

**REVELATION'S HYMNS:
COMMENTARY ON THE
COSMIC CONFLICT**

by

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I declare that

REVELATION'S HYMNS: COMMENTARY ON THE COSMIC CONFLICT

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

ABSTRACT

Topic

This study examines the hymnic pericopes found at Revelation 4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.10-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12; 15.3,4 and 19.1-8 in light of the cosmic conflict theme. It considers that this theme is a major contributor to the development of Revelation's plot, and thus the hymnic sections are informed by, and inform the understanding of the controversy.

Purpose

Recognizing that the majority of critical studies give interpretative primacy to the social and political realities that existed in the Roman Empire at the time of Revelation's composition, there is need for an examination of the storyline from the perspective of issues that are clearly of narrational importance. This study argues that the cosmic conflict is at the center of the book's concerns, and attempts to determine the function of the hymns in relation to the ongoing controversy. Previous examinations of the hymnic sections have either considered them to be a response and/or parody to Roman liturgy, examples of God's unquestioned sovereignty, or expressions of thematic overtones found throughout the book. While all these approaches make a contribution to a greater understanding of the hymns, the relation of the hymns to the ever-present conflict theme has not been explored. This study allows the hymnic sections to engage with the larger narrative issue as to who is truly the rightful sovereign of the universe.

Conclusion

This study found that a close examination of the text confirms that the cosmic conflict is the major motif in the narrative, and that it does not simply serve as a metaphor for political realities. It also concluded that the temple/throne room imagery found

throughout the storyline, should have a controlling influence upon interpretation. This setting provides the backdrop for understanding the origins and issues of the controversy. Another conclusion of the study is that the only way for the controversy to be resolved is for God to reveal Himself in such a manner that the truth about Him is manifest. Finally, it was seen that the hymns do provide commentary on the conflict, by acclaiming God's goodness and right to rule, despite the undertones of Satan's accusations.

Key terms: Cosmic conflict, theodicy, lamb, throne, hymns, dragon, Satan, Michael, Christ, narrative critical, victory, war in heaven

To Vivian,
Joy, David, Eliana, Jeremy
and baby Eloise,
for their unflagging support
and much needed prodding

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1QM	War scroll from Qumran cave 1
ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>Ant.</i>	Antiquities
<i>AUSS</i>	Andrews University Seminary Studies
AV	Authorized Version
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
<i>BR</i>	Biblical Research
<i>BS</i>	Biblical Studies
<i>BT</i>	Biblical Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
<i>CBR</i>	Christian Brethren Review
EDNT	Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>EVQ</i>	Evangelical Quarterly
<i>ExpTim</i>	Expository Times
IA	Implied Author
<i>INT</i>	Interpretation
IR	Implied Reader
<i>JAAR</i>	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
<i>JBL</i>	Journal of Biblical Literature
<i>JETS</i>	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
<i>JR</i>	Journal of Religion
<i>JSNT</i>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
<i>JSP</i>	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha

<i>JSOT</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
<i>JTS</i>	Journal of Theological Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NA ²⁷	Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece, 27 th ed.
NASB	New American Standard Version
NC	Narrative Criticism
<i>Neot</i>	Neotestamentica
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary of the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	New Testament Studies
OT	Old Testament
<i>RevExp</i>	Review and Expositor
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>Stat. Silv.</i>	<i>Stattus Silvae</i>
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>TJ</i>	Trinity Journal
<i>VE</i>	Vox Evangelica
<i>VT</i>	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	World Biblical Commentary

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation is like no other in the New Testament. It impacts all of the senses of the reader in a manner that the Epistles and the Gospels do not. The sights, sounds, odors, voices, and thunderings mix with a jarring juxtaposition of images and Old Testament references to create a continuous assault on the mind. A tremendous artistic effect works upon those who read or hear its contents. This is part of the blessing that is pronounced in the opening verses (Rev 1:3). The otherworldly nature of Revelation increases the demand for a thoughtful consideration of how it should be read. The book has captured the imagination of artists, poets, and songwriters as well as having perplexed many a scholar with its symbols, flashes of colors, and complex literary imagery. In order to engage with such a rich text, it is imperative that hermeneutical presuppositions be identified. After an initial clarification of the purpose, justification, and scope of this study, this chapter will outline the hermeneutical methods to be followed throughout this investigation into the hymns of Revelation.

Purpose of the Research

The aim of this investigation is to examine both the contribution that the hymnic pericopes make to the cosmic conflict theme in Revelation, and to explore the way in which this leitmotif can influence the reading of the pericopes. A principal objective of this study is to demonstrate that by allowing the war in heaven motif to have a dominant role in interpretation, the understanding of Revelation's plot is enhanced and the hymnic sections are seen to make a meaningful contribution to such a reading. It is part of the purpose of this study to show that heavenly temple, which

contains the throne room, has a controlling influence on the narrative. It is from the throne room that the cosmic conflict began and from which the heavenly songs originate. Their refrains are reflective of the issues in that conflict. A principal argument of this study is that the cosmic conflict theme contributes to all readings of Revelation, and that the hymns in particular are best understood against this backdrop.

Justification for the Research

A purview of modern commentaries on the book of Revelation indicates that the war in heaven theme rarely exerts a guiding role in interpretation. Critical commentaries tend in the direction of seeing the Roman Empire as the primary force behind John's imagery.¹ Other commentaries focus on God's sovereignty as Revelation's overarching interpretive framework.² Unquestionably Revelation interacts with its historical setting and the original reader would see in the oppressive

¹ See Leonard Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Thompson's strong contribution to the study of Revelation includes thoughtful investigation of the genre and use of language within the text. Thompson challenges the traditional view of an actual persecution occurring under the reign of Domitian. His main concern with the book is limited to the historical situation during the time of its composition. See also, Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 384-5; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, (Nashville: T. Nelson) 1998, 729; David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John", *BR* 28, (1983): 5-26. Aune's influential article rejects the idea that the hymnic sections are drawn from the church's liturgy, arguing instead that they are a parody of the Roman imperial court ceremony. David E. Aune, "The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)" *NTS* 36, no. 2 (1990): 182-204; Michael Naylor, "The Roman Imperial Cult and Revelation." *CBR* 8.2, (2010): 207-239; Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Hans-Josef Klauck. "Do they Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of John" *CBQ* 63, (2001), 683-698; G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* BNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 164; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 22, summarizes this situation stating that modern historical scholarship assumes that Revelation's main theme is "the author's social world." Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*. (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1999) 6-14 surveys a variety of different approaches to this issue.

² William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1982), 7 and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) 31, both stress God's sovereignty. Osborne writes, "Even the actions of the forces of evil are controlled by God. Everything they do comes only by permission from God." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 320, writes, "Although God's realm is separated from the earthly, he is nevertheless in control over earth's affairs."

power of Rome an attempt to overturn God's rule.³ However, those interpretations that focus largely on the role of the imperial cult of Rome are overlooking the role of the cosmic conflict in the narrative as a whole. In a similar manner, Revelation does declare that God's sovereignty is maintained. God clearly is the victor in the controversy, yet this does not minimize the depth of that struggle, nor the lengths to which God has gone to achieve His victory. These readings tend to constrict the role of the hymns to reflection on either past events, or the abstract concept of God's rule.

In a similar manner, those dissertations that have explored the function of the hymns in Revelation, while making a valuable contribution to the understanding of these pericopes, have not taken into account the commentary that the hymns provide on the cosmic conflict.

Studies on the Hymns

The hymns summarize or serve as a climax to the events recounted in the story, and thus are an integral part of the book.⁴ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's observation that the hymnic sections "comment on and complement the visions and auditions of the book" is well grounded.⁵ It remains to be explored *how* they

³ There are many sources that portray the rule of Domitian as repressive and tyrannical. See Tacitus, *Agricola* (98); Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric* (100); *Letters* (105-109); Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* (110). Recent scholarship has questioned the extent of Domitian's persecution. See Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 101-115, for an extended discussion. Thompson, (*The Book of Revelation*, 175), concludes that the text is not necessarily addressing a crisis for the church. The apocalyptic theme reveals nothing of the actual political situation. Rather it reveals the perspective of the writer (and readers) toward society as a whole. See also Peter Antonysamy Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12, 7-12* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 10f; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 84-107; Philip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor Or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 22, (2000), 103.

⁴ Klaus Peter Jörns, *Das Hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen Zu Aufbau, Funktion Und Herkunft Der Hymnischen Stücke in Der Johannesoffenbarung*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), 170.

⁵ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 166.

complement the conflict theme and its concomitant theodical issues that hold Revelation together. The writers of various dissertations have considered the hymnic portions from perspectives that enhance one another. Michael Anthony Harris' 1989 study was the first to consider the literary role the hymns played in Revelation. He correctly observed that an effort to connect the hymnic sections with early Christian liturgical practices was not germane to understanding their role in the narrative.⁶ This does not preclude a historical interest in liturgical practices, but that would not be a primary concern for a narrational reading. Harris' study highlights the importance of the hymns to the overall narrative. His focus of attention on the literary function leads him to see the hymns as examples of epideictic rhetoric. The hymns serve as a reaction to the praise given to "the gods and emperors."⁷ He also notes that the hymns comment on the cosmic war, Satan's ultimate defeat, and this world's participation in the rebellion.⁸ Having other concerns, he does not pursue the relation of the hymns to the larger issue of Satan's rebellion within Revelation's story. Harris, building on the work of Jörens, identifies 4.8-11; 5.9-13; 7.10-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12; 15.3-4; 16.5-7; and 19.1-8 as meeting the criteria⁹ to be designated as hymnic sections.

James Altenbaumer explores the literary and conceptual connections between the individual hymns in the narrative.¹⁰ Recognizing that the hymnic sections are

⁶ Michael Anthony Harris, "The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 7.

⁷ Ibid, 277.

⁸ Ibid., 290, 306.

⁹ Ibid., 14. See Jörens, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 19. Jean-Pierre Ruiz, "Praise and Politics in Revelation 19:1-10" in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. by Steve Moyise, (Edinburgh & New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 70. John M. Court, *Revelation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 83 also cites these texts as hymnic sections, with the inclusion of 7.15-17.

¹⁰ James Edward Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth in the Hymns in Revelation" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1992).

integrally related to their settings within the book, Altenbaumer seeks to understand the relation that each hymn has to the others. To facilitate this, he first surveys the form critical and history-of-religion methodologies that have dominated this field in the past. Utilizing a commonly accepted body of hymns, he demonstrates their close literary links, and builds a persuasive case for noting the interconnections among them. He reads the hymns as a coherent unit that describes the cosmic myth of salvation, in a setting of praise and celebration. To the hymns noted by Harris, Altenbaumer adds 18.19-20, 21-24.

Stephen Norwood Horn's study of the hymns comes from the perspective of Revelation's over-arching theology. Beginning his study with a complex discussion on the theology of Revelation, he then follows with an examination of the hymns in other parts of the NT. Lastly, he focuses on the function of the hymns within Revelation. He contends that one weakness in all previous studies is the failure to notice, "John summarized his theological themes in worship scene hymns."¹¹ His list of hymns is similar to Harris' with the inclusion of 6.10. Horn's conclusion is that the sovereignty of God is the most important theme in the Revelation, and the most frequent theme of the hymns.¹²

Kendra Jo Haloviak explores a new literary approach to the hymns.¹³ Building on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Haloviak argues for a dialogical approach to these pericopes, rather than a monological one. As a dialogical method carries on a conversation with previous writers, meaning is modified through interaction with

¹¹ Stephen Norwood, *The Author's use of Hymns as Summaries of the Theology of the Book of Revelation* (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 148.

¹³ Kendra Jo Haloviak, *Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogical Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation* (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2002).

others. A monologic reading would have a single interpretation, and would be similar to those studies that see Revelation as having a single truth that needs to be decoded. Haloviak considers that the hymns call the reader to experience truth through dialog between varying genres. This dialog is essential for interpretive choices. She sees an interchange between the experiences of OT prophets, of whom Revelation's author would have close affinities, with the Christian communities, of which the Seer would have close social ties. There is interplay between apocalyptic genre and that of the Hebrew prophetic literature. Haloviak also builds on Bakhtin's understanding of chronotype¹⁴ to explore the hymnic interface of events in heaven and earth relating to each other. Haloviak's list of hymns is similar to that of Harris.

Brian K. Blount's commentary on Revelation contains a thoughtful excursus on reading the hymns as "Songs of Resistance."¹⁵ He focuses his attention on seven antiphonal hymns that, through call and response "cascade down to earth and rise back up to the heavens" (4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 16.5-7; 19.1-4; 19.5-8). He sees the first hymn as paradigmatic for what follows, and that the celebration of God's lordship is the overarching theme. The use of certain descriptors, such as the Almighty and the one who was, is and will be, reflect on the acclamations given to Caesar.¹⁶ The point that is unfolded through the hymnic praise is that it is not Caesar that sets the course of history, but rather the Lamb. The opposition to the Roman regime is the continual theme.¹⁷ The hymns are a "celebration of confrontational

¹⁴ Bakhtin's term relates to the connection of time and space expressed in literature. See Haloviak, "Worlds at War" 125.

¹⁵ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

resistance” urging those that encounter the text to stand against the lordship of Rome.¹⁸

These studies¹⁹ each explore a similar body of hymns in very different fashions. They each make a contribution toward the understanding of the hymns in the narrative of Revelation. However, none of them engages the hymns directly with the conflict theme that plays such an important role in understanding Revelation’s plot. This thesis will attempt to address that lack by exploring the relation that the hymnic pericopes have to the larger cosmic conflict.

Scope of the Research

Different writers engage the hymns from a variety of perspectives. Instead of confining the study of each hymn piece to its individual verse (i.e. 4.8), I will be looking at the hymns as units or sections (thus, 4.8-11). I will be examining these hymnic pericopes as they are encountered in the book of Revelation. The hymnic units examined in this study are found at 4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12; 15.3-4; and 19.1-8.²⁰ While recognizing that other passages are seen as hymnic, this study will be limited to the ones noted.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid. 98.

¹⁹ I was not able to procure a copy of A. R. Nusca’s “Heavenly Worship, Ecclesial Worship: A ‘Liturgical Approach’ to the Hymns of the Apocalypse of St. John” (PhD diss., Rome, 1998). However, Nusca reads the hymns in light of the function of the congregation to whom John wrote. He focuses on 1.5b-6, 4.8-11, 5.8-14, 7.9-12, 11.15-18, 12.10-12, 13.4, 14.3, 15.3-4, 16.5-7, 18.20, and 19.1-8.

²⁰ All English quotations from the scriptures are from the NASB, unless otherwise noted.

²¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 315, sees sixteen hymnlike compositions, but unites them into seven antiphonal units (4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 16.5-7; 19.1-4, 5-8) and then includes 15.3b-4 as being a single independent hymn. He at first notes 12.10b-12 as one of the compositions, but then does not include it as an independent hymn. It is his concept of hymnic pericopes that I will be following.

Methodology

All forms of communication, whether spoken, written, illustrated, or acted demand that some message be sent and received. Unless one is content to live in a situation characterized by uncertainty regarding understanding, a general agreement on meanings, intentions, and constructions must be present. This is especially true in situations in which feedback cannot be given or received, as in a document written millennia past. Add to this separation of time, a cross-cultural and trans-historical dimension, and the possibility for misunderstanding is greatly multiplied. Some would argue that beyond a possibility, misunderstanding becomes a certainty. Therefore, the demand for some guidelines to be used in the process of interpretation is imperative.

Historically, this has been the role of a hermeneutical system, to help give clarity to the process by which a person can interpret.²² A “hermeneutic” refers to any theory of interpretation, whether theological, legal, medical, literary, or philosophical.²³ In current literary studies, hermeneutics has been considered more of a philosophical exercise, that is, thinking more about the *process* used to interpret a communication rather than the *tools* by which one interprets.²⁴

²² Anthony Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), 11 argues that originally hermeneutics was focused on the rules by which one can interpret rather than the current, more philosophical emphasis.

²³ David S. Dockery *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 16.

²⁴ Thiselton (“Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics” in *Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge Press: Cambridge 1998), 95) emphasizes that hermeneutics is currently more focused on the consideration of “how” one interprets, rather than the act of interpreting. Claudia Camp (“Feminist Theological Hermeneutics” in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub. 1997) 53) similarly defines hermeneutics as “the process of conscious reflection on how interpretation is done.”

In all communication, there are at least three elements. There is the source of the communication, the receptor of such a communication, and the message itself.²⁵ Relating this to the Scriptures, there are the writers of the Biblical books, the message contained in those books, and at least two different sets of receivers. There are the receivers who were in the mind of the writer when composing his work (frequently called the implied reader),²⁶ and there are present day receivers. Various literary schools of thought perceive the interplay between sender (author), message (text), and receiver (hearer/reader) differently.²⁷ Hermeneutical studies presently concern the process by which one decides which of these three elements are determinative for meaning, how one comes to that decision, and how or if, meaning can be discovered.

Narrative Criticism

Over the past decades, the variety of methods engaged in the study of the New Testament has greatly increased.²⁸ One of the recent developments in the field of hermeneutics is that of narrative criticism. Narrative criticism utilizes literary

²⁵ B.C. Lategan, "Current Issues in the Hermeneutical Debate," *Neot* 18 (1984), 3.

²⁶ In narrative criticism, the implied reader is different than any particular historical reader, whether at the time of the writing's composition, or at a later historical period. The implied reader is a construct of the text. J. D. Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia Fortress Press, 2nd edition, 1988), 38; G. R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* Second ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 163; R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 209; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; New Testament Series. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 15. The important point to note is that this approach is designed to help any reader approach the text as the 'implied reader' would. See also Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 20.

²⁷ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 9. The structure for identifying these three areas was popularized by Roman Jakobson. Jakobson included three other elements; code, contact, and context. These categories focused on the way the message was packaged, the medium that was used to communicate it, and the cultural societal background. See Arthur Asa Berger, *Media and Society: A Critical Perspective*, (Lanham [u.a.]: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 29 and Jakobson in Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics" in *Style in Language*, (edited by Thomas A. Sebeok, Cambridge MA: M.I.T Press, 1978), 350-377.

²⁸ James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 17. Resseguie gives an overview of the array of methodologies, from historical criticism to deconstructionism.

techniques that have traditionally been applied to fiction.²⁹ However, contrary to the origins of the techniques, the term is primarily used by biblical scholars and not by modern literary critics.³⁰

Biblical scholars have turned to a narrative approach to help take advantage of the positive contributions critical studies have made, while continuing to emphasize the unity of the text.³¹ The tendency of historical-critical studies (form criticism, redaction criticism, source criticism) contributed to an atomizing of the text and, in the view of some, to ultimately be counterproductive. These studies tend to see the narrative only as a vehicle for understanding the historical, social, and religious settings that are beyond the perimeters of the story.³² The stress on the unity of the text is one of the key presuppositions of narrative criticism. This method is a tool that functions best with other disciplines, so that there can be a corrective to the potentially ahistorical tendencies of the narrative critical approach.³³

²⁹ Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) is an important work for the understanding of the development of narrative criticism.

³⁰ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 18. The term was coined by David Rhoads. See David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark" *JAAR* 50, no. 3 (1982), 412.

³¹ Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 73, recognizes the weakness of a solely historical reading and the need for balancing approaches.

³² Dal Lee, *The Narrative Asides in the Book of Revelation*. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002), 139-140.

³³ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 153. M.C. de Boer, ("Narrative Criticism, Historical Criticism, and the Gospel of John" *JSNT* 47, (1992) 40), argues that some narrative critical scholars appear to be anti-historical. He points out that for historical studies as well as narrative critical ones, the text is the focus of attention. The major difference, he argues, is on the perception of the author and reader. This difference, however is not insurmountable and thus narrative criticism can and should be used as an adjunct method with historical studies. D. A. Carson, (*The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 63-68), rejects the use of narrative criticism, because of its foundational literary assumptions. Specifically, his concern is the question that is raised of the historicity of Biblical events by critical studies, including narrative criticism. The issue of the appropriate use of critical tools is one that evangelical scholars continue to wrestle with. See Grant R. Osborne, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical", *JETS* 42/2 June 1999, 193-210 and Robert L. Thomas, "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical: Another View", *JETS* 43/1 March 2000, 97-111 for two different perspectives. Robert William Klund, "The Plot of Revelation 4-22" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002, 5-6) recognizes that while many proponents of the narrative criticism will reject the historicity of the

The historical narratives found in the Gospels and Acts use plot, characters, and setting to unfold the story of Jesus and the early disciples. Both history and theology are united in a story format. Narrative criticism pays attention to the theological meaning of the text, and uses a variety of techniques to accomplish this goal. By paying close attention to *how* the story is told (poetics), the *what*, or the meaning of the story is enhanced.

David E. Aune highlights four main aspects of this hermeneutical method. The first is the distinction between the “how” and the “what” of the story. In other words there is a two-level structure in a text, containing form and content, that needs to be recognized and appreciated. Second, there is an emphasis on the biblical text as literature, with an eye that is quick to discern the literary details. Third, the texts are viewed as a closed literary object that can be examined. Fourth, the value of the text is based upon its literary unity.³⁴ The last feature is its most important one, providing a balance to those methods that look for seams, breaks, and aporias as markers indicating the history of the transmission of the text. Literary unity also serves as a foundation from which to engage the text, using literary analysis.

A common metaphor that is used to illustrate this point is one that involves paintings, windows, and mirrors. The literary aspects of the text, can engage the reader of the narrative the way one would consider a painting. The use of words, grammatical techniques, and style can be compared to the colors, perspectives, and brush strokes laid out on a canvas. The interpreter can view these in detail or in whole, seeing the text as one would a painting. Changing the metaphor, the interpreter

biblical records, there is nothing inherent within its tenets that require that this perspective be accepted. He also concludes that the interpretive goals of narrative criticism are compatible with a grammatical historical hermeneutic.

³⁴ David E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric*, (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 315-317.

using a historical method will look at these traits more as a window into the world of the author. This reader will then seek to discern the background or origins of the various parts of the text. Once more changing the metaphor, the same words and illustrations can be seen as a mirror, reflecting back upon the reader so that he/she is transformed as an interaction with the text occurs, being part of the community for whom it was intended. Narrative criticism seeks to intertwine these aspects of interpretation. Despite the complex theological and historical aspects of the book, Revelation lends itself to a narrative reading with its characters and unfolding of an ongoing storyline.³⁵

Narrative criticism does consider cultural, linguistic, and historical issues as important. Nevertheless the primary focus of this technique is on the “formal features of a text in its finished form.” It may be considered strange or anachronistic to apply modern literary critical techniques to a text that is foundational for religious faith. Yet frequently the biblical narrative literature shows similar characteristics to modern

³⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 155. Early narrative critical studies have focused on the Gospels, with Mark being the initial Gospel subjected to this form of study. See David M. Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); David B. Howell, "Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel." *JSNT Sup*, no. 42 (1990); Culpepper, *Anatomy*; Walter Brueggeman, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Revelation also offers a suitable framework for this approach. See James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998); David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 1998). As David L. Barr notes, "Waiting for the End that Never Comes: The Narrative Logic of John's Story" in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (New York: T&T Clark, 2001) 101, that whatever else the "Apocalypse is, it is a story." An unusual and strange story, one not frequently encountered elsewhere but a story nonetheless. Revelation's narrative has unique attributes connected with it, being highly episodic and deep with imagery drawn from the OT and other backgrounds. Still, it lends itself to a narrative reading. See Lee, *Narrative Asides*, 91. John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre" *Semina* 14, 1979, 9, considers that apocalyptic literature is set within a "narrative framework." M. Eugene Boring, *Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse*, *CBQ* 54, Oct (1992): 702-23, also highlights the value of a narrative reading of Revelation.

story telling, that is, there is the use of syntax, plot, imagery, setting, point of view etc. All of which play an important role in narrative criticism.³⁶

One of the major contributions that literary studies have made to the narrative critical approach is that of giving close attention to the details of the rhetorical devices writers use, the interplay of themes and words, as well as to how characters are developed within the story. This latter point involves attention to features that comprise the characters' speech, actions, traits, epithets, and development. Utilizing a "painstaking analysis of the nuances, ambiguities of words, images, metaphors, and small units of text" facilitates a broad understanding of the writing. This kind of analysis of pericopes within a larger text is frequently called a "close reading." Such close readings analyze the complex interrelations and ambiguities of the components within a work. While beginning with smaller units, narrative criticism has developed to the point of encompassing entire books.³⁷

James Resseguie demonstrates this literary technique by using a visual example. Taking Van Gogh's *The Good Samaritan* as an illustration, Resseguie points out how a close view of the painting unfolds its story. In a similar way, narrative criticism works with a text, exploring narrative subsections and tracing the verbal connections to the larger plot. The painting is self-contained, a complete whole that must be viewed as such. This is an essential principle for narrative criticism. The details of the artist's background or the history of the reception of the work, important as these factors are, do not overly impact interpretation of the painting. In a similar

³⁶ Resseguie *Narrative Criticism* 19. Osborne, (*Hermeneutical Spiral*, 153), also recognizes the danger of treating a religious text as fiction. But both religious and historical narratives as well as fiction use plot, characters, setting and perspective to tell their story. In the Gospels, history and theology are united in a story format. Historicity is vital, though there is a distinction between the recounting of a person's history and the person himself. The point is to decipher the meaning of the historical-theological text, not reconstruct the actual event.

³⁷ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 21-25.

manner, the background of a text's author, or how the text has been read throughout history, from a narrative critical perspective, do not overly impact interpretation.

Resseguie points out that by noting the shades and colors it becomes clear that Van Gogh's painting focuses on four characters. The two major ones are in the foreground, the other two are less distinct and recede into the distance. This occurs in a narrative as well, with some characters in bolder relief, and others more "flat." The setting (a mountainous scene), various articles (an empty chest, a book, a garment), the different colors (brownish for the Levite and priest, in contrast to the blue, scarlet, and gold of the Samaritan) all help to convey the story inherent in the painting. In a similar manner, close attention to the details of a finished text is a defining characteristic of a narrative critical approach.³⁸

In a narrative critical approach, special attention is paid to the roles of author, reader, and narrator. In any narrative work, there is the historical author who penned the work. This is generally distinguished from the author (implied author in narrative critical terms) of the text. The implied author is the one who is encountered by the reader. In some circumstances, there can be an abundance of information given for an historical author, such as knowledge about the place of birth, perspectives on life, and other biographical details. These fade into the background when only the text is considered, and thus the formation of the construct of the implied author who is only known through the text itself. This may or may not conform to the historical³⁹ author's values and concerns.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid. 26-30.

³⁹ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 74. See Mel W. Gnatkowski, "The Implied Reader in the Book of Revelation," (ThD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988) for an extended study on the implied author, implied reader, and narrator as it relates specifically to Revelation.

⁴⁰ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 155 notes that for those with a high regard for the biblical integrity, "the presence of the author is critical in order to tie us to the historicity of the story."

In addition to the implied author (IA), within a text there is frequently a narrator. This is a device used to convey meaning directly to the reader.⁴¹ The role of a narrator varies within different texts. Within the biblical corpus, the difference between the IA and narrator is rare, if existent at all. The narrator is the invisible speaker within the text. This is the voice describing the growth of the church in Acts or relating the introduction to the Gospel of John.⁴² In Revelation, after an initial third person narration,⁴³ John plays an active role as a narrator. He interacts with the heavenly beings, asks questions, and weeps at what he sees. Within Revelation, the role of the IA and the narrator are virtually blended.⁴⁴

One of the pressing issues relating to interpreting a text is the role of the reader. Naturally there is a vast difference between the original readers of a text like Revelation, and those who come to it for the first time today. In its attempt to engage the reader into the text, and have the text affect the reader, narrative criticism posits an “implied reader.” As the original recipients are no longer available to modern readers, a practical help is that of the “implied reader” (IR).⁴⁵ This represents a construct of a reader who would know things not specifically stated within the text (for example, the worth of a talent) that today’s readers might not know without additional research. The IR knows everything the text assumes the reader knows and forgets what the text does not assume reader knows. From a narrative critical

⁴¹ Gnatkowski, “The Implied Reader” 4.

⁴² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 155 suggests that within the Scriptures, the narrator is “often indistinguishable from the God who inspires him.”

⁴³ The formal tone of 1.1-3 prepares the reader to accept the narrative voice of John and begins to develop the “intimate encounter” that is strengthened as the story unfolds. Diana Jill Kirby, “Repetition in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America 2009), 131.

⁴⁴ Gnatkowski, “The Implied Reader” 12.

⁴⁵ Osborne *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 163.

approach, the actual reader is to read the text from the standpoint of the IR.⁴⁶ The IR reads the text as the author anticipated, “transcribing all the clues within a text in the manner the author intended.”⁴⁷ One of the purposes of this construct is to understand what is the text demanding of its intended reader. As Grant Osborne states, “in the act of reading the text I allow the text to determine my response by submitting to its internal dynamics and reordering my own life accordingly...”⁴⁸

While no actual reader would grasp all the complexities that may occur within a text, from a narrative critical perspective it is important to attempt to gain the viewpoint of the IR. The IR concept is actually a “principle that sets criteria for interpretation.” An important interpretive question to be asked is “Is there anything *in the text* that indicates the reader is expected to respond this way?” The answer may not always be attainable⁴⁹ but in narrative criticism, it is always worth asking. This construct is to help the modern reader assume something of the perspective that formed the cultural outlook understood by the original reader.⁵⁰

Narrative critics focus on several discrete aspects of the text. Some of the most important traits that are especially appropriate for a study in Revelation are: rhetoric, setting, characters, plot, and perspective. While narrative criticism embraces a wider variety of tools than these five, the following discussion and this study as a whole will focus on these aspects.

⁴⁶ Powell *Narrative Criticism*, 20. Culpepper, (*Anatomy*, 209), considers that the IR focuses the attention on the original intended message of the text, rather than being a free flowing entity that allows one to play with differing meanings.

⁴⁷ Resseguie *Narrative Criticism*, 31; Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 38.

⁴⁸ Osborne *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 163.

⁴⁹ Powell *Narrative Criticism* 21, emphasis original.

⁵⁰ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York, Basic Books, 1981), 62.

Rhetorical devices help identify the structure of a text or the theme of a narrative. Various rhetorical devices include verbal repetition, inclusios, chiasms, figures of speech, and the inversion of the normal.⁵¹ For example the repeated “I know” expressions in 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15 form a verbal thread throughout the letters to the churches. The usage of the word “appeared,” found only in 11:19; 12:1, 3 is a verbal thread that unites the images found in this passage as well. In a narrative critical approach, special attention is given to the rhetorical moves and grammatical clues given by the author.

An understanding of how the characters in a narrative are portrayed helps to unfold the storyline. Characters are described in a multiplicity of ways emphasizing the depth that they possess.⁵² Some characters have a single characteristic that defines them. Others are simply agents within the story with no dimension to them, while others are full-fledged and realistic.⁵³ Naturally, in a work of fiction, characters are constructs of the author, merely created to fulfill role.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the reader learns about them in the same way one learns about characters in a historical narrative, such as the Gospels. The author reveals details about the character by describing them, or through showing their actions, recording their speech (or the words of others), or revealing their thoughts.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Resseguie, (*Narrative Criticism*, 75) following Bakhtin describes the upside down nature frequently found in Revelation and the Gospels as carnivalesque. Thus at the cross the innocent dies while the guilty are set free, the sun fails at midday and the cross becomes a throne. See, M. M. Bakhtin, and Caryl Emerson, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 122.

⁵² Round or flat is a common distinction between characters with depth and those with none. Round characters are capable of surprising the reader. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 67.

⁵³ Osborne *Hermeneutical Spiral* 159. Culpepper (*Anatomy* 161) refers back to Aristotle, arguing that characters should be morally good, lifelike, and consistent.

⁵⁴ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 55.

⁵⁵ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 121.

In Revelation, the main characters are described through sobriquets, titles, and descriptive appellations. God is frequently called “the one sitting on the throne” (4.2,3,9; 5.1,7.13; 6.16; 7.10,15; 19.4; 20.11; 21.5). “Lamb” is the most frequent title for Christ, but “lion” and “son of man” are also used (5.5-8; 14.14). Satan is described as a “serpent” and “dragon,” reflecting the dual nature of persecutor and deceiver (12.9; 20.2). Revelation’s characters are unlike those encountered in the Gospels or Acts. John is the only human character, with two undisputed human character groups (those who respond to the call of Revelation, the saints, and those who dwell on the earth.)⁵⁶

Conclusion

This study will use a narrative critical approach to the book of Revelation, combined with the tools of the historical-grammatical method.⁵⁷ Both schools of thought attempt to take the document as a whole, looking for the meaning that an ideal or implied reader would discern. Any literary analysis is part of a larger hermeneutical process. Thus the combining of a narrative critical approach, with a more traditional historical-grammatical perspective should have the effect of strengthening the end result of the research. As Osborne notes, “all aspects...function together and inform one another in the hermeneutical process of discovering the meaning of a narrative text.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kirby, “Repetition,” 139. The twenty-four elders are also considered by some to be human, but this is a contested opinion.

⁵⁷ Also called the grammatico-historical or syntactical-theological. See Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1981), 88.

⁵⁸ Osborne *Hermeneutical Spiral* 168.

Two important factors will be taken into account in examining what role the hymnic portions play in Revelation. The first is that the meaning of any passage cannot be determined in isolation. Each pericope needs to be understood in light of the organic nature of the whole. This aspect is particularly important for a study of the hymns, which are found throughout the book. Secondly, these passages will need close readings with the aim that the nuances, complexities, rhetoric, and overarching plot are brought to bear to facilitate interpretation.⁵⁹ As will be highlighted in the next chapter, the setting of the temple within Revelation plays a contributory role in placing the hymns within the narrative flow. From the perspective of this study, this highlights the issues facing the heavenly council, to which the hymns are responding.

⁵⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation* 18.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERARY CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

Meaningful understanding of any text involves effort on the part of the reader. Many issues need to be taken into account to mine the literary strategies of an author. This is especially necessary when a work comes from a vastly different culture and context, as does the book of Revelation. Issues such as authorship, structure of the text, and use of language all impact understanding. Taking the book in its narrative context adds a further impetus to this study. A narrative reading is especially concerned with these considerations.

The *way* the writer tells his story bears upon its interpretation. Subtle grammatical clues, phrases, metaphors, and texture all impact understanding of the text.¹ However, judgments made on issues such as how the text came into being, or how it is laid out are both effected by and effect interpretive decisions. For example, if one *a priori* believes it is impossible for predictive prophetic utterances to exist, this will color interpretations of a text that claims it. To illustrate this one may consider the book of Daniel, to which Revelation frequently alludes. Many passages in Daniel contain what appear to be predictive prophecies. If this is considered impossible then the reader will come to different conclusions regarding the origin, purpose, and meaning of the text, than if such a judgment was not held. Each interpreter brings a perspective to the text. This study using narrative criticism will attempt to enter into the world of the author, understanding and taking his viewpoints seriously (while recognizing the limitations of being able to do so fully).

¹ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 1.

In order to accomplish this effectively, one must learn to listen carefully. Language forms a rhetorical force that provides a framework with which to understand the world. Vernon K. Robbins paints a vivid picture of this by comparing a text to “an intricately woven tapestry...” Thus by viewing a text from different angles, “multiple textures of the text [fall] into view.”²

The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyze important literary considerations that impact any reading of Revelation. This chapter will examine authorship, genre, grammatical techniques, and structure to discern their impact on an interpretative stance. At the end of each section I will state what perspective this study will follow in the examination of the hymns that are found within Revelation’s storyline.

Authorship

The identity of Revelation’s author confronts the reader immediately. In the first verse, the reader encounters the recipient of the heavenly message identified only as John. Although apparently well known to the first receivers of his message, questions about his role, authority, and background challenge the modern reader. As readers attempting to take the role of the implied reader, there is admittedly much that is unknown.

Unquestionably the implied author of the text intends that he be viewed as an active participant in the unfolding of the visions. He hears commands (1.10), reveals his location (1.9), hints at his tribulations (1.9), and describes his overwhelming reactions to the encounter with the exalted Christ (1.17). The author maintains a personal presence throughout the book. He is several times taken by the Spirit (4.2;

² Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1996), 2-3.

17.3; 21.10), weeps at heavenly pronouncements (5.4), worships inappropriately, and is then gently rebuked by an angelic interpreter (19.10; 22.8). However, he reveals no other clues concerning his origin. While the author identifies himself as John, relates part of his experience, and writes from a position of authority, questions still haunt his historical identity.³

John also takes the role of the narrator within Revelation. It is from his perspective as a visionary that the book unfolds. His first person description of what he has seen, heard, tasted, felt, and experienced draws the reader into his world. The reader senses his anguish and awe (5.4; 17.6). That fact that he writes in the first person limits the knowledge he can share with his readers. He can only know what is shown or revealed to him (7.13,14). “His lack of omniscience makes him like the reader/hearer—someone who is privileged to see things differently.”⁴

The historical question as to whether or not the reader should take the author’s name as John at face value, and believe that is really his name, is not a narrative critical concern. Using a famous person’s name to give credence to a text was a “widespread ancient literary phenomenon.” This feature was particularly a characteristic of early Jewish apocalypses. All known Jewish apocalypses are written using a pseudonym. A well-known and respected personage’s name gave weight and authority to a text.⁵ Pseudonymity, as well as anonymity were less of an issue for the ancient world than for ours.⁶ Given the literary climate current when Revelation was composed, it is not inconceivable that John is a pseudonym.

³ John uses his name four times within the narrative (Rev. 1:1, 4, 9; and 22.8)

⁴ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 48.

⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xlix.

⁶ Note that the book of Hebrews has no name attached to it. The gospel writers as well did not state their names within the text. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xlvi.

Nevertheless, the end result of this consideration frequently breaks the unity of the text, which unity is a narrative critical priority. Aune views the fact that John's name is only mentioned in the beginning and the end of the text, as potentially indicating that these chapters were an addition to an originally pseudonymous or anonymous core, composed roughly of chapters 4-21.⁷ As per this example, questions about authorial identity can give way to a disjointed reading of the text. A narrative reading takes the information about John from the text itself.

John does nothing to increase his stature or authority with his intended audience by claiming anything other than his visionary experience and shared experience of tribulation.⁸ The writer considers himself a fellow companion and partaker in the tribulation affecting the community as a whole. He claims no particular positional authority within the church, but addresses himself simply as "brother" (Revelation 1.9). His influence comes from having received the prophetic message, which in itself is an "unheard of authority."⁹ Reading the narrative it becomes clear that the author knows and is known by his intended audience.¹⁰ It is evident that John has an intimate knowledge of the churches to which he is writing. He is acquainted with details of the current issues that confront them.¹¹ The understanding that John the apostle was responsible for Revelation is incontestably

⁷ Ibid., xlix.

⁸ Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 6.

⁹ Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1986), 51.

¹⁰ On this basis, H. B. Swete, (*The Apocalypse of St John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999 reprint), clxx), concluded it is "scarcely possible that the book can be pseudonymous." Ben Witherington III (*Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9) also concludes that Revelation cannot be pseudonymous.

¹¹ Gnatkowski, ("The Implied Reader," 23), considers that John's authority is strengthened by the contextual descriptions in a way that surpasses a direct description. He is God's servant and has received a divine message.

the universal opinion of early Christian commentators, who would reflect most closely, the understanding of the original recipients of Revelation.¹²

What is evident from the text is that John is well known to the churches to which he writes. He is extremely familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, weaving them intricately into the tapestry he creates. John describes himself as part of the prophetic community that has continuity with OT prophets (19.10; 22.8,9; 10:9f cf. Ezek. 2:8; 3:1-3).¹³ His fellowship in the tribulation that awaits the reader strengthens the bond and reduces the distance between reader and author. The IR would naturally accept his prophetic and experiential authority.¹⁴ Following a narrative critical approach, this study shall use interchangeably, the expressions “the author” and “John” without any intention to make an ultimate decision as to the identity of the historical author.

Genre

It is a well-known and important tenet of literary criticism that literary works should be understood in relation to other works that exhibit similar features such as form, content, and function.¹⁵ Greg L. Linton argues that “identifying a text’s genre is

¹² Early sources largely, but not unanimously identify John as the apostle, son of Zebedee. See Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press; Berrien Springs, Michigan 2009), 2. For more detail see: Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 81.15 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:240); Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.14-2; 4.20.11 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1:479, 491); Tertullian *Against Marcion* 3.25 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3:342); Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 6.13 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 2:504); Hippolytus *Treatise of Christ and Antichrist* 36-42 (*The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 5:211-211). Hendriksen (*More Than Conquerors*, 13), recognizes the widespread unanimity of the early church in considering John the apostle to be the write of Revelation. So, William C. Weinrich ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture XII, Revelation* (Inter-Varsity Press: Downers Grove 2005) xix. This conclusion is not without difficulties, though they appear over exaggerated in light of the overwhelmingly early consensus. See Collins, *Morphology of a Genre*, 28-29.

¹³ Boxall, *The Book of Revelation*, 6. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation* 34-36, for a broad discussion on authorial identity.

¹⁴ Gnatkowski, “The Implied Reader,” 36.

¹⁵ David Hellolm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John” *Semia* 36, (1986), 68.

crucial for determining its meaning.”¹⁶ It must be admitted however, that frequently it is not so clear what type of genre the reader is encountering. Literary critics differ in the qualities that they consider significant in forming and identifying particular genres.¹⁷ Thus some ambiguity and disagreement as to the exact definition of a text’s genre is to be expected.

Nevertheless, genres serve a hermeneutical function and are a valuable interpretive aid. A level of reading and understanding occurs when there is a connection with other similar works. Thus, asking in which genre is a text written is the “most important question an interpreter can ask.”¹⁸ The assumptions readers bring to a text impacts their reading of it. Thinking of Revelation as a history written in advance will affect interpretation, as well as viewing the text as solely relating to the first century.¹⁹ Interpreters spend time and energy determining genre because the decision “will affect how they interpret and understand” a given text. In other words, genre gives an interpretive strategy.²⁰

The history of interpretation shows that identifying Revelation’s genre is not easy, nor have interpreters always agreed. This is due in part to differences in perspectives of the reader, and in part due to the nature of the text. Revelation surges over distinct literary boundaries. Numerous intertextual characteristics flow into one another. Frequently writers indicate the genre of their work (as in Mark 1.1) with some paratextual reference (such as title, subtitle, preface etc.) When this is not the

¹⁶ Greg L. Linton “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse: The Limits of Genre” in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (SBL: Atlanta, 2006), 9.

¹⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 39.

¹⁸ Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse,” 12.

¹⁹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of all Things*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13

case, the reader must approach the text with a working hypothesis from which one can base interpretation. However, Revelation is very intertextual, thus frustrating the reader's attempt to have a clear view of genre.²¹ Readers interacting with the text must make choices as to which genre to bring into the foreground, and which must recede into the background. Upon completing the reading of the first chapter "no single, clear generic identity" emerges.²² At least three potential classifications of genre arise from the opening verses of the book. Flowing out of Revelation 1.1-4, the book has been classified as an epistle, a prophecy, and an apocalypse.

Epistle

Addressed to the seven churches that are in Asia, Revelation opens and closes with distinctive epistolary characteristics. In 1.4-6 there is a greeting, introduced by the familiar terms "grace and peace" that are reminiscent of the Pauline epistles (Rom. 1.7; 1 Cor. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.2 etc.). Direct instruction is given to John to send out what he sees to the seven named churches (1.11). The book closes with a salutation of grace (22.21). The epistolary aspect of Revelation facilitates reading in worship and demonstrates that Revelation is not only a plan of "identifying future events" but is more of a "theological workbook."²³ In addition to these features, the first series of seven in Revelation are the letters to the seven churches. The epistolary genre is an important background for understanding Revelation.

Those who consider Revelation to have authorial integrity, must weigh the place the letters hold in the overall scheme of the book. The letters bring a different

²¹ Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse" 26.

²² Ibid., 31.

²³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxxii.

genre to Revelation than the prophetic or apocalyptic. John ties the book together with the verbal links in the prologue and epilogue. The epistolary characteristics that disappear throughout the main body of the book reappear in the final chapter. This genre must be taken seriously in forming an overall understanding of the book.²⁴ It is important that as the epistolary sections are integrated into the text as a whole, this genre has its weight in any interpretive scheme.

Exactly how much weight each aspect should receive is debatable.²⁵ Robert Surridge, whose work concentrates on the rhetoric of the letter to Laodicea, discusses this interrelation between Revelation's differing genres. Focusing especially on the epistolary parts of Revelation, he emphasizes the difficulty that the history of interpretation has had in rightly weighing this generic context. Whether due to a focus on historical issues, or persecution themes, or supposed multi-document sources, or devotional applications, the letters of Revelation have too frequently been severed from the rest of the book. Nevertheless their "social, rhetorical and narrative content" are integral to understanding Revelation as a whole. While other generic aspects are at play, Revelation must be understood in view of its epistolary nature.²⁶

Prophecy

While part of Revelation's fabric, the characteristics of the seven letters lead the reader to consider that this is not simply an epistle. John undoubtedly has knowledge of the local circumstances of these churches. Yet choosing only seven

²⁴ Robert James Surridge, "The Art of Apocalyptic Persuasion: The Rhetorical Dynamics and History of Influence of the Letter to Laodicea (Rev 3.14-22)" (PhD diss., King's College, 2000), 64.

²⁵ Harris, ("Literary Function," 40), argues that since John is not a participant in the narrative, then the epistolary section doesn't begin the apocalypse. Thus the conclusion that Revelation is epistle is difficult conclusion to support. This seems to ignore the tight literary unity of Revelation and the interlocking nature of the prologue and epilogue.

²⁶ Surridge, *Apocalyptic Persuasion*, 79.

when there were other churches within the area (with several larger ones), and the following series of sevens within the book indicate that John's purpose is not solely to communicate to the members in those churches. John's larger purpose is to speak to God's church throughout the ages. Using the framework of an epistle, John writes to the church universal.

To this church, John proclaims a message from God. John indicates that he understands his writing to be prophetic (1:3,19; 22:7,10,18-19). John describes himself as receiving a commissioning that is similar to that of Ezekiel (see 10:8-11 and Ezek. 2:8-3:3). He views himself in a prophetic line receiving a message from God and Christ, via the hands of the angel, to be sent to the church universal. The origin of the book is not John's creative mind, but "God Himself."²⁷

John presents his book not simply as a literary creation, nor merely as a rhetorical tool. He describes Revelation as a result of a divine encounter and command prompted by the Spirit (1:10,11; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). What he wrote is a reflection on what he saw and heard. Over 30 times John repeats the expression "I saw." Almost as many times John describes what he "heard." Jon Paulien rightly notes, "Regardless of the position one takes with respect to the origin of the visions, John himself appears to understand his book to be more of a divine construct than his own composition."²⁸ While much scholarly effort is spent examining words, allusions, and thematic bridges within the text, this should not cause the reader to overlook or

²⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 13.

²⁸ Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987) 44 n. 2.

dismiss the claim that John makes. He claims to describe events that are yet future (1:19; 4:1) and soon to be fulfilled (1:1; 22:6).²⁹

Naturally, various Christian communities have interpreted these divinely inspired visions differently. Prophecy can mean different things to a variety of readers. The NT writers considered that prophecy could include a clear predictive element (Luke 24:25-27; Acts 11:27,28). Thus it is not unreasonable to interpret Revelation as containing predictive prophecy. Others, uncomfortable with this perspective emphasize that prophecy is more of a “forth-telling” rather than a “fore-telling.”³⁰

Nevertheless, it is evident that John intended his book to reach into the future. In the opening verses, which are designed to set the tone for the entire work, he receives the initial blessing for those who read, hear, and keep the words of the prophecy (1.3). The final culmination that he describes is a new heaven and a new earth (21; 22) in which there is no more curse, but a restored Eden with open, face-to-face communion with God (22:3,4). The questions over God’s faithfulness (6.10) are finally resolved. Before that occurs, believers will experience a life and death conflict over maintaining their allegiance to God, in the face of economic penalties, and finally death (13:16,17). John reveals warnings that are designed to prepare people for this final crisis (14:6-12). To neglect the prophetic emphasis that is woven through

²⁹ Viewing the text as a result of John’s actual visionary experience is the position taken in the recent study on the temple imagery in Revelation. See John and Gloria Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse in the Light of the Temple* (Jerusalem: Beit Yochanan, 2003), 17 n. 22.

³⁰ Many commentators view the predictive elements of books like Daniel and Revelation to have been composed after the fact. Prophecy *ex eventu* would theoretically be used to give authenticity and authority to a text. In this way prophecy is interpreted not as primarily prediction, but conveying a message in God’s name. See Delbert Royce Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 501-503; Greg Carey, *Ultimate Things: An Introduction to Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature* (Chalice Press, 2005), 9; Collins, *Introduction to Apocalyptic*, 11. However, in many cases this simply reflects an interpretive bias at work, as much of the NT relates to Scripture in the manner of fulfilled prophecy.

Revelation is to misinterpret it. To disregard the prophetic emphasis is to vitiate it. This must be balanced by understanding that the purpose of prophecy is to bring about a moral change in the lives of believers. Prophecy contains a range of material that is predictive, exhortatory, censuring, consoling, and encouraging.³¹ Each dimension needs to be given its proper sphere. The reader needs to be aware of these facets of the prophetic genre and incorporate them into her understanding of the text.

Apocalypse

John's opening words (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) as well as the similarity of his book to other Jewish and Christian writings has given rise to a generic category called apocalypse. This development is similar to the situation with the origin of the technical term "gospel" being applied to works that are similar to the book of Mark. Mark opens his text with a self-description that he is giving "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1.1). Mark's usage of the word εὐαγγέλιον became a way to describe works similar to his. In an analogous way, John's use of the word ἀποκάλυψις has given rise to a generic classification for works similar to his.³² A number of texts have been classified as apocalyptic, based on the paradigm set by Revelation.³³ Even with a class of works described as apocalyptic, the definition of such a genre is not unanimously agreed upon nor has such a classification been universally accepted. In part this is due to the presuppositions of those endeavoring to

³¹ Koester, *End of All Things*, 45.

³² Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse," 26.

³³ For a list of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings see Eugene M. Boring, *Revelation*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 38-39.

make this classification.³⁴ This situation, and the intertextuality of Revelation create difficulties for those wanting to identify Revelation's genre as apocalyptic.

David L. Barr notes that identifying Revelation as an example of apocalyptic literature is a relatively recent exercise, dating back to 1832. Before that, Revelation was viewed more as a prophetic rather than apocalyptic work. Barr lists five traits of apocalyptic literature on which there is some degree of agreement. They are:

1. There is a claim that a revelation is given to a prophet
2. The revelation is imparted by a dream, vision, or heavenly visit
3. The revelation is mediated by a figure, such as an angel
4. The revelation is not usually self-explanatory, but uses symbols
5. The work is pseudonymous.³⁵

While such a list of characteristics can be helpful, they are nevertheless limited. As Barr also recognizes:

No work of literature is unique (each is related to others by a series of interlocking traits); but none of these works to which it is related is exactly alike. Each shares numerous traits with the others; but not all share all the traits. So the issue in defining a genre is one of boundaries: is the definition broad enough to take in all the exemplars and still narrow enough to exclude works that are clearly of a different kind? And probably the answer must always be 'no.'³⁶

The truth of such an observation is compounded with respect to Revelation. This is evident by the questions that remain, after much scholarly effort has been spent with little agreement.

After an extensive survey, Aune focuses on three important aspects of any genre: form, content, and function. He then firmly defines these areas in general apocalyptic terms, before applying them to Revelation. He considers the essential elements of *form* to be an autobiographical narrative composed of revelatory visions

³⁴ Linton, "Reading the Apocalypse," 34.

³⁵ David L. Barr, "Beyond Genre: The Expectations of Apocalypse" in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 74.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 75

framed in such a way that the revelatory messages form literary climax. *Content* is seen as a transcendent, eschatological viewpoint. An apocalypse's *function* is to give authority to the message, so that it results in both cognitive and behavioral changes that are consistent with the viewpoint of the message.³⁷ Aune sees Revelation as reflecting the characteristics of apocalypse, so defined.

F. D. Mazzaferri's study leads him to a very different conclusion. After similarly reviewing the three paradigmatic aspects of form, content, and function, Mazzaferri rejects the idea that Revelation should be classified as an apocalypse. He recognizes that there are similarities between apocalyptic writings and Revelation. Nevertheless he considers these similarities superficial.

An example of Mazzaferri's critique can be seen in relation to the idea of content. He perceptively considers the eschatological emphasis found within Revelation. While John does look toward the eschaton, he transforms the end by looking back to Christ's death and resurrection. For John the decisive event has already occurred. The end is only the completion of a process that reached a high point at the cross (5.6-8; 12.10-11).³⁸ In addition John's viewpoint is different than what is typical for an apocalypse. Apocalyptic literature has a deterministic perspective while Revelation has more of a prophetic, conditional one.³⁹

After reviewing arguments relating to these three categories, he finds support for viewing the book within the genre of apocalypse wanting. In no uncertain terms Mazzaferri states that "Rev completely fails to qualify as a genuine apocalypse...Any

³⁷ David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, ed. David E. Aune, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book, 2008) 61.

³⁸ F. D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective*, (New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 250.

³⁹ Boring, (*Revelation*, 35-37), argues that apocalyptic is a "particular kind of eschatology" with a particular "understanding of the doctrine of divine providence." Thus Mazzaferri's criticism goes to the essential heart of the identification of apocalyptic genre.

residual question will vanish completely in view of the overwhelming case for [the] prophetic identity.”⁴⁰

Certainly the word prophecy can be used to summarize the genre of Revelation. Richard Bauckham insists that John knew he was writing a “prophetic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures...”⁴¹ Yet this does not exhaust the genre. The epistolary aspects blend with the prophetic. While Revelation may not fit the exact attributes of the apocalyptic genre, its edges bleed into what is currently considered apocalyptic form.⁴² This vagueness of distinct forms causes a lack of clear resolution on the issue of genre.⁴³ Given this ambiguity, Surridge’s summary is appropriate.

In terms of genre, Revelation is now usually seen as a pastoral letter, written by a Christian prophet who chose to write using apocalyptic language and imagery under the influence of the Hebrew Bible. Whatever his choice or blend of genre it is agreed that it is his choice, and that he makes it so as to be a more effective communicator of his message—a message designed to influence those who read it.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Mazzaferri, *Genre of Revelation*, 258.

⁴¹ Bauckham, *Climax*, xi. Bauckham also supports the connection between Revelation and the genre of apocalypse. See the full discussion at *Climax*, 38-91.

⁴² One of the main difficulties in discussing the apocalyptic genre is the scholarly disagreement on what exactly constitutes apocalyptic. As noted above, Barr includes pseudonymity as a defining characteristic. If this is true (and all Jewish apocalypses are pseudonymous), then Revelation does not fit this genre. If this is dropped out as a characteristic (as in Aune, *Genre*, 60, who contends only for “autobiographical form”), then Revelation might be considered apocalyptic. The Apocalypse Group of the SBL Genres Project, tried to identify the characteristics of the apocalyptic genre, by looking at works they first considered to be apocalyptic. In some sense, their efforts involved circular reasoning. See Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse,” 34. Thompson, (*Revelation*, 18), takes Revelation as the paradigm for the apocalyptic genre, considering that if a text resembles Revelation, then it is within the apocalyptic genre. Thus by Thompson’s definition, Revelation is apocalyptic by default.

⁴³ Adela Yarbro Collins, (*The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message 22 (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 5), writes that John “does not seem to have distinguished between an apocalyptic and a prophetic book.”

⁴⁴ Surridge, *Apocalyptic Persuasion*, 69.

John's use of a blend of different genres needs to be recognized and taken into account by the reader. Being aware of the power of presuppositions, the perceptive reader will engage with the text rather than forcing a mechanical grid upon it. This will also allow the presence of the different genres to inform interpretation. This study will proceed from a perspective similar to that of Surridge quoted above. The text reflects the visionary experience of a Christian, who uses what is currently called apocalyptic imagery and language to both communicate its message with believers in a first century context, as well as having special prophetic significance for the church throughout the ages.

Grammar

The narrative style of a writer comprehends the expressions and forms that are used. As Resseguie describes style, it is “*how* the narrator says what he says.”⁴⁵ John's grammatical style is anything but smooth. He frequently constructs solecisms, changes genders, and utilizes unwieldy Greek grammatical forms. Among these are: the irregular use of cases, broken constructions, superfluous personal pronouns, and non-matching genders or numbers. There are also a variety of idiosyncratic grammatical phrases.⁴⁶ John's vocabulary is also unique among biblical authors. Approximately 11% of the words that he uses are *hapax legomenon* for the NT and another 10% are rarely used by other NT writers.⁴⁷

One of the issues to be resolved in considering grammar is John's familiarity with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. As Aune rightly observes “The Greek of

⁴⁵ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 48.

⁴⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, cxix.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, cxv.

Revelation is the most peculiar Greek in the NT, in part because it exhibits interference from Semitic languages, perhaps both Hebrew and Aramaic.”⁴⁸ From the early 200’s C.E., commentators have reflected on John’s Greek. Dionysius of Alexandria concluded that John’s “use of the Greek language is inaccurate and he employs barbarous idioms producing solecisms.”⁴⁹ Aune reviews four explanations for this situation. They are: Revelation was originally written in Hebrew and then translated into Greek; John thought in Hebrew but tried to express himself in Greek; Hebrew was a model language for Revelation; and John was only secondarily bilingual.⁵⁰ R. H. Charles convincingly argues for the role of a Hebraic underpinning for John’s Greek text, summarizing that while John “writes in Greek he thinks in Hebrew.”⁵¹ H. B. Swete broadens the base for John’s solecisms, arguing that there is most likely more than one cause. Hebraic thinking may be one reason,⁵² and a desire to give movement and reality to the reading of his visions another.⁵³ John may have been intending to mark OT allusions through the use of “Hebraicized Greek.”⁵⁴ Possibly John, exiled to Patmos, simply did not have the editorial help he needed to transcribe his visionary experiences into smoother prose.⁵⁵ While there may be

⁴⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, clxii. Charles, *Revelation I*, cvii-xlix.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxcix. Aune gives Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 7.26 as his reference. However, according to www.newadvent.org/fathers/250107.htm the correct reference would be 7.25 (accessed 6/10/2011).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Charles, *Revelation I*, cxliii.

⁵² See the detailed study by Steven Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁵³ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, cxx.

⁵⁴ Roloff, *Revelation*, 12.

⁵⁵ Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God*, (Review and Herald: Hagerstown) 2004, 10.

multiple reasons impacting the writing of Revelation, the IR needs to pay close attention to what John is doing with his use of language.

Viewing Revelation as a narrative whole will encourage the reader to be less dismissive of grammatical irregularities and more willing to reflect on them. A close reading considers how the threads of the tapestry are woven together to create an image. Grammatical irregularities might be part of the intentionality of the author to highlight different or specific aspects of the texture of the text. Unquestionably these solecisms would be jarring to the eye and especially the ear of those encountering Revelation in its original language.

Barr stresses the aural aspects of Revelation, contending that the structure itself lends to an aural emphasis. In addition to the series of sevens, the topography of the book, the scroll images woven into the text, there are the multitude of sounds (thunder, trumpets, voices) that pervade the book.⁵⁶ In a situation where Revelation was read aloud to a congregation (Rev. 1.3), the solecisms would not easily be passed over. Most errors would be quickly noticed by a majority of the listeners.

This investigation considers that the grammatical irregularities create an unsettling effect that draws attention to John's theological points. His use of ungrammatical constructions, the passive voice to indicate God's activity, gender anomalies, and other similar moves are to be understood as part of his rhetorical style.⁵⁷ These techniques intensify the linguistic impact of the text. They are intentional stratagems to get those experiencing the text to pay closer attention. John's theological purpose is strengthened by his grammatical constructions.

⁵⁶ David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse of John As Oral Enactment," *Int* 40 (1986): 243-56. See also Aune, "Problem of Genre," 50-51 for examples of the aural nature of Classical Greek.

⁵⁷ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 48.

Structure

Writing around the turn of the last century, Wilhelm Bousset confidently stated that Revelation “can no longer be regarded as a literary unity.”⁵⁸ Bousset saw four points that supported his conclusion. They were:

1. Well defined seams
2. Repeated ideas with different view points
3. Representation of the judgment in different locations
4. Supposed differing dates for various sections

In light of Bousset’s observations, which reflect the popularity of the source criticism of the day, Aune neatly summarizes three main theories that aid in understanding the origin and final form of the structure of Revelation. These approaches are described as compilation, revision, and fragmentary theories. Compilation theories argue that two or more distinct bodies of work were combined to create the final work. Revision theories consider that a later editor expanded a single composition. Fragmentary theories understand that Revelation was formed out of smaller, discrete literary units.⁵⁹ As the understanding of the book’s literary structure is inseparable from an interpretive stance, it is necessary that the question of the organization of the text be considered.⁶⁰ It is not the purpose of this section to review the many different structures that have been proposed for Revelation.⁶¹ Rather, two main ideas will be

⁵⁸ Quoted by Swete, *The Apocalypse*, xlvi.

⁵⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cx-cxviii.

⁶⁰ Mathias Rissi, *Time and History; a Study on the Revelation*, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 1.

⁶¹ The variety of proposed structures are almost as many as the number of interpreters. See J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), 69. Among these are: a series of sixes (J. Massynghaerde Ford, *Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 14-17); the four visions (George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 14-17); chiastic structure (Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines with a Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis* (Worthington, OH: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976); and compilation theories (R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), 1ff)

considered, that of the structural unity of the text, followed by an examination of the predominant setting within the narrative.

Structural Unity

Aune combines different aspects of a variety of theories to formulate his understanding of the construction of the text. His view is that the book was formulated in two major stages covering many years. The first stage had an apocalyptic focus and consisted of sections of the first chapter and 4.1-22.5. The remainder of the book was filled in during stage two. Aune thinks it likely that author-editor wrote smaller independent units, and then combined them into the book of Revelation, forming a literary unit.⁶² He considers that the end product is only “relatively unified.” According to Aune, the editor’s redactional techniques are obvious to modern analysis.⁶³

Yet this conclusion is not as obvious as Aune makes it appear. Osborne considers such redactional theories to be “interesting and though speculative, certainly possible.” However, he argues that it is easier to see the unity of style and composition evident in Revelation. One can view apparent repetitions and doublets as part of the author’s strategy. As the final product is what lies before the IR, dissecting the work is not necessarily helpful.⁶⁴ From a narrative critical perspective, it is unnecessary.

Even among scholars who consider redactional theories helpful, there is a consensus that Revelation needs to be understood as unity. This perspective is well

⁶² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxx-cxxxiv.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, cxxviii.

⁶⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 28. Osborne concludes (29), that “Theories of composition are ultimately unnecessary.”

stated by Jacques Ellul. “I maintain that the Apocalypse must be read as a whole, of which each part takes its import by relation to the whole: in other words, the Apocalypse cannot be understood verse by verse.”⁶⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza views Revelation as a “work of strict composition and magnificent completeness.” Evidence of this is seen in its “uniformity of the vocabulary and style” as well as its theological unity.⁶⁶ If such literary craftsmanship has formed the book into “a coherent whole,”⁶⁷ this at least suggests the possibility that the supposed seams and discontinuities in the book are actually part of the author’s theological purposes and not the result of poor editing.

This is in fact, the conclusion that Bauckham comes to. He argues that the effort spent parsing Revelation into discrete units illustrates a failure to appreciate the unique literary integrity of Revelation. He goes so far as to say and perhaps overstating the case, “scarcely a word can have been chosen without deliberate reflection on its relationship to the work as an integrated interconnected whole.”⁶⁸ A close reading of Revelation reveals a textual harmony that is only the result of John’s care and effort. Revelation is a “meticulous literary composition” with “an unusual depth and density of meaning which yields itself only to [a] proper understanding of its literary character.”⁶⁹

Reading Revelation as a whole is essential to an understanding of the narrative nature of the book. Paying attention to how the narrative constructs meaning is an

⁶⁵ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 13.

⁶⁶ Elisabeth Fiorenza Schüssler, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 36.

⁶⁷ Boring, *Revelation*, 30.

⁶⁸ Bauckham, *Climax*, x.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

integral part of a narrative reading. Both form and content, that is, the way the story unfolds as well as the story itself are important. A narrative reading will allow the composition to control interpretation, and not the reverse. If there are difficulties in the text, they cannot be resolved by positing a different source, author, or redactor. More importantly, a compositional unity indicates there will be a thematic unity to help guide interpretation. Accepting the literary integrity of Revelation is essential to clarifying the role difficult passages play within the book. This study will proceed from the assumption that the book is a unified whole, the intentional result of one author, and that the text needs to be engaged in its entirety.

Structural Background

John's calculated use of literary techniques and the depth of intertextuality imply an underlying structure. An important, yet often overlooked aspect of discerning the structure in a text is that of the background or setting. Particularly for a narrative reading, setting contributes to the structure and helps develop the central conflict of a plot line.⁷⁰ A narrative reading gives special attention to the location in which the action unfolds. Settings provide the context for the actions of the characters and are important as the characters and their actions. Using the metaphor of grammar, Mark Powell argues that the settings provide the when, where, and how of the story.⁷¹ The setting helps set the perspective or point of view that is integral to a full interpretation. For this consideration, setting can be geographical, temporal, or

⁷⁰ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 88.

⁷¹ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 69.

social.⁷² Settings provide a special role and function within the narrative from which the informed reader gleans interpretive clues.⁷³

John utilizes a variety of settings throughout his book to help create meaning and form. Mount Zion is the gathering place for the Lamb and the 144,000 (14.1f). Armageddon, (or the mountain of Megiddo), is the gathering place for their enemies (16.16). The sea and earth both give rise to the beast and false prophet who join the dragon in his war against God (13.1, 11). There is a wilderness that affords protection for the woman (12.6,14) and to which John is taken to see the harlot Babylon (17.3). The two cities, Babylon (17.18) and Jerusalem (21.1f) form an important part of the narrative, representing the capitals of those that are either heaven or earth bound.⁷⁴ John uses time periods such as the 42 months or 1260 days (13:5; 11:3; 12:6,14) to create temporal settings. Combined with these and other images, the setting of the heavenly sanctuary forms an important part of the structure of Revelation.⁷⁵

Direct reference to the temple (ναός) occurs 16 times in Revelation (3:12; 7:15; 11: 1,2,19 (2x); 14:15,17; 15:5,6,8 (2x); 16:1,17; 21:22 (2x)). This constitutes over one third of the NT references. Both the frequency of mention, and the strategic locations of the heavenly temple within the narrative indicate that it is the focal center of all divine activities. It is there that the heavenly council meets (4:2f;), the redeemed worship (7:9-12), and judgment arises (15:1-8).

⁷² Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 160.

⁷³ Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 141.

⁷⁴ See Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice between the Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse*, HTS 48 (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International 1999).

⁷⁵ The importance of the temple imagery for Revelation has been disputed. R. J. McKelvey (*The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament*. (London: Oxford U.P., 1969), 161) argues that John is not interested in the temple as it only serves as stage scenery. This misses the point of the pervasive nature of the imagery, and misses its connection with the unfolding narrative.

In addition to the direct mention of the temple, there are multiple allusions to furniture related to the sanctuary. John sees the outer court and altar (11:1, 2), the altar of incense (6:9; 8:3,5), the golden lampstand (1:12,13,20; 2:1,5; 4:5;⁷⁶ 11:4), trumpets (4; 8-11) and libation bowls (15; 16). The sanctuary imagery relates an interaction between what occurs in heaven, and divine actions on earth.⁷⁷ It is part of the thesis of this study that the temple imagery contributes to the overarching theme of the cosmic conflict. The hymnic portions within Revelation are set within a temple setting. The backdrop of the issues of the heavenly council and the controversy that began within the throne room/temple make this an important part of interpretation.⁷⁸

Aune recognizes that the heavenly throne room has a controlling influence on John's narrative. He concedes, "the entire vision report...is apparently perceived from the vantage point of the throne room..." The narrative repeatedly refers back to the throne room imagery.⁷⁹ While Aune argues that the background for this imagery is the Roman imperial court, Paulien makes a compelling case for seeing the Hebrew cultus as John's source.⁸⁰ Robert Briggs' study brings him to a similar conclusion.

⁷⁶ The lampstands in chapter four have been disputed as referring to the sanctuary. See below.

⁷⁷ Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 31. For an exploration of the temporal-spatial movements conveyed by temple imagery see Jon Paulien, "Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions" in *Symposium on Revelation Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 187f, and Richard Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology" in *Symposium on Revelation Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 99-130.

