

**A PIE IN A VERY BLEAK SKY? ANALYSIS AND APPROPRIATION OF THE
PROMISE SAYINGS IN THE SEVEN LETTERS
TO THE CHURCHES IN REVELATION 2-3**

by

MARK WAYNE WILSON

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SUMMARY

This study of the promise sayings elucidates the **motif of victory** as the book's macrodynamic theme. Through intentional examination, the thesis finds the issue epitomized throughout Revelation on two levels—formally (re structure) and materially (re content). Jesus as Victor over death and the dragon desires the Asian believers to be prepared for his soon coming. The victors are promised eschatological rewards if they overcome various internal and external threats.

In mapping out the dramatic scenario **Chapter 1** explores afresh such background issues as authorship and audience. The pagan religious environment, represented by the Artemis and emperor cults, is demonstrated to be adversarial. **Chapter 2** looks at four situations in Revelation—the rhetorical, historical, apocalyptic, and prophetic. Their composite exigences point to an early dating in the late 60s. **Chapter 3** postulates that *chiasmus* is Revelation's macrostructure, and a chiastic model is proposed. **Chapter 4** examines several proposed forms for the seven letters, such as edicts, oracles, and epistles. We conclude that they are a *mixtum compositum*—best called *prophetic letters*.

Chapter 5 explores the sociological significance of *victory* in the Greco-Roman world. Through the use of language such as *νικᾶω* and images like the palm branch, John motivates his audience toward the ideal of victory. **Chapter 6** investigates the text of the promises and their *contexts* as reflected intertextually in traditions of biblical literature. Local references are also determined to contribute to a *multivalent* interpretation of the promise imagery. **Chapter 7** surveys the eschatological fulfillment of the promises, especially in the new Jerusalem. The rewards of spiritual provision, heavenly place, and divine person serve to incite the saints to victory. **Chapter 8** investigates the appropriation of the promises for the time and the text world of Revelation. A multiplicity of functions for the promise sayings is established.

This study shows that the promises function as prophetic parenthesis to help the saints endure the coming tribulation. The possibility and reality of such a fulfillment and the appropriation of the promises allow us to postulate that these promises to the victors are not vain pines in a very bleak sky!

KEY TERMS

Book of Revelation, Revelation 2–3, Asia Minor, Seven churches, Appropriation, Seven letters, Prophecy, Apocalypse, Victor sayings, Local references, Promise and fulfillment, Persecution, Martyrdom, Rhetorical situation, Chiasmus, Form and function, Intertextuality, Co-textuality, Multivalence, Macrodynamic theme

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie oor die belofte uitsprake in die briewe aan die sewe gemeentes in Openbaring 2-3 lig die **motif van oorwinning** toe as die sentrale tema van makrodinamiese omvang in Openbaring. Deur middel van 'n doelgerigte ondersoek bevind die studie dat die saak van oorwinning die twee brandpunte in die boek Openbaring vorm, naamlik, op formele vlak (re metode en struktuur van Openbaring en van die studie), en materieel (d.i. inhoudelik).

Jesus as oorwinnaar oor die dood en oor die draak, koester die sterk begeerte dat die gelowiges van Asië gereed moet wees vir sy spoedige advent. Netsoos die profete van die Ou Testament waarsku Johannes die gemeentes oor die netelige situasie waarin hulle hulself bevind ten opsigte van die sosiale, politieke en religieuse situasie. In hierdie konteks word aan die oorwinnaars bepaalde beloftes van eskatologiese belonings gemaak as hulle die interne bedreigings van valse leringe en van vervolgings van buite sou oorkóm.

Deur vrugbare gebruikmaking van die perspektief van *intertekstualiteit* word die siening gesubstansieer dat Johannes se gehoor/lesers daarvan kennis moet neem dat hulle situasie geensins verskil van die lotgevalle van God se volk onder vorige vreemde onderdrukkers soos die Babiloniërs nie.

Hoe sal die gelowiges hierdie uur van toetsing deurstaan?

Ten einde hierdie hele dramatiese scenario uit te stippel, ontgin **Hoofstuk 1** opnuut die velde van agtergrond soos outeurskap, eerste gehoor/lesers, en hulle religieuse omgewing. Dit word gestel dat die heidense religieuse omgewing, soos verteenwoordig deur die Artemis en keiserkultus, baie vyandiggesind van aard is. **Hoofstuk 2** bekyk en interpreteer vier situasies wat in Openbaring teëgekóm word, naamlik, die retoriese, historiese, apokaliptiese, en profetiese. Die samegestelde aard van hierdie noodsituasie wys heen na 'n vroeë datering van Openbaring, naamlik, in die laat sestiger jare van die eerste eeu, vóór die verwoesting van Jerusalem. In **Hoofstuk 3** word beredeneer dat *chiasme* die mees geskikte beskrywing vir die struktuurvorm van Openbaring is. Met chiasme as heuristiese instrument kan aangetoon word dat die beloftes en hulle vervulling in Openbaring 2-3 'n beduidende rol in die struktuur van die boek speel. Hierop volg **Hoofstuk 4** waarin moontlike literatuurvorms vir die sewe briewe voorgestel word, naamlik, edikte, orakels, en epistels/briewe. Daar word voorgestel dat dit beskou moet word as *mixtum compositum* wat goedsikks *profetiese briewe* genoem kan word en wat sewe samestellende uitsprake omvat.

Hoofstuk 5 ontsluit die sosiologiese beduidenis van die idee en verskynsel van *oorwinning* in die Grieks-Romeinse wêreld. In Openbaring hou dit in dat Johannes beide verbaal (re die gebruik van die Griekse werkwoord *νικάω*) én beeldsprakig (re 'palmtak') sy gehoor ge-inspireer het ten opsigte van die ideaal van oorwinning. **Hoofstuk 6** ontleed die teks van die belofte uitsprake, en die *ko-tekste* soos wat dit intertekstueel weerspieël word in bybelse tradisies. Plaaslike verwysings word ook in ag geneem ten einde tot 'n polivalente interpretasie van die belofte-beeldspraak by te dra. **Hoofstuk 7** gee 'n analitiese oorsig van die vervulling van die eskatologiese beloftes, veral ten opsigte van die nuwe Jerusalem. Die belonings van geestelike voorsiening, 'n hemelse woonplek, en van 'n goddelike persoon dien om die heiliges aan te spoor tot oorwinning oor die verbete vyande. Hierop volg **Hoofstuk 8** wat die *toe-eiening* van die beloftes binne die boek Openbaring en vir die tyd en tekswêreld van die boek self ondersoek. 'n Veelvuldigheid van funksies, wat verkry word uit 'n multidissiplinêre eksegetiese metodiek, word vir die belofte uitsprake vasgestel en beskryf.

Hierdie studie toon aan dat die beloftes van oorwinning aan die sewe gemeentes in Klein-Asië funksioneer as profetiese vermanings, waarvan die beeldspraak ontleen is aan 'n verskeidenheid van bybelse tradisies. Die vervulling hiervan kan reeds al in Openbaring 19-22 gesien word. Dit toon verder aan dat, anders as in die geval van die gevalle Rome, die heilige stad genaamd Jerusalem op die oorwinnende bruid sal wag. Die moontlikheid én werklikheid van die vervulling en toe-eiening van die beloftes van Openbaring 2-3 regverdig dit om te postuleer dat hierdie beloftes beslis nie ydele 'koeke vir die hiernamaals' (d.i. "pies in the sky") is nie! Nee, die Openbaring aan Johannes was bedoel om 'n profesie van troos vir die volk van God te wees en dit funksioneer beslis as sodanig.

PREFACE

Completion of this thesis has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, experiences of my life. Postgraduate study is always daunting, but to complete it in the midst of ongoing family and career responsibilities has been especially difficult. This achievement then is a corporate one, with many individuals and institutions having a part in its success. I would like to recognize some of these at this time.

First, I would like to thank my promoter Professor H A Lombard for his supervision of this thesis. His knowledge of Johannine literature made him an invaluable resource for its completion. The hospitality of him and his wife Frieda during my visit to Pretoria was much appreciated as well as his willingness to 'detour' through Virginia during a sabbatical visit to the United States. His comments were always incisive and judicious and helped greatly to move the thesis to a satisfactory completion.

During my master's study at Regent University Professor J R Williams cemented my interest in the book of Revelation and in eschatology. The friendship of him and his wife Johanna has been a special inspiration. Regent Professor C H Holman likewise provided my foundation in hermeneutics as well as use of his own doctoral thesis. Special thanks go to the Regent Divinity Dean H V Synan, Associate Dean J L Story, and the Divinity faculty for their support and encouragement. Thanks should also be given to Professor H L Lederle, former Unisa professor, who first recommended that I enroll at Unisa. And Professor W J Wessels, although a scholar of the 'other' testament, has been a valuable friend and contact at Unisa as well as host during my visit to Pretoria.

The bulk of this thesis was written during an eleven-month study sabbatical in 1996. To stop life for this period would not have been possible without generous financial support. Therefore I would like to thank the following: my parents Wayne and Idella Wilson; Michael Little, president of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN); Rod and Jo Williams; Bob and Janyce O'Brien; Bob and Frances Truitt; Harold and Sharon Rhoades, and David and Bobby Ritter. I wish to thank particularly the pastor, Rev Dr Charles Wickman, the session, and the congregation of my home church Kempsville Presbyterian for their ongoing support. They provided financial resources for three trips to Turkey and my trip to South Africa, as well as monthly support during my study sabbatical. It is impossible to name the many friends at KPC who prayed for strength and endurance during my six-year enrollment at Unisa. Thank you, all!

Invaluable research assistance was provided by two libraries. C B Brand and M S Khosie, New Testament subject librarians at Unisa, provided occasional help from the South African side. Luwanna Baker and her interlibrary loan staff at Regent University bent over backwards to provide books and articles necessary for my research. A thank you to both libraries for your excellent personnel. Dieter Korr spent many hours assisting me with German translations. My gratitude goes to Gemma Aguilar for her assistance on an Italian translation. And thanks go to my wife for her willingness to help me on French translations.

The challenge of producing a thesis from a distance of 8,000 miles has been greatly facilitated with the development of Internet. Jim Funari and his staff at CBN lent their computer expertise on numerous occasions to make the processing and flow of information at home and across the Atlantic much easier. John Parker, Jr, did a necessary computer upgrade for no charge as his contribution to this project. Hazel Full assisted in getting copies of the thesis shipped to South Africa.

During my Unisa enrollment I have made six trips to the sites of the seven churches as well as a visit to the island of Patmos. Under the auspices of CBN Travel I have had the privilege of teaching scores of pilgrims about the early church in Asia Minor. To become acquainted firsthand with Revelation's life setting has added a special dimension to my research. Thanks go to Ruth Sims, Denise Wynn, and Maria Barone for catching the vision of Turkey's importance for Christian visitors.

During my time of postgraduate study I have seen my four children—Leelanee, Winema, Jim, and David—grow up, attend college, and leave home. Hopefully you were not neglected too badly and that my accomplishment will inspire your own future endeavors. I love you all!

I especially want to thank my wife Dindy—a 'companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance' that comes with doctoral study. Without her prayer support and constant encouragement this project could not have happened. She gladly became the breadwinner during my study sabbatical. I rather like J M Court's words to his wife in his introduction to *Myth and history in the book of Revelation*: 'to have lived with me and a work on the Apocalypse is more than anybody should be expected to endure.' My sentiments exactly, Dindy.

I have one final word of gratitude. The resources and inspiration to complete this degree ultimately came ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος καὶ τοῦ ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἐρχόμενου καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς (Rv 1:4–5).

ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations used in the thesis follow the pattern provided in *Form and style in theological texts: A guide for the use of the Harvard reference system* by J Kilian (2nd ed 1989, Pretoria: Unisa). I wish to thank Mrs Kilian for giving me her own desk copy, when the volume was out of print and unavailable for purchase. Stylistic matters not covered by *Form and style* follow the pattern provided in *Reference techniques* by M Burger (1992, Pretoria: Unisa). Italicized words are part of the original quotation unless otherwise noted.

Greek translations are my own, unless otherwise noted, and are based on the Rahlfs edition of the Septuagint and the UBS⁴/Nestle-Aland²⁶ text. Old Testament references usually follow the New International version. All classical references are taken from their respective editions in the Loeb Classical Library, except those of Philo which are taken from the updated Hendrickson edition of his works. References in the Dead Sea Scrolls are taken from the updated translation by Martínez. The two-volume edition edited by J H Charlesworth provided references to the Pseudepigrapha. Quotations from the early church fathers follow the standard edition edited by P Schaff and A Roberts.

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A.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

The letters to the seven churches, according to G R Beasley-Murray (1978:70). 'comprise the best known and most frequently expounded section of the book of Revelation.' This is undoubtedly because chapters 1–3 are the most accessible section of Revelation, which Ulfgard (1989:8) describes as 'one of the most disputed books of the New Testament, and one of the most difficult to appreciate.' Whether chapters 2–3 should be called letters (Ramsay 1994), prophetic letters (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:165), messages (Roberts 1988:22–23), prophetic messages (Bauckham 1993a:2), or proclamations (Aune 1990:183ff) remains open to question and personal preference. Many commentators today prefer 'message,' although the traditional terminology 'letter' continues to be commonly used. In this thesis I will use the traditional 'letters' (*Sendschreiben*) to describe these chapters.

The form of these letters has received much scrutiny in recent years, with increasing investigation of their various sections. Such research is long overdue. The final (at least in four of the letters) and perhaps most significant section is the promise sayings. L Poirier (1943:42) remarked a generation ago 'que leur interprétation est une partie faible chez plusieurs commentateurs.' This remains the case despite a host of commentaries, monographs, and articles on the book of Revelation. A master's thesis done by R R Benedict in 1967 is the only other major study found that focuses on the promises and their place in Revelation. Thus it is timely and appropriate to examine the promise sayings in this thesis.

A.2 METHODOLOGY OF THE THESIS

Two major studies that concentrated largely on the historical background of the letters have been done in this century—W M Ramsay's *The letters to the seven churches of Asia* (1904) and C H Hemer's *The letters to the seven churches of Asia in their local setting* (1986). The importance of historical-critical study for interpreting Revelation has been well stated by R Mulholland (1990:23): '[It] can provide an understanding of the contemporary meaning of this pool of resources upon which the account of the vision builds....Historical-critical methods can give us the starting point of the images, myths, and symbols.' From this starting point recent commentators have begun to investigate the letters from newer critical perspectives such as literary criticism (Ryken 1984), rhetorical criticism (Kirby 1988), sociological criticism (McVann

fresh insights into Revelation. In this thesis I propose to adopt an eclectic approach, utilizing insights from the aforementioned methodologies. My underlying presupposition, in the well-chosen words of R Gundry (1987:255), 'assumes that the language of the biblical text, including its symbolic language, grows out of and speaks to the historical situation of the writer and his readers.'

The thesis begins with a fresh examination of the background of Revelation related to its author, destination, and provenance. The social and religious background of the historical reader and his Jewish and Greek audience in the seven cities of Asia will likewise be addressed. We agree with A Yarbro Collins (1984:20) that 'the original historical context [is] the essential foundation of the interpretation of any text.' Chapter 2 examines four situations seen in Revelation—the rhetorical situation of the earthly and heavenly church, the historical situation of the Roman Empire, the apocalyptic situation of Jesus, and the prophetic situation of John. In Chapter 3 chiasmus is proposed as the macrostructure of Revelation, suggested in part by the promises found in chapters 2–3 and their fulfillments in chapters 19–22. A chiastic outline is evaluated according to criteria proposed by C Blomberg. Chapter 4 examines several proposals regarding the form of the seven letters. Imperial edicts, prophetic oracles, and ancient letters are given extensive analysis. Revelation 2–3 is determined to be seven prophetic letters divided into seven sayings—address, epithet, praise, blame, coming, hearing, and promise.

The second half of the thesis focuses on the promises in the victor sayings (*Siegersprüche* or *Überwindersprüchen*) that end each letter. R Bauckham (1993b:14) captures the importance of this quest:

Thus the call to conquer...is a call to engage in the eschatological battle described in the central chapters of the book, in order to reach the eschatological destiny described at the end of the book. In a sense *the whole book is about the way the Christians of the seven churches may, by being victorious within the specific situations of their own churches, enter the new Jerusalem* (my emphasis—MWW).

In Chapter 5 we look at the topic of victory, beginning with the biblical use of *νικάω*. The victors are identified as all believers, not just martyrs. Victory as an ideal in the Greco-Roman world, exemplified in the athletic games, is highlighted. In Chapter 6 textual and grammatical questions related to each promise saying are first examined. Then the key images in the promises are investigated in the context of local references. Co-texts related to the images in New Testament, Intertestamental, and Old Testament literature are likewise discussed. In Chapter 7 a final promise saying is first investigated. Then the fulfillments to the promise sayings are highlighted. Each image is developed as it appears throughout Revelation,

particularly in chapters 19–21 where the parousia and new Jerusalem are introduced. The examination of the hermeneutical spiral, begun in Chapter 3, is here completed. The thesis concludes in Chapter 8 with a discussion of Revelation's theme and the function of the seven letters. The coming of Jesus and victory are determined to be macrodynamic themes. The letters with their promise sayings function as parenetic and prophetic wake-up calls. Through repentance and obedience the believers are assured of participation in the rewards promised in the eschatological kingdom to be established at Jesus' soon-coming parousia. The motivation of this thesis therefore is to analyze the promise sayings in Revelation and to examine how the audience in these seven representative Asian churches understood and responded to these promises in the midst of their social, political, and spiritual challenges.

CHAPTER 1: THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROMISE SAYINGS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 important introductory questions regarding Revelation are reconsidered. Johannine authorship, provenance on the island of Patmos, and destination to the province of Asia are initially discussed. The starting point for this reconstruction is the prologue to the book (1:1–8). Next the identity and role of the historical reader is explored. Finally, the Jewish and Greek audience in its social and religious setting is discussed. The question of date will be deferred to Chapter 2.

1.2 THE AUTHOR

The author of the Apocalypse identifies himself as John four times in Revelation. A threefold affirmation of his identity is found in chapter 1 (1:1, 4, 9) with a closing identification made in 22:8. Which first-century John he is, New Testament scholars have yet to resolve. A half century ago M Kiddle (1940:xxxiii) wrote concerning the Johannine corpus: 'It is quite impossible to determine the authorship of any of these books from the available evidence.' In the intervening years little new evidence has emerged to elicit any consensus. Extensive discussion regarding the proposed identities of 'John' can be found in such standard New Testament introductions as D Guthrie (1990:932–48) and in J du Rand's survey of Johannine literature (1991:221–27). My comments on authorship will explore topics not typically discussed.

1.2.1 External testimony

The external testimony is that of the early church fathers.¹ In an early second-century exposition of Revelation 20 Justin Martyr, speaking with the Jew Trypho in Ephesus, identifies the Revelator as 'one of the apostles of Christ' (*Dial* 81:4). The issue of authorship is closely tied to that of date. The primary testimony to both is that of Irenaeus in *Against heresies* (cf Eusebius *HE*:3.18.2.2–3; 5.8.6) in which he makes three statements:

- John, the disciple of the Lord who leaned on Jesus' breast, published his Gospel while residing in Ephesus (3.1.1) and died during Trajan's reign (2.22.5; 3.3.4).
- John, the Lord's disciple, is the author of the Apocalypse (4.20.11; 4.30.4; 5.35.2).

¹The testimony of over two dozen patristic sources is listed by H Alford (1875:1.198ff).

- John saw the Apocalypse toward the end of Domitian's reign (5.30.3).

As J A T Robinson (1976:222) notes, 'there are few scholars who would accept all three statements, and many who would reject both the first two.' A Yarbrow Collins (1984:26; 55ff) is a contemporary scholar who rejects Irenaeus' first two statements yet accepts the third. Like her colleagues, she fails to answer satisfactorily why, if Irenaeus' testimony regarding authorship cannot be trusted, he should be trusted concerning the date.

1.2.2 Internal portrait

In 1:1 John is called a slave (δούλος). This is unlike the opening verse both of 2 and 3 John where the author calls himself the elder (πρεσβύτερος). In Revelation 1:9 John calls himself 'your brother and partner' (ἀδελφός ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνός). In 22:9 the angel calls himself a fellow slave (συνδούλος) of John. A self-description found in the Fourth Gospel—the disciple (μαθητής) whom Jesus loved' (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)—is never used. Unlike the Synoptics which mention a John, the son of Zebedee, this Gospel is silent regarding either. 1 John has no authorial self-descriptions. Within the Johannine corpus these internal self-descriptions are mutually exclusive, with no overlap in terminology.

1.2.3 John as apostle

1.2.3.1 Identification

M Hengel (1989:126) asserts that John 'is depicted as a prophet and in no way as an apostle. The twelve apostles are authorities of the past.' Is Hengel correct? The apostolic lists in Matthew 10:2 and Mark 3:16 name John, the son of Zebedee, brother of James—together the sons of thunder—as an apostle. However, the author of Revelation never calls himself an apostle. This in itself is not unique because James in his epistle never calls himself an apostle either. Instead he identifies himself as 'a slave (δούλος) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1:1). Yet James is clearly identified by Paul as an apostle in Galatians 1:19. Feuillet (1965:107) states that the fact John 'foregoes the title of Apostle in a work so akin to the style of the ancient prophet, is not at all a valid objection; on the contrary, an anonymous writer who would have wished to present his work as that of the Apostle John, would have been most certain to use the title.'

This is actually what occurred with two second-century documents. In the apocryphal *Acts of John* the apostle John is seen ministering in Ephesus. He is identified as the brother of James (88), the one who leaned upon the Lord's breast (89), and his companion on the mountain with James and Peter (90). The *Acts of John* also places its John in four of the seven Asian churches—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Laodicea. The gnostic *Apocryphon of John* (2nd century) names its author as the brother of James, one of the sons of Zebedee. These later works combine traditions within the canonical authorial self-descriptions.

1.2.3.2 The use of ἀπόστολος

In 2:2 the Ephesian church is commended for testing some so-called 'apostles' and exposing them as liars. Implicit in such an examination is the church's acquaintance with true apostles and a developed criteria for apostolic examination (cf *Did* 11.3–6). Paul is the only apostle known to be linked with the Ephesian church (Ac 19:1ff). When John came to Ephesus,² he himself must have been examined by the church and found to be a faithful witness. The text implies that John is a true apostle who is now in relationship to the Ephesians, like Paul was.

