. With this in mind, the reader/hearer is invited to read /hear the message of the Book of Revelation to focus on Him in order to witness for Him. Those who are witnesses must witness under God's banner of faith, with Him being the origin and goal of their lives and for the whole of creation.

Revelation 1 : 8 “stands out not only by its position immediately preceding the beginning of John's account of his vision (1 : 9 – 22 : 6), but also because it is one of the two occasions in Revelation on which God Himself speaks” (Bauckham, 1993 : 25).

The phrase ‘Alpha and Omega’ promotes the monotheistic way of worship and witnessing. This theme is carried through the whole book of Revelation. All of God's people are called upon to worship Yahweh alone. It is this monotheistic faith that determines the prophetic outlook of Revelation.

Christ is the forerunner of Christian witness because He was the first One to bear witness to the Father. Christians are supposed to follow in His footsteps as His witnesses. Those who put their hope in Christ can gain confidence in Christ's sovereignty and thus guard themselves against despair and consequent compromise to the world's view of things.

This world has its own standards of dealings with life issues. The world has no regard for God. Again, right from the beginning, God wants His followers to know, and to get it from Him personally, that He is the forerunner in all matters of



life. When it comes to witnessing, Christ is the first. When He came into the world, His purpose was to bear witness to the Father. He taught the world everything He had to teach it about the Father. He bore this witness under trying conditions. His witness was not acceptable to the world but that did not deter Him from continuing with the witness program. As the One who precedes everything, He wants His subjects to know that He expects a similar witnessing commitment from them just as He did it.

The followers of Jesus Christ are assured that they are getting into a field that has already been tested by their Lord. They therefore need not fear anything because He will be with them to support them all the way till the end. As the first born from the dead, He suffered during the process, but He remained faithful in His witness, allowing nothing to dissuade Him from His goal. The Christians are called upon to be like Jesus and remain faithful in their witnessing from the beginning to the end. They have Him as their example of a faithful witness. As their Lord He has already been designated Ruler over all nature by the Father. He is the One who is going to take the Church and hand it over to the Father on the last day. Only those who shall have been faithful like Him will be in that number that will to be handed to the Father.

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It is also worth noting that what the Father does, so does the Son. In the witnessing function, the Christian is in it together with the Trinity. Victory is guaranteed to all who will be faithful.

According to Bauckham,

“Although it might initially seem that God and Christ are in some way distinguished by the two different self-declarations in 1 : 8 and 1 : 17, in 22 : 13 the placing of the title which is used only of Christ (‘the first and the last’) between those which have hitherto been used only of God seems deliberately to align all three as equivalent. Moreover, since the title, ‘the first and the last’, is the one

that occurs in divine self-declarations in Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 44 : 6; 48 : 12), with very much the significance that the other two titles have in Revelation, it would be very odd if precisely this one meant something different from the others in Revelation” (1993 : 55).

The Father and the Son therefore participate together and equally in eternal livingness even though that of Christ was interrupted by death, it continues since He overcame death on the cross. The Christian is therefore with the Trinity in his witnessing function here on earth. The words ‘Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you’ (Deut. 31 : 6), are the cornerstone of Christian witnessing. This is an eternal promise that will never change. God has promised every Believer not to be afraid of anything when it comes to the business of witnessing, because God is ever present in the life of the Believer.



As mentioned above, this God is not only of the present, but He is the God of the past as well as the God of the future age. Again this is an indication of the ever present nature of this God who is giving a revelation and a message of hope to all His followers through His servant John. The significance of this knowledge is that it immediately tells those who are listening to the author that they are not having a temporary God, but One who is forever present in their lives and One who is there because of His love for them.

God, as the ever present One, gives reason to the Believer to believe that the task unto which he/she has been called to perform can be carried out with confidence because the One who sends knows it all and also accompanies them. Even though situations may change during the course of the witnessing, He is already aware of the challenges facing the faithful witness. A plan of action already exists from the One who controls the present and the future. As the One who is coming, He is actively involved in the affairs of His children beyond the time scope. His interest

is to see the witness succeed in the witnessing function. Plans for such success are already in place. What the Christian needs to do is to rely on and trust the all-knowing God for guidance to victory.