⁷⁸ This will be more fully developed in the next chapter.

⁷⁹ See Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 7. Aune however, argues that the source for this imagery is the Roman court, rather than the Hebrew sanctuary.

⁸⁰ One of the issues to be decided is: Where would the implied reader's greatest basis of shared experience be found? Aune, ("Imperial Court Ceremonial,"6), recognizes the difficulty of explaining how a provincial resident would gain enough background of the workings of the imperial court to successfully use it to reflect the heavenly court, yet feels there is enough evidence to suggest the possibility. Paulien's arguments rest on the fact that the majority of allusions that compose Revelation are drawn from the OT and Jewish Apocalyptic. This intertextuality grounds the shared experience between author and reader. See Jon Paulien "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation" *AUSS* 33, no. 2 (1995), 245-264; See also Jon Paulien "Dreading the Whirlwind Intertextuality and the use of the Old Testament in Revelation" *AUSS* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 5-22. Given the wealth of the OT background and the numerous intertextual

In short, the belief that John was appreciably influenced by non-scriptural Jewish literature, however true or untrue it may be regarding other themes in Revelation, is to be rejected regarding the temple. The sanctuary strains of the OT testimony alone were apparently more than adequate for John to have built his temple scenes and symbolisms upon.⁸¹

Among the images that draw attention to OT allusions are the garments worn by Jesus in the initial vision (1.13); the seven lampstands (1.12); the door opened in heaven (4.1); the trumpet (4.1); the precious stones (4.3); the twenty-four elders (4.4); the sea of glass (4.6); the four living creatures (4.7); the slain Lamb (5.6); and the bowls of incense (5.8). Each of these has a connection with some aspect of the Hebrew sanctuary service.⁸²

The temple imagery plays a two-fold purpose in the narrative structure of Revelation. In addition to highlighting the spatiotemporal progression, these images serve as introduction or enhancement to the main visionary sections that follow. This functions as a narrative thread to tie the entire book together. In the introductory vision, Jesus as priest⁸³ tends to the sanctuary lamps, keeping them continuously

allusions, the IR would be expected to catch the echoes of the Hebraic system. The large number of allusions and echoes makes the OT the primary background for Revelation. Naturally, if John were to employ imagery which had no OT counterpoints, that would impact interpretation. The Ben-Daniels argue (*The Apocalypse*, 43), that an OT parallel will trump any “non-canonical parallel with the temple in the Apocalypse.” Dean Davis, (*The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992), 111), agrees with this conclusion.

⁸¹ Robert Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, (New York: P. Lang, 1999), 217-218. This is important for a narrative reading, for the IR would most naturally consider OT imagery has having a priority in contributing to understanding. Briggs, (*Jewish Temple*, 219), forcefully stresses this point. “...It is evident that John’s virtually exclusive use of the OT as the written background source of his principal temple motifs ought to be kept in mind lest the risk of misinterpretation increase.” He earlier writes (*Jewish Temple*, 144), “It would appear that the OT pseudepigrapha had virtually no influence on the temple imagery of Revelation apart from those affinities which have mutual precursors in the OT.” For the large number of OT allusions in Revelation, see H.B. Swete *The Apocalypse*, cxi; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 101 who considers there are an average of 10 allusions per chapter.

⁸² Paulien, “Hebrew Cultus,” 249-251.

⁸³ Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 93) recognizes that ποδήρης occurs 12 times in the LXX and refers to priestly garments, but correctly notes that other descriptions of priestly garments are missing in John’s description (breastplate, ephod, etc.) He concludes that there is no clear authorial intention to depict Christ as priest. Paulien (“Hebrew Cultus,” 249 n.18) admits that the imagery is not exhausted by a

burning as reflected in the daily service of the temple.⁸⁴ The details that describe the priestly Christ (1.10-20) are reapplied and emphasized in the messages to the seven churches. This demonstrates an intimate connection between Christ as priest and the letters to the churches.

The opening of the seven seals is prepared by the sanctuary scene in chapter 4 (4:5f) and by the slain Lamb (5:6) in chapter 5. The thematic relationship between sanctuary imagery and the visions is continued before the blowing of the seven trumpets. The image of the golden altar (8:3), with the prayers of the saints, indicates Christ's ongoing mediation before and during the trumpets' sounding.

The view of the Ark of the Covenant (11:19) intensifies the sanctuary imagery and brings to view the judgment and the Day of Atonement. This serves to introduce the cosmic conflict vision of 12-14. The temple imagery in 15:2-8 is a prelude to the final rewards or punishment that people receive. Richard Davidson argues that the next sanctuary scene (19:1-10) is transitional. The final aspects of judgment are soon to be carried out, and the intercession of the sanctuary has ceased. The earth-heaven tension conveyed throughout the narrative will soon be resolved. The final scene closes the circle and brings heaven and earth together, with the temple imagery reaching its fulfillment in the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (21.22).

The impact that the temple imagery has on the narrative in Revelation has been recognized,⁸⁵ but there has not been a connection made between the temple setting and the hymns placed within that setting.

priestly interpretation, but that it is certainly part of the intertextual allusions. See also, Boxall, *Revelation*, 42; Boring, *Revelation*, 83. The Ben-Daniels, (*The Apocalypse*, 26), also recognize the priestly imagery, but contend that the garments point to a Day of Atonement motif, rather than daily service.

⁸⁴ The following overview is based on Davidson "Typology," 116-119.

⁸⁵ The Ben-Daniels (*The Apocalypse*, 3), argue that the temple should be considered the "organizing principle" of Revelation as a whole. See also Andrea Spatafora, *From the Temple of God to God as the*

A narrative reading pays close attention to setting as a means of underscoring subtle clues that contribute to a full understanding of the storyline. John uses temple imagery to accomplish an important purpose. The heavenly temple provides the setting for most, if not all of the hymnic portions. If it can be demonstrated that the temple scenes are reflective of the larger conflict motif found in Revelation, this will then help in seeing how the hymns reflect that controversy.⁸⁶ The next chapter more fully explores the contribution that the heavenly sanctuary imagery makes to an understanding of the narrative.

Temple: A Biblical Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation, (Roma: Ed. Pontificia università gregoriana, 1997) and Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery* which confirm the importance of the temple for interpreting Revelation. For an overview of the temple imagery in the NT, see Margaret Barker, *On Earth as it is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995).

⁸⁶ According to Giblin (*The Apocalypse*, 94), the plot line of Revelation is fairly simple: “it is that of the coherent, progressively enunciated holy war of God on behalf of his harassed people.”

CHAPTER THREE

CONFLICT AND THEODICY

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the textual markers within Revelation that bring the cosmic conflict theme to the fore. It will begin with an overview of the conflict motif and the function of chapter 12 in drawing the reader's attention to that theme. Satan's role within the narrative will be considered as well as an exploration of the development of his character within the storyline. In order to do this more completely, it will be necessary to pay close attention to the pervasive temple imagery and the divine council that meets within it. This examination will clarify Satan's original and subsequent roles within the council, first as a privileged member and then as an accuser. A brief overview of selected OT passages that contribute to an understanding of Satan's role in the conflict will then be explored. It is from his adversarial position that the cosmic conflict developed. Associated with the origins of the conflict are theodical concerns that the narrative seeks to redress. This chapter concludes by uniting the preceding observations in order to lay a foundation for hearing the hymnic sections against the dissonant echoes of Satan's accusations.

Cosmic Conflict Motif

As highlighted in the previous chapter, a narrative reading endeavors to take the entire work into consideration as a basis for interpretation. The aim is to encounter the document as the IR would. Again it must be stressed that for narrative criticism, the IR is presupposed by the text itself, understands the world of the author, and knows things that may not be explicit in the text. The important point is that the IR sets the criteria for interpretation based upon a reading of the material. As Powell

concisely expresses it “Is there anything *in the text* that indicates the reader is expected to respond this way?”¹ Narrative criticism suggests that there is a storyline being developed within the writing under consideration. The IR must take into account what is being unfolded throughout the document. The parameters within the story form the fuller picture, which provides a deeper understanding and appreciation of the plot and its resolution. This helps set a text-based foundation for interpretation. This tool is an effective means for helping to discern the major themes in Revelation. It is the argument of this study that the cosmic conflict theme has a contribution to make to all readings of the book, and specifically that the hymnic pericopes are best understood in this light.

Revelation’s emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the interaction with culture (whether it be that of the first or twenty-first century) need to be seen in the larger framework of the controversy theme that is woven throughout the book. Understanding both the political realities that existed as John wrote Revelation, and the unmistakable certainty of God’s ultimate victory contribute to any reading of Revelation. Nevertheless there is the need for a more developed picture into which these realities are placed. Revelation itself provides that fuller framework.

A recent study that gives weight to the conflict theme within Revelation is Sigve Tonstad’s *Saving God’s Reputation*. Tonstad reads Revelation’s storyline as focusing on the combat theme, with central questions relating to God’s justice and the manner in which God brings about His rulership in the universe. The issue of *who* raises those questions, and the *method* by which they are answered is part of the larger plot within the storyline. In this way, Revelation can be loosely conceived as a

¹ Powell *Narrative Criticism*, 20 emphasis original.

theodicy.² By allowing the conflict motif to bear the weight that John places upon it the reader is encouraged to encounter each passage with this backdrop distinctly in mind.³ This helps the reader to recognize that the overarching concern in the narrative is the cosmic conflict and the issues raised by it.⁴

Tonstad lays a foundation for his thesis, by recognizing the pivotal role that Revelation 12 plays in the storyline. His assertion that this chapter is widely acknowledged as holding a central key for a proper interpretation of the book is well grounded.⁵ The abrupt nature of an apparently new beginning in the unfolding of the

² Sigve Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, LNTS, 337 (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2006) 14-15. Tonstad's aim is similar to Eugene M. Boring, ("The Theology of Revelation: The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns" *Int* 40, no. 3 (1986), 260), who views the apocalyptic genre as a kind of "narrative pictorial theodicy" which attempts to answer the question "Why doesn't God do something about the apparent triumph of evil?" He suggests that Revelation responds to two questions: Who rules in this world, and what is the meaning of the tragic events of history, 257. Klund ("Plot of Revelation," 12), argues "The plot unity centers on the overarching conflict between the rightful ruler over the earth (Jesus Christ) and the usurper of that rule (Satan)." This conflict is a central feature of the plot and figures predominately into a narrative reading. Tobias Nicklas has reviewed Tonstad's book in the *Review of Biblical Literature* 11/2008 (460-462). Nicklas argues that the original readers would not have approached the book as Tonstad does, though he recognizes it is a legitimate approach. Another weakness of the work, from Nicklas' position, is that Tonstad doesn't engage more fully with the entire text of Revelation, beginning his examination in chapter four. In sum, Nicklas is not convinced of the main thesis, which is that Revelation attempts to portray theodical concerns. Kayle de Waal ("Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation," *Ministry Magazine*, January 2009), has also critiqued Tonstad's work. de Waal questions whether Tonstad sufficiently connected the faithfulness of Jesus with the conflict theme. He contends that there is no strong argument making this connection. On the other hand, he notes that Tonstad supports his contention that the cosmic conflict them is a rhetorical key for Revelation. This is accomplished by Tonstad's use of the OT; the trans-historical nature of the human predicament portrayed in the seals; and the primary role Satan has in the book. Certain parts of Tonstad's work has no bearing on this study, but his central claim that the cosmic conflict is an integral part of understanding Revelation clearly is an integral aspect of this thesis. In addition to Tonstad and Boring mentioned above, Warren Carter ("Vulnerable Power: The Roman Empire Challenged by the Early Christians," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, eds. Anthony J. Blasi, Jean Duhaime, and Paul-Andre Turcotte (Walnut Creek: Atlamire Press 2002) 484), argues, "Revelation discerns its much larger context in a cosmic struggle between God and Satan." Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, "The Function of the Church in Warfare in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), demonstrates that the warfare theme is endemic to the narrative structure of Revelation. This study recognizes the debate on the role the conflict theme plays within Revelation, but contends that it is central to a proper understanding of the book.

³ Norman R. Gulley, "Revelation's Throne Scenes" *JATS* 8/1-2, (1997), 219. Gulley argues, "It is vital to grasp the world view of Revelation. It deals with the cosmic controversy between God and Satan. Everything in the book has something to do with this controversy."

⁴ Stubblefield, (Warfare), 3.

⁵ Tonstad *Saving God's Reputation* 23; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* 134; Swete *Apocalypse*, xl. Abir, (*Cosmic Conflict*, 55), writes that this chapter has "received more attention" than the rest of

narrative arrests the attention of the reader. Given the detailed unity that the author works into the book as a whole, this sudden introduction of a “fresh start”⁶ cannot be accidental. Rather John is calling the reader to consider thoughtfully the role this section plays within the narrative.

The chapter begins to fill out the picture of Satan as a character within the narrative. John develops Satan’s character by identifying his twin role as deceiver and persecutor. However, this is not Satan’s first appearance in Revelation. The name, Satan, is mentioned five times in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2:9, 13 (2x), 24; 3:9) introducing his role as vying for supremacy, not simply in the Roman Empire, but throughout creation. In the letter to the church in Smyrna, John describes Satan’s work of inflicting suffering and tribulation. Such suffering is undertaken “by those who claim to be Jews but are not” but are actually part of the synagogue of Satan. While the historical referent is ambiguous⁷ a verbal thread connects with the

the NT. Witherington, (*Revelation*, 21), emphasizes the unexpected nature of the section points to its structural importance. So, András Dávid Pataki. "A Non-Combat Myth in Revelation 12" *NTS* 57 no. 2 (2011): 258-272; William Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20” *AUSS*, Vol. 23, No.1, (1985): 37-54; Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001.)

⁶ Bauckham *Climax* 15; Abir (*Cosmic Conflict*, 58) identifies this as the fulcrum of the book. Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), 177-178, notes the importance of the chapter and the two main divergent methods of interpretation. One is to look for popular pagan mythology for the backgrounds; the other is to explain the storyline on the basis of the OT. This study gives the priority to the OT origins of John’s allusions.

⁷ Commentators differ on whether an actual conflict between Jews and Christians is being discussed (so Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 240; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 75; Barr *Tales of the End* 50; Steven J. Friesen “Satan’s Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation” *JSNT* 27.3, 354; Steven J. Friesen "Sarcasm in Revelation 2–3: Churches, Christians, True Jews, and Satanic Synagogues" in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, ed. David L. Barr, Vol. 39, (Atlanta: SBL 2006), 134) or if these were individuals claiming to be Christians (perhaps Jewish Christians) but were assimilating to the society. So Boxall, *The Revelation*, 89. For a broader investigation of both views see Paul. B. Duff “The Synagogue of Satan’: Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John” in *The Reality of Apocalypse*, ed. David L. Barr, Vol. 39, (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 147-168. Witherington, (*Revelation* 101), concludes “whatever human agencies were involved, John clearly places the ultimate blame on Satan. He is the one who casts them into prison.” That is the point of the narrative; behind the persecution that the church endures in all ages is Satan, not simply an earthly power.

eschatological tribulation that looms large in Revelation.⁸ The inhabitants of Smyrna are promised protection from the “second death,” which incorporates Revelation’s final judgment scene (Rev. 20:14,15), thus pointing the reader to something larger than the local conflict.

The development of this theme in the letter to the church in Pergamum confirms this observation. There the church is confronted with living in the same location as “Satan’s throne.” While many scholars see in this a reference to some aspect of imperial Rome,⁹ this alone does not do justice to the Revelation’s tapestry. The throne is a powerful image within the book, pointing to the conflict theme revolving around God’s right to rule.¹⁰ It occurs in seventeen of Revelation’s twenty-two chapters and is mentioned forty-seven times. The image is woven into the very fabric of the book. The mention of Satan’s throne following the first mention of

⁸ Resseguie *The Revelation*, 79-80.

⁹ Colin J. Hemer *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting*, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986) 84-85 highlights several common interpretations ranging from the fact that Pergamum was a center for pagan worship, to the presence of cult of Asclepius, to being a center for emperor worship. The interpretation suggested in this study does not negate any historical referents, yet insists that Revelation itself points to a broader conflict. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 246.

¹⁰ Schüssler-Fiorenza, (*Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 24), sees the throne as the main symbol in the book. In *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 58 she considers that it raises the theological question, “Who is the true Lord?” Other interpreters that see the centrality of the throne image in Revelation are: M. Eugene Boring, “The Theology of Revelation: ‘The Lord our God The Almighty Reigns’” *Int* 40, no. 3 (1986): 257-269; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) 339; Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 141-142; Witherington, *Revelation*, 113; Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 107; Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament: Interpreting the Message and Meaning of Jesus Christ*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 609. László Gallusz’s “The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Károli Gáspár University, 2011) is an important study in the role of the throne throughout Revelation. Daeguuk Nam *The “Throne of God” Motif in the Hebrew Bible*, (Seoul, Korea: Institute for Theological Research, Korean Sahmyook University, 1994) 2, states that the throne is a symbol of “kingship or royal authority.” He also highlights the inseparable connection of the throne and the temple imagery. Rossing, (*Two Cities*, 66) argues that in addition to the importance of the image of throne, is the posture of the one upon it. Rev 4.2 describes the one “sitting on the throne” (καθήμενος). Babylon also is pictured (17.1,3) as “sitting” (καθήμενην) upon the beast and upon many waters contributing to the importance of the imagery. This type of opposing imagery runs throughout Revelation.

God's (1:4) highlights the spiritual conflict that is inherent in the book.¹¹ Satan's action in giving his throne to the beast (13:2) underscores the intensity and universality of the conflict.¹² The imagery of the thrones throughout the book, shape several important theological themes.¹³

John develops the earlier imagery in the pivotal chapter 12. Here, Satan is pictured as engaged in an ongoing war against God's church (12:6, 14, 17). Yet that war had its origins in heaven (12:7). His titles of "devil and Satan" (as well as the images of serpent and dragon)¹⁴ reflect on his dual traits, deception and accusation (which is manifest at times as persecution). Satan's fury against the woman spreads to the remainder of her children. The narrative also hints at Satan's primordial origins.¹⁵ The war he initiated began in heaven. The origin of the conflict suggests that he "once served in the divine court."¹⁶

The narrative continues with Satan's attempts to conquer through the utilization of his two compatriots, the two beasts of chapter 13. Rather than simply

¹¹ Ricky Lee Williamson, "Thrones in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 156-7. It is interesting to note that Satan's throne is given without description as compared to the detailed vision of chapter 4.

¹² Williamson, ("Thrones" 167), notes that the dragon gives his throne to beast, though the dragon is "already thwarted." He sees irony at work here, in that the expressions "power" and "great authority" are used of the dragon who is "inadequate for the task of overturning the plan of God." While this in a final sense is true, it misses the point of what happens next. Blasphemy and persecution follow as the dragon and the beast continue the war that originated in heaven. It also misses the point of the larger narrative, and that is that God's rule is established not on the basis of force, but through the self-giving of the Lamb. The decisive victory in the war is through Christ's death (Rev 12:10-11). Yet this does not minimize the accusations and activities that called for such an unheard and unimagined response.

¹³ Williamson, "Thrones," 170.

¹⁴ The description of Satan as *dragon* is only found in Revelation. It is significantly mentioned eight times in chapter 12 (out of 13 total occurrences.) The other references are found in chapters 13, 16, and 20. See Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 101.

¹⁵ However, see Caird (*The Book of Revelation*, 153) who writes, "the Bible knows nothing of the premundane fall of Satan."

¹⁶ Thompson *The Book of Revelation*, 83; also Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2011) 169.

reflecting the Empire and the imperial cult,¹⁷ these two forces complement Satan in his ongoing assault. They form an “unholy trio” that is in opposition to the rule of God. In this way the conflict intensifies throughout the remaining chapters of the book.¹⁸ As the devil’s two allies and their armies are finally destroyed (19:20-21), he remains alone in the battle. This points to his role as both the instigator of the rebellion and the one whose final accusations must be silenced. His unmasking must come about through an exposure of his falsehoods that is accomplished by a revelation of who God is and how He acts.

Satan in the Narrative

Despite the appearance of Satan throughout the narrative, many readings of Revelation view him as powerless, simply a foil to God’s sovereignty, or as a hypostatization of evil.¹⁹ However, if Revelation is to be seen as dealing with the larger biblical theme of God’s way of confronting evil, then Satan’s role demands a closer reading. Tonstad notes that “the rhetorical situation of Revelation is cognizant of an opposing will and agency” in a way that surpasses many interpretations of the book.²⁰ John portrays this opposing will and agency as one of the defining traits of Satan.

¹⁷ Fee, *Revelation*, 164 makes this connection explicit.

¹⁸ It must be stated that this development is done within the backdrop of Satan’s ultimate defeat. He has been cast from heaven (12:7-9) and is overcome through Christ’s victory and that of His followers (12:10,11). Nevertheless the reader is confronted with the ongoing efforts of Satan until the end of the storyline.

¹⁹ Thompson *The Book of Revelation*, 83.

²⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 38.

In works of fiction, characters are simply constructs of the author. Their purpose is to fulfill a role in the ongoing story.²¹ A narrative reading of the Bible, while not diminishing the historicity of the characters, will also ask what role does this character accomplish in the storyline? An author reveals the character through either description, or by showing their actions, speech, or thoughts.²² Satan as a character in the narrative is continually described as the chief antagonist. His one aim is to wage what appears to be a futile war against a sovereign God. In this, he can be considered a flat or static character. Such characters are typically identified with a single characteristic, idea, or quality.²³ Round (or full fledged) characters have a complexity that is not easily expressed in one sentence.²⁴ From this perspective Satan would be considered flat and not fully developed.

However, there is a further consideration that must be brought to bear when making a critical judgment on the role of a character. Flat characters typically do not surprise. The “test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way.”²⁵ Given this added dimension of character development in the narrative, the depth and position of Satan as character calls for reevaluation. There are several points in the plot of Revelation that demand a more nuanced reading in

²¹ Characters can be viewed as part of the overarching backdrop for the story, not to be seen as persons but as part of the setting. The opposite of this view is to see any person mentioned as ‘character’ within the story. One needs to be able to distinguish between characters who play a central role in the plot, and those who simply give dimension to the story. See Gnatkowski, “The Implied Reader,” 64.

²² Powell, (*Narrative Criticism*, 52), confirms that “showing” is less precise, and that the “reader must work harder” to collect data and evaluate what is being conveyed.

²³ Forster, *Aspects*, 67.

²⁴ Resseguie *Narrative Criticism*, 123. Clearly Satan could be described as singularly malicious, and in this way, flat. See Stubblefield, “Warfare,” 90.

²⁵ Forster, *Aspects*, 78.

relation to the role Satan plays.²⁶ Tonstad identifies three ways in which Satan surprises the reader, thus highlighting the important role that the devil has in the development and meaning of the story. These three elements arise from Revelation 20, where Satan is, at first, left alone in his single-minded war against God. The story unfolds with his being bound by a mighty angel and then inexplicably released to once again carry on his unremitting attacks. It is the surprising and difficult to explain release that gives the reader pause. The unexpected and hard to understand nature of his renewed attack forces the reader to pay closer attention to the overall weight Satan carries in the storyline.

Tonstad begins the major part of his study with Revelation 20, beginning at the end as it were.²⁷ He notes the almost universal problem that scholars have with John's insistence that Satan *must* (δεῖ) be released after having been bound for 1,000 years. Why, at the very end of the story, when the conflict appears to have been resolved, must Satan be set free for one more attempt at deception and overthrow of the government of God?²⁸ Suggested answers range over a wide territory in search of clarity. The scope of solutions includes the faulty nature of the text (Charles), John's loss of interest in his story (Kraft), the depersonalization of Satan (Sweet), a demonstration of God's sovereignty (MacLeod),²⁹ and merely as a foil to allow the

²⁶ Stubblefield, ("Warfare," 89), also notes that the amount of space the Satan plays in the narrative, contributes to seeing him as a round character. Although the name only occurs eight times, his presence is all throughout the narrative.

²⁷ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 41-54. His purpose is to help break up "entrenched" readings and allow the cosmic conflict theme, so evident in the last half of the book, to have a dominant role in reading the book as a whole.

²⁸ Klund, ("Plot of Revelation," 196), notes that this provides a shock to the reader, and raises questions as to what will happen to Satan and what will he do.

²⁹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 44-48.

martyred saints to receive their reward (Fee).³⁰ None of these are convincing, as they ignore the continued role that Satan plays in the narrative. Considering the storyline as a whole, including the larger biblical context, Tonstad discusses three deductions relating to Satan's role.³¹

1.) Satan's imprisonment, followed by the startling and surprising release, contributes to filling out his character and demonstrates that he holds a central role in the development of Revelation's plot. This role is drawn from the wider range of the OT. John's description of Satan as that "ancient serpent" (20.2, cf. 12.9) refers the IR back to Gen. 3. This is also on display in chapter 12, where the key elements of the Genesis story are brought to view. The serpent of old, the woman, and the child, all direct the IR to the broad allusion of the fall and entrance of sin into a perfect world.³² Thus the agent and cause of the *primordial* questions about God's justice and character is on center stage at the final end of the battle. In this way John places the spotlight on Satan, not in a congratulatory way, but in order to highlight his importance to the narrative as a whole.

2.) Satan's solo appearance demonstrates his uniqueness in the unfolding human drama. Beginning with chapter 13, Satan unites with the sea-beast (13:1) and the land-beast (13:11) to facilitate his war against God's rule. This unholy trio continues their work through to chapter 19, where the final battle is initiated. It is important to note that while this battle begins in chapter in 19:11, there is only a temporary interruption when two of the three leaders are taken and thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). The battle continues after the 1,000 years when it is finally

³⁰ Fee, *Revelation*, 282

³¹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 48-51.

³² Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 387.

completed (20:8).³³ During the ultimate battle Satan at first has the stage to himself. His earthly allies have been destroyed and at this point in the narrative, the second resurrection has not occurred, thus he alone continues the fight. This position gives the character special significance that will not be overlooked by the careful reader.

3.) Satan's persistent role as *deceiver* is integral to the ongoing story, and this characteristic is founded upon the larger biblical story. Satan is bound in order to prohibit him from carrying on this work of deception (20:3), which is what he proceeds to do the instant he is freed from his prison (20:8).³⁴ The last mention of the devil, before he is thrown into the lake of fire refers to his deceptive traits (20:10). This should be seen in the light of the backdrop of the Genesis narrative as well. There, the ancient serpent fomented a deception that led the woman to distrust God's provisions. Her response to God's query as to what she had done, is that "the serpent deceived me and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). Satan's words and innuendos act as a destabilizing force in the Edenic world. John picks up this larger theme and incorporates it into his storyline.

Tonstad's conclusion is that these three strands weave a picture that demonstrates Satan is more than simply engaged in evil deeds. He is at work to deceive humanity about the nature of the truth of God. It is from these strands that "Revelation weaves a compelling theodicy."³⁵ The denunciations deployed against God demand a compelling response. Satan is not a flat character in the narrative but plays a principal role in bringing accusations against God's government. This

³³ Note the verbal thread woven around the concept of war. Πολεμεω, the verb occurs 6 times in Revelation, while πολεμος occurs 9 times. See 2.16, 9.7,9; 11.7; 12.7, 17; 13.4,5,7; 16.14; 17.14; 19.11,19; 20.8. The war begun in heaven and continued on earth meets its fulfillment after the 1,000 years.

³⁴ This is the trait he displays in Revelation 12:9 as well, being described as the one who deceives the whole world.

³⁵ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 53.

conclusion is supported by other narrative clues as well. In particular, the activity of Satan in Rev. 13 under his description as the dragon, adds to Tonstad's deductions.

The chapter is replete with images that demonstrate the dragon's intention of fulfilling a "God-like" role. Each of these must be seen against the framework of his ongoing attacks against God. At the end of Revelation 12, the dragon stands by sea, seeking reinforcements. He is intent on carrying out his warfare against the seed (σπέρματος) of the woman and thus continuing the battle that has begun in Eden.³⁶ To that end he turns to the sea, the symbol of chaos and hostility to call an ally who will work with him in the battle. They are then joined by the lamb-like beast arising from the land. As mentioned above, these three powers form a trinity of evil,³⁷ in which the dragon takes the status of God. The following observations buttress this understanding.

1.) The beast resembles the dragon in significant ways. Both have seven heads and ten horns and are wearing diadems (12:3; 13:1) In the narrative only Satan, the sea-beast and Christ wear diadems. The location of diadems is significant as well. The dragon bears the diadems upon his heads, while the sea-beast bears them on his horns (12:3; 13:1). This indicates that the dragon is the ruling authority in the triumvirate. In this way, Satan seeks to be recognized as God.³⁸

2.) The dragon gives his throne to the sea-beast (13:2). As mentioned above, the throne is a significant prop in the storyline. It is most frequently used to represent God's rule and government. One of the main points in the conflict is underscored when Satan claims his own throne and then transfers it to the beast. As Christ joins

³⁶ Caird, *The Book of Revelation*, 159.

³⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 207.

³⁸ Ibid.

the Father on His throne (3:21), the beast joins the dragon in sharing the throne, stressing the nature of the counterfeit and the attempts at overthrowing the rule of God. The action raises the issue: Is God worthy to rule or should another take His place?

3.) John places the spotlight on the dragon's activity that is manifested through the beast. The dragon, though cast out of heaven, still empowers his agents. This emphasizes the fact that "he is still actively executing his schemes."³⁹ As the slain Lamb redeems those from every "tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9), so the beast has authority over the same group (13:7). That the beast and the Lamb both receive a deadly wound⁴⁰ is frequently noted as the "most striking" aspect of the parody⁴¹ that John employs. As the Lamb is slain and yet lives, so too does the beast. The implication behind the image is that Lamb has experienced a resurrection by the power of the Father. The sea-beast likewise experiences such a resurrection by the power of the dragon.

The rhetorical questions "who is like the beast?" and "who can fight against it?" (13:4) are markers that point out the intensity of the conflict. These questions have a textual echo to Exodus 15:11, which asks the question, "Who is like you among the gods, O Lord?" The questions as posed in their relation to the sea-beast are framed as a challenge to God. The beast, with the dragon receiving deferred worship (13:4), now attempts to replace God. As Koester perceptively comments "The outcome of the Lamb's work is that the world worships God the Creator (5.10, 13),

³⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 687.

⁴⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 183. John uses the verbal connection of ὡς ἐσφαγμένον to tie together the two images (5:6,9,12 and 13:3). Unfortunately many commentators then weaken the overall force of the imagery by relating it back to Nero's death. See Bauckham *Climax of Prophecy*, 438f.

⁴¹ I use the term parody here as defined by Joe E. Luncford, *Parody and Counterimaging in the Apocalypse*, (Wipf & Stock: Eugene, Oregon), 2009, xi. He defines parody as the use of a term in the sphere of evil that imitates the positive expression in the sphere of good.

but the outcome of the Beast's work is that the world worships Satan the destroyer (13.4).⁴²

4.) A less frequently recognized portrayal of Satan's role is highlighted by John's use of the verb *to give* (δίδωμι). The passive form is frequently used in Revelation to describe a divine passive, which communicates God's activity behind the scenes. For example, the four angels were given permission to harm the earth and sea (7:2); much incense was given to the angel by the altar (8:2); the woman was given wings to flee from the persecution of the dragon (12:14); the bride is given fine linen (19:8) and the redeemed are given authority to rule (20:4).⁴³

Within Revelation 13 the verb appears in a cluster of verses, all of which describe the activity of the dragon and the beast. It is found in 13:5 (2x), 7 (2x), 14, and 15. Commentators generally view the meaning of δίδωμι in this context as limiting the activity of the beast and thus indicating God's sovereignty.⁴⁴ While God's dominion is universal, and the storyline ultimately ends with His throne the sole point of focus while earth and heaven flee (20:11), this reading misses an important consideration. The narrative continues to demonstrate the work of the dragon in attempting to replace God's government. John underlines this by using the active form of δίδωμι twice before introducing the passive forms.

The dragon is the one who *gave* (ἔδωκεν) power, authority, and his throne to the beast. He obtains ultimate worship due to his *giving* authority to the beast (13.2, 4). As the beast also receives a mouth that speaks blasphemy (13:5a) and authority to

⁴² Koester, *End of all Things*, 127.

⁴³ See also 6:2,4,8,11; 9:1,3,5; 11:1, 2; 16:8.

⁴⁴ So, Beasley-Murray *Revelation*, 213; Resseguie *The Revelation*, 185; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 695. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 743) defines the passive as "a circumlocution for direct mention of God as subject of the action of the verb."

act for forty-two months, the most natural reading is that the dragon gives these to his surrogate, the beast. As the woman is given a place to flee for a time, times, and half of time (12:14) by God, the beast is given authority to persecute for the equivalent time period (13.5). This is commonly seen as a divine restriction on the beast's activities.⁴⁵ However, a closer reading suggests that this is part of the texture of John's development of the role of Satan. Instead of indicating a divine passive, the usage of ἐδόθη here signals Satan's role in giving the sea-beast and the land-beast their role in the controversy, as part of his attempt to gain jurisdiction over God's kingdom.

The dragon and his accusations are not simply an annoyance to a sovereign God, much the way a persistent fly might annoy a person. The indictments that Satan raised in the heavenly council are not easily dismissed. God cannot use the same techniques of force, power, and deception to answer the accusations that have been made against His government. Rather, the work of deception and subversion that the dragon engages in, calls forth the most radical response from God.

Even if the above reading of δίδωμι is not accepted, the other major clues still function within the text to point out that Satan's character is more than simply a foil to be played against God's sovereignty. Satan's role in the narrative is consistent but it is also dynamic and not static. The importance of Satan as a character in the narrative lends support to Tonstad's contention that Revelation is better read in the light of conflict theme with the resultant theodical concerns. The thesis for the current investigation is that the hymnic pericopes also need to be considered from the

⁴⁵ This "reminds John's audience that even the Antichrist is a pawn in God's greater design" Keener, *Revelation*, 340; All that the beast does is within "the grand strategy of God," Caird *The Revelation*, 167. However, Fee, (*Revelation*, 182, 186), sees the connection between the passive and the first use of the active and claims that power comes from Satan, and that he is the true force behind the beast. This is properly balanced with the idea this activity is allowed by God.

background of the conflict and the accusations brought against God. Satan's slander and allegations were first leveled at God and His government of the universe. John's picture of Satan is drawn from a wealth of OT images that, when woven together, raise issues of great importance.⁴⁶

Temple Imagery and the Divine Council

Another line of evidence that supports reading Revelation as concerned with theodical issues raised by the cosmic conflict, is an often-missed connection found in the introduction to the main war scene in Revelation 12.⁴⁷ As always, it is important to give close attention to the setting. For a narrative reading, the setting is always charged with meaning⁴⁸ and thus the reader must give heed to the author's verbal connections. In any storyline, the author chooses between a variety of events, people, and actions. The choices of the author in this matter are filled with significance. Thus John's choice of images and the manner in which they entwined with one another demand close consideration.

As argued in the previous chapter, the sanctuary plays an important role in providing the backdrop for Revelation. Aune recognizes that the heavenly throne room has a controlling influence on John's narrative. He concedes, "the entire vision report...is apparently perceived from the vantage point of the throne room..."⁴⁹

Throughout the book, there are several major throne-room scenes that connect to the

⁴⁶ Stubblefield, ("Warfare," 88-92), recognizes the complexity of Satan's character and cites narrative space, trait variety, the ability to surprise, and the rich OT background as reasons for his conclusion.

⁴⁷ When one reviews proposed structural outlines for Revelation, chapter 12 is frequently posited as beginning a new section. So, Fee *Revelation*, vii, 161; Beasley-Murray *Revelation* 191; Witherington, *Revelation*, 163; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 229; Michaels, *Revelation*, 147; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 134; Fiorenza *Revelation*, 175.

⁴⁸ Alter, *Biblical Narrative*, 116; Lee, *Narrative Asides*, 140.

⁴⁹ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 7.

heavenly temple (Rev 4-5; 8:2-6; 11:19; 15; 16:17-17:3; 19:1-10; 21:5-11). These however do not exhaust the imagery of the sanctuary in Revelation. Nevertheless, they do stress the ongoing texture that the sanctuary and the heavenly council that meets within it, contribute to the overall tapestry.

In the setting of Revelation 12, the formative chapter for discerning the contours of the conflict, John uses a verbal thread that ties the war theme to the heavenly temple setting. In Revelation 12:1, 3 John writes that two major signs (the woman and the dragon) *appeared* (ᾤφθη) in heaven. The only other usage of this form of the word is found in 11:19.⁵⁰ There the “temple in heaven” is in view, which in this way is verbally entwined with the tableau that depicts the woman and the dragon in conflict.⁵¹ Significantly, it is the Ark of the Covenant that is the focus of John’s vision. In the wider biblical context there is a direct connection between the throne of God, the ark, and the divine council. This connection needs further exploration in order to appreciate the texture of John’s imagery and how such imagery informs the conflict theme.

The Ark as Throne

The first biblical reference to the ark is found in Exodus 25, where Moses receives instruction on building a sanctuary so that God can dwell with His people (Ex 25.8). The ark is the first article of furniture described in those instructions (Ex 25.10-22). It was a chest overlaid with gold inside and out. The thick lid was

⁵⁰ Resseguie *The Revelation*, 170; Aune *Revelation 6-16* 679 and 662 in which Aune suggests that 11.19 should be connected to 12.1f.; Osborne, *Revelation* 448; Gallusz “Throne Motif,” 251.

⁵¹ Roloff *Revelation* 139, considers that there is a significant break between the two chapters. Abir (*Cosmic Conflict* 58-60) includes 11.15-19 as the introduction to 12.1-15.8 but does not see the verbal link. He follows the sevenfold use of “sign” (12.1,3; 15.1; 13.13, 14; 16.14; 19.20) and the location of “in the heaven” as his textual markers. However, 11.19 also contains the phrase “in the heaven” which is an additional verbal thread.

decorated with two cherubim, their wings outstretched and their faces turned toward the cover, (כַּפֹּרֶת, frequently called the mercy seat), in an apparent indication that the heavenly host focused their attention on what would occur in this location. In verse 22, it is clearly stated that this would be the place where God would meet with Moses and communicate to him as the representative of Israel.⁵² Implicit in the instruction given to Moses that the sanctuary was to be built following a pattern, is the belief that the sanctuary and its successor, the temple in Jerusalem, were copies of God's dwelling in heaven.⁵³

The ark was the holiest of all the articles of furniture in the earthly sanctuaries, whether the tent in the wilderness or later in Solomon's temple. In 1 Chron. 28.11, the second room of the temple is called the "room of the mercy seat." This indicates that the כַּפֹּרֶת was the most important item in the sanctuary. There is an intimate connection between the mercy seat and the ark. Within the OT, they are always referred to together, indicating that the functions of the two are related and connected.⁵⁴ The close connection with the Decalogue, placed within the ark and the mercy seat upon it indicates the essential principles of God's rule. As "mercy and truth" have met together (Ps 85.10), they are also united with "justice and judgment" in forming the foundation to God's throne (Ps 89.14). There is interplay between mercy, justice, God's presence, and His rule. There is an interaction between God's kingdom and the principles of that kingdom. Therefore it was an easy step for the biblical writers to conceive of the ark as the throne of God. László Gallusz considers

⁵² In addition to being the place where God would commune with His people, it was the focal point of bringing the congregation into oneness with God. On the Day of Atonement blood would have been sprinkled on the mercy seat, to cleanse the congregation from their sins (Leviticus 16.15, 30).

⁵³ Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse*, 89; Gulley (*Revelation's Throne Scenes*, 220), concurs with this conclusion, as does Davidson ("Typology," 102).

⁵⁴ Ben-Daniel, *The Apocalypse*, 86.

that “the emphasis on the divine presence resulted in the association of the ark with God’s earthly throne” and that this was located in the central place of the sanctuary, God’s dwelling place.⁵⁵

Yahweh is frequently described as dwelling or sitting between the cherubs that formed part of the mercy seat (2 Sam. 6.2; 2 Kgs. 19.15; Ps. 80.1; 99.1). Thus to move the ark was conceived as a means of transporting God, as when the Israelites wanted His help in battle (1 Sam. 4.4). Jeremiah develops the implicit parallel between the ark and the throne of God (Jer. 3.16,17). The ark has close connections with God’s power, authority, and rule. “Whether it had the form of a throne or...of a chest, it is certain that it was considered as the dwelling-place of Yahweh, to such a degree that the terms Yahweh and ark of Yahweh are sometimes interchangeable.”⁵⁶

After reviewing the position the ark played in the OT, Spatafora concludes that it “was also believed to be God’s throne.”⁵⁷ Hannah, in his explication of Rev 5.6 argues that the four living creatures surrounding the throne are emblematic of the ark. As the ark in the earthly temple had images of cherubim sculpted on it, so the heavenly counterpoint has living cherubim.⁵⁸ Even if Hannah’s view is an overstatement, the imagery still conveys the truth that the throne/ark is woven

⁵⁵ Gallusz “Throne Motif,” 22. Nam (“Throne of God,” 3-5), while not pursuing the concept in detail, notes the role that the ark served in connection with the throne.

⁵⁶ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 257.

⁵⁷ Andrea Spatafora, *From the Temple of God to God as the Temple: A Biblical Theological Study of the Temple in the Book of Revelation* (Roma: Ed. Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997), 27.

⁵⁸ Hannah, Darrell D. "Of Cherubim and the Divine Throne: Rev 5.6 in Context." *NTS* 49, (2003), 531. Hannah builds off the work of Robert Hall ("Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4.6" *NTS* 36, (1990): 609-13) who comes to the same conclusion. Alberto Treiyeer (*The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*. Alberto Treiyeer, 2008) confirms this, and sees in Solomon’s adding two cherubim in the temple (1 Kgs 6.23-38; 8.6-7; 2 Chr 3.10-13; 5.7-9) the antecedent for John’s vision (pp. 119, 120). Charles Giblin, (“From and Before the Throne: Revelation 4:5-6a Integrating the Imagery of Revelation 4-16” *CBQ* (Jul 1998), 502), agrees with Hall’s conclusion. Gallusz (“Throne Motif,” 116), argues against this position based on several contextual points, yet agrees that the throne has connections with the ark, 253.

throughout Revelation uniting this imagery with the temple setting.⁵⁹ The throne imagery, located within the temple resonates with the OT idea of the divine council. An exploration of this concept will confirm that God's throne room was the location for holding the heavenly court. As John has linked the temple setting with the origins of the cosmic conflict, it is important to consider the role of the divine council in connection with the temple background.

Divine Council

The expression "divine council"⁶⁰ is used to describe the numerous biblical images of the prophetic picture of Yahweh meeting with a group of heavenly beings. Yahweh is often described as enthroned "amid the worshipping hosts" of heaven.⁶¹ Within the council, there frequently is a discussion, resolution, ultimately a decision, and then an action taken. The council is frequently identified by a variety of titles, though there are times when no specific title is given. There is the "council of El"

⁵⁹ Bauckham *Theology* "The living creatures...are the heavenly prototypes of the two cherubim who flanked the mercy-seat" in the earthly temple, 33.

⁶⁰ E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, (Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 24: Scholars Press, 1980) is the first major consideration of this theme, comparing the biblical concept with a similar idea in the ANE. While not accepting all of his conclusions, the biblical context does promote the idea of heavenly council. See also Richard J. Clifford. *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS* 45, (1944): 151-157; and Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). A basic scholarly consensus is that the divine council parallels with the ANE, particularly Ugaritic texts, giving evidence that there has been a movement with the development of Israel's faith from polytheism to monotheism. This discussion is beyond the scope of this study. But see the dissertation by Michael S. Heiser, "The Divine Council in Late Canonical and Non-Canonical Second Temple Jewish Literature" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2004) who explores the question as to whether a modern day description of monotheism is an adequate description for postexilic Judaism. The current study proceeds from the perspective of Revelation and its use of OT texts. Rather than viewing the council as having competing gods, it is composed of angelic and celestial beings, and at times the prophets, all of who are subject to Yahweh their creator, as is related in late Jewish literature. There is conflict in the council as demonstrated by the larger theme in Revelation, but as will be seen it is the conflict of one of the most exalted members now using deception to subvert the council processes.

⁶¹ Frank M. Cross, Jr. "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah" *JNES* Vol. 12, No. 4 (Oct., 1953) 274.

(Job 15.8), the “council of Eloah” (Ps. 82.1), the “council of Yahweh” (Jer. 23.18), and the “council of the holy ones” Ps. 89.5(6), 7(8). Dean Davis, in his study on the divine council in relation to Revelation 4 and 5 highlights these and several other council scenes within the OT.⁶² Among the other significant scenes he mentions are Job 1.6; 2.1; Isa. 14.13; and Zech. 3.1.

Davis’ study focuses on four major council scenes in which the interaction among the council participants is emphasized. Each of these scenes has implications for an understanding of Revelation, and particularly for this study. These are 1 Kings 22; Isa. 6; Dan. 7; and Ezek. 1, 10.⁶³ These are chosen as examples of the heavenly court scenes in the OT. They also have relevancy to chapters 4 and 5 due to numerous thematic and verbal threads.⁶⁴

Davis’ concludes that the “council is consistently pictured as convening before divine actions are taken...” thus suggesting that its chief function is executive and judicial decision-making.⁶⁵ There appears to be an open discussion within the council before such decisions are made. While there is participation and communication among the council members, God is always the one who pronounces the final decision.⁶⁶ Of important significance for this study, is the intimate connection between the council and the throne in a temple setting. All four of Davis’ main examples have the throne in play, and the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel are

⁶² Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 110.

⁶³ Ibid. 91f. Gallusz (“Throne Motif,” 4) identifies these four scenes as the most significant OT throne images.

⁶⁴ Giblin, (“From before the Throne: Revelation 4:5-6a Integrating the Imagery of Revelation 4-16” *CBQ* 60, no. 3 (1998), 504) describes this scene as a picture of God’s court.

⁶⁵ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 109-110.

⁶⁶ Mullen, *Divine Council*, 205-9; Meira Z. Kensky. “Trying Man, Trying God: The Divine Courtroom in Early Jewish and Christian Literature” (PhD diss., The University of Chicago, 2009) 7.

specifically set in a temple setting. Thus Davis states “The location of the Old Testament divine council centers at the divine ‘mountain,’ the site of God’s tabernacle or temple, whether on heaven or earth.”⁶⁷ This merger of the conceptual images of the throne/temple/ark/divine council⁶⁸ needs to be recognized in Revelation. These figures play an important role as a backdrop for Revelation’s throne scenes.⁶⁹

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders⁷⁰ appear at significant junctures throughout the book,⁷¹ pointing to the ongoing role of the heavenly court. The fact that the elders are mentioned as seated around the throne before John mentions the four living creatures that are *in the midst* of the throne, highlights their importance (4.4).⁷² They participate in the heavenly worship (4.10-11; 5.9-10, 14; 11.16-18; 19.4), are involved with the prayers of God’s people (5.9), and act as interpretive guides (5.5; 7.13). Throughout Revelation’s storyline, the elders lay down the symbols of their authority by either casting off their crowns or falling down in worship, thus removing themselves from their position on their thrones (4.10; 5.8, 14; 11.16; 19.4). Gallusz writes that they form the “most prestigious part of the heavenly

⁶⁷ Davis *Heavenly Court*, 101.

⁶⁸ Kensky, (“Divine Courtroom,” 332), sees the fusing of semantic ideas in the throne-chariot-courtroom imagery and that this is encapsulated in the throne images in Revelation.

⁶⁹ Mario Veloso’s “Doctrine of the Sanctuary and the Atonement as Reflected in the Book of Revelation” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, (Silver Spring MD: BRI), 1989, 183-186, explores Revelation’s use of *naos* and concludes that the majority usage of the word gives the setting for the throne scenes as the heavenly sanctuary.

⁷⁰ For an overview of the dominant interpretations of who the elders are see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 287-92. Whether the elders are angelic beings, redeemed humans or, less likely, some figures derived from astrology is not as important for this study, as their role as members of the divine council. See also J. Daryl Charles, “Apocalyptic Tribute,” 469.

⁷¹ Rev. 4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4.

⁷² This apparent disruption to the logical flow of the description has been noted and given rise to suggestions of poor literary skill on John’s part. Rather than attempting to force the text to conform to the reader’s expectations, a more useful strategy would be to discern the author’s intents. See Gallusz, “Throne Motif,” 197, cf. Charles *Revelation I*, 115.

council.”⁷³ This strengthens the conclusion that interwoven with the temple/throne imagery in Revelation is that of the divine council.

Among the general titles used to describe partakers in the council in the OT are the following: “holy ones” (Deut. 33.2; Job 5.1); “sons of God” (Job 1.6; Ps 29.1); “seraphim” (Isa. 6.2-3,6); “cherubim” (Ezek. 10.1-22); “thousands” (Dan. 7.10); “hosts” (Isa. 13.3). Yet there are a few occasions when the members of the council are explicitly named. Among those who are so identified are Gabriel (Dan. 8.15; 9.21); Isaiah, who is seen as responding to the divine query and carrying out the divine command, (Isa 6.8-13);⁷⁴ and Satan (Job 1.6; 2.1; Zech 3.1).⁷⁵ It is this identification of individual participants in the council that substantiates the conclusion that Satan was once a member of the divine court.

The specific naming of Satan in connection with the heavenly court confirms that he once had access to the council and had been involved in its proceedings. This reinforces the allusive nature of Satan’s character within the plot of Revelation. It will be seen that the heavenly council is the location in which Satan first made his accusations against God’s rule and government by raising questions about God’s fitness to reign. Satan’s role in the heavenly courts and his endeavor to overthrow and subvert the council proceedings are drawn from many OT images. It will be helpful to briefly note a few of these examples.⁷⁶

⁷³ Gallusz, “Throne Motif,” 202.

⁷⁴ Cross, (“Council of Yahweh,” 275) notes that this action makes Isaiah an effective part of the council. Additionally, there is Micaiah in 1 Kgs. 22 and Jeremiah’s word against the false prophets, Jer. 23.18.

⁷⁵ Michael R. Stead. *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1-8*. (New York; London: T & T Clark, 2009), 88-90, links Zech. 3; Isa. 6; Ezek. 3 Job 1.6-12; 2.1-7 and 1 Kgs. 22 as being corresponding images for the divine council.

⁷⁶ For a contrary summary on the use of Satan in the OT see Derek R. Brown, “The Devil in the Details: A Survey of Research on Satan in Biblical Studies,” *CBR* 9, (2011); Peggy Lynne Day, *An Adversary in Heaven: ŠĀṬĀN in the Hebrew Bible*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988), 74-78,

Satan in the Divine Council

Job contains the first direct mention of Satan⁷⁷ in the Hebrew Bible. Job unambiguously highlights Satan as bringing accusations against God within the context of the council. Appearing in the opening chapters, Satan is portrayed in his double role of accuser and destroyer, which John develops more fully in Revelation. In Job 1.6-13 Satan appears among the “sons of God,” a designation for the heavenly court.⁷⁸ Satan’s attendance at the council⁷⁹ provokes no resistance giving the impression that he had every right to be among the members of the council. When interrogated by Yahweh, he raises the implicit accusation against God by questioning Job’s motives for serving Him. God’s people do not serve out of freedom, but simply from the motives of fear and reward is the embedded thought. When given permission to test the truth claims of his own statements, Satan goes and destroys Job’s loved ones (Job 1.13-19).

When he is unable to shake Job’s faithfulness, he returns to the council with an even greater demand. Not only does he want to destroy Job’s possessions and his family, Satan wants to torment Job himself (Job 2.1-13). (The entire narrative is instructive for the study of Revelation, which builds on the idea of Satan’s

concludes that there is no one being called Satan in the OT. Her conclusion could be countered by arguing that there is a development of the idea throughout the context of the canon and that earlier references, in fact, need to be seen in the light of later ones. Naturally this would call into question the topic of inspiration and what the bible writers were attempting to communicate, all beyond the confines of this study. See also Marvin E. Tate, "Satan in the Old Testament." *RevExp* 89, no. 4 (1992): 461-474. Tate argues that there is no Satan in the OT as is found in later literature. He does acknowledge that the satan in Job’s account, is a member of the heavenly court.

⁷⁷ The LXX of Job 1-2 uses devil (*diabolos*). The Hebrew usage here is articular, and a number of scholars see this usage not as a name, but as a description of an accusing angel. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 472.

⁷⁸ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 101; Heiser, “Divine Council,” 122.

⁷⁹ There are further descriptions of the role of the council woven into the larger setting of Job. See Heiser, “Divine Council,” 126.

unremitting attacks on God's people.) Satan appears amidst the council members with his accusations against God and his followers. He casts aspersion on God's methods of working with His people, as well as on the dedication these followers have toward God. The accusations have the effect of subverting God's authority. This scene evokes a theme important for this study: "Is God's justice actually just?"⁸⁰ The indictment against Job is used to impeach God. This implies a charge that God Himself is corrupt, using faulty methods to assure the allegiance of His people. These same accusations are woven into the theme of Revelation.⁸¹

Zechariah 3.1-7 is another OT example of the working of the divine council.⁸² Once again, Satan is mentioned in his role as an accuser; this time Joshua, the representative of Israel, is the subject of his attacks. This council scene depicts more clearly the adversarial nature of Satan, as he is standing⁸³ at the "right hand" of Joshua (cf. Ps 109.6) and thus questioning "his fitness to be high priest."⁸⁴ The Angel of the Lord is also standing near by and the setting is interwoven with court and temple imagery.⁸⁵ As the scene unfolds, Yahweh, as the head of the council, rebukes

⁸⁰ Kensky, "Divine Courtroom," 7.

⁸¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 659. It is of interest to note that Satan afflicts Job, but it is through the testing process that Job becomes the overcomer (Job 42.10-16), which is another important theme in Revelation.

⁸² Kensky, "Divine Courtroom," 119. This is also seen as part of the background for John's description of Satan as accuser in Revelation 12. So Osborne, *Revelation*, 472; Mounce, *The Revelation*, 237; Caird, *The Revelation*, 154 who specifically sees this in relation to role of the divine court. Stead, (*Intertextuality*, 88) explores the role of the divine council within the book of Zechariah as part of his larger study on intertextuality. See also David L. Petersen, "Zechariah's Visions: A Theological Perspective." *VT* 34, no. 2 (April 1, 1984); Carol L. Meyers, and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 182-183.

⁸³ This is the most common posture in Hebrew literature for denoting the technical procedures of the heavenly Court. Heiser, "Divine Council," 125; cf. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai*, 183. It is mentioned five times in this passage (Zech 3.1 (2x), 3, 4, 7).

⁸⁴ Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (T&T Clark: Edinburgh, 2005), 224.

⁸⁵ Barker (*The Revelation*, 215) describes the location for this scene as the "holy of holies" thus strengthening the connection between the heavenly court and the temple imagery. Stead,

Satan, following which Joshua's garments are changed, denoting a transformation in judicial standing and forgiveness to the nation of Israel (Zech. 3.2-4). The prophet enters into the council discussion in verse 5, by addressing the heavenly attendants and requesting that a turban be placed on Joshua's head.⁸⁶ Finally, the angel of the Lord, who has been present during the proceedings, speaks to Joshua.⁸⁷ The scene depicts the workings of the council, with Satan unmistakably in the position as an accuser. In a narrative containing thematic similarities to Job, Satan has access to the council and while his position is an adversarial one, there appears to be no question as to his right to voice his accusations.

Ezekiel 28.12-19 is another OT passage that informs John's development of Satan's character in Revelation's storyline and also has a connection to the heavenly court.⁸⁸ This lament takes a different perspective than does either Job or Zechariah, yet in the background lays the imagery of the divine council and Satan's once highly exalted position within it. The text melds images together, outlining the fall of the king of Tyre and through him, the fall of the highest of angels.⁸⁹ That the text is

(*Intertextuality*, 159-170), comes to the same conclusion, and quotes Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, *Priestly Rites and Prophetic Rage: Post-Exilic Prophetic Critique of the Priesthood*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 249, and Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004) 258, in support.

⁸⁶ Stead (*Intertextuality*, 158-159), highlights the unusual nature of this intervention and the attempts that the versions have undertaken to "rectify" the uncomfortable situation of the prophet directing the heavenly attendants. The LXX omits the wording; the Vulgate and Peshitta make it in the third person. Stead compares Isaiah's "and I said" (Isa. 6.8) with Zechariah's "and I said" (Zech. 3.5) and concludes that prophetic interjection and involvement in the council is standard.

⁸⁷ For an interesting alternate view on the interplay of the council and the role of the angel of the Lord, see Heiser, "Divine Council," 123-130.

⁸⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 658; Roloff, *Revelation*, 143.

⁸⁹ It is well recognized that this conclusion is not universally accepted. Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), 118-119 has a good overview of a variety of differing interpretations that contradict the view promoted here. Block (103), sees only the king of Tyre at play in the poem, yet also admits the connection between this passage and that of Genesis 2 and 3. See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, Ky.: J. Knox Press, 1990). Leslie C. Allen, (*Ezekiel. 20-48*, (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1990), 95) argues that to see Satan in the passage detaches it from its literary setting. However, the larger canonical context points beyond the king of Tyre. The

reaching beyond an earthly king is suggested by the settings (garden of God, mountain of God), the descriptions (anointed cherub, the covering cherub, the seal of perfection),⁹⁰ and the verbal description used to highlight the subject's origins.⁹¹ The interplay within the text of the role of the covering cherub, the position on the mountain of God, and the Edenic background point to the theme of the divine council. There is a "conceptual overlap" between God's throne room, sacred locations, and the heavenly court.⁹² This striking dirge alludes to the heavenly council and from the vantage point of Revelation, Satan's position within it.

A close reading of the text further leads the reader to see this passage as one that John utilizes as part of his textual tapestry. The exalted position of this anointed cherub (Ezek. 28.14), his ultimate fall (Ezek. 28.16), and his "casting to the earth" (Ezek. 28.17) are reflected in Revelation 12. Satan's initiation of the war in heaven and subsequently being thrown to the earth unfolds the same storyline as Ezekiel.⁹³

contextual parallels to Genesis 3, Isaiah 14, Revelation 12, as well as passages in the gospels point to someone greater. Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, Trans. by Ronald E. Clements, eds. Frank Moore Cross, Klaus Baltzer, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 90, agrees that from a "traditio-historical point of view" there are close connections with Genesis 2 and this chapter. Yet he also recognizes that the passage is extremely cryptic, 95.

⁹⁰ Tonstad *Saving God's Reputation*, 93; cf. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 588-9. By contrast, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1087, sees that the perfect being in this chapter is a reference to Adam.

⁹¹ Lamar Eugene Cooper (*Ezekiel*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 264-267) reviews the variety of interpretations on the background of this dirge. He concludes that the description "in Eden" means that the king of Tyre is being compared to someone "in an exalted position who was favored by God." He notes that certain key verbs in verses 14, 17, 18 create linguistic ties that point beyond the work of king of Tyre. There are also descriptive phrases that support this conclusion. This being is described a "model of perfection," "full of wisdom," and "perfect in beauty." He has been "on the mount" and walked "in the fiery stones." After consideration of the nuances of the text he concludes "Such descriptions make it unlikely that a strictly human creature is in view."

⁹² Heiser, ("Divine Council," 38), points out how this background is indicative of a divine council setting. Block, (*Ezekiel*, 114), notes the ambiguity of understanding the imagery of both paradisiacal aspect of the home and the position of the mountain of God. He suggests that this represents direct "access to God, the head of the divine assembly."

⁹³ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 94.

Elements within Ezekiel's dirge contribute to a further understanding of Satan's position within the divine council.

From the exalted descriptions within the chapter, a picture emerges that shows that whatever Satan's description in Revelation, this was not always the way he was described. He was once "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28.12), covered with every precious stone (Ezek. 28.13), and blameless in his ways (Ezek. 28.15). These extraordinarily high attributes are parallel those that indicate an uncommonly close proximity to God. His depiction as the "anointed cherub who covers" and as the "covering cherub"⁹⁴ echoes the ark in the temple, with the angelic wings spread over the mercy seat.⁹⁵ This reinforces the imagery of intimacy that Satan had in God's presence and that his role in the heavenly court was one of closest association with God. It was a lofty station that Satan once held, before unrighteousness arose and his beauty was turned toward deceptive arts. Tonstad puts it well when he writes:

From the vantage point of Revelation this is another reminder that the agent of deceit and destruction in the cosmic conflict originally had quite a different status and function.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ This could be interpreted as the shielding or guarding cherub; nevertheless the point remains of this being's proximity to God.

⁹⁵ See Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 95, who references Exod. 25.20; 37.9; 1 Chron. 28.18; 1 Kgs 8.7; cf. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 85 and Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 584. Iain M. Duguid *Ezekiel*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House 1999), 400-401, emphasizes the connection between this cherub's role and the intimate position with God. He argues that the imagery of being on the holy mountain and walking amidst the stones of fire is reflective of the sanctuary.

⁹⁶ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 94. Richard Davidson, ("Satan's Celestial Slander," *Perspective Digest* Vol 1, #1 1996) 33, notes that רכלה described in the passage, (Ezek. 28.16, 18) comes from a semantic root that means to go about for trade or gossip. He points to Ezek. 22.9 as an example of the noun derived from the verb. This fits in with the larger picture drawn in Revelation. See Jose Maria Bertoluci, "The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil" ThD diss., Andrews University, 1985 for an in depth examination of this passage and Isa.14.12-15. He concludes that the passages use a vertical typology, in that behind any human figure is an archetypal figure who represents the originator of evil.

The two positions can hardly be more unlike one another. First, Satan's original role was to stand in the immediate presence of God, partaking in the council. His actions were at one time blameless. Second, Satan assumes the function as both deceiver and accuser, utilizing his once close standing with God to more effectively hide the true aim of his subtle indictments. The text does not describe how this transformation happened, but decidedly indicates that a change has occurred (Ezek. 28.15).

These changes, both in attitude and position are indicated in another OT passage that also reflects the imagery of the divine council. In Isaiah 14.12-21 are several thematic connections to Ezek. 28, both in terms of the storyline and imagery.⁹⁷ Isaiah refers to the "mount of assembly" (Isa 14.13) in which an exalted being is endeavoring to assert his position and authority over God's. This expression, like Ezekiel's reference to the "mountain of God" reflects the divine council imagery.⁹⁸ The passage also contains metaphors that bear on Revelation's plot and Satan's role in the narrative.⁹⁹

The Isaianic poem describes a "star" that is "fallen from heaven" (Isa. 14.12). This being's attempt to exalt himself above the "stars of God" and become "like the Most High" are chronicled as the poem proceeds (Isa.14.13, 14). The passage culminates with this star being "thrust down" to the pit (Isa. 14.15). The connections between the outline of the passage and the casting down of Satan in Revelation 12 have offered commentators sufficient warrant for detecting a thematic parallel.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Abir, (*Cosmic Conflict* 91), notes the connection between Rev 12 and the passage in Isaiah.

⁹⁸ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 100; John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 1 Chapters 1-39. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986) 322.

⁹⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 469, builds on Aune *Revelation 6-16*, 695 and sees the fall of Satan (Rev. 12.7-9) as reflecting the passage in Isaiah. He describes it as a "primordial fall."

¹⁰⁰ Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 236), cites this passage as background for Revelation 12. Fee (*Revelation*, 169-170), stresses that John's war in heaven is derived from the "ancient Jewish tradition" that Satan was once a member of the heavenly court. He cites Isa. 14.12-15 as the textual context for

While Jan Fekkes recognizes the thematic connections, as well as the extra-biblical Jewish exegesis found in *2 En. 29.3-5* and *Adam and Eve 12-16*, he also notes that the predominant Jewish interpretation is that the “star” represents Nebuchadnezzar and rejects the parallels between the two passages.¹⁰¹

Fekkes stresses three significant differences between Rev. 12 and Isa. 14. First, there is no hint that in Revelation Satan’s fall is the result of pride or self-glorification, as there is in both Isa. 14 and Ezek. 28, rather his appearance is reminiscent of an accuser in a court-like setting. Second, the fall does not appear to be in the distant past as reflected in Isaiah, but current and as a result of the work of the Messiah. Third, Satan is not consigned to the pit, at least not until chapter 20, but simply excluded from the heavenly court.¹⁰² These conceptual differences lead Fekkes to dismiss Isaiah 14’s connection with Revelation. However, due to Revelation’s depth of OT allusions and the pervasiveness of the conflict imagery, Tonstad argues that too facile a rejection of this passage is unwarranted.¹⁰³

Under closer scrutiny, Fekkes objections do not seem insurmountable. John frequently alludes to a larger OT context without capturing every detail in his tapestry. It is part of John’s dialogical use of Scripture to awaken broader echoes in the mind of the IR. Thus, the absence of any mention of pride can be explained by

John’s description. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 658), sees connection between these passages and a link between two ‘falls’ of Satan, one at the beginning of creation and one at the beginning of the new creation. Yarbro Collins, (*Combat Myth* 81), recognizes the connection. Oswalt, (*Isaiah*, 322), rejects identifying the “morning star” as having any connection with Satan, as did many of the Reformers.

¹⁰¹ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 186-187.

¹⁰² Ibid 188.

¹⁰³ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 70.

what John intends the IR to pick up from the inherent imagery.¹⁰⁴ G. K. Beale ably counters the objection that the fall mentioned in Revelation is recent, by positing two falls of Satan. One is connected with creation, the other with the new creation inaugurated by Christ's death.¹⁰⁵ Tonstad describes this two-stepped fall as a fall from innocence that turns the angelic being into a deceiver and accuser, and a fall from influence, which restricts his sphere by exposing his deceptions.¹⁰⁶ Fekkes seems to recognize that his third objection is already answered in the larger storyline of Revelation, in that Satan does ultimate end up in the pit (Rev. 20.3).

In sum, there are a variety of OT texts that have allusive connections to the conflict portrayed in Revelation. They depict the origin of a heavenly being that was once part of the heavenly court. His primordial position was one of great beauty and perfection. He was intimately connected with God's presence, symbolized by one of the covering cherubs formed of gold on the כַּפְרִיִּם. However, in the biblical description, a fall occurred due to the inexplicable emergence of the unrighteousness that arose despite his initial perfection (Ezek. 28.15). Both the Isaiah and Ezekiel passages inform the biblical understanding by highlighting that this mysterious change took place within the fallen cherub's heart (Ezek. 28.17; Isa. 14.15). When John unfolds his tapestry on the fall of Satan, he weaves into the narrative the rich OT background.

¹⁰⁴ Tonstad (*Saving God's Reputation* 73), also rightly underlines that the Satan is described not only as an accuser, but also as the ancient serpent, and the deceiver. These images need to be held in balance and not played one against the other.

¹⁰⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 658. James Leonard Papandrea, (*The Wedding of the Lamb: A Historical Approach to the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 101), writes that Jewish tradition places the fall of Satan before the creation of the world. *2 Enoch 29* indicates that this occurred between the second and third days of creation. Such specificity is beyond the Biblical parameters, however the broad outlines of the story are not.

¹⁰⁶ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 75. This two-stepped fall comports well with the biblical narrative highlighting Satan's change of character and position.

The reader familiar with the OT would catch the threads within the text that point to this broader picture.

The resulting image outlines the history of Satan, as a being who was once closely connected with God and had full right to heavenly council. At one point in the past, before the creation of this world,¹⁰⁷ a change took place that brought this mighty angel into the position of deceiver and accuser. Dissatisfied with God's rule, he began his work among the members of the heavenly council, among whom he had been positioned as one of the highest and most privileged of their number. Spreading dissatisfaction among the participants of the court he was cloaked under the most deceptive guise. Due to the powerful nature of his deceptions, strengthened by his intimate connection with the throne of God, his work is not easily unmasked. John's description of the joy in heaven over his exclusion and the woe that comes to the world (Rev. 12.12) is indicative of the force of his misrepresentation of God and the lengths to which God will go to reveal the truth.