A second mention of 'apostles' is found in Revelation 8:20. The saints, apostles, and prophets are instructed to rejoice over God's impending judgment of Babylon. But is the locus of this group heaven or earth? R H Mounce (1977:332) interprets this in light of its parallel in 12:12 to mean the church glorified is enjoined to rejoice. Contrarily, G E Ladd (1972:241) regards the inhabitants of heaven to be angels, and that the people of God on earth (i.e., the saints, apostles, and prophets) are the ones invited to rejoice. Mounce's view rightly places apostles and prophets already among the heavenly martyrs. For 18:24 states that blood of the prophets and saints (and by metonymy, the apostles) has already been shed in Babylon. The two prophetic witnesses are already martyred in chapter 11. Historically the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul had already occurred in Rome.³ Babylon's death sentence on the church has now become the same judgment imposed by God on Babylon (Caird 1966:229–30). Ladd's perspective also fails to take into account that in every scene in Revelation where the people of God are seen praising or rejoicing (cf 7:10ff; 15:2ff), their locus is in heaven.

²Eusebius (*HE* 3.1.1) records that, following the apostolic dispersion from Palestine at the beginning of the Jewish War (ca AD 66), John was assigned to Asia where he lived until his death in Ephesus.

³If the intriguing suggestion of C H Turner (1912:214; cf J Munck 1950)—that the two witnesses are a reference (albeit a multivalent one) to Peter and Paul—has validity, it illustrates the interchangeability of the offices of apostle and prophet.

The final mention of 'apostle' is in 21:14. Inscribed on the twelve foundations of the heavenly city are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. But does this objective identification of the Twelve necessarily exclude John from an apostolic office, as Yarbro Collins (1984:28) suggests? Similar identifications in the New Testament suggest not. In Acts 13:1 Paul is identified with the prophets and teachers in Antioch. Later Paul calls himself an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). In 1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul calls himself an apostle, yet in 12:28 he mentions the ministry of apostles. In Ephesians 1:1 Paul likewise calls himself an apostle; yet in 2:20 and 3:5 he speaks objectively about the ministry of apostles and prophets, while in 4:11 he counts apostles among the fivefold ministry.⁴ Peter first calls himself an apostle in 1 Peter 1:1 and later an elder (5:1). Ministry in the New Testament is portrayed as charismatic and functional, not static and institutional, such as is seen later in Ignatius (cf Lombard 1976:47–48).

1.2.3.3 The greeting and closing

John's greeting to the seven churches in 1:4 is characteristically apostolic. The words *χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη*...open all of the canonical Pauline letters except 1 and 2 Timothy. (1 and 2 Timothy, like 2 John, use the phrase *χάρις ἔλεος εἰρήνη*....) The Petrine letters also begin similarly. In 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter—letters that all have a stated Asian provenance or destination—Paul and Peter identify themselves as apostles.

The closing of Revelation in 22:21—*Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων*—resembles that of Paul's letters. This same phrase and its variations beginning with *Ἡ χάρις*... are found in the closing of every canonical Pauline letter. The use of this typical apostolic greeting and closing reveals no hesitation on John's part to link himself with these apostles. This greeting and closing in Revelation would certainly stimulate associations in John's audience with the letters the apostles had earlier sent to their congregations, which were still being read.

1.2.3.4 The public reading of Revelation

John's instructions to have the Apocalypse read aloud publicly (*ἀναγινώσκω*⁵; 1:3) suggest another dimension of his authority. The public reading of Scripture is a practice well attested in the early church (Justin Martyr *Apol* 1.67; cf Gamble 1995:151). It follows an established custom in

⁴The point can be made of course that this occurs because Ephesians is a non-Pauline work. Yet why would an unknown imitator include such an obvious contradiction? An argument like this is double-edged because it can be made to cut either way.

⁵*BAGD* (1979 s v) defines *ἀναγινώσκω* as 'read aloud in public...of scripture reading in the services of synagogue and Christian church.'

the Palestinian and Hellenistic synagogues (Lu 4:16ff; Ac 13:15; 15:21; 2 Cor 3:15; cf Martin 1993:985–86). Paul charged the Thessalonians to have his letter read aloud to all the believers (1 Th 5:27). And he told the Colossians that, after his letter to them is read aloud, it should be read in the Laodicean church. The Colossians are to read publicly Paul's letter to the Laodiceans after the Laodiceans have read it (Col 4:16). During his ministry in Ephesus Timothy is instructed to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13). Thus two of the seven churches are known to practice the public reading of the Septuagint (cf Wilson 1994c:13–14) and of Paul's letters. For John to present his prophecy to these Asian congregations is to claim for himself equal authority with the Old Testament prophets and the apostle Paul.⁶ And for these congregations to allow this prophecy to be read publicly is to acknowledge its divine authority.

1.2.3.5 Letters to seven churches

The significance of the number seven will be discussed fully later (cf *infra* 1.3.3.1). Here to be noted is an ancient tradition found in the Muratorian Fragment: 'Since the blessed apostle Paul himself—following the pattern of his predecessor John—writes, giving their names, to not more than seven churches.... For also John, in his Apocalypse, while writing to seven churches, yet speaks to all' (Stendahl 1962:239). Thus John's seven letters are believed to represent the universal church, since the number seven symbolizes totality. Because Paul is said to have followed the pattern (*ordo*) of John, the seven churches he addressed—Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Galatia (considered one), Thessalonica, and Rome—also symbolize the universal church.

In the Fragment John is simply called a disciple and author of the Fourth Gospel. Yet Paul and his letters are compared to 'the person of John, whose authority and whose competence have been established earlier in the Fragment' (Stendahl 1962:241). Because both John and Paul have written letters to seven churches, they stand in a place of authority with these churches.

It is noteworthy that around AD 110 Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, also wrote seven letters to five churches in this region (one was to Rome and one to Polycarp). However, that seven churches were addressed was accidental and not by design, for he intended to write a second

⁶In 2 Baruch (2nd century A.D.) the apocalypticist closes with a long letter from Baruch to the nine and a half tribes carried into captivity. He instructs its recipients to 'read it carefully in your assemblies' (86:1).

letter to the Ephesians (*Eph* 20.1; cf Trevett 1989:119). Although Ephesus is the first church addressed in the traditional order following Eusebius (*HE* 3.36), an alternative order lists Smyrna first (Lightfoot et al 1992:134–35). Ignatius' collection of seven letters was the editorial product of Polycarp (Gamble 1995:61), who undoubtedly sought to make literary connections with Paul and John. However, he did not intend to equate the authority of Ignatius with that of the other two.

1.2.4 John as prophet

1.2.4.1 Identification

That John regarded himself as a prophet is certain, since six times he calls his work a prophecy (*προφητεία*; 1:3; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19; cf Wilson 1994a:200). In 10:11 John is told again to prophesy at his prophetic commission. Also, 'prophets' are mentioned eight times (*προφήται*; 10:7; 11:10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9). All the references except the first are clearly to New Testament prophets.

The phrase in 10:7, 'his servants the prophets,' alludes to a number of passages in the Old Testament (*Jr* 7:25; 25:4; *Dn* 9:6, 10; *Am* 3:7; *Zch* 1:6). Such texts clearly refer to prophets who declared their messages to Israel and Judah. Some commentators (Walvoord 1966:172; cf Bauckham 1993b:261–62) see John's reference here as also signifying Old Testament prophets. The phrase occurs only one other time; in 11:18, after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, a time of rewarding 'your servants the prophets' has come. Here the phrase clearly refers to the Christian prophets who are John's contemporaries.⁷ Charles (1920:1.266; cf Caird 1966:129) is thus correct when he states that in 10:7 'the phrase refers to the Christian prophets, the contemporaries of the Seer.'

Whether 22:9 directly speaks of John as a prophet has been much discussed. The phrase 'your brothers the prophets,' Yarbro Collins (1984:45) believes, 'does not compel the conclusion that John was a member of a prophetic circle or guild in any local sense.' On the other hand, Aune (1981:18–19) thinks this phrase is evidence that John was part of such a circle. The only self-designation that John assumes is *δούλος* (1:1; cf Schüssler Fiorenza 1985:151). In 22:9 the angel identifies himself as a *σύνδουλός* of John, of his brothers the prophets, and of the keepers

⁷When Ignatius mentions 'the prophets' four times in his letters (*Mag* 8.2; *Phld* 5.2; 9.1, 2), in each case the reference is to the Old Testament prophets (cf Swete 1909:xxi).

of the words of this book. This identification verifies John as a slave, but also identifies as slaves the prophets and the keepers of the book. John is additionally called a brother (cf 19:10) of the prophets, hence he is a prophet himself. Logically and semantically John is therefore designated a slave and a prophet in this verse. John's awareness of himself as one of God's prophetic servants is suggested by a number of internal indicators in Revelation. These will be discussed next.

1.2.4.2 A prophetic experience

The phrase ἐν πνεύματι, 'in the Spirit,' is found four times (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). It appears at the beginning of John's major visions which an angelic interpreter shows to him (δείκνυμι; cf infra 2.4.2.4). In 1:11 John is directed to write to the seven city churches before he sees the exalted son of man. In 4:2 John sees the occupied heavenly throne. In 17:3 he sees the mysterious woman symbolizing Babylon, the city of Rome. And in 21:10 he sees the holy city, new Jerusalem descending from heaven. Four habitations are seen by John while 'in the Spirit'—the present and future home of the saints, the eternal home of God, and the home of the enemies of God and the church.

The phrase ἐν πνεύματι points to a prophetic experience for John like that of the Old Testament prophets, particularly Ezekiel. In 11:24 Ezekiel is taken in the Spirit to the land of the Chaldeans where he is shown a vision of the captivity. And in 37:1 Ezekiel is brought in the Spirit to a dry plain where he is shown the famous vision of dry bones.

Mazzaferri (1989:295) correctly captures the significance of this and the subsequent indicators: 'There is no doubt that John's careful choice and use of sources places him at the head of a long line of biblical prophets with Ezekiel especially in view....Indeed, it is no exaggeration to suggest that John is urged to don Ezekiel's metaphorical mantle just as Elisha did Elijah's.' Although J C de Smidt (1994:238–41) reviews six hermeneutical perspectives on ἐν πνεύματι, he only hints at the emphasis presented here.

1.2.4.3 A prophetic declaration

The τάδε λέγει formula, found 7 times in the letters (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), is utilized repeatedly in the Septuagint for prophetic declaration. The phrase τάδε λέγει κύριος is used 318 times. The formula is found most frequently in the major prophets—Isaiah (25x), Jeremiah (64x), and Ezekiel (125x). Often when this formula is used, additional names are added. 'Lord God' is

found 35 times, 34 of which are in Ezekiel (e g, 12:10: *τάδε λέγει κύριος κύριος*; *כה אמר אדני יהוה*). Another name is 'Sovereign Lord' found 7 times only in Isaiah (e g, 10:24: *τάδε λέγει κύριος σαβαωθ*; *כה אמר אדני יהוה צבאות*). A third name is 'Lord God of Israel' found 20 times (e g, Isa 37:21: *τάδε λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραηλ*; *כה אמר יהוה אלהי ישראל*). This phrase is utilized by prophets such as Moses, Joshua, Nathan, and Elijah. Variants of this expression are 'of the Hebrews' (Ex 9:1, 10:3) and 'of David' (2 Chr 21:12; Isa 38:5). A final name is 'Lord Almighty' found 28 times—24 times in the postexilic books of Haggai (6x) and Zechariah (18x; e g, Zec 1:3: *τάδε λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ*; *כה אמר יהוה צבאות*).⁸

Only this final name *παντοκράτωρ* is used in Revelation (9x; 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). In every instance *θεός* is added to the designation; however, in 16:14 and 19:15 *κύριος* is omitted, but only because of metonymy through earlier use in each pericope.

The *τάδε λέγει* formula is used only one other time in the New Testament, when the prophet Agabus addresses Paul: *τάδε λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον* (Ac 21:11). This association of the Holy Spirit with the prophetic word is rare in the Old Testament. Only two texts make this specific link. In 2 Chronicles 24:20 the Spirit of God 'entered into' (*ἐνέδυσεν*) Zechariah and he declared *τάδε λέγει κύριος...* before the people. In Ezekiel 11:5 the Spirit of the Lord 'fell upon' (*ἔπεσεν*) Ezekiel, telling him to say, *τάδε λέγει κύριος*.

Aune (1990:187) states that the phrase *τάδε λέγει* 'was obsolete in koine Greek, and therefore had connotations or associations of archaism very similar to the now obsolete English phrase "thus saith".' The formula's use by Agabus and John shows that it was *not* obsolete in the first-century Christian community. Certainly the phrase had strong associations with the Septuagint. But the Greek phrase represents a prophetic speech formula—*כה אמר*—that spans nearly a thousand years in the Old Testament from Moses (Ex 4:22) to Malachi (Mal 4:1).

The formula is found in modified form in Ignatius (*Philad* 7.3; cf Aune 1990:188). Referring to a prophetic declaration he had made while visiting the Philadelphian congregation, Ignatius declares: 'But the Spirit was preaching, saying this:' (*τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ἐκήρυσσεν λέγον τάδε*). Ignatius' statement reiterates the ongoing nature of prophecy in the Christian community, now through the Holy Spirit. The only use of the present participle *λέγον* in the New Testament is in Acts

⁸The inconsistency of the translators of the Septuagint is seen in the above translations. For example, in Isaiah 7:7 *יהוה אדני יהוה* is also translated *κύριος σαβαωθ* while in the other six occurrences the Hebrew text is *יהוה צבאות*. This phrase outside of Isaiah is translated *κύριος παντοκράτωρ*; however, this Greek translation in Zechariah 11:4 stands for *יהוה אלהי ישראל*. The translations vary particularly in Jeremiah where there is considerable variation between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint.

20:23, where Paul told the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit was warning him of impending imprisonment.

While Aune's discussion (1990:188–89) of the formula's use in Greek oracles and in Persian decrees and letters is useful historically, it is doubtful that its use by the early church, and by John with the Asian churches in particular, came via that route. Because the God of Israel was a living God who speaks to his people, it was natural for the early Jewish Christian community to adopt the verbal patterns and prophetic perspectives of the Old Testament. Indeed Peter declared in his speech on the Day of Pentecost that the outpoured Spirit fulfilled Joel's prophecy (Ac 2:16ff) and that all persons could now declare prophesy. Prophetic speech became a hallmark of the Christian community. That λέγει is a present tense verb reiterates prophecy's current role in the believing community. The modified phrase τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει, which appears at the end of each letter (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), reveals a further perspective on the Spirit's role in inspiring the prophetic word in the early church. By using this formula John again places himself in the Old Testament prophetic tradition.

1.2.4.4 A prophetic commission

The pneumatic experience that John has in chapter 1 has prophetic significance, yet his actual commission does not occur until 10:8ff. In this delay 'John is closer to Isaiah than to Jeremiah or Ezekiel, whose calls come at the outset of their careers' (Mazzaferri 1989:291). At his commission a mighty angel (cf 5:2) instructs John to take an open scroll⁹ from his right hand and to eat it. Its taste is sweet as honey, but after John swallows the scroll, his stomach becomes upset (v 10). He is called to prophesy again to peoples, nations, languages, and kings.

John's eating the scroll is a direct allusion to Ezekiel's prophetic commission. At his call (2:1ff) Ezekiel likewise sees a hand holding an open scroll (vv 9–10), which contains words of lament, mourning, and woe. He too is directed to eat the scroll. Unlike John, the angel feeds Ezekiel the scroll, which tastes sweet as honey in his mouth (3:1–3). Ezekiel does not experience a bitter aftertaste, however. Following the eating of the scroll, Ezekiel is commanded to speak the word of God to rebellious Israel. With his commission John stands in the tradition of the major prophets, especially Ezekiel.

⁹The identification of this scroll is beyond the scope of our discussion, yet it has great interpretive significance. I agree with Mazzaferri (1989: 267ff) and Bauckham (1993a:243ff) that John uses βιβλιδάριον (10:2, 9, 10) synonymously with βιβλίον (10:8) and should not be translated 'little scroll.' This scroll, now open, is the identical one seen in 5:1 sealed with seven seals. That scroll is an opisthograph, like the one Ezekiel eats in 2:10ff.

1.2.4.5 A prophetic act

In 11:1ff an angel tells John to take a reed and measure the temple and the altar and to count the worshipers. The outer court is to be excluded because it is to be given to the Gentiles to trample for 42 months. This prophetic act introduces the ministry of the two witnesses who are to prophesy during this period of 1260 days.

Prophetic acts were typical of the prophets. Isaiah went about stripped and barefoot for three years (Is 20:2–3); Jeremiah bought a linen belt and hid it (Jr 13:1ff); Hosea married a harlot (Hs 1:2–3); and Zechariah broke two staves marked Favor and Union (Zch 11:7ff). Ezekiel began his public ministry with a prophetic act—the construction of a clay model of Jerusalem under siege (4:1ff). But John's particular act replicates one found later in Ezekiel. In a vision in chapters 40–42 the prophet is taken to a high mountain in Israel where he views a city with buildings. Then he sees a man with a measuring rod in his hand. Through these three chapters Ezekiel follows this man through the temple area recording the measurements that are taken. The measuring of the temple precedes the return of the glory of God and the restoration of the land. These key themes also reappear in Revelation 21–22. Thus John's performance of a prophetic act—the measuring of the temple—indicates that he stands in direct succession to the Old Testament prophetic tradition.

1.2.4.6 A prophetic curse

Revelation closes with a twofold curse upon those who would add or subtract from John's prophecy: 'If anyone should add (ἐπιτίθημι) to these [words], God will add to him the plagues written in this book. If anyone should take away (ἀφαιρέω) from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city written in this book' (22:18–19). John makes a clear allusion to Deuteronomy 4:2: 'Do not add (προστίθημι) to the word which I commanded you, and do not take away (ἀφαιρέω) from it' (cf 12:32 [13:1 LXX]).¹⁰

This word was the decrees and laws which Moses was about to give to Israel, poised on the banks of the Jordan River. If the people were obedient to God's word, they would possess the promised land. Moses' audience had witnessed God's judgment at Baal Peor (Dt 4:3–4), which followed Moab's seduction of Israel through the advice of Balaam (Nm 25:1ff). Lest they compromise again, they are sworn through these curses not to pervert God's commandments.

¹⁰A curse was also invoked by the Greek translators of the Pentateuch: 'They commanded that a curse should be laid, as was their custom, on anyone who should alter the version by any addition or change to any part of the written text, or any deletion either' (LetAris 311).

John's prophetic curse climaxes several uses of Exodus and wilderness typology in Revelation. In the Pergamene letter Balaam's doctrine and its local adherents are roundly denounced (2:14). The Sinai theophany (Ex 19–20) is paralleled in the eschatological earthquakes of the throne-room vision (4:5) and the conclusions of the sevenfold judgment cycles (8:5; 11:19; 16:18–21; cf Bauckham 1993a:202–4). Six of the ten plagues that fell on Egypt are replicated in the trumpet and bowl judgments (cf *infra* 2.5.2.2). And the song of Moses (Rv 15:3–4), preceding the bowl judgments, parallels a similar song in Exodus 15.

This use of the prophetic curse formula, according to Roloff (1993:253), 'lies wholly on the line of prophetic self-consciousness. For the prophet speaks in the certainty that through him God and/or Jesus himself is speaking to the church.' Thus John sees himself as a successor to Moses and likewise indicates to his audience that he exercises prophetic judgment like Moses.

1.2.4.7 Itinerant and resident prophets

Yarbro Collins (1984:134–37) works from the hypothesis that John is an ascetic itinerant prophet. The matter is important in developing the proper relationship between John and the seven churches. The New Testament portrays prophets both as peripatetic and resident. Agabas traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch to predict a famine (Ac 11:27–28) and later met Paul at Caesarea to warn of the apostle's coming imprisonment (21:10–11). The prophets Judas and Silas¹¹ journeyed to Antioch after the Jerusalem council with Paul and Barnabas (Ac 15:22, 32–33). 1 John 4:1–6 gives directions on how to recognize whether the prophets who have gone out (ἐξέρχονται) into the world are true or false. The Didache (11–13) likewise provides criteria to determine the veracity of apostles and prophets. Note again the close connection between the two ministries: the apostle who asks for money is a false prophet (Did 11.6).

Resident prophets are found in Antioch in Acts 13:1–3, although again the roles of Paul and Barnabas change to apostle when they depart for Cypress. Philip, the deacon and evangelist, lived in Caesarea with his four daughters who prophesied (21:8–9). Paul instructed the prophets in Corinth to be orderly and to judge themselves (1 Cor 14:29–32). These references show that both itinerant and resident prophets exercised legitimate ministries in the early church.

¹¹Note that Silas assumed an apostolic role when he accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Ac 15:40ff; cf 1 Th 2:7).

The local references reflected in the seven letters (cf *infra* ch 6 *passim*) suggest that John had a personal knowledge of each church, although they are sufficiently general that he might have garnered such information secondhand. Aune (1981:27) thinks Jesus' words in 2:21 'may be regarded as a reference to an earlier oracle directed to Jezebel herself by John, or perhaps by one of the members of his prophetic circle.' The language clearly suggests that some previous relationship had existed. Although John exercises authority over these Asian churches, this need not imply he was personally known in each. Paul apparently never visited Colossae (cf Col 2:1), yet wrote two letters to the church there. Yarbro Collins's hypothesis, while producing some interesting conjectures (1984:137), fails to resolve the Revelator's identification as an itinerant or resident prophet.

1.2.5 Conclusion

While the New Testament does not provide explicit testimony that John the apostle is the same as John the prophet, there is no objective evidence that contravenes such an identification either. Whether an apostle or prophet or both, John's authority over the seven churches is evident. His ability to correct and rebuke in the name of Jesus is singularly unique among New Testament prophets. No other prophets (e.g., Agabus or Judas) have such external authority. Their prophecies are heeded because they are speaking from within the community. Only individuals functioning as apostles (e.g., Paul, Peter, James) speak with the authority evidenced by the letters to the seven churches. From the internal indicators described above, the Revelator exemplifies spiritual confidence working within both apostolic and prophetic traditions in the early church. We agree with the assessment of Botha (1988:1) that the author 'was a man of authority, well known to his readers, a man whose words would be accepted as being a revelation from God....'

1.3 DESTINATION AND PROVENANCE

The destination and provenance of Revelation are mentioned in 1:4, 9–11. That the entire book and not just chapters 1–3 was destined for this audience is seen in the reference to the churches again in 22:16. The geographical background of the province Asia and the seven cities, particularly their order, will be discussed in this section.