The Christian enters into the realm of witness with this understanding that he/she will never be found to be alone in any situation and at any time. This is a great morale boost even before the witnessing task starts. God has taken care of similar situations in the past, He is taking care of them now and He has already gone into the future to take care of all future challenges. Everything is taken care of from God's side. What remains is for the Christian to agree to become a faithful witness of Jesus Christ.

As God Almighty (Pantokrator), God is to be understood by the witnessing Christian as One who has all the power in Himself to do whatever He wants to do with His creation. All His creation is subject to His creative power. He holds the power to direct all the events in the whole of the universe. Nothing that He wills cannot happen. He has the power to create and the power to destroy that which He has created, including man. God is therefore able to deal with all His opponents and defeat them without any resistance. The whole of creation belongs to Him and is subject to Him.

However, there is one area which He does not automatically control. This is the area of witnessing. This he has left to the individual Christian to decide whether to do it or not. God does not force anybody to witness, though He would like everybody to be His witness. What he does is to invite everyone to be His witness but leave it to the individual to decide. As the Pantokrator, He has the power to ensure that those who agree to become His witnesses he gives them the furniture to do the job. All that requires God to take care of is guaranteed that it will be given to the true witness. The Christian has to play his/her part in ensuring successful witnessing from his/her side.

God, by making the Christian aware that He is the Almighty, leaves no room for doubt in the mind of the Christian that faithful witnessing is possible here on earth. God invites those willing to partake in witnessing because He has the power to help them become what He would like them to be. The Christian must trust in the Lord. Not only does God have the power to help individuals to reach the goal, but He also has the power to protect the individual from being harmed by the Devil. In the event of failure in the process, the fault is never from God's side. Witnessing for Jesus Christ is so important to Him that He will pay any price for it. God's power as the Almighty can be seen in His protection of His witnesses.

The appearance of the name 'Pantokrator' seven times in the Book of Revelation, (1 : 8; 4 : 8; 11 : 17; 15 : 3; 16 : 7; 19 : 6; 21 : 22) points to the completeness of His power, which cannot be doubted. "The Greek *pantokrator* ('almighty') indicates not so much God's abstract omnipotence as His control over things" Bauckham (1993 : 30).

According to Beale, the use of the word 'pantokrator' refers to God as the One who sovereignly directs His people's history. This means that whatever happens in this world is predetermined by the 'Pantokrator'. He even has the ability to allow evil to work towards the promotion of His righteous plans. Such transcendence is the basis for His governance of history as the *pantokrator*. This therefore suggests that wherever the Christian is sent by God to witness, the result is already guaranteed.

For those who were facing persecution or even martyrdom, because of their witnessing, hearing these words from the mouth of the Lord would help them to have more courage to stand for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They would be enabled to face trials with a smile and hope for a better life hereafter and that it was worth dying for their faith in Jesus Christ than compromising because of the challenges that they were faced with.

A close look at what has been argued above, it shows that God was and is still revealing Himself to His followers or to those who would be His followers in such a way that they should see Him as being there for them during their times of struggles. Witnessing always has its challenges. God was not only there for the Christians but He was always with them in the midst of their struggles. He was and is still part of those struggles with every Christian who witnesses faithfully because He is interested in them overcoming the enemy. He has already overcome the enemy and He wants to make sure that they also overcome him. That is why He died on the cross, to defeat the Devil.

The way God makes Himself known is meant to encourage the reader/hearer of the message of the Book of Revelation to stand firm in their faith and not to succumb to the enemy's attempts to move them away from their Lord. This is a proof of God's direct and active interest in the welfare of the Christians here on earth. This is proof in the highest order that the Christian life is theocentric in its very nature and that its author wants to ensure that it succeeds. God will do anything to help the individual Christian to win the witnessing battle.

Once more it can be demonstrated that the witnessing function that the Christians are being called to perform takes place under the supervision of the Most High, who sits on the throne. The throne room is actually the theological power of the Book of Revelation. This is where it all happens. The throne is therefore not just there for one specific function, but it is there as the center of all that happens in God's creation. It is the control room of God's creation. God is the commander-in-chief of everything. Coming to terms with this fact aids the hearer/reader to formulate a response to the challenges of this world. The hearer/reader needs to stay focussed on what the directives are saying from this control center. Overcomers are going to make it on the basis of their obedience to what the One sitting on the throne commands them to do or not to do. Disobedience to the One sitting on the throne is a non – starter for those seeking to overcome their enemy.