The aforementioned framework is important for this study. It reveals that the temple is the place in which the divine council met. It was in this location that the war in heaven began. If this suggested reading is correct, it contributes to an understanding of the setting for many of the hymns in Revelation. Embedded as they frequently are in the scenes that are connected with the heavenly court and temple imagery, the songs need to be heard against the larger symphonic backdrop. The

¹⁰⁷ John's description of him as the "serpent of old" points the reader back to the Genesis narrative and the deception that occurred in the Garden of Eden. This indicates that Satan's transition to deceiver and accuser must have occurred before the creation of this world. The biblical record is silent as to exactly when that might have occurred, or what prompted it. There is however a nexus of images that is comprised of Ezek. 28; Isa. 14 and Gen. 3. Joseph Jensen promotes the triangular nature of these passages, Joseph Jensen, "Helel Ben Shabar (Isaiah 14.12-15) in Bible and Tradition" in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition*, eds. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), 343-345, quoted by Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 93. See also G. L. Keown, "A History of the Interpretation of Isaiah 14:12-15" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1979), 2, referenced by Jensen, *Helel Ben Shabar* 345, note 21.

textual echoes are more distinctly heard with this enhanced setting. Not only do the hymns point to God's sovereignty, but also to the fact that one of the most honored members of the council has questioned this sovereignty. The conflict that had its beginning in heaven has its climax on earth.¹⁰⁸

Issues in theodicy

Given the larger OT imagery that John utilizes in telling his narrative, several threads are drawn together to fill out the issues in Satan's war against the government of God. If the above readings are correct, and the IR sees in the "ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12.9) the fuller OT background,¹⁰⁹ Satan would not be considered a flat character but instead one who has an important role in the plot. Originally an exalted covering cherub, this being experienced a primordial fall. Formerly one of the highest of celestial beings, unrighteousness (וַעַל, in the LXX it is ἀδικήματα) mysteriously arose within him and subverted his perfection (Ezek. 28.15). This led to an inner exaltation, which was eventually manifested in a desire to place himself above God and His heavenly court (Ezek. 28.17; Isa. 14.13,14). Instead of participating as an exalted member of the council, he used his previous position as a platform to undermine God's authority. This activity was clothed with such great deception that the issues raised demanded an unimagined response from God.

It is with this background that several points need to be considered in relation to reading Revelation against the broader war in heaven theme and the resultant

¹⁰⁸ Charles, *Revelation I*, 298.

¹⁰⁹ As Bauckham puts it (*Theology*, 18), Revelation is a "complex network of literary cross-references, parallels" and contrasts that informs the reading of the entire narrative. John's use of the OT "creates a reservoir of meaning" that can be progressively drawn from.

theological concerns. Eugene M. Boring views Revelation as the response to two questions that are in essence the same: Who rules in this world? What is the meaning of the events of history?¹¹⁰ These questions have special force in the concrete circumstances that believers faced under Domitian's claim to be *Deus et Dominus*.¹¹¹ The questions of rule and right are clearly important to Revelation's story. The emphasis that is placed on God's sovereignty is unmistakable. God's position on throne is dominant within the book. He is described as "the Lord God Almighty" seven times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22) and with a shorter form, "the Almighty," used twice (16.14; 19.15).¹¹² God's omnipotence and rule are clearly stressed. However, this position needs to be seen against the backdrop of the war that is being waged. Despite God's position, all is not well in the universe. If God is Almighty, how do his people understand the history of His dealings with them? Too frequently the faithful suffer persecution while the impenitent prosper.

Questions are thus raised about God's faithfulness and fairness.¹¹³ Can God be depended on to fulfill what He has promised? Why has God taken so long to make His rule felt throughout the universe? What is the fuller meaning of history? These questions point the reader in the direction of understanding better the nature of the

¹¹⁰ Eugene M. Boring "The Theology of Revelation: The Lord our God the Almighty Reigns." *Int* 40, No. 3 (1986), 257. He describes apocalyptic literature as a "pictorial theodicy" 260.

¹¹¹ Briggs, (*Jewish Temple Imagery* 48-50), assembles significant evidence for questioning the historicity of this perspective. See also Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 104-106, for the lack of evidence contemporaneous with Domitian. Thus caution must be exercised in describing Domitian's attempts at receiving worship. Nevertheless, Aune shows that the expressions, though not linked in inscriptions or coins, were used to describe emperors before and after Domitian. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 311. See also Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 236-237.

¹¹² Bauckham, *Theology*, 30. As Boring ("Theology," 259) notes, there is only one other NT usage (2 Cor. 6.18).

¹¹³ Anssi Simojoki, "The Book of Revelation" in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, eds. Antti Laato and Johannes Cornelis de Moor (Brill, 2003), 677 points out that the theodicy of Revelation must be understood against the background of God's faithfulness. The issue is "will His words be fulfilled"?

controversy and function to surface theodical issues. Satan's attack on God's throne relates to *how* God rules and the foundation for His authority. The deceptive nature of the adversary's attacks reflect on *who* God is and His *method* of rule. Satan has attempted to subvert God's authority and thus God cannot simply impose His will, nor is it His nature to do so arbitrarily. As Tonstad writes "God's method is the crucial issue in the drama."¹¹⁴ This is one of the undertones in the council account in Zech. 3, in which Satan distinctly figures.

Peggy Lynne Day recounts the consensus of scholarly opinion concerning this passage. In sum, that opinion views Joshua as a representative for the community of faith. The change of clothing is representative of a change in status, from sinful to forgiven. Satan stands by Joshua to accuse him, thus blocking this pardon. His accusations are not recorded but the implication is that the sinfulness of the community forms the basis for his assaults. Their sins have made, in his view, pardon impossible. Satan is "opposed to the plan of salvation."¹¹⁵ From Revelation's perspective the implications of this are broadened. Satan's accusations against God's people are, in essence, subtly framed accusations against God. How could God continue to maintain the justice of His rule and at the same time extend forgiveness to His people? Will God be able to maintain faithfulness to His word?¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 3.

¹¹⁵ Day, *Adversary*, 117. Day notes the scholarly support for this reading but considers it fanciful, concluding that the ultimate issue is that some in the community were opposed to Joshua's position as high priest, 121.

¹¹⁶ As the author of Hebrews frames it "if the words spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty" how could anyone escape? Hebrews 2,2,3.

These questions about God are sketched into the imagery under the opening of the fifth seal (Rev. 6.9-11).¹¹⁷ If God is faithful, why doesn't He do something about the apparent triumph of evil?¹¹⁸ As the Lamb breaks the seal, John sees the souls of martyrs underneath the altar¹¹⁹ and then hears their plaintiff cry,¹²⁰ "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (6.10). Whether the imagery represents only OT martyrs or includes those in the Christian era is open to debate. What is clear is their longing for justice and the inherent question of God's faithfulness. The issue is not God's sovereignty, which is firmly entrenched in Revelation. In the forefront is the question of God's apparent passivity in the face of unrelenting evil. Why has He not acted, or responded on behalf of His suffering people? Since He *is* sovereign, why is He allowing evil to continue and apparently triumph? The implication that is raised is, there is a fault in His character and rule. Questions are voiced about the means that God uses to govern. It is important to note that this plea does not focus on the unjust use of authority and control. Rather, the question calls for more activity on God's part, not less. While Satan's accusations are designed to undermine God's rule and

¹¹⁷ See Joel N. Musvovsi, "The Concept of Vengeance in the Book of Revelation in its Old Testament and Near Eastern Context" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1987) for a full study on the idea of vengeance.

¹¹⁸ Boring, "Theology," 260.

¹¹⁹ It is unclear whether this is the altar of burnt offering, placed in the courtyard or the altar of incense. This is the first of eight references to the altar in Revelation (6.9; 8.3 (2x), 5; 9.13; 11.1; 14.18; 16.7). Stefanovic, (*Revelation*, 244), argues for the altar in the courtyard, and thus not part of the heavenly temple. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 391), views this as the altar of incense due to its proximity to God. Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 146), argues for a blended imagery of sacrifice and petition, represented by both altars. Briggs, (*Jewish Temple Imagery*, 123-124), argues strongly for a view similar to Beale.

¹²⁰ The verb κράζω here has juridical overtones. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 159. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 406.

call into question His authority, from a heavenly perspective there is an abundance of freedom and surprising absence of enforced sovereign rule.¹²¹

The martyrs are not expressing a cry for vengeance, but a plea that injustice be corrected. The call is based on a strong tradition within the OT (Gen. 4.10; Ps. 6.3; 13.2; 74.10; 79.1-10; Isa. 6.1; Jer. 47.6; Dan. 8.13; 12.6-7) wherein God's people cry out for justice. The trans-generational nature of this plea demonstrates that it cannot be confined to one historical context and that there is a larger issue at stake. This is not a call for revenge, but that justice be done and "seen to be done."¹²² In this way it reflects the implicit idea that the vindication of God's people, is interlocked with the vindication of God.¹²³ The cry is not birthed from a desire for retribution, but out of concern for God's reputation.¹²⁴ This plea contains a strong negative, which is frequently masked in the English translations. The ESV has "how long before you will judge and avenge our blood...." The NIV writes "how long...until you judge...." These translations give the impression that the martyrs are asking when will the delay be over. The Greek is stronger, with a tinge of accusation or wonderment, suggesting that God is not acting even though the situation demands it.¹²⁵

The martyrs describe the Sovereign Lord as "holy and true"¹²⁶ (ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός), an expression found only here as a divine title.¹²⁷ While holiness and

¹²¹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 143.

¹²² Caird, *The Revelation*, 85.

¹²³ Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 64.

¹²⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 148; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392. There is a "hint of delinquency on the part of God," writes Tonstad (*Saving God's Reputation*, 134). The reader is confronted with the fact that it is not entirely clear that God's judgment's are just. Kensky, ("Divine Courtroom," 322), argues that part of the force of the narrative is to persuade that reader that this is so.

¹²⁵ Kensky, "Divine Courtroom," 323. ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν.

¹²⁶ Christ is described as the one who is holy, who is true in Rev. 3.7 without the conjunction καὶ.

truthfulness are frequently ascribed to God separately,¹²⁸ the uniqueness of their being united together points to the larger backdrop of Revelation. God's holiness is primarily manifested by His moral and ethical purity¹²⁹ both of which are questioned by the apparent injustice and God's apparent refusal to act on behalf of His people.¹³⁰ These attributes have been misrepresented by the arch-deceiver in his role to subvert God's sovereignty.

In the unfolding of Revelation's story, John reiterates the importance of God's justice being recognized as true. In an apparent response to the cry of the martyrs under the altar, the same altar later says that God's judgments are "true and righteous" (16.7). The altar's voice underscores the larger context and questions that are raised against God in the narrative.¹³¹ A similar cry is echoed in other places within the storyline. Within the song of Moses and the Lamb is the refrain "Righteous (δίκαιαι) and true (ἀληθινὰ) are your ways" (15.3). In the first of the hallelujahs, God's judgments are seen to be "true and righteous" (19.2).

Bauckham stresses the importance of conjunction of the word *true* both in its relation to justice being done, and the righteous aspects of such decisions. There is an inextricable connection between God's judgments and the exposing of falsehood. God's judgments bring the truth to the fore, overturning the deceptive nature of Satan's accusations. "Justice is about exposing the truth of things."¹³² This is what the

¹²⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 159.

¹²⁸ 'The Holy One' is used frequently throughout the OT and is the favorite epithet of Isaiah (Isa. 1.4; 5.19, 24; 10.20 et. al).

¹²⁹ Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 33.

¹³⁰ Kensky, ("Divine Courtroom," 322), sees this cry as originating within the divine court.

¹³¹ "The purpose in this context is theodicy," writes Osborne (*Revelation*, 581).

¹³² Bauckham, "Judgment in the Book of Revelation" *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004), 1.

martyrs cry out for. They plead for resolution in the long-standing controversy between God and the ancient Serpent.

The narrative directs the reader to several concerns that are best understood within the parameters of the concept of theodicy. These issues revolve around the fundamental questions of God's right and fitness to rule the universe. Satan has challenged God's position as sovereign by imputing to God inequality in His dealings with His creation. God's faithfulness in the fulfillment of His word, and His fairness in establishing justice are doubted. Satan works against God's plan of salvation, attempted to create a division between mercy and justice.

Understanding that Satan's fundamental attributes are deception, slander, and persecution, it becomes clear that it is not enough for him to be overcome by strength of force. As the issues fomented by Satan reflect on God's essential goodness and worth, it is apparent that the truth about God alone can dispel the mists of Satan's lies. That dishonesty and defamation are his defining characteristics is evident from a close reading of the narrative. In the letter to the church in Smyrna, John highlights slander (2.9)¹³³ as a central characteristic of Satan. This is also an essential trait of the sea-beast, Satan's mouthpiece (13.1, 5-6). It is interwoven with the sobriquet "devil" (διάβολος).

Inseparably linked with this is John's description of the serpent as the ultimate deceiver. Beginning with the letter to the church of Thyatira, the verbal thread *πλανάω*¹³⁴ unites Satan and his proxies. Jezebel attempts to lead astray Christ's

¹³³ βλασφημία, frequently translated by the English cognate blasphemy, has the connotations of disparagement, reviling, slander and vile gossip. Resseguie *Revelation*, 89; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 65; O. Hofius, βλασφημία, in EDNT, Vol. 1, ed. Horst Robert, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990), 220.

¹³⁴ This deceptive trait is only found among evil characters in Revelation's storyline. Translations are not consistent in their use of the word. Jezebel deceives the church members (2.20), Satan deceives the whole world (12.9), the false prophet deceives the common people (13.14) and Babylon deceives the nations (18.23). See Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 93.

servants. She is similar to the land-beast, who is also identified as a false prophet that deceives (16.13; 19.20; 20.10; 13.11,14). Satan is the fountainhead of this deception, using his abilities to deceive the whole world (12.9; 20.3, 8, 10). Such a flood of deception (12.16)¹³⁵ can only be overcome by a clear unfolding of truth. The verbal thread of “mouth” is significant in Revelation. What comes from the mouth of the beast, the false prophet, or the dragon represents deception (16.13). This is in direct contrast to that which comes out of the mouth of Christ.¹³⁶ The sword that comes from His mouth (1:16) is emblematic of the way that He conquers. The sword is not in the hand as it would be in normal battle. Christ vanquishes His foes through His word, which is truth in the fullest measure. Deception of all kinds is excluded from the heavenly courts and from those who will be among the heavenly inhabitants (14.5; 21.27).¹³⁷

Therefore, in the storyline of Revelation, the dragon’s methods need to be revealed, his character displayed as part of the resolution to the conflict. The deceiver needs to be unmasked and God unveiled in such a fashion that the heavenly council and on-looking universe are completely convinced.¹³⁸ Satan’s attacks on God’s authority (which imply attacks on God’s nature) and his obfuscation of God’s methods need to be redressed. This necessarily involves a certain level of freedom for Satan to pursue his continued course of deception and slander. He is allowed to work

¹³⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 483; Caird, *The Revelation*, 159; Beale, 673. Resseguie sees this more as simply a pattern of Satan’s destructive power, *The Revelation*, 176.

¹³⁶ See 1.16; 2.16; 14.5; 19.15 with 13.2, 5, 6; 16.13.

¹³⁷ Repetition plays an important role in highlighting themes in a narrative. This is especially true for Revelation. The repeated focus on deception and slander as the main thrust of Satan’s weapons in undermining God’s rule bears close observation. According to Leonard Ryken, (*Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987) 83), repetition is the “dominant rhetorical strategy in Revelation,” quoted by Klund, (“Plot of Revelation,” 37).

¹³⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 3

his will, fomenting deception and persecution. Even after the 1,000 years, he once more moves forward in duplicity and fraud.¹³⁹

The questions and accusations raised by the dragon demand a satisfactory response from the heavenly government. God must demonstrate that His ways of ruling are compatible with and in fact are, the foundation of universal harmony. “God’s judgment is not an external authority imposing its will on people, but the light of truth exposing evil for all to see.”¹⁴⁰ That exposition can come about only as God reveals Himself in a convincing way that dispels the mists of deception. As Tonstad expresses it: “only *God* can redeem God’s reputation.”¹⁴¹ In Revelation’s storyline, this occurs not only in the unfolding of final judgments, but primarily in the salvific work of the Lamb.

Resolution to the heavenly conflict and the theodical issues raised occurs as God is revealed through Christ. The close ontological connection between God and Christ is embedded into Revelation’s narrative. The throne, the center theological image in the story, is shared by both of them (3.21), and is described as belonging to both God and the Lamb (22.3).¹⁴² Christ’s acts are the means by which history is clarified and God’s reputation is restored. It is significant that the only historical referent in Revelation to the earthly life of Jesus is to His death. Miracles are the domain of Satan and his associates, while Christ and His followers overcome through self-sacrifice. This focuses the reader’s attention to the priority that Christ’s death

¹³⁹ It is significant that Satan’s first accusations (Gen 3.1), in his role as that ‘ancient serpent’ reflected the idea that God’s government deprived His subjects of their freedom. This is a subversion of the idea that freedom is the essence of “God’s regime and basic to the divine-human relationship” (Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 155).

¹⁴⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 3.

¹⁴¹ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 188, emphasis original.

¹⁴² See also: 7:9-10; 7:17; 12:5; 22:1.

holds in the narrative. Christ's sacrifice, manifested through His death is not seen in terms of victimization. Rather, the "death of *Jesus* represents the act of *God*."¹⁴³ It is the revealing of God through the death of Christ that overturns Satan's accusations.

Several themes in Revelation support this conclusion. Jesus' roles and descriptions frequently highlight that His actions are functionally equivalent to those of God. In the opening verses, the message that John receives is from both God and Jesus (1.1-2). In a similar way the offer of grace and peace to the seven churches extends from God, the seven-fold Spirit, and Jesus Christ (1.4-6). Boring sees this as John's "functional identification of God and Jesus."¹⁴⁴ The self-declarations that are attributable to God and Christ reinforce this observation. God declares that He is the Alpha and Omega (1.8), as does Christ (22.13).¹⁴⁵ The fact that Jesus is worthy of worship contributes to the functional identification of God and Christ. As the slain Lamb, Jesus becomes the center of an ever-widening ring of heavenly worshipers (5.6-12). These worshipers eventually include all creation in a worship scene that focuses both on God and the Lamb (5.13). The theological intent of this imagery is that God has defined "his rule with his act in Jesus."¹⁴⁶ It is important to recognize that within Revelation's narrative, what Christ does, God does.¹⁴⁷ Or as Bauckham writes: "Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world*."¹⁴⁸ Thus the narrative drives the reader to see in the sacrificial overcoming of the Lamb, God's resolution to the crisis.

¹⁴³ Boring, "Theology," 265 emphasis original.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Bauckham, *Theology*, 55-58.

¹⁴⁶ Boring "Theology," 266.

¹⁴⁷ Bauckham *Theology*, 63.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 64, emphasis original.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the narrative parameters that contribute to viewing the cosmic conflict theme as a major interpretative motif. Rev. 12.7-12 highlights the unfolding of the predicament that faces the heavenly council. Here the storyline clearly delineates the war that forms such an important part of the plot.¹⁴⁹ That conflict was thrust upon the heavenly inhabitants through the assaults of Satan.¹⁵⁰ The war began in heaven (12.7) and has its climax at the end of the 1,000 years (20.8-11). Yet a decisive event occurs as the great dragon is thrown down (ἐβλήθη)¹⁵¹ to the earth. Abir highlights the judicial¹⁵² overtones of the word, and the final exclusions that accompany those who are thrown down. This suggests Satan's final expulsion from the heavenly council. Satan and his army no longer have a place in heaven (12.8). The cause for his loss of position, contributes to an understanding of the action within the plot. If, as many expositors agree, the death of Christ causes Satan's fall, then it would be in harmony with the storyline to suggest that Christ has revealed enough about God's character to dispel Satan's lies so that his access to the heavenly council is closed. However, Satan does not cease his accusations (12.10) or his attempts at war (12.13).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ πολεμέω the verb occurs 6 times in Revelation, while πολέμος occurs 9 times. See 2.16, 9.7,9; 11.7; 12.7, 17; 13.4,5,7; 16.14; 17.14; 19.11,19; 20.8.

¹⁵⁰ This reading views the grammatical difficulty of 12.7, in which there is a genitive articular infinitive (Μιχαήλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι) to be understood as suggested by Charles, *Revelation I*, 322 as a Hebraism that has a causal aspect. Thus "Michael and his angels *had to* make war." See also Thompson *Syntax*, 62-63; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 322; and Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 654.

¹⁵¹ The passive voice indicates divine activity. Within the short passage are multiple mentions of his being "thrown down" (12.9 (2x), 10, 13). Other significant uses of the word are in 14.19; 18.21; 19.20; 20.2-3, 10, 14, 15.

¹⁵² Abir, *Cosmic Conflict*, 139; Stefanovic *Revelation*, 396.

¹⁵³ Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 655), suggests that verse 10 indicates that Satan has been barred from heaven, but in a limited sense. He also notes the connection with Dan 2.35 Theod. for the background to this phrase. There is also a close parallel of this phrase with 20.11, see Smalley, *The*

The text points to a specific time¹⁵⁴ when this fall has occurred (12.10). This signifies an important turning point in the heavenly conflict. The next verse points to the death of Christ as that which has brought about Satan's downfall. "The blood of the Lamb" (12.11) is shorthand for God's redemptive act in Christ.¹⁵⁵ It points the reader back to the initial vision (5.6) where the Lamb first made His appearance in the divine council. As God's actions are seen through Christ's activities, the slain Lamb portrays the nature of God's government and assures His ultimate and redemptive sovereignty.¹⁵⁶ Despite Satan's continuation of his war (12.13,17), the foundational victory has been secured. The battle on earth continues to be of interest to the heavenly court. The war on earth is an extension of the war that began in heaven. Heavenly agencies remain interested in the ongoing demonstration of the principles of the two kingdoms. Christ's death has brought about the downfall of Satan and has revealed in a way nothing else could the nature of God's rule. Satan's weapons in this war are those of slander, deception, and persecution. God can only respond with the weapons that are in His armory, which are faithfulness, truth, and love.

A heavenly and an earthly perspective are woven into Revelation's tapestry. The pattern reveals that an exalted heavenly council member is now dedicated to the subversion of the heavenly court. It is recognized that such a strongly dualistic and personal perspective regarding the existence of evil is foreign to the modern reader. The trend of expositors is to see Satan as a metaphoric way of describing evil or simply a foil against God's sovereign actions. However, the broader narrative

Revelation, 324. Witherington, (*Revelation*, 170), highlights three falls in 12.9; 20.2; 20.10. The first indicates that Satan no longer has a legitimate place or role in the court. Caird, (*The Revelation*, 157), writes, "Satan is stripped of his rights, but not of his power to do appalling harm."

¹⁵⁴ ἄρτι

¹⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray *Revelation*, 203.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid 202. Smalley, *The Revelation*, 326; Caird, *The Revelation*, 153-54.

reinforces the personal nature of the accuser and his primordial origins. While difficult for the modern reader, this is completely consistent with the storyline. Within the backdrop of the sanctuary and the divine council, John weaves the origins of the cosmic conflict. If this reading is correct, the hymnic portions (which are placed in a temple and divine council setting) need to be heard with the dissonant echoes of Satan's rebellion in the background.

CHAPTER FOUR

HYMNIC PERICOPES OF 4.8-11; 5.9-14

Introduction

The hymns of Revelation have been the subject of several dissertations, as well as finding a place in a variety of articles, books, and the appropriate discussions in commentaries.¹ The thesis for this study is that the hymnic portions² contribute to

¹ The following list of references includes works that focus on hymns in the NT, which do not generally include in-depth sections on Revelation, as well as studies that deal exclusively with the role the hymns play in Revelation. James H. Charlesworth "Jewish Hymns, Odes, and Prayers" in *Early Judaism and its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Robert A. Kraft, George W. E Nickelsburg, 411-425 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke's Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning and Significance*, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985); Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*, translated by Percy Scott (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962); J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John" *AUSS* 36, no. 2 (1998): 207-229; John J. O'Rourke, "The Hymns of the Apocalypse" *CBQ* 30, 1968: 399-409; Leonard L. Thompson, "Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John" *The Journal of Religion* 49, no. 4 (1969): 330-350; David E. Aune, "The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John" *BR* 18, (1983): 5-26; Robert H. Smith, "'Worthy is the Lamb' and Other Songs of Revelation," *CTM* 25, (1998): 500-506; David Seal, "Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on the Praise Utterances of Revelation 4:8 and 11," *JETS* 51, no. 2 (June 1, 2008), 339-352; Edgar Krentz, "Epideiktik and Hymnody: The New Testament and its World" *BR* 40, (1995), 50-97; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990); Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background*. (Cambridge Eng.: University Press, 1971); Martin Hengel, "Hymns and Christology" in *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003); Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); --- *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); David R. Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation." in *Christ the Lord*, ed. Harold Hamlyn Rowdon, (Downers Grove: Ill: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 257-281; Klaus Peter Jörns, *Das Hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen Zu Aufbau, Funktion Und Herkunft Der Hymnischen Stücke in Der Johannesoffenbarung*. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971); Gottfried Schimanowski, "Connecting Heaven and Earth: The Function of the Hymns in Revelation 4-5" in *In Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, edited by R. S. Bousthan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67-84; Michael Anthony Harris, "The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988); A. R. Nusca, "Heavenly Worship, Ecclesial Worship: A 'Liturgical' Approach to the Hymns of the Apocalypse of St. John" (PhD diss., Rome, 1988); James Edward Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth in the Hymns in Revelation" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1992); Stephen Norwood, "The Author's use of Hymns as Summaries of the Theology of the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998); Kendra Jo Haloviak, "Worlds at War, Nations in Song: Dialogical Imagination and Moral Vision in the Hymns of the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2002); Ardea Caviggiola Russo, "Behind the Heavenly Door: Earthly Liturgy and Heavenly Worship in the Apocalypse of John" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2009.)

² Different writers discuss the hymns from a variety of perspectives. Instead of confining the study of each hymn piece to its individual verse (i.e. Rev 4.8), I will be looking at the hymns as units or sections (thus, 4.8-11 etc.). Aune, (*Revelation 1-5*, 315), sees sixteen hymnlike compositions, but unites them

the overall plot of Revelation and need to be heard against the backdrop of the cosmic conflict, a setting that is underexposed in the major studies that consider the function of the hymns in the narrative. The hymnic sections are an integral part of the entire plot. Therefore the setting in which they occur, needs to be taken into account when considering both their function and meaning within the storyline. As is typical in a narrative reading the setting and backdrop function as “an interpretative framework” that promotes an understanding of the actions played out within the narrative. The setting also serves to keep the reader’s attention focused on the overarching theme of the plot.³ In Revelation, the temple and divine council setting serves this function.

In the previous chapter, the argument was made that one of the unifying storylines in Revelation is that of the cosmic conflict. This was accomplished by exploring the relationship between the sanctuary setting, the heavenly court, and Satan’s position within the court. Rather than an ancillary backdrop to a critique of imperial Rome, the narrative texture of Revelation places Satan’s accusations in the foreground. It is this understanding that allows the reader to make sense of the ending of the story. The temple/heavenly court setting dominates throughout the book. It was as a member of the divine council that Satan fomented discord through deception and misrepresentation of the nature of God’s government. Those singular accusations need to be refuted, in order for a successful resolution to the heavenly crisis to occur. Although Satan’s allegations were first heard in the courts of heaven, they have a universal dimension. The conflict begun in heaven continues here on earth. The ongoing narrative confirms that the church’s earthly trials are a result of Satan’s

into seven antiphonal units (4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 16.5-7; 19.1-4, 5-8) and then includes 15.3b-4 as being a single independent hymn. He at first notes 12.10b-12 as one of the compositions, but then does not include it as an independent hymn. It is his concept of hymnic pericopes that I will be following.

³ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 16.

prosecution of the war. Therefore refutation of his charges needs to be recognized on the earth as well as in heaven.

With this reading of Revelation, the question as to the function of the hymnic pericopes needs to be addressed. Recent studies⁴ have concluded that the hymns are John's literary creation.⁵ They play an important role in promoting the storyline of the Apocalypse.⁶ The hymns accompany "*all the major events*" in Revelation.⁷ Thus, their function is to comment on the actions that are unfolding within the plot. In fact, the hymnic sections are essential to a clear understanding of the storyline. Their location at key points in the unfolding drama substantiates this conclusion. Within Revelation there is little sustained discourse,⁸ however there is much recorded speech. As the hymns contains a great amount of Revelation's discourse, exceeded only by Jesus' communication to the seven churches, it is a critical element in understanding the narrative's ideological position.⁹ This chapter will first consider a brief overview of the dominant understanding of the function of the hymns within Revelation, and then will examine the first two hymnic pericopes in the light of the cosmic conflict.

⁴ Carnegie, *Worthy is the Lamb*, 248. Carnegie identifies the lack of *hapax legomenon* within the hymns, interlocking phrases and expressions, and the intimate connection with context, as reasons for his conclusion.

⁵ This would not negate the fact of John having heard the heavenly songs, but indicates that he endeavored to recount them in a strikingly well composed literary form.

⁶ Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John," 208.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 211. Emphasis original.

⁸ The discussion between John and an elder being the longest, 7.13-15. Speech from God only occurs unambiguously twice, 1.8 and 21.5-8.

⁹ Kirby, "Repetition," 142.

Background and Composition

A primary consideration for discerning the manner in which the hymns interact with the storyline, is giving close attention to the context and the literary threads that unite the pericopes with the fuller narrative tapestry. Before turning to an examination of the hymns and their function within the conflict motif which comprises the main aim of this study, it will be helpful to explore issues related to the origins of the hymns and any hymnic parallels found within the context of the larger Greco-Roman world. This examination will consider John's source material for the hymns as well as the bearing this has upon interpretation.

Naturally, one possibility for the origins of the hymns is that they are faithful transcriptions of the visionary experience, written down as John heard them. Yet, as Beale has noted, the use of language, the connections to early Jewish traditions, as well as to versions of the OT indicates that editorial activity is at work.¹⁰ Thus it is doubtful that the hymns come from the vision alone. Another possibility is that John inserted hymns that previously existed as part of early Christian liturgy, either in whole or slightly adapted for his purpose.¹¹ The integration that the hymns have with the narrative, as well as the linguistic connections among the hymns and the larger plot argue against this conclusion.¹²

Another potential source for John's hymnic sections is the Merkabah mysticism that was developing at a time parallel to that of Revelation's composition.

¹⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 368.

¹¹ See O'Rourke, *Hymns of the Apocalypse*, 409. David Seal, "Shouting in the Apocalypse: The Influence of First-Century Acclamations on the Praise Utterances of Revelation 4:8 and 11", *JETS* 51, no. 2 (June 1, 2008), 339. This would naturally include the liturgical elements from Jewish worship that may have found their way into Christian usage. See Robert H. Smith, "'Worthy is the Lamb' and Other Songs of Revelation" *CurTM* 25, (1998), 502.

¹² Aune, ("Imperial Court Ceremonial,"23), argues that such a view, at the least, needs to be radically altered if not entirely abandoned.

The roots of this mysticism are traced back to the influence of Yochanan ben Zakkai, who died around 90 C.E. The Merkabah mysticism involved an ascent to the throne of God. Visionaries prepared for this journey through a variety of ascetic practices including prolonged fasting, specific prayer postures, and the utilization of hymns and songs.¹³ Of particular hymnic importance is the trisagion originally found in Isa. 6.3. This is the “song par excellence” of apocalyptic visionaries.¹⁴

The aim of the mystic’s ascetic practices, which served as preparation for the visionary experience, was to reach the throne room of God. In describing the passage of Merkabah mystics, Gershom Scholem utilizes the language of an earthly imperial court, with the mystic traversing endless halls and several gates. He describes such visions as a “Judaized form of cosmocratorial mysticism concerning the divine King (or Emperor.)”¹⁵ Such visionary descriptions have verbal threads connecting to Ezekiel, a text that John utilizes freely as well.

While the hymns are John’s literary creation, formed for his own purposes,¹⁶ he clearly utilized pre-existent themes and material.¹⁷ This supposition conforms to the observation that the entire book is a well-written composition reflective of great literary skill. John’s use of images that were current in the society is widely recognized. His use of those metaphors and their function in the narrative are a matter of interpretation.

¹³ Smith, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 504.

¹⁴ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 57.

¹⁵ Gershom Scholem, *Merkabah Mysticism and Jewish Gnosticism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1946) 40-79) quoted in Smith, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 505.

¹⁶ This would not negate the fact of John having heard the heavenly songs, but indicates that he endeavored to recount them in a strikingly well composed literary form.

¹⁷ Note for example the frequent use of the Hebrew *amen* (1.6,7,8; 3.14; 5.14; 7.12; 19.4; 22.20, 21), *hallelujah* (19.1,3,4,6), and the use of the *trisagion* (4.8).

Scholars have examined the use of hymnic material in Roman society as both a source and as an interpretative guide for the passages found in Revelation. Edgar Krentz identifies hymns dating from the early Roman period that were sung in honor of various deities as well as Roman emperors. He particularly mentions Pergamum and Ephesus as cities in which guilds of hymn singers were paid to honor Augustus. Krentz views this Roman background as essential for a proper interpretation of the hymns in Revelation.¹⁸ Aune argues that the hymns found within Revelation are drawn from the ceremonies within the imperial court and are to be read as parodies of the court.¹⁹ Robert H. Smith agrees with both Krentz and Aune, seeing the hymnic material as reflecting Roman usage, and functioning as a polemic against the Roman Empire.²⁰

Aune recognizes that John has employed a number of sources from which to compose the hymns. Aune gives precedence to the influence of Israelite kingship traditions, Hellenistic kingship traditions, and the Roman court (which in turn was affected by Hellenistic divine ruler traditions).²¹ He specifically attributes the use of hymns within the throne room as a parody against Rome. As hymns were integral features of all the Mediterranean religions, their use was ordinarily reserved for giving praise to the gods. If ascribed to men, whether alive or dead, it was an indication that such individuals were equal with the gods.²² The emperors often received divine

¹⁸ Edgar Krentz, "Epideiktik and Hymnody: The New Testament and its World", *BR* 40, (1995), 54. Krentz recognizes that the actual form of the hymns is no longer extant.

¹⁹ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 5.

²⁰ Smith, "Worthy is the Lamb," 504.

²¹ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 6.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

honors characterized by sacrifices, incense, processions, hymns, and acclamations.²³

Aune cites the example of the acclamations given to Herod Agrippa I. According to the biblical account, his oration brought forth praise that described him as a god, not a man (Acts 12.22.)²⁴

Such acclamations were an important part of the ceremonies that attended the emperor. Nero is reported to have paid for singers, in the tradition of Augustus. These acclamations consisted of simple praise, rhythmic formulas, or phrases that were easily memorized and had broad appeal. They were frequently chanted and repeated over and over.²⁵ Such acclamations had a number of functions in the Roman society. They gave the emperor a way to measure public opinion of his rule, served as a means of disseminating imperial propaganda, and reaffirmed the legitimacy of the emperor's accession, which would by no means be taken for granted. Ultimately, acclamations demonstrated the people's appreciation of the food, money, entertainment, and protection given by the emperor-benefactor.²⁶

David Seal draws a number of parallels between the form, characteristics, and functions of hymnic acclamations in the Roman Empire and the hymns found in Revelation. He particularly focuses on the hymnic sections of 4.8 and 11 in drawing comparisons. His study yields several points of correspondence between the broader context of the Roman world and John's recital in Revelation.²⁷ In order to fully appreciate the impact of Seal's argument, we will first consider the hymnic material found in 4.8.

²³ Ibid, 16.

²⁴ Ibid., 17. See also Josephus *Ant.* 19.343-46.

²⁵ Seal, "First-century Acclamations," 342-43.

²⁶ Ibid. 344-45.

²⁷ The following is taken from Seal, "First-century Acclamations," 345-351.

The first two points of contact relate to the four creatures repetitive singing of “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Seal pinpoints evidence that attributes to Domitian the attribute of holiness or sacredness²⁸ and quotes Hopkins as identifying a second century oath that describes the emperor as most holy.²⁹ Seal sees in the heavenly choir’s acclamation that God is holy, a rebuttal of the emperor’s claim. In addition to the designation of holiness, the repetition satisfies another trait of hymns in the first century. Frequently expressions would be repeated within an acclamation for ease of memorization. While Hebrew typically employs a double repetition for emphasis, the threefold expression designates an unparalleled trait. Seal understands that the interweaving of these traits within the hymn indicates that God will not tolerate the anti-holy empire.

He then focuses on two appellations that are used in the hymn to refer to God. The first is the “almighty,” which directs the reader’s attention to the sovereignty of God. The second expression is the one who “was, is and is to come” connoting the eternal nature of God. While noting the Hebraic backgrounds to both titles, Seal understands their function in the hymn as countering the claims of the empire. The former designation is understood as challenging Rome’s claim to power, while the latter confronts Rome’s ideology of *aeterna*, which extended to the eternal peace, eternal Rome, eternal city, and the eternal people of Rome.³⁰ Seal also points out that the hymn piece is continually repeated, both day and night, without rest (4.8b). He then cites Tacitus who describes day and night acclamations that echoed around the

²⁸ Stat. *Silv.* 5.2.177

²⁹ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 225, quoted in Seal, *First-century Acclamations*, 345.

³⁰ See Wes Howard-Brook, and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 233.

palace, honoring the emperor. Thus the hymn serves to challenge the predominant principles of Rome, and the manner in which such principles were expressed.

Turning to the second pericope (4.11), Seal highlights the short honorary declaration given by the elders, “worthy are you” as being similar to Roman praise. As the expression has no parallel in the OT, it is suggested that it arose from Roman practice.³¹ Thompson places the origin of the phrase in Rome’s political arena.³² It was a common tribute ascribed to Domitian upon his arrival.³³ Seal supports this observation by referring to Josephus, who records the triumphal reception of Vespasian, after the siege of Jerusalem. He is described as the only one *worthy* to rule Rome.³⁴ In addition to the acclamation of worthiness, there is an additional reflection of Roman usage in the pericope. Following the praise of God’s worth, the elders ascribe, “glory, honor, and power” to God. These terms express values that were important in the Greco-Roman world and were also frequently used to honor emperors.

The actions of the elders are also seen in light of practices common in Roman society. In addition to expressing praise to God, the 24 elders both cast down their crowns and prostrate themselves in worship before Him. Aune notes that the casting down of crowns is a reflection of the Hellenistic practice of honoring the gods. He points out that crowns were once given to Alexander, as though he were a god. He also quotes Josephus who describes the gift of a crown to Antony at Ephesus by an

³¹ However, see Beale’s argument (*The Book of Revelation*, 335-36), relating the ascription to the hymn in Daniel 4.35-37.

³² Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 58.

³³ J. Daryl Charles, "Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5 " *CTR* 7, (1993), 96. Charles refers to Martial the source for this observation.

³⁴ Seal, “First-century Acclamations,” 350.

embassy of Hyrcanus and Jewish people.³⁵ There is evidence that the ritual of prostrating oneself before the emperor was well established, even being practiced by the Roman senators before an empty throne.³⁶

Drawing together the verbal parallels between words and actions within the first hymnic pieces in Revelation and a similar use in honoring the emperor, Seal concludes that the chants function as a challenge to the ideologies of Rome.³⁷ This deduction is supported by the work of Smith, Krentz, and Aune noted above, as well others who have examined the hymns.³⁸ Thus read, the hymns communicate a counter-imperial message, specifically that God reigns and is the universe's true sovereign. The current study pursues the complementary and partially contradictory conclusion that the hymns are better read in the light of the cosmic conflict. Both conclusions understand that God's reign is being contested, but point to different challengers to God's authority. Before pursuing the main outlines of the current investigation, a few observations on the evidence mentioned above is in order.

As Aune notes, relatively little is known in detail about the hymns and acclamations current at the time of Revelation's composition.³⁹ Thus, many of the conclusions in regard to their use are either drawn from a small sample of references, or by way of supposition and inference. In addition, there is the broader question of what is the primary influence for John's imagery. For example, Seal points to John's description of the repetitive ascription of holiness, as pointing to God's intolerance of

³⁵ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 12. See Josephus *Ant.* 14. 304-323.

³⁶ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 13.

³⁷ Seal, "First-century Acclamations," 352.

³⁸ See Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 56-68; Charles, "Imperial Pretensions," 85-97; Leonard L. Thompson "Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John" *JR* 49, no. 4 (1969): 330-350; Blount, *Revelation*, 95-98.

³⁹ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 16.

the anti-holy empire and its rule.⁴⁰ However, the trisagion is drawn from the OT and was frequently used in other apocalyptic works. Thus the question needs to be addressed, is John reworking the material for an anti-Roman polemic, or does the larger narrative story of the OT play a more determinative role in identifying its function?⁴¹ Similarly, the titles given to God and the worshipful prostration demonstrated by the elders, all have OT antecedents.⁴²

The same could be said of Aune's argument that the imperial court forms the background for the hymns. Aune recognizes the difficulty of explaining how a provincial inhabitant would know enough about the workings of the court to draw the proper inferences, yet feels this is not insurmountable.⁴³ The question still remains as to where the primary influence should be placed, and the determinate role such influence plays on understanding the text. Briggs argues that the depth of OT allusions and verbal threads within Revelation point to that background as the principal source from which to draw an interpretive stance. He writes that John's "virtually exclusive use of the OT as the written background source of his principal temple motifs ought to be kept in mind lest the risk of misinterpretation increase."⁴⁴ This admonition is well grounded.

This investigation complements the work of Aune, Thompson, Seal, Krentz, and others by giving the OT backgrounds priority in understanding the function of the

⁴⁰ Seal, "First-century Acclamations," 346.

⁴¹ See below for this investigation's perspective on John's use of the trisagion.

⁴² Seal, ("First-century Acclamations," 346), notes the LXX background for the epithet "Lord God Almighty" as well as the origins for the phrase "was, is and is to come" in Exod. 3.14. There are also OT references that describe the worshipful approach to God. See Ps. 95.6. In addition, it is well recognized that such prostration before a ruler was widely practiced in the Orient. See Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 13.

⁴³ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 6.

⁴⁴ Briggs, *Jewish Temple*, 144.

hymns. The Hebrew conception of the heavenly temple, which serves as the location for the divine council, exerts a formative influence on John's work. While not denying that the hymns contribute to the recognition that Rome is no equal to God's sovereignty, this investigation pursues the idea that there is a more powerful antagonist to God's rule, and that Rome or any earthly government is merely the puppet of that adversary. It is to explore the relation of the hymns and the issues introduced within the controversy theme that we now turn. This study will limit the hymnic pericopes to 4.8-11; 5.9-14; 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12; 15.3-4; and 19.1-8.

Revelation 4.8-11; 5.9-14

In an effort to hear Revelation's hymns against the backdrop of Satan's accusations and the issue of theodicy that is woven into the storyline, it will be helpful to identify certain narrative parameters for each pericope. Clarifying the setting, what is occurring within the plotline, and identifying the characters⁴⁵ involved will provide a basis from which to explore verbal threads that connect to the larger theme. This is particularly important for the first hymnic sections to be considered. The importance for a careful reading here is underscored due to the position that chapters 4 and 5 have in relation to the rest of the book. These chapters form a unit that impacts the remainder of Revelation. The thematic and literary unity between these two chapters is well demonstrated.⁴⁶ There are several threads that unite the chapters, among which are the position of the elders, the living creatures, and the angelic beings. The strong

⁴⁵ See Jung-chu Wu, "Worthy is the Lamb: The New Song in Revelation 5:9-10 in Relation to its Background" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2005), 3-22.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 16-19; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 311-16; Charles, *Revelation I*, xxvi; Swete *The Apocalypse*, xli; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 47; Russell S. Morton, *One Upon The Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition historical/theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 68.

connection between the hymnic portions (4.11; 5.12) that include the ascription of worth, and the reception of key attributes by the object of the hymns, play a decidedly important role in supporting this reading.⁴⁷ Together these chapters form the “theological fountainhead and anchor point” for the entire book.⁴⁸

As the “fulcrum” of Revelation⁴⁹ the images found here introduce not only the opening of the seals in chapter 6, but also the rest of the visions that comprise the major body of Revelation.⁵⁰ Due to the impact that this section has on the rest of the narrative, the reading that one encounters here will affect how one reads the other hymnic passages. This paradigmatic section influences one’s interpretation of the entire storyline. A common construal is that this first throne vision communicates God’s sovereignty and His reign throughout the universe. Aune states these chapters “anchor each series of events in the sovereignty of God, who controls events that transpire upon earth.”⁵¹ Robert Klund argues that the opening vision depicts God’s sovereign reign over all creation.⁵² Beale takes the purpose of these chapters as the demonstration that God and Christ are sovereign.⁵³ He argues that “*the hymns make explicit the main point of the vision and of the whole chapter: God is to be glorified because of his holiness and sovereignty.*”⁵⁴ Osborne understands the section to

⁴⁷ These characteristics will be more fully examined in the discussion under the hymnic sections.

⁴⁸ Boring, *Revelation*, 102.

⁴⁹ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 25, 108.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 313.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Klund, “Plot of Revelation,” 85.

⁵³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 311.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 332 emphasis original.

emphasize that God sovereignly controls the past, present, and future.⁵⁵ Many readings of Revelation's plot proceed from this perspective, that God's sovereignty is the foundation of the document and everything unfolds from this vantage point. God's sovereignty is clearly in view, but it needs to be remembered that it is a sovereignty contested by the attempts of Satan to undermine God's authority.⁵⁶ While there is no explicit mention of his rebellion in this passage, there are thematic hints that connect the hymns to the larger theme. These allusions will be brought out in the consideration of the setting, characters, and plot, as well as in the examination of the hymnic portions.

Setting

The setting for chapters 4 and 5, a literary diptych,⁵⁷ is the throne room in heaven. As John is taken up in the Spirit, he sees an open door *in heaven*, and the first object that draws his attention is the throne, and the one sitting upon it. It is this dramatic shift from the earthly realm of the seven churches to the heavenly atmosphere that largely comports the remainder of the book that has led commentators to view this section as "the theological center of the book."⁵⁸ The visual impact of John's departure from the island of Patmos to the heavenly throne room is startling. The sights and sounds that he encounters combine to create an

⁵⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 237.

⁵⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 310; Boring, *Revelation*, 103; Blount, *Revelation*, 94, each see the praise as a reflection of the angelic exaltation over the emperor.

⁵⁷ Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 105), describes these two chapters as a "diptych that provides the interpretative key to understanding the Apocalypse." J. Daryl Charles, "An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1-14)" *JETS* 34, no. 4 (1991), 462, highlights several linguistic connections between the two chapters. These include: the One sitting on the throne (4.2, 9 & 5.1, 7, 13); the living creatures (4.6 & 5.6, 8, 11, 14); the elders (4.4 & 5.6, 8, 14); worthy (4.11 & 5.9, 12); as well as other verbal threads.

⁵⁸ Roloff, *Revelation*, 68.

overwhelming sense of awe. Thus the throne room setting must be the perspective from which the narrative events within Revelation are considered. While the throne is the essential prop in the entire narrative of Revelation,⁵⁹ it plays particular importance in this setting. Nineteen of the forty-seven occurrences found in Revelation are found in these two chapters.⁶⁰ The throne room is inseparably linked with the temple in Revelation. Here the images of divine council, sanctuary, and law court are merged together.⁶¹ The focus on the throne provides a rich, intertextual image. The highly allusive text points to several OT antecedents among which are the following references: 1 Kgs. 22.19-20; Isa. 6.1-4; Dan. 7.9-14 and Ezek. 1.1-28.

It is important to bear in mind that it was in this setting that Satan's accusations against God's rule were first brought forth. In the previous chapter, the OT background of Satan's role in the divine council was reviewed. In the weaving of Revelation's tapestry, John has drawn together several OT threads to convey to the reader the multifaceted nature of Satan's character. Revelation's portrayal of Satan's attempt to usurp God's throne with his own, reiterates the attempt found in Isaiah 14.13-14:

You have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly.

It is not only earthly emperors that claim title to worship, nor from the viewpoint of Revelation, does it seem that the emperors of Rome even hold a priority of place in

⁵⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 31. Bauckham sees ubiquity of the symbol, as demonstrating how important is faith in God's sovereignty.

⁶⁰ Tonstad highlights the anarthrous reference to the throne gives the sense of a first mention in a narrational sense. This conclusion is strengthened with the articular use at 1.4 and 3.21, *Saving God's Reputation*, 116 note 27. It is of interest that the articular use is also found in 2.13 where Satan's throne is mentioned. Thus is set the stage for the conflict over who shall rule and whether God's rule is just.

⁶¹ Caird, *The Revelation of St. John*, 61; Bauckham, *Theology*, 33.

the story. From Revelation's perspective their attempt is a poor reflection of the heavenly battle for worship. Thus while the echo chambers of the heavenly vaults ring with the praise of God's creation, there is still the lingering voice of accusation and insinuation that someone else is more fit to rule. Implied in this opening setting is the persistent question, "To whom does the earth belong?"⁶²

Dramatis Personae

Several important characters appear in this diptych. There are the four living creatures (4.6)⁶³ that sing the first hymn, the twenty-four elders (4.4)⁶⁴ that are involved in singing the antiphonal response, the angelic multitude that also participate in the hymns (5.11), and the extended creation that eventually participates in the universal praise to God and the Lamb (5.13). This breadth of characters, all of who are ultimately involved in the hymnic sections, indicates the universal dimension of this pericope. John is also considered one of the characters within the narrative. He is not simply a passive bystander. He becomes involved with the unfolding of events,

⁶² While Fiorenza (*Just World*, 120), approaches this more from the perspective of the socioeconomic political situation, she is correct when states that the throne represents Revelation's main theological question, which is, Who rules? Bauckham, (*Theology*, 39), also recognizes that this section lays the groundwork for understanding the conflict between God's rule and those who oppose this rule. However, he as well sees this more in terms of Rome's oppression and does not give the weight that the narrative does to the heavenly origins of the contest.

⁶³ See the previous chapter for a further discussion on the four living creatures and their relation to the throne. The imagery is based on Ezek. 1.5-21 and Isa. 6.1-5. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 328-330 for a discussion on their identity.

⁶⁴ See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 287-92 and Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 323-26 for an overview of interpretations regarding the elders. Bandy appropriately notes that the elders are the only ones sitting in the divine court and that they are seated on thrones as well. This indicates that they make up a special group within the divine council, thus reinforcing the setting that we have identified. See, Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 181. Gallusz, ("Throne Motif," 202), confirms this observation. Their prominence is clearly of importance, as they appear throughout the narrative, in chapters 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19, and usually in connection with the hymnic pericopes. John Wick Bowman, *The Drama of the Book of Revelation: An Account of the Book*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 43 considers that they are reflective of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Such identification supports the idea of the elders being part of the divine court.

weeping at the apparent loss of one to resolve the heavenly crisis (5.4), and dialoguing with one of the elders (5.5). As a prophet he becomes a member of the divine council.⁶⁵

The two major characters within this section are the “One sitting upon the throne” and the Lamb. These two figures, though remote, tower over the narrative and are the clear focus of attention. The hymnic portions are directed to both of them. The initial titles used in the section, appear to be the two favorite expressions used by the John to identify God and Christ. The former phrase (with slight variations) is used seven times within the two chapters (4.2, 3, 9, 10; 5.1,7,13) and another six times in the rest of the book (6.16; 7.10, 15; 19.4; 20.11; 21.5). The expression allows John to avoid describing or identifying the one seated there,⁶⁶ yet clearly it is a reference to God.⁶⁷ The fact that God is described as “sitting on the throne” contains intertextual imagery that evokes the divine court.⁶⁸

The Lamb is John’s “favorite Christological designation” and occurs twenty-eight times in reference to Jesus.⁶⁹ It is first found in the second panel of the diptych, chapter 5. As John hears an overcomer has been found who can resolve the tension in the heavenly council (5.2-5), he turns to see this mighty warrior. He is told that “Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (5.5) has prevailed. Both of these

⁶⁵ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 165. Both Zechariah and Isaiah have had similar experiences; see the previous chapter.

⁶⁶ Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977) 49 notes that John does not reveal much about God. There are only two occasions on which God speaks, 1.8 and 21.5-8. See also Bauckham, *Theology*, 23.

⁶⁷ 4.8f make this plain, as well as several OT antecedents, 1 Kgs 22.19; Pss. 9.4; 45.6; Isa. 6.1; Ezek. 1.25; 10.1; Dan. 7.9.

⁶⁸ Bandy, *Lawsuit*, 181. Resseguie understands this repeated expression to denote God’s control of the universe. James Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse*, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998), 107. J. Daryl Charles, *Apocalyptic Tribute*, 462, interprets the view of God sitting as indicating that He is “reigning and judging.”

⁶⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 119. See Bauckham, *Theology*, 67.

titles have connotations of military victory and Messianic expectations.⁷⁰ Yet when John turns to look, he sees the Lamb pictured as if slain (5.6—ὡς ἐσφαγμένον). The startling nature of this Messiah's conquest is through death. There is a jarring juxtaposition of military images with the slain Lamb.⁷¹ The Lamb's method of conquest will become more apparent in the consideration of the hymnic section that immediately follows His description. At this point it is important to recognize the close association that the Lamb has with the One seated on the throne.⁷²

The Lamb appears *in the midst* (ἐν μέσῳ) of the throne, and of the living creatures, and of the elders (5.6). This difficult grammatical expression has been understood as meaning that the Lamb stood between the throne and the living creatures that surround it, with the twenty-four elders in the next circle.⁷³ Alternatively, it can be interpreted that the Lamb is actually in the middle of the throne.⁷⁴ At the least, the imagery portrays the Lamb near the center of the throne, and linked with the One upon the throne (5.13). The Lamb receives worship in the same manner as God does (5.8, 4.10).⁷⁵ The point of the imagery is theological, the slain Lamb stands where God dwells.⁷⁶ This underscores an important idea that bears on

⁷⁰ Jong-chu Wu, "Worthy is the Lamb," 22.

⁷¹ See Steve Moyise "Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb" in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, (ed. Steve Moyise, (New York: T&T Clark, 2001) 181-194, for a discussion on how the military and sacrificial images interpret one another.

⁷² The ways the hymns are set in the narrative reinforce this conclusion. The first two, 4.8, 4.11 are sung solely to God. The next two, 5.9b-10, 5.12 are sung solely to the Lamb. The last one, 5.13, is sung to both of them. This arrangement strengthens the ontological tie between them, and also serves to undergird the conclusion that the two chapters are a unit.

⁷³ Aune, (*Revelation 1-5*, 352), adds the possibility of the Lamb standing among or with the elders and living creatures. Cf. Charles *Revelation I*, 140.

⁷⁴ Hannah, "Of Cherubim," 541; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 132.

⁷⁵ Donald Guthrie, "The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation" *VE* 12, (1981), 65.

⁷⁶ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 251.

the present interpretation. The Lamb and the One on the throne are inextricably linked. “What the Lamb does, God does.”⁷⁷ Boring points out that throughout Revelation “God is the one defined by Christ.” They share the throne and their figures and voices fade into each other.⁷⁸ By highlighting this in the beginning of the plot, John lays the groundwork for reading the actions of Christ as part of God’s response to Satan’s deceptions.⁷⁹

Plot

The storyline in this section begins with John being called up into heaven (4.1) and concludes with the entire creation singing to both the One on the throne and the Lamb (5.13), while the living creatures and elders worship (5.14). Chapter 4 is divided into four parts, comprised of 4.1-2a; 4.2b-3; 4.4-8a and 4.8b-11.⁸⁰ The first section moves John’s perspective to heaven, leaving behind the earthly realm, as John is taken away “in the spirit.”⁸¹ The second scene occurs as he enters the heavenly court and sees the throne and its occupant. The third section focuses on the members of the divine council who are described as the twenty-four elders and then the four living creatures. The fourth scene begins the hymnic pericope in which the four living creatures break into song, followed by a description of the song that the elders sing.

⁷⁷ Guthrie, “The Lamb,” 66.

⁷⁸ Boring, “Narrative Christology,” 707.

⁷⁹ In summary, throughout this section the Lamb receives worship, has omniscience (seven horns, seven eyes), possesses Spirit’s fullness, is slain, has power, is accounted worthy, is a messianic figure and is ontologically related to God. See J. Daryl Charles, “Apocalyptic Tribute,” 463.

⁸⁰ Resseguie *The Revelation*, 105-106; Beale *The Book of Revelation*, 316-317.

⁸¹ Cf. 1.10; 17.3; 21.10.

Chapter 5 breaks into four units as well, marked off by *and I saw* (καὶ εἶδον), covering 5.1; 5.2-5; 5.6-10 and 5.11-14.⁸² Here the first segment draws John's attention to the sealed book (τὸ βιβλίον) in the hand of the One sitting upon the throne.⁸³ The book must have great importance⁸⁴ for it becomes the focus of the next event. The cry of the angel in the second part highlights the significance of the book and the crisis in the heavenly court. There is need for someone that is worthy to open the book. The Lamb is revealed in the third division of the chapter as the one who meets the dual criteria of both being worthy and able. The fourth unit, as in chapter 4, contains the hymnic pericope.

Resseguie sees the plot both here and in the narrative as a whole, as following a U-shaped structure. This is the standard shape of comedy, in the sense that the plot begins at a stable situation, then misfortunes bring the action to a low point, which is resolved and then the plot moves back toward a stable resolution.⁸⁵ His view is that God and Christ represent the top of the U, being the stable part.⁸⁶ In other words, the heavenly realm and its point of view, is one of peace and stability. Everything in heaven is calm, tranquil, and in order. The throne, with the concentric circles of living creatures, elders, and the angelic multitude reflect the order of a world under God's

⁸² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 329 sees only three units, subsuming the second “καὶ εἶδον” into the first.

⁸³ Prigent, (*Apocalypse*, 242) rightly observes the fact that the book is in the hand of God, and thus presented by Him, underscores the idea that message is related to the person of God Himself. Stefanovic, (*Revelation*, 200), argues that the phrase ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν indicates that the scroll was set on the right side of God.

⁸⁴ What the scroll represents has been much discussed. See below under narrative details.

⁸⁵ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 166.

⁸⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 45.

control. It is a perfect scene and in this way determines how the reader reads the remaining chapters.⁸⁷

Charles paints a similar picture. He describes John's entrance into the heavenly realm as a movement from the "failures, troubles" and dark outlook of this earth into an "atmosphere of perfect assurance and peace."⁸⁸ Not for a moment is there the slightest question or mistrust in the heavenly host.⁸⁹ It is an image that conveys the idea that heaven is above the fray of earthly turmoil.

As one encounters the scenes in Revelation for the first time, this dominant understanding of the plot appears to harmonize with the flow of the narrative. However, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, both the strength of Satan's deceptive role, and the war that began in heaven, must be allowed to influence how one reads the entire story. Satan's slanderous attacks and his incessant confrontation with God's government is the substructure on which Revelation is built. On this reading, John's movement into heaven is not to provide a contrast between the earthly toil and the heavenly peace.

Rather, the conflict theme underscores the truth that the tumultuous "conditions on earth can only be understood in the light of the war that began in heaven."⁹⁰ Therefore it is the conflict that originated in heaven, and the understanding that this conflict began with one of the foremost members of the heavenly council, that should provide the framework for determining how one reads the remaining chapters. Sensitized by a close reading of the entire narrative, the IR would

⁸⁷ Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 175.

⁸⁸ Charles *Revelation I*, xxvi.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁹⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 118.

understand that the war had its beginnings among angelic beings (12.7-9). The movement to heaven is not simply to a place of “perfect assurance and peace,” but also the place where the cosmic war began. In commenting on chapter 5, the second part of the diptych, A. Yarbro Collins contends that this section presupposes Satan’s rebellion against God. “In the context of the Apocalypse as a whole, it is clear that the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth.”⁹¹ If this interpretation is correct, there should be elements in the diptych and the hymnic pericopes within it, which support this judgment.

Narrative Details

A close reading of the narrative does indeed uncover numerous literary connections that encourage the reader to allow the heavenly conflict to form the framework of interpretation. First, there are the *thematic connections* that link chapters 4 and 5 with chapters 12 and 13, and the resulting impact these pivotal chapters have on the following storyline.⁹² Fekkes notes the many links that comprise a literary connection between the two units and concludes, “Rev. 12 and 13 are apparently to be understood as the antithetic parallel to chapters 4-5.”⁹³ He bases this conclusion on a number of conceptual associations among the four chapters.

The counterpoints of the dragon, the sea-beast, and the earth-beast as the parody or false triumvirate to be compared with the One on the throne, the Lamb, and

⁹¹ A. Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39.

⁹² A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 40-42, underscores the importance of the parallel between the function of the visions (chs. 4 and 5 and ch. 12) serving as a backdrop for what follows. There is a counterpart between the Lamb’s worthiness in chapter 5 and His victory in chapter 12. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation* (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 66, cites the comparative themes between the two sections as evidence of the literary skill with which Revelation was written. Thompson, *Revelation*, 40 calls the imagery of chapter 13 the “polar opposite” to the imagery in chapters 4 and 5.

⁹³ Fekkes *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 83 note 50.

the seven-fold spirit are well noted.⁹⁴ In addition to this, is the strong verbal thread *slain* (5.6; 13.3) connecting the two sections. Both the Lamb and the sea-beast are slain but still live, implying a resurrection⁹⁵ that calls forth the universal acclaim that is given to both the Lamb and the beast (5.12,13; 13.3). The text contains a close identification of the beast with the dragon (13.4), which is a reflection of the intimate relation between the Christ and God. The Lamb receives the scroll from the One on the throne, and therefore receives power (5.7, 12). The sea-beast receives power and a place on the throne of the dragon (13.2).

Fekkes also underlines that both sections focus on the presentation of an agent (5.5,6; 13.1). Both agents receive authority to function and participate on the throne of their benefactor (5.6; 13.2). Finally a hymn (13.4b) is used to strengthen the contrast between Christ and the sea-beast.⁹⁶ The hymn posits a contrast between the two characters and the sources of their authority. This short hymn is in correspondence to the larger hymnic section in chapter 5. On the basis of this juxtaposition, there is justification for reading the hymns as a reaction against the sea-beast, and this

⁹⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 591; Roloff, *Revelation* 190; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 409.

⁹⁵ A widespread interpretation understands the text that describes the beast's survival of its deadly wound to refer to Nero's death and rumors of his expected resurrection, or perhaps to the fact that he did not really die and would mount an attempt to retake Rome. See Roloff, *Revelation* 156-157; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 188; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation* 13-14; Martin Kiddle and M. K. Ross, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder, 1963), 244-45; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy* 407-30; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 737-40; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 176-177; John J. Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles of Egyptian Judaism*, Society of Bib Lit Diss series 13 (Missoula, Mt: Scholars, 1974) 80-87. Also Tacitus *Histories* 1.2, 2.8-9; Suetonius *Nero* 47-50; Dio Cassius 63.9.3, 66.19.3. See Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation* 30-33 for the weaknesses of this view. This interpretation with its stress on Nero, has been called a "modern scholarly construction" in Jan Willem van Henten, "Nero Redivivus Demolished: The Coherence of the Nero Traditions in the Sibylline Oracles," *JSP* 11, no. 21 (2000), 3. Van Henten sees no evidence for this interpretation, particularly in regard to the Sibylline Oracles. Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 184), contends that this interpretation fails to fit the import of Revelation's narrative. Resseguie, (*Revelation Unsealed* 56), raises the questions "In what way is Nero the consummate opponent of Christ? How does Nero share the power, authority and throne of the dragon" seeing he is deposed and dead? The strength of the imagery points toward the controversy theme in Revelation, rather than the putative return of Nero.

⁹⁶ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 83.

response naturally extends to the power behind it, which is the dragon.⁹⁷ The acclamations of the diptych find a “distorted counterpart” in the scenes in chapter 13. The parallels between these two sections help define the “composition of the book,”⁹⁸ and places the heavenly conflict in the front for interpretation. As Fekkes points out, the issue facing the readers of Revelation is not merely political nor is it only a local situation that is under consideration. Rather it is “spiritual, suprahistorical, and part of the ongoing struggle between God and Satan, and their followers.”⁹⁹

Secondly, the *image of the throne* also places the conflict theme in the foreground. This has been mentioned above, under the consideration of the setting. Nevertheless it bears reiterating that the throne imagery conveys the concept of the heavenly court¹⁰⁰ and the underlying assaults on God’s rule of the universe. These attacks are the result of Satan’s determined slander over the way God’s rules. While earthly emperors may lay claim to obedience and fealty on the part of their subjects, the image of the throne points to a greater conflict. This conclusion is strengthened by the dramatic use of the throne throughout the narrative.

The narrative ends with the throne distinctly identified as belonging to God and the Lamb (22.1,3.) In a world free of sin and without any curse, their united rule extends into eternity. This highlights once again the connection between God and

⁹⁷ Carnegie, (*Worthy is the Lamb*, 256), notes that the hymn in 13.4b has connections with the pericopes in chapters 4 and 5. He also considers whether the hymn in 13.4b reflects on the imperial cult and poses the question as to whether or not the hymns are intended to counter this. He recognizes that it is “precarious” to conclude from similar terminology in Martial and Statius that some reflection on the imperial cult is John’s intent. Schimanowski, (“Connecting Heaven and Earth”, 76), also sees the connection between the hymnic pericope under discussion and the opposition they portray to the beast and the dragon.

⁹⁸ Roloff, *Revelation*, 155.

⁹⁹ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 83.

¹⁰⁰ Aune’s influential article on the role of the imperial court on the background for this scene highlights God’s role as ruler within the divine court. The author’s dependence on this imagery is debatable, yet the imagery of the throne and its connection to the divine council is well grounded. See Aune, “Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 18,19.

Christ, underscoring that what the Lamb does, God does.¹⁰¹ Their sharing of the throne represents the unity of action between them. The throne imagery not only invokes the disputed territory, but points to the way in which that territory is secured. The accusations and slander of the dragon are overcome through the sacrifice of the Lamb.¹⁰²

The throne, and the One sitting upon it, becomes the only remaining image in the final judgment and John forcibly makes it the sole object of attention. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away and no place was found for them” (20.11). This movement underlines the vindication of the One sitting on the throne as the “fabric of the universe dissolves as if to leave no competing point of reference.”¹⁰³ Thus the central role that the throne plays in this section, also points to the spiritual battle that forms Revelation’s foundation.

A third line of evidence for linking the pericope to the conflict theme is found in a *grammatical connection* that chapters 4 and 5 have with the book of Ezekiel.¹⁰⁴ Tonstad focuses on the unwieldy grammatical construction ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου (4.6) and explores what is meant by the phrase “in the middle.”¹⁰⁵ Spatially, it has the meaning of near, or in the vicinity of the throne.¹⁰⁶ Yet this does not exhaust its

¹⁰¹ Guthrie, *The Lamb*, 66.

¹⁰² Bauckham, *Theology*, 63, highlights that what Christ is said to accomplish, God does as well.

¹⁰³ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 118.

¹⁰⁴ Witherington, *Revelation*, 116; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 316 and many other commentators recognize John’s use of Ezekiel.

¹⁰⁵ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 119-121.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 121 note 49; See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 137.

linguistic overtones. While the events unfolding in Revelation's diptych occur in the vicinity of the throne, there is also another image being conveyed.

The LXX uses similar phraseology in translating Ezek. 1.4 and 28.14, 16. In the first reference, Ezekiel describes, "a great cloud with fire flashing forth continually and a bright light around it, and in its midst something like glowing metal in the midst of the fire." The NASB translation "glowing metal" is apparently based in part by the LXX translation of ἠλέκτρον (which would indicate a metal of high brilliance) for the Hebrew לְמַשְׁכָּה.¹⁰⁷ This burning imagery is a reflection of the divine presence (1.27). Ezekiel's introductory vision indicates that events he sees, are occurring in the middle, that is, in God's presence (ἐν τῷ μέσῳ αὐτοῦ LXX).

The reappearance of this phrase in the poem that describes the covering cherub underscores its significance. The cherub walked "in the midst of the stones of fire." He was also destroyed from "the midst of the stones of fire" (ἐν μέσῳ λίθων πυρίνων, Ezek. 28.14 LXX). Tonstad notes that Ezekiel's first vision, and this poem travel over similar territory, "in both instances attention is riveted on the fiery middle." He concludes that Ezekiel's plot also conditions Revelation's storyline. Ezekiel's story discusses the covering cherub, who once was part of the "privileged circle"-- *in the midst* as it were, but from Revelation's view, is no longer there.¹⁰⁸ This absence is picked up by the larger connotations of John's unwieldy "in the midst and around the throne." There is someone who is conspicuous by his absence. It was from the privileged position "in the midst" that the covering cherub first engaged in his work of deception and rebellion, seeking to supplant God's government.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, Francis, Edward Robinson, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, and Francis Brown. *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1979), 365 "shining substance."

¹⁰⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 121.