1.3.1 The province of Asia

The addressees of the book of Revelation were seven churches in the Roman province of Asia. The greeting in 1:4 states: 'John to the seven churches in Asia.' This is the sole mention of 'Asia' in the book. Strabo uses the word 'Asia' to signify either the entire continent (*Geog* 2.5.26, 31; 7.4.5) or the Roman province in western Anatolia (*Geog* 13.4.2). An older and narrower use of the term (as e g used by Homer // 2.460–62) connotes the Greek cities of the Aegean coast. P R Trebilco (1994:302n) suggests that 'this narrower use of "Asia" is probably found in Rev 1:4'. Yet neither the Panionic League (ca 800 BC; Bean 1979:3–4) nor the Delian Confederacy (ca 470 BC; Levi 1984:140) included any of the inland cities like Laodicea. Hence it is difficult to accept this narrower definition. Since John's orientation is Roman rather than Greek, John surely means the province by naming the location of the churches (1:11).

The province of Asia was formed in 129–26 BC following the bestowal of the Pergamene kingdom upon Rome by Attalus III in 133 BC (Trebilco 1994:292). Its territory covered the former Greek territories of Mysia, Lydia, Caria, much of Phrygia, the Troad, the coastal cities of Doria, Ionia, and Aeolia, as well as such islands as Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Patmos (Ramsay 1898:1.171). To the north were the Roman provinces of Bithynia and Pontus, to the east Galatia, and to the south Lycia and Pamphylia. Asia became a senatorial province following Rome's administrative reorganization in 27 BC and reported directly to the Senate (Cassius Dio 53.12.4). Augustus and subsequent emperors were much involved with Asia's affairs, however (e g, Cassius Dio 53.15.4–6; Tacitus *An* 2.47).

1.3.2 The island of Patmos

John informed his audience that he was on the island of Patmos when he received the Revelation (1:9). Like such prophets as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah who influenced John, he too is in prophetic exile. The island is mentioned by only two ancient authors—Thucydides (3.33) and Strabo (*Geog* 10.5). That John was a partner in the persecution seems to confirm that his removal to Patmos was involuntary.

During the early principate Mytilene (Tacitus *An* 14.50) and the Aegean islands (*An* 15.71) often became destinations for those exiled. C H Turner (1912:199) names Gyarus, Cynthnos, Seriphos, Amorgos, Andros, Naxos, Lesbos, and Cos as specific islands known to have received exiles. According to Eusebius (*HE* 3.18), in the 15th year of Domitian's reign (i e, AD 95) the emperor banished his niece Flavia Domitilla to the Tyrrhenian island of Pontia because of

her Christian testimony. Eusebius, citing Irenaeus (*Haer* 5.30.3), also mentions here that the 'apostle' and 'evangelist' John 'was still alive, and was condemned to live in the island (νησον) of Patmos.' Both the source and the status of Eusebius' work are indicated by a very significant introductory formula at the beginning of 3.18 that reads κατέχει λόγος, meaning 'the story goes, i.e., 'as we are told.'

G B Caird (1966:20) notes that 'these were cases of *deportatio in insulam*, a penalty which involved confiscation of property and loss of civil rights.'¹² Only the emperor could pronounce this sentence, which was often given to leading citizens who fell from favor. A lesser punishment called *relegatio ad insulam* could be pronounced by a provincial governor. Caird (:22–23) quotes Tertullian (*PraescrHaer* 36) that John's sentence was the latter—in *insulam relegatur*—and then infers that John was relegated from Ephesus by the proconsul of Asia. However, he fails to note that Tertullian in the same text states that John was relegated from Rome, not Patmos, after first being plunged in burning oil and suffering nothing.

The evidence regarding the terms of John's banishment remains inconclusive. Likewise, whether he was sent from Ephesus or Rome also cannot be established. What is clear is that John received his revelation on this lonely island whose area is barely 34 square kilometers and whose terrain is volcanic, rocky, and virtually treeless (Carrez 1995:7).

1.3.3 The seven churches

1.3.3.1 The number seven

Since 1:4 is the first use of the number seven in the book and given the importance of this number to the Revelator, it is necessary to discuss briefly John's use of seven. The uniqueness of the number seven was recognized in the ancient world. Seven is neither a factor nor a product of the first ten numbers. Because of this virginal quality, the mathematician Pythagoras, a native of the island of Samos, identified it with the name of the virgin goddess Athena (Clayton & Price 1988:4). The ancients saw a religious connection for, as Stock (1984:25) states, 'letters of the alphabet were symbolic of the first, fundamental elements of the cosmos (*stoicheia*), the seven vowels being associated with the seven notes of the scale and the seven elemental spirits presiding over the seven planets.'

¹²Of the six examples Caird cites in Tacitus and Juvenal the first is not an example of *deportatio*; rather Gaius Silanus, proconsul of Asia, was relegated (*relegandum*) to the island of Gyarus (Tacitus *An* 3.68).

B C Birch (1986:3.559) observes that the number seven 'is the most significant symbolic number in the Bible, appearing in some manner in almost six hundred passages.' The use of seven is a recognized literary device in Revelation, with a heptad of each of the following: churches and spirits (1:4), lampstands (1:11), stars (1:16), lamps (4:5), seals (5:5), horns and eyes (5:6), angels and trumpets (8:2), thunders (10:3), heads and crowns (12:3), plagues (15:6), bowls (15:7), and kings (17:9). In fact, of the 88 uses of ἑπτά in the New Testament 55 occur in Revelation. There are seven unnumbered beatitudes (1:3 *et al*).

Revelation's structure has often been seen in terms of sevens. J M Ford (1975:46–48) notes seven series of seven in the construction of the Apocalypse. J Blevins (1984:7–10) sees Revelation as a heavenly drama depicted in seven acts.¹³ We will explore further the importance of seven as a structuration device in Chapter 3. Within biblical numerology seven is symbolic of completeness. By addressing his message to seven specific churches John indicates, according to R Bauckham (1993b:16), that these churches are '*representative of all the churches.*'

1.3.3.2 Other churches in Asia

Why seven churches were singled out over other churches in the province has remained an open question. Fierce inter-city rivalry existed for a place among Asia's seven leading cities. The three largest—Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum—were the recognized 'First of Asia.' Sardis and Cyzicus were next, with the two remaining seats contested by Laodicea, Apamea, Tralles, and Magnesia ad Meandrum (Ramsay 1994:125–26; cf Mitchell 1993:1.206). Poirier (1943:34) rightly rejects the suggestion that the selection of cities is according to representation from the former tribal regions: Ephesus and Smyrna are in Ionia; Pergamum in Mysia; Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia in Lydia; and Laodicea in Phrygia. The regions of Troas, Aeolis, and Caria are thereby omitted altogether. Such an arrangement 'seems of little value, particularly as it also fails to allow for the Roman system of government...and hence the way the Romans and inevitably the inhabitants of the province saw themselves' (Burnett et al 1992:1.365).

Six other sites are certain locations of churches in the first century: Troas (Ac 16:8–11; 20:5–12; 2 Cor 2:12; 2 Tm 4:13), Miletus (Ac 20:15, 17; 2 Tm 4:20), Colossae (Col 1:2), Hierapolis (Col 4:13), Tralles (Ignatius), and Magnesia ad Meandrum (Ignatius). R Oster

¹³Blevins (1984:17–19) links the sevenfold organization of Revelation to seven scenery windows (*thuromata*) in Ephesus' theater (most theaters had three to five windows). Such an association seems too pedestrian.

(1992:1.938) lists thirty-seven Anatolian cities where Christian communities were established in the first and second centuries. None of the cities that follow are on his list, although Oster acknowledges that because Revelation was designed as a circular letter, this increases 'the number of Christian sites that can be inferred from early Christian literature.' Other probable sites include Assos, Mitylene, Chios, and Samos (Ac 20:13–15); Priene (Ramsay 1895:294); and Cyzicus (Ramsay 1994:126–27). Several of these cities are more prominent than Thyatira and Philadelphia. In fact, without explicit mention in Revelation it is questionable whether scholars would have placed churches in these cities. It is likely that many more Asian cities had churches, particularly those along the extensive Roman road system (for a map see Mitchell 1993:1.120). Cities near Ephesus such as Notion, Metropolis, Nyssa, and Heraclea under Latmos probably also had Christian communities.

1.3.3.3 The order of the seven churches

That the seven churches begin with Ephesus appears a conscious design element of Revelation. Ephesus as the center of John's Asian ministry would in part account for its preeminent position (Bruce 1979:120ff).¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza (1992:53), like many commentators, notes that Ephesus is 'the nearest city to Patmos.' However, this is not the case—Miletus held that distinction (cf Thompson 1990:143). During the Greek classical period Miletus was the most prosperous city in Asia Minor. Following the city's destruction by the Persians in 494 BC, Miletus lost its preeminence to Ephesus (McRay 1992:4.825–26). Miletus was briefly the site of the third provincial cult in Asia under Caligula around AD 40 (Dio Cassius 59.28.1; cf Robert 1949), but following his assassination the cult was stopped for political reasons (Friesen 1993:26).

Patmos harbor (modern Skala) is located approximately 60 miles southwest of Ephesus, but only 40 miles kilometers southwest of Miletus (Hemer 1986:27; cf Carroll 1992:5.179). Trophimus was left by Paul in Miletus, probably with believers, after becoming so ill on their journey that he could no longer continue (2 Tm 4:20). Paul, on the return of his third missionary journey, stopped in Miletus and sent a representative from the Milesian church to Ephesus to bring its elders back for a tearful farewell (Ac 20:17–38). Miletus was a day's journey from Ephesus (cf *AcJn* 18). Already Ephesus was having a problem with its harbor silting up, and for this reason

¹⁴Ignatius (*Eph* 12.2) later calls Ephesus the highway (πάροδος) through which prisoners from the East passed on their way to martyrdom in Rome, which 'seems to suggest that their spiritual position corresponds to their geographical position' (Lightfoot et al 1992:145n17).

Ramsay (1994:169) has suggested that Paul bypassed Ephesus and landed at Miletus.¹⁵ The four harbors of Miletus likewise silted up later, but in the second half of the first century it was a thriving port.

The variant reading in Acts 20:15, 'tarried at Trogyllium' (AV), suggests another practical difficulty attendant with sailing from Patmos to Ephesus. Between this promontory jutting westward from the mainland and the island of Samos was a narrow strait less than a mile wide. Ships rounding the Trogyllium were susceptible either to becalming or to the dangers of passing through these narrow waters (Wilson 1898:4.814). The prevailing northern winds, called Etesians, made sea travel difficult, even in the summer when smooth sailing could be guaranteed usually only in the morning. When Pliny the Younger went to take up his post as provincial governor of Pontus, he sailed directly from Rome to Ephesus. However, the Etesian winds would not allow him to sail up the Aegean to the Hellespont, so he traveled by road in intense heat to Pergamum. There he was forced to reboard a coastal boat because of sickness, in spite of continued adverse sea conditions (*Ep* 10.15–17). The unpredictability of sea travel would be an important factor in routing to the nearest port.

Patmos was in the territory of Miletus and fell under its jurisdiction (Hemer 1986:222n8). The island was the guardian of Miletus' western sea boundary, with its fortress at Castelli (Papadopoulos 1993:5). Correspondence from the island would probably pass through it initially (contra Hemer 1988:424). Thus Miletus, not Ephesus, would be the first major city with a church through which the Apocalypse would pass. At the road junction at Magnesia ad Meandrum the messenger could just as easily have gone east to Laodicea as northwest to Ephesus.

W M Ramsay (1994:134; cf Watson 1992:5.1143–44) has conjectured that the order of the churches in Revelation represented a circular postal circuit that a courier would typically follow. Because of the mountain ranges, the cities of western Anatolia developed along the Aegean coast and in the four main river valleys—the Caicus, Hermus, Cayster, and Meander. Hence the Roman road system normally followed the natural terrain between the cities of Asia.¹⁶ The Romans had divided Asia into judicial assize districts (*conventus* or διοίκησις), where the proconsul would periodically hold his courts. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Sardis, and Laodicea

¹⁵Ramsay's suggestion is mitigated by Justin Martyr's remark (*Dial* 142, ca 150; cf Artistides *Orat* 23.24) that he was soon to set sail from Ephesus, assuming that Eusebius' (*HE* 4.18.6) placement of this Xystus in Ephesus is correct. The harbor received periodic dredging to keep it open (Oster 1992:2.543).

¹⁶The major highway system in western Turkey today still largely follows a circular route linking five of the seven cities (excluding Thyatira [Akhisar] and Pergamum [Bergama], although both are along other major highways).

were all *conventus* cities (Jones 1937:61).¹⁷ The perquisites of being an assize city in the first century—here Celenae (Apamea) just east of Laodicea—are noted by Dio Chrysostom (*Or* 35.15–17):

The courts are in session every other year in Celenae, and they bring together an unnumbered throng of people—litigants, jurymen, orators, princes, attendants, slaves, pimps, muleteers, hucksters, and artisans. Consequently not only can those who have goods to sell obtain the highest prices, but also nothing in the city is out of work, neither the teams nor the houses nor the women. And this contributes not a little to prosperity; for wherever the greatest throng of people comes together, there necessarily we find money in greatest abundance, and it stands to reason that the place should thrive.... So it is, you see, that the business of the courts is deemed of highest importance toward a city's strength and all men are interested in that as in nothing else. And the foremost cities share this business each in its turn in alternate years.... Yes, and you share also in the sanctuaries of Asia and in the expenditures they entail, quite as much as do those cities in which the sanctuaries are.

Ephesus also was the base for a college of couriers (*tabellarii*) who would carry official Roman messages throughout the province. As a communications hub, the city also was the central bureau for the dispatch of Asia's tax officials (Trebilco 1994:309). J W Bowman (1962:4.69) sees the seven churches in the form of the seven-branched candlestick of the Jerusalem temple with numbers 1 and 7, 2 and 6, 3 and 5 forming pairs on opposite sides and number 4 at the top. When the seven cities are highlighted as such on a map, this suggestion seems highly imaginative. In fact, in John's opening vision he envisions seven lampstands (*λυχνίας*), not one (1:12), which later are identified as the seven churches (1:20).¹⁸ Each church, beginning at Ephesus, is the center of its lampstand, and functions as a spiritual communication center and ecclesiastical *conventus* from which secondary messengers would be dispatched. Thus Revelation was meant for a larger audience than the seven designated churches.¹⁹

1.3.4 Conclusion

From his island exile on Patmos John is directed to communicate with seven representative churches in the Roman province of Asia. Of the seven cities Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum

¹⁷The number of districts in Asia varied between 10 and 13. For a convenient list of the major cities in each district see Burnett et al (1992:1.363–65); for the geographical boundaries see Map 5 in the same volume.

¹⁸John's identification of the seven lampstands with the seven churches differs from Josephus' identification (*BJ* 5.217) of the seven lamps (*λύχναι*) with the seven planets. This mitigates against B Malina's attempt to link Revelation with astronomy (1995:12ff).

¹⁹In his letter to the Ephesians on Jewish privileges in 43 BC, Dolabella writes, 'And it is my wish that you write these instructions to the various cities' (Josephus *Ant* 14.227). Johnson (1961:§118n) explains, 'Since Ephesus was the chief city in the Roman province of Asia, Dolabella apparently expected the Ephesians to undertake the transcription and the circulation of his commands throughout the province.'

were the three premier cities in the province, while Sardis and Laodicea placed among the top seven cities. Thyatira was geographically located between Pergamum and Sardis, while Philadelphia lay between Sardis and Laodicea. The cities were located along the highly developed Roman road system. Based on geographical and political considerations, it is conceivable that John might have visited these seven churches earlier while on a ministry tour of the province. Because of Patmos's geographical proximity and political connection to Miletus, the messenger carrying Revelation probably passed through Miletus initially before making his first stop in Ephesus.

1.4 THE READER

1.4.1 The oral nature of Revelation

John designed his work as oral enactment. The first of the seven beatitudes, or macarisms, declares this in 1:3: 'Blessed is the reader, and blessed are the hearers of the words of the prophecy....' Barr (1986:243) elaborates, 'The original audience encountered it as an aural experience (1:3), and that experience determined both the way the Apocalypse is structured and the meaning the auditors found in it.' Because Revelation was read aloud, Long (1994:407) believes the first-time hearer/reader was extremely vulnerable to the emotional controls of the narrative. Thereby 'it is probable that the narrator's intended effect would strike home with great force.' The identity of the reader and his audience, particularly their socio-religious background, will be discussed in the next two sections.

The topic of the public reading of Scripture was introduced earlier (cf supra 1.2.3.4). Within the congregations those who were literate and could read publicly would undoubtedly become the designated readers. Gamble (1995:220) observes that 'the capacity to read was appreciated as one of the manifold gifts of the spirit—a charisma.' Although reading is never mentioned in the New Testament as one of the charismata, its functional nature in the congregation closely parallels those gifts mentioned by Paul in Romans 12:6–8.

Since the initial believers in cities such as Ephesus were Jews drawn from the synagogue (Ac 19:8–10), they would probably continue to read publicly the Law and the Prophets each Lord's Day (cf Gamble 1995:211ff). Indeed John's allusions to major traditions in ten Old Testament books (e.g., Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel; cf Fekkes 1994:101–2) suggests that he expected these congregations to have a broad scriptural background. Gamble (1995:10) observes that

'every Christian had the opportunity to become acquainted with Christian literature, especially the scriptures, through catechetical instruction and the reading and homiletical exposition of texts in the context of worship.' The use of Revelation in public worship has caused some commentators to suggest a liturgical context for its reading (cf Shephard 1960; Barr 1986:252–56). As John's representative to the seven churches, this messenger probably would himself read the Apocalypse in each church. Reading Greek texts in continuous script (*scriptio continua*) was challenging, so 'good public reading required familiarity with the text' (Gamble 1995:204–5).²⁰

1.4.2 Attendant to the prisoner

Who might this reader be, and what would be his relationship to the text? Most probably he was someone known to John. Church tradition cites a disciple of John named Prochorus who served as his amanuensis during the visionary experience (Papadopoulos 1993:6). The book of Acts records that Paul was allowed personal attendants while imprisoned in Caesarea (24:23) and in Rome (28:30). Lucian (*Tox* 18) mentions that, when Deinias was sent into exile, his friend Agathocles decided to accompany him. Ancient precedent certainly allowed for such an attendant to be with John on Patmos (cf Rapske 1994:370ff).

1.4.3 Personal emissary

The reader might have been John's personal emissary to the seven churches, where he would undoubtedly be known. It is impossible to know if he was Jewish or Greek, yet the book's prophetic/apocalyptic character suggests a Jew would be more familiar with such generic content. Clearly this unnamed individual was given enormous responsibility in seeing that the vision was delivered to the churches. He also faced great personal risk. Since his mentor was already banished for Christian activity, he was walking into potential trouble in several of these cities. He was in danger from the Jews in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the Romans in Pergamum, and the false prophetess in Thyatira. He would need to confront the apathetic leadership in the churches in Sardis and Laodicea. Thus this man would himself need to possess spiritual maturity and authority for such a mission.

²⁰An order of readers in the church is first mentioned by Tertullian (*PraescrHaer* 41).

1.4.4 Scribe for additional copies

John was instructed to write εἰς βιβλίον (1:11), and the messenger probably carried this original copy. In each city he would read it publicly on the first day of the week before an assembly of the house churches or, in the case of Ephesus, perhaps in several of the larger house churches. Although the churches are only a day's journey apart, such a process could have been lengthy, especially if the public reading were delayed until a service on the Lord's Day (1:3).²¹ This could conceivably extend the delivery time over six weeks. He probably also copied or dictated copies for each church while staying in the respective cities (Hemer 1988:424). Copies would be necessary if the smaller churches in each district were to hear the Revelation.

1.4.5 Interpreter to the churches

What role would the reader have in interpreting the book to the congregations? R J Bauckham (1993a:1) comments: 'Revelation was evidently designed to convey its message to some significant degree on first hearing (cf 1:3), but also progressively to yield fuller meaning to closer acquaintance and assiduous study.' It would be the reader's responsibility to lead such a study. B Witherington III (1995:45) has made a similar conjecture concerning the Pauline correspondence:

I suspect that Paul entrusted his letters to coworkers because he knew that they could read and speak Greek well, expound on points the audience did not fully understand (which required that the person in question know the mind of Paul rather intimately), and catch and express the various shades of tone in the written record of Paul's voice, including irony, sarcasm, love, compassion—who could, in short, be not merely letter carriers, but also the rhetorical deliverers of his communications.

Thus the reader probably played a key role after the initial reading in making understandable Revelation's mysteries.

1.4.6 Literacy in Asia

A competent reader was especially important in the ancient world, where most of the population was illiterate. W V Harris (1989:272) calculates a literacy rate of less than 15% among the population in Rome and Italy, basing his estimates on the high concentration of inscriptions there. He speaks about Ephesus as also having 'a very large number of inscriptions' (:274), so

²¹An example might be Paul's visit at Troas recounted in Acts 20:6–12. The apostolic party spent seven days in this port town evidently prolonging their departure until the first day of the week when they could celebrate the *agape* feast together. Although Paul certainly enjoyed fellowship with the believers during his week in Troas, his formal ministry in their midst was seemingly delayed until the Lord's Day (v 7). Ramsay (1895: 289–90) places their arrival in Troas on Tuesday, April 19 and their departure Monday, April 25.

a literacy rate in the 15% range would be plausible there as well. Such a percentage could probably be sustained in the other six Asian cities also. The high number of inscriptions found throughout Asia as well as the many Greek writers produced in the region (cf Grant 1984:38) both point to a populace with some degree of literacy. Commenting on early Christian literacy, S A Stephens (1994:408) states that 'it is not clear what proportion of the converted could actually read and were read to in community worship.' This final comment is puzzling in light of our earlier discussion (cf supra 1.2.3.4). In John's case he clearly intended that the reader should read Revelation in each church, so that every member could hear it.

1.4.7 Jews and literacy

An additional dimension of the literacy question relates to the percentage of Jews in the churches. The question of Jews in the cities will be addressed more fully in the next section. Harris (1989:281–82) seeks to debunk the perception of mass literacy in first-century Judea. He effectively counters the apparent evidence for this assertion in three Matthean passages, yet fails to address the most important passage which he mentions in a note—Luke 4:16ff. Here Jesus reads from a passage in Isaiah in his home synagogue at Nazareth. If a craftsman in an obscure Galilean village had learned to read, it is certainly plausible to suggest that many Jewish men throughout Judea had likewise learned to read (cf Millard 1992:4.340).