This is the kind of witnessing that God wants to see being practiced in His Church by all those who are His followers. God takes pleasure in guiding their lives in order to make them successful witnesses. Faithful witnessing therefore enjoys its control from the throne room. When this happens all of God's quality characteristics are released to go and offer assistance

#### **5.4 OVERCOMING THROUGH FAITHFUL WITNESSING**

The biggest battle that the Christians have here on earth is against the Devil. As already mentioned above, the only way of overcoming the Devil is by witnessing against him. At face value, it is impossible to defeat the Devil from a human point of view. Witnessing against the Devil involves wrestling and struggling with him. Jesus' call to His followers is that they should overcome the Devil because He has already overcome him. The method that those who have already won the battle used was that of witnessing. Revelation 12 : 11 says: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony..." For this to happen, the witnesses must witness faithfully to God, as unfaithful followers of the Lamb cannot produce any long lasting results. God honours faithful witnessing and blesses those who are involved in it by giving them victory over their enemy.

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Those who fight against the Devil have to set their priorities right. This is so because they need to employ a particular strategy in fighting this experienced tempter. A purposeless witnessing does not yield any results to the witness him/herself. The result of this kind of witnessing is that the victors are rewarded by their Master. Overcoming is therefore a process and not an event. As a process it also requires that the individual Christian must demonstrate the presence of all those qualities of pure living that God expects to find in the seven Churches. The witness that results in the defeat of the Devil brings glory to God.

Witnessing for the Lord Jesus can produce no other result than overcoming the enemy of the Lamb. Even though the source of the victory is God Himself, the witnessing Christian must work hard to reach this goal. During the process

witnessing, the witnesses have to contend with both internal and external forces within the Church. This has to be done against all odds and at all times. True witnessing requires that the witness continues with the witnessing even when the challenges become greater.

Let us now attend to the answering of the questions that were raised in our problem statement in Chapter 1. The first question we want to consider is ‘Why should Christians suffer when they have been released from the kingdom of darkness, from the control of the god of this world to be under the control of the God of heaven, the Almighty?’ The discussion that we had in the previous chapters has demonstrated that Christians have been released from the Devil’s bondage by the power of the Lord, in order for them to serve God. They are now free to do any good work for the Kingdom of heaven. Witnessing for Jesus Christ is one of the privileges of serving the Lord. While they were in the kingdom of darkness they could not serve God, even if they wanted to do so. But now they have the right to serve their God because they have now earned the right to partake in the things of God.

As it has already been indicated, witnessing for the Lord Jesus is accompanied by suffering. This suffering leads to the reward of living eternally with the Lord. However, the witnessing that leads to suffering is not imposed on the witnesses by the Lord; it is optional. It is to the benefit of the Christian if they willingly partake in witnessing for their Lord. The Christians are able to witness under difficult conditions because they are assisted by the Almighty God because such witnessing brings glory to Him. Therefore witnessing under opposition from the Devil is not a sign of abandonment by the Lord but rather a sign of faithfulness to and support from God. Suffering because of witnessing should therefore not be a burden but a joy to the Christian witness. This way of living should be seen as part of the benefits of being a Christian. The Christian who overcomes the challenges of witnessing until the end is going to be pronounced a conqueror and crowned by the Lord on the last day. One might want to know what kind of rest do the Christians have in Jesus Christ if they are seen to be struggling to keep the

Devil away from them. The answer is that they are indeed resting from their forced labor under the leadership of the Devil and are now enjoying the freedom of choice of those things that lead to eternal life. This involves a lot of hard work but one that is beneficial in the end.

Another issue that needs to be considered is the defeat and death of the two witnesses. According to the record in the Book of Revelation, the two witnesses do not die a natural death – they are killed. This thesis holds the view that the two witnesses points to the Old Testament Saints – Elijah and Moses – but they are not the center of focus in the Book of Revelation. They are a symbolic representation of the whole Church. The duty of witnessing is not meant for two individuals only. The whole Church is supposed to be involved in witnessing for Jesus Christ – this is the main task of the Church.