A fourth narrative consideration that contributes to an understanding of the plot is the *tension within the heavenly council* evidenced in chapter 5. This tension arises in relation to the seven-sealed scroll (5.1) and the search for someone who is worthy to open it (5.2,3). The scope of those involved, extending to every part of creation accentuates the point that the issue confronting the divine council is of great importance.¹⁰⁹

While this is clearly a moment of great consequence in the divine council, not all of the details are transparent in their meaning. In particular, the scroll has generated much discussion as to its origin, contents, and function.¹¹⁰ Alan S. Bandy, while not venturing to specifically identify the scroll, does examine its function within the narrative. Noting the OT parallels (Ezek. 2.9-10; Dan. 12.4) of the scroll's lamentation, mourning, and woe he deduces that the scroll has a connection with divine judgment. The description of the scroll being sealed supports his reasoning.¹¹¹ He concludes that it must be some form of legal document that is "only accessible to the authorized recipient."¹¹² It is the search for that recipient that raises the tension within the divine council.

¹⁰⁹ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 167.

¹¹⁰ Helpful overviews are found in Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 344-346; Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 125-128; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 242-245; Osborne, *Revelation*, 249-250; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 127-128; Stefanovic *Revelation*, 205-206. A fuller treatment can be found in Morton, *Once Upon The Throne*, 138-149. Most agree that the book should be understood as a scroll not a codex, Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse 22*; Caird, *The Revelation 70*; Charles, *Revelation I*, 136. Aune divides possible interpretations into two broad categories; those relating the eschatological events unfolded in the remainder of Revelation and those interpretations that relate the scroll to a broader significance, such as a book of destiny, the book of life, a record of humanities sins etc. The thesis for this study, could harmonize with many of the interpretations suggested, as long as the cosmic conflict remains in the central position that it holds within Revelation itself. Uniting the rebellion theme with a specific interpretation, J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) sees the scroll as the title deed to creation forfeited by sin in Genesis, 112.

¹¹¹ Bandy, *Lawsuit*, 193.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 194.

The next scene (“and I saw” 5.2) focuses John’s attention on a strong angel who fulfills the function of a herald for the divine council. With a loud voice the angel places a question before the entire universe: “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” (5.2b). The question is asked in a reverse manner from which the task could be accomplished. The seals must be broken before the book can be opened. This technique heightens the expectation for the reader.¹¹³ John’s emphasis on the absence of anyone within the entire universe as being worthy compounds the sense of crisis. “And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.” John’s personal expression of anguish at the loss of anyone who is worthy to open the book serves to increase the discomfort for the reader.

The verbal thread “worthy” occurs seven times in Revelation. The first and last uses describe polar opposites. In 3.4 it is the faithful in Sardis that are worthy to walk with Christ. In 16.6 it is the unrighteous that are worthy to drink blood for their part in the martyrdom of the saints. The remaining five occurrences are found in this section (4.11; 5.2, 4, 9, 12, 16.) Gottfried Schimanowski sees the expression as representing the leitmotiv of the passage.¹¹⁴ The verbal connection between the first hymnic pericope and the second demonstrates that the worthiness of the One sitting on the throne is paramount to the heavenly council. God’s worthiness is connected to the worthiness of the one who can open the scroll. As Boring observes, the “figures of God and Christ flow into each other.”¹¹⁵ Seen from this perspective, Tonstad is

¹¹³ Resseguie identifies several places within the narrative in which John employs this literary device called *hysteron-proteron* or last-first, *Revelation Unsealed*, 116.

¹¹⁴ Schimanowski, “Connecting Heaven and Earth,” 73. He also explores the origin of the expression, recognizing the traditional understanding that it derives from a dependence on ruler proclamations. He disagrees, arguing for the primacy of the *Hekhalot* literature, although recognizing that these texts are late, 73-74.

¹¹⁵ Boring, “Narrative Christology,” 709.

correct in his conclusion that God’s worthiness, proclaimed in the first hymn, “stands or falls with the...perceived worthiness of the Lamb (5.6).”¹¹⁶

In sum, the thematic links between the diptych and chapters 12 and 13; the dominance of the throne imagery; grammatical links to Ezekiel’s vision concerning the fallen cherub; and the narrative tension all support Yarbrow Collins’ observation that “the problem facing the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth.”¹¹⁷ Our next step in this investigation is to consider the details of the hymnic sections and explore whether they support the thesis that the hymns contribute to an understanding of the conflict theme in Revelation.

Hymnic Pericope (4.8-11)¹¹⁸

καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἐν καθ’ ἐν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνά πτέρυγας ἕξ κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν καὶ ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες

ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος
κύριος ὁ θεὸς
ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (4.8)

This pericope contains two hymns that are arranged in an antiphonal manner. The four living creatures, in a continual refrain that acknowledges the holiness of God, sing the first hymn. John describes the continuity of their singing by using the expression “day and night they do not cease to say...” The ongoing character of their worship is highlighted by the verbal emphasis of “day and night” and “they do not

¹¹⁶ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 125.

¹¹⁷ Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39.

¹¹⁸ While the role the conflict theme plays in Revelation and its impact upon an understanding of the hymns is an essential part of the thesis for this study, this is not meant to imply that the hymnic portions do not contain motifs that have echoes in other portions of Scripture. For example, praise for God’s creative ability is a recurrent strain throughout the OT. Nevertheless there are significant points of contact between the hymns and the conflict theme within Revelation itself that have either been ignored or underplayed. This study is an attempt to provide a corrective to that lack.

cease” (ἀνάπαυσιν οὐκ). Both of these phrases are repeated in 14.11, where those who follow the beast and his image are said to have no rest (οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν), “day and night.”¹¹⁹ There is also another illustration of a constant activity in the narrative, and that is found in the hymn at 12.10. There, Satan is described as playing the role of the accuser, “day and night” before God. In these passages, the strength of the parallel imagery is evident. As the four living creatures are before the throne worshiping day and night (4.10), so too Satan is before God, accusing day and night.¹²⁰ A close reading of the passage demands that the praise within the hymn be set against the backdrop of accusations that are unremittingly repeated in the heavenly courts.

The hymn is built on a triadic formula, with each of the three lines containing three parts.¹²¹ It is reminiscent of Isaiah’s vision of the heavenly temple (Isa. 6.1-3) with the seraphim calling out the triad of “holy, holy, holy.”¹²² Holiness is a distinct attribute of God in Revelation. In the hymn found in 15.4, the song claims that God only is holy, (μόνος ὁσιος). Although that hymn uses a synonym, both passages secure God’s unique right to holiness. In the Isaiah passage, God’s holiness is brought out in distinction to the uncleanness of the prophet (Isa. 6.5). John utilizes the song of holiness as part of his theological substructure.¹²³ Being the first description in this

¹¹⁹ As part of the larger conflict theme, it is important to keep in mind that those who give allegiance to the beast are ultimately giving their allegiance and worship to the dragon (13.3,4).

¹²⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 332.

¹²¹ Horn, “Hymns as Summaries,” 34; Altenbaumer, “Salvation Myth,” 43. Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 112), argues that only the first and last stanzas are truly formed in a triadic manner. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that he also identifies “three” as being associated with either the divine or the counterfeit divine in the narrative of Revelation.

¹²² Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 145. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 302-306, for a fuller discussion of the use of the phrase in both Jewish and Christian literature. Altenbaumer, (“Salvation Myth,” 93), notes that this trisagion, first used by Isaiah is picked up by other texts from 1 Enoch to 1 Clement. John’s use is the first distinctly Christian usage.

¹²³ Fekkes, (*Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 146), notes this as well, confining it to God’s judgment on an evil society and people. This is clearly part of the overall picture, but the power behind the evil in society is also addressed in the storyline.

hymn, holiness “pushes all the action which follows” both in the hymns and the storyline.¹²⁴ As Fekkes writes, the revelation of God’s holiness is “more than simply a statement of being—it is a basis for action.”¹²⁵ At the end of the story, there will be no place in the holy city for anything unclean (21.27). Finally, God’s holiness will overcome all evil. Yet the issue of *how* that will be accomplished is part of John’s larger concern. As G. B. Caird pointedly asks: “Is God then to vindicate his holiness by destroying all that he has made?” “How can God assert his sovereign power over a sinful world without denying either his holiness or his creative purpose?”¹²⁶

In the light of the larger storyline, it is the lack of action that has called forth this serious question. In 6.10, the question over God’s holiness is raised in connection with His apparent inability to respond to evil. The expansive freedom enjoyed by those who oppose God, prompts the question “when will God act?” The issues brought out under the fifth seal and the relevance to the theodicy theme in Revelation have been explored more fully in the previous chapter. There is a suggestion of accusation and bewilderment, as God appears to be refusing to clear His own name and defend His people. ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν conveys a sense of wonder at God’s refusal to put an end to evil, thus compromising His holiness.¹²⁷ The first hymn with its threefold mention of God’s holiness is not only an ascription of His essential nature. The song is an

¹²⁴ Altenbaumer, “Salvation Myth,” 94.

¹²⁵ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 147. Fekkes develops the need of holiness in God’s followers in the continuing pages.

¹²⁶ Caird, *The Revelation*, 68-69.

¹²⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 148; Kensky, “Divine Courtroom,” 322, and see the section on this passage in the previous chapter.

affirmation that despite the accusatory questions over God's character, the heavenly council recognizes His inherent holiness.

Isaiah's hymn is altered to reflect the different concerns of this context. While the connections between the two passages are strong (six winged creatures, the throne vision, antiphonal singing) the differences are also significant. The first change is found in the second stanza. Where Isaiah has "the Lord of hosts"¹²⁸ John writes "the Lord God, the Almighty."¹²⁹ This phrase, in a variety of forms, is used seven times in Revelation. It is found as part of God's direct speech (1.8), and included in the songs sung by the living creatures (4.8), the twenty-four elders (11.17), the victors over the beast (15.3), and the great multitude (19.6). It is echoed by the voice from the altar (16.7) and by John as Revelation's narrator (21.22).¹³⁰ The descriptor "Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ)¹³¹ clearly denotes God's ultimate power and authority. The full expression carries with it the fact that there is no authority that can rival the authority of God.¹³² This is an acclamation of God's "unlimited power and control over history" and a reminder that evil does not ultimately rule.¹³³ Yet it must be remembered that Revelation's larger story describes one who attempts to overthrow God's position. That Satan ultimately fails does not minimize the deceptive strength

¹²⁸ Davis, (*Heavenly Court*, 159), underscores the equivalency between the Hebrew Adonai Yahweh and John's phrase, Lord God. The Almighty is the usual LXX equivalent for Lord of Hosts, except in the book of Isaiah. These similarities cause him to see these phrases as generally equivalent.

¹²⁹ The combination of "Lord" and "God" has frequently been assessed as parodying the similar usage within the imperial cult. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 310-316. For a contrary assessment see Thompson, *Revelation*, 104-107.

¹³⁰ In addition, Almighty is found in 16.14 and 19.15. It is only found in 2 Cor. 6.18 outside of Revelation. Davis, (*Heavenly Court*, 159), argues that each occurrence of the full phrase is found (with one exception) within a judgment setting. It also occurs in the LXX, cf. Amos 3.13; 4.13; 5.14-16 etc.

¹³¹ Found in God's self-speech, the word is more than a title, but "the last word about God." See Horn, "Hymns as Summaries," 114.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 113.

of his attacks. The voice of acclamation needs to be heard against the voice of accusation that was previously vocalized in the heavenly court, in which Satan insinuated questions about the inherent “rightness” of God’s rule.

This perspective is strengthened by the unusual turn the hymn takes. Instead of following Isaiah’s expression, “the whole earth is filled with his glory,” here is the third triad, “who was, and who is, and who is to come.” The absence of Isaiah’s phrase has prompted varying responses from commentators.¹³⁴ Swete considers that the phrase simply didn’t fit John’s purposes.¹³⁵ Stephen Smalley argues that the change reflects the inappropriateness of a comment focusing on the earth, while the song is sung in heaven.¹³⁶ However, Harris, in his study on the hymns in Revelation concludes that the rewriting shows that Revelation’s narrative world is in a state of rebellion. It is not now, “full of his glory,” rather it is in a state of depravity.¹³⁷ This world is not now one that “manifests the goodness of God’s creation.”¹³⁸ Fekkes also sees a theological purpose behind the change. This world cannot be called “full of God’s glory,” but must wait for the time when all that is unholy is removed.¹³⁹ David Mathewson views the change as contextually appropriate because God’s glory will only fill the earth in the future,¹⁴⁰ after the final destruction of Satan and his allies.

¹³⁴ It is of interest that several other texts that utilize Isaiah’s saying, keep the expression that the earth is full of His glory. See 2 En 21:1; 4 Bar 9:3; 1 Clem 34:6 in Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, quoted by Altenbaumer, “Salvation Myth,” 93.

¹³⁵ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 73. The expression would be “less appropriate in a tribute of praise which is offered in heaven.”

¹³⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 122.

¹³⁷ Harris, “Literary Function,” 290.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³⁹ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 149. Jörns *Hymnische Evangelium*, 29-31.

¹⁴⁰ David Mathewson, “Isaiah in Revelation” In *Isaiah in the New Testament*, ed. by Steve Moyise and M. J. J. Menken, (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 191.

Revelation gives the reason for the world's current state of turmoil. It has its origins in the war that began in heaven, with deceit, slander, and accusations being the primal weapons.

The final triad (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) has drawn attention both for its unwieldy grammatical construction¹⁴¹ and its use within the narrative. A similar expression is found in 1.4 (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) and 1.8 (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) while a shortened version appears in 11.17 (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν) and 16.5 (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν). This last truncation could represent the idea that the eschatological aspect of God's coming has reached a fulfillment at those points in the narrative. It is possible that the final phrase in the triad "who is to come" (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) is not intended to be equivalent to "who shall be." In other words, the author is not proposing to describe the abstract existence of God as covering the future no less than the past and present. If this had been his meaning, he would have written, "which shall be."¹⁴² Nevertheless, Davis argues that the expression is equivalent to the Hebrew verb "to be" which is the basis for the divine name (Ex. 3.14).¹⁴³ Both sides of this discussion need to take into account the way the narrative connects the designation with the conflict theme. The beast, in opposition to God, is described in a similar triad. The beast "was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss" (ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου). This is mentioned twice in

¹⁴¹ Horn, "Hymns as Summaries," 37; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 46; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 32.

¹⁴² Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament Vol. II, the Writings of John, the Gospels, the Epistles, the Apocalypse*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1946), 412-413. Martin sees the last phrase as pointing to God's immutability. It does not refer so much to an abstract point of existence, but rather God's coming to confirm His covenant promises in the person of Christ in the once-for-all eschatological coming. This as well highlights the important connection of seeing God's activity in Christ. See also Morton, *Once Upon The Throne*, 113; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 332-333.

¹⁴³ Davis, *Heavenly Court*, 160; Also Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 126. Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 113), writes that it does characterize God's transcendence, and stresses God's eternity.

chapter 17, both times with the added qualifier that he goes into destruction (17.8,11). There is a connection between the triad describing God's eternal being, and the triad used to identify the temporary nature of His adversary. Once again, seen within the larger context of Revelation's storyline, the hymn alludes to the broader theodicy theme and the role that the opposition plays within the text. The concern over God's holiness, the titles that connect to God's opponent in Revelation, and the absence of the Isaianic statement of the earth being filled with God's glory, all connect the hymn with Revelation's larger concerns.

καὶ ὅταν δώσουσιν τὰ ζῶα δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων
 πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ βαλοῦσιν τοὺς στεφάνους αὐτῶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου λέγοντες (4.9-10)

The focus of the remainder of the chapter centers on the twenty-four elders and their song of adoration. Verses 9 and 10 serve as a link from the first hymn to the one found in 4.11. It is within this chorus sung by the elders that the theme of worthiness, which plays a central role in chapter 5, is first raised. Once again the text contains grammatical irregularities that divide scholars and impact interpretation. The issues turn on the proper translation of ὅταν (4.9) and the way the series of future verbs δώσουσιν, πεσοῦνται, προσκυνήσουσιν, and βαλοῦσιν (4.10) are to be understood. Should ὅταν be translated as “whenever” giving a timeless sense of the scene,¹⁴⁴ or translated as “when” referring to a specific time? Translations such as the ESV and the NIV favor the former, while the NASB favors the latter.

¹⁴⁴ Swete, *Apocalypse*, 73; Charles, *Revelation I*, 127; Jon Paulien, "The Seven Seals" in *Symposium on Revelation--Book I*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook. Vol. 6, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 215.

Robert Mounce argues that the imagery is one of continual worship, and thus the adverb ὅταν should be translated as “whenever.”¹⁴⁵ Mounce’s assumption is that the report of the living creatures giving glory, honor, and thanks is an event identical with the singing of the trisagion in verse 8b, and that the following scene of worship by the elders is also a continual, ongoing experience. However, the future tense of the verbs in verses 9 and 10, argue against this conclusion.¹⁴⁶ While there is not unanimity of opinion of this point, several commentators have seen the force of this argument. Beale stresses that the combination of ὅταν plus the future tense of the verbs directs the reader to consider a future event, namely the worship scene that occurs in 5.8-13.¹⁴⁷ Ardea Russo¹⁴⁸ refers to G. Mussies, who, noting the use of ὅταν in 8.1 (“*When the Lamb broke the seventh seal*”), understands the passage as referring to an action in the future.¹⁴⁹ Read in this way, the section is not describing a repeating liturgy in heaven, but an event that takes place at a specific point in the vision.¹⁵⁰ Mathewson sees “grammaticalizing expectation” at work in the passage. Working off of the verbal aspect theory developed by Porter, Fanning, and others, Mathewson explains that the Greek future tense contains the semantic idea of expectation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁵ Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 126. See Osborne *Revelation*, 238, for a similar view.

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, *The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax*, sees this as a Hebraism reflecting an imperfect and thus should be read as a past event, 45. Ford, (*Christology*, 214) cites Jörens, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 28 as looking to a future event.

¹⁴⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 334.

¹⁴⁸ Russo, *Heavenly Worship*, 173.

¹⁴⁹ G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek, as used in the Apocalypse of St. John; a Study in Bilingualism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 342-347.

¹⁵⁰ Russo, *Heavenly Worship*, 174; see also Krodell, *Revelation*, 158.

¹⁵¹ David Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John's Apocalypse*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 37. Verbal aspect theory understands that the verb tense indicates the author’s conception of a viewpoint of the action, rather than the familiar time or type of action generally explained in Greek grammars.

Therefore, the collection of future tense verbs in 4.10, points to a process that occurs “when” the living creatures “give” glory to God. The future forms show what can be expected to occur *when the condition is fulfilled*. The imagery does not point to a timeless experience, but a specific event. The reference includes, but is not limited to 5.8-14.¹⁵²

The importance of this point is to tie together the hymn found in 4.11 and its ascription to the worthiness of God, with the larger question in the storyline as to who is worthy to open the book. The singing of this hymn needs to be heard in the setting of the question raised in 5.2. This reinforces the notion stated above that the worthiness of the One sitting on the throne is the central issue before the heavenly council. God’s worthiness has been contested by the accusations of Satan. In his attempt to subvert God’s rule, he has deceptively insinuated questions about God’s character. In Revelation’s broader storyline, Christ reveals God’s rule throughout the universe. God’s worthiness is connected to the worthiness of the one who can open the scroll.

The grammaticalized expectation draws the reader to the theodicy theme as well. The expected event, that the twenty-four elders “*will fall down* before Him who sits on the throne, and *will worship* Him who lives forever and ever and *will cast their crowns* before the throne...” as they sing their hymn points to their recognition of God’s rightful rule and the resolution to the issue of identifying who is *worthy* to occupy the throne. Their actions take place *when* the living creatures give glory to God. In this context, the importance of the elders is found in the acts that they

¹⁵² Ibid., 113. Mathewson points to other sections in Revelation in which the elders worship, albeit at times without the specific mention of the living creatures (7.11; 19.4; 11.16).

perform.¹⁵³ They relinquish their position on their thrones, fall in worship before God, and place their crowns before Him. It is in this setting, that they sing their hymn of adoration.

The actions of the elders are frequently interpreted against the background Roman vassalage. Gallusz quotes Gregory Stevenson as an example of this perspective.

In antiquity a common sign of vassalage was the taking off of the diadem (symbol of royalty) by the conquered ruler and the placing of that diadem at the feet of the conqueror (Cicero, *Sest.* 27; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29). The performance of the elders should be understood as an imitation of such an act of subordination.¹⁵⁴

This perspective may indeed comprise part of the background from which John draws. However, the plot of Revelation points in another direction that deserves consideration as well, as it forms the natural setting from which to draw an interpretive stance. Any interpretation of the repeated action of the elders in relinquishing their position on their thrones (4.10; 5.8, 14; 11.16; 19.4) needs to be sensitized by the controversy inherent in the throne imagery within Revelation.¹⁵⁵ The backdrop is the one who said in his heart “I will ascend into heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly” (Isa. 14.13). The surrender of their thrones by the elders must be seen as countering the one in the council who longed to place his throne above God’s. These acts of worship are in contrast to the counterfeit worship at play in the story (13.8,12). The dimension that

¹⁵³ In John’s “mind the function of the elders was far more important than...their identity.” See Gallusz, “Throne Motif,”202.

¹⁵⁴ Gallusz, “Throne Motif,” 203. See Gregory M. Stevenson "Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:4, 10; 14:14." *JBL* 114, no. 2 (1995): 268-269. Also Osborne, *Revelation*, 204; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 58; Aune *Revelation 1-5*, 308-309.

¹⁵⁵ Another possible aspect of this would be to see the crowned locusts (9.7) as a kind of parallel to the twenty-four elders. See Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 82.

must be kept in view, is that behind any earthly manifestation of this counterfeit worship, is the arch-deceiver who is persistent in his work of undermining God's authority. Instead of participating in that rebellion, the throne-seated members of the heavenly council acclaim God's rightful rule by the action of vacating their thrones.¹⁵⁶

The act of casting off of their crowns supports this observation as well. In Revelation, the diadem is frequently identified with a symbol of royalty, while the wreath-crown (στέφανος) is seen as a sign of either victory or royalty. However, Stevenson notes that the imagery of the στέφανος could carry four connotations, instead of the two given the usual attention.¹⁵⁷ Through an examination of relevant historical background, he adds divine glory and honor to the well-recognized illustrations of victory and royalty.

Wreaths were considered sacred to the gods and the possession of the crown represented the divine character. The Romans attributed the use of wreaths in their society to their gods. Thus, the crowns were called the "crown of the god" (τῷ του θεοῦ στεφάνω).¹⁵⁸ In a similar manner, gold was frequently considered an appropriate symbol of divinity. Thus a golden wreath could serve as a proof of one's deity.¹⁵⁹ Stevenson further argues that the imagery of the elders and their crowns expresses an association specifically with divine glory.¹⁶⁰ The removal of the crowns functions to demonstrate that whatever is symbolized with both the thrones and crowns, the elders

¹⁵⁶ The use of προσκυνέω within the narrative highlights the inherent conflict. Aside from the references in which John begins to worship an angel (19.10; 22.9) and an future reference to the submission of the wicked before the righteous, all the other uses in the storyline refer either to the worship of God and/or Jesus (4.10; 5.14; 7.11; 11.1, 16; 14.7; 15.4; 19.4, 10; 22.9) or the worship of the dragon or one of his subordinates (9.20; 13.4 (2x), 8, 12, 15; 14.9, 11; 16.2; 19.20; 20.4). Here the counterimaging of the two sides of the controversy is evident.

¹⁵⁷ Stevenson, "Golden Crown," 258.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 261.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 269.

recognize that this imagery belongs to God, not the dragon or his surrogates.¹⁶¹

If it were granted that there is a connection to divine glory in the crowns, the casting down of those crowns would be a further recognition that the elders do not see themselves as in anywise in contest with God. This forms a contrast to the Isaianic passage that stands behind part of John's imagery for filling out the character of Satan. In Isaiah 14.14 the expression "I will be like the Most High" gives evidence of the ultimate aim of the heavenly rebel. Satan's goal is to replace God as the object of worship, in this way promoting self-deification. That such deification is his intention is made explicit later in Revelation. It is through the adoration that the sea-beast receives, that Satan also is worshipped (13.4). The elders, on the other hand, recognize that there is one God and He is worthy of worship. The act of vacating their thrones illustrates their recognition that God is the rightful ruler. The act of casting off their crowns points to their recognition that God only is worthy of worship. Both acts are in direct contrast to the ultimate aims of Satan and any counterfeit claims to sovereignty.¹⁶²

The hymn that the elders sing contains direct speech toward God with an emphasis on His creative power. The four-line hymn contains an opening strophe that praises God's worthiness, and ends with a section introduced with a ὅτι clause that through synonymous parallelism emphasizes His creative ability.¹⁶³

ἄξιός εἰ ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν
λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν
ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα
καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν (4.11)

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 113.

¹⁶³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 309.

The acclamation that God is worthy is often seen as being drawn from Roman practice contemporaneous with the writing of Revelation. There is the possibility that the background is of political origin, drawn from an acclamation given to the emperor or one of his representatives upon entrance into a city.¹⁶⁴ This perspective is frequently united with the interpretation that the expression “our Lord and our God” functions as an antithetical reflection on the ascription of those titles to Roman emperors.¹⁶⁵ It is not necessary to deny any polemical references in the hymn, to also recognize that the acclamation of God’s worth does not in any way attribute to God what He did not already possess. The song does not impart to God honor, but is a recognition that He *is*, in fact, worthy.

The structure of the hymn connects it with the hymnic portions in the second panel of the diptych, which also focus on “worthiness,” thus pushing the boundary of meaning beyond political polemics. The hymn contains two progressive triads, one concerned with the ascriptions that God shall receive (glory, honor, power) and the second built on the verbs in the final strophe (you created, they were, they were created.) These triads echo the three-fold use of “worthy” in the broader context (4.11; 5.9; 5.12), and a triad that is built on the activity of the Lamb. He was “slain,” He “purchased,” and He “made.” Altenbaumer has demonstrated the interlinking nature of these hymnic portions.¹⁶⁶ His chart is reproduced below.

¹⁶⁴ Osborne *Revelation*, 240; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 236. Prigent recognizes the weaknesses of the evidence for this idea, though admits that it may harmonize with the contours of the text.

¹⁶⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 310; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 119; but see also Robert Alan Briggs, "A Backgrounds Investigation of the Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1996), 48-50 and Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 104-106 for a contrary view on the use of the phrase. Boxall, (*The Revelation*, 89), concludes that even if Domitian did not specifically claim the title or if Revelation was written at an earlier date, it is still possible to see a critique of the imperial cult.

¹⁶⁶ Altenbaumer, “Salvation Myth,” 43-45.

4.11 worthy are you...to receive
 a glory
 b honor
 c power
 you created...they were...they were created

5.9-10 worthy are you to receive
 you were slain...you purchased...you made

5.12 worthy is...to receive
 c' power
 wealth
 wisdom
 strength
 b' honor
 a' glory
 d blessing

The purpose for demonstrating this interweaving of themes within the hymnic sections of chapters 4 and 5 is to show that there is a natural unity, perhaps a chiasmic ordering between these passages. To attempt to understand the acclamation of God's worth without the broader narrational concerns forces the focus of interpretation into too narrow a view.

The hymn ascribing God's worthiness must be informed by the question that resonates in the heavenly council as to who is worthy to open the book (5.2) and that is finally answered in the hymn that declares that the Lamb is worthy. This interface between the Lamb's actions and God's actions is part of the subtext within the narrative. Any interpretation of the hymnic sections in this important diptych needs to be sensitized by the issue facing the heavenly council. The songs are not sung in isolation from the larger context. The question as to who is worthy to open the book points the reader to the problem confronting the court. The acclamation of worth by the elders presupposes the issue facing the divine assembly and their response to it. While the elders recognize God's worthiness, the great deceiver first denied this

claim. It took God's self-revelation in Christ to overcome Satan's misrepresentations. Heard in this way, the elders' song is a counterpoint to Satan's accusations.

God is said to be worthy to receive (λαβεῖν) the triad of glory, honor, and power. Honor is always linked with glory within Revelation (4.9, 11; 5.12, 13; 7.12; 21.26). Glory is ascribed both to Christ and God within Revelation's world (1.6-to Christ; 4.9,11-to God; 5.12-to the Lamb; 5.13-to both). The concept recurs frequently in the hymnic sections (4.11; 5.12,13; 7.12; 19.1). The importance of this theme is underscored by the universal command to "give God glory" (14.7), which is set in the context of warning against the worship of the beast and the ultimate refusal of the wicked to follow this command (16.9).¹⁶⁷ This dichotomy blends with the background question so pertinent to Revelation, "who is really worthy of worship?" The elders' ascription of glory to God is set against the work of the devil, who attempts to prohibit God from receiving His just due.

Glory and honor were joined with "thanksgiving" in the triad found in 4.9. In the song of the elders, power becomes the final element in the triad. This change draws attention to the last phrase and emphasizes its importance.¹⁶⁸ It is used frequently within the hymnic sections (4.11; 5.12;¹⁶⁹ 7.12; 11.17; 12.10; 19.1), and is ascribed both to God and Christ. Osborne notes the OT context for the idea of power, where a personal God demonstrated His ability to intervene in human history.¹⁷⁰ If the expression of being worthy to *receive power*, sounds cumbersome in English, it is easily understood in the Greek, as λαβεῖν has both the connotations of receiving and

¹⁶⁷ It appears that a temporary acknowledgement to God's glory is recognized by a group in 11.13.

¹⁶⁸ Jörns, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 37, Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 312.

¹⁶⁹ Note the synonym in 5.13 that is ascribed to both the Lamb and God.

¹⁷⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 241.

taking. A Greek hearer or reader would understand the expression as we might “to take power.”¹⁷¹ This reading is found in 11.17 where the hymn sung by the elders offers thanks to God because, “You have taken Your great power.”¹⁷²

The idea of power is an important theme in Revelation and will be more fully addressed under the discussion of the hymn portion in 5.12. Here it is sufficient to notice the verbal thread back to the controversy theme. In 13.2, the dragon is said to give his power to the sea-beast. Thus, as both God and the Lamb share power (4.11, 5.12), so too does the dragon and his surrogate. Power is particularly an attribute of the dragon and his two associates. In chapter 13, the expression is used seven times (13.2, 4, 5, 7, 12, 14, 15), more than any other single chapter in the book. This brings to the fore, one of the dominant questions confronting the reader, who is really worthy to receive power?

The final two lines of the hymn are in synonymous parallelism and emphasize God’s role as the creator.¹⁷³ There is a strong emphasis on God as the subject and all creation as the object. It is clear that there is a distinction between the One who created and the rest of the existing universe. The Greek expression is clearly difficult, as evidenced by the numerous corrections in critical footnotes.¹⁷⁴ Yet, the larger question that needs clarification is the function this ascription of God’s creative ability plays in the plot of Revelation. Why the emphasis on the willful aspect of creation and the universality of creation?¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Fee, *Revelation*, 74.

¹⁷² This translates the perfect indicative of λαμβάνω.

¹⁷³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 309; Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 113.

¹⁷⁴ Charles, *Revelation I*, 134. Osborne, (*Revelation*, 241-242), explores the difficulties and suggested resolutions to the concept that the existence of all things is stated before they were created. He argues that seeing an ABA pattern and not a chronological unfolding of creation is the simplest solution.

¹⁷⁵ Boring, *Revelation*, 107.

The theme of God as creator comes up repeatedly throughout the storyline. The emphasis on the intentionality of creation and its all-encompassing scope indicates the universal dimension of creation within the plot. Its importance is accentuated by its inclusion in one of the few places in which God speaks in Revelation's narrative. "And he who sits on the throne said, 'Behold I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true'" (21.5). This is perhaps the most important pronouncement in the book.¹⁷⁶ The definitive goal toward which the story has been moving is ultimately realized. The damage done by sin and its author, Satan, has been completely healed through the formation of the new creation.¹⁷⁷ Satan and those who joined him in his rebellion against God's government have been destroyed in the lake of fire. There is to be no more trace of sin. Revelation's sea, once the abode of the beast and a symbol of death and chaos, a reservoir of evil, no longer exists (21.1).¹⁷⁸ It is in this setting that God once again exercises His creative ability, and creates a new heaven and a new earth. Evil will no longer pose a threat to any part of the creation.

The verb "to create" also reappears in Rev. 10.6, where a strong angel swears an oath by the One "who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and things in it, and the sea and the things in it." The vow is a pronouncement that "there will be

¹⁷⁶ Krodel, *Revelation*, 348. It is important to note as well, the command to John to "write." Previously Jesus had given him this instruction; here it is God who so commands.

¹⁷⁷ That John views his book in light of the larger biblical concerns, is evident from his description of the tree of life and the statement that there will be no more curse, both of which draw the reader back to the Genesis account. See Rev. 22.1-4.

¹⁷⁸ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 252. For a broader examination of the meaning that the sea no longer exists, see Jonathan Moo "The Sea that is no More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John" *NT* 51, no. 2 (2009): 148-167. Moo reviews several interpretations, including the one followed above, and concludes that the removal of the sea represents the end of God's judgments against evil. The creation will no longer be called upon to bring destruction upon any power set against God (as in the flood and in the Exodus). Bauckham, (*Theology*, 53), has a similar view, and argues that the removal of the sea indicates that there will no longer be any threat of evil.

delay no longer” and that the “mystery of God is finished” at the sounding of the seventh angel (10.6,7). This is a declaration that God will soon take His rightful power and bring into being the fullness of His reign (11.17). The oath is in partial response to the poignant question of the martyrs, how long will it be before God acts?¹⁷⁹ In this way, God’s role as creator is once again linked with the conflict theme in Revelation.

Another noteworthy allusion to God’s creative power is found in 14.6. In this setting the first of three angels heralds a composite message designed to warn the inhabitants of the earth of the dangers of worshipping the sea-beast. These warning messages are in opposition to the death decree and coerced worship fomented by the sea-beast and the land-beast (13.15-17). The angelic messengers place the call to worship the creator in the context of the final judgment. There is a special directive to worship the one who made all things, set against the background of a forced and false worship promoted by the counterfeit trinity (cf. 14.9,10). This focuses the reader’s attention on the heart of the conflict within the storyline. Will the creature or creator receive worship?¹⁸⁰

It is not frequently noted,¹⁸¹ but the warning of the angel (14.6) contains a significant allusion to Exodus 20.11. The angelic proclamation, προσκυνήσατε τῷ ποιήσαντι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν (14.7), has an extremely close parallel, both conceptually and linguistically to the Sabbath commandment within the Decalogue. In the LXX of Ex. 20.11 is: ἐποίησεν κύριος τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ

¹⁷⁹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 214.

¹⁸⁰ Barr, *Tales of the End*, 129.

¹⁸¹ Numerous commentators, while noting other OT allusions, pass over this one without significant comment. Beale serves as an example, especially given his close attention to OT antecedents in the text. He sees analogous references in 14.7 to Acts 14.15, 18 and Dan. 4.34 but misses the clear reference to the Exodus 20.

τὴν θάλασσαν. This highlights God's distinctive claim to worship, as referenced in the commandments. He is the one who brought all things into existence and is therefore worthy of worship.

The hymnic acclamation of the elders is not set in isolation from John's larger narrational concerns. The themes that form the heart of the hymn are connected to the issues that comprise the central concerns of the controversy motif.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section was to examine the hymnic portion found in chapter 4, and then to explore its connections with the larger conflict theme woven throughout the rest of the book. If it is correct to say that the hymns function like a commentary on the events in the text,¹⁸² then it is appropriate to consider the text as a whole when drawing conclusions relating the meaning and role of the hymns. A common interpretation is to view this paradigmatic section as largely focused on God's sovereignty. However, there is good evidence for understanding the imagery as describing a sovereignty undermined or at the least, under attack. A variety of thematic and literary considerations combine to support this conclusion. A brief summary of this evidence will now be considered.

The first set of evidences revolves around the throne. This is the major prop or image in this section. It is admitted that this image lends itself naturally to the interpretation that sees God's rule and sovereignty as the central concern. However, it also raises the question as to *who* should be the one ruling. Revelation's larger narrational issues remind the reader that there is one who desires to place his throne above God's. Therefore, the throne is an image in dispute. The section also contains a

¹⁸² Witherington, *Revelation*, 118; Keener, *Revelation*, 171; Boring, *Revelation*, 107.

description of those around throne, drawing the reader to understand that the events are taking place in the setting of the divine council. The larger textual imagery places Satan within that divine court as an accuser. It must be recognized that his undermining and slanderous activities are part of the backdrop. The power of the divine crisis is evident from the description of chapter 5, where John is brought to intense weeping due to the lack of one who is worthy.

The parallel nature between chapters 4 and 5, with 12 and 13 supports a broader reading of the hymns. There are several thematic connections between the four chapters that demonstrate the two sections should inform each other. One cannot read the latter two chapters, without keeping in mind the action in the first two, but the opposite is also true. These opening central chapters need to be read in the light of the larger unfolding conflict theme. The content of the hymns themselves also contribute to the proposed reading. God's holiness is the focus of the first hymn yet in the larger narrative, God's holiness is questioned. Therefore the ascription needs to be understood against those inquiries that question whether God is acting in a manner consonant with holiness. In a similar manner, God's ability to create is placed in the setting of ultimately overcoming evil. *How* God overcomes evil is part of the larger story and is based on God's self-sacrificial revelation through Christ. This will be brought out more fully in the examination of the next hymnic pericope, 5.9-14.

Hymnic Pericope (5.9-14)

This section introduces a “new song”¹⁸³ sung by a combined chorus of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.¹⁸⁴ While other passages indicate a

¹⁸³ A new song is frequently mentioned in the OT, most often in the Psalms (33.3; 40.4; 96.1; 98.1; Isa 42.10). This is “newness” in relation to quality (καινός) and is a repeated theological theme in Revelation, so Jörens, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 48. καινός is something entirely different, new in nature

response of adoration and worship *after* a song (4.8, 9, 10; 5.14), this one shows that the chorus falls down (5.8) *before* singing the hymn.¹⁸⁵ This act of adoration is due to the power of the preceding verses. While the setting has been briefly reviewed above, it will be helpful to take a closer look at the context of the hymn, in order to help set the parameters for interpretation. This hymnic section is set in the report and resolution of tension facing the heavenly court.¹⁸⁶ Within this scene are three important considerations. These are: the search implied by the question broadcast throughout the universe; the uncertainty caused by the lack of response; and the answer ultimately given in the form of the slain Lamb.¹⁸⁷

The verbal thread “worthy” used in the last hymn is picked up in the second verse of the chapter, when the strong angel places the question of worthiness before the heavenly council. The focus is on who is worthy¹⁸⁸ to open the sealed scroll. The universal failure to find anyone who meets the qualification is bewildering.¹⁸⁹ The total silence in response to the question is conspicuous in a noisy book like Revelation. Certainly this is “a moment of greatest portent” in Revelation’s unfolding

TDNT, 3.447-449. The thread of a new song runs throughout the narrative, and is joined by those redeemed from the earth (14.1-5; 15.3,4).

¹⁸⁴ That both groups join in the song can be contested. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 357), notes that masculine ἔχοντες (having the harps and golden bowls) appears to refer back to the elders and not the living creatures, and thus the elders only would be the ones singing the new song. However, John is not strict in following the rules of concord. Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 120; Krodel, *Revelation*, 165; Roloff, *Revelation*, 80 see a combined chorus singing the hymn. Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 135 note 29), argues that even if the harps and bowls are restricted to the elders, the adoration in song could involve both groups.

¹⁸⁵ Jörns, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 47.

¹⁸⁶ Horn, “Hymns as Summaries,” 39.

¹⁸⁷ Morton, *Once Upon The Throne*, 134.

¹⁸⁸ Thompson, (*Revelation*, 94), sees in the idea of worthiness, a combination of moral integrity, legal standing, and physical strength.

¹⁸⁹ No one is found in heaven, on the earth or under it.

drama.¹⁹⁰ The result of this silence and the lack of anyone found worthy is that John weeps greatly. John apparently understands the importance of the question and the issue facing the council. However, one of the elders interrupts John's uncontrolled crying¹⁹¹ to inform him that there is one who has overcome, and implies that this overcoming, qualifies him for being worthy. The elder then combines two Messianic images, the Lion from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49.9) and the Root of David (Isa. 11.1, 10), to describe the mighty warrior who has overcome and thereby earned the right to open the scroll.

John then sees (καὶ εἶδον) located in the middle of the throne, the living creatures and the twenty-four elders, "a Lamb standing as if slain." The centrality of the location indicates that the Lamb is the focus of attention. As John looks for the emergence of the conquering Lion, he sees a slaughtered Lamb.¹⁹² This interplay of images indicates that the power of God is manifest through the self-sacrifice of the Lamb.¹⁹³ This commanding disclosure, that God's authority is displayed through a sacrificial death, causes the adoration to occur before the singing of the hymn.

The importance of this observation lies in the fact that it points to the method that God uses to establish His reign. The image that John sees, not only connects the Lamb with the attributes of deity,¹⁹⁴ more importantly, the image redefines omnipotence.

¹⁹⁰ Paul J. Achtemeier "Revelation 5:1-14" *Int* 40, no. 3 (1986), 284.

¹⁹¹ Charles, *Revelation I*, 139.

¹⁹² Leonard L. Thompson, "A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation in the Apocalypse of John" *Semeia* 36, (1986), 152, notes the irony of life given through death, and power displayed in the powerless.

¹⁹³ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation, Sacra Pagina Series*, (ed. by Daniel J. Harrington. Vol. 16. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993), 87. Krodell, *Revelation*, 164 states that death discloses *how* the Lamb conquers.

¹⁹⁴ The chapter, "Trinitarian Evidences in the Book of Revelation", in Woodrow W. Whidden, Jerry Moon, and John W. Reeve, *The Trinity: Understanding God's Love, His Plan of Salvation, and*

Omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love.¹⁹⁵

God's right to rule is questioned in the larger narrative structure, and that right cannot be enforced through sheer power. Given the importance that Revelation places on the effects of the deceptive nature of Satan's accusations, an overwhelming display of force would only serve to strengthen Satan's claims. If the slanderous mischaracterizations of God are to be overthrown at all, it must be through the discovery of the truth about God. This is the role that the slain Lamb serves. God is revealed, through the Lamb, as the self-sacrificial one. God's worthiness is inseparably connected with the worthiness of the Lamb, which is demonstrated through a conquering, that takes place through death.¹⁹⁶

The idea of conquering through death is an important theme in the book. If the Lamb is the key Christological noun in Revelation, "conquer" is the "key Christological verb." In a variety of forms (conquer, prevail, triumph) it occurs twenty-three times in Revelation, twice as frequently as in the rest of the NT.¹⁹⁷ In Revelation's narrative structure, conquering or overcoming connotes an acquittal in a court of law.¹⁹⁸ Earthly courts frequently condemn God's people, but their faithfulness gives them an acquittal in the heavenly one. They overcome through self-

Christian Relationships, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2002) has a good overview of a number of passages that help the reader see the ontological connection between the Lamb and the One on the throne. Specifically, 82-86, deal with this section of Revelation.

¹⁹⁵ Caird, *The Revelation*, 75.

¹⁹⁶ A close reading of the passage demonstrates the connection between the themes of worth, conquering and death. No one is worthy to open the scroll (5.3-4) until it is mentioned that the Lion has overcome/conquered (5.5). The hymn interprets the vision by stating the Lamb is worthy because He was slain (5.9b). The Lamb is worthy because He conquered through a self-sacrificial death. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 359.

¹⁹⁷ Boring, *Revelation*, 111.

¹⁹⁸ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 14.

sacrifice as well. However, their victory is not abstract, nor is it only over the social and political forces that they face. The believers are persecuted by the devil (2.10) and it is he that they conquer, through Christ's overcoming (12.11). They conquer even though they might be martyred through the persecution fomented by the devil's pawn (13.7). What must not be neglected is that they are conquering *Satan* through their deaths;¹⁹⁹ they are not merely overcoming the strength of the empire. This concept resonates with the heavenly council.²⁰⁰ There should be no question that the Lamb's victory is of the same nature. Christ has also conquered Satan and "earned the right...to rule the universe."²⁰¹ The fact that a "new song" in the OT is generally connected with God's victory over the enemy supports the idea that this is part of the backdrop for the "new song" that the heavenly chorus sings.²⁰²

The hymnic portion in 5.9b-10 is actually a two-part song. First there is the acclamation that the Lamb is worthy, followed by two parallel couplets, both of which expand on the result of the Lamb's death.²⁰³ The hymn begins with ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν, which parallels the expression found in the hymn in 4.11.²⁰⁴ Here, the Lamb is said to be worthy to "take the book and to break its seals," in this way resolving the tension

¹⁹⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 78.

²⁰⁰ The inseparable nature of Satan's attacks upon God's people and its relation to the cosmic conflict must be recognized as an important strand within Revelation's tapestry. As stated above, both Job and Zechariah highlight the point that the accusations against God's people are understood as an attack upon God's trustworthiness. In Revelation, the persecution of the saints immediately follows the pericope on the war in heaven (12.7-17). In this way, John identifies the true source of the persecution God's people face, as well as connecting the earthly accusations with the heavenly conflict. Satan's followers unite with him in the cosmic conflict by their attacks upon the followers of the Lamb.

²⁰¹ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 90.

²⁰² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 358.

²⁰³ Roloff, *Revelation*, 81.

²⁰⁴ The larger chorus described in 5.12 also opens their hymn with ἄξιόν ἐστιν. This formulation of the expression appears to be without precedent. Jörns, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 72.

that has arisen in the heavenly court. The parallel couplets that follow contain a broadened explanation as to *why* the Lamb is worthy.

καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες
 ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ
 ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ
 γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους
 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ
 τῆς γῆς (5.9-10)²⁰⁵

The ὅτι clause governs the rest of the hymn by drawing the reader's attention to three reasons that the Lamb is considered worthy. The first reason, which controls the rest of the hymnic pericope, is that the Lamb was slain (ἐσφάγης). The word occurs eight times in Revelation, four times referring to Christ (5.6, 9, 12; 13.8) twice referring to His followers (6.9; 18.24), once referring to the destruction under the fourth seal (6.4) and once referring to the sea-beast (13.3). The last reference demonstrates an obvious counterfeit and counterimaging to the work of Christ. The sea-beast received a deadly wound and yet lives, in a manner similar to that in which Christ is slain, yet is shown standing in the heavenly court (5.6).

The acclamation of Christ being worthy, due to His death, points to the larger narrational issues. The forces of evil, which in the plot are larger than any one single government, are overthrown through Christ's death.²⁰⁶ It is a startling fact within the narrative, that in this hymn worship and adoration are given to the Lamb and not to God. The unexpected nature of the scene underscores the unity between the two major characters in the storyline. This reinforces the deduction that what the Lamb does God

²⁰⁵ For a discussion on the textual issues and the weakness of the text that supports the KJV reading, see Michaels, *Revelation*, 97 and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 136. For a more in depth discussion see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 360. For our purposes, either reading would fit into the interpretation that the conflict theme is the backdrop for the hymn.

²⁰⁶ Witherington, *Revelation*, 120.

is seen as doing.²⁰⁷ The Lamb's victory is God's victory. Christ's sacrificial death "belongs to the way God rules the world."²⁰⁸ Christ conquers not by force, but through death. He triumphs not through violence, but through self-sacrifice.²⁰⁹ Rage, force, and persecution are the methods that Satan uses in the promotion of his agenda to establish his throne and garner worship to himself. Satan uses deception, coercion, and physical might. God's rule is revealed through utter and complete self-denial and self-sacrifice. Thus the combined chorus acclaims Christ worthy due to His death. It is a death that forever establishes the legitimacy of God's kingdom.

The second part of the ὅτι clause builds on the death of Christ and shows that by His death He purchased a worldwide people. That the verb (ἡγόρασας) denotes transactions in a commercial sense is evident in 3.18 and 13.17.²¹⁰ In the first instance, Christ appeals to Laodicea to purchase gold, clothing, and eye salve that they might be spiritually whole. In the second, only those who worship the beast and receive his mark will be allowed to buy the necessities of life. The expensive nature of Christ's purchase is shown by the cost paid. It was by His blood (ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου) that the transaction was accomplished demonstrating the value of those purchased. The aorist tenses used here both in reference to Christ's death and His purchasing a people points to the same event, His death on the cross.²¹¹ "Blood is a graphic expression for Jesus' giving up of his life in its meaning for salvation" and is not necessarily meant to give a description of the manner of Christ's death. What needs to

²⁰⁷ Bauckham, *Theology*, 63. The "extraordinarily high Christology for the message of Revelation...makes absolutely clear that what Christ does, God does."

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 64, emphasis original.

²⁰⁹ Keener, *Revelation*, 186.

²¹⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Redemption as Liberation: Apoc 1:5f and 5:9f." *CBQ* 36, no. 2 (1974), 228.

²¹¹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 400.

be grasped is that in yielding His life, Christ emancipated people from the “realm of opposition” to God.²¹² That realm of opposition is characterized by satanic rule.²¹³

The third causal reason for the acclamation of worth given to the Lamb, is that He has formed (ἐποίησας) the people of God into a kingdom of priests. This concept intersects with the idea of freedom contained in the act of purchasing. To be bought or redeemed is the language of the slave-market. In the OT Exodus narrative, God’s people are liberated from slavery in Egypt and formed into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19.6).²¹⁴ That image runs throughout Revelation’s design, uniting the opening and closing of the book (1.6; 20.6). Through His death, Christ has purchased His followers and created an eschatological kingdom of priests. This would be in harmony with Roman law, in which a freed or ransomed prisoner would be reintegrated into his own nation.²¹⁵

This godly kingdom is in opposition to the kings of the earth who follow Satan and his associates (6.15; 16.12, 14; 17.2, 10, 12, 14, 18; 18.3, 9; 19. 18, 19). This can be seen, not only by the recurrent theme of the kings of the earth, but also by the description of those who are formed into God’s kingdom. They are formed from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” This fourfold expression occurs four more times with a different word order in each instance (7.9; 11.9; 13.7; 14.6).²¹⁶ This group forms those who are caught in the midst of the conflict. They are persecuted by

²¹² Roloff, *Revelation*, 81.

²¹³ For a brief discussion of Christ’s death within the narrative, see the excursus following this section.

²¹⁴ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 101.

²¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation,” 229.

²¹⁶ There are two more similar usages however in each of those cases a significant word is replaced in the formula. See 10.11 and 17.15.

the beast (13.7) and are the recipients of threefold warning in chapter fourteen which is designed to warn the hearers against the worship of the beast (14.6).

Satan attempts to inaugurate his kingly rule over the people of the earth. This is indicated by the diadems that he and his surrogate wear (12.3; 13.1). He endeavors to be the king over the kings of the earth. However, in the narrative, Christ is revealed as the true “King of Kings” wearing many diadems (19.12, 16). In the Exodus narrative, God’s people are freed from slavery to Pharaoh. In the eschatological Exodus, they are freed from Satan himself²¹⁷ not simply the tyranny of Rome.²¹⁸ They participate in Christ’s sacrifice and carry on His victory over Satan.²¹⁹

λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ
ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν
τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ
εὐλογίαν (5.12)²²⁰

The next part of the hymnic section (5.11-12) is sung by an innumerable²²¹ host of angels that form the larger circle beyond the living creatures and the elders. Their “loud voice” praises seven of the Lamb’s characteristics. As the Lamb came and “took” the scroll, He now is acclaimed worthy to “receive” or take perfect

²¹⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 101.

²¹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, “Redemption as Liberation,” 230, sees the kingdom established by Christ “in political terms, as the alternative to the Roman Empire.”

²¹⁹ Wu, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 213; Caird, *The Revelation*, 77.

²²⁰ Osborne, (*Revelation*, 263) notes that the singular use of the definite article illustrates Sharp’s Rule which indicates that the entire list forms a conceptual unity. Charles, (*Revelation I*, 149) describes this “as though they formed one word.”

²²¹ The numbers given in the text are only circumlocution for an incalculable crowd, Roloff, *Revelation*, 81.

praise,²²² denoted by the sevenfold content of the hymn. There is nothing lacking in the angelic praise of Christ.²²³

The narrational connection between the Lamb and God is heightened in this hymn. This is the third use of the adjective worthy within the throne room setting of chapters 4 and 5. The first two (4.11 and 5.9) contained the expression “you are worthy” using the second person singular, a form of direct address. In this third instance the third person singular expression is used, referring to the Lamb. The hymn teaches that God’s saving acts are effected through Christ’s self-sacrifice. Because Christ is God’s revelation in the storyline, Christ is able to receive qualities that exclusively belong to God.²²⁴

Three of the attributes, power, honor, and glory (now in the first, fifth, and sixth positions) were offered to God in the hymn of the elders, with their order reversed. The concept of “power” plays an important role in Revelation and serves as a verbal thread, connecting this hymn with others, as well as with the conflict theme undergirding the plot.²²⁵ Power is ascribed to God in four other hymns (7.11, 11.17, 12.10 and 19.1). In particular, the hymn at 12.10 is set in the midst of the war pericope that, as with the scene in chapter 5, demonstrates that Christ’s victory through death is the means of conquest over the dragon. Power is also an attribute that the dragon bestows on the Christ-like counterfeit, the sea-beast (13.2). As God and Christ both share this quality, so Satan does with the beast. Additionally, the kings of

²²² Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 122), notes the verbal connection made as the same verb, λαμβάνω is used in both instances.

²²³ J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 83.

²²⁴ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 139

²²⁵ Osborne, (*Revelation*, 263), points out that having *power* placed at the head of the list, emphasizes that Christ’s death is the power that conquers the forces of evil.

the earth give their power to the beast (17.11), as the counterpoint to the angelic host ascribing power to the Lamb.

Power is an important theological theme in Revelation. While recognizing the political nature of the source and use of power, and its connection to the empire Smalley notes that the dragon's delegation of power, throne, and great authority, to the beast sets up a world in which forces of evil too frequently rule. God's power will prevail in this cosmic conflict but it is a power that has been "transformed by the death of Christ." The slaughtered Lamb condemns those forces that are opposed to God. All power is ultimately derived from God, and its truest expression is found not in self-aggrandizement as per the dragon, but in self-sacrifice as displayed by the Lamb.²²⁶

This inversion of the typical understanding of power reflects the point of view from which Revelation's story unfolds. Revelation's world is one in which "nearly everything is turned inside out and upside down." Resseguie uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque to describe the "inside out, upside down" perversion and inversion of the way things appear.²²⁷ Carnavalesque aims to critique norms, values, and ideas of the "dominant culture."²²⁸ In Revelation's story, power is manifest in an unexpected way. The Lamb demonstrates strength through suffering.²²⁹ The dragon and his cohorts attempt to demonstrate their power through slander, coercion, persecution, and ultimately a universal death-decree (13.15; 16.6; 18.24). God's reign, established through the slain Lamb, is secured on the foundation of self-giving.

²²⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 194-195.

²²⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 43.

²²⁸ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 75.

²²⁹ Donald Guthrie, "The Lamb in The Structure of the Book of Revelation," *VE* 12 (1981), 65.

Several of the other attributes mentioned are repeated in other hymnic sections. Strength, wisdom, and honor are repeated in the song of praise in 7.12.²³⁰ Glory, an important theme in Revelation, was first used as part of the elders' song (4.11), but is also repeated in 7.12 and in 19.1. Blessing occurs in three hymnic sections as an attribute of Christ (5.12) and of God (5.13; 7.12). "Riches" stands out in this list of seven, as it is never repeated in a hymn. A later hymn (7.12) also containing seven ascriptions replaces "riches" with "thanksgiving."²³¹ As a characteristic, riches are never ascribed to God as King in the OT.²³² This unusual occurrence heightens for the reader the sense of carnivalesque and points to the larger theodicy theme.

As Resseguie appropriately recognizes, "wealth and self-sacrifice appear to be oxymoronic."²³³ The jarring nature of the ascription causes the reader to engage with the text, considering in what ways the slaughtered Lamb can be conceived as receiving riches. The only other occurrence of the word in Revelation points out the intentional contrast that John displays throughout the narrative. In Revelation's world the dragon utilizes deception to pursue his agenda of overturning God's rule. He raises questions about God's fitness to govern, as well as His impotence in the face of satanic power and prestige. Satan's cohorts prosper as God's people suffer. Revelation portrays Babylon, Satan's proxy, as being suffused with wealth. She is clothed with expensive material and adorned with gold and other precious stones

²³⁰ With the addition of power and wealth, these five traits were also gifts that God bestowed on Israelite kings, Aune *Revelation 1-5*, 365-66.

²³¹ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 128.

²³² Smalley, *The Revelation*, 139.

²³³ Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 122.

(17.4; 18.16). The merchants of the earth “have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality” (18.3).

However, Babylon’s wealth is only transitory. The second use of “riches” in the narrative (πλοῦτον) is found in 18.17. “For in one hour such great wealth (πλοῦτος) has been laid waste.” The speed with which Babylon’s accumulated wealth disappears underscores its fleeting nature. Babylon appears to have wealth, as Satan’s program of accusation and attack appears to prosper. From the below perspective of this world, Satan looks to be winning his incessant war. The heavenly perspective casts things in their true light. For Christ “wealth is gained through self-sacrifice, not self-aggrandizement. His wealth is a result of voluntary slaughter on the cross...it is a product of self-service, not exploitation of others.”²³⁴ The contradiction of salvation through apparent defeat reflects God’s unfolding plan.²³⁵ This contradiction is in reality the disclosure of the fundamental truth about God’s character and government. God’s rule of the universe is established on the truth of His self-sacrifice, demonstrated in the Lamb’s death.

καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ
 τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας
 τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἄρνίῳ
 ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν
 αἰώνων (5.13)²³⁶
 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἔλεγον
 ἀμήν
 καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν (5.14)

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Achtemeier, “Revelation 5.1-14”, 287.

²³⁶ Whereas in 5.12, the article was only used in the first instance, here it is repeated before each of the attributes. This gives an individual emphasis to each trait. So, Osborne, *Revelation*, 265.

The final portion of the pericope, functions to tie the entire diptych together. The praise of the expansive heavenly chorus extends to the entire creation (5.13), counteracting what appeared to be the universal failure to respond to the question of the strong angel (5.2). No one throughout all creation, with the exception of the Lamb, was found worthy to take the scroll. Now the entire universe sings a fourfold doxology both to the One on the throne and the Lamb. A set of four is frequently used in Revelation to represent the entirety of creation.²³⁷ In this way, the fourfold doxology reflects the number of the universe.²³⁸

This hymn is the final antiphonal response to the other hymns throughout chapters 4 and 5, and therefore is addressed to both God and Christ. This promotes the advanced view of Christ that permeates Revelation.²³⁹ That “every created thing” (πᾶν κτίσμα) in heaven, on and under the earth, and on the sea joins in the hymn reflects the idea of creation mentioned in the elders’ hymn (ἔκτισα τὰ πάντα-4.11). The last words of the elders’ hymn focuses the attention of the reader on the fact that God is the Creator of all. Now the entire creation sings in adoration. The hymnic cycle moves from the ultimate past, identified by the creation language, to the future and God’s “ultimate victory.”²⁴⁰ The hymn posits a time when rebellion and injustice will no longer exist²⁴¹ and the war begun in heaven will be finished, or at the least, there will be a universal recognition of God and Christ’s just authority.²⁴²

²³⁷ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 31. Note the fourfold description of those purchased by Christ’s death (5.9), the four corners of the earth (7.1; 20.8) and the four living creatures (4.6).

²³⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 102.

²³⁹ Charles, (*Revelation I*, 151), recognizes that the throne of both is one and the same.

²⁴⁰ Boring, *Revelation*, 111-112.

²⁴¹ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 102.

²⁴² How to understand the universal acclaim is an open question. Boring, (*Revelation*, 112), contends that the passage indicates “it is impossible to see any part of the universe as ultimately rebellious and

The expectation of the elders falling in worship (προσεκύνησαν) mentioned earlier (4.10) finds a concrete realization in response to this final hymn (5.14). By the use of this *inclusio*, the entire passage is woven together. Additionally, in the initial description of the throne room scene, the elders are mentioned first, followed by a description of the living creatures. At the end of the scene, the living creatures are mentioned and then the elders. In this way the literary unit is tightly bound off indicating that the hymnic themes are united. The four living creatures “kept saying (ἔλεγον), ‘Amen’” at the close of the section. As they opened the hymnic chorus (4.8), so now they close it with an ongoing, continuous Amen.

Excursus: Christ’s Death in the Narrative

Utilizing the imagery of the slain Lamb set in the midst of the throne, and as the object of attention of the heavenly court, John places high importance upon the death of Christ. This is despite the fact that the crucifixion is mentioned only once (11.8), and that in a metaphoric sense.²⁴³ The value given to the slain Lamb combined with the lack of expansion on the meaning of Christ’s death raises questions as to how the IR would interact with the imagery. Does John intend that a broad understanding of the atonement be incorporated into the slain Lamb concept, or does his purpose lie elsewhere? Being the dominant symbol that is used to portray Christ, it is clear that John must have designed to communicate an idea important to the understanding of

lost.” However, he qualifies this, (226-231), as he expands on the balance between a universal and limited salvation reading of Revelation. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 365), recognizes that the “earth-dwellers” do not submit to, nor praise God (14.7-11; 16.4-11) and if the praise is given in an absolute sense, then this must be seen as a forced submission. However, this expression “forced submission” must be carefully nuanced, especially given Revelation’s understanding of “power.” The force that could finally compel the wicked into recognizing God’s sovereignty must be found in the Lamb’s death. This is not to argue that the wicked will ultimately be saved, but that their acknowledgement of God’s worth is predicated upon their seeing His self-sacrifice. This same issue is brought out in the hymn in chapter 15. There, it is distinctly noted that “all the nations” will come and worship, or give homage in God’s presence.

²⁴³ The fact that He was *pierced* is also mentioned in the opening of the book (1.7).

the plot. Several factors must be taken into account in order to gain an appropriate understanding of Christ's death within the storyline and the meaning conveyed by the juxtaposition of the images of the conquering Lion with the slain Lamb.

The Lamb becomes the dominant title for Christ in Revelation, replacing a "son of man" (cf. Dan. 7.13-4 with Rev. 5.6-13) and the "Servant of Yahweh" (cf. Isa. 49.10 with Rev. 7.16-17).²⁴⁴ Several backgrounds can contribute to informing the meaning of this governing imagery. The symbol may have been drawn from among the following concepts: (1.) The *tamid* lamb slain within the sanctuary service (Exod. 30.38-42), (the widespread use of the temple imagery in Revelation would support this observation); (2.) The Passover lamb, which symbolized God's deliverance of His people, (the Exodus motif within Revelation lends credence to this idea); (3.) the lamb of Isa. 53.2, 7, 9, pointing to a sacrifice with atoning significance, (again the temple imagery would give support to this idea); (4.) a conquering lamb as found in *IEn.* 89-90.²⁴⁵

While several of the John's potential backgrounds would contribute to seeing Christ's death in terms of redemption and atonement, the language that he uses has given some interpreters pause in coming to that conclusion. For example, Blount notes that the more frequent $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\omega$ used in connection with Christ's death in terms of a sacrifice, is not used at all in Revelation.²⁴⁶ John exclusively uses $\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$, which only

²⁴⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 352.

²⁴⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, 108. Fekkes, (*Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 153-58) sees primarily the Paschal background at work. Steve Moyise, (*The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, The Continuum Biblical Studies Series (London: Continuum, 2001), 125) argues for either the Paschal Lamb or the Lamb of Isa. 53. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 351) stresses the sacrificial aspects of the Lamb who redeems as He conquers. Charles, (*The Apocalypse I*, 141), supports the idea of the conquering lamb based on *IEn.* Loren L. Johns, "*The Origins and Rhetorical Force of the Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John.*" Ph.D. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1998, 120-121 casts substantial doubt on the use of the Enoch imagery as the background for Revelation's lamb.

²⁴⁶ Blount, *Revelation*, 110. Mark 14.12; Luke 22.7; Acts 14.13, 18; 1 Cor. 5.7 all use $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\omega$ to signify the putting to death in relation to a sacrifice.

appears in 1 John 3.12 outside of the Apocalypse. This might signal John's intention to focus more on the slaughter or execution of Christ, rather than the redemptive aspects of His death. This reading would place the emphasis on Christ as a witness to the same resistant behavior to the empire that should be developed in His followers. As the true witness, the Lamb sacrifices His own life in order to reveal His testimony to God's lordship in a hostile environment.²⁴⁷

Loren L. Johns' study explores both the backgrounds and meaning of the slain Lamb for the book of Revelation. One of his major contentions is that readers have failed to take seriously the Lamb Christology of the book. After exploring the lamb imagery in early Judaism, Johns' concludes that the idea of a "redeemer-lamb figure" is not found in Jewish apocalyptic traditions.²⁴⁸ He contends that the IR would not have made a connection from the Lamb's death to the idea of redemption. Johns also notes that σφάζω is not restricted to Christ (6.4, 9; 13.3; 18.24) and thus it is doubtful that the word has expiatory connotations when used in relation to the Lamb.²⁴⁹ He comes to the conclusion that "there is little in the Apocalypse of John to support this understanding of Jesus' death as Atonement."²⁵⁰

In addition to the picture of Lamb standing and yet slain²⁵¹ by the throne, the metonymy of Christ's blood is also woven into the warp of the text. His blood is

²⁴⁷ Blount, *Revelation*, 109.

²⁴⁸ Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 167; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2003, 109.

²⁴⁹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 129.

²⁵⁰ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 130. However it appears that the linguistic argument is overstated. For while θύω is used in relation to a sacrificial slaughter, it is also used simply in terms of death (John 10.10) and need not bear the sacrificial connotation. In the LXX account of Abraham's offering of Isaac, σφάζω (Gen. 22.10) is used, pointing to a sacrificial death.

²⁵¹ John's description is ἀρνίον ἐστῆκεδς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον. The perfect tenses indicate a continuous action or the on-going effect the Lamb's death. That death occurred in history, and has been followed by a resurrection (See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 353.)

introduced in the opening section of Revelation, where it is described as the means of releasing God's people from their sins (1.5). However, as sin is only mentioned once more within the entire book, and the second time refers to the sins of Babylon, it is questionable as to whether or not John intends a broad understand of redemption to be understood. Blount doubts that this is John's purpose and he rejects redemption as a primary concern for the storyline. Blount argues instead that the concepts of execution and conquest are what John is endeavoring to communicate.²⁵²

The imagery of blood is used some 19 times in Revelation. The first and second use, indicate that Christ's blood is the means by which God's people are purchased and formed into a priestly kingdom (1.5; 5.9, 10). It is also the means by which the robes of the righteous are purified (7.14) and the righteous gain victory over the dragon (12.11).²⁵³ The blood of the righteous is also shed in Revelation, calling for God's justice to be enacted on their behalf (6.10; 16.6 (2x); 17.6 (2x); 18.24; 19.2). The majority of the other uses relate blood in a metaphoric sense to the judgments that occur on the earth (6.12; 8.7,8; 11.6; 14.20; 16.4). The final appearance of the word is in relation to Christ's return, where He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood (19.13).²⁵⁴

While the ideas of execution and conquest are not absent from the larger storyline as evidenced by the language John uses and the broad imagery of shedding

²⁵² Blount, *Revelation*, 36.

²⁵³ Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 328) understands the expression *διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου* to indicate that Christ's blood is both the ground and the means of their victory.

²⁵⁴ Opinion is divided as to whether this refers to Christ's own blood as was understood by Patristic writers (see G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 280) so Sweet, *Revelation*, 283; Krodel, *Revelation*, 323; Harrington, *Revelation*, 192-193; Boxall, *The Revelation*, 274; or the blood of His enemies, Beasley-Murray *Revelation* 280; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 491; Roloff, *Revelation* 218; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 354. Caird (*The Revelation*, 243) followed by Stefanovic (*Revelation*, 564) sees the blood as representing the blood of martyrs. Boring, (*Revelation*, 196-97) sees the blood as dual symbol of Christ's death and those of his followers.

blood, neither are the concepts related to a broader biblical redemption. It is unnecessary to make a sharp distinction between the concepts as it relates to Christ's death. As Mark Bredin notes, "It is not necessary to say that if the Lamb is a martyred figure, then it cannot be a sacrifice..."²⁵⁵ It is better to view the multivalent nature of Christ's death as being a powerful symbol that includes complementary facets.²⁵⁶ The slain Lamb is both the "key to the redemption of God's people" as well as the "key to God's victory over evil."²⁵⁷

The narrative's use of the blood of the Lamb as a means of forming the people of God into a kingdom of priests has clear overtones to the Exodus account and the redemptive deliverance of God's people through the slain Passover Lamb.²⁵⁸ At the same time, it is important to keep in view that the movement from conquering Lion to slain Lamb is designed to highlight the theological heart of the storyline. "The Conquering one conquers by being a slain lamb..."²⁵⁹ The blending of the images of lion and lamb demonstrate that God's omnipotent power is manifest in the self-sacrifice of Christ's death. God's victory over evil is discernible through the slain Lamb. The Lamb's followers conquer in the same manner, through their willingness to retain their allegiance to God in the face of threats to their existence.