But what about Jewish literacy in the Diaspora? Gamble (1995:7) writes, 'Yet careful instruction of Jewish children in Greek must have been the rule in the Diaspora, again for the reading of scripture.' Regarding the situation in Asia Minor, Timothy may serve as an example. His home Lystra was a newly created Roman colony (26 BC), but the native Lycaonian influence predominated (Ac 14:6). This frontier town had an insufficient Jewish population even to have a synagogue. Because Timothy had a Greek father, he was still uncircumcised when he joined the apostolic party (Ac 16:1–3). Adopting a canonical reading of the Pastorals, Paul reminds Timothy how he learned the Scriptures from infancy from his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tm 1:5; 3:15), who themselves apparently could read. In 1 Timothy 4:13 Timothy is encouraged to read publicly the Scriptures. The commitment of two women in an obscure Galatian town to hand down literacy suggests a broader pattern of Jewish education, which would be facilitated even more in those Greco-Roman cities with synagogues. The geographical distribution of Jewish inscriptions in Ionia, Phrygia, Caria, Lydia, Galatia, and Pisidia

reaffirms further the probability of widespread Jewish literacy in Anatolia (cf Trebilco 1991:43–163 *passim*).

1.4.8 Books in Asia

Acts 19:19 provides insight into the reading public in Ephesus. A number (ἱκανοὶ) of the new converts burned the magical scrolls they possessed. Whether they could actually read these scrolls or simply owned them for their apotropaic power is unknown. The value of these scrolls was the equivalent of 50,000 drachmas (ἄργυριος; a silver coin equaling about a day's wage). While this number may seem exorbitant, it nevertheless reflects both the wealth of the Ephesian believers and the high cost of book ownership in the ancient world. Harris (1989:195) notes that in Tebtunis during the period AD 45–49 the cost of papyrus was four drachmas a roll. Since the price outside Egypt would have been much higher, it 'must have been quite expensive for most people's purses' and therefore not 'a standard everyday material for ordinary citizens' (:195).

Ephesus figures prominently in two of the five canonical ancient Greek novels—Xenophon's *Ephesiaka* and Achilles Tatius' story of Leukippe and Keitophon. C M Thomas (1995:84) calls attention to three complexes of *topoi* that are evocative of the city's religious profile in such literature of the Roman period—'the image of Artemis, the inviolability of her temple, and the appearance of Rome on the religious horizon....' (cf *infra* 1.5.3.2 for the Artemis background). Other novels also have an Asian connection. Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* is set on the island of Lesbos; Chariton's home was Aphrodisias, near Laodicea.

Who were the readers of these novels? E Bowie (1994:451) regards them as the educated classes in the province of Asia. These wealthy and elite individuals, probably males, had a variety of literature including novels, histories, geographies, magical papyri as well as religious texts to read. Such books could be procured from a civic library, such as that in Smyrna which Strabo (*Geog* 14.646) calls one of the city's chief buildings.

Pergamum in particular had its own heritage regarding literacy. The city in the Greco-Roman period possessed a library estimated at 200,000 scrolls, which was second only to the one in Alexandria. Because of an embargo of papyrus instituted by Ptolemy, the residents began to use skins—Pergamene paper, hence parchment. Following the burning of Alexandria's library, Antony carried off Pergamum's library and presented it to Cleopatra in 41 BC (Radt 1984:15). In Hellenistic Pergamum Harris (1989:136), quoting L Robert, notes that even 'some girls received a degree of education, probably in part at school, and were able to compete in

calligraphy.' Whether this attitude toward general education, particularly of both sexes, continued into the Roman period is unknown but probable.

1.4.9 Conclusion

The reader of the Apocalypse, blessed by John in his first macarism (1:3), was probably a close ministry associate. He was perhaps an attendant to the prisoner on Patmos and could have served as his amanuensis. As John's personal emissary to the seven churches, the reader was likely known to the initial audience and himself possessed spiritual authority to stand against John's opponents in the churches. He also became an interpreter of the prophecy to the churches and was perhaps also responsible for making copies for distribution. He was certainly among the small percentage of people in the ancient world who were literate. Whether he was Jewish cannot be determined, but the higher rate of literacy among Jews strongly suggests the possibility. John's audience was to some degree sophisticated literarily as is demonstrated by the writings and inscriptions whose provenance was Asia. While these descriptives yield an interesting profile, church history is uncertain regarding his identity.

1.5 THE AUDIENCE

1.5.1 The original hearers

John's exile to Patmos prevented him from speaking with his Asian audience—the original hearers—'mouth to mouth' (the Greek idiom; cf 2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 14). Hence his book served as a written conversation with his audience. Letters like those to the seven churches, according to P J J Botha (1992:209), 'create appearance in the experience of the recipient(s) by evoking the physical presence of the author(s).' John, like Paul (1 Cor 5:3–4), could be 'with you in spirit' when his oral communication was read to the churches. We agree with Yarbro Collins (1984:144:) who thinks that, since the Apocalypse was read aloud before the assembled Christians in each city, 'it is better to speak of the first "hearers" of Revelation, rather than the "readers".'

The congregations of the seven churches were composed of Jews and Gentiles. The result of Paul's 2 1/3 year residence in Ephesus (AD 52–54) was that 'all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord' (Ac 19:10). Allowing for Lucan hyperbole, widespread dissemination of the gospel apparently occurred some two decades (early

dating ca 69) or four decades (late dating ca 95) before Revelation was written. The religious backgrounds of these two groups within their local communities provides an important backdrop for understanding the seven letters and their promises.

1.5.2 The Jews in the seven cities

1.5.2.1 Introduction

The presence of Jews in western Anatolia is documented to about 210 BC through a resettlement by the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III (cf Ramsay 1994:102ff). A number of references in Josephus describe the struggles of the Jews for political and religious recognition by the Romans in the Greek cities of Asia (e g, *Ap* 2.38–39). The earliest of these (ca 35 BC) is a letter from Octavian to the Asian proconsul Norbanus Flaccus ordering him to allow the Jews to send money to Jerusalem without hindrance (*Ant* 16.166; cf Johnson et al 1961:§129). The rights of the Jews were confirmed by Augustus around 1 BC (*Ant* 16.162–65).

A Jewish community seems to have existed in all seven cities. (The dispersion of the Jews dates from the 8th to the 6th centuries BC following the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles.) The book of Ephesians, probably a circular letter, addresses in part conflicts between Jews and Gentiles in the Asian churches (e g, Eph 2:14–3:6). While the situation of the Jews in Asia can only be summarized here, P R Trebilco has provided a broader discussion of the issue in his *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (1991).

1.5.2.2 The Jews in Ephesus

The presence of Jews in Ephesus is richly documented, with Josephus making ten references to that fact (*Ant* 14.223–27, 228–29, 230, 234, 238–40, 262–64, 301–13, 314–17; 16.27–65; *Ap* 2.39). In the last reference Josephus claims that the Ephesians Jews ‘bear the same name as the indigenous citizens, a right which they received from the Diadochi.’ Such a right to hold citizenship as a tribe was extraordinary in the Greco-Roman world. Hemer (1986:38) interprets Josephus (*Ant* 12.125–26) to say that this privilege created problems and believes ‘the agitation of the Ionians against the Jews seems to presuppose that a Jewish community already possessed the citizenship and that the fact was resented by their opponents.’ Decrees by Lentulus (49 BC) and Dolabella (43 BC), cited by Josephus, confirmed the rights of the Jews.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus (ca AD 52), he spoke in the synagogue for three months. The site of this or any other synagogue is yet to be found (cf Oster 1992:2.549). He then relocated to the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Ac 19:8–10).²² Acts also mentions seven sons of a Jewish priest who practiced exorcism in the city (vv 13–16). When these priests were attacked by a demoniac, the Jews in the city became greatly afraid (v 17). When the Ephesian Jews attempted to mollify the crowd assembled in the theater against Paul, their representative Alexander was shouted down when the crowd realized he was a Jew (v 33). This reaction underscores the underlying tensions between the monotheistic Jews and the pagan Gentiles of the city.

1.5.2.3 The Jews in Smyrna

There is little literary evidence for the existence of Jews here. Hemer (1986:66) sees the Jewish vindictiveness against Smyrna in the earlier Sibylline Oracles (3.344, 365; 5.122–23, 306–7) as evidence of the animosity between the city's Jews and pagans. The synagogue in the city, called that 'of Satan' (Rv 2:9), is responsible for the persecution and impoverishment of Christians. No archaeological evidence for such a synagogue has yet been found (Fox 1987:481).

1.5.2.4 The Jews in Pergamum

This letter, with its overt Old Testament references to Balaam, Balak, Israel, and manna, would suggest a viable synagogue. However, little is known about the Jewish presence in Pergamum. Josephus (*Ant* 14.247–55) cites a decree of the Pergamene magistrates (138–29 or 113–95 BC) that affirms their alliance with Rome and their willingness to cooperate with Hyrcanus and the Jews in their struggle against the Seleucids. The Pergamenes not only received a personal envoy on the matter but sent their own to Hyrcanus. The decree closes with an affirmation that Abraham was a friend of their ancestors, the Spartans. Such a positive response from the Pergamenes seems unlikely without a Jewish presence in their midst. Trebilco (1991:8) suggests that the Theodorus mentioned in the decree was a recognized Jewish resident of Pergamum and therefore admitted to the city council to present the envoy's letter.

²²This assumes the essential historicity of the Acts account (cf Wenham 1993:250ff) contra H Koester (1995:128) who negatively concludes: 'Little historical information, however, can be gleaned from Luke's narrative.'

Cicero (*Flac* 28.68) records that Flaccus confiscated only a small amount of gold here in 62 BC, which suggests a small Jewish community in the region.²³ Hemer (1986:90) accounts for this limited Jewish population because 'the central position of the city in the imperial cult did not favour the development of Jewish settlement.'

1.5.2.5 The Jews in Thyatira

The only direct evidence of Judaism is the problematic 'Sambatheum' inscription (Hemer 1986: 110). Indirect reference to a Jewish presence comes in Acts 16:14 where Lydia is said to be a God-fearer from Thyatira. This inference by Hemer (:109–110) seems probable: 'As Philippi had no synagogue (cf. Acts 16.13), it seems more likely that she first encountered the Jewish faith in her own city.' Use of the Jezebel typology (Rv 2:20) suggests a familiarity with the Old Testament, which a Jewish nucleus in the church would have.

1.5.2.6 The Jews in Sardis

There is no mention of Jews in the Sardian letter in Revelation 3. Obadiah 20 mentions that exiles from Jerusalem were residing in Sepharad, whose probable identification is Sardis (Wineland 1992:5.1090). Josephus (*Ant* 12.149) mentions that Antiochus III relocated two thousand Jewish families from Mesopotamia to Phrygia and Lydia. Since Sardis was the capital of Lydia, it is likely that some of these families settled in the city. Josephus (*Ant* 14.235) later cites a letter of the propraetor Lucius Antonius, in which he guarantees their rights as citizens to maintain an association and keep their native laws. Augustus later upheld the right of the Jews, which was being challenged by the Asian city administrations, to collect monies for Jerusalem (*Ant* 16.171).

A synagogue, part of a Roman bath and gymnasium complex, has been excavated by American archaeologists in recent years (cf Seager & Kraabel 1983:168ff). Although it dates from the early 3rd century AD, its remarkable size and central location indicates the wealth and

²³Harris (1976:24–25), however, translates 'at Pergamum not much less' (*Pergami non multo minus*), that is, than the hundred pounds confiscated at Adramyttium. 'The received text, *non multum*, "at Pergamum not much", produces an anticlimax of which Cicero would certainly not have been guilty' (:25n). If Harris's emendation is correct, a different picture of the Jewish presence in Pergamum would result.

strength of a long-standing Jewish community (Pedley 1992:5.983). Inscriptions from the synagogue show the Jews using Greek names²⁴ and being citizens of the city (Hemer 1986:137).

1.5.2.7 The Jews in Philadelphia

There appears to be no external evidence for a Jewish community in Philadelphia. A third-century inscription found ten miles east of Philadelphia mentions a 'synagogue of the Hebrews' (Hemer 1986:160). Revelation 3:9 refers to so-called Jews in a synagogue of Satan. Like the Jews in Sardis, they have opposed the Christians, wearing them down so they have little strength. Ignatius (*Phld* 6.1) later mentions persons who are expounding Judaism to the Christians there. Whether these Judaizers came from a local synagogue is unknown.

1.5.2.8 The Jews in Laodicea

Although Revelation makes no mention of Jews in Laodicea, there is literary evidence that such a community existed. The Seleucid resettlement mentioned in relation to Lydian Sardis also included Phrygia. J B Lightfoot (1875:19–20) considered Laodicea and Apamea, the two leading cities of Phrygia, as the likely destinations of these Jews. Cicero (*Flac* 26.68) records that the proconsul Flaccus confiscated twenty pounds of gold bound for Jerusalem at Laodicea. T Reinach, cited by Ramsay (1994:309–10), estimated that this amount indicates an adult Jewish population of 7500, to which must be added women and children.

Josephus (*Ant* 14.241) records a letter from the magistrates of the city to the proconsul Gaius Rabirius acknowledging the receipt of his letter from the envoy of the high priest Hyrcanus. Although epigraphical evidence validating this Jewish presence is lacking, Hemer (1986:183) says 'this may testify only to the Hellenization of the Jewish community.'

1.5.2.9 Conclusion

Acts 19 and Revelation 2–3 are the only New Testament sources for Jews in three of the seven cities. However, other literary, archaeological, and epigraphical evidence suggests a probable Jewish presence in all seven cities. The Jewish and Christian communities in two of these cities are in open conflict. In John's vehement castigation of the synagogues in Smyrna and Philadel-

²⁴Regarding the overwhelming preference for Greek rather than Hebrew in the Jewish inscriptions in Sardis and in Asia Minor as a whole, Seager and Kraabel (1983:189) quip, 'There is a higher percentage of Hebrew in the decorations of the typical American synagogue of today!'

phia 'he is rejecting the Jews as being the "people of God"; but he is also condemning Jewish accommodation to Greek city life' (Thompson 1990:138).

Jews in Asia undoubtedly formed a core of the congregation in each of the seven churches. This core community, because of its morality, literacy, and familiarity with the Old Testament, provided spiritual stability for the pagan converts. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Revelation's pervasive intertextuality with the Old Testament would have struck a resonant chord with this audience. Their familiarity with Israelite prophetic and apocalyptic traditions would be a boon for interpreting the Apocalypse to the wider Greek audience.

1.5.3 The Greeks in the seven cities

1.5.3.1 Introduction

The founding of the Ephesian and Asian churches was discussed earlier (cf supra 1.5.1). The opposition against Paul organized by Demetrius and the silversmiths in Acts 19:23ff was left unresolved following the illegal assembly in the theater at Ephesus. Paul's hasty departure brought an immediate lessening of tensions but the underlying provocation remained. When he looked back on this period of his ministry, Paul wrote 'about the hardships we suffered in Asia, so that we despaired even of life' (2 Cor 1:8). Since the temple of Artemis was the focus of this disturbance as well the source of continued controversy in the second-century *Acts of John*, we will explore its relevance as a background to the Apocalypse.

Hellenistic religion and philosophy posed a continual challenge to the nascent Christian community in Asia. In the early 60s when Paul addressed the Colossians and Laodiceans (Col 4:16), a heretical tendency had insinuated itself into the church. In 1917 M Dibelius (1975:82–90) proposed a mystery cult background related to the oracle of Claros near Ephesus. The Anatolian and Egyptian mystery cults attracted many adherents in Asia, and the oracles at Claros and Didyma were famous throughout the ancient world. Although the precise nature of the Colossian heresy remains disputed (cf O'Brien 1982:xxx–xxxviii), it seems to have included Jewish, gnostic, and pagan elements. C E Arnold (1992a:5–40) likewise sees the use of power terminology in Ephesians, especially in 6:10–18, as directly related to pagan preoccupation with spiritual 'powers' in western Asia Minor during the first century. Finally, the problem of false teaching confronting Timothy in the Ephesian church, according to G D Fee (1988:9), included 'elements of Hellenism, especially an admixture of Greek dualism....'

Literary, epigraphic, and numismatic sources also chronicle the rise of the Roman emperor cult in Asia Minor during this same period. Reference in Revelation 13 to the second beast out of the earth, considered to be the Asian priesthood of the cult, validates the importance of investigating this background. As the church grew throughout Asia and the social and political ramifications of its teaching became increasingly felt, tensions increased between it and the prevailing Greco-Roman culture. We will next explore the pagan religious backgrounds in the seven Asian cities.

1.5.3.2 The Artemis cult in Asia

1.5.3.2(a) The Artemis temple in Ephesus

Commentators, in discussing the religious background of Ephesus, invariably refer to the magnificent temple of Artemis there. Yet most make little more than a reference to its notoriety as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Hemer (1988:425) alone suggests regarding John's Ephesian letter that 'there may also be a background of contrast with the Artemis cult.'

The Artemesium that stood during the New Testament period was actually the fifth temple (E) built on the site in Ephesus. While it is beyond our purpose to give a history of the temple (cf Trell 1989:78ff), several significant events should be mentioned. It was built in the fourth century BC after temple D, built in part by the Lydian king Croesus (6th cent BC), was burned to the ground by an arsonist. The new temple that arose became the largest religious building in the Hellenistic world, about four times the size of the Parthenon. It became a favorite tourist attraction of the ancient world (Casson 1994:287). The cult image associated with this period is the familiar polymaste Artemis depicted on coins and in statues. Whether the appendages are to be identified as bee eggs, ostrich eggs, boiled eggs, bull testicles, or breasts remains unresolved (cf Oster 1990:1725). However, recent scholarship suggests that Artemis was not a goddess of fertility or orgiastic behavior but 'the protector of the family, the provider of political and social stability' (Strelan 1996:93; contra Arnold 1992:25).

1.5.3.2(b) The Artemis temples in Sardis and Magnesia

Other temples to Artemis were located in Asia, one of which was in Sardis. An earthquake shook Sardis in AD 17, severely damaging the city (Strabo *Geog* 12.8.18). The emperor Tiber-

ius generously assisted in the city's reconstruction; however, work on the temple was not completed until the middle of the second century.

Another Artemisium was located southeast of Ephesus at her sister city, Magnesia ad Meandrum, one of the cities addressed by Ignatius. Like the temples in Ephesus and Sardis, it too faced westward. Its altar was modeled after the great altar of Zeus at Pergamum.

1.5.3.2(c) Cult functions in their Asian context

R Oster (1976) and C Arnold (1989) have drawn attention to the importance of the Artemis cult in the Asian background of the New Testament. While the locus of their writings has been mainly Acts and Ephesians, such research has an obvious bearing on understanding Revelation. Oster (1976:32–35) cites three important functions of the Artemisium in Ephesus: (1) economic, as the banking center; (2) civic, as the repository of governmental inscriptions; and (3) asylum, offering protection and succor to debtors and the indigent.

A fourth function—religious—was undoubtedly the most important. The special covenant relationship between the city and her patron deity is evidenced in Acts 19 by the cry raised first by the craftsmen and then by the citizens during the riot: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians' (Μεγάλη ἡ Ἄρτεμις Ἐφεσίων; vv 28, 34). This genitive of possession illustrates the linkage between Artemis and Ephesus. The city clerk quieted the crowd, asking: 'Who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper (νεωκόρον) of the great Artemis and of her image that has fallen from heaven (δισπετοῦς)?' Such comments clearly describe the feelings of the populace toward Artemis in the first century. This neocorate relationship was depicted on Ephesian coins, with one type portraying a woman holding a temple in her outstretched hands (Oster 1982:215–16).

1.5.3.2(d) The Artemis festivals

In Greek mythology the traditional birth of Artemis is nearly identical with the nativity story of the Ephesian Artemis (cf Oster 1990:1706–8). Her birthplace was at a grove called Ortygia; and outside Ephesus was such a place, which the Ephesians identified as the birthplace of the goddess (Strabo *Geog* 14.1.20). The nativity story also has remarkable parallels with the one in Revelation 12, in which John is apparently constructing a Christian antithesis to the prevailing Artemis ethos (cf Yarbro Collins 1976:65–72; 1979:84–86). According to Oster (1990:1711), the birthday of Artemis held each year on the sixth of Thargelion (May–June) 'was one of the larg-

est and most magnificent religious celebrations in Ephesus' liturgical calendar.' A second festival was the Artemesia, held annually during the month of Artemisium (March–April). The festival was especially popular, according to Xenophon of Ephesus (*Ephes* 1.2.2–4), because young men and women traditionally chose their marriage partners there.

Even as the Jews of Asia traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts (Ac 2:9; 21:27; cf 6:9),²⁵ the province's pagan residents thronged to Ephesus to celebrate the Artemis festivals (Arnold 1972:18). Believers in the Asian congregations had undoubtedly made pilgrimages to Ephesus before converting to Christianity. Perhaps this was how Epaphras came into contact with Paul and was converted before returning to Colossae to found the church there (1:7; 4:12). Ignatius, in his letter to the Ephesians (9.2), used a remarkable analogy from his pagan past: 'So you are all companions on the way, God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holy things (θεοφόροι καὶ ναοφόροι, χριστοφόροι, ἄγιοφόροι), in every way adorned with the commandments of Jesus Christ—you in whom I am very glad.' Schoebel (1985:67), citing Dölger, states: 'In 9.2 Ignatius refers to the small religious objects such as miniature temples that were carried in the parades in honor of the Ephesian Diana.' Ramsay (1994:115–16) expands:

Yet the passage sets before the readers in the most vivid way the picture of such a festal scene, with a troop of rejoicing devotees clad in the appropriate garments, bearing their religious symbols and holy things in procession through the streets. That is exactly the scene which was presented to the eyes of all Ephesians several times every year at the great festivals of the goddess; and Ignatius had often seen such processions in his own city of Antioch. He cannot but have known what image his words would call up in the minds of his readers, and he cannot but have intended to call up that image, point by point, and detail after detail.

1.5.3.2(e) Conclusion

C M Thomas (1995) has searched the non-Christian literature from the first century BC to the fourth century AD in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database for references to Ephesus. Of the approximately 350 substantive references, Thomas found that 'fully one-third of the passages referring to Ephesos or things Ephesian refer to the goddess, her sanctuary, or her cult personnel' (:85). Such an emphasis in the secular literature underscores the significance of the cult in Ephesian society. As van Tilborg (1996:68) observes, 'The Artemis temple colours all the activities in the city in a way which can very well be compared to the function of the temple in Jerusalem.' Thus the Artemesium and its festivals undoubtedly constituted an ongoing challenge to the Christians in John's audience.

²⁵H Ulgard (1989) is a recent advocate of the thesis that the Feast of Tabernacles is alluded to in Revelation, particularly in 7:9–17.