“By way of exposition the two witnesses can only refer to a significant witness to Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit in the face of an ungodly onslaught. By way of application, the Church is expected to grow in its witness to the world, especially as the final day approaches. This will only be achieved through an empowered witness by the Holy Spirit” (Pohlmann, 1997 : 74 – 75).

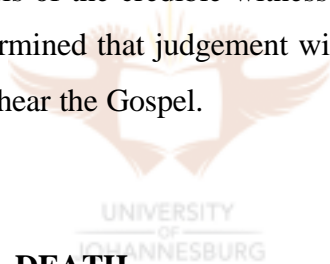
The death of the two witnesses suggests that the Church has a predetermined period of operation in this world. This is confirmed by the phrase: ‘...when they have finished their testimony...’ One day the testimony of the Church will come to an end, when God will be satisfied that the Church shall have done what He had established it for. It is at that time that the beast will be able to ‘defeat’ the Church. In actual fact it will not be the beast ‘defeating’ the witnesses but God stopping the Church from continuing with the witnessing function. This point is proven by the fact that no one could harm the two witnesses as long as they had the power to harm their opponents. This is further proof that as long as God wants the Church to witness in this world, no harm will befall the Church. Elijah and Moses were the forerunners of the Church and God used them to point to the



direction that the Church was to take as long as He wanted to use them. They only stopped functioning when He stopped them.

The existence of the Church in this world does not, therefore, depend on whether the enemy agrees with its existence or not, but whether it is within God's will or not. When the two witnesses are killed, that does not mean that they were defeated, but rather that God won the battle. When the Church shall stop to exist on earth, it will not be that the enemy shall have had victory over the Creator, but that God shall have declared the end of the battle and hence ushering in the period of judgement on the inhabitants of the world. The Church can therefore not be defeated by anything.

God uses two witnesses to point to the importance of having credible witnesses against an accused for a case to be able to stand in a court of law. God is going to judge the world on the basis of the credible witness of the Church. In fairness to His creation, God has determined that judgement will only come when all people shall have had a chance to hear the Gospel.



## **5.5 WITNESSING TILL DEATH**

According to Revelation 11 : 15, "...The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever". This suggests that it is Christ's responsibility to see to the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth. But this Kingdom could only be established after the defeat of God's opponent. Christ's victory over the Devil was to be the only way that this Kingdom could be established on earth.

Indeed Christ has already played His part in the process of redemption. Now there remains a responsibility for the Christians to continue the process by being actively involved in witnessing for Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation is a call to faithful witnessing by all Christians.

It is generally understood that through His death and resurrection from the dead, Christ demonstrated victory over the enemy. When He walked out of the tomb it was the most clear demonstration that even death is subject to the Creator of the universe. Not only was Christ demonstrating victory over the enemy, but He also opened the way for all others who would want to have this victory over the same enemy that they could equally do the same. Christ's victory is therefore not only in the present but also in the future. All that is opposed to God's rule, has been defeated by the Lamb. He has and still will overcome all opposition to God's rule and establish His kingdom in this world.

“The victory He has already achieved in His death and resurrection is decisive, but needs to be continued by His Christian followers in the present and completed in His parousia in the future” (Bauckham, 1993 : 67). Indeed Christ has finished His part of the victory, what remains is for His followers to play their part in order to bring the process to its desirable end. While Christ was still on earth He fought and won the difficult battle against the Devil.

Jesus does not win His victory by military conquest and those who share His victory and His rule are not national Israel, but the international people of God. This refers to victory over evil won not only in the spiritual sphere but also in the political sphere in order to establish His Kingdom on earth. Christ's victory is seen in action when the people of the world start to obey His commands as against those of His opponent.

Du Rand says :

“The narrative of the Apocalypse is engineered to reinforce a particular understanding of God and Christ among the readers...in other words, the theological narrative according to the Apocalypse, helps the believing community (and individuals) to recognise that life in their society makes

sense. In such a way the shared knowledge is made objective and the theological symbolic universe maintained” (1997 : 60).

It is when the Believers in Christ start making sense of life here on earth that the kingdom of God is established on earth. What Du Rand says is further proof that the messianic war and victory over the enemy does not only involve the Messiah alone but that it does involve all His faithful subjects who are still living on earth. The Christians’ victory is the victory of the Christ.