The truth that God's power is manifest in self-sacrifice, has been contested by the dragon through the war he wages against God's rule. Christ's death, while having

²⁵⁵ Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology of the Book of Revelation*, (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003) 182-183.

²⁵⁶ Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys Pub.), 2005, 109.

²⁵⁷ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 168.

²⁵⁸ David Mathewson's review of Johns' study considers this to be a major flaw and concludes that it is incorrect to downplay the sacrificial and atonement nuances of Christ's death. See <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/the-lamb-christology-of-the-apocalypse-of-john/> accessed June 18, 2013. Also Witherington, (*Revelation*, 121), sees the doctrine of the atonement at work in the forming of God's people into a kingdom through the death of Christ.

²⁵⁹ Johns, *The Lamb Christology*, 159.

a redemptive-atoning effect upon the saints is also a testimony to God's lordship and authority in a hostile environment. Whether it is ancient Rome, or any current system that the dragon utilizes to persecute God's people or acclimatize them to his kingdom, the point is the same. The slain Lamb directs the reader to a restored communion with God, evidenced by the forming of the priest-kingdom, and to the way such a community should live as members and representatives of that kingdom.

Müller correctly points out that while the Lion and Lamb images inform one another, it is the Lamb that is predominately used in the narrative and thus the metaphor communicates several important concepts.²⁶⁰ These are:

1). The Lamb's victory is a non-violent one. Revelation's emphasis on the ideas of conquering and overcoming stress that victory has been attained by the Lamb and needs to be embraced by His followers. However this victory is not the result of physical force or violence, but through a submissive, redemptive death that resisted all the attempts of the dragon to subvert Christ's faithfulness. What appeared to be a great defeat was in reality the greatest victory. The followers of the Lamb similarly experience a transformation of defeat into a conquest (13.7; 12.11). Rather than portraying victory through violence, the slain Lamb serves to demonstrate victory through suffering love.

2.) The Lamb has absolute power and authority, and this is demonstrated by the seven horns upon His head (5.6). Horns are frequently a symbol of power in Revelation. The dragon, the sea-beast, and the scarlet beast all have ten horns (12.3; 13.1; 17.3). Only the Lamb has seven horns, the number of perfection and fullness. In Revelation's upside down world, the fullness of power or omnipotence is demonstrated through suffering and dying. The Lamb subverts the typical meaning of

²⁶⁰ See Ekkehardt Müller, "Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 3: The Lamb Christology," *JATS*, 22/2 (2011), 46-48 for the following.

power by His death. The twin images of God as the One on the throne, the Lamb's horns symbolize their omnipotence. They rule jointly upon the same throne (3.21). Nevertheless that power is defined and moderated by the manifestation of love, displayed through death.

3.) The Lamb also has complete wisdom and omniscience, as indicated by the seven eyes (5.6). He is the true reader of the thoughts and intents of His followers and therefore is able to test their motives. The link between the eyes and the Spirit strengthens the redemptive aspect of the Lamb's work. The two images function together to convict the saints of their danger in being acclimated to the dragon's kingdom, as well as their need to be faithful to God and separate from Babylon.

4.) The culmination of these factors is that the slain Lamb is worthy of worship (5.8-13). It is the multifaceted work of Christ as sacrifice and conqueror, redeemer and faithful witness that calls forth the adoration of the heavenly choir. Christ is worthy to unfold the truth about God because of His demonstration of how God's government works and the nature of its principles. These are in direct opposition to the kingdom of Satan, and the misrepresentation he has cast upon God. Christ is worthy of worship because His death also has a transformative impact upon those who see and believe the truth He reveals.

Conclusion

In this section of Revelation, as with the entire book, the central issue is: Who is worthy to receive worship? The choice is ultimately between the worship of God and the Lamb, or Satan and his intermediaries. Seen in this way, the hymnic sections have an important function. As J. Darrel Charles notes, they provide a strong

affirmation and statement of faith.²⁶¹ Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind both the setting for these affirmations and the verbal threads to the remainder of the book. The determinative background is the divine council, which confronts a crisis of immense proportions. The many verbal threads identified above, link the hymns to the larger conflict theme that plays an integral role in the formation of Revelation's plot. It bears repeating that the setting is the divine court, the heavenly location in which the conflict first began. A close reading of the text will keep the importance of the background in view.

Investigating this pericope in light of the war theme reveals several verbal threads that combine to show the connection of the hymns to the larger plot. The first hymn picks up the issue before the council, and ties it back to the hymn sung to God in 4.11. Worthiness plays a vital role in this pericope. The Lamb's worthiness is attributed to the fact that He was slain. This illustrates God's method of conquest and the essential characteristic of His rule, which is self-sacrifice. The ontological unity between God and Christ is stressed in this section, so that what Christ does, God does.²⁶² The fact that the slain Lamb plays a decisive role in the controversy fomented by the dragon is underscored by the attempt of the sea-beast to counterfeit this singular attribute (13.3). A second reason the Lamb is considered worthy is that through His death, He is able to emancipate people from their opposition to God. Those freed are formed into a kingdom of priests. This group is the counterpoint to those "kings of the earth" who take the dragon's side in the cosmic war.

The second hymn stresses the carnivalesque aspect of Revelation's point of view. This is accomplished by the emphasis placed on "power" as a characteristic that the Lamb is worthy to take. Both power and wealth are redefined as taking place

²⁶¹ J. Daryl Charles, "Apocalyptic Tribute," 464.

²⁶² Bauckham, *Theology*, 63.

through self-denial and the service of others. While the dragon and his compatriots use power and wealth as tools of their coercive program, the slaughtered Lamb demonstrates that true nature of power. In this light, He reveals the truth about God and His government. It is not one founded on brute strength or sheer force, but is established upon the principle of being “other-centered.”

The third section serves as a concluding part of a larger inclusio, tying together various images into a united picture. The entire universe will one day join in acclaiming the truth about God and Christ that has been so strenuously denied by Satan. All of creation joins in recognizing the praiseworthiness of the One on the throne and the Lamb. The final repeating “Amen” not only concludes the last hymn, but also serves as a continuous ending for the entire diptych. The “amen” functions as a recognition of the truths that have been expressed throughout the passage.²⁶³ The prostration of the elders reinforces the understanding that there is One worthy to be placed on the throne. God’s throne is recognized as secure against the attempts of the Satan undermine God’s government. The divine council sees and acknowledges the evidence that God’s rule is just. The slain Lamb removes any lingering trace of a question implanted by Satan’s slander.

²⁶³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 265.

CHAPTER FIVE

HYMNIC PERICOPE OF 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12

The last chapter began the investigation of the hymns to discern their function in the light of the war theme that is a major contributory to Revelation's storyline. It was shown that the imagery of chapters four and five influences how one interprets the unfolding of the remainder of the book. Set in the heavenly throne room, the rest of the narrative flows from this point of view. A close reading of this paradigmatic section showed that the war theme is inherent within the structure. Reading the hymns in those chapters from this perspective uncovered many verbal and conceptual threads to the larger storyline. In this chapter, three more pericopes will be considered. They are each set in a different chronological framework. As with the hymns in the previous chapter, these are also antiphonal in nature. The first pericope, 7.9-12, is placed in an eschatological period when the great tribulation has past and the redeemed are portrayed as standing before the throne. The second section, 11.15-18, occurs during the closing of the seventh trumpet and is a time when the eschatological age is about to be ushered in. The final pericope, 12.10-12, can be considered as occurring during this age, which would include past events both heavenly and earthly. As in the previous chapter, an overview of the setting, plot, and characters in the larger context of each pericope will be given first. This overview will help to set the narrative parameters in which the hymnic sections are found. Then a closer reading of the each of the hymnic sections will take place, with the aim of exploring their relationship to the larger conflict theme.

Revelation 7.9-12

Setting

This pericope begins a new segment within the larger vision of chapter seven. The entire chapter serves as an interlude¹ following the intense cosmic disruptions that occur during the opening of the sixth seal (6.12-17). The chapter itself is divided into two sections, the first focuses on the sealing of the 144,000 (7.1-8), and the second concentrates on the great multitude that sings the first hymn in the pericope (7.9-17). This transition is marked by the author's familiar "After these things I looked" (μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον)² and indicates the start of a new unit. John utilizes this phrase at four points in the narrative, (4.1; 7.9; 15.5 and 18.1) and it serves to highlight the prominence of the section. The fuller transitional phrase μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ is used only here and at 4.1. It functions to underscore the connection to the earlier paradigmatic throne room scene and stresses the importance of what is to come.³ Throughout the pericope there are verbal threads that tie back to the initial throne scene. The author now signals a distinct movement from the chaos and catastrophes occurring on the earth to the worship and song in heaven.

¹ While the interruption to the narrative flow at first surprises the reader, on further reflection it becomes apparent that this chapter is skillfully connected to the larger story. The repetitive use of καὶ throughout the opening of the seals leads the reader to expect the seventh seal to open next. The sudden discussion of the sealing, at first glance appears out of place. A closer reading indicates this is a shift in focus, not a true departure from the seals. So, Stephen W. Pattemore, *Souls Under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003), 128-129; Boring, *Revelation*, 127. For a contrary understanding of how this chapter fits within the entire book, see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxxiii, 276. Yarbro Collins, (*The Apocalypse*, 50-51), also sees a lack of connection to the seals. For an extended discussion on the role of digressions in Revelation, particularly chapters seven and ten, see Peter S. Perry, *The Rhetoric of Digressions: Revelation 7:1-17 and 10:1-11:13 and Ancient Communication*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

² The chapter itself opens with a close equivalent to this phrase (μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον), the difference being the use of the singular pronoun as opposed to the plural. For a discussion on the possible significance of this, see Perry, *Rhetoric*, 73-76.

³ Lund, *Studies in the Book of Revelation* 99, calls this the same scene as in the fourth and fifth chapters.

As John looks, he beholds a great multitude near the throne. Once again, the throne plays an important role in forming the setting for the pericope. It is the main geographical marker in the text. Although there will be a time when the throne is upon the new earth (22.3, 4), and conceptually this imagery could be occurring then, John makes it clear that this scene is in the throne room in heaven.⁴ The presence of the angelic host, the elders, and the four living creatures gives support to the idea that once again the setting is that of the divine council in heaven (7.11). This is confirmed by both the mention that the multitude is before God in His temple, and by the fact that the living creatures and the elders disappear from the narrative after the last hymn but before the creation of the new earth.⁵ The throne is the central prop; the characters involved are all around or before the throne in the setting of the heavenly court.

The approximate chronological setting of the scene is made evident by the imagery and conversation that occurs in the larger context. Whether the events here are to be understood as occurring before or after the creation of the new heavens and earth is unclear.⁶ What can be determined from the text is that evil is finally overcome. The great multitude wears white robes and hold palm branches⁷ in their hands. Both are symbols of a final conquest over evil. The palm branches are possibly reminiscent of the Feast of Tabernacles, for just as the Exodus is an important figure in John's imagery, so the last feast in the Jewish economy is now in focus. The elder specifically explains the meaning of the white robe, as being emblematic of the multitude having come through the great tribulation, and having been washed by

⁴ So Thompson, *Revelation*, 108; Boxhall *The Revelation*, 125; Roloff, *Revelation*, 99.

⁵ The last mention of the elders and living creatures is in 19.4,

⁶ There are verbal connections between this section and 21.6; 22.1.

⁷ The only other reference to palm branches in the NT occurs in John 12.13, on the day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Christ's blood (7.14). However, white robes are promised to all overcomers at the eschaton, and not only those who have experienced martyrdom (3.4, 5, 18).⁸ All of the Lamb's followers overcome through their willingness to be faithful, even in the face of death (12.11). His example serves as the paradigm for them. Their victory is attained through apparent defeat, just as Christ triumphed through death so the believers follow the path He set.⁹ At the least, mental preparation for martyrdom is a trait that John endeavors to promote in the reader.

The content of the hymn and the surrounding verses also point to the fact that victory is fully accomplished. "Salvation" is emphatically ascribed to God and the Lamb, and represents a total, full, and final deliverance.¹⁰ All of the vicissitudes of life are past. There is nothing that shall trouble them any longer. All their hungers, thirsts, fears, sorrows, and pains are past (7.16). Every tear will be wiped away by God Himself (7.17). This reflects the situation after the millennium and the imminent creation of the new earth (21.4), which is also placed in the setting of the throne and the heavenly temple (21.3). While the exact time frame within the narrative cannot be positively identified, it is clear that it represents a time when the conflict is resolved. At some future time, God's people will be "freed from misery and suffering, be in the immediate proximity of and in communion with God" joining in a heavenly chorus.¹¹

⁸ Against Caird, *The Revelation* 96; Bauckham *Theology*, 77; and Boring *Revelation*, 133 who see the multitude as martyrs. Resseguie *Revelation*, 138 and Krodel, *Revelation*, 184 argue that the imagery cannot be limited to martyrs. Both interpretations agree that the white robes are reflective of a victory gained. Martyrdom is an important theme in Revelation and has been considered the primary motif in the book. See Mitchell G. Reddish, "Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse " *JSNT* 33, (1988): 85-95. Kiddle, *Revelation*, xli considers the book to be a textbook for martyrs.

⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation* 125

¹⁰ Krodel, *Revelation*, 184

¹¹ Roloff, *Revelation*, 96

Dramatis Personae

As in the first hymnic pericope, the main characters in this part of the narrative are God, “who sits on the throne,” and the Lamb. While both of them appear as largely passive figures receiving adulation,¹² in this section there is a description of their future activity. In reference to those around the throne, it is said that God will spread “His tabernacle over them” and will “wipe every tear from their eyes.” The Lamb will serve as their shepherd and guide them to the springs of the water of life. While in chapters 4 and 5, God and the Lamb tower majestically over the narrative, here they interact in a warm and personal way with the other figures in the pericope. These activities reflect the Exodus, where God’s *Shekinah* protected Israel as a pillar of fire by night or pillar of cloud by day (Exodus 13.21-22.) The work of the Lamb as a shepherd also strengthens the ontological unity between Him and God. Here the Lamb assumes the OT role of Yahweh (Psalm 23; Ezek. 34).¹³

The elders and the living creatures are also involved in this passage. Once again the elders are mentioned first, before the living creatures.¹⁴ Both are mentioned as standing around the throne and being surrounded by the larger angelic host, another character group in the section. Grammatically, the exact role that the elders and the living creatures play is unclear. The angelic host is the subject of the sentence and it is stated that they are “around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures.” Then follows “they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God...” The question that arises is *who* is included in the “they” of the sentence? The

¹² This is the case in the first pericopes as well, with the notable exception that the Lamb takes the book (5.7).

¹³ Roloff, *Revelation*, 187

¹⁴ Thompson, (*Revelation*, 109), mistakenly mentions that this is the only place that the elders are mentioned first, neglecting to take into account the order of introduction in the vision in chapter four.

most natural reading would be that it refers back only the angelic host.¹⁵ This would then indicate that the elders and the living creatures function in a largely passive way in this scene, forming more of the background. The exception is when one of the elders again dialogues with John to give an explanation of the last character group.

The final character group in the scene is the great multitude that John sees in the beginning of the section. They are innumerable and drawn from the same fourfold assembly that constituted the kingdom of priests purchased by Christ's blood (cf. 7.9; 5.9) and pictured as standing before the throne.¹⁶ This multitude offers praise both to God and the Lamb that focuses on salvation. They are also the recipients of the solicitude and care that God and the Lamb bestow.

Plot

The pericope that revolves around the singing of the hymns is set within the larger context of a "literary pause" between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. The opening of the sixth seal (6.12-17) points to climatic events that lead to the anticipated return of Christ. The kings of the earth and those united with them are terrified at this prospect and cry out for the mountains to fall on them and hide them from Christ's appearing. Their anguish gives rise to the question, "who is able to stand?" John first sees a sealing event designed to provide the answer to the question posed under the sixth seal. An angel is sent with a commission to seal God's servants

¹⁵ So Thompson, *Revelation*, 109, but against Resseguie *The Revelation* 138, Krodel *Revelation*, 189.

¹⁶ In Revelation, ἴσθημι is often used to indicate one who had been slain but is now alive (see 5.6; 11.11; 20.12). However, in the heavenly court scenes, aside from God sitting on the throne, the twenty-four elders are the only others who are seated. Angels, in this setting, are always portrayed as standing (7.1, 11; 8.2, 3; 10.5, 8). As the angels are considered "fellow servants" (22.8-9) with John, perhaps this indicates the redeemed are also seen in this light. See, Felise Tavo, *Woman, Mother, and Bride: An Exegetical Investigation into the "Ecclesial" Notions of the Apocalypse*, (Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006) 164. Blount (*Revelation*, 110-111), views the imagery as a sign of resistance against the empire.

before the four angels unleash destruction on the earth. John hears the number of those sealed, that is, 144,000 from every tribe of Israel (7.4-8).¹⁷ The opening expression in the passage, μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον (7.1), does not indicate a change of scene as frequently supposed. The sealing event occurs on earth, which is also the location for each of the events under the seals.¹⁸ It does however indicate a new section and a change of focus.

After hearing the pericope that involves the number of those sealed, a new break is introduced with a visual component, μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ (7.9). Here the scene changes from earth to heaven. It is then that John sees a great multitude, drawn from the universal group of nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues. After describing their location (before the throne and the Lamb), and how they look (white robes with palms), John hears their hymn (7.9,10), which then inspires the song of the angels (7.11,12). The remainder of the section is a dialogue between one of the elders and John. The conversation resolves the question concerning the identity of the crowd, and the reason for their presence before the throne. It also describes how they will be comforted and protected by God and the Lamb (7.13-17).

¹⁷ The identity of those who are sealed and their connection to the great multitude, as well as the function of the sealing has been much discussed by commentators. One perspective is that both groups are said to represent the church though from different points of view. The sealing represents God's protection of the church on earth, through the coming judgments, while the multitude represents the experience of all believers in the future. See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 154; Swete, *Apocalypse*, 99; Kiddle *Revelation*, 138; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 140. Thomas, (*Revelation*, 474-483), sees the 144,000 as a literal group drawn from the physical descendants of Abraham and distinct from the great multitude. Roloff, (*Revelation*, 97), in contrast, states that the number must naturally be understood symbolically. In addition to this discussion, is the question as to whether or not either group represents only those who are martyred, so Caird, *The Revelation*, 95-98; Kiddle *Revelation*, 135. Bauckham, (*Climax of Prophecy*, 55-56), sees the 144,000 as fulfilling the number of those who should be martyred (6.11). Osborne, (*Revelation*, 311), argues against such a limited understanding. (For a helpful overview see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 416-423). For the purposes of this study, the exact relationship between the two groups, those sealed and the great multitude, is not necessary to ascertain.

¹⁸ Pattemore, *Souls Under the Altar*, 128.

Narrative Details

Within this section there are several pointers to the larger combat theme that contributes to Revelation's underlying storyline. The first indicator is the initial imagery in the chapter, that of the sealing of God's servants. The seal of God is widely seen as a counterimage¹⁹ to the mark of the beast (13.16,17; 14.9,10). The concepts behind "sealing," and the use of seals in general, would be well understood by the IR. Jay Casey identifies several of these functions. Seals could be used in a legal setting to identify ownership of property and confirm the validity of contracts. A seal could be utilized as a sign of authority and power. In the religious sphere, seals often contained an image of a deity and thus were a type of protection. Slaves and soldiers were frequently marked either in the arm or forehead with their owner's insignia. Similarly, devotees to a cult might have a sign of consecration to their deity in the hand, brow, or neck. The Hebrew phylacteries were worn as a sign of devotion to God and as a reminder of His deliverance (Deut. 6.8; 11.18; Exod. 13.9).²⁰ The OT background for the sealing is found in Ezek. 9, where God's people are saved from an immediate destruction befalling Jerusalem.²¹ However, in present setting those sealed are not necessarily saved from death, but are saved into the kingdom.²²

The contrast between the seal of God and the mark of the beast directs the reader to the two sides in the cosmic conflict. The imagery points to a time "when

¹⁹ Lunceford's *Parody and Counterimaging* explores the many ways the author utilizes expressions in both a positive and negative sense to highlight the carnivalesque world of Revelation. For his discussion on the seal versus the mark see, 252-261.

²⁰ Jay Smith Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 174-175.

²¹ Frederick James Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John*, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 218.

²² Casey, "Exodus Typology," 175.

mankind is divided under two allegiances.”²³ The seal clearly is a brand, that among other things, marks ownership²⁴ and adherence to someone in an authority role. It is also a sign of protection against demonic threats that will be brought against those who bear it.²⁵ Once again, it is important to keep in mind that behind any political threat, such as ancient Rome, John sees not a mythic dragon at work, but one who is the real source of persecution and deception. Those who worship the beast through the receiving of his mark, ultimately worship the dragon (13.4). Thus the opening of the chapter immediately points the reader to the larger issues in the narrative.

In the setting of the hymn, there are verbal threads that connect to the broader storyline as well. While previously mentioned in the descriptions above, their function deserves additional comment. The first thread is the source of the composition of the great multitude, which comes from “every nation and all tribes and peoples, and tongues.” This fourfold group is first mentioned in the hymn of the elders and living creatures (5.10) where they are said to have been purchased by death of the Lamb. The group is mentioned again in the context of being conquered by the beast (13.7), and in the context of the first angel’s call to worship God (14.6).²⁶ John’s use here indicates that the multitude, although conquered by the beast, have ultimately conquered it. In this manner John highlights the narrative concern of the believers’ participation in the conflict. As the Lamb has conquered through death (5.5-10), so His followers must do the same. This conquest is not however, solely against Rome or any other political reality, but is a victory over Satan’s misrepresentations of God and

²³ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 140.

²⁴ Thompson, *Revelation* 107.

²⁵ Casey, “Exodus Typology,” 175; Kiddle, *The Revelation*, 134.

²⁶ They are also brought to view in 10.11; 11.9; and 17.15.

his attempts to divert God's followers from their loyalty to Him. The multitude believes the truth about God's character and His faithfulness. It is this belief that enables them to conquer even in the face of death.²⁷

The second verbal thread, which is the white robes that the multitude wears, supports this inference. There is disagreement among commentators as to whether or not the robes must indicate martyrdom.²⁸ This is the obvious import of the imagery in 6.11. There the martyrs are given white robes and told to wait until the death of the rest of those who should be killed. However, the image is also used in a more general sense as a symbol of the final inheritance (3.5; 19.8). Thus it is not clear that the robe here necessitates martyrdom. However, the robes do point to another counterimage in Revelation, which is the clothing of the harlot. While God's people are dressed in white robes, Babylon is dressed in purple and scarlet, the color of the dragon (17.4). Babylon is the seducer of the world (17.5; 18.3) and the willing companion of the dragon to communicate his deceptions. Babylon intoxicates the nations with her wine (14.8), which is found in a golden cup filled with abominations (17.5). She participates in the persecution of the saints (17.6), and thus through deception and persecution she supports the dragon's warfare against God. The white robes are in stark contrast to her attire. The robes indicate the multitudes' spiritual purity instead of participation in the immorality of the whore.²⁹

Additionally, the reader learns through John's conversation with one of the elders, that the robes were washed and whitened by the blood of the Lamb (7.14). The

²⁷ Richard Bauckham, "The List of the Tribes in Revelation 7 Again," *JSNT*, 42, 1991, 102-104, correctly identifies the parallels between this section and 5.5-14. This thematic link unites the multitude's willingness to suffer with the sacrificial victory of Christ. As argued in the last chapter, Christ's death illustrates *how* God rules, and must be seen not only in terms of salvation, but in relation to Satan's accusations.

²⁸ So Charles, *Revelation I*, 203; Keener, *Revelation*, 243.

²⁹ Caird, *The Revelation*, 101.

involvement of the multitude (“they have washed their robes”) indicates a cooperative effort on the part of the believers. They have followed Christ in His demonstration of complete trust in God’s faithfulness, and in this way take His side in the conflict. The members of the crowd are prepared for the presence of God, in a manner similar to that of Moses commanding the people to wash their clothes before coming into God’s presence (Exod. 19.10,14).

As the setting here is that of the divine council, there is another echo at play in the imagery of the clothing. That echo refers back to Zech. 3.3f, in which Satan stood accusing Joshua, who is clothed in filthy garments. Despite his uncleanness, the command is given for Joshua to receive festal clothing.³⁰ He receives this gift, as a result of the rebuke given to Satan. The white robe therefore, on several levels, points to the triumph over the adversary that the multitude has experienced. They have escaped his seductions, overcome his accusations and misrepresentations, and have followed the example of Christ.

The third image that contributes to reading the hymns in the setting of the conflict theme is that of the palm branches. As mentioned above, the only other NT reference is found in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12.13). However, the OT connects the use of palm branches to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23.40). This raises the issue as to what is the predominate imagery being highlighted. Is it a victor’s triumph or the festival the imagery John was attempting to evoke?³¹ If John

³⁰ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 227.

³¹ J. A. Draper, "The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7-17" *JSNT* 19, (1983): 133-147 argues that connecting palm branches with victory is a “groundless identification” based more on a Hellenistic background rather than a Hebraic one. He points to the use of the palm in the feast of the Tabernacles as the primary image (138). See also Gustav Adolf Deissman, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub. 1901), 368-7. Jon Paulien, ("Hebrew Cultus" 270), sees the Feast of Tabernacles here as well. Stefanovic, (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 270), also points out that under Maccabean rule and the defeat of Antiochus Epiphanes, palms were used in celebration of victory. Based on this Maccabean connection of the palms to victory,

meant for the reader to recognize an allusion to the Feast of Tabernacles, that would not necessarily cancel the overtones of victory found in the imagery. The Feast itself was a celebration of victory and of God's protection,³² following as it did the cultic Day of Atonement in which the people and the sanctuary will be ceremonially cleansed from sin (Lev. 16.30).

Given Revelation's emphasis on the importance of overcoming, it is safe to conclude that even if the Feast is predominately in view, it is the triumphal aspect that is being stressed. It is also important to recognize the familiar inversion of meaning and imagery found so frequently in Revelation. Palm branches were a symbol of victory in the Hellenistic world. However, in that world victory was achieved through force of arms and power. In Revelation the imagery undergoes a reversal in meaning. The palm now becomes a symbol of victory through sacrifice rather than through force.³³ This inversion of the imagery urges the IR to keep in view the larger storyline.

A final narrative thread that points to Revelation's overarching conflict theme is the mention of "the great tribulation" through which the multitude has passed (7.14). The definite article, plus the use of the adjective (μεγάλης) marks this as the key interpretative phrase in the passage.³⁴ It is the last and final tribulation that God's people must endure.³⁵ The multitude has passed through this period of tribulation and

Charles, (*Revelation I*, 211), rejects the Feast of Tabernacles imagery. Murphy, (*Fallen is Babylon*, 225), agrees with Charles' reasoning and sees the Maccabean usage as denoting a symbol of joy and victory. Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 192), argues that the Feast anticipated the messianic age and thus is fitting imagery for this section.

³² Boxall, *The Revelation*, 125.

³³ Blount, *Revelation*, 151.

³⁴ Casey, "Exodus Typology," 181; Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon* 226; Blount, *Revelation* 151

³⁵ The present participle, ἐρχόμενοι, is connected to the aorist indicatives ἦλθον (7.13) ἔπλυναν, and ἐλεύκαναν (7.14). This has been understood by some as indicating that the multitude is currently

is now securely in heaven. This tribulation period consists of the ultimate manifestation of satanic power.³⁶ Tribulation is an important verbal thread in John's narrative tapestry.³⁷ It characterizes John's experience (1.9) and is connected with the devil's attacks upon the church (2.9, 10). Here it refers to the final display of Satan's attempts in forcing the church to conform, while not necessarily excluding any of the pressures that God's people have experienced throughout history.³⁸ The redeemed have experienced the full and ultimate display of Satan's deceptive and persecuting power, unleashed in the final great tribulation. Although Blount limits his comment to the work of Rome, he rightly recognizes the narrative point that "if the dragon cannot rule in heaven, he is determined to destroy God's people on earth."³⁹

This overview of the narrative uncovers several thematic connections within the text that relate to the conflict theme. The counterimaging of the seal of God in opposition to the mark of the beast; the counterimaging of the white robes against the dress of the harlot; the imagery of the palm branches and the mention of the great tribulation all combine to direct the IR to the war that began in heaven and is being resolved on earth. The setting of the hymn in the throne room, reminds the reader of Revelation's dominant question that is at the heart of this conflict--is God fit to rule? As with the previous hymns, this one needs to be heard against the background of that question.

coming out of the tribulation. See Charles, *The Revelation I*, 213. Tavo, (*Woman, Mother and Bride*, 166) sees a similar perspective as the crowd is continually growing as individuals are added to it. However, the finite verbs in the passage being aorists would indicate that the participle should be read as a completed action. See Casey, "Exodus Typology," 181.

³⁶ Charles, *Revelation I*, 213.

³⁷ The theme comes originally from Dan. 12.1. See also Matt. 24.21; Mark 13.7-19.

³⁸ Krodel, *Revelation* 185.

³⁹ Blount, *Revelation*, 233.

Hymnic Pericope (7.9-12)

7.9-10

In a reversal of the common OT imagery, wherein Israel was not allowed to come into God's direct presence (for example, Exod. 19.12f), and yet also a fulfillment of the promise to make Israel a nation of priests (Exod.19.6; Rev. 1.6),⁴⁰ this section opens with the great multitude standing before the throne, indicating direct access to God.⁴¹ Up to this point in the narrative, it has been the elders and the living creatures followed by the growing number of angelic beings that have been in the presence of the throne. The multitude bears the tokens of triumph (white robes, palm branches), yet the hymn they sing credits that conquest to God.

Whether or not the multitude is the same entity as those sealed remains a debated question. Nor is it entirely clear as to whether this character group should be understood to represent the whole Church throughout the ages or a select part of it, possibly martyrs or those living at the time of Christ's return. Bauckham sees both groups as one, and best interpreted as representatives of an army being readied for holy war. He argues that the numbering of the 144,000 is reminiscent of the OT census, used for identifying those able for military service (cf. Num. 1; 1 Chron. 27.23) and that the emphasis on male virginity (14.1-4) both support this conclusion.⁴²

The messianic war is interwoven with Revelation's emphasis on conquering. The beast, as Satan's proxy, defeats God's followers (11.7; 13.7) but ultimately they

⁴⁰ Casey, "Exodus Typology," 183.

⁴¹ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 148.

⁴² Bauckham, *Theology*, 77-78; also *Climax*, 215-229. Boring, (*Revelation*, 131), notes that the number "thousand" has military connotations.

in turn contribute to his defeat (15.2; 12.11).⁴³ James Valentine agrees both with the war overtone, and the identification of the two groups as being one. The war imagery denotes the Church engaged in battle, yet participants as well in the judgment in heaven. The multitude represents the Church triumphant, having stood on God's side in the controversy, and ultimately receiving vindication.⁴⁴ However, even if both groups are not identical,⁴⁵ the concept that God's people are part of His army and must conquer, as did Christ, is apparent from the larger narrative. Each of the seven letters ends with an appeal to the one who overcomes, culminating with the presentation of Christ as the believer's paradigm.⁴⁶

The hymn that the conquerors' sing reflects their recognition that God has been involved in their triumph. Once more there is an antiphonal song, this time one that focuses on victory, which is used to further the plot in Revelation's narrative.⁴⁷ Verse 10 initiates the antiphony and reveals its theme.

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον καὶ ἰδοῦ, ὄχλος πολὺς ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἠδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἁρνίου περιβεβλημένοι στολὰς λευκάς καὶ φοίνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν καὶ κράζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλη λέγοντες ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἁρνίῳ (7.9-10)

The power and imagery of the hymn is heightened by the present tense of the main verb, *κράζουσιν*,⁴⁸ and by the loud voice⁴⁹ with which the multitude, heard as a united

⁴³ Bauckham, *Theology*, 70.

⁴⁴ James Valentine, "Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1985), 219.

⁴⁵ Blount, *Revelation*, 145; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 483

⁴⁶ 2.7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3.5, 12, 21.

⁴⁷ Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 125.

⁴⁸ Although the manuscript evidence is additionally divided here by a participle and an aorist, the difficulty of the present tense gives it priority.

chorus, sings. The loud voice is appropriate for the triumphal nature of the hymn. Anticipation is thus increased, and the reader or hearer is drawn more closely into the narrative.⁵⁰

The hymn opens with the first of three usages of ἡ σωτηρία in Revelation, the other two also being found in hymnic pericopes (12.10; 19.1). Each use is articular, which gives the impression that the reader is familiar with the subject. However, this first mention is more fully clarified in the hymn of chapter 12. This is a grammatical technique that John uses throughout the narrative.⁵¹ In this way he emphasizes that “the victory, the deliverance” is not the achievement of the crowd, but of God,⁵² through the sacrifice of Christ.

A key interpretive decision must be made relating to the word σωτηρία. Is the emphasis actually on salvation, or is the song ascribing victory to God? Is the frequent NT idea of redemption from sin the main thought, or is it more the final victory of God’s sovereignty?⁵³ A case can be made for both readings. The mention of “blood of the Lamb” conveys connotations of salvation from sin, as does the initial introduction of the Lamb as having been slain (5.6). This idea is confirmed by the statement that the multitude has washed their robes in His blood, which appears to point in the direction of salvation. Mounce argues that the hymn reflects the multitude’s

⁴⁹ A loud or great voice appears in strategic places in the narrative. For example, see 5.2, 12; 6.10; 7.2, 10; 8.13; 10.3; 12.10; 14.7, 9, 15; 16.17; 19.17. Frequently connected with angelic beings, it is an indication of the importance of what is to follow.

⁵⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 192.

⁵¹ Other examples are 2.11 and 20.14; 11.3 and 11.4-13; 17.1 and 17.5; 11.7 and 13.1-10. See Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 163.

⁵² Charles, *Revelation I*, 211.

⁵³ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 193.

realization that the deliverance is due to the redemptive activity of Christ.⁵⁴ Robert Bratcher, after considering the translation “victory” decides that salvation is a better choice here.⁵⁵ Horn, in his consideration of the passage, concludes that σωτηρία represents “Christian salvation.”⁵⁶

Alternatively, Caird argues that salvation cannot be the meaning here. Because salvation was accomplished in the past, both by Christ’s death and the believer’s faith response, the emphasis here must be on the victory they have experienced through persecution.⁵⁷ Bauckham concurs, seeing the OT background of Ps. 3.8, wherein it is God’s act of deliverance that is primarily in view.⁵⁸ J. Roloff also stresses the OT echoes and concludes that the hymn proclaims “the victory that God and Jesus Christ have achieved...”⁵⁹ Similarly, Yarbro Collins argues that the meaning of σωτηρία here is victory and sees in the passage a reflection of the victory songs found in Exodus 15 and Judges 5.⁶⁰

While the primary meaning in this context is victory,⁶¹ the two ideas are not that far apart, especially given the larger narrative setting. John has already mingled the concepts of salvation and victory in his introduction of the Lamb (5.5,6). In that

⁵⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 162-63. See also Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 101.

⁵⁵ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 127.

⁵⁶ Horn, “Hymns as Summaries,” 49.

⁵⁷ Caird, *The Revelation*, 100.

⁵⁸ Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 225. The psalm, containing thanks to God for deliverance from oppressive enemies, is parallel to the hymn in Rev.7. See Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 226.

⁵⁹ Roloff, *Revelation*, 98.

⁶⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Apocalypse (Revelation)” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 1005. Altenbaumer, “The Salvation Myth,” 128, concurs with the OT background for the victory song and sees the entire hymn as built on that foundation.

⁶¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 320.

scene, Christ is portrayed as the victorious conqueror, precisely because He was slain. It is His sacrificial death that brings victory over Satan in the cosmic war, for in His death the Lamb reveals the truth of how God rules and dispels any lingering doubts sown by the devil's deceptive lies. The death that accomplishes salvation for the multitude also demonstrates God's worthiness to reign. The hymn is sung as a spontaneous expression that the redeemed recognize God's right to rule, in spite of the accusations that have been brought against His government. The victory over God's enemies is an "eschatological salvation" precisely because, as Revelation's storyline opens to the reader, it is allegiance to Satan and his earthly understudies⁶² that constitutes the main obstacle to the recognition of God's sovereignty.⁶³ That allegiance is the result of Satan's accusations against God and His people, founded upon his misrepresentation of God. The fact that victory is attributed both to God and to the Lamb in the hymn,⁶⁴ underscores not only the essential unity between the two, but also the key role that Jesus holds in defeating Satan. Both are crucial in this victory, because in Revelation's storyline Christ reveals God's faithfulness and trustworthiness, which have been questioned by Satan.

The connotation of victory, rather than exclusively that of salvation is also supported by the phrasing of the song. There is no copulative verb in the hymn and many versions supply the word "belongs" (so the NCV; ESV; RSV; NIV; NKJV; HCSB; and MOUNCE). This is due to the use of σωτηρία, in the nominative case, with τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν...καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ in the dative case. Osborne notes that the dative can be understood in either a possessive or instrumental way, that is, salvation belongs to

⁶² Whether the surrogates refer to ancient Rome or a more modern oppressive system, the principle is the same.

⁶³ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 225.

⁶⁴ This reflects the usage in 5.13, in which both God and the Lamb receive worship.

God, or has been achieved by God. He agrees with many that the sense is possessive and that “belongs” should be supplied to the hymn.⁶⁵ Yet that raises the question, what is the meaning behind the phrase “salvation belongs to our God”? In what way can salvation be said to belong to God? One could properly speak of salvation coming from God, as in the translation “Salvation comes from God” (GNB). However, this turns the dative into a genitive, denoting God as the source of salvation. A more consistent reading is to allow the connotations of victory to predominate and to understand the passage as crediting “victory to our⁶⁶ God...and to the Lamb.”⁶⁷ This is not only grammatically coherent, but is consistent with the over-arching war theme in Revelation. The multitude ascribes victory to both God and Christ, thereby joining the divine council in recognition of God’s fitness to reign, Satan’s deceptive accusations notwithstanding.⁶⁸

7.11-12

The victory song of the multitude inspires a response from the innumerable angelic host that surrounds the throne. They fall prostrate before the throne and offer an antiphonal doxology of praise. Earlier in the narrative, it was the twenty-four elders who worshipped in this manner, and sang as a response to the hymn of the

⁶⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 320; so Smalley, *The Revelation*, 193

⁶⁶ It is of interest that “our God” appears eight other times in Revelation (4.11; 5.10; 7.12; 12.10 (2x); 19.1,5,6), always in a hymnic pericope.

⁶⁷ Paul Ellingworth, “Salvation to our God,” *BT* 34, (1983): 444-445

⁶⁸ Blount, (*Revelation*, 96), realizes the overtones of victory in the hymn, and then asks, who is the victory over? In his view, “there is only Rome.” He sees the symbols we have discussed as representing victory over the “beastly machinations of imperial Rome...” While a specific historical reality might be also in view, the narrative points to a broader victory--the one that occurs in the cosmic war. While it is not necessary to deny that there might be “political taunting” occurring in the scene, it is necessary to recognize that storyline points to a larger concern, which is the war that originated in heaven. Prigent, (*Apocalypse*, 291), points out that the victory the martyrs experience, is in the final analysis, that of the Lamb.

living creatures. While the victory song was sung to both God and the Lamb, the doxology has God alone as the object of praise.⁶⁹ Nevertheless a closer reading of the narrative uncovers a movement in the expression of devotion given to God and the Lamb. Victory (or salvation) is said to be the province of both of them (7.10). Then God receives worship and the antiphony of praise (7.11, 12). However, it is the Lamb who is mentioned next, in reference to His blood (7.14.) In 7.15, God is once more mentioned in relation to the throne, the temple, and His tabernacle. Finally the Lamb, in the center of the throne, will be their shepherd protecting them, and God will ultimately wipe the tears from their eyes (7.17). In this way, John underscores the fundamental unity of the Lamb and God, intermingling their roles and attributing to Christ characteristics that the OT reserves for God.⁷⁰

λέγοντες
 Ἀμήν ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ
 δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν (7.12)

“Amen” frames the sevenfold doxology forming an inclusio. As part of the antiphonal chorus, the doxology must be seen in response to, and as an expansion of the victory song. The opening “amen” supports this idea, and should be understood as equivalent to the Hebrew אָמֵן or “so be it.”⁷¹ The angelic host is thus confirming the judgment of the multitude--that victory in the controversy is God’s. The doxology testifies to the angelic agreement as to why God is considered worthy of worship and

⁶⁹ Though, Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 163), considers that both God and the Lamb are the recipients of the praise.

⁷⁰ See Ps. 23.1; Isa 25.8; 49.10. Altenbaumer, “The Salvation Myth,” 130.

⁷¹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 194. Amen is used in other hymns (5.14; 19.4) but always at the end of the hymn. Therefore the first “amen” must be seen as an affirmation of the hymn the multitude sings. See Osborne, *Revelation* 321.

His right to be the sovereign of the universe.⁷² The heavenly host recognizes that the revelatory and redemptive work of Christ demonstrates that God rightly possesses these sovereign attributes, “and is worthy of receiving eternal ‘blessing and glory ... and thanksgiving and honor.’”⁷³ The seven attributes are also ascribed to the Lamb (5.12), with the exception that “thanksgiving” here (which is only ascribed to God in Revelation), replaces “wealth” in the praise to Christ. Thanksgiving, or thankfulness, is appropriate in view of the victory that has just been celebrated. As part of the heavenly council, the angels support the acclamation that victory in the cosmic war has been won by God, and by extension, the Lamb. The doxology emphasizes each of the individual characteristics by the inclusion of the article before each trait, as well as the repetitive use of *kai* throughout.

Conclusion

Keeping in mind the claim that the problem before the heavenly council is the rebellion of Satan, paralleled by a rebellion on earth,⁷⁴ and that the issues at stake are concerned with the justice of God’s rule throughout the universe, it would be expected that the hymnic sections would in some measure be related to the larger theme. In reviewing the narrative details, imagery, and setting that surrounds the antiphonal hymn in chapter seven, as well as the content of the hymn, it becomes evident that the song of the multitude and the angelic response need to be heard against the background of the heavenly war. The hymns in the exemplary chapters 4 and 5 are unmistakably set in the context of the crisis facing the council. In that

⁷² Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 113

⁷³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 432. Beale also notes that the thematic connections to the book of Daniel bring to view the cosmic scope of God’s end-time victory.

⁷⁴ Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse*, 39

setting, John demonstrates that Jesus conquers through His sacrificial death. In the hymnic pericope presently under investigation, Christ's followers partake in that victory both through their willingness to conquer as He did and as importantly, by their recognition that sacrifice *is the way God conquers*.

The setting is replete with images of victory--the palm branches, the white robes, and the fact that they have come out of the great tribulation. The song the multitude sings is clearly an acclamation of victory, but not simply victory against political realities on earth. In Revelation's storyline, there is a larger conflict raging than the one between persecuting governments and disobedient subjects. The war in heaven is the source of the "*conflict between society and the church on earth.*" Earthly conflict results from the war in heaven.⁷⁵ The victory that the multitude ascribes to God and Christ has been won by Christ's faithful revelation of the nature of God's government, a revelation that finds its apex in His death. While Revelation's author never explicitly mentions Calvary, the IR would unquestionably make the connection from "the blood of the Lamb" to the cross. Through that discovery, the multitude is convinced of God's faithfulness and His worthiness to be the sovereign of the universe. The multitude recognizes that the victory that they have partaken in can only be attributed to the One on the throne and to the Lamb.

Revelation 11.15-18

Setting

Charles' statement that it is uncertain whether the setting for this section is heaven or earth is perplexing, given the author's statement that the loud voices that

⁷⁵ Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11:1-14:5*, (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 78-79 emphasis original.

sing the first hymn are “in heaven.”⁷⁶ The spatial marker, plus the presence of the twenty-four elders who are initially seated upon their thrones indicate that as with the previous hymns, this one is placed in the throne room setting, with members of the divine council present. The reader is once more placed in the location and setting in which the ever-present controversy began. Thompson notes that the setting is the throne room, which has been the primary backdrop since chapter 4.⁷⁷ The mention of the temple in 11.19 reinforces this judgment. While the verse also serves as a hinge between the images in chapter 11 and 12,⁷⁸ the mention of the ark in the heavenly temple also alludes to the council in which Satan was once a member and held the position of covering cherub (Ezek. 28.14). This is the first and only unambiguous mention of the ark, though the throne with the living creatures (4.4-8) is identified with it.⁷⁹ The ark is a distinct feature of the “Holy War motif” that is so pervasive in the narrative.⁸⁰ The setting also points to the connection between two aspects of judgment that are brought out in the hymn. There is a positive or favorable judgment for God’s people, and a negative judgment on those who oppose God (i.e. the dragon, his surrogates, and those who join them).⁸¹

This heavenly realm constitutes a distinct break from the immediately preceding setting. There the attention is placed on the treading down of the holy city (11.2) and the persecution of the two witnesses by the beast from the abyss (11.3, 7).

⁷⁶ Charles, *Revelation I*, 294.

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Revelation*, 128.

⁷⁸ Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar*, 119.

⁷⁹ See chapter three above and the discussion of the role of the temple and divine council within Revelation’s story.

⁸⁰ Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 121.

⁸¹ Blount, *Revelation*, 219.

These events take place on the earth, as do the events that lead up to the discussion of the two witnesses (10.1-11.1). As with the larger setting of the hymnic pericope in chapter 7, there is a disagreement among interpreters as to how the scenes (in this case 10.1-11.14) relate to the on-going images of the sounding of the seven trumpets.

Many commentators understand the events of chapters 10 and 11 as forming an interlude or parenthesis between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, in a form analogous to the role of chapter 7, located between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. Mounce considers the interlude, not as a pause in the unfolding of events, but as a means of instructing the church in both its role and destiny during the final period of world history.⁸² Beale calls the preceding section a “literary and theological parenthesis,” which has broken the action that has been unfolding in the trumpets.⁸³ The function of the parenthesis is to provide an interpretation of the events covered under the six trumpets.⁸⁴

However, an argument can well be made for noting the connecting links between the scenes in these two chapters and the heralding of the trumpets. An eagle flying in heaven warns of the triple woes that are to come upon the earth (8.13). This links each of the remaining trumpets with a “woe.” Upon the conclusion of the fifth trumpet, it is mentioned that the “first woe is past” (9.12), thus linking the events under the sounding of the trumpet with that “woe.” While the sixth trumpet sounds in 9.13, it is not until 11.14 that the second woe is completed. This seems to unite the scenes of chapters ten and eleven, with the unfolding imagery found at the end of

⁸² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 199.

⁸³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 609. See Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Tripartite Structure of the Sixth Seal, the Sixth Trumpet, and the Sixth Bowl of John's Apocalypse (Rev 6:12-7:17, 9:13-11:14, 16:12-16)," *JETS* 35, no. 1 (March 1, 1992, 1992), 69 for a list of commentators who follow this perspective.

⁸⁴ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 521.

chapter 9 (9.13-21).⁸⁵ Both views see the ongoing witness of the church on earth as the subject of the imagery, in contrast to the heavenly setting that begins the hymnic pericope.

Dramatis Personae

The seventh angel with a trumpet is the first character portrayed in the pericope (11.15). It is a flat character, with no function other than that of blowing the trumpet. The relation of that activity to the remainder of the section will be discussed below in the plot. Next there are the unidentified “loud voices” that sing the first part of the antiphonal chorus.⁸⁶ There have been singular heavenly voices earlier in the narrative (1.10; 4.1; 6.1,3,5,7; 9.13), but this is the first place there is not a clear identification with a heavenly chorus. The voices probably do not represent the twenty-four elders, who comprise the character group singing the antiphonal part of the hymn. These singers might include either the angelic chorus (5.11-12; 7.12), or the great multitude (7.10), or both.⁸⁷ God is once again the focus of the hymn, however in this scene there is no interaction with Him, other than that He receives the worship of the elders. Nevertheless the multi-dimensional view of God portrayed throughout the narrative is highlighted here, as He is shown as sovereign, loving, and wrathful.⁸⁸ Christ is mentioned, but has no appearance in the hymn.

⁸⁵ Steinmann, “*The Tripartite Structure*” 75; also Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts*, 114.

⁸⁶ Blount, *The Revelation*, 221, describes them as “foreboding voices,” which given the praise that follows seems a misrepresentation of them.

⁸⁷ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 169.

⁸⁸ Stubblefield, “Warfare,” 81.

Plot

The plot action immediately surrounding the pericope concerns the closing of the events under the sixth trumpet and the second woe, the warning of the proximity of the third woe (11.14), and then the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11.15). An issue that needs clarification is that of the relation of the third woe to the unfolding narrative. John never clearly identifies the completion of the final woe as he does the first two (9.12; 11.14). This is more disconcerting, especially as it is mentioned that the ultimate woe “is coming quickly.” In the rest of the narrative (2.16; 3.11; 22.7, 12, 20) the meaning of that phrase is that of the imminence of the personal coming of Christ. In this context, there is no clear statement as to the fulfillment of the final woe.

Charles connects the third woe with the opening of the Ark of the Covenant and the unfolding of the remainder of the book.⁸⁹ Resseguie understands the upheaval of sea and land, caused by the appearance of the sea and land beasts to constitute the third woe.⁹⁰ Similarly, J. P. M. Sweet identifies the woe that occurs when Satan is cast down (12.12) and the events that follow as the third woe.⁹¹ Beale understands the woe to be contained in the hymnic passage under consideration and that this is the fulfillment of the seventh trumpet.⁹² Antonius Siew agrees with Beale that the woe is contained in the seventh trumpet, as the first two woes are unfolded in the fifth and sixth trumpets. However, he argues that as the seventh seal had no separate content,

⁸⁹ Charles, *Revelation I*, 297. Charles’ understanding of the formation of the text influences his view. Roloff, *Revelation*, 134-35, similarly understands the difficulty concerning the woes as part of the work of a “pedantic annotator.”

⁹⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 167.

⁹¹ Sweet, *Revelation*, 190.

⁹² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 609-610.

but encompassed the trumpets, so the seventh trumpet has no distinct substance but encompasses the seven last plagues of God's wrath (15.1-16.21).⁹³

On the whole, it appears that both Beale and Siew are on the right track, in identifying the woe with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. This fits with the action in the plot under the previous two trumpets. While their view of *how* the woe relates to the trumpet diverge from one another, G. Beasley-Murray identifies a point of contact between them. He notes that no action is introduced under the seventh trumpet. He continues to argue that the final woe can be seen as “reflected in verse 18a...” which describes the coming wrath of God that is further clarified in the plagues.⁹⁴ Therefore, at a minimum, the hymn points to the time when the last woe will be experienced by the world.⁹⁵ What is evident is that the story has reached a point in which the eschatological age is to be ushered in and there is a culmination to the “mystery of God” (10.7).

Narrative Details

Siew's monograph on 11.1-14.5, examines the chiasmic arrangement of this portion of Revelation. The pattern he proposes is an example of a concentric, conic-spiraling approach, which has a sense of ascent and descent, moving from earth to heaven and back to earth. The pivot of the chiasm is the war in heaven (12.7-12). For the purposes of this study, it is of importance to note what is the mirror passage in the chiasmic arrangement, to the section currently under discussion. Siew labels 11.15-19 as “God's Kingdom Comes” and pairs it with 13.1-6, called “The Kingdom of the

⁹³ Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts*, 115-116.

⁹⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 187-188.

⁹⁵ However, Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts*, 117, is correct when he links the seventh angel with the woe in verse 14, thus beginning this section with the loud voices that sing the hymn.

Beast/Dragon.’⁹⁶ If this identification is correct, it strengthens the connection between the pericope and the war in heaven theme. The rhetorical power of this chiasm, with its paired sections and pivot on the heavenly conflict, informs the reader of the connection between occurrences in heaven and on earth. The impact of the cosmic war to earthly events may be unseen, but is at the same time, undeniable.⁹⁷ Siew’s chiastic outline is reproduced here.

- A. 11.1-2 (Temple Measured/City Trampled)
- B. 11.3-6 (Signs of 2 Witnesses)
- C. 11.7-13 (Death/Resurrection/Ascent of the 2 Witnesses)
- D. 11.15-19 (God’s Kingdom Comes)
- E. 12.1-4 (Dragon Woman Conflict)
- F. 12.5-6 (Woman’s Escape and Refuge)
- G. 12.17-12 (War in Heaven)
- F’ 12.13-14 (Woman’s Escape and Refuge)
- E’ 12.15-17 (Dragon Woman Conflict)
- D’ 13.1-6 (Kingdom of the Beast)
- C’ 13.7-10 (Death of Saints)
- B’ 13.11-18 (Signs of 2nd Beast)
- A’ 14.1-5 (Temple/City Restored)

In exploring the structure of the larger unit, Siew gives attention to the developing storyline, and John’s use of the temporal indicator, three and a half

⁹⁶ Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts*, 76.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

years.⁹⁸ He examines the correspondence between the two opposing members in the chiasm. He notes that the beast comes into power and rules for the stated time period, three and a half years. This is in opposition to the passage under discussion, wherein the beast is divested of power, and the kingdom becomes that of the Lord and His Christ. This movement emphasizes “God’s battle with Satan” and the overturning of Satan’s attempts to rule.⁹⁹

Siew identifies five verbal and conceptual parallels between the paired sections of the chiasm.¹⁰⁰ The first thread between the sections is found in 13.2 and 11.15,16, and is built around the themes of the beast’s throne and his kingdom. The beast receives power and a throne from the dragon, and represents the kingdom of the world. The earthly rule is a reflection of dragon’s attempt to install his reign. “It is the dragon *in* the beast, though the latter is not to be strictly identified or equated with the former.”¹⁰¹ It is this kingdom that the hymn proclaims belongs to the Lord and His Christ, and is the subject of the first hymn.

The second parallel is the worship that is received by the beast and the dragon (13.4) and the worship that is received by God (11.16). Any attempt by a ruler to demand worship is a form of idolatry and an effort to usurp the worship that belongs to God. The hymn points to the final establishment of God’s rule which is related to the worship He receives. The contrast between the temporal indicators for both kingdoms comprises the third association. The beast’s reign is given for 42 months (13.5) while that of God’s kingdom is forever and ever (11.15). The announcement

⁹⁸ Ibid., 205. The time period is first mentioned at 11.2, as forty-two months, then again at 11.3, this time as 1260 days. At 12.6, the same period is referred to, and then at 12.14, here as a time, and times and half a time. The time frame is mentioned once more at 13.5, as forty-two months.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The following is based on Siew, *The War Between the Two Beasts*, 205-208.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 206, emphasis original.

that God's kingdom is eternal is placed after the completion of the 42 months (11.2,3).

The fourth and fifth connections are related to the object of the beast's blasphemy. Blasphemy (or slander) is a defining characteristic of the beast and the dragon (2.9; 13.1, 6; 17.3). In 13.6, God's dwelling is the object of the beast's blasphemy. This identification is of note as pointing to a thematic connection with the hymn, especially as the temple is brought to view at the end of the hymnic passage (11.19). The two images mirror one another. Additionally, the blasphemy targets those who dwell in heaven (13.6), which appears to refer, at least in part, to the twenty-four elders (11.16).

These parallels may be more nuanced than some of the other connections drawn out by Siew's chiastic structure. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect supports the pattern that is proposed. For the purposes of this investigation, these narrative details uncovered by a close reading of the text, relate the hymn directly to the war in heaven theme.

Hymnic Pericope (11.15-18)

11.15

In contrast to the silence that occurred after the opening of the seventh seal (8.1), following the sounding of the seventh trumpet loud voices were heard proclaiming the first hymn in the pericope. As is characteristic of Revelation, there is a mingling of what John hears and sees. The content of the first hymn in this pericope is the eternal nature of the kingdom of God and Christ. This is followed by the elders' antiphonal response, which thanks God for initiating His reign and then includes the result of that action. These two aspects of the second hymn are divided between

poetic and prosaic sections.¹⁰² The mention of the kingdom in the first hymn (“He will reign forever” 11.15), and then again at the conclusion of the poetic portion of the second hymn (“have begun to reign” 11.17), forms an *inclusio*. Sovereignty recognized is integral to the passage. The hymns celebrate the transfer of usurped authority from the dragon, back to the rightful ruler of the universe. The confusion and chaos initiated by Satan’s subtle attacks on God are finally countered. The emphasis in this section, God and His rightful rule, is underscored by the mention of God three times, Lord twice, and Christ once.¹⁰³

καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν
καὶ ἐγένοντο φωναὶ μεγάλαι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγοντες
ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ
βασιλεύσει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (11.15)

While the hymn focuses on God’s reign, the opening part raises an important interpretive question. The word ἐγένετο¹⁰⁴ is frequently translated as “is” or “was” (2.8; 6.12; 8.1 etc.). Read in this way, the hymn is simply announcing that the kingdom is God’s. It reflects a situation that has always been true, that the kingdom has always belonged to God and Christ.¹⁰⁵ There is certainly a sense in which God’s reign has been eternal. Yet the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that the throne, the central image of God’s rule in Revelation, is contested territory. The war in heaven is

¹⁰² Jörns, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 101-102.

¹⁰³ Ekkehardt Müller, “Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11,” (ThD diss., Andrews University, 1994), 386.

¹⁰⁴ The tense of the verb, γίνομαι, is aorist, as are the verbs in the second hymn. It is frequently viewed as a prophetic perfect, or in a proleptic sense. See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 638; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 289. However, since the narrative flow is at a time when the 42 months is completed, then the usage of the past tense verbs describe actions which are completed, seen from the point of view of the future. So, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 611; Siew *The War*, 120.

¹⁰⁵ So, Christopher Rowland, “The Book of Revelation” In *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck. Vol. 12, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 643.

over who actually has the right to rule. The questions raised about God's fitness to govern are what need to be answered in order for His reign to be established. As Caird points out, a king may be one *de jure*, but not *de facto*. In addition to the announcement of accession, there needs to be a responding acclamation by the king's subjects.¹⁰⁶ The acclamation heard in the first part of this section, is in response to the rebellion that has been raging throughout the world. The heavenly chorus adds their voices to the previous canticles. It is a song of victory over the accusations of the dragon. Given the overall movement of plot, ἐγένετο, should here be translated as "became," indicating that a transformation from one condition to another has occurred.¹⁰⁷ The "kingdom of the world" now belongs to "our Lord and His Christ."

Blount argues that the kingdom of the world must represent Rome. The reign of Caesar will fail, he rightly notes, but God's reign will be eternal.¹⁰⁸ Yet this is too limited of a view, given John's larger concerns and the cosmic dimensions of the hymns. The usurpation of power and authority by the beast is only a manifestation of the dragon's continued attempts to subvert the heavenly order. It is "the dragon in the beast" that is at work to oppress God's people and to cast aspersion on God.¹⁰⁹ The kingdom that Satan once arrogated to himself now passes to "its true Owner..."¹¹⁰ The triumph of God over Satan, and the recognition that this is so, is the reality lurking behind the content of the hymn proclaiming that the kingdom of the world

¹⁰⁶ Caird, *The Revelation*, 141.

¹⁰⁷ So Boxall, *The Revelation*, 169; Siew, *The War*, 119; Thompson, *Revelation*, 128

¹⁰⁸ Blount, *Revelation*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ Siew, *The War*, 206.

¹¹⁰ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 139.

now belongs to God and Christ.¹¹¹ The cosmic discord caused by Satan's accusations is quelled, the choir recognizes and acclaims God's just rule.

The hymn announces that this rule belongs to "our Lord and His Christ" (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ). The mention of "His Christ" is sudden and unexpected. The same expression is found in the hymn at 12.10, and the setting there makes it clear that this is an equivalent expression to the Lamb.¹¹² Once again John is highlighting the close connection to God's reign and the sacrificial death of Christ. This phrasing picks up the imagery found in Ps. 2.2. The psalm describes the "kings of the earth" and their rebellion against "the Lord and against His Anointed..." culminating in the call to worship the son and thus avoid his wrath (Ps. 2.12). The psalm forms a backdrop for both hymns and the events that are unfolded in the eschatological judgment.¹¹³

The final phrase of the hymn points to the everlasting nature of the kingdom. However, the expression, καὶ βασιλεύσει,¹¹⁴ leads to an ambiguity. The ownership of the kingdom has just been ascribed to both God and Christ. However, the singular nature of the verb, "he shall reign" raises the question as to who is being referred to. The grammar clearly points to the Anointed alone being the subject. Both Dan. 7.13,14 and Ps. 2 support this, tilting the reading of the text to refer to Christ's rule. The context however, points to a joint rule, for not only is it stated that the kingdom belongs to the Lord and His Anointed, but the elders give thanks because God has

¹¹¹ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 226.

¹¹² A similar expression is found in 20.4, 6 as well. Each of these occurrences contains the definite article, and thus indicates that it serves as a title. These verses are placed in the context of Christ's reign. See Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 163.

¹¹³ Caird, *The Revelation*, 141.

¹¹⁴ The verb is a third person singular, future indicative.

“begun to reign” (11.17).¹¹⁵ Swete argues that the meaning is that ultimately Christ’s reign will be subsumed into God’s.¹¹⁶ A similar expression is found at the end of Revelation (22.3, 4). There the throne is identified as belonging to both God and the Lamb, followed by the statement that the bondservants will serve *Him*, see *His* face, and have *His* name in their foreheads.

Taking the narrative background into account, two observations are important. The first is the role of Christ in the ushering in the kingdom. Twice in the narrative, the title King of Kings is used for Christ (17.14; 19.16). It can truly be said that this is *His* rule that will be eternal. It is His return that highlights the opening of the book (1.7) and its closing (22.12, 20, 21). Second, there is the repeated theme emphasizing the ontological unity between the Lord and His Christ. Revelation makes it clear that “what Christ does, God does”¹¹⁷ and it is through His actions, specifically His death, that God’s kingdom is secured. The authority of the kingdom of the world is broken, as Satan’s accusations are countered by God’s self-revelation in Christ.

11.16-18

The first hymn considered in this investigation, was met by an antiphonal response by the twenty-four elders (4.11). In a scene with verbal threads to the initial throne room vision (cf. 4.10,11; 5.8; 14), the elders here once again leave their thrones and prostrate themselves before God. Picking up the theme in the immediately preceding hymn, they thank God for the initiation of His rule. In the first hymnic pericope the elders sang (4.11), and proclaimed God’s worthiness due to His creative

¹¹⁵ Altenbaumer “The Salvation Myth,” 171.

¹¹⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 139.

¹¹⁷ Bauckham, *Theology*, 63.

power. Now they thank Him for establishing His government over a part of the creation that had been in rebellion. God has not surrendered to the demonic forces, but overcome them.¹¹⁸ As the hymn opens with the elders' thanksgiving, it then moves to recount the actions that are the cause for praise.¹¹⁹

καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενοι ἐπὶ τοὺς
θρόνους αὐτῶν ἔπεσαν ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ
λέγοντες

εὐχαριστοῦμέν σοι κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν
ὅτι εἴληφας τὴν δύναμίν σου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐβασίλευσας
καὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὠργίσθησαν
καὶ ἦλθεν ἡ ὀργή σου
καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι
καὶ δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις
καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις
καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου τοῖς μικροῖς καὶ τοῖς μεγάλοις,
καὶ διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν (11.16-18)

The hymn is introduced with titles for God, which are familiar to the reader. The first, the Lord God Almighty, is found in God's opening speech (1.8), in the hymn that is sung by the four living creatures (4.8), in the three more hymns (15.3; 16.7; 19.6), and then finally in the discussion about the descent of the New Jerusalem (21.22).¹²⁰ The title reflects the Hebrew designation, the Lord of Hosts (יהוה צבאות), which has connotations of military power. Given the context of the hymn, the expression refers to God's authority and sovereignty, "achieved through his victory over the powers of evil in the final conflict."¹²¹ It is not simply God's position that is being reflected upon, but as the hymn progresses it becomes evident that the gratitude

¹¹⁸ Krodel, *Revelation*, 230.

¹¹⁹ While the noun εὐχαριστία is used earlier (4.9; 7.12), this is the first and only use of the verbal form. See Smalley, *The Revelation*, 290; Osborne, *Revelation*, 442.

¹²⁰ A similar title, God the Almighty, is also found at 16.14 and 19.15.

¹²¹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 290.

expressed is due to the victory that has been gained in the controversy, and the ensuing results.

The reader has also encountered the second title (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν) title earlier in the narrative (1.4, 8; 4.8) but here it appears in a shortened version.¹²² The third part of the ascription, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, is not included in the elders' acclamation. Its absence is due the eschatological fulfillment that is occurring in the narrative.¹²³ The kingdom of the Lord and His Christ, from the perspective of the storyline, has arrived. The rule of the Almighty is no longer coming; it is now present. The tension created by the attempts to overthrow God's rule, is resolved.

The hymn proceeds with the explanatory ὅτι, followed by verbal phrases and the use of infinitives that unfold the initiation of God's rule and the subsequent results.¹²⁴ The opening phrase, which controls the rest of the hymn and is the basis for the thanksgiving, declares that God has assumed¹²⁵ His great power and begun to reign.¹²⁶ This is clearly an unusual expression, given that God has been connected with the imagery of throne since the opening chapter (1.4), within the inaugural vision of the heavenly temple (4.2,3f), and then continually throughout the narrative. The phrase demands consideration, given Revelation's frequent portrayal of God's position as ruler in the heavenly council and throughout the universe.

¹²² For a discussion on the counterimaging inherent in the title, see the previous chapter.

¹²³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 613 sees the ὅτι clause as replacing the last part of the triad. That would make the statement about God having taken his power and initiating His reign as part of the descriptor. It is better to read the ὅτι as an explanatory phrase, giving the reasons for the hymn of thanks.

¹²⁴ Müller, "Microstructural Analysis," 388. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 613), sees the ὅτι clause as replacing the last part of the descriptive triad.

¹²⁵ εἴληφας is in the perfect tense, but the idiomatic sense is best conveyed with the understanding that God "has assumed" His power. See Kiddle, *The Revelation*, 208.

¹²⁶ ἐβασίλευσας is an aorist, which here should be taken as ingressive and indicates the initiation of God's reign. See Smalley, *The Revelation*, 290; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 642.

This initiation of God's rule and assumption of His great power can best be explained in light of the narrative theme. Keeping in mind the background of the dragon's attempts to usurp God's position on the throne, the narrative points to a time when those attempts and the motivation behind them are made manifest. The heavenly council, represented here by the elders, is rejoicing that God has both made evident the falsity of Satan's claims and has assumed His rightful rule. It is in the victory over the powers of evil and over that part of humanity that has joined in the rebellion, that God establishes His rule.¹²⁷

The narrative frequently describes how the issues in the war in heaven are currently being unfolded on earth. The dragon has attempted to inaugurate his reign on earth, denying that God has the right to be the ruler of the universe. Through the art of deception and misrepresentation (12.9), and through the almost unchecked ability and capacity to persecute and overcome the believers (6.9,10; 13.7), Satan has worked to establish his kingdom. The hymn points to a time in the storyline, in which Satan's defeat is manifest and assured, and God inaugurates His kingdom. Satan's wrath (12.17), which oppresses God's people, is ultimately vanquished.¹²⁸

Close attention must be paid to the way in which the initiation of the kingdom occurs. The elders ascribe thanksgiving because God has assumed His great power. What follows in the prosaic portion of the hymn describes God's wrath and the judgment that comes upon the nations. Does this indicate that before this point in the narrative, God has been a passive observer to the unfolding events, but now He unleashes His power, thus by brute force overcoming His enemies? Unquestionably

¹²⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 189.

¹²⁸ Kiddle, *The Revelation*, 208

the hymn does discuss judgment and the unveiling of God's wrath. A close reading of the text must take into account what might appear to be conflicting information.