In the *Acts of John* 42 John himself determines the ultimate fate of the Artemis temple. After he preached to the residents of Ephesus, 'the altar of Artemis suddenly split into many parts, and the oblations put up in the temple suddenly fell to the ground, and its glory broke, and so did more than seven of the idols. And half of the temple fell down, so that when the roof came down, the priest also was killed at one stroke.' The truth is that the final temple E was destroyed by the Goths (ca AD 262) and, with the Christianization of the empire, never rebuilt.

1.5.3.3 The general religious background

Although the seven cities shared a common Artemis background, each city had its own distinct religious traditions. These traditions were expressed in the worship of various Greek and Egyptian gods. The role of religion during this period has been summarized by S Mitchell (1993:1.113): 'Religious activity in the cities of the empire was, with rare exceptions, explicit and public; often involving the whole community in unified celebration of the gods. Its significance lay in rituals which all could observe and in which many citizens participated. These range from prayer, sacrifice, solemn ceremony, and religious processions to feasts, games and festivals.' We will briefly survey the religious background of each city.

1.5.3.3(a) The religious background of Ephesus

While the worship of Artemis is the predominant religious background, other spiritual forces must be mentioned. D Knibbe (1978:490–503) identifies fourteen other Greek deities, including Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Apollo, with a history in first-century Ephesus. Apollo was especially significant in Ephesian mythology because he and his sister Artemis were born to Leto in a nearby sacred grove called Ortygia (Oster 1976:28n33).

D E Aune (1988:1312) believes that John in chapter 12 has rewritten a familiar Hellenistic combat myth: 'The particular myth John used is the Greek Leto-Apollo-Python myth. The goddess Leto, pregnant with Apollo, was pursued by the dragon Python. Leto fled to a distant island and eventually gave birth to Apollo who, when just four days old, killed Python.' To this myth John has prefixed the image of the woman in heaven who appears as the queen of the cosmos Artemis (:1313). Bauckham (1993a:197) concurs: 'Because of the dragon's connexion with Apollo's birth, the case for supposing that Revelation 12:1–4 was deliberately intended to recall this story seems a good one.'

The city was also renowned as a center for magical practices (cf supra 1.4.8). Foremost among these are the so-called 'Ephesian letters' ('Εφέσια γράμματα). These written magical spells, according to C E Arnold (1992:15), were thought to be 'laden with apotropaic power, that is, in the warding off of evil demons.' Acts 19:19 shows that a number of new converts had been involved in sorcery. Their determination to renounce such practices is evidenced by their burning, rather than selling, these scrolls valued at 50,000 day's wages. Revelation has more references to sorcery than any other New Testament book (cf D E Aune 1987; J E Elliott 1993). Except for a reference in Galatians 5:20, the *φαρμακία* word group occurs exclusively in Revelation—*φαρμακία* (18:23); *φάρμακον* (9:21); and *φάρμακος* (21:8; 22:15).

1.5.3.3(b) The religious background of Smyrna

The only known temple of significance, apart from that of the emperor cult, was the temple to the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele near Smyrna's harbor (Akurgal 1976:848).

1.5.3.3(c) The religious background of Pergamum

The four patron deities of Pergamum were Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, and Asclepius, all of which appear frequently on the city's coinage (Ramsay 1898:3.750). Lohmeyer (1953:25) believes that the throne of Satan (Rv 2:13) 'ist wohl der große Zeusaltar verstanden.' The monumental altar of Zeus the Savior (Σωτήρ) dominated the acropolis rising 1000 feet above the Caicus River valley. W Barclay (1957:51) vividly describes the scene in John's day: 'All day long this altar smoked with the smoke of countless sacrifices to Olympian Zeus. It dominated the city. No one could fail to see it; the eye of anyone in Pergamos was drawn to it. As it stood there on its jutting ledge on the hillside it would look like nothing so much as a great seat or throne.' John's vision of the smoke of incense rising off the golden altar to the heavenly throne (Rv 8:3–4) probably brought associations with the altar of Zeus to the minds of the Pergamene believers.

Just above the Zeus altar on its own terrace was the smaller temple of Athena. Akurgal (1993:76) writes: 'In western Anatolia, it seems that the most important temple of the city belonged traditionally to the goddess Athena.' Tribute was given to Athena as the Victory-Bearer (Νικηφόρος), and many dedications are extant attesting to her ability to give victory (Hansen 1971:448–50). Given the importance of the victor motif in Revelation (cf infra ch 5), Athena Nike's prominent role in Asia must be considered.

Across the valley to the southwest was the renowned healing sanctuary of Asclepius, or Aesculapius as the Romans called him. After Epidaurus, it was the most famous Asclepium in the ancient world, attracting patients from a wide area. Asclepius' characteristic title was also Σωτήρ. During the Roman period the cult of Asclepius 'came to surpass those of all other gods in importance' (Hansen 1947:444). Sick and infirmed travelers 'might be seen on the roads day in and day out...wending their way to the sanctuaries of the healing gods, of Asclepius in particular' (Casson 1994:82). Celebrations to Asclepius also drew pilgrims from throughout the Aegean. Lucian (*Icar* 24) records that Pergamum along with Delphi were places 'where they all run and celebrate solemn festivals.' Edelstein & Edelstein (1945:2.65) believe that Asclepius became perhaps the 'most significant and most powerful antagonist in the spiritual struggle that ensued between paganism and Christianity.'

The serpent/dragon imagery, represented prominently in Revelation 12, is derived from a number of sources, particularly the story of the Fall in Genesis (cf Beckwith 1919:612ff). Yet among these sources should be included the serpent imagery of Asclepius. 'Asclepius was always shown with a serpent, usually carrying a staff about which a serpent was coiled' (Avery 1962:178). Real snakes were a part of the healing cure in the Asclepium. One such healing is recorded in an inscription from Epidaurus (Edelstein & Edelstein 1945:1.§423.17; cf Pausanias 2.27.3):

A man had his toe healed by a serpent. He, suffering dreadfully from a malignant sore in his toe, during the daytime was taken outside by the servants of the Temple and set upon a seat. When sleep came upon him, then a snake issued from the Abaton and healed the toe with its tongue, and thereafter went back again to the Abaton. When the patient woke up and was healed he said that he had seen a vision: it seemed to him that a youth with a beautiful appearance had put a drug upon his toe.

Bauckham (1993a:195–96) notes that 'snakes were also used to represent the god in the Dionysiac mysteries and the rites of the Phrygian Sabazios: they symbolized sexual and mystical union with the god. Serpents were associated with the cult of Isis...and with the cult of the local goddess (Cybele) at Sardis.' And at Pergamum 'the serpent was associated with all three major cults, of Asklepios, Dionysos, and Zeus.'

Ramsay (1994:210, 211) displays the obverse and reverse of a Pergamene cistophorus with the serpent prominently represented, and believes that 'such symbolism proves that the converted pagan readers for whom the Apocalypse was originally written were predisposed through their education and the whole spirit of contemporary society to regard visual forms, beasts, human figures, composite monsters, objects of nature, or articles of human manufacture, when mentioned in a work of this class, as symbols indicative of religious ideas.'

Bauckham (1993a:196) concurs that 'these associations cannot be easily dismissed as irrelevant, for in the image of the snake John appears to have selected precisely the most pervasive image of pagan divinity in the area of his churches...and that he intends a broader polemic against the pagan cults of the seven cities seems quite possible.'

1.5.3.3(d) The religious background of Thyatira

Inscriptions provide some knowledge of the objects of local worship. The local god was called Helios Pythius Tyrimnaeus Apollo, who represented a syncretistic conception of Lydian, Macedonian, and Greek deities (Hemer 1986:110). Outside the city was a shrine of the oriental Sibyl Sambathe in a sacred precinct of the Chaldeans. Ramsay (1898:4.758) asserts as certain 'that this shrine was a seat of soothsaying, and that a prophetess was the recipient of inspiration and uttered the oracles at the shrine.' A locally organized civic cult of Rome and Augustus was dedicated before 2 BC (Mitchell 1993:100, 102). Little archaeological work has been done in the city, so knowledge about its temples is limited.

1.5.3.3(e) The religious background of Sardis

Following the earthquake that devastated Sardis in AD 17, Tiberius promised ten million sesterces for rebuilding of the city and remitted taxes for five years (Tacitus *An* 2.37). He was heralded as the 'Founder of the City,' and Sardis renamed itself Caesareia Sardianeon in gratitude (Hanfmann et al 1983:144). Nine years later the city lost its bid to become the second neocorate for the emperor cult in Asia (Tacitus *An* 4.56). Apart from the temple of Artemis and the Jewish synagogue, there appears to be little other significant religious activity during the first century, although numismatic evidence shows renewed interest in Zeus Lydios, the Kore of Sardis (Hanfmann et al 1983:144).

1.5.3.3(f) The religious background of Philadelphia

'Philadelphia had so many gods and so many temples that sometimes men called her "little Athens." To walk through her temple-scattered streets was to be reminded of Athens, the centre of the worship of the Olympian gods.' This fanciful and exaggerated description by W Barclay (1957:98) begs correction. In fact, the city had few religious traditions. As the newest of the seven cities, Philadelphia was founded in the middle of the second century BC either by Eumenes II or by his brother Attalus II. Archaeological excavations have been limited because

of the presence of the modern city over the ancient remains (Hemer 1986:154). An inscription from around 100 BC documents the presence of cultic altars in the city for at least ten gods and goddesses (cf Boring et al 1995:§771).

1.5.3.3(g) The religious background of Laodicea

Pliny the elder (*NHist* 5.105) notes that Diospolis ('city of Zeus') was the first settlement built on the site. Zeus was apparently the chief deity of this early city and of Laodicea also (Bruce 1992:4.229). The religious center of the Lycus valley was the temple of the Anatolian deity Men Karou, located fifteen miles west of Laodicea. The temple sponsored the leading medical school of Phrygia (Strabo *Geog* 12.8.20). Bruce writes, 'Over and above their worship of Zeus and Men, the Laodiceans consulted the oracle of Apollo at Klaros in Ionia, to which they sent an annual delegation' (1992:4.230). Klaros lay twelve miles northwest of Ephesus, which itself was one hundred miles west of Laodicea. Inscriptions found at the shrine verify that Laodicea was one of the oracle's most faithful clients (Bean 1979:215). In AD 26 Laodicea was one of the cities that competed for the neocorate of the new imperial cult temple. It was passed over because of a lack of resources for the task (Tacitus *An* 4.55).

1.5.3.3(h) Conclusion

From paganism came the Greek converts to Christianity. Several of the problems reflected in John's seven letters came either directly or indirectly from conflicts with this religious background. Bauckham (1993a:196n75) validates the importance of this survey, stating that 'the imperial cult was not the only form in which pagan religion affected the seven churches: the problem at Thyatira was evidently one of compromise with the ordinary socio-religious life of the city trade guilds. John was fighting on several fronts, and in chapter 12 required a symbol of evil more fundamental than the imperial cult.'

1.5.3.4 The emperor cult in Asia

1.5.3.4(a) Introduction

The early imperial period saw the rise of the emperor cult, with Anatolia becoming a key center. Commenting on its distribution in Asia, L L Thompson (1990:159) writes: 'Five of the seven cities had imperial altars (all but Philadelphia and Laodicea), six had imperial temples (all but

Thyatira), and five had imperial priests (all but Philadelphia and Laodicea).’ This statement by Thompson, who draws his observation from several maps in S R F Price’s definitive work *Rituals and Power* (1984:xxii–xxiv), is misleading. Price’s study covers the first three centuries AD, so to locate broad imperial cult activity in the seven cities, as Thompson does, is anachronistic. Because numerous studies have explored the relationship of Asian Christianity to the emperor cult, particularly in regard to persecution (cf Swete 1909:lxviii–xciii; Botha 1988), we will only survey the types of cult activity found in the pertinent cities during the first century.

1.5.3.4(b) The emperor cult in Ephesus

The Ephesians founded a cult of Roma soon after the Romans gained hegemony in 133 BC (Mellor 1975:57). In 29 BC Augustus granted the city the right to dedicate a sacred precinct (τέμενος) to Dea Roma and Divus Julius, commanding that the Roman residents should honor these two deities (Cassius Dio 51.20.6–7). A cistophoric tetradrachma minted in Ephesus (ca 41–42) during the reign of Claudius provides a striking coin type of this precinct (Arslan 1992:30, 41). The Greeks wanted their own temple, and ‘by 6 BC the Ephesians had built a temple of Roma and Augustus in, or adjoining, the precinct of the Artemesium’ (Mellor 1975:138). In AD 26 Tiberius denied Ephesus the privilege of building the province’s second imperial cult temple, because it was already the temple keeper of the Artemesium (Tacitus *An* 4.55). Ephesus became ‘twice *neokoros*’ in AD 89/90 when Domitian built the temple of the Sebastoi, the fourth temple to the imperial cult in the province of Asia. S Friesen (1994:25ff) sees the building of this temple as the *Sitz im Leben* for the tensions with the state as depicted in Revelation 13.

1.5.3.4(c) The emperor cult in Smyrna

The first temple in Anatolia for the deity Roma was erected in Smyrna in 195 BC (Tacitus *An* 4.56). Mellor (1975:16n19) suggests ‘that the Smyrnaeans were the first to establish a cult to Rome’—anywhere! Even at this early date, the city was willing to ally herself boldly with Rome in spite of Seleucid encroachment. Roman sentiment was reciprocated, as is indicated by Cicero (*Phil* 11.2.5) who called Smyrna ‘the city of our most faithful and most ancient allies.’

Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:30) believes that ‘an allusion to the imperial cult and to the goddess Roma is probably intended in Revelation 12, since the “woman clothed with the sun” clearly is the anti-image of Babylon.’ This identification is problematic, however. Mellor

(1975:111ff) in his discussion of Roma's epithets provides no evidence that she was ever called the 'queen of heaven' or that her child was 'celebrated as the "world's savior" and as sun-god Apollo.' Aune's link of chapter 12 (cf supra 1.5.2.3) with the Apollo-Leto-Python myth is more tenable.

In AD 26 Tiberius chose Smyrna to become the *neokoros* for the second temple of the imperial cult in Asia. The city was chosen for the honor over eleven other Asian cities, including Pergamum, Sardis, Laodicea, and Ephesus (Tacitus *An* 4.55). This temple was probably converted from the earlier temple of Roma built in 195 BC (Mellor 1975:135n10).

1.5.3.4(d) The emperor cult in Pergamum

The first temple in Asia dedicated to the imperial cult was built here by Augustus in 29 BC (Cassius Dio 51.20.7). The site of the temple is unknown, but it was probably in the civic center located at the foot of the acropolis (Price 1984:137). Pergamum's selection came from its prominence as capital of the old Attalid empire and first seat of the newly constituted Roman province (129 BC). Mellor (1975:80) notes that it had also become 'the religious and political center of the Koinon of Asia—the organization of the cities of Asia.' The principal official of the *koinon* was the cult's chief priest who was chosen annually (Arnold 1972:20). This official is regarded by most commentators as the second beast out of the earth (Rv 13:11–17). Whether Pergamum or Ephesus was the *de facto* capital of the province in the first century remains an open question (Hemer 1986:82–84). The identification of Pergamum as the throne of Satan (Rv 2:13) almost certainly refers in part to the presence of the imperial cult, which 'was the only temple of the province of Asia for more than half a century (29 BC–26 AD) and so the officials of the Koinon gathered there' (Mellor 1975:141; contra Schmitz 1965:3.166).

1.5.3.4(e) Conclusion

Pergamum, Smyrna, and Ephesus were neocorates for the emperor cult in Asia during the first century. Whether emperor worship met any religious felt needs of the populace has been questioned. However, P J J Botha (1988:90) asserts that in the Asian cities the cult 'expressed genuine religious content' and that it 'was designed to express εὐσεβεία.' The emperor as an incarnation of the divine brought order and stability to daily life, which was often viewed as governed by the hands of a capricious Fate. Emperor worship 'was one of the ways in which Romans themselves and provincials alongside them defined their own relationship with a new

political phenomenon, an emperor whose powers and charisma were so transcendent that he appeared to them as both man and god' (Mitchell 1993:1.103).²⁶

1.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed key information that serves as the background for the promises in Revelation. The difficult issue of authorship was addressed. Although the title 'apostle' is never used in relation to John, several factors suggest that John's authoritative role with the churches would be compatible with that designation. It was concluded that John identified himself with the role of prophet because of his prophetic experiences and Revelation's repeated self-description as a prophecy. The provenance of the letter on the island of Patmos was discussed as well as the geographical importance of its destination—seven churches in the province of Asia. It was suggested that the initial city with a church that the Apocalypse passed through was Miletus, not Ephesus. The possible identity of the reader mentioned in 1:3 and his responsibilities were discussed. He is believed to be a disciple of John and an individual who likewise exercised spiritual authority in the Asian congregations.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the audience—Jews and Greeks—who were the initial hearers of John's prophecy. A Jewish population was likely resident in each of the seven cities. The core of the nascent church was Jewish, largely stemming from Paul's evangelistic efforts in the province. The religious background of the Greeks was diverse. Artemis, with her main temple in Ephesus, was the primary Greek religious cult of the region. The older Greek deities remained particularly strong in the three coastal cities, while the traditional Phrygian deities remained strong in Laodicea. Asia was also a center of the newly formed emperor cult. The rise of the emperor cult brought intense competition among all the cities to become the neocorate for its temple. While Pergamum became the seat of the initial neocorate under Augustus, other temples were built in Smyrna and Ephesus during the first century. In the next chapter four situations related to the churches, the Roman Empire, Jesus, and John will be explored.

²⁶Oddly, provincial coinage failed to honor the emperor as the imperial cult did. While the portrait of the emperor replaced the imagery of deities on the obverses of coins, the emperor is depicted in human, not divine, form. 'The use of the lituus indicates that many of the portraits are intended to show the emperor in a human, priestly, capacity' (Burnett et al 1992:1.47). Instead it is the empresses who are likened to various goddesses using divine symbolism.

CHAPTER 2: THE SITUATIONS OF REVELATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Within the book of Revelation four major situations are presented. These perspectives become apparent as John's locus changes constantly between and within heaven and earth. First is the rhetorical situation of the seven churches, seen especially in the first three chapters. Although chapters 4–22 never forget this original audience, the visionary perspective there expands to show the heavenly church as well. The exigence of the Asian churches is revealed in their rhetorical situation.

The historical situation of the Roman Empire is glimpsed throughout Revelation. Whether that situation best fits the decade of the 60s or the 90s will be discussed. This section closes with a look at the sociological perspective of perceived crisis.

The apocalyptic situation of Jesus is presented next. The question of genre from the perspective of Revelation 1:1 will be reopened. Because Revelation 2–3 are in fact words from Jesus, who was dead and now lives again (1:18), we will discuss the thematic emphasis that characterizes his words in the Apocalypse. The Synoptic traditions as they relate to the Apocalypse are examined. This perspective moves beyond the temporal *Sitz im Leben* to the eternal eschatological issues facing the churches.

The prophetic situation of John is explored lastly. In Chapter 1 we established that John is a prophet to the Asian churches and that Revelation describes itself as a prophecy six times. Here the Old Testament prophets and traditions that influenced him are delineated. We attempt from internal evidence to discover where temporally John saw himself in relationship to his prophecy. We close with a discussion of Revelation as predictive prophecy.

It is often said that John nowhere quotes from the Old or New Testaments. It is true that he never uses a formal introduction, such as 'It is written.' Instead he utilizes a literary technique called intertextuality. His intertextual allusions number in the hundreds. Within Revelation *intra*textuality is likewise evidenced by the frequent repetition of names, images, times, etc. Recognition of both phenomena will assist in interpreting otherwise obscure and difficult passages. Likewise John's multivalent use of images must be recognized. Ulfgard (1989:84) has expressed well this feature of Revelation's style: 'Rev's details seldom have only *one* fixed, ab-

solute meaning, and its symbolic language may often be understood in mutually complementary ways.' We begin now with the rhetorical situation of the church.

2.2 THE RHETORICAL SITUATION OF THE CHURCH

The church in the book of Revelation is portrayed in two dimensions—the local Asian churches which represent the church on her way to the eschaton and the glorified universal church in heaven. The situation of the believers in the seven churches, however, is interrelated with that of the heavenly saints. Long (1994:404–5) suggests that the narrative movement between narrator(s) and reader(s) is 'a movement from a single, compliant readership (1:9) to the diverse, seemingly troublesome, and complex readership of chapters 2–3, and back to a single-community readership from chapter 4 onwards.' We disagree that such a chiasmically arranged movement is part of John's purview, for his audience remains the same throughout the book.

2.2.1 The definition of rhetorical situation

L F Bitzer (1968:6) defines rhetorical situation as 'a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence.' In Chapter 1 (cf supra 1.5) the 'persons' were identified as the Jewish and Greek audience; the 'objects' were the Jewish and Greek religious backgrounds. We will examine the 'events' later in this chapter as the historical situation of the Roman Empire.

G A Kennedy (1984:35) clarifies: 'What Bitzer means by an "exigence" is a situation under which an individual is called upon to make some response: the response made is conditioned by the situation and in turn has some possibility of affecting the situation or what follows from it.' The exigences of the churches as a group are manifested in several dimensions—political, socio-religious, and eschatological—often in combination. *First*, the churches are experiencing present or imminent persecution from the ruling empire, which itself is in political turmoil. This will be explored further under the historical situation. *Second*, the churches are being pressured by social and religious forces in their pagan and Jewish environment. These backgrounds were reviewed in Chapter 1 and will be explored passim throughout this chapter. *Third*, the churches are largely unprepared for the soon coming of Jesus and the eschatological kingdom they will inherit. The divine judgments that have begun against the enemies of God, including the Jews,

will soon fall upon the churches unless they repent. The topics of parousia and judgment will be explored further under the apocalyptic and prophetic situations.

2.2.2 The rhetorical situation of the seven churches

While the Asian churches share a common rhetorical situation, each church likewise has its own rhetorical situation. Kirby (1988:199) aptly states that John 'presents the rhetorical exigence of the actual text of ch. 2–3 as primarily involving Jesus, who dictates the letters; this exigence stems from the activities of the seven churches mentioned.' Here we will examine the text of the seven letters to determine each church's rhetorical situation. The exigences will be categorized as external or internal threats.

2.2.2.1 The church of Ephesus

The Ephesian church is commended for its labor without wearying, its endurance (2x), and its stand against evil while standing for the name of Christ (2:2–3). The background of the Artemis cult (cf supra 1.5.3.2(a)) is relevant here because it continued as 'a strong and vital force in the city of Ephesus long after Christianity arrived. Artemis' worshippers offered strong and tenacious resistance to the intrusion of Christianity' (Oster 1976:29). The ever-present threat of the Artemisium would require vigilance on the part of this church and its leaders. Its ongoing struggle could take a toll on the community and in part account for losing its first love, for which the church is rebuked.