“The Apocalypse of John is portraying a futuristic rather than a realised eschatology. John expects a future resurrection, a future announcement of judgement, the eschatological coming of Christ on the clouds and the future descent of the new Jerusalem. In particular, the coming of Christ is emphasised” (Du Rand, (1997 : 64). What Du Rand is saying is true, the Book of Revelation seems to see life more as a future gain. But this does not mean that it only concentrates on the future. It also has something to say to the Christian who is living on earth here and now.

Revelation points the Christian’s life to both the present and the future. It encourages the Christian to live a life of faithfulness witnessing in order to be victorious over the enemy. In this way they will be able to enjoy the future glory in the new Jerusalem. However, that future enjoyment will depend on whether they shall have gained victory over the enemy while they were still on earth. It is this victory which guarantees them the future resurrection leading to the new life.

As we have already mentioned above, the two witnesses represent the Church of Jesus Christ. The message that is contained in the Book of Revelation is for the whole Church, not just some people. Our lord Jesus Christ, after having won the battle against the Devil, challenges all those who have chosen to follow Him in this life, to live a life of faithful witnessing. Jesus is qualified to make such a demand because He also lived in this very world. Jesus lived a faithful witnessing life. He met many challenges along the way but was able to conquer them all. It is

out of concern for faithful witnessing that He sends messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

Jesus uses Himself as an example of someone who lived a life of faithful witnessing. To demonstrate that Jesus' concern is for the whole Church, He addresses all His concerns to the whole congregation. Jesus uses Himself as a source of encouragement for the Church to live faithfully. His self-declarations come out very strong as an indication to the Churches that He is there for them. As the One who has gone ahead of them He is prepared to join them in their present struggles against evil. Jesus goes to all that extent because even though He has already defeated the devil at the cross, the battle must continue through His followers. The Devil is now challenging Christians as a challenge to Christ Himself. The Devil wants Christians to stop witnessing for Jesus Christ.

When Christians get hurt in the process they do so as secondary targets. The chief target is the message that they are spreading through their witnessing. If Christians could only stop witnessing they would not be in trouble with the Devil. The Devil hates witnessing Christians on the one hand, while on the other hand Christ is urgently looking for faithful witnessing Christians. When Christians engage themselves in faithful witness they lift Jesus up.

The special scenario that is presented in chapter 11 is precisely to heighten the Christians' attention to the dangers that are coming from the devil and how they should deal with them in such a way that they will come out the victors over the Devil. The battle plan is already prepared and it is for the Church to be obedient to their Master's commands. For the Church to continue effectively impacting the dark world around her, she must be fully committed to faithful witnessing for Christ in the midst of challenges. Should the Christians stop exercising this important function, there is no future for it in this world.

Even though the Book of Revelation does not directly teach realized eschatology, it sounds to me that it indirectly teaches this because it is their present state in

Christ that determines how they are going to be in the future. Their present status is directly affected by their faith in Christ. I therefore see in the Book of Revelation an implied realized eschatology. It is on the basis of this implied realized eschatology that the reader/hearer of the message of the Book of Revelation can respond to the invitation to participate in it. Because eschatology is implied in the Book of Revelation, it is therefore assumed to be partially realized, with the full one to be fully obtained at Christ's parousia.

The victory of Christ points to the physical removal of the saints from this world to the new world. Just as the Israelites were physically moved out of Egypt to demonstrate their freedom from slavery, so will the victorious Christians be physically removed from this trouble-infested world to the trouble-free world.

The Book of Revelation teaches that the Believer must live a life that exhibits the marks of the kingdom of God here on earth in the midst of opposition. Christ ably demonstrated how this can be done during His earthly ministry. The physical removal or exodus of the Christians is paramount to their salvation. Their salvation culminates in their exodus from this world. This idea is fully developed in Revelation. It is the main goal of the Christian's salvation to be with the Lord in His heaven eternally. This, however, can only be obtained through victory over the devil.

All this is made possible because of God's ability to liberate his people from the enemy's oppression and lead them to a theocratic independence in a land of their own.