Power is a characteristic that has been attributed to both God and the Lamb in previous hymns (4.11; 5.12; 7.12). In Revelation's narrative world, God's power is a counterimage to the power of the dragon and the beast (13.2; 17.13). Power is interpreted and transformed through Christ's death (12.7-12).¹²⁹ The victory that is celebrated in the hymn is one that comes through Christ's way of conquering, which is seen in His death. This is not an attempt to empty the judgment, mentioned in the hymn and described in fuller detail later in the book, of its force, solemnity, or its stark reality.¹³⁰ Rather it is to argue that divine judgment must be seen as an expression of divine justice and divine love. God's power does not suddenly become like that of the dragon. Such an interpretative move would only serve to support the claims made against God in the controversy. The consistent point of view of the narrative is that all of God's actions must be interpreted and understood in the light of the cross. It is Christ's revelation through His sacrificial death that establishes God's reign and the defeat of Satan.¹³¹

The hymn declares that the commencement of God's reign (ἐβασίλευσας) is met with the wrath of the nations (ὠργίσθησαν). The two ingressive aorists parallel one another, signaling that the start of God's rule is countered by the response of the nations.¹³² In the hymn, the reaction of the nations clarifies that the time has come for

¹²⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 194.

¹³⁰ Moyise, "Lion Lie Down" 181-194, argues that both the images of the Lion and the Lamb need to be used to interpret one another.

¹³¹ Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 514.

¹³² Psalm 2 continues to function as the background for the hymn. The kings and rulers set themselves against the Lord and His Anointed and the Lord responds to their anger (Ps. 2.1-7). See Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation* (London: New York: T & T Clark, 2011) 41-57 for an overview of the use of Psalm 2 in Revelation.

the complete demonstration of divine wrath.¹³³ The violence of those who have chosen to fulfill the dragon's wrath (12.17) is "answered by the effective judgments of God."¹³⁴ There is clearly a play on words in the hymn, the nations are angry- ὠργίσθησαν; and God's anger has come- καὶ ἦλθεν ἡ ὀργή σου. The verbal tenses are also instructive. The nations experience anger within themselves that has God and His government as its object. By contrast, God's anger is spoken of as having arrived or come. In the face of the wrath of the nations, "God's wrath is disclosed."¹³⁵ The meaning of this is clarified in the remainder of the hymn, which continues to be governed by the main verb ἦλθεν.

The next section of the hymn forms an inclusio¹³⁶ in which three aorist infinitives are used to contrast judgment and reward. The passage can be outlined as follows.

And the time¹³⁷ has come
 A For the dead to be judged
 B And to give the reward to
 your servants the prophets
 and the saints¹³⁸
 and those who fear your name, small and great¹³⁹
 A' And to destroy the destroyers of the earth.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ Ibid, 55.

¹³⁴ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 143.

¹³⁵ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 291. Smalley understands the καὶ mentioned in relation to God's wrath to be adversative. God's wrath is more fully described in the outpouring of the seven last plagues (15.1-16.21).

¹³⁶ Müller, "Microstructural Analysis," 388; Osborne, *Revelation*, 444.

¹³⁷ καιρὸς,

¹³⁸ Whether "your servants" is made up of the prophets and the saints, or whether they are two distinct classes is open to discussion. See Mounce, *Revelation*, 227.

¹³⁹ The καὶ before "those who fear your name" most likely should be read as epexegetical.

¹⁴⁰ Note the parallel to 19.2. Author's translation

The structure emphasizes two distinct aspects of the God's wrath as shown in the coming judgment. The initial καὶ in the opening phrase can be exegetical, strengthening the connection between God's wrath and the coming judgment. That would yield "and your wrath has come, namely the time for the dead to be judged."¹⁴¹ This reading gives content to the meaning of God's wrath as being manifested with time for judgment. The remainder of the narrative supports this understanding.

What the hymn emphasizes is that the judgment has both a positive and negative aspect. The ABA structure highlights the fulfillment of God's promises to His people. There is a reward given to the servants of God, whether they are small or great. In opposition to this, destruction awaits those who have engaged in destroying the earth.¹⁴² This would include the godless, and also Death and Hades (20.14), the beast and the false prophet (16.13f; 19.19-22), and the originator of the war, the devil (20.10).¹⁴³ The inauguration of God's rule brings with it either reward or annihilation. That both are the results of choices made in this life is a consistent theme throughout the book (22.12; 2.23; 14.13; 18.6; 20.12,13). The secondary judgments that come into the world are for the purpose of bringing the nations to repentance (2.21; 16.9). The final judgment will make manifest those who have rejected that purpose.

Conclusion

As with the previous hymns, this antiphonal section distinctly provides commentary on the pervasive conflict theme. The song of the unnamed choir, as well

¹⁴¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 445.

¹⁴² This can also be seen as given in response to the cry of the martyrs (6.10). In that passage, there is not only the call for judgment to be given against Babylon and the nations aligned with her, but also the call for a positive judgment to be given to the people of God. See Stephen W. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198.

¹⁴³ Krodel, *Revelation*, 230.

as that of the twenty-four elders, contains praise to God for the inauguration of His rule. The initiation of God's reign at a point in the narrative that follows the prophetic time period allotted to the beast and the dragon indicates that God's rule has been hindered up to that time. Despite John's description of the initial heavenly vision, which revolved around God seated upon His throne, the perspective of the broader plot indicates that God's position was under attack. The nuanced accusations subtly dispersed by the arch-deceiver needed to be disputed in a manner that convinced, not only those who first encountered those accusations, but the inhabitants of earth. The joy with which the singers welcome God's taking His power and His position as ruler, is in contrast to Satan's allegations that God is unfit to rule.

In the face of the wrath of the nations, that is those who have joined forces with the beast and the dragon, God's wrath is revealed. God's opposition to the persecution and mistreatment of His people is ongoing, yet there is a signal manifestation of that wrath in an eschatological setting. However, as the hymn indicates, the final display of God's wrath needs to be seen in the context God's redemptive purposes. Before the ultimate outpouring of wrath, there is the possibility that one might leave the nations headed toward destruction, and become part of those redeemed, who come out of every nation, tongue, tribe and people.¹⁴⁴

Revelation 12.10-12

The next hymn is set within what is almost universally recognized as one of the most important chapters of the book. It is in this chapter, that John "makes explicit for the first time that the combat myth is the conceptual framework"¹⁴⁵ of the entire

¹⁴⁴ This is the implication of John's commission, to prophesy again concerning "peoples, and nations, and tongues and kings" (10.11).

¹⁴⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 231.

book. The origins of the war in heaven are here to a great degree clarified. The chapter unfolds the narrative of that war that has its “beginning with Satan” and continues manifesting itself “in history through his earthly representatives.”¹⁴⁶ The position that the chapter occupies is close to the center of the book both structurally and thematically.¹⁴⁷ Tavo notes that “the dramatic struggle between the dragon and the woman with child (12:1-18) visualizes the mortal confrontation between God and Satan as unquestionably the underlying *Urfampf* of the entire Apocalypse since all other struggles derive from it.”¹⁴⁸

There is a change in the tenor of the visions as well. The cosmic nature of the visions, with the signs and portents displayed across the sky bring about a new stage in the unfolding narrative.¹⁴⁹ New characters are brought into the vision as well. These changes indicate that the conflict between God and his satanic adversary is the determinative theme of the section. Roloff raises the question as to why John has delayed identifying such an important theme. He concludes that John wanted to avoid any misrepresentation of Satan as equal to God.¹⁵⁰ It is unequivocally true that Satan is not, in any respect God’s equal, as the entire narrative demonstrates through Satan’s defeat and destruction. Nevertheless, as John reveals with greater clarity that the

¹⁴⁶ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 58.

¹⁴⁷ William Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20.” *AUSS* 23, no. 1 (1985), 37.

¹⁴⁸ Tavo, “The Structure of the Apocalypse,” 67.

¹⁴⁹ Many scholars disagree on the relationship between 11.19 and chapter twelve. Some sense that there is a distinct break between the two. Roloff, (*Revelation*, 139), sees a “large caesura” separating chapter eleven from the rest of the book. Yarbro Collins, (*The Combat Myth*, 157), notes that 11.19 marks an ending, while 12.1 marks a beginning. Blount, (*Revelation*, 222), sees the verses as serving as a kind of inclusio with 11.1,2. Others see a closer connection between the 11.19 and 12.1. As the aorist passive ὄφθη, which is the main verb of 12.1, is only used three times in Revelation (11.19; 12.1; 12.3), Tavo, (*Woman, Mother and Bride*, 258-260), concludes that chapter 12 must be understood in the context of 11.19. Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 660-661), sets 11.19 with chapter twelve in his structure recognizing that the verse serves as a hinge passage, concluding 11.15-18 and introducing 12.1-17.

¹⁵⁰ Roloff, *Revelation*, 139.

origins of the conflicts the church faces on earth are related to the war in heaven, he has also given markers throughout the narrative of the depth and intensity of Satan's attempt to make himself equal with God. The next hymnic pericope celebrates the failure of that attempt.¹⁵¹

Setting

The setting for this section is, as with all the hymns thus far, in heaven. The expression ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ¹⁵² denotes a location, rather than simply portraying the events against the sky. The initial events of the chapter are given in the context of “God's own dwelling.”¹⁵³ However, while previous hymns have distinctly noted the throne or temple imagery, suggestive of the heavenly council (4.8, 11; 5.9-14; 7.9, 10; 11.15),¹⁵⁴ that connection is more allusive in this passage. The entire chapter shifts seamlessly from heavenly to earthly points of view. The opening signs are both located “in heaven” (12.1, 3), while verses 5-6 appear to indicate events that occur on earth. Then verses 7-12 relate back to heaven. It is within that heavenly setting that the hymn is proclaimed.¹⁵⁵

A close reading of the passage suggests that the setting is not a general heavenly context, but as with the other hymns, the throne room of God. The verbal

¹⁵¹ Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 81.

¹⁵² ἐν here carries the locative sense.

¹⁵³ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 258-9. Tavo also notes that the expression ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ appears 18 times in Revelation, always indicating the abode of the divine (4.1, 2; 5.3, 13; 8.1; 11.15, 19; 12.1, 3, 7, 8, 10; 13.6; 14.17; 15.1; 19.1, 14).

¹⁵⁴ The seventh angel is originally mentioned in 8.2, as standing before God, with the following verses (8.2-6) carrying temple imagery.

¹⁵⁵ Yarbro Collins, (*The Combat Myth*, 102-3), sees these shifts as indications of different source material. While not primarily a concern for a narrative reading, the issues of sources for this portion will be discussed more fully under the section *narrative details*.

threads that tie together 11.19, 12.1, and 12.3 support this observation. These three verses are united both by the repeated expression ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, and distinctly by the repeated use of ὄφθη. This expression appears only in these verses in Revelation, indicating that John is carefully using his words. Rather than use the familiar εἶδον, John links the verses together with the aorist passive form of ὀράω.¹⁵⁶

That it is the temple of God *in heaven* that suddenly *is seen* by John helps the reader discern that the hymn is heard in the setting of the temple. Aune adduces several reasons in support of this reading.¹⁵⁷ He first notes the formulaic mention of lightning, thunder and earthquake that appears at 4.5; 8.5; 11.19 and 16.18-21. These omens develop with increasing intensity throughout the narrative. Their function is seen both in conclusion *to* and introduction *of* an on-going series. These omens are epiphanic and symbolize the imminence of divine judgment.

Aune also points out, that the opening of a view into heaven introduces a revelatory vision. This is clearly seen in chapter four, where the throne room is first introduced. That paradigmatic vision informs the setting for the seals and trumpets. Similarly, the opening of heaven in 19.11 functions as an introduction to the climax of the war theme, demonstrated by the defeat of the powers arrayed against God. Thus, the opening of the temple in 11.19 can also be seen as introducing the following vision.¹⁵⁸ Given these narrative connections, in addition to the allusive nature of Satan's role as the "covering cherub" (Ezek. 28.14)¹⁵⁹ and his connection to the ark, Aune's conclusion that the temple motif found in 11.19 serves an introductory

¹⁵⁶ Tavo, (*Woman, Mother and Bride*, 258), notes that εἶδον is used 60 times in Revelation, making the use of ὄφθη more significant and reinforcing the conclusion that it is an important verbal marker.

¹⁵⁷ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 660-662.

¹⁵⁸ Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 662), also cites a potential similarity between Isa. 66.6-7 and Rev. 11.19-12.5a in support of his conclusion. This argument has not been included due to its tentative nature.

¹⁵⁹ See the discussion in chapter three, on the role of Satan in the narrative.

function is well grounded. The setting for this hymnic pericope is once again comprised of throne room and temple imagery.

Dramatis Personae

John introduces four new and primary characters to the reader in chapter 12. These are a celestial woman, her child, a great dragon, and Michael, the leader of the angelic host. The hymn, which is sung anonymously, is directed to both God and Christ, while neither of them plays a distinctly active role in the chapter. Mention is also made of the woman's offspring, a collective group identified by their adherence to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. The following exploration of the characters within the chapter will focus on the four primary ones.

The Woman

The celestial woman is woven throughout the action of the chapter (12.1-2, 4-6, 13-17). She is described as the first σημεῖον of the chapter and introduced with the adjective μέγα. Despite the fact that she is persecuted and pursued by the dragon, she is introduced from a heavenly perspective that is indicated by the fact that she is clothed with the sun, wears a crown of twelve stars, and stands upon the moon. Her appearance is contrasted with that of the whore named Babylon (17.4, 5; 18.16) as part of John's counterimaging. Although there are many similarities between the two women, the function of these counterpoints is to demonstrate their opposing positions.

Both women are portrayed as being a mother, one through the description of giving birth, the other through a title (12.2; 17.5). They are both found in the wilderness (12.6; 17.3), clothed (περιβεβλημένη) in a unique way (12.1, 17.4), and considered as queens (12.1; 18.7.) They both interact with a beast that has seven

heads and ten horns (12.5, 6; 17.3). However, in the first instance the beast (dragon) stands as a persecuting power, while in the second account the woman rides, or controls the beast. This reversal highlights the contrast that the reader is to discern between the whore and the woman who comprises the great sign.¹⁶⁰

The correct understanding of the identity of this woman has been widely debated. Interpretations range from the woman representing Mary the mother of Jesus, to an astrological image, to reflecting a goddess such as Isis.¹⁶¹ At times the woman has been identified with a variety of historical figures.¹⁶² Tavo's examination of recent scholarship identifies four trends concerning the interpretation of the woman. All of these view the woman primarily as a collective reality, either in an exclusive or inclusive sense. In other words, the woman can be understood exclusively as a collective image, being interpreted as the church throughout history, only the Christian church, or only the OT church. An inclusive view would argue that while the woman may fit into one of the three preceding ideas, she may on a secondary level, represent the mother of Jesus.¹⁶³ Thus the current discussion focuses on two main issues: what is the identity of this collective image and is a secondary reference possible?¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 86. Duff also notes that the beast ultimately destroys the whore, while unable to inflict lasting harm to the woman of chapter twelve.

¹⁶¹ See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 680-681.

¹⁶² Arthur William Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) 89-103 contains a discussion of church groups and individual women who declared themselves to this woman incarnate, including Ann Lee, the leader of the Shaker movement.

¹⁶³ Tavo, *Woman, Mother, and Bride*, 227-228. See also the similar discussion in Philip L. Mayo, *"Those Who Call Themselves Jews": The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 152-153; for an historical overview see one of Mayo's sources, Bernard J. Le Frois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12); Individual Or Collective? an Exegetical Study* (Roma: Orbis Catholicus, 1954), 11-61.

¹⁶⁴ Tavo, *Woman, Mother, and Bride*, 236.

An obstacle to the secondary interpretation that points to Mary is the fact that the woman flees into the desert. It is hard to see how this persecution period of 1260 days (12.13) could be made to apply to Mary. Additionally, there is the reference at the end of the chapter to the woman's offspring (12.17). This representation of the dragon's anger and the continuing war with Mary's other children make such identification dubious. It is also difficult to see how the woman could represent the Christian church only, as the woman gives birth to Christ in the narrative. This appears to be an insurmountable objection to this interpretation.

The fact that the imagery of a woman is often used, in both testaments,¹⁶⁵ to refer to the people of God gives precedence of place to the interpretation that sees the woman as representative of the church throughout history. "As the mother of the Messiah (v.5) she is Zion of old, as the mother of Christians (v. 17) she is the new Israel."¹⁶⁶ There is continuity between the church of the OT and that of the NT. The woman represents the messianic community throughout all the ages, "the ideal Israel."¹⁶⁷

The Child

The woman is described as "with child," that is, in the process of giving birth. This child is the next character the reader encounters. The child's function in the vision is as the object of the dragon's ire (12.4) and as the one destined to rule all nations (12.5). The referential phrase that he should rule with "a rod of iron" points

¹⁶⁵ See Isa. 54.5; Jer. 3.6-10; Ezek. 16.8; 2 Cor. 11.2; Eph. 5.22-32; Rev. 19.7; 21.9.

¹⁶⁶ Tavo, *Woman, Mother, and Bride*, 229. Mayo (*Call Themselves Jews*, 158) reaches a similar conclusion stating that the woman is "at once Israel and the church."

¹⁶⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 231.

the reader to Ps. 2.9, an important messianic psalm.¹⁶⁸ This is an indication that the child prefigures Christ. This analysis is reinforced with the statement that the child is caught up to God and His throne. In this way John unites the image with Revelation's overall tapestry of Jesus' joint rule with God (3.21; 5.6, 13; 11.15; 22.1).

However, if the child represents Christ, the abruptness with which his birth and subsequent exaltation to the throne are mentioned raises certain questions. These focus primarily on the issue as to why there is no mention of Christ's death and resurrection. Yarbrow Collins' assigns the lack of any reference to Christ's death and resurrection to the underlying sources she contends that John is utilizing.¹⁶⁹ Kiddle considers such questions as unnecessary and contrary to the artistic skill with which the narrative is composed. The meaning of the passage is clear enough, as the context is "rich enough in allusion to leave us no doubt."¹⁷⁰ Caird takes a different view of the passage, arguing that the actual birth of Christ is not referenced in the passage. He considers that John is describing not the nativity of Christ, but the cross of Christ. His argument is based on the idea that in Psalm 2, it is upon enthronement that God addresses the king, not at his birth (Ps. 2.7-9). Sonship and enthronement are thus linked, and both occurred in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 1.4).¹⁷¹ Beasley-Murray, while finding the concept expressed by Caird attractive, doubts the validity of the interpretation. He contends that John is simply trying to identify the deliverer who is at the center of the story. He argues that the birth and ascension of Christ are telescoped into the entire Christ-event.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ This psalm is connected to the previous hymnic pericope as well.

¹⁶⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 105.

¹⁷⁰ Kiddle, *The Revelation*, 221.

¹⁷¹ Caird, *The Revelation*, 149-50.

¹⁷² Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 200.

The majority of commentators recognize that the passage portrays the victory that Christ has gained over the dragon. Andras Pataki develops this idea and significantly broadens it. While recognizing the tenuous nature of source critical attempts to find the original legend upon which John might have constructed chapter 12, he admits that many readers would have seen in the woman, dragon, and child, associations with pagan myths. However, the myth is reorganized in such a way that there appears to be no contest between the dragon and the child. The dragon is not even able to touch the child. He views this potential reworking as having a polemical function. Rather than a combat myth at work, there is, at least from Satan's perspective, simply a "defeat myth."¹⁷³ John thus diminishes the importance of the contest.

Whatever the ambiguities found in this passage, there is clarity in the way it is connected to a larger narrational theme. The passage continues the ongoing conquering imagery that has been present from the opening pages of the narrative. The main point of the child's exaltation to the throne, is that Satan's attempts at subverting God's rule ultimately fail.¹⁷⁴ The larger concerns of the narrative clearly indicate that Christ and His people conquer through the means of sacrifice. This is not simply a matter of effective military strategy, rather it is outworking of the principles at play in the war in heaven.

The Dragon

The dragon is the next character introduced in the passage, and as with the woman, is described as being ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. The woman alone is

¹⁷³ Andras David Pataki, "A Non-Combat Myth in Revelation 12" *NTS* 57, (2011), 271.

¹⁷⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 239.

presented as the “great sign” of Revelation; the dragon is simply “another sign.”¹⁷⁵ The dragon is further described with the adjective great (12.3) but this refers to his power, or possibly size.¹⁷⁶ While dragons are stock images in many mythological accounts, John clearly defines who the dragon is, and what is his aim. He is that “serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (12.9). The use of a variety of names and epithets serves to highlight the primary traits of the dragon. In the expression “ancient serpent” John draws the reader to the serpent in Genesis 3, who acted as a deceiver.¹⁷⁷ Deception is a defining trait of the dragon. As the devil and Satan, he is a slanderer and accuser.¹⁷⁸

It is in this descriptive passage that unfolds the identity of the dragon, that he is once again described as “the great dragon” (12.9).¹⁷⁹ This places him in the category of destructive characters and places within the storyline. Not only is he one with the great whore (17.1; 19.2), the great city (11.8; 16.19; 17.18; 18.10, 16,18, 19, 21) and great Babylon (14.8; 16.19; 17.5; 18.2), but he is also the power behind their evil greatness. The dragon is red, the color of blood, in contrast to the impressive

¹⁷⁵ Tavo, *Woman, Mother, and Bride*, 257.

¹⁷⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 314.

¹⁷⁷ The entire chapter has overtones that relate back to Genesis. There is the image of the pregnant woman, the ancient serpent, and the enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman. This highlights the biblical idea that the conflict theme is one that has a larger background than simply Revelation. Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub., 1995), 36-42, explores the Genesis text and concludes that there are three aspects of the battle in view. Namely, there is a battle between the woman and the serpent; between the posterity of the woman and the serpent; and then a final destruction of the serpent. These images are clearly picked up in Rev 12. See also R. A. Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15" *JBL* 84, no. 4 (1965): 25-27.

¹⁷⁸ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 173.

¹⁷⁹ The title dragon is reminiscent of both the OT and ANE cosmogonies. See Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 134-135 as indicating that the connection between the Hebrew words for dragon (תנין), sea (ים), and deep (תהום), as well as the mention of רהב refer to God's defeat of all the ANE serpents in one blow.

appearance of the woman. This also links him with evil in the narrative for Babylon is clothed in scarlet and this is the color of the beast she rides (17.3, 4; 18.16).¹⁸⁰

The dragon's seven heads with their seven diadems, in addition to the ten horns indicates that he is a ruler, or at least aspires to be so. While the woman is crowned with a στέφανος, the dragon wears διαδήματα, which are also worn by Christ in the vision of the final battle (19.12). The number seven indicates completeness or perfection, while ten suggest fullness or totality. Here again is John's counterimaging at work, for the dragon's rule is one of usurpation. The dragon is engaged in undermining God's way of rule throughout the universe.¹⁸¹ His work is to cast aspersion upon God and ultimately place himself on God's throne.¹⁸²

Michael

The final new character that is brought to view in this chapter is that of Michael. He appears only once and that is in the act of leading "his angels" in a war against the dragon (12.7). That Michael is engaged in the defeat of Satan (12.7-9), and then disappears from the narrative, has raised questions as to what role Michael is playing and how does that role interact with the victory that is won by Christ (12.10.).

While Michael is a major angelic figure in early Judaism, he makes infrequent appearances in the Bible. He is first mentioned in the book of Daniel (10.13, 21; 12.1) and then in the book of Jude (Jude 9). Michael's engagement in the battle with Satan is the only mention in the book of Revelation. The Danielic references depict Michael

¹⁸⁰ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 171.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 172.

¹⁸² For a fuller investigation to the role of the dragon, or Satan as *character* in the narrative, see chapter three above.

as engaged in conflict with other angelic beings described as “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” and the “prince of Greece” (Dan. 10.13, 21.). Michael is also described as the “great prince” who has charge of Israel (Dan. 12.1). Michael’s role and influence is greatly expanded in several extra-biblical Jewish sources, some predating Revelation, and others following it.¹⁸³

Michael’s role as Israel’s great prince and his engagement against the powers of evil maybe be clear in both Daniel and Jude.¹⁸⁴ However, his exact purpose in Revelation is less so. There are questions associated with his function, specifically relative to Christ’s prosecution of the war in heaven. The narrative portrays the beginning of the conflict as occurring between Michael and the dragon (with their corresponding angels). As Mounce notes, “It is the archangel Michael, not the Messiah, who wars against Satan in this final struggle.”¹⁸⁵ However, the hymn embedded within this section of the narrative moves to Christ’s victory over Satan, and as most commentators rightly see, this victory is won at the cross. This raises the question as to the relationship between Michael’s victory and Christ’s triumph. Pierre Prigent, noting the difficulty that the section on Michael creates, indicates that it does harm to “the unity of the chapter.”¹⁸⁶

Caird recognizes that the *means* of victory is nothing less than the crucifixion.

He then attempts to explain the contradiction between Michael’s victory in heaven

¹⁸³ See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 693-695 for a fuller discussion of several of the early Jewish sources that fill out the extra-biblical understanding of Michael, seeing him as part of a group of archangels. Charles Gieschen, (*Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1998), 126), in assuming an early date for Daniel writes that Michael is widely mentioned in biblical and extra-biblical literature from 300 BCE to 200 CE. For a full treatment of Michael’s role in early Christianity, see Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).

¹⁸⁴ Michael also appears in many other texts, see 1QM 17.5-8; 1 *Enoch* 20.1, 69.14; 2 *Enoch* 33.10; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10.18.

¹⁸⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 236.

¹⁸⁶ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 89.

and the death of Christ as the source of victory in the hymn. He argues that every heavenly event has a counterpart in an earthly reality. “When the victory is being won in heaven, Christ is on earth on the Cross.”¹⁸⁷ Michael functions like a staff officer, removing Satan’s flag from the map, while Christ wins the victory at Calvary.¹⁸⁸ The weakness with this view is that it sets up a dichotomy within the text. Michael and his angels are described as actually engaged in battle with the dragon and his angels, not simply removing a flag from a map. This is not to deny the connection between heavenly and earthly realities, but that connection is stronger than Caird allows. It is hard to see how, in Caird’s reading, Michael’s victory “serves to establish the authority of Christ.”¹⁸⁹

Unquestionably the majority of commentators consider Michael to be an angelic character distinct from Christ. Yet a close reading of the narrative as whole, uncovers several places in which Christ is described in angelomorphic terms. Tonstad notes that, while the extent of these depictions of Christ is contested, it raises relevant questions that have led some interpreters to see Michael as a representation of Christ.¹⁹⁰ This is an important question with decisive ramifications for understanding the narrative and one that is not easily settled.

Leo Percer explores the possibility that the IR might have conflated the images of the child, Michael, and Christ, seeing them as all pointing to the same reality. This reading would understand that the child and Michael more fully define the role of Christ. While the connection between the child and Christ is well attested,

¹⁸⁷ Caird, *The Revelation*, 153.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 154. Prigent, (*Apocalypse*, 387), understands Michael’s function as leading a “mopping-up operation” following Christ’s death and resurrection.

¹⁸⁹ Leo R. Percer, "The War in Heaven: Michael and Messiah in Revelation 12" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1999), 177.

¹⁹⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 82.

understanding Michael as another representation of Christ is not. Nevertheless, Percer notes that a first century audience may have easily made this connection. The representation of Christ in the opening chapter of Revelation (1.12-16) unites the images of the Ancient of days, the “son of man,” and the angel of Daniel 10 (Dan 7.9-14; 10.5). This might have led the IR to operate under an “angelic Christology.”¹⁹¹

Percer’s examination of this thesis takes into consideration the growth of early Jewish messianic expectation, and the “incorporation of angelic characteristics” with the doctrine of the Messiah.¹⁹² This integration of angelic traits with an understanding of the work of the Messiah transcended Jewish writings. Early Christian interpreters regularly referred to Christ in angelic terms, frequently describing Him as “the Angel.”¹⁹³ Given John’s ability to draw a variety of images into his work, it can rightly be assumed he was well aware of the apocalyptic traditions. Therefore it would not be surprising if he utilized angelomorphic language in Revelation.¹⁹⁴

Before considering Percer’s examination of the evidence that Michael might be another representation for Christ, it is needful to clarify certain expressions. Hoffmann states the need for a working definition of the term “angelomorphic” and stresses its importance for an understanding of the Apocalypse. As the word is related to the terms “angelic” and “divine,” it is essential that the shades of meaning be

¹⁹¹ Percer, “War in Heaven,” 185. Contra, James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 158, who writes that the idea of an “angel christology” in early Christianity is “counter to the evidence.” Hannah, (*Michael and Christ*, 6), considers that Dunn’s conclusion is an overstatement.

¹⁹² Percer, “War in Heaven,” 187.

¹⁹³ Gieschen, (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 7), notes that the Arian controversy minimized the tendency to refer to Christ in angelomorphic terms.

¹⁹⁴ Percer, “War in Heaven,” 188.

clarified here as well.¹⁹⁵ He formulates a workable definition of an angel as a “heavenly intermediary being, who is in the service of God, and functions as a messenger or servant.” Divinity, he associates with the exclusive description of God and attributes that are uniquely related to Him.¹⁹⁶ Carrell has a similar working classification, defining angels as heavenly beings distinct from God and humans, whose role is as a messenger.¹⁹⁷

After an in-depth discussion, Hoffmann concludes that an angelomorphic depiction of Christ is one that describes “Christ by relating him to angels, without implying either an angelic or an explicitly divine status.”¹⁹⁸ Such a definition is similar to Gieschen’s understanding of angelomorphic Christology as an “identification of Christ with angelic form and function” without necessarily identifying Him as an angel.¹⁹⁹ Hannah clarifies this by noting that the expression “angelomorphic Christology” is a phenomenological one, referring only to visual portrayals of Christ in the form of an angel.²⁰⁰ While Christ may be described in ways that remind the reader of an angelic being, this does not indicate that He is created, nor does it lessen His ontological unity with God.²⁰¹ With this background and clarification, the relation of Michael to Christ can be further developed.

¹⁹⁵ Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 18.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁹⁷ Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 14.

¹⁹⁸ Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, 28.

¹⁹⁹ Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 28. This is similar to the expression “angel of the Lord,” used in the earlier books of the OT. See Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 19f.

²⁰⁰ Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 13.

²⁰¹ Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 76.

Percer's examination of John's opening vision (1.12-20) corroborates the conclusion of many, that there are strong thematic links to the book of Daniel. In addition to informing the overall theme in Revelation, these links have a direct bearing on angelomorphic depictions of Christ. The opening description of Christ with white hair is reflective of the Ancient of Days (Dan. 7.9). The appellation "son of man" (1.13) most likely refers to angelic beings in Daniel, and perhaps Michael.²⁰² The description of the being in Dan. 10.5-6 is in many ways similar to John's description of Christ. The parallels include being clothed in linen, the eyes like torches, the feet as burnished bronze, and the sound of the voice. It is clear that John uses angelomorphic language in the initial vision that is similar to that of Dan. 10. This conditions the reader to be sensitive to other places in Revelation, where an angelomorphic depiction of Christ might occur.

Percer mines the imagery found in 10.1-7; 14.14-16; and 19.11-16, for their contribution to a fuller understanding of how Christ is portrayed in the narrative. Each of these passages can be read as depicting Christ in angelomorphic terms. The first describes a mighty angel who is clothed with a cloud, adorned with a rainbow, and has feet like pillars of fire (10.1). These traits call to mind earlier depictions of God and Christ (4.3; 1.12-20). The rainbow, in addition to its connection with the divine throne (4.3), is united with the glory of Yahweh (Ezek. 1.26-28).²⁰³ Percer determines that there is a possibility that this is an angelomorphic depiction of Christ, and that many ancient commentators came to this conclusion.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Percer, "War in Heaven," 191. See also, Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 247-9; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity*, (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 94-113.

²⁰³ Percer, "War in Heaven," 194. He also recognizes Gieschen's (*Angelomorphic Christology*, 258), conclusion that the rainbow is indicative of the divine nature of the angel.

²⁰⁴ Percer, "War in Heaven," 197. Percer points to Gieschen *Angelomorphic Christology*, 257 and to Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 136, as identifying Primasius, Victorinus, and Augustine as among the

An examination of the imagery connected with the “son of man” (14.14-16) and Christ as the rider on the white horse (19.11-16) lead Percer to conclude that John mixes angelic and Christological elements in his revelation of Christ. The representations given might lead the IR to identify Christ with Michael. A number of traditions are used that represent Messianic activity yet are intertwined with angelomorphic concepts. Percer recognizes the possibility of viewing Christ as an angelic being, perhaps Michael.²⁰⁵ He then proceeds to demonstrate that there are other portrayals of Christ in Revelation that prohibit such a conclusion.

Percer marshals three lines of evidence to mitigate the conclusion that Michael should be identified with Christ. These are: the warnings against the worship of angelic beings; Christ’s reception of worship in the Apocalypse; and the titles given to Christ. After reviewing these categories, Percer concludes that while it is not possible to entirely rule out the portrayal of Christ as an angelic being, the evidences leans toward the idea that the Messiah is superior to the angels.²⁰⁶ Therefore the identification of Michael with Christ is misguided.²⁰⁷ However, in this conclusion, Percer seems to be misled by the lack of precision in definitions.

He is rightly concerned that the readers not mistakenly identify Christ solely as an angelic being. Yet based on the definitions previously given, to understand Michael as an angelomorphic depiction of Christ would not lessen Christ’s divinity, nor conflict with the prohibition against the worship of angels. Rather it elucidates

ancient commentators who held this view. Rowland, (*The Open Heaven*, 102), sees no differentiation between the angel in 10.1 and the description of Christ in 1.12-20. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 137, refutes this connection by noting that John doesn’t attempt to worship this being, nor does the angel act on his own authority. He might be an angel representing Christ, but Carrell argues, it is not Christ.

²⁰⁵ Percer, “War in Heaven,” 205.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 224-5.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

Michael's role in the war in heaven.²⁰⁸ Instead of a lesser victory achieved by an angel named Michael,²⁰⁹ seeing the character as an angelomorphic picture of Christ demonstrates a consistency on who achieves the victory and the manner in which it is accomplished. Viewing the character of Michael, as with that of the child, as a representation of Christ, it once again places Christ's sacrifice as the means of victory in the conflict. If, as previously argued, the war does have overtones related to Satan's misrepresentation of God, then the victory in that war cannot be attributed to an angelic being, but must be the province of one who is ontologically equal with God. No delegated authority would be sufficient to remove the questions raised about God's rule.²¹⁰

There are two hazards with nuancing the angelomorphic portrayals of Christ in Revelation. The one most commonly and studiously avoided is that of understanding Christ as a created being. Being worthy of worship and having a place on God's throne assures Christ's position as above the created order. The second peril is to view Christ as distant and removed from the creation. Tonstad stresses the bivalent depiction of Christ, which identifies both His exalted status and His lowly disposition. This disposition, in addition to being manifested in the incarnation, can be seen in Christ's assumption of an angelic form or function.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Hannah, (*Michael and Christ*, 161), notes that in the NT, Christ fulfills many of the roles attributed to Michael in Jewish traditional strands, although Hannah does not see Michael as an angelomorphic depiction of Christ.

²⁰⁹ Hannah, (*Michael and Christ*, 128), underscores the difficulty this partial victory would cause, if it were indeed Christ's, and then John assigns it to Michael. Hannah's point is that the ultimate victory (which is based on the cross) doesn't occur until 19.11f. However, this misses a striking facet of the narrative, that even at that time, Satan is not destroyed, but only temporarily bound to be released once more. Instead of seeing Michael's victory as *interrupted* by the hymn, it is better to see the hymn *interpreting* Michael's victory as actually the victory of the cross. This provides a better narrative consistency.

²¹⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 88.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

While admittedly a position held by a minority, to see Michael as an angelomorphic, or a pre-incarnate representation of Christ brings continuity and fuller meaning to the narrative that is absent from other readings. It allows the hymn to function as an interpretation of the surrounding vision, by clarifying *the means* by which Satan is cast out. Michael is not necessarily superseded by either Christ's victory on the cross (5.6; 12.10-12), or the final triumph when Christ leads the heavenly host into battle (19.11). Rather, "the identity of the figure represented as Michael blends" into Christ's. Thus, the child, Michael, and Christ are three images that serve to interpret one another. In this way, Jesus remains at the center of the conflict, as it is only through Him that the conflict can be resolved.²¹²

Plot

As indicated above, the entire chapter is given to a discussion of the war theme from different perspectives. It is divided into three units and forms an A, B, A' pattern with interrelated conflicts. The passage can be diagrammed as follows:

A: 12.1-6
 B: 12.7-12
 A': 12.13-17

Satan, under the representations of the dragon and serpent is active in all three sections, thus stressing his importance in the narrative. Units A and A' (12.1-6; 13-17) relate the contest between the dragon and the woman. The dragon's anger directed toward the woman and her children is representative of Satan's ongoing attacks against the church.²¹³ This demonstrates "that persecution...is not merely political or

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 169.

local, but is spiritual, suprahistorical, and part of an ongoing struggle between God and Satan, and their followers.”²¹⁴ The visions represent the most “fundamental struggle of the entire Apocalypse, i.e. the mortal confrontation between God and Satan.” All other struggles derive from this primary one.²¹⁵ These units can also be broken down into two subsets.

Section A, opens with the conflict between the dragon and the woman (12.1-4) and then is followed by a description of the woman’s escape and her place of refuge (12.5-6). Section A’ is composed of an inverse pattern. There is a mention of the woman’s escape and refuge (12.13-14), after which comes a description of the conflict between the dragon and the woman (12.15-17). The center unit, (12.7-12) tells of the heavenly battle between Michael and the dragon, and contains the hymnic pericope announcing the victory of Christ. The war in heaven is firmly placed in the midst of the narrative.²¹⁶

In the first section, the protagonist (the woman) and her antagonist (the dragon) are introduced. The second section rehearses the war in heaven and the defeat of the dragon. The final section once more picks up the conflict between the dragon and the woman. While the outline is clear, the exact relation between the divisions is not. Questions arise as to the chronological and causal relations among them. There is a comprehensive overview in the chapter, but it is unclear as to how the parts relate to the whole and what is the overarching direction the action is moving.

Tavo attempts to elucidate the interactions between the sections of the chapter by noting the difference between a Greco-Western mentality and a Semitic one. The former would prefer a logical-linear step-by-step progression through the chapter (and

²¹⁴ Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 83.

²¹⁵ Tavo, *Woman, Bride and Mother*, 226.

²¹⁶ Siew, *The War Between the Beasts*, 76.

the entire book), while the latter might develop the narrative in what Tavo calls “waves.” This would indicate that the theme or plot is presented and re-presented, with clarification and development until the entire picture becomes clear. In this way, the three scenes within the chapter would indicate the development of a single theme. Each wave would clarify and elucidate the main idea of the chapter, which is “the struggle for ultimate control between God and Satan.”²¹⁷ Both the initial attack by the dragon upon the woman and her child, and the ultimate attack at the end of the chapter, are informed by the war in heaven scene. The conflict holds the central part of the narrative, both spatially and in terms of meaning.

The importance of this observation is heightened, when one attempts to read the narrative movement of the chapter as indicating chronological consistency. Tonstad rightly points out that an improbable storyline results from an evaluation that views each of the three sections in a straightforward chronological sequence. The dragon first attempts to destroy the child on earth (12.4) and when that attempt fails (12.5), he initiates a war in heaven (12.7). Failing here he is cast to the earth (12.9) and then continues his attacks on the woman, realizing his time is short (12.13, 12).²¹⁸

The cumbersome and wieldy reading that this produces raises appropriate questions about its validity.²¹⁹ Satan’s defeat against an earthly Christ, followed by an attack on the exalted Christ seems improbable, even given Satan’s determination and

²¹⁷ Tavo, *Woman, Bride and Mother*, 244.

²¹⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 66.

²¹⁹ Lunceford, (*Parody and Counterimaging*, 184-5), argues against a primordial fall that occurred in heaven. He contends that it is not necessary to understand the text as meaning that Satan was ever *in* heaven. His view is that Satan attempts to destroy Christ at birth, and then follows into heaven (185). This would appear to go against the larger biblical imagery that John uses to develop the character of Satan. John distinctly ties in Satan with the Genesis 3 account, as well as utilizing other allusive OT texts. These have been more fully examined in chapter 3. Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 235), sees the conflict as an actual warfare in heaven itself. The statement of 12.8, that Satan no longer had a place in heaven argues against Lunceford’s view as well. The fact that he no longer has place in heaven implies he once had one. See Charles *Revelation I*, 324f; Swete *Apocalypse*, 154; Beasley-Murray *Revelation*, 201; Murphy *Fallen is Babylon*, 286.

desperation. A more natural reading would be to allow the center portion of the chapter to hold an interpretative control upon the entire section. It is well recognized that there is an interruption in the narrative flow with the introduction of the war in heaven scene.²²⁰ The distinct nature of this section helps to locate the cosmic battle as occurring prior to the earthly events. Satan's defeat is interpreted as restriction on both his influence and activity, "as a consequence of the earthly events."²²¹

While the narrative places the birth of the child before the war in heaven, the conflict is not first initiated with that birth. The dragon's attack on the woman and child is predicated on the prior war begun in heaven. The result of that initial conflict was a movement from heaven to earth by Satan and his angels (12.4). This movement pinpoints the heavenly origin of the dragon. The unfolding of the narrative in this chapter "points to a cosmic conflict that began in heaven before embroiling the earth."²²²

If one were to rearrange the three sections of the chapter in a chronological sequence, with a beginning, middle, and ending a different order would appear. The middle section (12.7-12), which not only comprises the center part of the ABA' pattern but is the center of a larger chiasm,²²³ would have not only priority in terms of its influence on the text, but a chronological priority as well. It contains the beginning of the narrative and the origin of the dragon's conflict with God's people. The birth of the child (12.1-6) with the attendant attack by the dragon would be placed in the

²²⁰ Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 172), calls this an embedded narrative. Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 691), notes it would be recognized as an "intrusive narrative fragment." He continues, however, to argue that the heavenly battle is a result of the failed attempt to destroy the child.

²²¹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 66.

²²² Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 68.

²²³ Siew, (*The War Between the Beasts*, 76), places this section at the heart of a chiasm covering 11.1-14.5.

middle. The continued persecution, based upon the shortness of the dragon's time (12.13-17), would remain as the third section.

The chronological priority and the explanatory power that the middle section of the chapter possesses, links with the larger narrative of Revelation, as well as with the expanded storyline throughout the OT. The description that the dragon is that "ancient serpent" (12.9) ties the war in heaven theme with the Genesis story. In Gen. 3, the ancient serpent raises questions against the justice of God's government, places doubt upon God's motives, and challenges God's essential goodness of character. The deceptive strengths of the dragon, as both a slanderer and deceiver, are employed to persuade others by "misrepresentation and innuendo" to join him in the ongoing conflict.²²⁴

Narrative Details

Within the present chapter are many aspects that call for further investigation. The significance of the time period that is mentioned twice under different expressions (12.6; 12.13), the meaning of the wilderness (12.14), the flood of water (12.15), and the action of the earth (12.16) all contribute to the overall narrative. However, these details do not bear significantly upon the role of the hymn, and thus will not be considered. Attention will be given to two areas that can impact an understanding of the function of the hymnic pericope in relation to the larger narrative. The first concern is the background material for the chapter, and the second is the unusual Greek construction in 12.9.

²²⁴ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 107.

It is evident that John did not create the imagery in this chapter out of thin air.²²⁵ The characters of the dragon, woman, and child would have been familiar to his readers, at least as types from other settings. Yarbro Collins sees these figures as “traditional images with a long history and a rich variety of connotations and associations.” She claims that in order to be rightly interpreted the traditional character and connotations must be familiar to the reader.²²⁶ The basic pattern of the story is found in a variety of forms in many different settings, and if Yarbro Collins’ analysis is correct, these hold the interpretive key to understanding the chapter. However, while there are superficial similarities between the images in the chapter and the wider social setting, there are admitted differences as well.²²⁷

In addition to the discrepancies between alleged sources and the narrative as it stands, Yarbro Collins’ injunction that origins inform meaning does not bear scrutiny. The origin of an expression is not necessarily determinative of its meaning. “Even if were possible to establish a story’s derivation from other sources with certainty, it does not follow that meaning is determined by what is designated as the ‘original’ source.”²²⁸ It is by no means evident that the sources can be identified, nor is that of primary importance for a narrative reading. Beale recognizes that none of the pagan myths have the essential elements of chapter 12. If John is reflecting on them, he is

²²⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Crises and Catharsis*, 104.

²²⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 57.

²²⁷ The investigation of source material for this chapter is extensive. See Charles *Revelation I*, 298-314; Roloff, *Revelation*, 142-45; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 667-74; Thomas W. Fisher, “The Dragon/Serpent in Revelation: The Rhetoric of an Apocalyptic Motif” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 32-47. Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth* 67, sees the birth of Apollo in the Leto myth as the closest parallel to the outline of chapter twelve. This is the best-known version of the story. While there are unquestionably points of contact, there are also decided differences, such as the birth of two children, Apollo and Artemis, instead of one child, and the dragon’s continued pursuit of the woman, despite the victory proclaimed in the hymn. The birth of the child before the woman flees is another contradiction. See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 671-2. Percer, (“War in Heaven,” 146-7), notes particularly the role of Michael as upsetting the comparison between chapter 12 and other Greek myths.

²²⁸ Tonstad *Saving God’s Reputation*, 61.

doing so through the lens of the OT. This is the source of the material on which he builds the narrative.²²⁹ It is the OT allusions that are imperative for the correct interpretation. These allusions place the cosmic conflict begun by Satan's rebellion at the center of the narrative.

In addition to the pregnant allusions, there is an unfamiliar grammatical construction that points the reader to the primary role that Satan plays in initiating the conflict. A close reading of 12.7 prioritizes this text as the first glimpse of the cosmic combat.

καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ὁ δράκων ἐπολέμησεν καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ (12.7)

Charles' analysis of text continues to be informative. He notes two unusual aspects of the verse. The first is the articular genitival infinitive, τοῦ πολεμῆσαι. The second is the use of the nominative case ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι in connection with the infinitive, when the accusative would be expected. Charles argues that this is a pure Hebraism, citing several OT texts as support. After examining Hos. 11.13; Ps. 25.14; 1 Chron. 9.25; and Eccles. 3.15, Charles concludes the awkward Greek expression translates the Hebrew infinitive, with a causative meaning. He then translates the verse as:

And war burst forth in heaven:
Michael and his angels had to fight with the Dragon, etc.²³⁰

Beale agrees with Charles' translation, yet sees the expression not so much as reflecting a Semitic influence, but rather due to an underlying dependence on Dan.

²²⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 624.

²³⁰ Charles, *Revelation I*, 322. Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 692), follows this translation.

10.20 (Theod.). The Danielic background points to an angelic contest, involving Michael and apparently evil angels, and waged on behalf of Israel.²³¹ This background shows that the conflict has its origins in a time that predates both the birth of the child and the continued attack upon the woman. It supports the idea alluded to in different OT texts, that the war John sees, while having a present and future context, has its origin in the past.

The force of the translation and its impact on any reading of the text is to underscore the “notion of necessity” contained in the phrase.²³² The war was something that was forced upon Michael and his angels by the agency of the dragon.²³³ This reading definitively ascribes the instigation of the war and therefore the responsibility for it “squarely on Satan.”²³⁴ Charles’ translation that “war burst forth” indicates the unexpected nature of the conflict. This harmonizes well with the larger OT background that depicts the root of the war as being located in an inexplicable desire to replace God. This desire arose in the “heart” of one whose original position was in the direct presence of God. Therefore the “primordial and heavenly origin of the conflict is grounded in the suggestive wording of this text.”²³⁵

²³¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 654.

²³² Smalley, *The Revelation*, 323.

²³³ Contra Percer, (“War in Heaven,” 178) who sees the war as a result of the enthronement of the child which then causes Michael to defend the child. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 361 reads the text as indicating that Michael forces Satan into battle.

²³⁴ Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 69.

²³⁵ Ibid. Osborne (*Revelation*, 469), also argues for seeing in the text the primordial origins of the conflict. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 653), describes it as primarily an eschatological event, though he recognizes the connection between the text in Isaiah and early Jewish views of the primordial aspect of the event. Caird (*The Revelation*, 153); Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 235); Michaels (*Revelation*, 150) doubt the connection with a primordial rebellion.

Hymnic Pericope (12.10-12)

The hymnic pericope holds a central place in the narrative of the chapter. In terms of both the micro and macro structure within the text, the hymn relates directly to the war in heaven theme that runs throughout Revelation. The hymn links the victory in that war to the defeat of Satan. The positioning of the hymn in this important chapter underscores the thematic links that it has to the final resolution of the conflict (20.1-5).²³⁶ As the hymns summarize or serve as a climax to the events recounted in the story²³⁷ the connection of this hymn with the war theme is evident. However, in this case, there is a tension with the details in the narrative and the content of the hymn. The hymn does not seem to match the story that has just been recounted. That story describes Michael's triumph over the dragon. The hymn relates the victory over the dragon back to Christ. As mentioned above, this tension can be resolved with understanding Michael as an angelomorphic depiction of Christ.

The hymn is set off from the remainder of the chapter in two distinct ways. First, the hymn is an audition, something John hears, rather than a vision, which he sees. Secondly, while the rest of the chapter is set as a narrative, this hymn, as with the others thus far encountered, is a proclamation.²³⁸ John has used the comparison between what he sees and what he hears as a means of guiding the reader earlier in Revelation. John heard that the "Lion from the tribe of Judah" overcame, but he turned to see a slain Lamb (5.5,6). Here the hymn also serves to interpret what John has seen, which is the conflict in heaven.

²³⁶ E. C. Shin, "The Conqueror Motif in Chapters 12-13: A Heavenly and an Earthly Perspective in the Book of Revelation," *Verbum Et Ecclesia JRG* 28, no. 1 (2007), 211.

²³⁷ Jörens, *Hymnische Evangelium*, 170. Osborne, *Revelation*, 473.

²³⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 112.

καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγουσαν
 ἄρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
 καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ
 ὅτι ἐβλήθη ὁ κατήγορ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν
 ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτοὺς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμέρας καὶ
 νυκτός

καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου
 καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν
 καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου

διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες
 οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν
 ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν
 εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει (12.10-12)

The loud voice (φωνὴν μεγάλην) that leads the hymn celebrates and proclaims Satan's defeat and Christ's triumph. This determines that the hymn should be heard as a victory song.²³⁹ The anonymous nature of the voice has prompted varying interpretations. Charles understands the reference to "our brethren" (12.10) in the hymn, to indicate that the singers are Christian martyrs. He argues that it would be an "insurmountable difficulty" to consider them as angelic beings.²⁴⁰ Yet, recognition of the close relation portrayed in Revelation between the angels and humanity serves to lessen this difficulty. As Beasley-Murray notes "the kinship between angels and the people of God is presumed" in the narrative (19.10; 22.9).²⁴¹ It is more probable that the loud voice is that of a supernatural being, likely that of four creatures and the twenty-four elders.²⁴² The singular nature can be explained as a collective voice, representing the heavenly court.²⁴³ The proclamation is both authoritative and

²³⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 138.

²⁴⁰ Charles, *Revelation I*, 327-8; So Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 701.

²⁴¹ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 203.

²⁴² Roloff, *Revelation*, 149. See also Smalley, *The Revelation*, 326.

²⁴³ Krodell, *Revelation*, 243.

reliable, as the members of the court have been involved with the conflict since it first erupted.²⁴⁴ As with the other hymns, this one serves as commentary on the issues in the conflict and its means of resolution.

The hymn unites attributes utilized previously in other hymnic sections, yet the combination of salvation, power, kingdom, and authority are unique to this hymn. “Salvation” is ascribed to both God and the Lamb in 7.10, with the connotation of victory. That meaning should be read in this hymn as well, especially given the clear war theme that surrounds the passage. The proclamation that the kingdom is established picks up the refrain enunciated in 11.15. This indicates that there is an intimate connection to both the establishment of the kingdom, through Christ’s death, and the ultimate realization of the kingdom at the end of the eschatological period (20.11).²⁴⁵

The mention of “power” also needs to be seen in the light of its use in the larger narrative. As part of Revelation’s inverted order, the nature of power is reinterpreted in the death and resurrection of Christ.²⁴⁶ Power is clearly used by God to defeat the dragon and his emissaries. However, it is not utter strength that allows the heavenly armies to defeat Satan, in the same way that the issues in the conflict are not settled simply by who has the greater military might or number of angels on their side. To the contrary, brute force would only serve to strengthen the deceptive insinuations that Satan has used to cast aspersion on God’s government.

The ascription of “authority” to Christ in the hymn is in harmony with the first three appellations. Revelation uses ἐξουσία more than any other NT book. It is part of

²⁴⁴ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 289.

²⁴⁵ Lund, *Studies*, 141; Roloff, *Revelation* 149.

²⁴⁶ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 194.

the counterimaging that John utilizes to emphasize the cosmic conflict. The dragon's authority (ἐξουσία) is manifested through the sea-beast and the land-beast (13.2, 5, 7, 12) as well as through Death and Hades (6.8). God's authority is manifested through acts of judgment (14.18). Jesus receives authority from the Father (2.28), and here it indicates the right to establish the kingdom, which He accomplishes through His death.²⁴⁷

The hymn is carefully constructed and has three strophes, respectively containing four, three, and four lines. There is some rhyming throughout the hymn as indicated by the use of ἡμῶν at or near the ends of lines; the use of ἀρνίου and θανάτου at the end of lines one and three in the second strophe; and θάλασσαν and μέγαν at the end of lines two and three in the final strophe. The hymn also exhibits parallelism built upon cognate words such as ὁ κατήγορ and ὁ κατηγορῶν; as well as an antithetical parallelism indicated by the contrast of εὐφραίνεσθε and οὐαί, οἱ οὐρανοὶ and τὴν γῆν. Additionally, the third line of the first and third strophes begins with ὅτι indicating a causal connection.²⁴⁸

The first strophe announces that “now” is the time for the arrival of the kingdom because, although it is not mentioned in the text, Christ's death and resurrection has led to the accuser being cast down. The second section points to the present victory the believers can experience by the intertwining of the death of Christ, their personal testimony, and their internalizing of Christ's death that leads them, if the situation demands it, to be willing to experience martyrdom. The final stanza encourages rejoicing in heaven and woe upon the earth, because while Satan is defeated he is not yet destroyed and still has a “short time” to wage war. Thus there is

²⁴⁷ Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict*, 169.

²⁴⁸ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 137.

the initial victory over Satan, the expansion of the victory in the lives of the saints, and the implications of that victory for both heaven and earth.²⁴⁹ With this overview in mind, the details of the hymnic pericope can be examined more closely.

The hymn opens with ἄρτι ἐγένετο signifying the temporal nature of the action. The classical use of ἄρτι, as meaning “now” holds in this passage.²⁵⁰ However, this is not the same context as brought out in 11.15-18, in which it is declared that the kingdom *has become*, both God’s and Christ’s. There the emphasis is on the actual initiation of the kingdom. That hymn is in an eschatological context indicated by the sounding of the seventh-trumpet. This hymn is placed in a chronological setting that allows for a time of persecution to be developed in the future (12.6, 14; 11.2, 3). Here the temporal adverb connected with the aorist ἐγένετο, points to the specific expulsion of Satan in a distinct historical event that becomes the motivation for the hymn.²⁵¹ While the death of Christ is not explicitly mentioned in the text, the expression “the blood of the Lamb” in the next strophe, points the reader to that decisive event as the means of securing Satan’s defeat. Sweet understands ἄρτι as reflecting the idea that the cross is “the turning point in world history.”²⁵² The use of ὅτι to demarcate the causal phrase secures the connection between the fall of the accuser and the triumphant beginning of the hymn.

The first strophe explicitly links the dragon’s fall and the arrival of the kingdom, yet leaves unanswered certain questions that bear upon a cogent interpretation of the text. In what way is ἐβλήθη as used in the hymn, related back to

²⁴⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 473.

²⁵⁰ H. -J. Ritz, “Ἄρτι” in *EDNT*, edited by Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, Vol. 1, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 159

²⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 699.

²⁵² Sweet, *Revelation*, 201.

the other references in the text? How is the title ὁ κατήγωρ related to the other titles given to the dragon in the chapter? What is the relation between the judicial aspects of the combat, as indicated by “the accuser,” and those military aspects designated by the war imagery? The answers to these questions are interwoven one with another.

Satan’s defeat and that of his angels is reiterated five times with the word ἐβλήθη (12.9 (3x), 10, 13.) The passive tense is used as a circumlocution for divine activity, once again underscoring that it is only the essential participants in the conflict and not their surrogates that can determine the outcome. The idea of Satan being “cast down” forms an inclusio (12.9 and 12.13), as well as being an integral part of the hymn itself. The repetition drives the theme home for the reader. While the passive form points to the divine working, the active tense is used earlier in the chapter to describe the dragon’s ability to cast down to the earth a third of the stars of heaven (12.4.)

The background imagery to the dragon’s attack is found in Daniel 8.10, wherein the little horn raises itself against the host of heaven and causes some of the stars to fall. While the reflective imagery is evident, it is not altogether certain that both passages are describing the same event. Smalley considers that they are, and understands the stars as referring to the persecuted saints in both situations.²⁵³ However, in Revelation, while “stars” can be used to refer to heavenly objects (as in 6.13) they frequently refer to beings, specifically identified as angels (1.16, 20; 2.1; 3.1; 9.1). In another angelomorphic description of Christ, He is declared the “Morning Star” (22.16). Therefore it is best to understand the stars in this passage to refer to angelic beings as well. In this way, a primordial action in the war in heaven is brought

²⁵³ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 318. Part of his argument is the understanding that Dan. 12.3, in which the wise are compared to stars can be used as guiding the interpretation of Dan. 8.10. However, even if such a tenuous connection can be made, it is not certain that this would also interpret the stars in Rev. 12.4. See Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 635-6), for a similar argument.

into view, in which Satan is the aggressor. His deceptive manner brought him a measure of victory in that he succeeds in getting a portion of the angels to join him in his rebellion.²⁵⁴ The active voice underscoring that the dragon “threw them to the earth” indicates his culpability. As the leader of the rebellion, he initiated the conflict and bears the responsibility of his own downfall.²⁵⁵

The repeated use of ἐβλήθη through the narrative and in the hymn underscores the truth that the dragon and his angels are in a free fall. “There is no more emphatic statement in the rest of Revelation than the fall, fall, and *fall* of the dragon from heaven to earth.” Recognizing the literary ties that this chapter has to Gen. 3, Siew points out that Adam and Eve were “cast out” (ἐξέβαλεν – Gen. 3.24 LXX) from the Garden of Eden. With the “ancient serpent” now being cast out, the reversal is complete. The woman is taken to safety, while her accuser suffers defeat.²⁵⁶ The repeated fall of the dragon, as well the OT antecedents found in Gen. 3; Isa. 14; and Ezek. 28; as well as the future fall of the dragon at the end of the eschaton (20.3 -- ἔβαλεν) broaden the parameters of meaning.

While admittedly a minority view, Osborne sees a “telescoping” of events in the fall of Satan. He considers the primordial fall of Satan, which must have occurred before the events in the Garden of Eden, to be the primary thrust of the war in heaven (12.7-9). The hymn, while emphasizing the historical victory and overthrow of Satan at the cross (cf. John 12. 31, 32), is not fully separated from the ultimate fall at the eschaton.²⁵⁷ All three images are intertwined throughout the chapter, but the emphasis

²⁵⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 461.

²⁵⁵ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 68. Osborne, (*Revelation* 471), sees *lex talionis* at work, in which what Satan did is now being done to him.

²⁵⁶ Siew, *The War Between the Beasts*, 138-9.

²⁵⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 468-9.

is first placed on the primordial fall, and then in the hymn, the weight lays on the death of Christ.

After an examination for OT antecedents that would inform John's description and repeated mention of Satan's fall, Tonstad gives Isa. 14.12-14 a primary role for interpretation. Recognizing that a surface reading makes it appear that the verbal parallels are scant, he argues that the exalted being in Isaiah, who is also fallen from heaven, "does not lie far from Revelation's triple description of Satan being 'thrown from heaven' (12.9)."²⁵⁸ Following a close reading of both passages with their verbal and thematic connections, he concludes that Isaiah's poem, with its portrayal of the fall of the "Day Star," forms the background for the war in heaven.²⁵⁹ This reading brings out two important aspects to the fall, which in a manner similar to Osborne's reading, are telescoped into one another.

If it is granted that the fall mentioned in the hymn and the surrounding text includes a primordial descent, one that points to a change in character, then this helps to elucidate Satan's origin. Tonstad considers that there are two differing aspects to ἐβλήθη. One represents a "fall from innocence" that makes the fallen angel into the one who "deceives the whole world." The second fall, which necessitates Satan being cast to the earth, identifies a "fall from influence." The first creates the platform from which Satan's power to deceive was exercised. The second "signifies the exposure and unraveling of the deception itself." The fall from innocence occurred primordially, before the activity of the ancient serpent in deceiving humanity. The fall from influence is a direct result of Christ's death, which by means of self-revelation,

²⁵⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 71.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

casts light on the falsehoods of Satan.²⁶⁰ It is the truth revealed about God, illustrated through the death of Christ that works to nullify Satan's role as a slanderer.²⁶¹ This unmasking, which comes through the cross, is the cause of celebration in the hymn.²⁶²

In addition to developing the theme of Satan's fall, the hymn introduces a new title that serves to fill out his character. Described with the appellation “ὁ κατήγορ” as well as with the participle “ὁ κατηγορῶν,” the accusatory aspect of his nature is emphasized. This trait is inherent in the first mention of Satan in the book of Job (Job 1.6-12; 2.1-6) as well as in the trial scene in Zech. 3. Both of these OT allusions reveal Satan in the role of an accusing agent before the heavenly council. This pre-expulsion role of Satan as a “divine prosecutor” is not only familiar to the OT, but early Judaism²⁶³ and the NT as well. Satan is depicted as the “prince of this world” (John 12.31; 14.30; 16.11) and the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4.4).²⁶⁴ Caird cites 1 Pet. 5.8, Jude 9, and 1 Tim. 3.6 as evidence that Satan retains his role as a prosecutor within the NT.²⁶⁵

While Satan's activity as the accuser of God's people is an ongoing theme throughout the Scriptures, the understanding of his role needs to be nuanced. He does not function simply as a foil within the heavenly court, nor are his accusations based on a proper concern or zeal for God's honor and law. Kensky stresses this in her

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 76. Tonstad also points to Charles (*Revelation I*, 324), who recognizes the limitation placed on Satan's influence.

²⁶¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 656

²⁶² Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 238; Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict*, 281.

²⁶³ Blount, *Revelation*, 237. Some of the intertestamental writings that illustrate this are *Jub.* 1.20; 10.8; 17.15-16; *T. Judah*, 19.4; *3 Bar.* 4.8; *1 Enoch* 40.7; *T. Levi* 5.6; *T. Dan* 6.1-6. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 661; Osborne, *Revelation* 472.

²⁶⁴ Osborne, (*Revelation*, 472), also points out the how the Johannine writings depict Satan as the father of rebellious humanity and a liar (John 8.44; 1 John 3.8, 10).

²⁶⁵ Caird, *The Revelation*, 154.

examination of Satan's role in the book of Job, though the principle applies to every circumstance in which Satan plays the accuser.

However the Accuser's role...is actually more subversive—these examples of human impropriety are used to impeach *God*, and while the matter at hand is ostensibly the piety of Job, the true challenge presented is whether or not God's conception of justice holds up to scrutiny and trial. The actions of man thus have direct implications for the question of God's ultimate justice and propriety.²⁶⁶

Kensky's observation broadens the implications of the epithet "accuser" while at the same time tightening its relationship with the other appellations used to describe Satan. The idea that he is simply a "divine prosecutor," whose task is to bring charges against humanity in the presence of God, is too constricted.²⁶⁷ All of the designations of his character need to be brought together to give the correct nuance to each individual title. The accusatory role is combined with the image of the ancient serpent, whose predominant characteristics are those of deception and slander. These images inform one another and demonstrate that while accusing the saints, Satan's ultimate purpose is to cast aspersion upon God and continue the task of undermining His authority before the universe. The hymn celebrates Satan's defeat in this quest. Christ's position as the slain Lamb (5.6), clarifies the issues in the cosmic conflict by revealing the nature of God's government.

Satan has been accusing God's people "day and night." This portrays an unremitting attack upon the people of God, and by implication upon God Himself. Implicit in the charges brought against "the brethren" is the accusation that God's character is corrupt as well. In the Job account, the unspoken charge is that God had

²⁶⁶ Kensky, "Divine Courtroom," 7, emphasis original.

²⁶⁷ Blount, *Revelation*, 237.

in some sense bribed Job, and in this way secured his allegiance.²⁶⁸ By challenging God to remove the hedge of protection, Satan felt he would reveal Job's true character, which in turn would portray God as unjust, selfish, and manipulative (Job. 1.1-12). The unmistakable courtroom imagery finds its resonance in the slanderous and deceptive accusations that Satan first made to the members of the heavenly council. A military victory alone cannot bring this conflict to closure. It is the misrepresentation of God that needs to be settled for the ultimate triumph to occur in the heavenly war. That triumph is assured through Christ's victory, as announced in the hymn. As in the experience of Job, there is a correspondence between the believers' conquest and God's triumph.

The definitive cause of the hymn's conquest is Christ's death and exaltation. The redemptive acts of Christ (1.5; 5.9) free the believer from sin and thus provide victory over Satan. Yet that triumph does not have the believer alone in view. It is the believer's continual trust in and commitment to God, in the face of apparent abandonment and loss, which is stressed in the next strophe of the hymn. The song of victory is inseparable from the testimony and experience of the believer. Christ has demonstrated that death is not a defeat, but a conquest, and His followers embrace that truth as well.²⁶⁹

The three lines of the second strophe emphasize the fact that not only has Christ triumphed over Satan, but that His followers do as well. The connective καί indicates that this stanza contains a further explanation marked by the ὅτι in verse 10. According to Beasley-Murray, this verse contains the central concern of the entire chapter. It clarifies the reason for Satan's overthrow, and the motivation for the

²⁶⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 659.

²⁶⁹ Krodel, *Revelation*, 243.

celebration of the hymn.²⁷⁰ Those who have been the object of Satan's accusations are described as the ones who have conquered him in return. The emphatic position of αὐτοὶ stresses the fact that it is the same ones who have endured the accusations that are victorious.²⁷¹ Their conquest unites Christ's death with their own experience. The idea of conquering is a familiar theme in Revelation, as each of the recipients of the seven letters (2.1-3.22) is encouraged to overcome. However, there are only two places in which John deploys the aorist, nonsubjunctive form of νικάω. This strophe of the hymn is one; the other location is 5.5, which describes the completed conquest of the Lamb.²⁷² This verbal thread tightens the connection between the victory of the believers and its source, the death of Christ.

The repeated use of διὰ signals explanatory clauses, denoting the ground of the believers' triumph. The first foundation for their overcoming is "the blood of the Lamb." This expression encapsulates the death of Christ and His resurrection. Christ's death is the critical foundation of the saints' ability to overcome. This sacrifice has previously been identified as the means of purchasing a people for God (5.9-10). His blood is also the instrument by which a change is effected in the believers, indicated by their robes being washed (7.14.). Thus, part of the consistent message of Revelation is that Satan was defeated at the cross, assuring the victory of the saints.²⁷³ As true as this is, it is important to keep in mind the larger dimension that the hymn refers to, and that is the war in heaven. If the narrative overview of the chapter is correct, and that war had a primordial beginning, then the salvation of the believer is a

²⁷⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 203.

²⁷¹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 328.

²⁷² Blount, *Revelation*, 238.

²⁷³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 476; so Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663.

secondary concern. It is important, certainly, but secondary nevertheless. The primary issue in the cosmic conflict reflects back on God's right to reign, a right confirmed through the death of Christ.