False apostles were also seeking a platform to promulgate their heresies, but they had been exposed (v 2). The Nicolaitans are first mentioned in this letter (v 6). Long (1994:407) acutely observes, 'The fact that the narrator knows that *μισείς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν* (2:6) suggests that the reader is to imagine a prior relationship between John and the Church, which makes the supposition that they would know what he is talking about plausible.' If our identification of this group with those of the Jezebel party in Thyatira is correct (cf infra 3.5.3), eating in the pagan temples is also a concern for John. The congregation has passed the test, enduring great internal tension as it has sought to maintain orthodoxy and orthopraxy in its community life (v 2). However, this struggle has produced a rigid fundamentalism and a loss of spiritual vitality. For this the church is called to repentance and to return to its first love (vv 4–5). If the church cannot regain its former spirituality, it is threatened with losing its leading role among the

churches of Asia (v 5). There is no explicit external threat mentioned either from the Jewish community or from the Roman authorities.

2.2.2.2 The church of Smyrna

The Smyrneans face persecution that may result in death. Jesus is the prototype victor-martyr who himself was killed and now lives again (2:8). Because of slander by the Jews, the church has suffered tribulation and poverty (v 9). Their economic deprivation is about to escalate into physical persecution with imprisonment and probable death awaiting some of them. However, they are not to be fearful because their suffering will last for a limited time—just ten days (v 10). Tribulation has apparently purged the church of all but the faithful, hence no internal threat exists and therefore no call to repentance is given. The threat is external with economic sanctions and tribulation, with the Jews inciting the Roman authorities to act against the Christians.

2.2.2.3 The church of Pergamum

The dual metaphors of 'double-edged sword' and 'throne of Satan' (2:12–13) allude to the *ius gladii* of the Romans whose seat of authority was in Pergamum. Jesus with his spiritual sword is contrasted with the temporal power of the proconsul. The city was also the center of the emperor cult in Asia (cf supra 1.5.3.4(d)), and persecution was occurring because the believers refused to renounce the name of Jesus and to deny their faith (v 13). The congregation in Pergamum has already experienced martyrdom in its midst—someone named Antipas, the only other person besides John to be named in the book. Antipas was probably a leader in the church, and his execution was intended to send a message that compliance to the authorities was the expedient thing to do.

During Israel's wilderness wanderings she encountered the prophet Balaam from Pethor (Nm 22–25). Because of his advice, Moab seduced the Israelites through immorality, making Balaam the prototypical false prophet in the New Testament (cf 2 Pt 2:15; Jude 11). A Balaam-like threat existed in Pergamum, where some members apparently thought they could sacrifice to the emperor and remain Christians (v 14). Holman (1982:347–48), citing second-century Christian sources, suggests that the problem is a form of incipient gnosticism. Instead it seems more a case of pagan syncretism. The false teaching of the Nicolaitan party is also represented (v 15). If the believers do not repent from eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual

immorality,¹ Christ promises to make war against those who are compromising his church (v 16). In this church the threat is both external and internal.

2.2.2.4 The church of Thyatira

The congregation is commended generously for its love, labor, service, and endurance (2:19). However, the Thyatirans are threatened with internal corruption by a false prophetess called Jezebel who is encouraging them to eat idol meat and to commit sexual immorality (v 20). Why such activity was encouraged is not articulated; however, Ramsay (1994:251ff) is probably correct when he suggests that Jezebel was condoning participation in the temple banquets of trade guilds to ensure continued membership for the Christians. Jezebel's activities and their fruit in the congregation is roundly condemned (v 21). In fact, death is promised to those members who do not repent—martyrdom (if we can call it that) by the Lord, not for the Lord (v 22). This judgment will be a sign to all the churches (cf *infra* 4.9.4) that such antinomian behavior will not be tolerated (v 23). A remnant of the church, apparently with minimal influence, has not gone along with Jezebel's persuasive teaching (v 24). This group is told simply to maintain its witness (v 25). The threat in this church is internal.

2.2.2.5 The church of Sardis

The church in Sardis has a name (i.e., reputation) that it is alive, but from a divine perspective is moribund (3:1–2). It has made little spiritual impact on the city, perhaps because of religious and political pressures mentioned earlier (cf *supra* 1.5.2.6; 1.5.3.3(e)). The church is to recall to its spiritual beginnings when the members initially heard and received the gospel. If it does not repent and become watchful, Jesus promises to come unexpectedly like a thief (v 3). The church's 'name' (a wordplay occurs with *ὄνομα*) is contrasted with the few names (i.e., persons) who have maintained their moral worthiness before God (v 4). The internal threat is apathy, not false doctrine. No overt outside pressures from the Jews or the Romans are mentioned.

2.2.2.6 The church of Philadelphia

Jesus is portrayed as having the key of David, whose spiritual authority can open or close any door (3:7). Although the church has been too weak to open its own door of opportunity, it has

¹When the third-century martyr Pionius was asked to sacrifice before the imperial cult in Smyrna, he likewise cited the negative example of the Jews at Beth-Peor (*MPion* 4.11).

not denied Jesus. Because the believers have been faithful to keep the word, Jesus himself promises to open a door for them (v 8). Like the Smyrnan church, the Philadelphians are experiencing pressures from the so-called Jews of the synagogue of Satan (v 9). However, persecution has not occurred, although Jewish harassment is apparently responsible for the church's weakened condition. In some public act of worship, the Jews will be made to acknowledge Jesus' love for the church (v 9). A universal hour of trial is predicted for the enemies of the church, which will be exempt because of its endurance (v 10). The threat is external here.

2.2.2.7 The church of Laodicea

The Laodicean church, unlike the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia, has prospered materially. This prosperity has produced spiritual tepidity, making its members lukewarm (3:16). Whereas the Sardians are working hard to appear alive by making a name for itself, the Laodiceans are content to be neither hot nor cold and are self-deceived about their true condition of spiritual poverty and blindness (v 17; cf Long 1994:406). They are told to buy gold refined in the crucible of suffering and white garments to cover the shame of their nakedness. They are likewise told to anoint their eyes with salve to cure their spiritual blindness (v 18). Like the other churches who are rebuked, the Laodiceans are challenged to repent (v 19). However, Laodicea is the only church to receive no word of praise. No outside pressures are mentioned; instead the threat is internal.

2.2.2.8 Conclusion

This brief review of the seven churches shows great diversity in their rhetorical situations (cf Long 1994:405–6 who calls this social location). Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea are all threatened internally—Ephesus and Thyatira by false teaching; Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea by spiritual lethargy and self-deception (cf Strand 1990:242). One caveat should be noted: external forces have doubtless contributed to the internal problems. For example, the Artemis cults in Ephesus and Sardis were strong, while in Thyatira and Laodicea economic and vocational pressures were significant. Smyrna and Philadelphia are suffering externally because of the Jews; only the Smyrneans, however, will suffer physically. Pergamum alone is threatened internally and externally. One of its members has already been martyred. Yet external persecution has failed to resolve the divisions based on false teaching within the congregation. These situations are outlined in the following chart:

<u>Church</u>	<u>Threat</u>	<u>Persecutor</u>	<u>Spiritual problem</u>
Ephesus	Internal		Loss of first love; false apostles/Nicolaitans
Smyrna	External	Jews	
Pergamum	External/Internal	Romans	Balaamites/Nicolaitans
Thyatira	Internal		Jezebelites
Sardis	Internal		Spiritually dead
Philadelphia	External	Jews	
Laodicea	Internal		Spiritually lukewarm

2.2.3 The rhetorical situation of the heavenly church

The past situation of the heavenly church relates directly to the present situation of the Asian congregations. For the church beyond Asia was persecuted and is now in heaven portrayed as survivors of these persecutions. This heavenly church is portrayed in unfolding visions throughout Revelation. Its rhetorical situation is significant because periodic glimpses of the heavenly destiny of the martyrs provides a 'pie in the sky' for the Asian believers still remaining. Identifying the visionary location of each appearance is important. For as C Rogers (1990:75) importantly notes, Revelation 'has an upstairs/downstairs quality about it: one has to be aware of what is taking place in heaven and what is taking place on earth.' The premise of B Malina's new commentary (1995)—that John is an astral prophet who interprets the sky according to Christ's work—surely misses the point. The sky in which John is primarily interested is not the sun, moon, and stars, but its inhabitants—the Triune God, the angels, and the exalted church.

At this point in our investigation we will be content simply to observe what these texts tell us about the heavenly church. Since these texts play a crucial role in the fulfillment of the promises, we will postpone a detailed exegesis of them until Chapter 7. Also a chart (cf infra 5.3.3.1), presented under the discussion of the identity of the martyrs, outlines the various names given to the members of the earthly church and the heavenly church and demonstrates the continuity of the two groups.

2.2.3.1 The church and the seal judgments

2.2.3.1(a) The fifth seal

The opening of the fifth seal (6:9–11) reveals a group of martyrs under the heavenly altar. Crying for divine vengeance, they are told to wait a short time (cf 20:3) until the rest of their brothers are killed and then given a white robe. This is the first clue in Revelation that a larger

persecution has occurred beyond that mentioned among the seven churches. The churches in Asia are perhaps aware of this larger persecution but, except for Smyrna and Pergamum, it has not affected them yet.

2.2.3.1(b) The interlude after the sixth seal

A larger group whose number is incalculable is seen in the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. They are called the great multitude (7:9), representing every language and people group on the earth. They are holding palm branches and wearing white robes, which was their due after shedding blood in the great tribulation (7:13–14). A large-scale martyrdom is portrayed in this particular heavenly vision.

2.2.3.2 The church and the trumpet judgments

In the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets the two witnesses are presented (11:3ff). After they prophesy 1260 days, the beast kills them and leaves their bodies in the street of the great city for three and a half days. At the end of this period God raises them from the dead and takes them into heaven. These two prophetic witnesses are considered by many commentators to represent the church which has been called to witness even to death (cf Mounce 1977:223).

2.2.3.3 The church and the dragon

After the dragon and his angels are thrown down to earth by Michael and the angels, a loud voice, identified by Ladd (1972:172) as perhaps one of the martyrs of 6:9–11,² is heard in heaven (12:10–12). Those who died, yet triumphed through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, are encouraged to rejoice because the accuser of their brothers has been cast down. However, the short time that the devil is loosed upon the earth will be a time of great wrath.

2.2.3.4 The church and the beast

The appearance of the beast forebodes evil for the church, for he is given power to conquer it (13:7). Here appears the only other occurrence in the book, apart from the seven letters, of the watch phrase 'he who has an ear, let him hear' (v 9; cf infra 4.12.1). What the reader hears

²Note the threefold use of ψυχή in 6:9, 12:11, and 20:4.

concerns imprisonment and further: 'If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed' (v 10). Thus some who refuse to worship the beast will die for their resistance. The saints are called to endurance and faithfulness in the face of this threat (v 10).

2.2.3.5 The church and the bowl judgments

Before the bowls are poured out, John sees the martyrs standing by the heavenly sea of glass. They have triumphed over the beast, his image, and the number of his name (15:2). With harps in their hands they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (vv 3–4).

The outpouring of the third bowl turns the earth's rivers and springs into blood (16:4). This judgment was the just recompense for shedding the blood of both saints and prophets (v 6). The angel in charge of the altar responds: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments' (v 7). God's judgments are directly connected to the malicious and vengeful treatment given to his people on earth (i e, *lex talionis*; cf Ex 21:23–24; Dt 19:21; 2 Th 1:6).

2.2.3.6 The church and Babylon

The great harlot is seen drunk with the blood of the saints and witnesses to Jesus (17:6). The destruction of Babylon/Rome in chapter 18 closes with an elaboration of this theme: 'In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth' (v 24). Thus the great earthly city, rather than being a friend to the people of God, was instead their enemy. Not only were believers killed within her environs, but she was also responsible for martyrdoms within the boundaries of her empire. The response of the heavenly multitude to Babylon's destruction was praise to God, for 'he has avenged on her the blood of his servants' (19:2). Babylon had committed many sins, but primarily 'God has judged her for the way she treated you' (i e, the saints, apostles, and prophets; 18:20).

2.2.3.7 The church and the wedding supper of the Lamb

In 19:5 a voice from the throne encourages the slaves of God to praise the Lord. This great heavenly multitude, after shouting 'Hallelujah!' (v 6), makes an announcement that the wedding of the Lamb has come (v 7). This bride, whose righteous acts as saints have prepared her for the wedding, is dressed in fine linen (v 8).

2.2.3.8 The church in the thousand years

In chapter 20 the souls of those beheaded for their testimony (v 4) come to life again in the first resurrection. Beheading with an ax, along with the sword (cf 13:9), are the only methods of capital punishment specifically mentioned in Revelation.³ These priests of God and of Christ (v 6) reign with Christ in heaven for one thousand years.

2.2.3.9 The church as the holy city, the new Jerusalem

From the new heaven the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descends prepared as a bride for her husband (21:2, 9–10). The proleptic announcement by the saints in 19:7–9 of the wedding supper of the Lamb now find its fulfillment. God's dwelling (σκηνη) is with his church (21:2). The covenant formula reiterating God's unique relationship with his people is recited: 'They will be his people, and God himself will be with them' (v 3; cf Lv 26:12; Jr 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ez 37:27; Zch 8:8; 2 Cor 6:16). The wealth and beauty of the church, in the metaphor of a city, is portrayed as precious and expensive stones (21:11).

2.2.3.10 Conclusion

The situation of the heavenly church can be outlined as follows:

³Swete (1908:262) states that the πέλεκυς was 'the traditional instrument of capital punishment in republican Rome, which, though under the Empire superseded by the sword (Act xii.2), still lingered in the memory of the provincials.' Josephus (Ant 14.125) recounts how Alexander was beheaded at Antioch during the middle of the first century BC.

<u>Revelation</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Martyrs</u>	<u>Identification</u>
6:9–11	Seal 5	Souls under altar crying 'How long...'	White robes
7:9–14	Interlude between seals 6 and 7	Every nation, tribe, people, and language crying 'Salvation...'; out of the great tribulation	Great multitude in white robes holding palm branches
11:3–12	Interlude between trumpets 6 and 7	Two witnesses/prophets killed by beast but resurrected and taken up to heaven	Prophecy 1260 days in sackcloth
12:9–12	Satan expelled from heaven	Did not love their lives so as to shrink from death	Conquered through blood of the Lamb and word of their testimony
13:7–10	Beast out of the sea	Beast conquers saints	Some killed by the sword
15:2–4,	Before bowls	Victorious over beast, image, and mark	Sing song of Moses and Lamb, 'Just and true...'
16:4–7	Bowl 3	Blood poured out to avenge blood of saints and prophets	Voices from altar respond 'True and just...'
17:6; 18:24–19:2	Fall of Babylon	Babylon destroyed because blood of prophets and saints found in her	Great multitude in heaven shouting 'Hallelujah...'
19:5–8	Wedding supper of the Lamb	Saints hear announcement of wedding supper	Great multitude in bright clean linen
20:4–6	1000 years	Souls beheaded come to life and reign for 1000 years	Without beast's mark on forehead or hand
21:1–4, 9ff	Holy city, new Jerusalem	People of God never again to experience death, mourning, crying, or pain	Dressed as bride; shining as precious stones

The portrait of the church on earth and 'in the sky' shows consistently that it has suffered persecution and violent death. Through endurance this great multitude has triumphed despite the opposition of Rome and her demonic agents.

2.2.4 The rhetorical situation of the Asian church in intertextual perspective

The rhetorical situation of the Asian church in Revelation with internal and external threats is likewise the intertextual perspective seen in Acts (external—19:8ff; internal—20:25ff); Colossians (internal—2:8ff); 1 Timothy (internal—1:3–7, 19–20; 4:1–6); 2 Timothy (internal—2:14–19; 3:1–9), and 1 Peter (external—3:12–19). Acts (at least the situations it describes) and Colos-

sians are usually dated prior to Revelation. The dating for 1 and 2 Timothy and 1 Peter is more problematic, since authorship is likewise an issue.

Are there any other New Testament documents whose rhetorical situations suggest congruency with that of the seven churches? J A T Robinson (1976:227) has noted some striking parallels between Revelation, 2 Peter, and Jude that might indicate so. His observation is outlined as follows:

<u>Content Parallels</u>	<u>Revelation</u>	<u>2 Peter</u>	<u>Jude</u>
1. False teachers into error of Balaam	2:14	2:15	11
2. Christians lured into immorality; Into contaminating their clothing;	2:20 3:4	2:14,18; 3:17	23
Into disowning their Master	2:13	2:1	4
3. True and false gnosis contrasted	2:17, 24	1:2-3, 16	8
4. Heretical teachers claim to be shepherds and apostles of flock	2:2		11-12
5. Appeal to remember teaching of true apostles, who are the foundation of the church and its faith	3:3 21:14	1:12; 3:1-2	17 3
6. Day of Christ likened to the thief; Likened to the morning star	3:3; 16:15 2:28; 22:16	3:10 1:19	
7. Existing heavens and earth disappear; To be replaced by the new	6:14; 16:20; 20:11 21:1	3:10 3:13	
8. Fallen angels chained in hell	20:1-3, 7	2:4	6
9. Theme of a thousand years	20:2-7	3:8	

The relationship among these texts is remarkable and suggests similar rhetorical situations. Robinson, of course, used such observations to date the writing of the New Testament before AD 70. The introductory questions related to 2 Peter and Jude are notoriously difficult. Their interdependence has long been recognized, however, and Chase (1898:2.802) correlates fourteen of Jude's twenty-five verses with verses in 2 Peter. The audience of 2 Peter purports to be the same as 1 Peter (3:1), while that of Jude is unstated. There is a strong possibility that Asia Minor is a destination for 2 Peter (Carson et al 1992:439) and for Jude (Bauckham 1983:16).⁴

⁴A relational hypothesis linking 2 Peter and Jude based on geography is this: while Silas (Silvanus) was delivering 1 Peter to the Anatolian churches he obtained a copy of Jude, likewise addressed to some of these churches. Upon his return to Rome he gave a report concerning the ecclesiastical situation of the Asian churches to Peter, who himself could not reply because of the circumstances of his imprisonment. Peter instead gave oral instructions to Silas to write a follow-up letter to the Asian churches in his behalf. Silas then drafted 2 Peter, incorporating portions of Jude to reiterate related themes in that letter.

Dating is even more uncertain with a range from AD 60–160. Bauckham (1983:157) assigns a date of 50–60 for Jude and 75–100 for 2 Peter (:158).

Ramsay (1996b:122) also recognized a relationship among the writings: 'It seems beyond question that this description is drawn from the same class of persons who are alluded to in the messages to Pergamum and Thyatira....A mere allusion to "the way of Balaam" in 2 Peter 1:15 [sic] and "the error of Balaam" in Jude 11 is sufficient to recall the familiar illustration. In both those places the allusion is evidently a current and stereotyped formula.' How this relationship affected dating, he offered: 'On the whole the tone of the messages to Pergamum and Thyatira in Revelation 2 perhaps suggests a more developed stage than 2 Peter 2, after that special temptation or tendency had become a recognized form of thought and life, but still within the church.' Hemer (1986:93) concurs that the technical use of 'Balaam' in Revelation might be derived from an earlier document such as Jude or even 2 Peter. We agree that the co-textual relationship is important in interpreting difficult texts in Revelation (which we will do); however, it is impossible to develop further such relationships among these three books. We conclude by noting that their respective audiences were confronting similar exigences, particularly false teaching and a misunderstanding about the parousia and the eschaton.

2.3 THE HISTORICAL SITUATION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

2.3.1 Background

Two periods have emerged as probable dates for the historical setting of Revelation—after Nero's reign (ca AD 69) and during Domitian's reign (ca AD 95). During the 19th century the early date was favored by scholars, while in the 20th century, following the publication of commentaries by Charles, Swete, and Beckwith the latter became preferred (Wilson 1993:587). This disparity in dating is extraordinary and presupposes two different periods within the church during which Revelation was written. Michaels's (1992:46) conclusion that interpreters should learn to 'live with a considerable degree of uncertainty about its date and historical setting' is perhaps realistic, yet it is critically unsatisfying. Hemer (1986:3) on the other hand says that 'the problem of date, however, is a crucial factor in the historical *Sitz im Leben*.'

The question of date is closely tied to that of authorship. Irenaeus' testimony (*Haer* 5.30.3) that the Revelation was 'seen' at the end of the reign of Domitian has been generally accepted today. Schüssler Fiorenza accepts this date unquestioningly for her literary and historical pre-

suppositions, and in her 1991 commentary gives only a limited discussion on the date, using the 'tradition' of Irenaeus as evidence. J du Rand (1991:232) likewise cites Irenaeus' testimony as 'the strongest external witness.' However, Irenaeus also states that the author of the Gospel and the Apocalypse are one and the same, and that the author is John the disciple of Jesus and one of the Twelve (cf supra 1.2.1). These conclusions Schüssler Fiorenza and most critical scholars have found untenable. I ask again, if Irenaeus' comments are found critically unacceptable on two of three counts, his third comment regarding date should likewise be critically examined (cf Wilson 1993:597). This is particularly true when other external evidence (e.g., Tacitus *Historiae* and Suetonius *Vitae*) provides no corroboration for the widespread persecution under Domitian of which Eusebius later speaks. Although Irenaeus' testimony seems incontrovertible, F J A Hort (1908:xxix), following Weiss, makes this plausible explanation:

Certainly at the beginning of Vespasian's reign Domitian, who first represented him at Rome bore a hateful character (Suet *Dom* 1)... If Domitian in his youth, not yet emperor, was regarded as the future head of the beast, he would in a very true sense be a main subject of the Apocalypse, and the best coming representative of the hostile forces against which St John represented the Church as contending: and it is conceivable that if this were known and remembered, the association of his name with the book might by a possible confusion, after Domitian had come to be known as a persecutor, pass into a tradition that the book was written in his reign.

Feuillet (1965:92–93) argues for a curious combination of early and late dating. John, while actually writing during Domitian's reign, fictitiously antedates his prophecy to the late 60s. He does not do this to deceive his readers or to suggest his prophecies are *ex eventu*; rather 'He merely wishes to take a step backward, and to place himself under Vespasian before the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, in order to see the theological significance of this event, the gravest crisis which the Christian community has had to face to date.' Needless to say, few interpreters have accepted Feuillet's hypothesis.