## 5.6 PROPOSAL

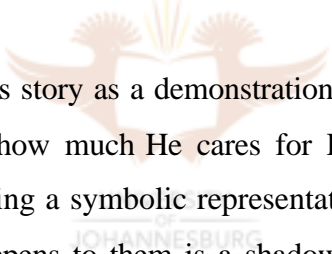
The author of the Book of Revelation portrays a situation of a perceived crisis which the first century Christians were living in at the time of writing the Apocalypse. This seems to have been the main reason for writing it. The Christians were living in a situation of fear, disappointment and even hopelessness because the conditions under which they were living were not what they expected as followers of the saving Messiah. They were supposed to have been freed from bondage. The conditions under which they were living did not bear witness to their expectations.

Because of these unfulfilled expectations and persecutions, some of the Christians were beginning to compromise their faith. This would be manifested by, for example, moral laxity or accepting heretical teachings among them. The author writes to warn them of the dangers of such practices. He also writes to encourage them to work towards winning the battle against their opponents. He demonstrates how important it is to live their life in this world such that they will overcome all the challenges they are facing during their earthly ministry. The author of the Book of Revelation stresses the theme of overcoming in the seven letters to the seven Churches in particular. Over and above showing them the importance of overcoming, he also makes them aware of the rewards that await those that would be overcomers at the end of their ministry on earth.

John calls upon his hearers/readers to take the route of passive resistance to the challenges that were facing them. He demonstrates to them that they are assured of victory over their opponents because their Master, Jesus Christ has already overcome the enemy at the cross. John also wants his hearer/reader to beware that by virtue of being follower of Jesus Christ they were going to meet opposition even persecution which may even cost them their life. This would happen to them because it happened to their Lord during His earthly ministry, and He also predicted that this would happen to those who would be His Disciples.

However, the good news is that because Jesus has already overcome the enemy at the cross, their victory is also guaranteed. The reason for this guarantee is that God is actively involved with them in their earthly struggles. When Christians get tempted to sin or do wrong, God is there to provide them the strength to resist the enemy's schemes.

The author of the Book of Revelation also wants his hearer/reader to know that God is aware of the difficulties that they are facing. Nothing happens in this world that He is not aware of. Not only is He aware of the evil activities that take place here on earth, but He already has a plan to bring judgement upon all those who oppose Him by persecuting His followers. God will also take revenge on the persecutors of His followers. Those Christians who may have to die through martyrdom are regarded as having overcome the enemy since they shall have stood for their faith until the end. Martyrdom is therefore not defeat but victory.



John uses the two witnesses story as a demonstration of what God will do for His Church and as a sign of how much He cares for His followers. With the two witnesses in chapter 11 being a symbolic representation of the Church of God in the whole world, what happens to them is a shadow of what will happen to the Church. The Church is charged with the responsibility to witness about the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the whole world. However, this task is only for a limited period. During this time, the Church's message will torment the inhabitants of the earth, i.e., those who do not believe in God. Their message will convict them of sin and judgement, but they will not repent. They will continue in their sinful life, but they will be tormented by the truth that they know. The inhabitants of the earth will want to harm God's witnesses because of their torment but they will not be able to do anything to them because of the protection that God has bestowed upon them.

When the predetermined witnessing period comes to an end, God will remove His protective hand from them. When this happens, the Devil will fight the Church

and will seem to overpower it. This period of ‘apparent’ defeat is symbolized by the three and half days that the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the street without being buried. During that period, the activities of the Church will be almost non-existent, i.e., it will lack visible power for a short period of time. The inhabitants of the world will rejoice over this state of affairs because that which had been tormenting them will be gone. But this will not be the true reflection of reality, it will be a distorted picture of the real thing because God shall not have finished His business.

Again, at God’s own predetermined time, He will breath life back into the ‘silenced’ Church. The breathing of life into the dead bodies of the two witnesses is symbolic of the way He will inject life back into the Church. This will be the final proof to the whole world that His Church is indestructible. This will happen to the whole Church throughout the world, wherever the followers of Jesus Christ will be at that God–appointed time. When the Devil will be busy celebrating ‘victory’ over the Church and Christ, the eternal living Church will emerge, to the surprise of the Devil and all his subjects. God will prove that He is in full control of the whole of His creation. This is one of God’s way of proving Himself to His Church and the inhabitants of the earth that He is the **Pantokrator**.



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