The second explanatory phrase that gives the basis for the victory over the dragon, *διὰ* with the accusative *λόγον*, spotlights the believers' response to Christ's triumph.²⁷⁴ The expression *τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν*, is a genitive of apposition, indicating that the "testimony" clarifies the type of "word" that they speak about Christ.²⁷⁵ This is a recurrent theme in Revelation, as John announced in the opening chapter that he was on Patmos because of the "word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1.9).²⁷⁶ Analogous expressions are found in relation to the martyrs (6.9) and those who will reign during the millennium (20.4). Christ exemplifies the character of God and the manner of His rule and is in this way called the "Faithful and True Witness" (3.14). In a similar way, the believers overcome by both a verbal witness, as well as the witness of a life of faithfulness.²⁷⁷

The final clause of the strophe clarifies the depth of the believers' witness, in that they are willing to give up their lives in order to maintain their constancy. This concept further develops the meaning of overcoming. The initial *καὶ* at the beginning of the phrase can either be seen as connective, indicating a third and separate aspect of overcoming, or be understood in an exegetical or explanatory way. As the first

²⁷⁴ *διὰ* with the accusative should be translated with the sense "because of" or "through." So, C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 54-5.

²⁷⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 703; Smalley *The Revelation*, 329.

²⁷⁶ Once again the Greek construction emphasizes that John was there "for the sake of" the word and testimony: "*διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.*"

²⁷⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 476.

two clauses both used *διὰ*, it is best to understand *καὶ* here, as explanatory.²⁷⁸ That is, they overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, *for* they did not love their lives even in the face of death. This does not necessarily exclude those who are not faced with the prospect of martyrdom.²⁷⁹ Rather it highlights the willingness to be faithful despite the threat of death, which in the narrative is a constant concern. Once again the inverted world of Revelation indicates that victory belongs to the one who, from an earthly perspective, appears to be defeated. Such defeat is in reality the ultimate triumph.

The final strophe of this theologically charged hymn is built upon a thematic as well as a spatial dichotomy. The verse opens with a call for heaven to rejoice which is abruptly followed by a cry of woe upon the earth and sea. This contrast is the result of the consequences brought forth by the two previous stanzas. The opening phrase, *διὰ τοῦτο*, refers back to the entire hymn as providing the reason for the rejoicing.²⁸⁰ The reason this exultation is presently confined to heaven is due to the announcement that Satan has been cast down and no longer has a place there.²⁸¹ This calls for unbridled joy in the heavens,²⁸² that is, among those who dwell there.²⁸³ Christ's

²⁷⁸ The NIV, drops the *καὶ* altogether, while the ESV translates it as "for." Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, 703) in his translation also uses "for."

²⁷⁹ So, Smalley, *The Revelation*, 328; Aune *Revelation 6-16*, 703; Keener, *Revelation 322*; Boxall, *The Revelation* 384; Roloff, *Revelation* 150; contra Michaels *Revelation* 152.

²⁸⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 703; Osborne, *Revelation*, 477.

²⁸¹ Roloff, *Revelation*, 150.

²⁸² This is the only place in Revelation where the plural noun appears. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 666), argues that this points to several OT antecedents, in which the heavens are called to figuratively rejoice over God's kingdom and His judgment. See Deut. 32.43 LXX; Ps. 96.11; Isa 44.23; 45.8; 49.13; cf. Dan. 3.59 LXX, Theod. So also Blount, *Revelation*, 239.

²⁸³ John uses the verb *σκηνώω* to describe those who dwell, or tabernacle in heaven. It is used in relation to God's temple, in which the redeemed will live in 7.15. The ultimate fulfillment of the promise in Exod. 25.8 is shown in Rev. 21.3. It is also used in 13.6, as the object of the beast's blasphemy. Just as the "loud voice" that proclaims the hymn is not necessarily restricted only to the redeemed, neither must the expression "those who tabernacle in heaven" be so restricted. This rejoicing would include all the heavenly inhabitants.

death has circumscribed the devil's influence, as his character has been clearly manifested before the heavenly court. Although at one time an honored member of the divine council, his deceptive arts and accusatory voice are no longer part of the proceedings. The issues in the cosmic conflict have reached a level of clarity that was not possible without Christ's self-revelation in death. This is reason for great rejoicing among the heavenly inhabitants.

The next section of the strophe identifies heaven's jubilation as the mirror image to the earth's woe. While Satan's influence is limited in heaven, he still has an opportunity to continue the war here on earth. This is the sphere to which he has been "cast down." Engaged in both deception and persecution, he renews his efforts to establish his own kingdom. It is in the arena of the earth and sea, the realm of evil,²⁸⁴ that Satan makes "his final desperate stand against God."²⁸⁵ He continues to wage the war that he instigated in heaven.

Contrary to the call for those who dwell in heaven to rejoice, this woe²⁸⁶ is not directed at one specific group of people, whether believers or unbelievers. There is no similar mention of the "inhabitants of the earth" to parallel those who live in heaven. This is most likely intentional on John's part, as the expression "inhabitants of the earth" is used of those who are enemies of God (3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 12, 14; 17.2, 8). This cry of despair and warning applies to both the righteous and the

²⁸⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 478.

²⁸⁵ Roloff, *Revelation*, 150.

²⁸⁶ Sweet (*Revelation*, 190, 202), argues that this woe is the fulfillment of the third woe of the trumpet series; so Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 290. According to Smalley (*The Revelation* 329), οὐαί occurs 14 times in Revelation. This use here is anarthrous, and is not likely to refer back to the third woe, but rather, as in 18.10,16,19, relates to the terrible events about to occur. So Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 239.

unrighteous.²⁸⁷ The former group suffers persecution and the threat of death, while the latter group will eventually receive God's judgments, even though He appeals to them in order that they may escape the final plagues (14.7-12; 18.4).

The last phrases of the hymn provide the reason for the counterweighted rejoicing and woe, as well as tying the imagery together with that of the war scenes (12.9). The cause (ὅτι) of this opposite but twin reaction is that Satan has come down to the earth and sea, with great wrath. The motivation²⁸⁸ for this wrath is his knowledge that the time is short (ὀλίγον καιρὸν). Satan is full of rage over his defeat that has been brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ. Satan's wrath is indicative of his frustration and fury both at his unmasking and the failure of his plans.²⁸⁹

While it is easy to understand the origin of Satan's anger, the reason for the extension of "his time" is not so clear. Certainly he attempts to utilize the limited time allotted to him, to manifest an earthly demonstration of his power.²⁹⁰ It is evident that victory is already secured through Christ's death. As Caird notes, "in one sense the work of salvation was fully accomplished on the Cross."²⁹¹ This raises the question, as to why any time is allotted to Satan at all?

Michaels' understands that the function of the expression is to give assurance to those afflicted by Satan's wrath. It is bounded about and limited, as trying as the

²⁸⁷ Roloff, *Revelation* 150. There is textual evidence for the addition of the expression τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν (those inhabiting the earth), however its attestation is debatable and the phrase is most likely a scribal interpretation. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 667.

²⁸⁸ ὅτι once again is used.

²⁸⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 479.

²⁹⁰ Roloff, *Revelation*, 151.

²⁹¹ Caird, *The Revelation*, 156.

persecution is, the reader knows that it has an end.²⁹² Mounce argues that it is the period of “Satan’s final and desperate struggle,” the comparatively short time frame between his defeat at the cross, and the final judgment.²⁹³ While these comments certainly have validity, and there is clearly an aspect of “the in-between period” from defeat to final destruction²⁹⁴ there appears to be another connection with the larger narrative.

At the end of the storyline, there is an additional amount of time given to Satan, which astonishes the reader in a manner similar to the unexpected extension of time in the hymn (20.3). After being cast into the abyss, he is set free for a “short time” (μικρὸν χρόνον). Admittedly the expressions used are different nevertheless the conceptual link is strong. Some interpreters view them as referring to the same event or at least to events that are connected.²⁹⁵ The names attributed to Satan in both chapters, point to verbal ties between the passages. “Devil” is used only five times in Revelation (2.10; 12.9, 12; 20.2, 10). Its use, both in this verse as well as in the list of titles in verse 9 and then in 20.2 appear to confirm the thread.

Nevertheless, this does not necessitate understanding both expressions as referring to the same period of time. The contexts argue against this conclusion. One event occurs in a narrative section that describes the origin of the war in heaven, and its relentless battle on earth, whereas the other event occurs in the eschatological

²⁹² Michaels, *Revelation*, 152. Michaels also connects this short time, with the time periods mentioned in the chapter. So, Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 366.

²⁹³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 239.

²⁹⁴ Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon*, 292.

²⁹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 668; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 704.

climax to the war.²⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the reasons for Satan's unexpected release (20.3) and the extension of his time to wage war (12.12) do overlap.

Both passages call for a more reflective activity on the part of the reader. The surrounding context in both sections refers to the devil as the "serpent of old" (12.9; 20.2), which in turn points the student to the initial work of deception carried out in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3.1). The unusual nature of the allotted time periods highlight Satan's role in the narrative, particularly as the subversive power dedicated to using slander and misrepresentation to accomplish his aim of overthrowing God's authority. Satan's role as a deceiver is more important to the narrative, than is generally granted in critical studies.²⁹⁷ While Christ's death has made Satan's deceptive nature clear to the heavenly chorus, the issue is as of yet not fully resolved by those who continue to live on earth. Time is allotted to him to pursue his own aims, yet only makes more distinct the spurious nature of his accusations against God, and the reality of his own character. His eventual demise in the final conflagration is the result of his own persecuting and subversive activity.²⁹⁸ Time is allotted to Satan in both contexts in order that his character may be more fully contrasted with the character of Christ.

Conclusion

As this hymnic pericope is set within the context of the war in heaven, its commentary on the conflict is more apparent than the previous hymns that have been examined. Not only does the controversy consume the surrounding narrative, it is also

²⁹⁶ Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 175), recognizes the "plot-time" difference between Satan's defeat at the cross, and his "ultimate fate at the end of time."

²⁹⁷ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 52.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

the subject of the anonymously sung hymn itself. In a manner similar to the earlier hymns (7.10; 11.15) this one announces the victory that God and Christ have won, resulting in the establishment of the heavenly kingdom. Here, the means of that victory through the death of Christ is clearly brought out, as is the corresponding defeat of Satan. This is the first hymn to give the adversary such a large place within its structure.

He is mentioned in each of the three strophes, with an ever-widening circle of information that is conveyed about him. The first strophe points out his accusatory nature and the loss of his position in heaven. The second strophe reveals that it is Christ's death that has defeated him, and that those who appropriate that death by faith and live a life patterned after Christ's, continually conquer him. The final strophe, although not antiphonal, has an antiphonal affect by contrasting the joy in heaven with the anguish on earth, which is due to the devil's continued efforts to promulgate the war.

While the Roman imperial society may justly be seen as one manifestation of this war, the contours of the narrative point to a broader and more fully developed picture. The persecutions that the church experience are inseparably tied to a wider conflict, and one that has its origins in the past rebellion of a member of the divine council. The issues that might have plagued the first readers of Revelation do not mark the beginning of the conflict, nor are they the sum total of that conflict. Bauckham is correct when he says that the devil's power "to deceive the nations with the idolatries of power and prosperity is by no means abolished."²⁹⁹ The struggle between God's kingdom, which is one of truth and righteousness, and the devil's kingdom, which is founded upon deceit and persecution, continues today.

²⁹⁹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 152.

Nonetheless, this hymn points out to the perceptive reader that the issues of the conflict have been made manifest at the cross. Satan has been stripped of disguise, and in this way is cast from heaven. He is now in the final desperate throes of a defeated enemy.

CHAPTER SIX

HYMNIC PERICOPE OF 15.3-4; 19.1-8

The hymns of Revelation have been described as celebrations of “confrontational resistance” designed to encourage those who live in an oppressive civic climate to engage in their own politically charged worship.¹ There is no doubt that these units call for those who encounter them to participate in the unending conflict that Revelation describes, and to prepare for the eschatological worship that is opened to view. It has been the argument of this study, that to experience the hymns chiefly in terms of the political realities that existed toward the end of the first century in the Mediterranean basin is to miss their connection with the larger narrative, and contributes to emptying them of their relevance and power. A close reading of the hymns must take into account the commentary that they provide on the war in heaven, and the motivation they provide for deciding which side of the conflict one will choose.

Thus far in this study, five of the seven pericopes that have been chosen for examination have been considered. In this chapter, the final two units that have been delimited will be explored. The first is set as an introductory piece to the outpouring of God’s wrath through the seven last plagues. Those plagues remind the IR of the plagues poured upon Egypt at the time of Israel’s deliverance (Exod. 7.14-12.42). Whereas in the Exodus account the hymn followed the deliverance, in this context the hymn precedes the final liberation. The last pericope follows the judgment upon Babylon and its destruction. The hymn celebrates the fall of Babylon, and helps to prepare the reader to encounter the Lamb’s bride (19.7-8). The same format that has been utilized in the previous two chapters will follow here as well. First there will be

¹ Blount, *Revelation*, 98.

an examination of the setting, *dramatis personae*, and plot, followed by other relevant narrative details. After identifying those parameters, the hymn will be explored with an eye toward discerning how the hymn informs the conflict theme and the issues that are pertinent to it.

Revelation 15.3-4

Setting

Chapter 15 functions as an introduction to the judgment plagues that will be poured out in chapter 16. The opening verse introduces a “great and marvelous” sign, which is comprised of seven angels who have the seven last plagues. This sign is specifically designated as occurring “in heaven.” Mention of the “sea of glass” (15.2) also points to the heavenly background, and confirms that the events described occur in the presence of God.² Additionally, the verbal linkage of a sign in heaven (σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) ties this setting to that of 12.1,3 where both the woman and the dragon are portrayed in similar terms.³ The expression once again points, not simply to a visual display in the sky, but rather to the action occurring in the place where God dwells.⁴ Immediately the setting places the chapter in the larger proximate context of the controversy that began in heaven. The three preceding chapters directly relate to the origin of the conflict and the ever-present issues over who is worthy to receive

² Yarbrow Collins, *Apocalypse*, 107.

³ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 869. The dragon is described as σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, while the woman is σημεῖον μέγα ὄφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

⁴ Tavo, *Woman, Mother and Bride*, 258-9. Tavo also notes that the expression ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ appears 18 times in Revelation, always indicating the abode of the divine (4.1, 2; 5.3, 13; 8.1; 11.15, 19; 12.1, 3, 7, 8, 10; 13.6; 14.17; 15.1; 19.1, 14).

worship. The heavenly backdrop, with the verbal thread connecting to the battle between the woman and the dragon places the war in heaven theme in view.⁵

As the temple imagery has had a controlling effect upon the narrative since the initial vision found in chapter 4,⁶ that setting continues to govern the imagery. This conclusion is solidified as the IR learns at the end of the chapter, that the seven angels come out of the heavenly temple and receive from one of the four living creatures, the seven golden bowls full of God's wrath (15.5-7). This places the setting for the chapter, once again distinctly in the heavenly temple, the place in which the divine council convenes. The temple imagery continues to influence the setting in which the hymnic pericopes are found. It creates the basic framework to be utilized in correctly hearing the heavenly choir.⁷

The chronological setting of the chapter is less clear, and hinges in a large degree on how one interprets the expression that the angels had "seven plagues, which are the last." Should this be read to mean that these are the last in a recurrent series and thus appearing for the final time in the book, or last in an eschatological sense, that these are the final plagues that culminate God's judgment upon the wicked? The first view would see the chronological setting to be similar to that in the opening of the seals and trumpets, which is at the beginning of unfolding judgments throughout history.⁸ The second view understands that these plagues, while noting similarities, do not parallel the seals and trumpets but considers that they represent the final judgment

⁵ Joel N. Musvosvi, "The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb" (*JATS* 9, no. 1-2 1998), 44-46.

⁶ Aune, "Imperial Court Ceremonial," 7.

⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 204; Kenneth A. Strand, "The 'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation" (*AUSS* 25, no. 3 1987), 274. Smalley (*The Revelation*, 382) recognizes that despite the lack of explicit mention of the throne, that the setting is the throne room.

⁸ So, Hendriksen, (*More than Conquerors*, 158) who views the plagues as covering the entire Christian dispensation; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 786; Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 282.

of God. The seals and trumpets were partial, indicating their function is to bring people to repentance, whereas the plagues complete God's wrath in response to Babylon's attempt to destroy His people.⁹

Both the mention of the seven angels (indicating completeness) as well as the expression “ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ” supports the latter conclusion. The ὅτι functions to give the clarifying reason as to why these are called the last plagues. It is because in them God's wrath is completed, or fulfilled. This is in harmony with the concept of the “wrath of God” in the rest of the NT, which frequently connotes “the final wrath at the eschaton.”¹⁰ As Pharaoh hardened his heart and thus plagues came upon Egypt, so those who worship the beast have hardened theirs, and all that remains is final judgment.¹¹

Dramatis Personae

Beside the almost cameo-like appearance of one of the four living creatures, this section has two main character groups, and contains an oblique reference to God. After consideration of God's role in the passage, the two character groups will be discussed.

As He has throughout the narrative, God continues to be a presence in the storyline despite the “background role” that He often holds. God's character is filled out in this chapter through a trait that surfaces throughout the narrative, and is once more brought to view here. This is the attribute of “wrath.” First introduced during the close of the penultimate seal, God's wrath emerges in prominent places in the plot.

⁹ So, Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 478; Osborne, *Revelation*, 561.

¹⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 561. See Mt. 3.7; Rom. 2.5, 8; 5.9; Eph. 5.6; Col. 3.6.

¹¹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 284. Mounce also notes that ἐτελέσθη here indicates that the final warnings are complete, but recognizes that there is still the judgment that occurs in 20.11 ff.

The sixth seal opens with a “great earthquake”¹² and closes with rebellious humanity crying out “Who is able to stand?” The object of their terror is the combined wrath of the God and the Lamb (6.12, 16-17). In contrast to this cry of fear, in the hymn that follows the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the twenty-four elders rejoice that God’s wrath has come (11.18). The message that is comprised by the proclamation of the three angels warns that those who worship the beast will ultimately receive God’s wrath (14.10). The wrath of God is described as the content of the golden bowls, to be poured out on the fully impenitent (15.7). This trait contributes to enhance and develop God’s character in the story.¹³ In this chapter, it also helps to develop the shadowy description of God when John refers to the smoke that comes from “the glory of God and from His power” (15.8). God is present in the scene, although unapproachable. The smoke that fills the temple indicates that God is there, yet remote and concealed.¹⁴ Several OT antecedents inform this description, although the portrayal here is unique due to the connection with God’s wrath (Exod. 40.34-38; 1 Kgs. 8.10-12; Isa. 6.1-5). It is God’s wrath, not merely His glory that prohibits anyone from entering the temple, indicative of the fact that at this point in the narrative, intercession has ceased. God has entered into the story to “act in sovereign judgment”¹⁵ and the opportunity for repentance is passed.

¹² Richard Bauckham, "Eschatological Earthquakes in the Apocalypse of John." *NovT* 19, (1977), 226 sees earthquakes as heralding the coming judgment of God.

¹³ Stubblefield, "Warfare," 81.

¹⁴ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 208.

¹⁵ Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 289.

Seven Angels

The seven angels are the first character group in the pericope, and as characters, are considered flat. They are introduced in the first verse as part of the sign in heaven, described as “great and marvelous” (15.1). They carry the final plagues that complete God’s wrath. Toward the end of the chapter they emerge from the temple to receive the bowls that are filled with the plagues (15.7-8). Their importance lies in the fact that they bear the seven plagues, shown by the thrice-repeated mention within the chapter (15.1, 6, 8).¹⁶ Even as the pouring out the plagues is completed, these angels remain in the background, although one of them interacts with John at two subsequent points in the narrative, engaging him in conversation on the fall of Babylon and the descent of the holy city (17.1; 21.9).

The clothing of the angels emphasizes the uniqueness of their role. When they come out of the temple they are described as wearing startlingly pure, bright,¹⁷ linen garments with golden sashes. The term *λίνον* appears only here in Revelation, and its use reflects a priestly or sacral garment. Such garments were worn by the priests in the OT, and especially by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16.4, 10, 23).¹⁸ The golden sashes are reflective of Christ’s attire in the introductory vision, where He is also pictured as a priest (1.13b). Thus, the seven angels are dressed in priestly attire, which also picks up the larger sanctuary imagery.¹⁹ The

¹⁶ There is a connection here to Lev. 26, which relates to God’s penalties upon Israel for disobedience. Lev. 26.21 (LXX) mentions *πληγὰς ἑπτὰ* in particular.

¹⁷ *λαμπρὸν* is translated as bright in 22.16.

¹⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 878.

¹⁹ Murphy, (*Fallen Is Babylon*, 334) views this as “suitable” attire for the angels.

“bowls” (φιάλας)²⁰ are drawn from the sanctuary as well, and were used to carry offerings and libations (Exod. 27.3; 25.29). The adjective “golden” (χρυσᾶς) is mentioned twice within the storyline in connection with the bowls. The first time it describes the golden bowls as “full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (5.8); the second occurrence indicates that they are now filled with the “wrath of God.” This creates a verbal thread uniting the two passages, indicating that the prayers of God’s people are instrumental in the manifestation of God’s justice.²¹

Victors Choir

The final character group in the pericope is made up of those who sing the hymn. They are victors in the conflict with the beast, his image, and the number of his name. Their position on the sea of glass²² is reminiscent of the inaugural throne room vision (4.6), and thus they stand as conquerors in the presence of God.²³ Yet it is not their own victory they are celebrating, rather they are praising God for His triumph.²⁴ The exact manner of their victory is unclear. Boxall sees in the mingling of fire with the sea of glass an indication that this group might have experienced martyrdom.²⁵ This is possibly supported by the expression that they are “standing” (ἑστῶτας) in

²⁰ The word is only used in the NT in Revelation, where it occurs 12 times (5.8; 15.7; 16.1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17.1; 21.9). Aside from the first instance, φιάλας is always used in connection with the seven angels.

²¹ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 207.

²² They are viewed as ἑστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν. Here, ἐπὶ could be translated as “by the sea” or “upon the sea.” Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 285), argues that “on” is the preferable translation, so Smalley, *The Revelation*, 385. Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 873), translates the phrase as “stood near the sea.”

²³ Yarbrough Collins, *Apocalypse*, 107.

²⁴ Charles, *The Revelation II*, 33.

²⁵ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 217. Charles, (*The Revelation II*, 32), sees this group as limited to literal martyrs.

God's presence, which could refer to the idea of the resurrection. There is a verbal thread with the earlier description of the Lamb, who although slain, also appears "standing" (ἑστηκός), clearly pointing to His resurrection.²⁶

However, rather than restrict the singers to only those who have been martyred it is better to see them as a larger, more inclusive group of those who have conquered by maintaining their faithfulness despite the opposition of the beast. The mention that they have the "harps of God"²⁷ and their song connects them with the 144,000 described earlier in the narrative (14.2,3; cf. 7.4-8). This group, while prepared for martyrdom, does not necessarily experience it. The overall emphasis on overcoming that runs throughout the narrative supports this deduction. Those that sing participate in the Lamb's victory, as they remain uncompromising and faithful in the face of satanic pressures.

The passage highlights that it is their participation in the victory that fits them to become part of the angelic choir. Their victory is described in an unusual grammatical expression, τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνοσ ἀυτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀυτοῦ.²⁸ The use of ἐκ with the genitive is unexpected, as the accusative would be more appropriate. There are two likely interpretations of the expression. The first would take it to convey the idea that the singers have "come victoriously *from* (the deception of) the beast."²⁹ That is they have kept themselves from the beast's promulgation of Satan's deceptive lies concerning the character of God. The second understands the use of ἐκ as indicating that they are victorious over

²⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 791.

²⁷ The genitival expression κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ could indicate they belong to the heavenly litany, so Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 285. Harps are first mentioned in connection with the twenty-four elders (5.8) and are absent from the songs of Babylon (18.22).

²⁸ Charles, (*The Revelation II*, 33) considers it "very difficult."

²⁹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 385, emphasis added.

the beast. The beast had been conquered them (13.7) but now they are “victorious over him.”³⁰ Both interpretations underscore the victory gained in the cosmic conflict and the role that victory plays in making this group part of the heavenly chorus and thus enabling them to sing the heavenly song.³¹ Their triumph is full and complete, as the threefold use of ἐκ indicates.³²

Plot

This section of the narrative functions as a transitional link between the unfolding of the conflict outlined in 12.1-14.20, and the introduction to the pouring out of the seven bowls. The broad outline of the three previous chapters can be summarized as first highlighting the war in heaven (12.1-17); followed by Satan’s utilization of the sea and earth beasts as accomplices to prosecute the war on earth (13.1-18); and finally God’s response proclaimed by the three angels’ warning and the subsequent judgment upon those who reject it (14.6-20). Inserted in between the prosecution of the war and the three angels is a picture of the 144,000 with the Lamb. They sing a new song that only they know (14.1-5).

Chapter 15 serves to pick up both the theme of judgment that has been visually displayed in the end of chapter 14, as well as introducing the reader to the content of the heavenly song. The narrative flow of the chapter opens with the introduction of the seven angels, and then is interrupted by the image and sound of the celestial choir. This forms an integral part of the narrative, and as the judgment contained in the seven bowls picks up the judgment imagery of 14.14-20, so the song

³⁰ Fee, *Revelation*, 211, emphasis original. So Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 791.

³¹ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 218; Bauckham, *Climax*, 297.

³² Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 205.

is connected with that introduced by the vision of the 144,000. The entire chapter is an inclusio based on the idea that God's wrath is now fulfilled or completed.³³

Narrative Details

In this chapter, John develops the most extensive use of the familiar Exodus typology in the book. He pulls together the image of the sea, the plagues, the song of Moses, and the ascending smoke that is reflective of Sinai, as well as the dwelling place of God, the tabernacle.³⁴ Not only does the hymn reflect the Exodus, but the feast is also interwoven into the surrounding narrative. The chapter is broken down into three literary units, introduced by *καὶ εἶδον* or a similar variation, each having a connection to the Exodus imagery (15.1, 2, 5). The first section introduces the seven angels and sets the stage for the coming plagues which are reminiscent of the plagues that fell on Egypt (15.1). The second section portrays the victory choir and the hymn that they sing, reflective of Israel's song of triumph (15.2-4). The final section is introduced with *καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον* and indicates the transition to another major scene (15.5-8).³⁵ This functions as introduction for the plagues.

The Exodus imagery has been widely utilized by John to convey the idea of the deliverance of God's people as an end-time Exodus. Alexander Gonzales identifies the Exodus motif at several points in the narrative. First among these is the idea of the Paschal Lamb (5.6), which he sees as the primary imagery of the often-

³³ Note the use of the passive *ἐτελέσθη* in verse 1 and then the passive *τελεσθῶσιν* in verse 8.

³⁴ So, Caird, *The Revelation*, 197; Murray, *Fallen is Babylon*, 232; Casey, "Exodus Typology," 189.

³⁵ A similar expression occurs only at 4.1; 7.9; and 18.1. Smalley (*The Revelation*, 382), connects the phrase with 7.1 as well, however there the expression is *μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον*, which serves a slightly different purpose.

repeated mention of “the Lamb” in Revelation.³⁶ He also considers the mention of the white robes (7.14),³⁷ the covenant imagery (21.3,7),³⁸ God dwelling with His people (21.3,22),³⁹ and the song of Moses (15.3)⁴⁰ as part of the overall Exodus perspective in Revelation. Beale notes that the emphasis on the woman’s flight into the wilderness (12.6,14) carries thematic connections to God’s care of Israel following the exodus, reflective of their wilderness sojourn.⁴¹

John’s use of the Exodus motif is consonant with the development of the idea in the OT. The Exodus became for Israel both the historical event that shaped the nation, as well as a typological event for God’s future activity. It is a controlling theme in the writings of the prophets. Hosea utilizes the imagery to convey God’s attempts to regain the affection of adulterous Israel. Sent into Assyrian exile and exodus, Israel is yet promised a return and renewal of their covenant (Hos. 3.1-5; 11.5-12). The Exodus motif is particularly developed in the book of Isaiah, which in places closely prefigures the overall storyline of Revelation.

Throughout Isaiah there are number of passages that develop the Exodus theme. Rather than fleeing from Egypt, Isaiah develops the return from Babylon as a new exodus. A cluster of these images is found in Isa. 40-55, though they can be

³⁶ Alexander R. Gonzales, "The Point of View of the Book of Revelation: A Literary Study" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2012), 169. J. Daryl Charles, ("An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1-14)" *JETS* 34, no. 4 (1991), 468), notes that while commentators have a variety of views as to the meaning of the lamb, the majority prefer a blend of the Paschal imagery with that of the Isaianic suffering servant motif.

³⁷ Gonzales, "Point of View," 171.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁴¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 643.

encountered throughout the book.⁴² The desert is turned into a paradise with God providing food and shelter (Isa 43.16-20). The Isaianic Exodus is a return to Zion, departing from Babylon (Isa. 48.20-21) as God leads Israel and defends them from behind (Isa. 52.12). The Red Sea crossing is portrayed as the defeat of Rahab, the dragon, as well as *Tannin*, *Yam*, and *Tehom* (Isa. 51.9-11; with 27.1), illustrating God's victory over gods that contend for supremacy.⁴³

Isaiah continues the imagery by describing God's people who both personify and inhabit Zion (Isa. 49.9-21; 51.11; 52.1-12; 61.8). Although once forsaken, Israel's destiny is to become the Lord's bride, as God rejoices over His people in a manner similar to a bridegroom with his bride (Isa. 62.2-5). Finally this Exodus culminates in their inhabiting the new heaven and the new earth (Isa. 65-66). God's defeat of the dragon, His redemption of Israel, and the ultimate fulfillment of His welcoming Israel into a new creation, is all echoed in Revelation's narrative.⁴⁴

Isaiah strikes a different chord in the way he envisions the new exodus occurring, which also finds resonance in Revelation's imagery. The triumph over Isaiah's dragon (תַּנִּין) comes about through the work of the Servant. This Servant suffers on behalf of Israel (Isa. 53.1-8), and yet is ultimately exalted (Isa. 52.13; 53.10-12). He takes on the role of the "new Paschal Lamb"⁴⁵ and is led to his death

⁴² Erich Zenger, "The God of Exodus in the Message of the Prophets as seen in Isaiah," in *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, translated by Graham Harrison, edited by Bas van Iersel and Antonius Gerardus Weiler (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 29-32.

⁴³ Gonzales, *Point of View*, 165. Gonzales refers to Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 134-135 as indicating that the connection between the Hebrew words for dragon (תַּנִּין), sea (יָם), and deep (תְּהוֹם), as well as the mention of רַהַב refer to God's defeat of all the ANE serpents in one blow.

⁴⁴ Gonzales, *Point of View*, 167.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

(Isa. 53.7), and yet appears as the new Moses to lead the people on their exodus.⁴⁶

These themes are echoed by the overtones of the Exodus motif in Revelation.

The image of the sea of glass contributes to this pattern by bringing up connotations of Israel singing after their passage through the Red Sea (Exod. 14.29-31). However, in Revelation the sea is “mixed with fire” (15.2). This may simply be an apocalyptic feature, or it might have a broader significance.⁴⁷ Several interpreters see the imagery of fire as indicating that God’s wrath or judgment is active.⁴⁸ Others understand it as pointing the reader to the experience of martyrdom that the overcomers have experienced.⁴⁹ Or the fire might be a representation of God’s presence and glory being reflected within the sea of glass.⁵⁰ Alternatively, it might represent a mingling of ideas, such as both deliverance and judgment, which can be seen as two aspects of one divine activity.⁵¹ As John’s focus here is on those who have been victorious over the beast,⁵² and specific attention is not given to the judgments until the next section, this last interpretation is the most preferable.⁵³

The connection to the background Exodus imagery and the “song of Moses” is at once evident and yet perplexing. Upon Israel’s passage through the Red Sea and

⁴⁶ G. P. Hugenberger, (“The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. by P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess and G. J. Wenham, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 119-120 demonstrates support for this conclusion by referring to Talmudic writings as well as a number of recent scholars.

⁴⁷ Casey, “Exodus Typology,” 191.

⁴⁸ So, Schussler-Fiorenza, *Revelation-Vision of Just World*, 91; McNicol, *Conversion*, 69; Charles, *The Revelation II*, 33. See 8.7; 8; 9.17, 18; 11.5; 14.10; 16.8; 17.16; 18.8; 19.20; 20.10, 14,15, 21.8.

⁴⁹ So, Boxall, *The Revelation*, 217; McNicol, *Conversion*, 69.

⁵⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 217. See Exod. 24.17; Ezek. 1.27.

⁵¹ So, Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 235; Murray, *Fallen is Babylon*, 235.

⁵² It is only in this setting that redeemed are described in a heavenly setting as those who have conquered. Though see the similar idea expressed in 20.4.

⁵³ Casey, “Exodus Typology,” 191.

the defeat of their enemies, they, with Moses, sang a song of triumph (Exod. 15.1-18). Thus the most natural expectation of the IR encountering this hymn is to expect it to be tied back to the Exodus account. However, this is not the only passage in the OT that could be considered a “song of Moses.” Toward the end of his life, a second song is given, found in Deut. 31.30-32.43. In addition, Ps. 90 is linked to Moses through its title, “A prayer of Moses.”⁵⁴ The relation of the hymn to its roots in important OT passages, as well as clarifying what is meant to by the title of the hymn (“the song of Moses...and of the Lamb”) contribute to a proper understanding of the commentary the hymn provides on Revelation’s larger narrative. These issues need to be explored more fully before the hymn is examined.

Hymn Title

The correlation between the title of the hymn⁵⁵ and its content has given birth to a variety of interpretations. Charles views the title, with its reference to Moses and the Lamb to be filled with difficulties and thus must be an interpolation as the result of a marginal gloss.⁵⁶ A narrative reading on the other hand, must take the difficulty and see what sense can be made out of it. The title should not be read as though there are two different songs, that is, one related to Moses and the other one to Christ. Rather, the title indicates a two-step progression that emphasizes both the occasion of the hymn (deliverance and victory) as well as its content (God’s just ways and

⁵⁴ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 872. Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 285), acknowledges the possibility of the priority of the Deut. 32 song, but concludes that given the overall imagery leads to reader to Exod. 15.

⁵⁵ Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 874) notes the importance of the hymn, as underscored by the extensive introduction and the specific mention of a title, which occurs only here.

⁵⁶ Charles, *The Revelation II*, 35.

deeds).⁵⁷ The first part of the title reminds the reader of Israel's historic deliverance from Egypt and an eschatological deliverance from Babylon. The second half elaborates on the manner in which this liberation is accomplished.

A further point that needs clarification is the function of the genitival phrases in the title. Should they both be read as subjective genitives, (the song that Moses and the Lamb sing), objective genitives (the song about Moses and the Lamb) or a combination? The fact that Moses is called Yahweh's servant (Exod. 14.31) and then immediately follows the song Israel and he sing, leads interpreters to see the first phrase, at least, in a subjective sense. This is clearly a reference to a song, not about Moses, but one that he participated in. Nevertheless there is some reticence to see the genitives as having parallel meanings. Aune argues that the second genitival phrase should be understood as objective, since there is no reference to any song sung *by* the Lamb, while there is one sung *to* the Lamb in chapter 5.⁵⁸

While Aune's point may be granted, it should not be allowed to overthrow the evident parallelism, especially in the close proximity to the highly structured hymn. Boxall recognizes both phrases as subjective, and understands the title to point to the fact that both Moses and the Lamb can be said to have sung this song. The Lamb should be understood as part of the group that is victorious over the beast.⁵⁹ This interpretation is in harmony with the larger theme, that God's people conquer as they partake in, and follow the Lamb's victory (12.11; 17.14). Yet there is another aspect that should be taken into consideration as well. This reflection considers the

⁵⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 205. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 792), understands the καὶ as epexegetical. See also Smalley, *Revelation*, 385; Osborne, *Revelation*, 564.

⁵⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 873; so Smalley *The Revelation*, 386.

⁵⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 218. Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 793), suggests that it is best to leave the latent ambiguity in the phrase.

image that is created by viewing both Moses and the Lamb has having overlapping experiences.

In order to develop this idea further, it will be helpful to note the rich OT background to the song. Almost every phrase in the Nestle-Aland²⁷ text is italicized to indicate that they are drawn from the OT.⁶⁰ Included in the hymn are references from Psalms, Amos, Jeremiah, and Deuteronomy.⁶¹ Conspicuous by its absence is any reference to Exodus 15. That anomaly gives rise to the question as to exactly what is John trying to communicate relative to the song.

John clearly has a commanding knowledge of the OT, although he never quotes from it with either a formulaic expression or introductory phrase. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that in this case, the Song of Moses is not “connected in any literary way” with either Exod. 15 or Deut. 32. It is simply an amalgamation of OT themes.⁶² Bauckham disagrees and understands that John creates deep literary connections “beneath the surface of the text.”⁶³ Bauckham notes verbal threads that run from Rev. 15 to the widely recognized allusions in Jer. 10.6-7; Ps. 86. 8-10; and 98.1-2. These passages connect the themes of God’s uniqueness and His triumph through His righteous acts.⁶⁴ Bauckham connects these threads with Exod. 15.11, which also raises the issue of God’s uniqueness and His wondrous acts. Bauckham claims this

⁶⁰ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 286.

⁶¹ See below for further identifications.

⁶² Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 135.

⁶³ Bauckham, *Climax*, 297. Bauckham (*Climax*, 307), describes the Rabbinic rule of *gezera shawa* as an example of what John does here. As Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 461), rightly notes, it is doubtful that John is using this technique. Nevertheless, the allusions to Exod. 15 are still present.

⁶⁴ Jer. 10.6-7 and Ps. 86.8-10 raise the point of God alone being worthy of the worship of the nations, while Ps. 98.1-2 connects the idea of a “new song” with God’s righteous acts.

verse is the starting point for John's development of the hymn.⁶⁵ However, it is questionable whether the IR would have made the necessary exegetical moves that Bauckham proposes.⁶⁶

Another suggestion that might inform the understanding of the title is to consider Deut. 32 as the primary chapter to which the song is connected. While recognizing the allusion to Exod. 15, as well as the other OT texts, Beale promotes Deut. 32 as being a major contributor to the thematic ideas found in Rev. 15. Specifically he notes the emphasis on judgment on apostate Israel and the attendant wrath, ideas that are picked up in the verses surrounding the hymn (Deut. 32.41-43; Rev. 6.9-11; 8.3-5; 14.18 with 15.2-4).⁶⁷ This connection is also important for Tonstad, who finds that the arguments for a primary influence arising from the song in Deuteronomy are more persuasive than the ones defending the song in Exodus.⁶⁸

This identification also has ramifications for understanding the unusual tying together of "Moses, the servant of God," and "the Lamb" in the title of the song. Tonstad notes that included in the background to the song in Deuteronomy, is the experience of Moses himself. The rejection of Moses as a leader, his exclusion from the long-sought Promised Land, and his failure to keep faith with God's ways are an integral part of the narrative. The song reflects Moses' "own searing experience and

⁶⁵ Bauckham, *Climax*, 303-305.

⁶⁶ Steve Moyise, "Singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb: John's Dialogical use of Scripture," *AUSS* 42, no. 2 (2004), 358. Moyise points out that John does not engage in this kind of detailed exegesis in Revelation.

⁶⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 793. Moyise, ("Dialogical Use," 359), agrees with identifying the influential role of Deut. 32, but disagrees with the emphasis Beale places upon it. Musvosvi, (*Song of Moses*, 44-45), argues that allusions to Deut. 32 are weak, and that Exod. 15 is clearly the primary chapter.

⁶⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 153

the subsequent struggle to come to grips with God's ways."⁶⁹ Tonstad suggests that the title reflects the combined legacy of both Moses and Christ. In this way the consecutive subjective genitives are pointing to the overlapping experience that Moses and Christ had, in being confronted with questions about God's ways. This observation resonates with the larger conflict theme in Revelation.⁷⁰

Another, albeit less noticed connection between the song of "Moses, the servant of God" and the song "of the Lamb" can be found in a different passage of OT scripture. As Moyise observes, John's use of the OT is often on a dialogical level, in which the pointers in the text suffice to maintain a "subliminal presence" that is felt as one reads the passage. According to Moyise, this is what is occurring in Rev. 15. The expectation of encountering Exod. 15 is built up, but those expectations are then dashed. The associations are there, but they are not on the surface.⁷¹ In a similar manner, the typological Exodus imagery that forms the background to the song in Revelation, points to another connection between Moses and the Lamb.

As has already been noted in the discussion of the setting above, biblical writers have frequently utilized the Exodus to describe future events in which God will act on behalf of Israel. This is particularly true in the book of Isaiah. The prominence of a second exodus theme woven throughout the latter half of Isaiah is well recognized. Intertwined into these passages is the Isaianic "Servant of the Lord," whose identity is clothed with ambiguity to such an extent that scholars have suggested a number of possibilities with little consensus.⁷² These identifications break

⁶⁹ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 153. See Num. 20.8-12; Deut. 1.37; 3.23-26; 4.21; 32.51-52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁷¹ Moyise, "Dialogical Use," 360

⁷² For extended discussions on the identity of this Servant see: H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord: And Other Essays on the Old Testament*, (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1965); Christopher R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah; an Historical and Critical Study*, (London: Oxford University

down along a few main lines that include: a corporate understanding, such as the nation of Israel; an individual understanding, such as an historical figure (perhaps Isaiah himself, or Jeremiah); an ideal figure; or the Messiah. However, a less well-known, but equally valid interpretation attempts to resolve inherent tensions by viewing the servant as a second “Moses figure.” G. von Rad argues that the prominence of the Exodus typology, invites, if not demands this interpretation.⁷³ In a reference to Isa. 53.12, Rabbi Simlai makes a distinct connection between the Servant/Lamb found in that chapter, and a Moses figure. According to the Rabbi, Moses also poured out his life and bore the sin of many when he offered his life for Israel (Exod. 32.32.) His death with those who were forbidden to enter the Promised Land finds a reflection in the death of the Servant, who “made intercession for the transgressors.”⁷⁴

G. P. Hugenberger identifies twelve important observations that support this identification, among which are the following points.⁷⁵ First, the appellation *servant* is applied to no one in the OT, with the exception of David, with greater frequency than Moses. Specifically, eighteen out of twenty-three references to the Servant of the Lord (עֶבֶד־יְהוָה) refer to Moses. Second, the broader Isaianic picture unites the servant imagery with the roles of a prophet, priest, and king. Only the assumption of a Moses-type figure that unites these positions can fulfill the imagery. Third, a second Moses character contributes to the solution of the tension between a corporate and individual

Press, 1956); Otto Eissfeldt, "The Ebed-Jahwe in Isaiah XL-LV in the Light of the Israelite Conceptions of the Community and the Individual, the Ideal and the Real" *ExpTim* 44, (1932/33): 261-68; Walther Zimmerli, and Joachim Jeremias, *The Servant of God* (Naperville, Ill.: A.R. Allenson, 1957).

⁷³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* Vol. 2. (New York: Harper, 1962), 261, quoted by Hugenberger, *Servant Songs*, 129.

⁷⁴ Hugenberger, *Servant Songs*, 120.

⁷⁵ See Hugenberger, 129-138, for the following.

understanding of the servant. Moses was Israel's representative and there are many ways in which his experience can be seen as typological for Israel as a nation. This historical relationship is analogous to that of Isaiah's servant and Israel. Perhaps the most significant parallel that Hugenberger discusses, is that of Moses' role as an intercessor and its connection to the function of the Servant. Although the first Moses was not allowed to suffer on behalf of Israel's transgression (Exod. 32.30-35), the second Moses, or the Servant, would be (Isa. 53.5, 8b, 10, 11b, 12b).⁷⁶

If this identification can be sustained, it provides another insight into the title of the hymn in Rev. 15. The Exodus imagery infusing the setting of the song, the distinct mention of Moses as the servant of God,⁷⁷ the mention of the Lamb immediately following this identification, are pointers to the broader OT texture of the reference. The themes of rejection, suffering, and submission are characteristic of Moses' experience as well as that of the Lamb's. These ideas are tied together both in Moses' life and that of the Isaianic Servant.⁷⁸ Thus reading the title in an exegetical manner, "the song of Moses, the servant of God, *that is, or even,*⁷⁹ the song of the Lamb" unites the experience of Moses with that of Christ. It combines the legacy and understanding that they both share. The hymn praises God that although His people go through rejection and suffering, and outwardly it appears that God has abandoned them to the satanic powers vying for control of the world, nevertheless they are confident that God's ways will be seen to be true and just.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 137.

⁷⁷ All four references in the OT to מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד יְהוָה describe Moses. See 1 Chr. 6.49; 2 Chr. 24.9; Neh. 10.29; Dan. 9.11.

⁷⁸ Hugenberger, *Servant Songs*, 130.

⁷⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 792.

Hymnic Pericope (15.3-4)

Throughout the narrative, John has strategically placed hymns that have provided commentary on the unfolding events. The previous two hymns, located in chapters 11 and 12, both celebrated the initiation of God's kingdom being manifested in this world. In chapter 12, the hymn focused on the total defeat of Satan through Christ's victory on the cross, and the recurrent nature of that victory in the lives of His followers. In chapter 11, the emphasis was on the fact that the kingdom is now being realized, not only in heaven, but also on earth, which is the sphere wherein Satan has continued to promulgate his attempt to overthrow God's rule. This hymn promised judgment upon those who were engaged in Satan's side of the battle, and reward to those who resisted Satan's misrepresentations about God. However, the narrative continued to delay the unfolding of judgment. In the hymn in chapter 15, the judgment thread is once again picked up through the "song of Moses...and of the Lamb."

The hymn is composed of two strophes that, while not set in an overtly antiphonal format, can be understood as uniting a verse of proclamation with a second verse of acclamation. In this way, the hymn can be heard in an antiphonal manner.⁸⁰ This perspective is supported by noting that the first strophe follows a pattern of Hebrew parallelism, followed by the second strophe that is structured around a rhetorical question and its three-fold answer.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 152.

⁸¹ Horn, "Hymns as Summaries," 61. See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 286-287, Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 206. Both Mounce and Resseguie consider that the hymn has a tripartite structure, with the first strophe composing the first section, and the second strophe being divided into two sections, the first contains the rhetorical question, while the second hold the three-part answer to that question. The hymn clearly draws on a number of OT texts. Aune, (*Revelation 6-16*, 874), calls it a "pastiche of stereotypical hymnic phrases" while Moyise ("Dialogical Use," 353), chooses the more neutral "collection." Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 461), describes it as a "patchwork of phrases." Given John's attention to literary detail, Moyise's suggestion seems the best.

καὶ ἄδουσιν τὴν ψῆδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ψῆδὴν τοῦ
ἀρνίου λέγοντες

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου
κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ
δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου
ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν
τίς⁸² οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ κύριε καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου
ὅτι μόνος ὁσῖος
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν (15.3-4)

The parallelism in the first strophe is evident, where the first and third lines echo similar thoughts, as do the second and fourth lines. “Lord God the Almighty”⁸³ is a favorite expression of John’s for God and has been used twice before in the hymns (4.8, 11.17) and is also found in the next hymn (16.7).⁸⁴ This is the only time the expression parallels “king of nations.”⁸⁵

The ideas expressed through the parallelism of the first and third lines are charged with significance, particularly in light of the issues that Revelation seeks to address.⁸⁶ In addition to hearing the voices of the hymn, this study has argued that the

⁸² The textual evidence is divided on the insertion of *σε* here. Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 381), argues that the above reading is more difficult and thus most likely gave rise to the addition of *σε*.

⁸³ Cf. Amos 3.13; 4.13 (LXX).

⁸⁴ See also 21.22; and 1.8, 16.14; 19.15, where *παντοκράτωρ* is used without the fuller title. This abbreviated use is also found in the hymn in 19.6. For a fuller comment on this title and its relation to the conflict theme in Revelation, see the above discussion on the hymnic pericope, 4.8-11.

⁸⁵ “King of nations” is found only here in Revelation. For support of this translation over “king of ages” or “king of saints” see Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament; a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (3d Ed.)*, (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 679-70. However, see also Sweet, *Revelation*, 240, where he argues in favor of “king of ages” as being the more difficult and thus more likely to be the original. *βασιλεὺς* usually refers to earthly kings, whether the righteous (1.6, 5.10; 21.24), the ungodly (6.15; 9.11; 10.11; 16.12, 14; 17.2, 10, 12, 18; 18.3, 9; 19.18,19) or perhaps both (1.5). The only exceptions are here, for God, and at 17.14; 19.16 for Christ. *βασιλεὺς* also picks up the idea of the initiation of the kingdom that is the theme of the hymn at 11.15.

⁸⁶ The greatness of God’s works recalls Ps. 111.2 and 139.14. The idea that God’s ways are just and true echoes Ps. 145.17 and Deut. 32.4.

voice of the slanderer/accuser needs to be kept in mind. Satan has attempted to sow discord and doubt among the members of the divine council over the validity of God's rule. The reader can hear the whispered voice asking the question, Is God really true and just? Is God actually worthy of worship and the praise accorded Him? The powerful and seemingly successful onslaught of Satan and his agents have caused these questions to be echoed, at times, by God's followers. However, as the earthborn victors in the conflict are now part of the heavenly choir, they raise their voices in affirming that God's ways are indeed, great and marvelous, just and true.

Mounce argues that the hymn is not pointing to any particular event when it directs attention to God's deeds and ways. He is surely correct to say that all of "God's redemptive works are great and marvelous."⁸⁷ However, given the issues that are at play within the controversy theme, and the pointed attention given to Christ's death in the hymn in chapter 12,⁸⁸ it is more reasonable to assume that the specific focus of God's deeds and ways must be found in relation to slaughtered Lamb who is placed in the midst of the throne (5.6). While Casey argues that "the ground of hope in 15.1-5" is not the Lamb's activity, but that of the Almighty whose deeds are the basis for the rejoicing, this neglects the close ontological unity between the two that has been demonstrated throughout Revelation.⁸⁹ It bears repeating that Christ's death is the key event in God's triumph over evil and the ultimate establishment of the kingdom.⁹⁰ It is His death that answers all the accusations of the adversary. The hymn's celebration of God's ways indicates that the choir now clearly sees what has

⁸⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 286. Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 387), views God's deeds and works in a light similar to Mounce, and in connection with Amos 4.13, understands them to refer to God's "good purposes for humanity."

⁸⁸ Blount, (*Revelation*, 98), understands this hymn to be built on the one in chapter 12.

⁸⁹ Casey, "Exodus Typology," 189. McNicol, (*Conversion*, 68), emphasizes that the song is concerned with the Lamb's triumph.

⁹⁰ Bauckham, *Theology*, 64.

at times been hidden from their view. By the light that comes through the prism of the cross, all other events in the history of the conflict are illuminated and God is shown to be worthy of His position as sovereign of the universe.

The next strophe is divided into two parts, the first containing a rhetorical question, and the second comprised of three ὄτι clauses that provide the answer. The inquiry, “Who will not fear, O Lord and glorify Your name?” echoes the first part of the three-fold warning proclaimed by the angels (14.7).⁹¹ There, a universal proclamation summons those “who live on the earth” to both fear and to glorify God, in view of the arrival of the judgment hour.⁹² While the song at first reading, may appear to give the impression that all nations have responded to this summons, and thus do fear and glorify God, a broader view of the narrative overturns this idea. As the plagues are poured out, there is a direct identification of those who “did not repent so as to give Him glory” (16.9).

The rhetorical question echoes the “incomparability of God” that is also demonstrated in God’s marvelous works. Bauckham sees the connection of the hymn with Exod. 15.11 and considers that the controlling motif of the passage is the uniqueness of God, as evidenced in what God has done.⁹³ This exaltation and praise of God is in direct contrast to the attempted deification of the beast and the dragon (13.3,4).⁹⁴ The adulation given to God is heard against the backdrop of another

⁹¹ It also reflects Jer 10.7, where both the expressions “King of nations” and the question “Who would not fear you” are found. Ps. 86.8-10 influences this passage as well.

⁹² Resseguie, (*The Revelation*, 198), notes the two-step progression that equates those who live on the earth with every nation, tribe, tongue and people. The rhetorical use of the number four indicates the universal scope of the message.

⁹³ Bauckham, *Climax*, 305.

⁹⁴ Thomas, (*Revelation 150*), parallels the defeat of Pharaoh with that of the defeat of the beast.

question, “Who is like the beast?”⁹⁵ It is God’s redemptive work manifested through the Lamb that answers this question, brings clarity to the issue, and calls forth the hymn.⁹⁶

Ultimately, the force of the opening question is to imply that *all* will recognize that God is worthy of being glorified,⁹⁷ because He has revealed Himself to be so. This theme unites with the hymn in chapter 5, which climaxes with the entire created order giving glory and honor to the One on the throne and to the Lamb (5.13,14). Here, as there, this is based upon the demonstrated worth of the Lamb because of His sacrificial death (5.9,10). That all nations will both fear and glorify God’s *name*, which is a sign of His personal being, the essence of *who* God really is,⁹⁸ indicates that the reality of God’s character has finally been made manifest. It is this reality that has been continually obscured by the dragon’s slander. It is ultimately revealed through Christ’s work of creation and redemption.⁹⁹ The effect of this revelation is to lead the nations away from the worship of the beast (and thus the dragon), and to the true worship of God.¹⁰⁰

The last part of the hymn is comprised of three ὄτι clauses each with a reason supporting the opening question. The first clause recalls the holiness of God, the

⁹⁵ This question is likewise an echo of Exod. 15.11 and Ps. 89.6. See Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 211. However, Beasley-Murray suggests that the dragon’s support of and influence on the beast is simply part of John’s rhetoric, whereas the narrative makes the conflict in heaven the basis for the storyline.

⁹⁶ Blount, (*Revelation*, 98), sees the hymn as a “slap in the Roman imperial face.” “This God, not Rome, is the one Universal Sovereign.” While God clearly is the one Sovereign, and there maybe an application to Rome intended, that does not exhaust the imagery, nor do justice to the larger issues brought out by John in the on-going story. Satan and his unremitting warfare against God, manifested through his attacks against God’s people is the larger motif.

⁹⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 796.

⁹⁸ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 388.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 220.

attribute that was first proclaimed in the initial vision and hymn (4.8). There the word ἅγιος is used, while here it is ὁσιος. The former term, ἅγιος, is used twenty-four times in Revelation, both with reference to God, Christ (3.7), His people (5.8), angels (14.10), and the city (11.2). The use of ὁσιος here (and in 16.5), is due to the echo of Ps. 145.17 LXX, in which ὁσιος is also used. This may indicate that there is no difference in meaning, the expressions being synonymous.¹⁰¹ However, Bauckham contends that ὁσιος is an attribute uniquely God's (ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος), while ἅγιος is a quality that can be experienced by God's creation as well.¹⁰² What is evident is that the emphasis of the phrase stresses God's uniqueness and incomparability.¹⁰³ It points out the ethical and moral dimension of God's character as it is linked with truth and righteousness.¹⁰⁴ Altenbaumer raises the question as to why the narrative suddenly brings forward the issue of God's holiness. What has happened that now allows the hymn to re-address God as holy?¹⁰⁵ Here the larger theodical theme contributes to providing an answer. The hymn functions to address the underlying questions raised by the apparent confusion over God's ways of working in this world. Specifically this phrase echoes the question over God's ways, as expressed by the martyrs under the fifth seal (6.10). What had been shrouded in perplexity by both the slanderous attacks of Satan and God's own apparent inactivity to respond, is made clear through a fuller understanding of God's activities.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 567.

¹⁰² Bauckham, *Climax*, 304-305.

¹⁰³ Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 796), correctly points out that the elision of the any verb in the phrase places the weight on the attribute of holiness.

¹⁰⁴ Charles, *Revelation I*, cx.

¹⁰⁵ Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 211.

¹⁰⁶ John's use of μόνος accentuates the truth despite any other claims to this attribute; it is inherently a characteristic of God only.

The second clause¹⁰⁷ picks up the universalistic strand implied by the question, and indicates that all nations will come and worship in God's presence. Unquestionably the rhetorical question is designed to admit only the answer "no one." This naturally leads to the second clause, which envisions the universal worship of God.¹⁰⁸ John's use of both Jer. 10.6-7a and Ps. 86.8-10 support this reading. In those passages, themes highlighted in the hymn are united with the OT expectation that in the messianic age, all the nations would recognize God as the only one worthy of worship.¹⁰⁹

There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord
Nor are there any works like Yours.

All nations whom You have made
shall come and worship before You, O lord
and they shall glorify Your name.

For You are great and do wondrous deeds;
You alone are God.

(Ps. 86.8-10)

While the conceptual parallels between this psalm and the hymn are evident, it also contains the closest linguistic parallels between the hymn and the OT.¹¹⁰ The incomparability of God is underscored, and this is framed in the setting of the

¹⁰⁷ Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 388), sees this as a subordinate clause and understands the ὅτι here to function in a consecutive sense, indicating that the effect of God's holiness is that the nations will worship, rather than referring each clause back to the question directly. So, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 797. Contra Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 286; Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 430, and also Osborne, *Revelation*, 567, who nevertheless recognizes the possibility of reading it as a subordinate clause.

¹⁰⁸ Krodel, *Revelation*, 279.

¹⁰⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 287. See Isa. 2.2; 45.23; 60.3, 4; 66.20-23; Jer. 16.19; Mic. 4.2-3; Mal. 1.11 as a sample of the OT expectation.

¹¹⁰ Moyise, "Dialogical Use," 350. Moyise identifies sixteen verbatim connections between the two passages, plus one connection that holds a slight variation on the form of the verb.

distinctiveness of His works. In both passages, this leads all the nations to come before God in worship.

This thread, although easily recognized in Revelation, is not as easily explained. The narrative draws to a close with the nations walking by the light of the Lamb and bringing their glory into the holy city (21.24-26). The nations partake of the leaves of the tree of life, which thus facilitates their healing (22.2). Yet, this idyllic and pastoral imagery is in stark contrast to the nations being smitten by the sharp sword that comes out of the mouth of the Divine Warrior (19.15) and their final deception by Satan (20.8) that results in their being consumed by fire that comes down from heaven (20.9). This apparently irreconcilable contrast is strengthened by the strikingly universalistic language employed in the description of the slaughter of the nations (6.15; 19.19).¹¹¹ Seeking the best way to unite these images, particularly in a book that is an extremely sophisticated literary composition, has taken interpreters down different paths.¹¹²

Bauckham reads this part of the hymn as an interpretation of the Exod. 15, in line with the OT hope that there will be a time when “all the nations will come to acknowledge the God of Israel and worship him.” He contends that the death of the martyrs has had a transformative effect upon the nations, leading them to repentance. The heavenly choir sings the hymn, not to praise God for *their* deliverance, but rather its function is to celebrate the fact that martyrdom has had an “effect on the nations, in bringing them to worship God.”¹¹³ The death of the believers has transformed the nations into followers of God.

¹¹¹ Bauckham, *Theology*, 102.

¹¹² McNicol, *Conversion*, 6.

¹¹³ Bauckham, *Theology*, 101. See also, *Climax*, 296-307.

Bauckham's attempt to explain the conversion of the nations as founded on the transformative effect of the martyrs' testimony is not universally accepted. McNicol rejects Bauckham's conclusion that it is the power of the martyrs' witness that brings the nations to the Lamb. He notes that the nations do bring their homage to Christ, but argues that this is the result of His victory and revelation of God, not that of the martyrs.¹¹⁴ Beale contends that Bauckham misreads the passage when he sees a shift in emphasis from the judgment theme in the original Exodus, to a salvific theme in John's Exodus. Beale considers it improbable that John's allusive use of the Exod. 15 and Deut. 32 "has entailed a washing out of the idea of judgment" since "judgment resulting in salvation" is integral to those texts.¹¹⁵ While this last point is most certainly correct, it does not really address the tension that exists between the apparent destruction of the nations (in judgment) and their apparent inclusion in the worship of God. This is particularly evident when one compares the expression in this hymn with that of 11.18. There the nations are angry, and it is only God's bondservants that fear His name. In this hymn, that trait is shared by "all the nations."

Upon a closer reading, it is clear that Bauckham is not arguing for a universalistic salvation. He recognizes the tension that exists concerning the final fate of the nations, and is content to live with it. Bauckham understands that John is depicting the martyrs' faithfulness as leading to the repentance "and faith of all the nations." However, John also depicts their rejection of this witness due to their loyalty to the beast, which ultimately leads to final judgment. For Bauckham, John does not

¹¹⁴ McNicol, *Conversion*, 70.

¹¹⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 800. Moyise, ("Dialogical Use," 359), disagrees with Beale's minimizing of the universalistic aspect of the passage, particularly because of the influence of Ps. 86, which has a strong universal outlook.

pre-empt their choice by predicting how successful the martyrs' witness will be.¹¹⁶

Thus, despite the universalistic tone, the narrative does not expect the salvation of every person.

Commentators generally agree with the conclusion, with slight nuances in expression. Resseguie explains the entrance of the nations into the city as representing those who have turned away from Babylon and decided to follow the Lamb to the new promised land.¹¹⁷ Boxall recognizes the ambiguity in the text and understands the clause in the hymn to point to a time when the nations will have "broken free of the shackles of deception" and chosen to follow the Lamb.¹¹⁸ For Witherington, it is evident that John does not portray universalism, but rather that "God's chastisements are intended to lead the lost to salvation" and there is no pleasure in the fact that some of the lost choose to remain lost.¹¹⁹ Osborne concurs with this observation and emphasizes that salvation and judgment are frequently juxtaposed in Revelation. It is by their own reaction to the invitation to repentance that the nations face either judgment or salvation.¹²⁰ Hendriksen explains the imagery, as referring to the ultimate acknowledgement that even the wicked pronounce, in view of the opportunities God has provided them, that God's character is righteous.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Bauckham, *Theology*, 103.

¹¹⁷ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 257.

¹¹⁸ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 308-309.

¹¹⁹ Witherington, *Revelation*, 206.

¹²⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 567-568. McNicol, (*Conversion*, 106) argues that the aim of John's rhetoric concerning the nations is a pastoral one. After passing through judgment, the nations will ultimately recognize the church is heir to God's inheritance. Thus it would be foolish for the church to enter into an allegiance with Rome, which is ultimately destined to recognize the superiority of the church.

¹²¹ Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 160. See also, Martin Rist, "The Revelation of St John the Divine: Introduction and Exegesis" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick et al, Vol. 12, (New York: Abingdon, 1957). Rist sees three possibilities that can explain the universalistic aspect of the passage. They are: John's use of a source without conforming it to his larger purposes; the proposed worship is an acknowledgement of God's power and justice (as Hendriksen); John is simply

These observations do not resolve all the complexities of the text nevertheless many of them share a common theme. It is the revelation of God's acts, whether through the martyrs (Bauckham), or through both the martyrs and the Lamb (Witherington), or through the Lamb alone (Moyise) that impacts the nations. The agreed point is that this revelation functions to overthrow the deceptive slander of the beast and move the nations to see the truth about God's rule. The hymn exposes how the "proof of the beast's deity" previously expressed in the universal acclamation it received (13.3,4), is refuted by the demonstration of those inherent characteristics that show the "unique deity of the only true God."¹²² In this way the worship of the nations is seen against the backdrop of the core issues in the heavenly conflict.

While the nations have previously been characterized as full of anger (11.18), there is a startling transition to describing them as participating in the worship of God. The fact that the description for the nations is found within a hymnic setting strengthens the corresponding nature. An obvious change has taken place among the nations. It is important to recognize that between 11.18 and 15.4 is the description of the casting out of the dragon.¹²³ The unfolding storyline unites the unmasking of Satan's accusations through God's self-revelation, with the songs of praise that the heavenly choirs perform. Apparently it is the dragon's defeat and the concomitant disclosure of God in Christ, which initiates the transformation among the nations.

The third and final clause supports this conclusion, through its direct statement that God's righteous acts have been revealed. This ultimate ὅτι phrase

inconsistent. On a narrative reading the first and third options must be rejected as not giving sufficient attention to the nuances of the text. In harmony with this, Charles, (*Revelation II*, 213) sees the passage as simply pointing out homage, not necessarily heartfelt worship. Caird, (*The Revelation*, 199), rejects this option and claims that the optimism of the passage must be allowed to control the interpretation.

¹²² Bauckham, *Climax*, 305.

¹²³ Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 219.

provides the concluding reason for the statement implied by the question, namely that *no one* will refuse to fear and glorify the name of God. Each of the three clauses intertwines with and supports one another. Thus, the revelation of God's righteous acts and the universalistic worship that is given to God strengthens the claim that God is holy. It is a holy God who deserves the worship of the nations, and acts in a righteous way.¹²⁴ The final affirmation underscores what the theme of the hymn has been repeating, that God's works are great and marvelous, his ways are true and just.¹²⁵

Charles contends that the "righteous acts" (δικαιώματά) should be understood as indicating God's judicial sentences, either in mercy or condemnation, or both. In that sense, what has been revealed are the judgments on Rome and upon those that support the Empire, whereas the remainder of the nations will experience judgment during the 1,000 years.¹²⁶ The broader usage in the NT supports this understanding, as do certain OT passages (see LXX Deut. 4.1; 1 Kings; 3.28; Luke 1.6; Rom. 1.32; 5.16). However, the word can also connote the idea of righteous acts or deeds (see Rom. 5.18). This is clearly the intent in the only other place John utilizes the word (19.8), where the translation righteous deeds is preferable.

Osborne argues that the idea of "righteous actions" provides a superior translation in this passage as well. He ties this back to Ps. 86.9-10 and Ps. 98.2, both of which are concerned with the great deeds that God has performed.¹²⁷ While

¹²⁴ Ibid., 212.

¹²⁵ Fee, *Revelation*, 213.

¹²⁶ Charles, *Revelation II*, 36. Smalley, (*The Revelation*, 389), agrees but places the emphasis upon "saving acts of judgment." The fact that the surrounding narrative is focused on the judgment of the wicked, supports this reading as well. Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 461), writes that it is the "righteous judgments of God" that lead the nations to fear and glorify Him. These judgments are both the final one about to occur in the plagues, as well as God's judgments throughout history.

¹²⁷ Osborne, *Revelation*, 568.

judgment is certainly in view in the hymn, and is unquestionably present with the seven angels waiting to pour out destruction upon Babylon and her supporters, the immediate tenor of the hymn is more positive. It is this characteristic, as well as the other use in the narrative, that tilts the meaning of δικαιώματά more toward the idea of God's victorious activity, or righteous acts. Mounce concludes that the worship given to God is generated because of the manifestation of his righteous deeds.¹²⁸

It is this demonstration of God's δικαιώματά that not only calls forth the worship of the nations, but the praise of the hymn itself. This reading is supported by the allusions to Ps. 98. As with the other OT texts, the allusions between the hymn and this psalm are significant. The psalm opens with a call to sing "a new song" to Lord, because "He has done wonderful things." As in the Exodus, it His God's right hand that has brought victory (Ps. 98.1; cf. Exod. 15.6). It is His salvation and righteousness (δικαιοσύνην, Ps. 97.2 LXX) that have been shown to the nations (98.2). The parallelism of the psalm directs the reader to relationship between the Lord's salvation and His righteousness. Both have been "made known" and "revealed" (Ps. 98.2.) This is emphasized with the final line in the third verse: "All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (Ps. 98.3). The rest of the psalm continues to praise God with song and musical instruments (Ps. 98.4-6), and concludes with a final statement about God's judgment in righteousness (Ps. 98.9; cf. Rev. 19.11).

The tenor of the psalm strengthens the conclusion that the focus is not judgment alone, but the manifestation of God's ways and acts. They are great and marvelous, righteous and true. This is portrayed before all, so that the end result is that God's name is both feared and glorified. It is the evidence of God's actions that is

¹²⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 287.

presented before the heavenly council, and recognized by the earthborn additions to the heavenly choir, which ultimately refute the accusations of Satan and call forth universal praise.

Conclusion

The pivotal phrase in the hymn is the rhetorical question that opens the second strophe. It is set apart from the rest of the verse by the three clauses that follow, and marked off from the previous strophe due to the lack of parallelism. The import of the question is to lead the reader to the answer, there is no one who will not both fear and glorify God's name. The literary thread that is represented with the idea of "name" serves to tie the hymn together with the larger story. Throughout the narrative, "name" is used to highlight the necessity facing God's people of believing the truth about God, rather than the adversary's defamatory misrepresentations, no matter what appears to be evidence to the contrary.

Beginning with the letters to the churches, there is a contrast between those who stand for God or Christ's name and those who do not (2.3; 2.13; 3.8). The issue as to *which* name people choose is essential to understanding the heavenly conflict now being played out on earth. Individuals will either bear the name of God and Christ (3.12; 14.1; 22.4), or the name of the beast and the dragon (13.17; 15.2). The fact that these names are placed within the forehead indicates the inner commitment to the one signified.¹²⁹ It points to the worship given to either the true God, as in the case of the hymn, or to worship given to the beast and thus dragon.¹³⁰ This directs the reader to the underlying issue in the war in heaven, is God worthy of worship? Those

¹²⁹ Barr, *Tales of the End*, 128.