Again it is beyond the scope of our discussion to review this question in depth. Extensive discussions on Revelation's date can be found in D Guthrie (1990:948–62) and J A du Rand (1991:228–34). Instead we will investigate some texts in Revelation that provide internal clues for dating, before reviewing the empire's historical situation during the decades of the 60s and the 90s as found in later literary sources. Whether a first-century historical crisis played *any* role in the writing of Revelation has recently been questioned by several commentators. A Yarbro Collins has proposed the sociological alternative of a perceived crisis to explain the conflicts pervading John's prophecy. We close with a discussion of the perceived crisis theory, evaluating it in light of the internal and external evidence presented up to that point.

2.3.2 The Roman Empire in Revelation

2.3.2.1 Introduction

S Smalley (1994:40–50) presents in paragraph form a number of arguments for the late and early dates. On sound academic grounds I wish to adopt his format and review other considerations that either emerge from the text or are seldom discussed by him and other commentators. One type of evidence to be used in discussion is Roman coin types produced in the provinces, particularly Asia, during the first century.

R Oster (1982:195) has chided New Testament scholars and historians for failing ‘to give appropriate and significant attention to the analysis and application of data preserved on ancient coins.’ This neglect may in part stem from a misapprehension of the differing purposes of ancient and modern coinage. Ancient governments advertised on coinage because ‘the only announcements which they could be sure that very many people would see were those on coins’ (Grant 1968:11). This was particularly true when the majority of the populace was illiterate (:25; cf supra 1.4.6). While Ramsay and Swete utilized coins to illustrate their volumes on Revelation, inscriptions and portraits on provincial coinage have seldom been used in recent studies on Revelation. Although Revelation is filled with visions, the visual experience of this book is largely subsumed by other considerations. Viewing Roman coins provides a tangible encounter with images that John and his audience would be familiar with. The numismatic windows given by provincial coinage provide us with fresh insights into several difficult issues in the book.

2.3.2.2 Food sacrificed to idols

The issue of εἰδωλόθυτον is mentioned explicitly in the Pergamene (2:14) and Thyatiran (2:20) letters. Ramsay (1996b:119) describes the situation: ‘In both Pergamum and Thyatira some of the Christians still clung to their membership of the pagan associations and shared in the fellowship of the ritual meal. If that evil were not burned out, the whole loose spirit of pagan society, its impurity and its idolatry, would continue to rule in the congregation.’

Eating food sacrificed to idols was one of the four practices from which the Jerusalem council asked Gentile believers to abstain (Ac 15:29; 21:25). Lightfoot (1865:309n1) in fact suggests that the expression οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βᾶρος (2:24) found in the Thyatiran letter ‘looks like a reference to the decree.’ Paul addressed this issue in his first letter to the Corinthians

(8:1ff; 10:19) written from Ephesus about 55. This raging issue that tore apart congregations in the early decades of the Gentile churches appears resolved later. In the *Didache* (6.3; ca AD 100) the command, probably based on the teachings of Paul and John, is simply: ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ εἰδωλοθύτου λίαν πρόσχε, λατρεία γάρ ἐστὶν θεῶν νεκρῶν. When Ignatius wrote his letters to the Asian churches (ca 110), he does not mention the problem of εἰδωλόθυτον. Ramsay (1898:759), who holds to late dating, concedes that the Thyatiran indecision regarding the issue of food sacrificed to idols appears to point to an earlier date than the reign of Domitian.

2.3.2.3 The riches of Laodicea

The earthquake that devastated the Asian cities of the Catacecaumene (i.e., 'burnt land') including Philadelphia and Laodicea in AD 60 would appear to rule out an early date. How could Laodicea in less than a decade be portrayed as rich and wealthy (3:17)? Lightfoot (1875:43) sees no problem of 'only a very few years' between the two.

Laodicea had accepted aid from Rome following earlier earthquakes (Strabo *Geog* 12.8.18; Suet *Tib* 8). However, after the earthquake in 60 only Laodicea among the Asian cities refused to accept Roman financial assistance. Tacitus records that Laodicea 'recovered by its own resources, without assistance from ourselves' (*propriis opibus*; *An* 14.27.1). Citing a building inscription firmly dated to 79 (*CIG* 3935 = *IGRR* 4.845), Hemer (1983:58) believes the surviving building inscriptions in Laodicea suggest a longer time frame more appropriate to a Domitianic date.

A key word in the Laodicean letter is πλουτέω (3:17, 18), which reappears in chapter 18 (vv 3, 15, 19). The Laodicean pride in her own self-accomplishment and financial independence appears to be exemplified in the church's attitude, for the congregation apparently partook of the wealth of its host community. The city's rebuilding need not be complete for this attitude to manifest. The socio-economic situation of Laodicea was a microcosm of Rome's (cf Yarbro Collins 1980:202). The dirge pronounced in chapter 18 decries Babylon's excessive materialism (cf *infra* 2.3.2.13). Through the example of Babylon's destruction, the Laodicean church is again reminded to desist from its present course lest the judgment pronounced on the world's economic system, in which it indulged, would likewise come upon it.

Yarbro Collins (1984:76) concludes that 'this bit of evidence is of no positive help in dating the book.' Yet the exigence of the earthquake and the subsequent Laodicean refusal of aid better suggests an early date in accordance with the church's rhetorical situation in Revelation.

2.3.2.4 The Parthian threat

The common identification of the first rider on a white horse (6:2) with the Parthians is problematic. Boring's (1989:122) statements that Parthia 'was never subdued by the Romans' and that 'the defeat of the Roman armies in the Tigris valley by the Parthian general Vologeses in 62 was still remembered in John's time' are inaccurate and wrongly speculative. As Henderson (1927:308) notes, 'During the first sixty years of the first century of our era the two rival Empires of Rome and Parthia had quarrelled and fought insatiably.' But the situation changed under Nero. The following points on the Parthian campaign are drawn from Henderson's (1903:153–95) incisive analysis, following Tacitus (*An* 13–15 *passim*).

Parthia's threat to Rome was regional, and the Roman campaign was primarily to secure its eastern frontier. Corbulo's conquest of Armenia (AD 59) and victory over the Parthians was total. Only through the folly of the client king Tigranes in 60 and the ineptitude of his replacement Paetus were the Parthians able to regain an advantage by defeating the Romans at Rhandeia (62). Once Corbulo reestablished the Roman position in 63, the Parthians again become supplicants with Tiridates forced to travel to Rome in 65 to receive his crown. The Parthian client king was treated as visiting royalty by Nero, and the emperor was hailed for restoring peace to the empire with his triumph over the Parthians. Tiridates visited the cities of Asia on his return to Parthia, and the impression given to John and the Christians would have been of a submitted monarch rather than a victorious general.

The civil war in 68–69 would have been an ideal time for the Parthians to strike against their longtime enemy. Mucianus, the governor of Syria, had left the eastern frontier vulnerable when he led the sixth legion westward to depose Vitellius. 'But neither Vologeses, nor his brother Tiridates in Armenia, showed any desire to break the peace and friendship recently secured by the Neronian policy' (Henderson 1908:145). In fact, Vologeses offered Vespasian 40,000 Parthian cavalry to help him secure the principate. The Flavians were thus indebted to the Parthians for their cooperation during this tumultuous transition.

If Revelation were written during Domitian's reign, as Boring believes, Roman memories would have been of three decades of peace with the Parthians. Henderson (1927:59) explains: 'After the fall of Jerusalem the eastern half of the Empire caused little anxiety to the Flavian Emperors.' In fact, the Armenian peace lasted over fifty years and is reflected by the total absence on Roman coinage of anti-Parthian war types, which only return again in the second century (Grant 1968:48n). Ramsay (1994:41–44) uses coin types from Parthia to identify the

rider in 6:2 as Parthian. Although the portraiture of bow and horseman *may* have some use for general background, Ramsay fails to discuss why and how John would have a knowledge of Parthian coins. He acknowledges that Greek and Roman coins show the Parthians as vanquished (:44), so it is improbable that John would depict them as victorious.

2.3.2.5 The great multitude

In 7:9 John sees a 'great multitude' (ὄχλος πολὺς) in heaven slain during the great tribulation. This innumerable group is from every nation, tribe, people, and nation. Johnson (1981:12.486) observes that this polyglot cosmopolitan multitude 'might well describe the crowds common to the agora or the quay of a seaport in first-century Asia.' While a seaport like Ephesus would have a diverse representation, only in Rome could the total ethnic population represented in the empire and beyond be found (Reasoner 1993:851). Juvenal's statement (*Sat* 3.62) bears this out: 'Long ago the Orontes has overflowed into the Tiber.' Such ethnic diversity appears to have characterized the early church.

Both Tacitus (*An* 15.44; *multitudo ingens*) and Clement (1 Cl 6.1; πολὺ πλῆθος) speak of 'immense multitudes' of Christians losing their lives under Nero. In his third vision Hermas (*Vis* 3.1.9) is refused permission to sit at the right hand of the angel. This special place is reserved for those who have endured 'scourgings, imprisonments, great tribulations, crosses, and wild beasts for the sake of the Name' (3.2.1). The scale of such suffering described in this postapostolic document (ca AD 95–100) accords with the historical facts of the Neronian persecution. As we will see, there is no evidence in the standard sources of a mass persecution of Christians in Rome under Domitian. John's use of 'great multitude' points to a time of conflict during Nero's reign.

2.3.2.6 Apollyon the destroyer

Since Grotius, Apollyon (Ἀπολλύων; 9:11) has been taken to be a word play on the god Apollo (Oepke 1.397; cf supra 1.5.3.3(a)) in his role as destroyer (from the verb ἀπόλλυμι or -ω). A A Bell, Jr (1979:98–99) believes that John's mention of Apollyon is another clue to identify Nero as the church's persecutor; this name 'is highly suggestive of Nero's patron deity Apollo and perhaps hinting at Nero's suspected role in the destruction of Rome.' This identification is certain given John's only other use of ἀπώλειαν in 17:8, 11 when the beast—the eighth emperor, Nero *redivivus*—is now ready to go to his destruction.

Both Seneca (*Apocol* 4.1.22–23) and Suetonius (*Ner* 53) note comparisons of Nero's voice and appearance with Apollo's. Suetonius (*Ner* 25.3) also mentions that following Nero's performing tour of Greece, he completed his triumphal return in Rome at the temple of Apollo, not of Jupiter. In the epitome of Dio's *Roman History*, Nero is hailed as 'our Apollo' (61.20.5; 62.20.5).⁵ Nero also had a coin struck depicting himself in the guise of Apollo playing a lyre.⁶ Coins from Nero's reign (54–68) show him with a hairstyle identical to one depicted on Apollo (Griffin 1984:121).

Caird (1966:120) and others (most recently, Grether [1992:1.302]) regard the reference as an indirect attack on Domitian, 'who liked to be regarded as Apollo incarnate.' However, Caird gives no source for his information. None of the Roman historians mention such a relationship. Instead they record that the god Domitian revered most was Minerva⁷ (Suetonius *Dom* 4.4; 15.3; Cassius Dio 67:1.2; 67.16.2 [Athena]). In fact, Jones (1992:100) insists: 'In private, his devotion to Minerva was absolute.' This devotion was expressed by the consistent issuance of four coin types annually, the erection of temples, and the sponsorship of an annual festival in Minerva's honor. Publicly, however, Domitian was devoted to Jupiter who had saved his life in 69. 'Throughout the reign, whether on coins or in the works of Statius, Silius Italicus or Martial, Domitian was linked with Jupiter and portrayed as his subordinate, his "warrior vice-regent" ' (Jones 1992:99). If the allusion in 9:11 is to Apollo, and it probably is, the reference is to Nero, not to Domitian. Commentators who continue to relate Domitian with Apollo have failed to check their sources and are perpetuating this identificational error.

A Kerkeslager (1993:118) finds another link to Apollo in the first seal (6:2): the bow carried by the rider on the white horse 'would have served as a fairly transparent symbol of Apollo.'⁸ He avows that John uses Apollo imagery as 'a polemic against the message of false prophets and the values of pagan society' (:119). Although he asserts that the polemical usage of the Apollo imagery is most pointed in 9:11, he makes no mention of its association with Nero.

⁵Cassius Dio (62.14.2), however, also states that Nero abolished the oracle of Apollo and seized its territory on his visit to Greece, perhaps for the god's distressing predictions or because Nero was crazy.

⁶M T Griffin (1984:120) believes Suetonius is inaccurate in two respects: that the god, not the emperor, is actually depicted on the coin and that the coins were struck before 66 and thus before his return. However, she concludes: 'But there is no reason to doubt that the coins were intended and understood as an allusion to the Emperor's performances.' For an illustration of this coin, see Grant (1968:PI 9, #1).

⁷For a coin type of Domitian showing a sacrifice to Minerva, see Grant (1968:PI 4, #1).

⁸Note the following Asian coin types of Apollo (Burnett et al 1992): with bow and stag (Miletus 2703, 2708, 2713–14), on rock holding a bow (Miletus 2712), on horseback with double ax (Hierapolis 2957), firing arrow from bow (Synaus 3107).

2.3.2.7 The temple in Jerusalem

Source analysis of Revelation has noted the significance of 11:1–2 for dating. For John to measure the temple, it must have still been standing, hence indicating a date before 70. Charles (1920:1.270), to allow for a late date, postulated that this was an earlier source which John incorporated into this vision. Robinson (1976:242), on the other hand, sees this reference as certain evidence for his premise that Revelation was written before the temple's destruction. Does this passage have significance for the dating of Revelation?

The temple (*ναός*) is first mentioned in 7:15. The great multitude who are martyred in the great tribulation are serving God continually in his temple. This temple is the heavenly reality of which the earthly temple was only a copy (cf Heb 9:1ff). In 14:15–17 two angels come out of the heavenly temple to announce the imminent harvest of the earth. John sees seven angels coming out of the heavenly temple with the seven plagues (15:5–6). In his vision of the new Jerusalem John fails to see a temple because God and the Lamb are its temple (21:22).

A related expression 'holy city' is used in 11:2. The temple/holy city imagery does not reappear until 21:2 when John sees the new Jerusalem descending from heaven prepared as a bride. John sees further elements of the holy city when he is taken in the Spirit to a high mountain (21:10). The final mention of the holy city occurs in the prophetic curse (22:19) when those who take away from this prophecy are warned that they will lose their place in the holy city. According to Park (1995:281), 'the expression "the holy city" is consistently used for the Heavenly Jerusalem rather than the earthly one.'

What therefore is the nature of John's temple in the holy city? Earlier (cf supra 1.2.4.5) we suggested that the probable source for this text is Ezekiel's participation in the measuring of the temple (chs 40–43). In his vision Ezekiel sees a future, restored temple built in an eschatological Jerusalem. Vos (1965:123) notes that ' "Jerusalem" is reserved in the Apocalypse for the new, or heavenly Jerusalem.' He further notes that this passage parallels Luke 21:24; however, John substitutes 'holy city' for the Lucan 'Jerusalem.' This change, he concludes (:123) 'may indicate a symbolical implication of this passage.' Mazzaferri (1989:321) likewise believes that 'the new Jerusalem, not the old, is in view.' He (:322) then asks why the nations attack the city, answering that 'the main reason is probably that John here reinterprets Jesus' original prophecy, Lu. 21:24, in the light of the fall of old Jerusalem.'

The temple/holy city imagery in Revelation speaks predominantly of a heavenly reality rather than an earthly one. But given John's multivalent use of imagery (cf Schüssler Fiorenza

1985:183ff), the physical temple and city might still be in view, especially because of the later reference to the great city 'where also their Lord was crucified' (11:8). Mazzaferri's tentative conclusion that old Jerusalem has fallen seems unsubstantiated, given the ambivalence of the imagery. Yet for multivalence to work in a text, the alternatives must be viable. Gundry (1987:258) is on target when he observes that 'the adjective "new" contrasts this Jerusalem with the present earthly one.' It is therefore likely that this text was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70.

2.3.2.8 The flight into the wilderness

E Renan (1899:150ff) first proposed that the flight into the wilderness (12:6, 14–17) describes the flight of the Jerusalem church to Pella (modern Tabaqat Fahil, approximately twenty miles south of the Sea of Galilee). S G F Brandon (1957:177) thinks that without the later accounts of Eusebius (*HE* 3.5.3) and Epiphanius (*Haer* 29.7; 30.2; *Mens* 15) that 'it is very unlikely that the passage would ever have been regarded as containing an allusion to a concerted flight of Jewish Christians across the Jordan to Pella.' S Sowers (1970:315), however, insists that 'the chapter is patently describing historical occurrences (for example the birth and crucifixion-exaltation of Christ, v. 5, and the persecution of the Church, v. 17) in mythological terms.'

Chapter 12 is indeed difficult to interpret, but the woman's escape to the wilderness has remarkable similarities with Jesus' admonition (Mt 24:15–22; Mk 13:14–20; Lk 21:20–24) to flee from Jerusalem to the mountains. Although Pella is not in the Transjordanian mountains, 'it qualifies as a city of refuge in the terms of the oracle since it is in the foothills of these mountains' (Sowers 1970:319). The dragon's attempt to destroy the Jewish Christians first in Zealot-controlled Jerusalem and then while crossing the Jordan in the winter floods (χειμών; Mt 24:20; Mk 13:18) comes to naught. Instead the Gentile churches of the Decapolis rescued and aided (τρέφωσιν; 12:6) the Jewish Christian refugees (Sowers 1970:315). With the Jerusalem church safe, the dragon now turns his attention to make war against the rest of the saints (v 17). Such a reconstruction is plausible, since other alternatives have little to commend them.

2.3.2.9 The beast of 666

In 13:18 the believer who has understanding (ὁ ἔχων νοῦν) is challenged to calculate (ψηφισάτω) the identity of the beast whose number is 666. By the time of Irenaeus the exact identity of the beast was lost (his best guess was 'Lateinos'), although the variant 616 was already recognized

(*Haer* 5.28.2). For two millennia speculation over the identify of 666 has spawned intense debate. For an older review of the possibilities see Peake (1920:312–27), while for a newer one see Bauckham (1993a:384–452).⁹

Among the Roman emperors Suetonius mentions only Nero as having gematria associated with his name (*Ner* 39.2). A Greek verse circulating around Rome lampooned Nero thus: 'Nero, Orestes, Alcmeon their mothers slew/A calculation new (Νερόψηφον). Nero his mother slew.' The numerical equivalent of Nero's name is 1005, the same as that of the rest of the sentence, 'his mother slew.' Scarre (1995:51, 54) states that 'the murder of his mother Agrippina...in 59 was the single most notorious act of Nero's reign.'

Nero is twice compared to a beast (θηρίον) by Apollonius (Philostratus *VitAp* 4.38). Indeed he is much worse because no animal 'devours its own mother, but Nero is gorged with such quarry.' Nero is also called a great beast (θήρ μέγας) in the Sybilline Oracles (8.157). Domitian is similarly called 'the most monstrous beast' by Pliny the Younger (*immanissima belua*; *Pan* 48.3), but this in the context of describing him as a *Nero redivivus*. Juvenal (*Sat* 4.38) likewise thought of Domitian as a second, albeit bald, Nero, and Martial (*Epig* 11.33) referred to Domitian's death as Nero's.

Ancient 'understanding' of the beast whose number is 666 points directly to Nero. In fact, Bauckham (1993a:384) unequivocally states that 'Nero Caesar is the name of the beast.' However, he avoids the obvious implication of an early date, claiming that 'John has *historicized* the apocalyptic tradition of the eschatological adversary identified with the returning Nero' (:444).

⁹The Hebrew and Greek gematria associated with the calculation of these names plus that related to Jesus is as follows:

<u>Neron Kaisar</u>		<u>Nero Kaisar</u>		<u>Lateinos</u>		<u>Jesus</u>	
ν= 50	N	ν= 50	N	Λ= 30	L		
ρ=200	R	ρ=200	R	α= 1	A	I= 10	I
ο= 6	O	ο= 6	O	τ=300	T	η= 8	E
ν= 50	N			ε= 5	E	σ=200	S
κ=100	K	κ=100	K	ι= 10	I	ο= 70	O
σ= 60	S	σ= 60	S	ν= 50	N	υ=400	U
ρ=200	R	ρ=200	R	ο= 70	O	ς=200	S
666		616		ς=200	S	888	
				666			

ΝΕΡΩΝ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ is a common inscription on the obverse of coinage from Ephesus (Burnett et al 1992; e.g. #2626), Sardis (#3011), and Laodicea (#2917). Further, the Hebrew letter waw (ו) has the value of six. 'Since there are six letters in the Greek spelling of the name of Jesus (Ἰησοῦς), the waw can stand as a sign of that name' (Finnegan 1992:353). 666 is thus a defective and deceptive enumeration of the true One numbered 6.

This tradition is now fulfilled in the Flavian dynasty which reestablished imperial power following the civil war. Further discussion of this beast will be deferred to the discussion of the seven emperors of chapter 17 that follows.

Several literary clues link this chapter back to chapters 2–3 where the seven churches are addressed. 13:9 contains the only other exhortation to hear in Revelation. And four “Ὁδὲ” sayings related to the beast, which perform a hortatorical function like the promise sayings, are likewise found. The saying in 13:10 follows a reference to the Nero *redivivus* myth in 13:3 (cf v 14), in which the beast has a fatal wound that healed. The person with wisdom in 13:18 can calculate the number of the beast—666 (cf infra 7.8.2.1). The persevering saints in 14:12 are to forgo the worship of the beast and his image and to refuse his mark. And in 17:9 the audience is invited to have understanding. The seven heads, which are seven hills, are a clue pointing to the city of Rome. Then follows the enigmatic mention of the seven kings/emperors. Through these four “Ὁδὲ” sayings, the Asian churches are exhorted to recognize and act on the spiritual implications of the present historical exigence.

2.3.2.10 The seven emperors

The primary internal evidence for dating is centered around Revelation 17:9–11. However, little consensus exists among commentators regarding the identity of the $5 + 1 + 1 = 7 + 1 = 8$ emperors (cf Beckwith 1919:704–8). The major designations of the eight emperors are presented below, although each has additional permutations:

<u>Historic</u> ¹⁰	<u>Principate</u> ¹¹	<u>Despotic</u> ¹²	<u>Roman Antichrist</u> ¹³	<u>Tyrannical</u> ¹⁴	<u>Christological/ Apocalyptic</u> ¹⁵
<i>Five Fallen</i>	<i>Five Fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>
1. Julius	1. Augustus	1. Augustus	1. Nero	1. Julius	1. Gaius
2. Augustus	2. Tiberius	2. Tiberius	2. Galba	2. Gaius	2. Claudius
3. Tiberius	3. Gaius	3. Gaius	3. Otho/Vitellius	3. Claudius	3. Nero
4. Gaius	4. Claudius	4. Claudius	4. Vespasian	4. Nero	4. Vespasian
5. Claudius	5. Nero	5. Nero	5. Titus	5. Domitian	5. Titus
<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>
6. Nero	6. Galba	6. Vespasian	6. Domitian	6. Nerva	6. Domitian
<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>
7. Galba	7. Otho	7. Titus	7. Unidentified	7. Trajan	7. Unidentified
8. Otho	8. Nero	8. Domitian	8. Unidentified	8. Unidentified	8. Unidentified

Boring (1989:183; cf Pretorius 1988:127), because of such diverse identifications, has suggested that seven here is 'a symbolic number standing for the whole line of Roman emperors (just as the "seven" churches of chapters 2–3 represent the churches of Asia—and the world).' While the number seven undoubtedly symbolizes the full sequence of Roman emperors (Bauckham 1993a:406–7), the historical reality of seven emperors underlies the tradition, even as seven churches existed. The beast who is the eighth is an emperor *redivivus* and is said to belong to the seven (Rv 17:11).