¹³⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 716.

that receive the beast's name concur with his blasphemous claim to divine kingship.¹³¹ Just as the divine name indicates God's protection and ownership, as well as the response of allegiance by the one bearing that name, so too receiving the name of the beast reveals one's decision to seek him as a personal benefactor.

The introductory statement describing the victory over the beast, his image, and the number of his name, functions as a bridge to the larger controversy theme. The three-fold designation directs the reader back to the description of the forced reception of the beast's authority that will come to the entire world (13.16-18). A mixture of miracles, economic penalties, and threats of death are the means used to coerce the nations into participating in worship of the beast. Conversely, the warning of the three angels points to the everlasting gospel and its call to worship God (14.6,7). In this way the hymn is woven into the larger narrational concerns. As with other hymns, this one also functions in part like "the chorus in a Greek drama" interpreting the surrounding events.¹³² Through the hymn, John points the reader to the manifestation (ἐφανερώθησαν) of God's deeds and righteous acts as the ultimate motivation for glorifying His name. The deceptive power that Satan's lies have had in leading the world to wonder after the beast (13.3,4) is overturned as the nations now worship God.¹³³ Even the threat of death or the persuasive power of the miraculous is not sufficient to move the nations away from allegiance to the true God. Having seen His great and marvelous acts, specifically as manifested in the slain Lamb, the choir is convinced of the truthfulness and holiness of His character and echoes the decision of

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of Just World*, 92.

¹³³ Murphy, *Fallen Is Babylon*, 331.

the wider divine council, “Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations” (15.3).

Revelation 19.1-8

Setting

Barr identifies the setting of this hymn as that of the throne room in heaven, reflecting the imagery that is initially found in chapter 4.¹³⁴ This observation contributes to seeing the background for the hymn as set within the temple. The multitude that introduces and closes the hymnic section is distinctly located in heaven (19.1). The twenty-four elders and the living creatures that join in the praise are, as always in the narrative, positioned before the throne. The third acclamation comes from the throne itself. The paradigmatic opening throne room vision continues to exert a control on the backdrop of Revelation’s storyline.¹³⁵ This is a reminder that the conflict of which John writes originated in heaven and began with one of the foremost members of the heavenly council, which council met in the throne room. It is from this location that each of the hymns is heard. Once again the worship scene inseparably connected with the hymn, helps interpret the action occurring in the surrounding narrative.

Dramatis Personae

This ultimate pericope introduces no new major characters to the narrative. The first and the final part of the hymn are sung by the great multitude, which is first

¹³⁴ Barr, *Tales of the End*, 135.

¹³⁵ William Shea, "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals" *AUSS* 22, no. 2 (1984), 250.

introduced in chapter 7 (7.9,10).¹³⁶ The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures appear for a final time in the narrative, and once more prostrate themselves in worship before God as they sing (19.4). The solitary new character in the scene is that of the unidentified voice that comes from the throne (19.5). The function of the nameless voice is solely that of exhorting the broader choir to continue in its praise to God.¹³⁷

Plot

The final hymnic pericope for this study, the “hymnic finale of the book,”¹³⁸ functions as the continuation of and conclusion to the final judgment on Babylon.¹³⁹ This judgment has been the subject of the narrative for the preceding three chapters, beginning with the introduction of the seven plagues and highlighted by the invitation extended to John by one of the seven angels to see the judgment unfold (17.1,2). This hymn continues the customary role that the hymns serve throughout the book, which is to help interpret and comment on the surrounding narrative.

¹³⁶ The identity of the multitude has been disputed and breaks down into three possibilities. These are an angelic multitude (so Hendriksen *More Than Conquerors*, 178; Aune *Revelation 17-22*, 1024; Swete *The Apocalypse*, 242), the church (so Caird *The Revelation*, 232; Roloff *Revelation*, 210; Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 341, Smalley, *The Revelation*, 476) or a combination of the two (so Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 926; Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 519; Catherine Gunsalus González and Justo L. González, *Revelation*, (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 124). Identifying the multitude with that of the one in 7.9, 10 seems correct, but as the angels sing in antiphonal response (7.12) they might be included here as well. This would also reflect the climactic choir that sings in 5.13.

¹³⁷ The voice from the throne is also heard as the seventh angel empties the final bowl (16.17). As with the multitude, there are varying perspectives on the identity of the voice. The fact that worship is to be given “to our God” makes it unlikely that this is the voice of God. It is possible that it might be that of Christ (so Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 930, cf. John 20.17) or as many commentators think, one of the 24 elders or living creatures (Charles, *Revelation II*, 124; Hendriksen *More than Conquerors*, 179; Mounce *The Book of Revelation*, 343; Carol Rotz, *Revelation: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press Of Kansas City, 2012), 272.) Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 522), suggests that the imagery might be reflective of an animate throne, and that the voice is that of the throne itself.

¹³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1040.

¹³⁹ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 515.

Just as the hymn in 15.2-4 is both a climax and prelude to the events occurring in the surrounding plot, so this chorus is the “grand finale of God’s judgments” on Babylon (17.1-19.10) but also serves as a prelude to 19.11-21.8, and the final introduction of the Lamb’s bride (21.10f).¹⁴⁰ As a climax, the hymn is the conclusion to the seventh plague, first introduced in 16.17.¹⁴¹ That plague brings the utter destruction of Babylon, which is expanded upon by the angel’s discourse throughout chapter 17. John’s verbal exchange with the angel (17.1, 15; 19.9) serves as a thread that binds the entire passage together.

While a new section begins with the opening of chapter 18,¹⁴² nevertheless the subject matter is the continuation of the judgment upon Babylon. Where John *saw* Babylon, drunk with the blood of the saints (17.6) and riding upon the beast (17.5), now he *hears* a dirge recounting Babylon’s fall.¹⁴³ The kings of the earth (18.9-10), the merchants (18.15-17), and those who make their living by the sea (18.17b-19), join together to sing the lamentation. This is followed by a call for both heaven and God’s people to rejoice over her (18.20). That invitation to rejoice, as well as the description of Babylon’s destruction and reminder that she is the source of the death of “all who have been slain,” forms the introduction to the final hymn (18.21-24).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Krodel, *Revelation*, 309.

¹⁴¹ J. Paul. Tanner, "The "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in Rev 19:6-10: Implications for the Judgment Seat of Christ" *TJ* 26, no. 1 (2005), 51.

¹⁴² μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον indicates the introduction of a new section.

¹⁴³ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 227.

¹⁴⁴ For a helpful discussion on the comparison between Babylon and Jerusalem, from a historical and contemporary perspective, see Howard-Brook, Wes and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 157-196.

Narrative Details

The mixture of sounds arising from the lament over Babylon's condemnation and destruction, mingled with the sound of joy and victory create a striking contrast. Yet the two strains are inseparably united. It is precisely because of the destruction of Babylon, that heaven can rejoice.¹⁴⁵ The hymn is a response to the call to exult over the judgment pronounced upon Babylon.¹⁴⁶ The celebration of the fall of the prostitute Babylon is seen as a victory, one that is related to the preparation of the Lamb's bride.¹⁴⁷ The hymn functions in a transitional manner, moving from the lamentation of chapter 18 to the repeated hallelujahs that echo throughout the pericope.

The correspondence between the two female figures¹⁴⁸ is highlighted by the structure of the hymn. Jean-Pierre Ruiz emphasizes this relationship by outlining the parallel nature of the song.¹⁴⁹ He describes five areas of similarity between the opening of the hymn (19.1-2) and its conclusion (19.6-8). These are:

1. Acclamation:

19.1: Hallelujah

19.6: Hallelujah

2. General Motive for Praise

19.2: Righteous nature of God's judgments

¹⁴⁵ Gonzales and Gonzales, *Revelation*, 124.

¹⁴⁶ Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 242.

¹⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16,17-19,10*, (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 482.

¹⁴⁸ Although beyond the scope of this study, it should be noted that the use of imagery of evil and good women in Revelation has generated different readings of the book. Schüssler Fiorenza, (*Vision of Just World*, 14), notes that the "sexist language" must be understood as metaphors for idolatry. Tina Pippin, (*Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 67), sees Revelation as deeply misogynistic. See also the helpful discussion in Blount, *Revelation*, 309-310. Howard-Brook and Gwyther (*Unveiling Empire*, 166-168), discuss the biblical connection between immorality and unfaithfulness to the covenant that God initiated with Israel and the relation of that theme to Revelation's two women.

¹⁴⁹ Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 496.

19.6: Lord our God reigns

3. Particular Motive for Praise

19.2: Judgment on the great harlot

19.7: Wedding of the Lamb has come

4. Conduct of Female Figure

19.2: Harlot corrupted the earth

19.7: Bride prepared herself

5. Response to Her Conduct

19.2: Avenged the blood of God's servants on her

19.8: Clothed in clean linen

Seen in this way it becomes clear that the hymn focuses on the two women, their actions, and their ultimate allegiances.

As Barr recognizes, John's interpretation of the symbolism of the bride's clothing (19.8), reminds the reader that it is not brides and whores that are the subject matter, rather the "on-going life of the followers of Jesus" that "clothe their own community in faithful deeds."¹⁵⁰ The contrast highlights those that follow the Lamb and thus unite with him in marriage, with those that follow the beast, symbolized by the woman riding upon it (17.3). The women represent those that ally themselves with Christ or his opponent, the beast.¹⁵¹ The juxtaposition of images points to the conflict inherent in the scene. The beast, upon which the harlot sits, represents a satanic figure, if not Satan himself.

If the beast of chapter 17 is identified with that of chapter 13,¹⁵² then it represents a satanic power, indicated by the explanation that those who worship the beast ultimately worship the dragon (13.4). However, the mention of the color of the

¹⁵⁰ Barr, *Tales of the End*, 136. Barr sees the alternative to this, as clothing Rome in her lavish ways.

¹⁵¹ Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, 343) sees the harlot as a symbol of Roman civilization, riding upon Roman military might, thus fusing the meaning of the figures.

¹⁵² This is the position several commentators take, linking the imagery to Rome. So, Blount, *Revelation*, 314; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 853; Smalley, *The Revelation*, 429.

beast (17.3; 12.3) and its ascent from the abyss could mean that it represents Satan himself. The abyss, mentioned seven times in the narrative, is unquestionably connected with the demonic¹⁵³ and arguably is always related to Satan (9.1, 2, 11; 11.7; 17.8; 20.1, 3). The initial references describe a fallen angel that unleashes destruction upon the world and is called Abaddon and Apollyon, the destroyer. This fallen star unleashes a demonic army upon the world, and has been identified with Satan.¹⁵⁴ This theme is picked up in the final references to the abyss, into which Satan is cast (20.1-3). Thus the description that the beast upon which the woman sits will “come up out of the abyss” (17.8) could be referring to the same situation. In this view, the beast the woman rides is another representation of Satan.¹⁵⁵ However, either of these interpretations point to the larger conflict theme upon which Revelation is built, as in both views Satan stands as the puppet master controlling Babylon.

The hymn also directs the reader to this theme by paralleling two other hymnic pericopes. The first parallel is based on the opening pericopes in chapters 4 and 5. The entire backdrop to the present hymn, as has been discussed above, is the judgment on Babylon outlined in chapters 17 and 18. This judgment scene serves as an earthly counterpoint to the paradigmatic heavenly worship scene of chapters 4 and 5, from which the main narrative flows. The contrasts underscore the ongoing war and its final conclusion. The divine council, represented by the elders and living creatures and joined by the extended creation, is distortedly reflected in the choir of kings, merchants, captains, and sailors. The heavenly worship is eternal (4.8) as opposed to the short-lived nature of the earthly acclaim given to Babylon (“one hour” 18.10, 17,

¹⁵³ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 146.

¹⁵⁴ So, Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 114.

¹⁵⁵ Ekkehardt Muller, *The Beast of Revelation 17-A Suggestion*, private paper, 2.

19). The counterimaging highlights that instead of a heavenly worship, there is worship “for the counterfeit god.”¹⁵⁶ The displacement of God as worthy of worship by a counterfeit has been Satan’s object since the origin of the conflict. Thus, while Babylon will have historical connections to political and religious systems that fight against the worship of God,¹⁵⁷ the larger imagery in the text is that of the war in heaven.

The second hymn that has verbal treads to the one currently under investigation, is found in 11.15-18. The connections between the two hymns point to the fulfillment of the divine plan and a conclusion of the heavenly conflict.¹⁵⁸ Among the notable connections are the presence of a multitude (11.15; 19.1,6); the response of the elders (11.16; 19.4); the mention of the “small and great” (11.18; 19.5), and the judgment that comes upon those who corrupt¹⁵⁹ the earth. Additionally both hymns point out that God has initiated His reign (11.17; 19.6). The aorist of the verb, ἐβασίλευσεν (19.6), is ingressive as is ἐβασίλευσας (11.17.) The verb, with God as the subject, is used only within these two hymns in the storyline, and points to the commencement of God’s reign.¹⁶⁰ As noted above in the discussion on its first use, this is clearly an unusual expression. This is especially so, as God has been connected with the imagery of throne since the opening chapter (1.4), within the inaugural vision of the heavenly temple (4.2,3f), and continually throughout the narrative. The phrase calls for consideration, given Revelation’s continual portrayal of God’s position as ruler in the heavenly council and throughout the universe.

¹⁵⁶ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 227.

¹⁵⁷ Howard-Brooke and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 158.

¹⁵⁸ Rotz, *Revelation*, 271.

¹⁵⁹ 11.18 uses διαφθείρω, while 19.2 has ἐφθειρεν.

¹⁶⁰ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 481.

This initiation of God's rule and assumption of His great power can best be explained in light of the narrative theme. Keeping in mind the background of the dragon's attempts to usurp God's position on the throne, the narrative points to a time when those attempts and the motivation behind them are made manifest. The heavenly council, represented here by the elders and the living creatures, is rejoicing that God has both made evident the falsity of Satan's claims and has assumed His rightful rule. It is in the victory over the powers of evil and over that part of humanity that has joined in the rebellion, that God establishes His rule.¹⁶¹

Hymnic Pericope (19.1-8)

The pericope is comprised of three sections each containing a song of praise (19.1b-3; 4-6; 7-8).¹⁶² The opening expression of the passage, μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα, is unique in Revelation¹⁶³ as compared with the more frequent μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον.¹⁶⁴ The emphasis here is on what John *hears*, which serves to interpret what John has just seen. The antecedent to ταῦτα is the entire portrayal of Babylon's fall in chapters 17 and 18¹⁶⁵ and that began with the seventh plague. While often indicating a major structural break, μετὰ ταῦτα, need not necessarily be read in that way. It is used other places in Revelation to indicate a change of scene, but one that has continuity with

¹⁶¹ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 189.

¹⁶² Duff, (*Who Rides*, 84), sees two hymns in the section. Mounce, (*The Book of Revelation*, 346), sees a separate phase beginning at verse 6, as does Osborne, (*Revelation*, 671), who places 19.6-10 with the remainder of the chapter. Certainly the passage has an interlocking aspect as identified above. However, noting Ruiz's structural examination above, it is better to take the entire section as a unit. So, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1019. Structurally, the passage would extend to verse 10, which as a unit functions as the culmination of the Babylon cycle, which began in 16.17. So, Tanner, *Marriage Supper*, 51.

¹⁶³ Rotz, *Revelation*, 271.

¹⁶⁴ See 4.1; 7.9; 15.5; 18.1.

¹⁶⁵ Ronald L. Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of Revelation 12-22* (Dallas, Tex.: SIL International, 2006), 161.

what has just transpired (7.9; 15.5). Also, the strong threads of Babylon's fall (19.2; 18.21), the call to rejoice (19.1; 18.20), and the discussion with the angel (19.9; 17.1) unites this passage with what proceeds.¹⁶⁶ Each section of the hymn will be discussed in turn.

μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλην ὄχλου πολλοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λεγόντων
 ἀλληλουϊά ἢ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν
 ὅτι ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ
 ὅτι ἔκρινεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην ἣτις ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ
 πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς
 καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς
 καὶ δεύτερον εἶρηκαν
 ἀλληλουϊά καὶ ὁ καπνὸς αὐτῆς ἀναβαίνει εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (19.1-3)

This first part of the pericope contains two sections, both sung by the great multitude. In many regards this passage brings to a conclusion themes that surfaced in previous hymns. The segment opens with the ejaculation “Hallelujah,” which is repeated three more times in the hymn (19.3, 4, 6). These are the only occurrences in the NT of this familiar OT expression.¹⁶⁷ It introduces a doxological strophe¹⁶⁸ similar to the ones found in 7.10, 11.15, and 12.10. Key concepts that have been enunciated in previous hymns are once again taken up and repeated. Woven into this summarizing hymn is the enthusiastic response of the choir to the final judgment as expressed by a three-fold focus on God's attributes.

The terms salvation, glory, and power, appear in the hymn in chapter 7 (7.10, 12), while glory and power also occur in the opening hymnic pericope (4.11). The usage of salvation here is similar to that of 7.10 and 12.10, wherein ἡ σωτηρία refers

¹⁶⁶ Tanner, *Marriage Supper*, 51.

¹⁶⁷ Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 519) points out that the word appears in a cluster of Psalms, that emphasize praise for God's deliverance. It occurs in the beginning of Pss. 111; 112; at the beginning and ending of Pss. 106; 113; 135; 146; 147; 148; 149; 150; and at the end only of Pss. 104; 105; 115; 116; 117.

¹⁶⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1024-25.

to God's triumph over the dragon and is best translated as "victory."¹⁶⁹ The genitive of possession indicates that these three traits rightly belong to God. Prominence is given to ἡ σωτηρία in the strophe, providing a frame for the celebratory song.¹⁷⁰ The victory is a result of God's initiative in His engagement with dragon in the heavenly conflict.

While salvation is surely in view as well, that does not take into account the full perspective of the narrative. Altenbaumer suggests that the fundamental issue here is "how will the holy God" bring about the deliverance of those who have been purchased by the Lamb?¹⁷¹ Unquestionably this is a major concern within Revelation. However, a more fundamental concern than the believers' deliverance is that of answering the accusations that have been brought against God's authority in the heavenly council. God's judgments bring the truth to the fore, overturning the deceptive nature of Satan's accusations. As Bauckham notes, "justice is about exposing the truth of things."¹⁷²

Two ὅτι clauses lay out the motivation for the initial doxology. The first of these is more general, pointing to the true and righteous aspects of God's judgment, followed by the specific motivation of judging the harlot.¹⁷³ The first reason given in the strophe repeats the proclamation that came from the voice of the altar during the fallen of the plagues (16.7). The repetition of the "true and righteous" nature of the

¹⁶⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 664; Caird, *The Revelation*, 232. See also the discussion above on 7.10.

¹⁷⁰ Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 262.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁷² Bauckham, "Judgment in the Book of Revelation" *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004), 1.

¹⁷³ Ruiz, *Praise and Politics*, 76.

judgment indicates both the validity and the absolute fairness of what appears to be a vindictive, destructive act, which seems outside of the character of God.¹⁷⁴

The second ὅτι clause gives the motivation for the song as being the specific judgment upon the great harlot. This strophe functions to summarize the events of the previous chapters, which delineated the fall of Babylon. It is also provides two supporting reasons, or the basis for this ultimate judgment. The first is that the harlot has ἔφθειρεν¹⁷⁵ τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς. This corruption (φθείρω) of the earth that the harlot accomplishes reflects the use of the cognate (διαφθείρω) in 11.18, which points to the destruction of the earth.

The words evoke Jer. 51.25 (28.25 LXX), in which the historical Babylon is destroyed, for the destruction she brought to the earth.¹⁷⁶ Beale argues that φθείρω carries the double nuance of corruption and destruction. Thus the influence of Babylon is not only to corrupt the earth, but also to bring about its destruction.¹⁷⁷ The corrupting effect of the harlot is a repeating theme throughout the storyline (14.8; 17.2; 18.3, 9.) In her persistent work of seducing the nations with her immorality, she utilizes Satan's foremost weapon, that of deception (12.9; 20.3, 8, 10).¹⁷⁸ This highlights the truth that behind any political entity, are the unremitting attacks of the adversary, utilizing the fundamental technique brought to bear in the origins of the heavenly conflict.

¹⁷⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 342. This is correct but see further below under the discussion on the last section of the pericope.

¹⁷⁵ The imperfect tense indicates the incessant nature of the Babylon's influence.

¹⁷⁶ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 364.

¹⁷⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 927. Beale points to the proximity of the mention of Babylon's persecuting nature in support of this conclusion.

¹⁷⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 665.

The final reason for the chorus of praise in this part of the hymn is that God has enacted divine vengeance upon Babylon. She has shed the blood of God's servants who have remained faithful to Him and now she is being punished in return. The verb, ἐξεδίκησεν, is used only twice in Revelation, here and in the cry of the martyrs for justice and vengeance (6.10).¹⁷⁹ This verbal thread demonstrates that the question raised by the martyrs over God's apparent lack of action in the face of the attacks of the dragon is now being answered. This is not a call for revenge, but that justice be done and "seen to be done."¹⁸⁰ The lack of God's response to the satanic attacks upon His people in the earthly battlefield, has given seeming support to Satan's questions over God's fitness to rule. Thus His triumph over the harlot reflects the implicit idea that the vindication of God's people is interlocked with the vindication of God.¹⁸¹

The hymn, corresponding as it does to the martyrs' pleas, indicates that this cry is not birthed from a desire for retribution, but out of concern for God's reputation. The verbal thread formed by the use of ἀληθινός (6.10; 19.2) reflects the idea that God must demonstrate the *truth* of His being and character.¹⁸² This is what is at stake in the cosmic conflict. There is an important connection made between the long-awaited judgment and the experience of God's people. The victory of the saints, whether through martyrdom or through the willingness to be martyred, is inseparably

¹⁷⁹ Behind this passage is 2 Kings 9.7, in which Elisha anoints Jehu as king, with the commission to avenge the blood of God's servants, slain by Jezebel.

¹⁸⁰ Caird, *The Revelation*, 85.

¹⁸¹ Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 64.

¹⁸² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 929.

linked with God's victory, demonstrated through Christ's death at the cross (7.10; 12.10-12).¹⁸³

The final strophe in this section announces the second hallelujah within the pericope. The irrevocability and the immutability of the judgment are indicated by the expression "her smoke ascends forever." The imagery is reflective of Isa. 34.9-10, where the perpetually ascending smoke functions as a memorial to God's punishment of Edom. As the smoke of the incense containing the prayers of God's people have ascended before His throne (8.4), the answer to those pleas is demonstrated in the smoke of Babylon's destruction.¹⁸⁴ In this way, judgment itself is connected with acts of worship within the divine council. The heavenly court sees the manifestation of God's moral rule.¹⁸⁵

καὶ ἔπεσαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ
προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ λέγοντες
ἀμήν ἀλληλουϊά
Καὶ φωνὴ ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου ἐξῆλθεν λέγουσα
Αἰνεῖτε τὸν Θεὸν ἡμῶν πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν καὶ
οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι (19.4-5)

The second section of the hymn contains an antiphonal rejoinder to the celebration of Babylon's destruction. For the final time in the narrative, the elders and living creatures participate in the hymns. Their emphatic "Amen. Hallelujah!" is a response to the song of the great multitude. Once more they direct attention to "God who sits on the throne" through their prostration in worship. The elders and living creatures previously fell down in worship before the Lamb, when He appeared before

¹⁸³ Caird, *The Revelation*, 232.

¹⁸⁴ Sweet, *Revelation*, 278. Sweet also notes that there is a contrast with Rome's claim to *Aeternitas* or eternity, which was indicated on Flavian coins. See also Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 233-34 for a contrast of Rome's claims with Revelation's view of reality.

¹⁸⁵ Boring, *Revelation*, 193.

the throne to open the sealed book (5.8). The worship before the throne in this hymn is a narrative thread that tightens the connection between Christ's actions and the demonstration of God's character.

As noted in the opening hymnic sections,¹⁸⁶ it needs to be kept in mind that the throne is disputed territory. Satan is attempting to replace God's throne with his own. The issues in the war in heaven focus on *who* has the right to *rule*. Since the opening of the controversy, Satan has disputed God's claims to that right. The mention of the throne here is contrasted with the description of the harlot as sitting like a queen upon her throne (18.7). This is another illustration of Babylon's satanic attempt to hijack the rule of the universe.¹⁸⁷ The elders and living creatures, members of the heavenly court¹⁸⁸ before which Satan first brought his slanderous accusations, direct the attention of the universe to the seat of true power and just authority.¹⁸⁹

Following the response of the living creatures and the elders, an unidentified voice¹⁹⁰ from the throne issues a call to praise "our God." The command¹⁹¹ is directed to God's "bond-servants" who are identified in the three succeeding clauses as those who fear Him, both small, and great. Martyrs alone are not being addressed, but the entire company of God's people.¹⁹² Each of the defining phrases has a connection to the larger narrative. The admonishment to "fear God" is part of the warning

¹⁸⁶ See the discussion above on the pericope in chapter 4.

¹⁸⁷ Blount, *Revelation*, 343.

¹⁸⁸ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 343.

¹⁸⁹ Boxall, *The Revelation*, 267.

¹⁹⁰ See the discussion under *dramatis personae* for possible identifications of the voice.

¹⁹¹ αἰνεῖτε is an imperative.

¹⁹² Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 273. This is true, even though Babylon is specifically stated as having shed the blood of God's bond-servants (19.2). However, the "bond-servants" is used frequently to identify the church at large (2.20; 7.3; 11.18; 22.3).

announced by an angelic messenger (14.6). Those that are called to join in the praise have responded positively to that appeal and have chosen God rather than His opponent the dragon. Additionally, all three of the descriptive clauses, the bondservants, the small, and the great, are each mentioned in 11.18, in this way once again underscoring the connection between the two hymns. This relationship is further defined in the final section of the hymn.

καὶ ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ὄχλου πολλοῦ καὶ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῶν ἰσχυρῶν λεγόντων
 ἀλληλουϊά
 ὅτι ἐβασίλευσεν κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν ὁ παντοκράτωρ
 χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιῶμεν καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ
 ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου
 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἠτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν
 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἵνα περιβάλῃται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν τὸ
 γὰρ βύσσινον τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν (19.6-8)

The final segment forms an *inclusio* with the opening hymn of the chapter, both by the repetition of the mention of a great multitude and the fourth and last use of hallelujah. The overwhelming sound of the assembly needs three similes to capture the deafening and triumphant cry.¹⁹³ The recurrence of ὡς compares the voice heard to that of a great multitude, to many waters, and to strong thunder.¹⁹⁴ A comparable simile is found in 14.2 where the 144,000 alone sing an unrecorded new song.¹⁹⁵ This thread raises the question as to *who* comprises this final chorus. Beale identifies this multitude with that which opened the pericope, being the redeemed, who voice their joy over the defeat of Babylon.¹⁹⁶ Smalley argues against this identification, seeing in

¹⁹³ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 234.

¹⁹⁴ Earlier in the narrative, the voice of the son of man is compared to that of many waters (1.15). See also some OT antecedents, Isa. 17.12; Ezek. 1. 24; Dan. 10.6.

¹⁹⁵ There John hears a voice that is ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης.

¹⁹⁶ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 931. Note the similarity of expressions, ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλης ὄχλου πολλοῦ (v.1) and ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν ὄχλου πολλοῦ (v.6).

the imagery an expanded group, much like that which sings at the end of the pericope in chapter 5.¹⁹⁷ While the exact identity of the group is debatable, it is clear that John intends for the reader to sense the force of their acclamation. The ultimate song in the narrative is noted for the power of its volume, which is in harmony with the importance of the message.

The final hallelujah and the accompanying crescendo that contains the reason for the acclamation, opens this section of the pericope. This is followed by a threefold exhortation to rejoice, be glad, and to give glory to God. A ὅτι clause supplies the reason for such triumph and exaltation.¹⁹⁸ The introduction of the ultimate hallelujah is explained by the proclamation that “the Lord God Almighty”¹⁹⁹ has begun to reign. The expression appears seven times in the narrative, several times within hymnic pericopes (4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 16.7; 19.6). The remaining references are in the opening and closing sections of the book (1.8; 21.22), underscoring the importance the title has to the theme of the hymns. It is generally argued that the expression points to God’s sovereignty and control over all events.²⁰⁰ While this aspect is not to be ignored, reading the hymns in the light of the war in heaven theme demonstrates that God’s sovereignty is under contest. A conflict rages over His right to be seated upon the throne. A close reading of the way the phrase is utilized here supports this conclusion.

¹⁹⁷ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 481. Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 524), sees both groups as the same, and both containing not only the redeemed or only angelic beings, but a larger combined chorus.

¹⁹⁸ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1022-23; Osborne, *Revelation*, 671.

¹⁹⁹ For a discussion on the textual issue of the inclusion of “our” in the phrase, see Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1016.

²⁰⁰ So, Bauckham, *Theology*, 30; Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 191.

For a final time, John connects this title with the commencement of God's reign. An ingressive aorist (ἐβασίλευσεν) is used to convey the idea that this is the initiation of God's rule.²⁰¹ The verb, with God as the subject, is used only here and in 11.17, and directs the reader to the start of God's reign.²⁰² In this way, the final hymn also functions as a closing bracket to a section opened by the fourth hymnic pericope. The material that is framed between these two pericopes unveils the origins and conclusion to the cosmic conflict.²⁰³ The commencement of God's reign brings closure to the war between God and Satan. The final "hallelujah" celebrates the establishment of God's *right to rule* before the universe. Despite Satan's subtle and continued attempts to overthrow the government of God, based upon his misrepresentation of God's character, the thunderous approval of the final chorus applauds the fact that God is now reigning.²⁰⁴

Nevertheless, a question needs to be addressed concerning the manner in which that reign is established. Notwithstanding Caird's statement that there is nothing "ghoulish or macabre" over the shout of triumph within the hymn,²⁰⁵ the imagery utilized creates an unsettled response, at least in the modern reader. The attention to detail given in the description of Babylon's fall, which the hymn celebrates, is disquieting to the point where Ruiz can write that "no responsible

²⁰¹ So Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 497; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 932; Osborne, *Revelation*, 672. Thompson, (*Semitic Syntax*, 41-2), identifies this as a timeless aorist. However, as Mathewson (*Verbal Aspect*, 54) rightly notes and Thompson also recognizes, the temporal aspect is determined by the context and deictic indicators of time. Here, as in 11.17, the chronological setting points to a time in the narrative when God acts and makes His reign known.

²⁰² Smalley, *The Revelation*, 481.

²⁰³ Altenbaumer, "The Salvation Myth," 265.

²⁰⁴ This does not overlook the continuation of the narrative through two more earthly manifestations of the war (19.11-21; 20.7-11). Rather what is in focus is an essential part of the resolution to the conflict that allows its full closure.

²⁰⁵ Caird, *The Revelation* 232.

Christian congregation today could sing” the hymn under investigation. The passage celebrates violence and an apparent bloodthirsty vengeance over opponents.²⁰⁶ The issue that confronts the reader is how does judgment on Babylon cohere with the statement that God’s acts are just and true. Rejoicing over the destruction of an enemy, even one as strong as Babylon, seems less than a Christian response. A correct reading here is essential. As Mounce points out: “Nothing less than the character of God is at stake.”²⁰⁷ As God’s character and His sovereignty form the fundamental issue in the cosmic conflict, it would be inconsistent to see in the establishment of God’s reign, actions that support Satan’s accusations against God.

The point of concern surfaces repeatedly throughout the storyline. The destruction to come under the sixth seal, leads the inhabitants of the earth to seek death rather than face the terrifying and soon to come “wrath of the Lamb” (6.16). The beast may do all sorts of despicable things to God’s people in its role as a persecutor and agent of Satan, but none compares with the description of God’s wrath being poured out with its attendant torment by fire (14.10-11). If this had been describing the action of the beast or it’s master Satan, it would be, no doubt, seen as the epitome of malice, vindictiveness, and evil.²⁰⁸

Mounce sees these acts as a demonstration of a just judgment on those who have oppressed God’s people.²⁰⁹ This conclusion is supported by the refrain given by an angel and a mysterious voice from the altar during the pouring out of the plague judgments (16.5-7). That passage forms an inclusio that focuses on the justice of God’s actions in the destruction of Babylon. This inclusio is itself part of a larger A-

²⁰⁶ Ruiz, *Praise and Politics*, 80.

²⁰⁷ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 344.

²⁰⁸ Moyise, *Lion Lie Down*, 182.

²⁰⁹ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 344

B-A pattern structured around the first six plagues. The organization of the passage drives the reader's attention to the central aspect of judgment. The pouring out of those plagues creates the following pattern:

A: 16.2-4: three angels and bowls
 B: 16.5-7: hymnic pericope proclaiming God's justice
 A': 16.6-12: three angels and bowls²¹⁰

The center portion of this structure (B) internally repeats the pattern and in this way underscores the thematic point that justice is demonstrated within the judgments of God.

A: 16.5: Righteous are You...because You judged these things
 B: 16.6: For (ὅτι) they poured out the blood of the saints
 A': 16.7: True and righteous are your judgments

Thus it can be accurately stated that the "purpose of all this violence is the establishment of justice."²¹¹

This is evidently true and an integral part of the narrative, but does not effectively dismiss all the difficulties involved. Since it is apparent that God has the power to bring justice on the oppressor, the question naturally arises: Why such a long delay in the exercise of that power? This is the question raised by the martyrs under the fifth seal. Secondly, one needs to question if this imagery effectively conveys the

²¹⁰ Howard-Brook and Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 152.

²¹¹ Ibid. Howard-Brook and Gwyther (*Unveiling Empire*, 155), also state that God has the authority to act with violence where justice demands it. The establishment of justice in this manner is the outworking of an apocalyptic *lex talionis*. A close reading of chapter 16 supports this conclusion. Here, John utilizes ἐκχέω to describe the pouring out of the final judgments. It is used nine times within Revelation, exclusively within this chapter. It is used four times before and again after the pivotal verse 6. In this manner John demonstrates that the outpouring of the plagues is in response to the actions of the dragon and his compatriots in pouring out the blood of the saints. See Blount, *Revelation*, 294-296. John's use of the verbal thread ἄξιός is also of interest here. The wicked are ἄξιοί to receive the plagues because they have poured out the blood of saints. The righteous believers are ἄξιοί to walk with Christ as they overcome (3.4). The remaining five times ἄξιός is used in Revelation relates to God's worth as well as Christ's, both in connection with the pregnant question, "Who is worthy to open the scroll?" (4.11; 5.9,12, 2, 4).

true nature of God's power. Does the hymn celebrate a final display of God's might indicating that it is the ultimate use of force that establishes God's sovereignty?

Barr recognizes the importance of these issues, and points out that throughout the narrative are numerous examples of destructive acts, particularly in relation to Christ, the manifestation of God's reign within the storyline. Christ exhibits wrath (6.16), gathers an army (14.1), watches the torment of the wicked (14.10), and treads the winepress of God's wrath (19.15) from which flows blood as high as a horse's bridle (14.20). This warrior slays the army of the beast, leaving their remains to be eaten by birds of prey (19.21).²¹² Barr provocatively writes that suffering which does not lead to repentance (16.8-11) but then is followed by destruction is the "deplorable logic of the Inquisition."²¹³

The moral problem involved with this hymn is fundamental, for if God triumphs only because of power, then *power* not love or goodness, is the ultimate value in the universe.²¹⁴ This is precisely one of the core issues in the conflict. Satan's misrepresentations have attempted to place doubt in the minds of God's creation, concerning His claim as universal sovereign.²¹⁵ A surface reading of the text appears

²¹² David L. Barr, "The Lamb Who Looks Like a Dragon: Characterizing Jesus in John's Apocalypse," in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 207.

²¹³ David L. Barr, "Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John's Apocalypse," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 98. The above notions of justice that are at work in the narrative must balance this comment. In the narrative, God's justice is appropriate given the previous actions of the dragon, which actions are missing in the inquisitional metaphor Barr utilizes.

²¹⁴ Barr, "Doing Violence," 99.

²¹⁵ Given the clear use of *lex talionis* in the narrative, one could question the statement that Satan's deceptive methodology is at issue in the resolution of the cosmic war. It must be remembered, that the IR of Revelation would have a common literary heritage with John, which is largely based on the OT. This shared experience, or overcoding as it is frequently called in literary criticism, allows for interplay between John's imagery and the background meaning found in the OT. See Paulien, "Hebrew Cultus," 246-247. John's overcoding as it relates to Satan's role in the narrative is dependent upon the larger biblical picture described in chapter three of this work. For further evidence that the issues relating to Satan's charges against God are part of the backdrop of early Christianity, see Sigve Tonstad, "Theodicy and the Theme of Cosmic Conflict in the Early Church," *AUSS* 42 (2004), 169-202. Tonstad

to confirm those accusations, in that now God establishes His supremacy through the exercise of superior force. Thus the two intertwined questions must be resolved.

There must be a reason for the delay in God's judgment action that sheds light on the issue of God's power.

Barr points back to the slain Lamb (5.5-6) as the crucial scene in the unfolding narrative. That image demonstrates that victory comes through suffering, and that the Lamb, as the representative of God, conquers through death.²¹⁶ Barr supports his claim with an investigation of the hymn found in chapter 12 (12.10-12). Set in the midst of the narrative's unfolding of the war in heaven, as noted above, the hymn points to the victory that comes through Christ's death. "At every juncture in this story where good triumphs over evil a close examination shows that victory is finally attributed to the death of Jesus."²¹⁷ Thus the satanic forces are not overcome through military might, but instead through the blood of the Lamb.²¹⁸

As has been demonstrated earlier in this study, Christ's acts are the means by which history is clarified and God's reputation, which has been attacked by the serpent, is restored. It is significant that the only historical referent in Revelation to the earthly life of Jesus is to His death. Miracles are the domain of Satan and his associates, while Christ and His followers overcome through self-sacrifice. This focuses the reader's attention to the priority that Christ's death holds in the narrative.

explores Origen's arguments against Celsus to demonstrate the reality of a personified evil in early Christian thought, and to examine the theological meaning of such of perspective. According to Tonstad, the reality of Satan places evil within a "historical concretion" that has no counterpart in pagan myths. It is this historical concretion that is at work in Revelation, in which John sees Satan's power manifested through persecuting authorities and subtly at work to subvert God's rule in the world.

²¹⁶ Barr, "Doing Violence," 101.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ekkehardt Müller, "Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 3: The Lamb Christology," *JATS*, 22/2 (2011), 57.

Christ's sacrifice, manifested through His death is not seen in terms of victimization. Rather, the "death of *Jesus* represents the act of *God*."²¹⁹ Satan's accusations are exposed and overturned through the death of Christ, which functions in the narrative as a revelation of God's character. That same death clarifies the ethical issues raised by the exercise of God's power. Bauckham's observation is important to keep in mind: "Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world*."²²⁰

The mention of *power* in the opening of this final hymnic pericope, in relation to the celebration of God's enacted justice reminds the reader that the imagery of power within the storyline has been transformed by the death of Christ. The slaughtered Lamb condemns those forces that are opposed to God. All power is ultimately derived from God, and its truest expression is found not in self-aggrandizement as per the dragon, but in self-sacrifice as displayed by the Lamb.²²¹ In this way, the divine judgment upon Babylon is seen both as an aspect of divine justice and divine love. The consistent point of view of the narrative is that all of God's actions must be interpreted and understood in the light of the cross. Thus, justice is served in the fall of Babylon, because such judgment is seen in and through the interpreting lens of the slain Lamb.

The remainder of the hymn supplies an added dimension that contributes to the explanation as to *why* there has been a delay in the exercise of this ethical punishment. This section of the hymnic pericope is built around two *ὅτι* clauses, the first identifying the reason for the hallelujah (which as noted above is the initiation of God's reign). The second explanatory phrase is introduced by the final *ὅτι* clause,

²¹⁹ Boring, "Theology," 265 emphasis original.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64, emphasis original.

²²¹ Smalley, *The Revelation*, 194-195.

which is subordinated to the first. In this way, it specifies and particularizes the meaning.²²²

The subordinating reason for the final hallelujah and the attendant rejoicing has two related parts. The first is that the marriage of the Lamb has come (ἤλθεν),²²³ and the second, is that the bride has prepared herself for this occasion (19.7). This clause points to the wedding of the Lamb as an important event in bringing about the actualization of God's reign.²²⁴ The narrative details a time when the OT image of the marriage between God and His people comes to a complete fulfillment.²²⁵ This metaphor provides a strong contrast to the work of Babylon. On one hand is the imagery of the harlot's fornication, corrupting the earth (19.2). On the other is the description of the bride, having prepared herself for the wedding (19.7).

John accentuates the point that the bride has had a part both in the preparation for, and the bringing about of the marriage. The text insists that the bride has "prepared herself *by herself*" (ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἡτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν).²²⁶ The verb (ἑτοίμαζω) is used seven times in Revelation (8.6; 9.7; 15; 12.6; 16.12; 19.7; 21.2), frequently in the context of the fulfillment of God's plan (specifically 9.15; 12.6;

²²² Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 494.

²²³ This is a culminative aorist, which emphasizes the arrival of the great event. See, Osborne, *Revelation*, 672.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 495.

²²⁵ There are antecedents for this imagery found in both testaments. See Isa. 54.6; 61.10; 62.5; Hos. 2; Ezek. 16.7ff and Mark 2.19-20; Matt. 22.1-14; 2 Cor. 11.2; Eph. 5.23. Prigent (*Apocalypse*, 525-6), points out that rabbinic Judaism, also developed the idea of the Messianic wedding feast. The Targum of the Psalms, paraphrasing Ps.45 specifies that the King whose wedding is being celebrated is the Messiah. See also Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 553, and Osborne, *Revelation*, 673, for insights into the ancient Hebrew wedding. For important parallels between the allusions found in Isa. 61.10 and 19.7-8, see, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 938. Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2007) makes a significant contribution to the discussion of the marriage in Revelation through an engagement with the social and historical issues current in John's day.

²²⁶ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 526, emphasis original. Huber, (*Like a Bride Adorned*, 154,) notes that a first-century bride would weave her own tunic, suggesting the ability to fulfill the position of a wife.

16.12). However, in this setting John is expressly underlining the role that the believer has in participating in the preparation. There is an important connection made between the long-awaited judgment and the experience of God's people. In the narrative, not only must the heavenly council recognize the rightness of God's rule, but there must be those upon the earth, which are convinced as well. As has been emphasized throughout the storyline, Christ's death provides the motivation and the means for this to occur.

The faithfulness of the believers, in the face of the alluring temptations of the harlot, confesses the justice of God's government²²⁷ as illuminated by the slain Lamb. The war that originated in heaven (12.7) brought consternation and perplexity to the heavenly council (5.1-3). The saints afflicted by the dragon as he prosecuted the war here on earth were also confounded and unable to understand God's actions, or more to the point, apparent inaction (6.10). While the dragon, beast, and false prophet gathered the world for the final battle in the confrontation (16.13-14),²²⁸ the bride prepared herself for the marriage, taking God's part in the cosmic conflict. The imagery of the wedding, as opposed to the illicit relations with harlot, accentuates the two choices within the narrative.²²⁹ These choices are, follow the Lamb as the one who reveals the truth about God, or follow Babylon and her master, the dragon. The narrative highlights that the bride has finally and fully made her choice, she will be part of God's kingdom, not Satan's.²³⁰ She has chosen to believe the truth about God, rather than Satan's slanderous accusations.

²²⁷ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 526.

²²⁸ Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 193.

²²⁹ Resseguie, *The Revelation*, 235.

²³⁰ Caird (*The Revelation*, 234), considers that it is martyrdom that provides the prothalamium to the wedding. However, martyrdom alone need not be in view. Rather, it is the decision to demonstrate Christ's faithfulness in the face of death, whether or not actual martyrdom is in view.

The last strophe of the hymn declares that the bride is clothed in fine linen, bright and clean (19.8) as opposed to the linen of the harlot (18.16), which includes the accessories of temporal wealth.²³¹ It has been given to her (ἐδόθη) to clothe herself in this attire. Using the explanatory γάρ, the passage further explains the bride's apparel as the "righteous acts of the saints." This righteous behavior (δικαιώματα), or faithfulness to God, is essential before the marriage can occur.²³² It is important to note that what is given the bride, is *not* the fine linen itself, but the opportunity or choice of arraying herself in such faithfulness.²³³

The aim of reconciling the statement of the bride's δικαιώματα, with image of the white robes received as a symbol of salvation elsewhere in Revelation (3.4; 6.11; 7.9, 13,14) has exercised a number of commentators.²³⁴ This is an attempt to help resolve an apparent classical theological tension between two (supposedly) conflicting ideas, the one being that salvation is a gift while the other is that the bride plays an active role in "preparing herself" and is thus clothed with her righteous acts.²³⁵

Clearly the phrase ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἵνα περιβάληται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν τὸ is not intended to imply that the bride has no part in the preparation process.

However, the image of the fine linen here is not being used in the traditional manner

²³¹ On the counterimaging of "wealth" in the plot, see the discussion above on 5.12.

²³² The bride's δικαιώματα is in contrast to both the ἀμαρτία and the ἀδίκημα that bring about the harlot's punishment (18.5). Thus divine justice is deemed to be righteous (δίκαιαι) when it punishes the harlot and rewards the bride (19.2). See, Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 502.

²³³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 348.

²³⁴ Beale, (*The Book of Revelation*, 936-938), explores the issue as to whether δικαιώματα should be read in an objective or subjective sense. That is, should it refer to God's vindication of the saints in their persecution, or the righteous acts the saints perform. While allowing the latter, he argues for the former.

²³⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 935; see also Roloff, *Revelation*, 212. Charles, (*Apocalypse II*, 127-8), consider the final phrase in the verse to be a gloss by another writer due to its difficulty. However, this situation exists in other verses as well, such as Eph. 2.8-10, Phil. 2.13; Mth. 22.11-13. This is not a conflict, but a harmony between different emphases on the salvation process.

as the metaphor of the white robe in other parts of the narrative.²³⁶ It is important to recognize that John is not discussing salvation, but contrasting the two women, the harlot and the bride.²³⁷ The parallel structure of the passage indicates that the harlot is ready for destruction because she has corrupted the earth (19.2). The bride is ready for the marriage, because she has demonstrated her faithfulness to Christ. The antithesis between the two women has reached fulfillment, both are clothed with their respective deeds and receive a just recompense.²³⁸

Therefore verse 8 is to be read as relatively parallel to verses 6 and 7, that introduce the section. God reign is now commencing, *for* the marriage has come, the bride is prepared. As Prigent observes, it is only when the church has “*the will to be totally faithful to God, [that] the latter can be proclaimed sovereign.*”²³⁹ Thus part of the reason for the delay in the ethical judgment upon Babylon is that God has given time for a community on earth to unvaryingly take His side in the cosmic conflict. In the equivalent manner as God has given freedom for the controversy to be unfolded in heaven in such a way that it convinces the heavenly court of the truth about God, He has allowed the conflict to run its course on earth, that each inhabitant may make a similar decision. When the church is as convinced of the truth about God’s character, as is the heavenly council, then the marriage will come and God’s sovereign reign will be fully actualized.

²³⁶ Though note Beale’s, (*The Book of Revelation*, 943), discussion on 7.13-15, in which there is a similar cooperative effort indicated by the statement that the great multitude has *washed their robes* in the blood of the Lamb. This highlights the testimony that the believers have identified with Christ, demonstrating the genuineness of their faith. His death has provided the means and motivation for such faithfulness.

²³⁷ As Blount (*Revelation*, 342), writes, the fine linen here represents the church’s opposition to those powers, whether secular or satanic, who attempt to control human history. Ruiz’s discussion, (*Prophetic Language*, 501-502), supports the conclusion that what is in focus, is not the dynamics of salvation, but the contrast between the two women.

²³⁸ Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 503.

²³⁹ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 527, emphasis supplied.

Conclusion

The content of the final hymnic pericope, while not introducing any substantial new characters into the plot, moves the story to its eschatological completion. The fulfillment of God's purposes is seen in the opposite but complementary rewards given to the two women. The women point beyond themselves, ultimately to the two powers to which they give allegiance. The harlot-city rides the beast from the abyss, partaking of the character of the dragon in her unremitting persecution of Christ's people, and thus continuing the attack upon the Lamb that began in heaven (17.14). The bride-city follows the Lamb wherever He goes (14.4), partaking in His character and taking His side in the conflict. Both women stand upon the earth, inviting others to follow their example.²⁴⁰

The hymn describes the last stage in the unfolding history of in the conflict, both inviting and producing an eschatological rejoicing.²⁴¹ This rejoicing is predicated upon the long awaited results of the choices that the two women have made throughout history. While the previous chapters have made multiple use of imagery of sexual misconduct, the hymn brings to a conclusion the earthly aspect of the heavenly battle by focusing on the bride's purity. Her apparel is pure (καθαρός), and she is prepared for the eschatological wedding.

Ruiz points out that within the larger setting of this hymnic section (16-19.10), the Lamb is only mentioned four times. Outside of the dual mention of the Lamb in connection with the wedding (19.7b, 9), the only other reference is in the context of the battle with the beast and his kings (17.14). In this way John is casting the spotlight

²⁴⁰ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 315. Beasley-Murray writes that the entire book can be summed up as the "*Tale of Two Cities*, with the subtitle, *The Harlot and The Bride*."

²⁴¹ Prigent, *Apocalypse*, 527.

upon the conflict theme that plays such a dominant role in the narrative. According to Ruiz, John places the focus of attention on the tension between the beast²⁴² and the Lamb. This struggle, which began in heaven, is at the heart of the contrast between the two women. The hymn unfolds the conflict that engulfs not just the heavenly participants but the earthly ones as well. In the confrontation between the two “sovereignties, the one demonic and the other divine, the Lamb emerges victorious.”²⁴³ This hymn, as well as the others found throughout the narrative, demonstrates that the heavenly council acknowledges God’s rightful sovereignty. It also expands that acknowledgment to include the church while still here on earth, as indicated by the woman’s preparation for the wedding.

The final hymn in the narrative juxtaposes the justice of the divine sentence pronounced upon harlot and the attending hallelujahs directed toward God, with the exultation and praise that takes place with the pronouncement that the marriage of the Lamb has come. Both streams of rejoicing spring from the clarity that is manifest in the ultimate choices the women have made. While Sweet is correct in stating that the continued triumph of ancient Rome’s power in putting to death God’s servants was “a standing denial of his *justice*”²⁴⁴ the narrative imagery is larger than that of ancient Rome. There are greater issues at stake in the unremitting war, which while originating in heaven has spilled over to the earth. The hymn points to a time when all *questions* about God’s justice are put to end. Each woman has fully chosen who is worthy to receive her worship and praise, placing herself on one side of the cosmic conflict or the other.

²⁴² This is either a representation of Satan, or at the least, as satanic power. See the discussion above in the section Narrative Details.

²⁴³ Ruiz, *Prophetic Language*, 499.

²⁴⁴ Sweet, *Revelation*, 279, emphasis original.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the hymnic pericopes found throughout Revelation and the cosmic conflict theme that forms the leitmotiv of the book. Through the use of narrative critical and historical-grammatical hermeneutics, the aim was to read the hymns as part of the larger plot. After an introductory chapter discussed the justification for the research and the methodology to be followed, chapter two considered four literary aspects that have a bearing on interpretation. These were, authorship, genre, grammar, and structure. In the examination of the structure of Revelation, particular attention was given to the temple imagery that forms the major setting for narrative. Chapter three then explored the relationship between the temple, the divine council, and the origins of cosmic conflict, endeavoring to lay the groundwork for approaching the hymns from the perspective of the war in heaven. The investigation of the hymnic pericopes began with chapter four, which explored the opening hymns found in Rev. 4 and 5. Chapter five examined three hymnic pericopes, containing the hymns found in 7.9-12; 11.15-18 and 12.10-12. Chapter six continued this research by considering the two final pericopes chosen for study, those in 15.3,4 and 19.1-8. This final chapter summarizes the key findings of this study, and then draws four general conclusions.

After identifying the methodology to be utilized in this study, chapter one pinpointed two important characteristics that were essential for a successful examination of the hymnic pericopes. Recognizing that it is generally accepted that the hymns provide commentary on the narrative surrounding them, the principle that

each pericope needs to be understood in light of the organic nature of the entire narrative was stressed. This has particular importance because even though the hymns are found throughout the storyline, they are connected with one another and the larger narrative theme. It was also underscored that close readings of the hymn sections were necessary in order to cast light on the nuances and complexities of the text. This was deemed to be of special importance, given the narrative critical stance taken as an interpretative position.

Two of the major contributions that came from the second chapter, were brought out under the literary consideration of the book's structure. The literary unity of the text and the formative setting for the storyline were considered. It was noted, that despite the tendency of historical studies to fragment the text, and even among those who consider redactional theories helpful, there is a growing consensus that Revelation needs to be understood as a unity. This unanimity has in turn, highlighted the literary craftsmanship of the book. The importance for this conclusion, is that it forces the reader to confront more intentionally any anomalies encountered. If the book was written with the extreme care that modern scholarship now attributes to it, then an appreciation for this detail is incumbent upon the reader if he/she hopes to come to a proper understanding of the storyline.

In addition to noting the thoughtfulness with which Revelation is composed, recent scholarship has pointed out the unifying role that the temple plays in forming an overarching arrangement of the subject matter. Woven throughout the narrative tapestry, the heavenly temple containing the throne room has a dominant and unifying influence on the structure. The background setting of the temple contributes to an understanding both of the storyline and the function of the hymns. The hymnic

pericopes are each placed within the setting of the temple, and thus are directly related to the issues that emanate from the throne room.

While most critical studies on Revelation focus on the interaction of the text with the political and social realities that existed at the time of its composition as a guiding principle for understanding the plot, it is an integral part of this study to allow the war in heaven motif to have a governing role for interpretation. Therefore, the third chapter of this work is of foundational importance. That section of the study explored the pivotal role that chapter 12 plays in the storyline, by highlighting both the origins of the cosmic conflict, as well as its chief instigator, Satan.

Despite an increasing tendency of commentators to dismiss the Satan as a flat or stock character in the narrative, one without depth or meaning, a close reading of the narrative corrects this misapprehension. Satan does not appear as simply a foil to God's power and sovereignty, or only as a metaphor for human evil and suffering. Rather the narrative develops the character of Satan in a number of surprising ways. He plays a formative role in the narrative from the opening letters to the churches, until the final destruction of evil and the formation of a new earth. His position on center stage in the final battle described in chapter 20 demonstrates his unique position in the unfolding of the drama.

Satan's work of deception and slander, united with his role as a persecutor, reveal his primary attributes. The counterimaging at work in the narrative indicates that these characteristics were brought to bear in the beginning of the cosmic conflict and continue to be utilized as the controversy rages on earth. Satan's puppets, the beast and the false prophet, as well as the harlot Babylon, unite with him to establish his reign. His ultimate aim is to divert the worship that should be given to God, to

himself. He attempts to accomplish this through misrepresentations and insinuations regarding God's character and His right to rule.

A close examination of the narrative, as well as the OT allusions upon which John draws to weave his tapestry, indicates that Satan was once a member of the divine council. By exploring passages such as Job 1; Zech. 3; Ezek. 28 and Isa. 14, it was concluded that Satan was once an exalted member of the heavenly court, and it was in the presence of the assembly that he began his work of misrepresentation and subversion. The heavenly temple is the location in which this court meets. The throne, which is a dominant prop in the narrative, is reflective not only of God's sovereign rule, but also of the fact that a former member of the council is contesting His authority. The texture of the text highlights that Satan's attacks on God's people, stem from his attempts to overthrow God's government.

Revelation's storyline, read in this way, indicates that in order for there to be a resolution to the conflict, Satan's methods need to be unmasked and his character revealed. Since his attacks utilize deception as a means of promoting his questions about God's sovereignty, God must demonstrate that His methods of rule are compatible with universal harmony. God cannot simply enforce His authority by the exercise of His divine omnipotence. Rather God must reveal Himself in a way that dispels the mists of deception. Within the narrative, that occurs in the revelatory work of Christ as the slain Lamb. The close ontological relationship between God and Christ expressed in the narrative, indicates that Christ's self-sacrifice serves to clarify God's nature and the justice of His reign. Christ's position on the throne, the contested territory in the narrative, serves to identify the truth about God.

With the above-mentioned foundation laid, the study then turned to an examination of the seven hymnic pericopes that have been delimited. The

consideration of the first pericopes composes chapter four. The chapter lays out the procedure followed in studying each of the subsequent hymnic pericopes. First the setting was acknowledged, and then *dramatis personae* were identified. These two parameters were followed by a brief discussion of the surrounding action, as well as relevant narrative details. The hymnic sections under investigation in this chapter (4.8-11; 5.9-14) were found to be part of the theological fountainhead for the entire narrative. Together they form a literary diptych. The introductory vision of the throne room and the heavenly temple exert a controlling influence on the entire book. Due to the influence the inaugural vision has, presenting the One on the throne, as well as His attendants in the divine council, the way one encounters the hymns here impacts the reading of the entire storyline.

The leading role that the “throne” plays in this section, and the narrative threads that connect it to the larger tapestry were explored. The throne room, the temple, and the divine council images were seen to flow into one another. The narrative revealed that a crisis was occurring within the divine council, signified by the question as to who was worthy to open the sealed scroll. The resolution to this crisis occurs when the conquering slain Lamb appears. The hymns in the diptych comment upon and are related to, both the crisis and its resolution. Several verbal threads were identified that united the hymns to the larger plot. As the worthiness of God to rule is one of the central issues in the controversy, this was also a vital concern in the pericope. The slain Lamb is declared to be worthy by the heavenly chorus, and the twin acclamations given to both the Lamb and God, indicate that the divine council recognizes that there is One who is worthy to be on the throne.

After an investigation of the paradigmatic vision and its attending hymns, the study turned to a consideration of the hymns found in 7.9-12; 11.15-18; 12.10-12.

This was the subject matter of chapter five. Each of these hymns is found in a different chronological framework, although the setting for each is the same. A close reading determined that each of the hymns is heard from heaven, specifically from within the temple. The divine council was, as in the two opening pericopes, involved in the singing of the hymns. The first and last of these hymns celebrated God's salvation or victory. In both cases it was the blood of the Lamb that was instrumental in securing this victory. Both of these pericopes also stressed the importance for Christ's followers to partake in His victory through their willingness to follow His method of conquest, which is through self-sacrifice. This becomes a dominant theme in the narrative. God's rule is established upon the principle of a self-denial that leads, if necessary, to yielding up of one's life.

The middle hymn in this chapter supports the conclusion that God's reign is being contested. This occurs by the superficially contradictory announcement within the hymn that God's reign has come to pass. The declaration that kingdom of this world now belongs to the Lord and His Christ, seems out of place given the dominance of the throne imagery in the narrative. However, this is explained when it is remembered that the throne is a symbol of disputed authority. The heavenly choir rejoices over the fact that the controversy draws to a close and God is finally exercising His just and sovereign rule. The joy with which the heavenly choir celebrates the initiation of God's reign is heard against the background of Satan's accusations that God is unfit to administrate the universe.

The last two hymns to be considered, 15.3-4 and 19.1-8 comprise the content of the sixth chapter. Both pericopes are placed in a larger narrative section that concerns the judgments that are brought upon Babylon. The first hymnic piece serves

as an introduction to the seven last plagues, while the last piece serves to conclude and comment upon Babylon's destruction.

The content of the first hymn in this chapter draws from the Exodus imagery. While present throughout the narrative, that theme is concentrated here. One of the essential aspects of the hymn is the statement that God's ways and works have been made manifest. His judgments, or righteous acts, are seen to be just and true. This unfolding of the truth of God's ways leads to all nations coming and worshipping before Him. This echoes the theme of universal acclaim that occurs under the hymnic pericope in chapter 5. In that setting as well as in the one under consideration, the cause of such rejoicing is the revealing of God's ways through the manifestation of the slain Lamb. Thus, once again the hymn celebrates the clarification over the truth of God's rule, made possible by the revelation of God's acts. This revelation overthrows the slander of the beast and draws the nations to see the genuineness of God's character. A close reading of the narrative points out that the acclaim that God ultimately receives from the nations is in opposition to the universal acclaim given to the beast. The latter is at first seen to be proof of the beast's deity, but this deception is exposed by the unmasking of Satan's accusations through God's self-revelation in Christ.

The final pericope under consideration is filled with joy and rejoicing, characterized by the NT's only usage of the Hebrew phrase "hallelujah." This celebratory hymn is in jarring contrast to the lament over the loss and destruction of Babylon. The hymn sets up a comparison between the harlot and the Lamb's bride. The two women are juxtaposed throughout the hymn. One, (the harlot), has corrupted the earth and therefore receives the judgment of God. The other, (the bride), has prepared herself through righteous acts, and therefore is ready for the marriage. The

collocation of the two women represents those that follow the beast as opposed to those who follow the Lamb. Thus, once again the hymn serves to direct the reader's attention to the conflict inherent in the narrative.

This hymn also contains many verbal threads that unite it with previous hymns. There are distinct connections to the paradigmatic hymns of chapters 4 and 5, chapter 7, 11, and 12. One of the important threads ties this hymn with the announcement in 11.17 that God has initiated His reign. Both of these hymns use an ingressive aorist to point out the inauguration of God's rule, which has been hindered by the accusations of Satan and the apparent triumph of evil. As the larger narrative background has in view Satan's attempts to usurp God's position on the throne, the storyline progresses to a point where those attempts are defeated. The hymn celebrates that God has assumed His rightful rule, and made evident the falsity of Satan's claims.

The passage also makes a significant contribution to the reader's understanding of why it has taken so long for God to assert His reign. The narrative details a time when the OT metaphor of the marriage between God and His people comes to fruition. This happens, in part, due to the preparation that bride makes for the wedding. It has been a theme throughout the narrative that the church needs to respond with faithful adherence to God, despite the pressures and temptations to abandon Him.

The final strophe of the final hymnic unit celebrates the fact that the bride is ready for the marriage in that she has prepared herself. Not only is the divine council convinced of the justice of God's reign, but the church on earth is as well. The church demonstrates her faithfulness to God as an essential part in her preparation for the wedding. Now that the bride is ready, and the marriage has come, God's reign

commences. It is only when the church demonstrates her total faithfulness to God, in the face of either persecution or wealth, that God can be proclaimed as the sovereign He is. It is when the church on earth sees things as clearly as the heavenly choir does, that God can exercise the prerogative of justice, and bring judgment upon those forces that contest His reign.

Conclusion

This study has taken as its point of departure to engage with the book of Revelation from a narrative approach. Reading Revelation in this manner yields a number of conclusions. First, a close reading of the narrative indicates that the cosmic conflict, or war in heaven theme, deserves more consideration than is usually granted it. Too frequently this theme is left underexposed in an attempt to relate the document back to the historical context of the time of composition. The overwhelming trend of scholars to see in the Roman Empire the primary focus of the book tends to relegate the controversy imagery to little more than stage scenery. The cosmic conflict, which is woven throughout the narrative, needs to be given greater weight in the work of interpretation. The tension that is evident throughout the narrative, the questioning of God's actions both stated and implied, the recurring role that Satan plays in the action, all combine to point the reader to a concern that is greater than that posed by ancient Rome. It is not an overstatement to say that the conflict theme provides a controlling effect on the narrative.

A second conclusion of this investigation is that the setting within the narrative provides an important contribution to the understanding of the storyline. The dominating role that the temple/throne room has on the text demands investigation. This study has demonstrated that there is a thematic connection between the temple,

the throne room, and the assembly called the divine council. Each of the hymns originates from within this setting. An examination of several OT threads that John weaves into his narrative indicates that Satan was once a privileged member of this council. Inexplicably, he moved from his exalted position in the heavenly court and was transformed into an accuser within it. His accusations are ultimately aimed at God, even though they may be first directed at God's people. His goal is to subvert the heavenly order and place his throne where God's is positioned. The heavenly council, the place where this war was first initiated, is the source of the hymnic acclamations. In this way, there is a strong thematic tie between the origins of the conflict, and the resolution to it, expressed in the hymns.

A third conclusion of this study is that God must refute Satan's charges in a way that is clearly recognized by the divine council. As the narrative consistently describes Satan as a slanderer and deceiver, it is evident that misrepresentation is one of primary weapons he uses in the prosecution of his war. This being the case, God cannot simply exercise force or omnipotence to restore universal acknowledgment of His reign. The questions and accusations raised by Satan were clothed with such artful deception and insinuation, that he was able to create enough dissonance within the universe that an authoritarian demonstration of divine strength would only promote lingering questions. Thus, God must reveal Himself in a manner consistent with His character and in a way that can be recognized as unmasking the accuser's deception. Revelation portrays that this unveiling of God and overturning of the adversary occurs in the self-sacrificial death of the Lamb. Christ demonstrates that the way God rules, is through self-denial. Satan is conquered by the exposure of the baseness and falsity of his accusations. The death of Christ reveals the truth about the character of God's reign, as well as the attempted reign of Satan.

The final conclusion for this inquiry is that the hymns provide commentary on the dominant conflict theme in the narrative. Rather than only serving as a parody of the Roman imperial court, or contrasting the peace of heaven with the turmoil on earth, the function of the hymns is to participate in the refutation of Satan's accusations. The hymns are integral sections of the storyline, reflecting on what has transpired before and anticipating what will occur. The paradigmatic opening of the hymns occurs in a section of the plot, in which the tension within the divine council is evident. Despite the praise sung to God by members of the council, the question as to "who is worthy to open the scroll" puts in focus the issue that faces the heavenly court. The questions that need to be addressed by the divine council have arisen due to the cosmic conflict. Thus, the perceptive reader will note that each of the hymnic choruses are performed in the setting from which the conflict arose. The hymns are sung with the accusing voice of Satan in the background, at the same time proclaiming that those accusations have been overcome. In this way, the hymns function as commentary on the cosmic conflict. The hymnic sections respond to what has been revealed about God and His government through the manifestation of the slain Lamb. Satan's false accusations, which have a fundamental role in driving the plot, are countered by the hymns as they proclaim that God's ways are just and true.

Academic Contribution

There is a growing body of literature that attempts to understand both the hymnic sections in Revelation and well as in the larger NT. Many of these studies, whether articles, dissertations, monographs, or commentaries consider the function of the hymns from the interpretive stance of the book's interaction with the threat, real or supposed, of the Roman Empire. Each of these studies has highlighted important

aspects of the hymns. However, there are few examples of an extensive engagement of the hymns with the cosmic conflict theme. This is due in part, to the scholarly community's tendency to give the milieu and setting in which the book was written an interpretative position that tends to override the narrational issues. The cosmic conflict is seen as a metaphor for the appropriate response to the Roman society, rather than as the key that unlocks the meaning to all of human history.

Recent studies have endeavored to provide corrective balance to this tendency, by attempting to engage the text in all aspects, and giving interpretative weight to the cosmic conflict. The present investigation is a further step in providing that balance, by reading the hymns as being informed by, and informing the war in heaven motif. Others will undoubtedly refine or correct some of the conclusions drawn in regard to the hymns and their function within the great controversy. Nevertheless if this study has pointed a way for more able interpreters to progress and advance, it will be considered worth the time and effort. As the music of the hymns began with a small group and then increased, it is hoped that this investigation contributes to a widening knowledge of Revelation.

A small choir, composed of the four living creatures, sings the book's opening hymn (4.8). This is followed by the praise of the twenty-four elders (4.11), which in turn is succeeded by a joint choir composed of both groups (5.9). This enlargement of the chorus continues until finally the entire creation is joined together in proclaiming that God and the Lamb are the rightful rulers of the universe (5.13). This ever-widening circle points to the expansive nature of the truth about God. One day all creation will see that self-sacrifice is the principle that governs the universe. Seeing God manifest in Christ, the deceptive mists of Satan's accusations will be dispelled. It will be evident to all, that self-exaltation, as manifested in Satan's attempt to elevate

his throne, is the cause of the discord that has brought much woe and suffering to the universe. God's character, as displayed in Christ, will be seen to be one of humility and self-denial. Through Christ, the government of God will stand secure, as all of the adversary's charges are refuted. The entire universe will proclaim with one united voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

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