The 'Historic' listing has strong literary backing. However, of the sources listed in note 10, all date from the early second century except Josephus (ca 93–94). Therefore they could not have influenced John directly, although their official sources and traditions might have. Revelation 13:3 is a probable reference to Nero, the head with a mortal wound. Nero would be dead and

¹⁰The order in Suetonius; cf Tacitus (*An* 4.34; 13.3); Josephus (*Ant* 18.32); Sibylline Oracles 5:12–51; and 4 Ezra 11–12. Giet (1957:54) and Ford (1975:290) follow 1–6 but opt for Vespasian as 7 and Titus as 8. Lightfoot (1889–90:1.2.509), in interpreting the ten kings in Epistle of Barnabas 4:4, reckons the first king as Julius Caesar and the tenth as Vespasian.

¹¹Adopted by Robinson (1975:243), Bell (1979:93–102), and Rowland (1982:403–13).

¹²Adopted by Swete (1909:220) and Charles (1920:2.69); Hort (1908:xxix) opts for Domitian as 7.

¹³Adopted by Turner (1912:217) and Allo (1933:281–82).

¹⁴Adopted by Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:97), who falls one emperor short by failing to list Claudius (cf 1985:42)

¹⁵Christological adopted by Strobel (1963–64:439–41). Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:42) feels that this interpretation 'finds its strongest support in Rev. itself,' yet changes the identification in her 1991 commentary. Jewish apocalyptic adopted by Yarbrow Collins (1984:64) and du Rand (1991:231).

could not be the reigning emperor. Therefore, this order is unlikely since Nero would be the reigning emperor (cf Yarbro Collins 1984:59).

2.3.2.10(a) The first emperor?

Although Suetonius begins his list with Julius Caesar, the principate actually began with his adopted son Augustus. Augustus had a strong link to Asia through his slave Zoilos. In 39 BC the then Octavian influenced the senate to grant special status to Zoilos' native Aphrodisias, near Laodicea. Around 35 he guaranteed the right of the Asian Jews to send the temple tax to Jerusalem (cf supra 1.5.2.1). In 30 Octavian stopped in Asia on his return from Egypt. A year later he authorized the first Asian temple of the emperor cult in Pergamum (cf supra 1.5.3.4(d)) and sponsored a sacred precinct for Roman citizens in Ephesus (cf supra 1.5.3.4(b)). Because of Augustus, the emperor cult had an early foothold in the province of Asia.

Around 9 BC Paulus Fabius Maximus, the proconsul of Asia, issued a letter to the *koinon* of Asia suggesting that Augustus' birthday be made an official holiday in the province as well as the beginning of the municipal new year (Lightfoot 1889–90:2.1.700–1). The *koinon* perfunctorily confirmed the proconsul's wishes, and the Asian calendar was changed. After the *koinon* issued the decree, the proconsul had it inscribed on a stele in both Greek and Latin and placed in the temple at Pergamum (Johnson et al 1961:§142). The decree was apparently distributed throughout the province because copies have been found in five Asian cities (cf infra 6.5.3.2).

Shortly before his death in AD 14 Augustus deposited an account of the things he had done (*rerum a se gestarum*; Suet *Aug* 101) with the Vestal Virgins. The three surviving texts of Augustus' *Res Gestae* have been found in Anatolia—Ancyra, Pisidian Antioch, and Asian Apollonia. A copy of Augustus' deeds was probably also posted at the Augustan temple in Pergamum, as it was inscribed on the walls of its sister temple in Ancyra (see Boardman et al 1986:535 for a picture). Other copies of his deeds were likely to be found in other Asian cities, since such official correspondence would enter through the place of 'First Landing'—Ephesus.

During Julius' lifetime the only provincial cities in the empire to issue coinage with his portrait were the Anatolian cities of Nicea and Lampsacus (Burnett et al 1992:1.38). The only Asian coinage to feature Julius was a posthumous issue from Apamea (:2.769). However, the coming of the principate brought a major change to this pattern. 'The portrait of the emperor, pervades, though does not exclusively occupy, the obverses of provincial coinage' (:1.38). Approximately two hundred provincial cities issued coins with Augustus' portrait. Speaking specifically of the

province of Asia, Grant (1968:75) writes: 'In his reign seventy-three mints of the province (out of the ninety-seven for the whole peninsula) seem to have issued bronze coins.' Such widespread attention given to Augustus in Asia suggests that in popular thinking he was considered the founder of the empire and hence its first emperor.

For his Christological interpretation Strobel (1963–64:437) seeks to pinpoint the defining moment in Revelation: 'für den Apokalyptiker bezeichnen Kreuz und Erhöhung das Telos des alten Äons in einem zugleich eminent historischen Sinne.' He arbitrarily decides to begin his list not with Tiberius, the emperor who was then reigning, but with the first emperor after the exaltation, Gaius (Caligula). There is another Christological perspective to be considered, however. The birth of the male child (12:5) is the earliest historical reference in Revelation, and the birth and exaltation are described as a unified event. After the war in heaven the dragon is flung to earth where his first activity is to attempt to devour the son (vv 3–4). This perhaps refers to Herod's attempt to kill Jesus (Mt 2:13–18). Jesus was born of course during the reign of Augustus (Lk 2:1; ca 4 BC). John's Christological perspective appears to begin with Christ's incarnation, not with his exaltation. Given the above evidence, we conclude that John's list begins with Augustus, not Julius Caesar or Gaius.

2.3.2.10(b) The civil war emperors?

All the lists that omit the three civil war emperors—Galba, Otho, and Vitellius—ignore the ancient literary evidence. The three are recognized as legitimate emperors by Suetonius, the Sibylline Oracles (5:12–51), and 4 Ezra (chs 11–12), but again these sources date later than Revelation. Numismatic evidence reveals that coinage for Galba, Otho, and Vitellius was produced at the large mint in Alexandria (Burnett et al 1992:2.735). 'At Antioch there was a mint which had duly struck coins of Galba and Otho, though not (owing to the short period between the news of Vitellius' accession known in May and the beginning of the anti-Vitellian movement soon after) of Vitellius' (Wellesley 1989:126). Although no coinage of Galba was minted in the seven cities, such coinage was produced at the Asian cities of Parium (Burnett et al 1992:1.386), Ilium (:1.392), and Cotiaem where unusually 'it produced coins for Galba, signed by no less than three "magistrates" ' (:1.518). Other cities in Anatolia that minted coins for Galba were Nicea, Nicomedia, Galatia, and Olba (:2.735). Numismatic evidence demonstrates that the three were recognized as legitimate emperors in the provinces. Galba's representation

on Asian coinage shows specifically that his rule was recognized in the region of John's audience. Therefore any identification that omits the three ignores that evidence.

2.3.2.11 The name 'Babylon'

John's use of the name Babylon (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21) has been seen as a 'weighty internal indication of the date' (Yarbro Collins 1984:58). Babylon is also found in other contemporary Jewish literature (4 Ez 3:1–2, 28; 15:46; 16:1; 2 Bar 11:1, 67:7; SibOr 5.143, 159). It is doubtful that John learned this symbolic name from these sources, given his use of Old Testament traditions particularly in Jeremiah (cf *infra* 2.5.2.4). Yet Yarbro Collins (1984:58) thinks it highly unlikely that the name would have been used before the temple's destruction by Titus, thus pointing to a date after AD 70.

Yarbro Collins's argument seems impressive except for one oversight. She omits the reference to Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13, whose probable referent is also Rome. In a later discussion of persecution under Domitian, she writes (1984:69): 'First Peter clearly reflects some degree of persecution, but its date is uncertain. The allusion to Rome as Babylon shows that it was written after AD 70.' Michaels (1988:lxiii) argues similarly regarding the dating of 1 Peter: '“Babylon” as a designation for Rome is not attested before AD 70, but becomes frequent in both Christian and Jewish sources after 70.' A circular argument is evident here regarding the use of Babylon. Revelation cannot be dated before 70 because 1 Peter and other documents are dated after 70, and 1 Peter cannot be dated before 70 because Revelation is dated after 70.

One answer to the frequent usage of Babylon in texts after AD 70 is its use in 1 Peter and Revelation before 70. Indeed Michaels (1988:lxvi–lxvii) concludes his twelve-page discussion of authorship, saying, 'The traditional view that the living Peter was personally responsible for the letter as it stands has not been, and probably in the nature of the case cannot be, decisively shaken.'

While W M Ramsay (1893:282ff) argued for a late date for 1 Peter (AD 80) and Peter's death, the historical tradition dating Peter's martyrdom to the Neronian persecution of ca AD 65–66 seems more certain (Eusebius *HE* 2.25.5–7; cf Chase 1898:3.769). This would place the writing of 1 Peter before AD 70 and thereby attest to the use of 'Babylon' for Rome before the destruction of the temple, the precise conclusion which G Edmundson arrives at in his Bampton Lectures (1913:119–20). John perhaps became familiar with Babylon as a metaphor for Rome through 1 Peter, whose audience was also Christians suffering in the province of Asia.

2.3.2.12 The fire

Revelation 18 describes the fall of Babylon the Great—Rome. This city on seven hills (17:9) was geographically accessible to the sea through its port Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber. A repeated image in this chapter is a city being destroyed by fire whose smoke is seen miles away by sea captains (18:17–19). Although Jerusalem is also situated on seven hills, it is landlocked and cannot be the referent (contra Beagley 1987:102–110). John certainly uses the judgment traditions concerning Babylon (Jr 51–52) and Tyre (Ez 27–28). However, his description of this conflagration appears to extend beyond biblical imagery to contemporaneous historical events.

The fire in Rome in AD 64, rumored to have been started by Nero himself, was certainly of the massive scale described in this chapter. It burned for six days and seven nights. Tacitus (*An* 15.40) records that of Rome's fourteen districts only four remained. The only other possible destruction on the scale described by John occurred during Titus' reign. Suetonius (*Tit* 11.8) mentions that a fire in Rome burned three days and nights consuming the area from the Capitol to the Pantheon. There is no record of any such destructive fire in Rome during Domitian's reign.

2.3.2.13 The luxury of Rome

Revelation 18 is the only New Testament text that uses *σπρηνιάω* (vv 7, 9) and *σπρήνος* (v 3), meaning to 'live in luxury, live sensually' (*BAGD* s v). Bauckham (1993a:338) calls the economic critique in this chapter 'one of the fiercest attacks on Rome and one of the most effective pieces of political resistance literature from the period of the early empire.' The wanton luxury of several Caesars is well known. Both Tacitus and Suetonius document the licentious living of Nero and record all manner of his debaucheries. Griffin (1984:128) notes that Neronian literature abounds with diatribes against luxury, citing the examples of Martial, Lucan, Petronius, and particularly Seneca.¹⁶ Vitellius' extravagances are likewise noted by Suetonius (*Vit* 13). The menu for one banquet was 2000 fish and 7000 birds. During his brief reign he spent approximately 900 million sesterces¹⁷ simply on banquets. The list of edibles procured from every

¹⁶Griffin lists the references in note 73, pages 271–72. She points out, however, that such attacks against luxury were standard in Roman schools of declamation and in works of Roman poets and philosophers.

¹⁷The buying power of one sesterce equaled the buying power of about R12 or \$3 today (Botha 1993:747).

corner of the empire bears a remarkable resemblance to the cargoes of the sea captains mentioned in 18:11–13.¹⁸

Domitian, on the other hand, while known for giving numerous and generous banquets, ‘usually ended them early; in no case did he protract them beyond sunset, or follow them by a drinking bout’ (*Dom* 21). The only extravagant entertainment that Domitian promoted was in the Colosseum and the Circus (*Dom* 4). Suetonius, however, does term Domitian as ‘excessively lustful’ and devotes a paragraph to his sexual proclivities (*Dom* 22).

There is no doubt that the word group *σπρηλιάω* and *σπρήνος* accurately describes the wanton luxury of the early principate. If John’s descriptive language seem to best characterize a period, the evidence suggests the early date rather than the late, although Domitian’s behavior was certainly debauched.

2.3.3 The Roman Empire in ancient literary sources

The primary literary sources for Rome in the 60s and the 90s include the works of Tacitus, Martial’s *Epigrams*, Statius’ *Silvae*, Suetonius’ *Lives of the twelve Caesars*, Pliny the Younger’s *Letters*, Cassius Dio’s *Roman history*, and Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius*. Modern treatments of the first-century Roman Empire depend on these sources for their historical reconstructions.

2.3.3.1 The situation of the empire in the 60s

The purpose of this section is not to present a complete history of the empire during the 60s. B W Henderson (1903), M T Griffin (1984), and K Wellesley (1992) provide excellent overviews of this turbulent period. Rather it is simply to outline the significant events surrounding the projected early date of Revelation. Many of the dates in this and the next section are drawn from C Scarre’s excellent survey *Chronicles of the Roman emperors* (1995).

64	July 19	Fire in Rome
65	April	Pisonian conspiracy to kill Nero foiled
	Spring?	Persecution of the church begins
	Summer?	Martyrdom of Peter in Rome
		30,000 die of plague in Rome; hurricane at Campagna
66	June	Vinician conspiracy to kill Nero foiled
	July	Jews capture Masada and halt temple sacrifice for the emperor
	August–	Jew/Gentile massacres with tens of thousands of Jews killed in Cae-

¹⁸Wellesley (1989:201), however, considers the portrait of Vitellius as a gluttonous and drunken host or guest at a succession of Trimalchian banquets to be Flavian revisionist history. ‘A dispassionate study of Vitellius hardly confirms the usual caricature.’

		sarea and Alexandria
	Sept 25	Nero begins performance tour in Greece
	Oct–Nov	Cestius attacks Jerusalem but forced to retreat in defeat Governor of Asia, Marcius Barea Soranus, prosecuted by Nero
	Or 67?	Martyrdom of Paul in Rome
67	July	Jewish forces defeated at Jotopata; Josephus captured
68		Nero returns from Greece
	March	Vindex revolts at Lugdunum, Gaul
	April 3	Galba proclaimed emperor at Carthago Nova, Spain
	May	Vindex defeated at Vesontio by German legions
	June 8	Galba recognized by senate
	June 9	Nero commits suicide by sword
	June 20	Vespasian and Trajan occupy Jericho; Jerusalem surrounded
	October	Galba arrives in Rome from Tarraco, Spain
	Fall	False Nero executed on Aegean island of Cythnus; his body shipped from Ephesus to Rome Famine in Rome
69	Jan 2	Vitellius ¹⁹ acclaimed emperor by Rhine legions at Colonia Agrippina
	Jan 10	Galba adopts Piso as heir to principate
	Jan 15	Otho usurps principate assassinating Galba and Piso
	Feb	Titus visits Ephesus to conspire with Governor C Fonteius Agrippa
	March	Otho leaves Rome to fight Vitellius
	April 14–16	Otho's army defeated at 1st battle of Cremona; he commits suicide
	May	Vitellius recognized by senate
	Late June	Capitol burned by foreign mercenaries when Vitellius arrives in Rome
	July 1, 3	Vespasian proclaimed emperor in Alexandria and Judea
	August	Batavian revolt along the Rhine under Civilis
	Sept	Dacian revolt along the Danube
	Oct 18	Moon turned to blood in lunar eclipse
	Oct 24–25	Flavians under Antonius Primus defeat Vitellians at Cremona with the city subsequently burned
	Dec 18	Capitol burned including temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus
	Dec 20	Rome captured by Flavian army under Antonius Primus; Vitellius killed in the Forum
	Dec	Domitian with Mucianus begin to govern jointly in his father's absence from Rome Flood of Tiber in Rome
70	January	Gauls revolt
	Winter	1st, 4th, 16th, & 22nd legions mutiny in Germany ²⁰
70	May 1	Titus besieges Jerusalem
	June	Domitian and Mucianus leave Rome to campaign in Gaul

¹⁹The birth of a three-headed monster to a woman in Syracuse is interpreted by Apollonius (Philostratus *VitAp* 5.13) to be the three emperors who reign briefly. Summing up the events of 69, he states, 'And Fate's whole episode was past and over within a single year.'

²⁰The revolt in Germany is the setting for one of the adventures of the fictional Roman informer Marcus Didius Falco who ruminates: 'At any other period it would have been impossible. Yet in the Year of the Four Emperors, when the whole Empire blazed in ruins while the imperial contenders slogged it out, this was just one especially colourful sideshow amongst the wide-scale lunacy' (L Davis 1992:27).

Sept 26	Titus captures Jerusalem and destroys the temple
Oct	Vespasian arrives in Rome to assume principate

2.3.3.2 The situation of the empire in the 90s

Again our purpose is not to present a complete history of the empire during the late 80s and early 90s. Henderson (1927) and B W Jones (1992) provide excellent overviews of Domitian's reign. Rather it is simply to outline the significant events preceding the proposed late date.

88		False Nero appears in Asia and finds refuge among Parthians
89	Jan 1	Saturninus, governor of Upper Germany, revolts
	Spring	Revolt of Chatti in Germany
	Summer	Revolt of Dacians on the Danube; 1st Pannonian War
91		Manius Acilius Glabrio exiled for atheism
	Fall	Grain famine causes Domitian in the spring to issue edict to destroy vineyards
92	May	Sarmatians & Suebi revolt on the Danube; 2nd Pannonian War
		Famine in Pisidian Antioch
93	Fall	Domitian's reign of terror begins
94		Reign of terror continues
95	May	Flavius Clemens (first cousin of Domitian) killed
		His wife Flavia Domitilla (niece of Domitian) banished to Pontia (Eusebius) or Pandateria (Cassius Dio)
	Summer	3rd Pannonian War?
96	Sept 18	Domitian murdered by his attendant Stephanus

2.3.4 The issue of perceived crisis

The internal evidence in Revelation suggests localized persecution in Asia while in other parts of the empire, particularly Rome, massive persecution had produced innumerable martyrs. This picture of widespread tribulation is compatible with an early date in the late 60s during or after the reign of Nero, but incompatible with the historical evidence for a late date around AD 95 during Domitian's reign.

The standard Roman sources portray Domitian as a tyrant and megalomaniac. Yet Pliny the Younger (*Ep* 10.96) begins his letter to Emperor Trajan by confessing that he has never been present at the examination (*cognitio*) of a Christian. It is remarkable that this high Roman official served as a state prosecutor during Domitian's reign, but never attended a Christian proscription. The likely reason is that no systematic persecution emanated from Rome during this period against Christians, and therefore Pliny is ignorant on how to proceed with the prosecution of those brought to him.

The testimony of Eusebius (*HE* 3.17–20) is also confused. On the one hand, he calls Domitian a second Nero whose policies resulted in persecutions and martyrdoms. On the other, he quotes Hegesippus that after Domitian met the accused grandsons of Jude, he freed them and decreed that the persecution of Christians was over. If Domitian were such a Neronic despot, it is difficult to understand such a dramatic flip-flop. Thompson (1990:95–115), in his sweeping review of the emperor's reign, argues convincingly that the persecution under Domitian was limited to those in his immediate circle and not directed against Christians as Christians. Thompson (:103–4) claims that later historians who have seized on Domitianic caricatures, particularly the emperor's alleged demand to be called 'our Lord and God' (*dominus et deus noster*), err in proposing this period as Revelation's historical background.

Ramsay (1994:71–72) recognized the lack of documentation for a Domitianic persecution of Christians and suggested that Revelation itself is the primary source. Robinson (1976:230) criticizes Ramsay's use of 'the evidence of the Apocalypse *already interpreted* as Domitianic material' and likewise asserts that 'the primary sources present a rather different picture.' If 1 Clement is dated to AD 95–96 (cf Lightfoot 1889–90:1.346–58), it might provide evidence of a Domitianic persecution. For, as Holmes (Lightfoot et al 1992:25) observes, 'At the time of writing, the church in Rome appears to be facing some sort of persecution; in fact the letter to Corinth has been delayed because of it (1:1; cf. 7:1).' Merrill (1924:161), however, objects to the evidential value of 1:1: 'It is quite preposterous to claim that the innocent sentence with which it starts bears manifest and conscious witness to a persecution of the Church of Rome by Domitian.' Edmundson (1913:191) believes the reference to 'sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses' in 1:1 better refers to the political turmoil in 69, thus he argues that 1 Clement was written in early 70. Domitian's biographer B W Jones (1992:117) summarizes: 'No convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians.... Perhaps a few Christians were amongst those executed or banished during the 90s: that hardly constitutes a persecution.' Such reassessments conclusively show that Domitian's persecution of Christians is more myth than fact.

Commentators who favor a late date, yet are aware of these historical difficulties, have proposed a new solution to the 'crisis theory.' A Yarbro Collins (1984:106) suggests that we look to psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies instead of historical ones for the answer. She concludes that the situation in Asia was only a 'perceived crisis.' The Christians experienced only 'relative deprivation,' and their persecution was no worse than that of others.

Their suffering was not an objective one, but rather 'due to the conflict between the Christian faith itself, as John understood it, and the social situation as he perceived it' (:106). Though official Roman historiographers may downplay any Christian persecution, Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:8), who herself holds to a late date, nevertheless concedes 'it is not borne out by the experience articulated in Rev. and other NT writings.'

Yarbro Collins's solution to the lack of historical evidence for a Domitianic persecution is unconvincing. Gager (1975:50) observes that the 'concrete situation [is] persecution and martyrdom... Whatever its date and location, the writing inescapably presupposes a situation in which believers had experienced suffering and death at the hands of Rome.' Likewise, the point of Robinson (1976:230–31) is well taken: 'One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities, represented by the "beast" of Babylon.'

As we observed earlier (cf supra 2.2.2.8), suffering was not a reality present in all the churches.²¹ The Laodicean church was prospering, but perhaps that was because of its distance from the Aegean coast. The initial addressees—Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum—were the three 'first' cities of Asia and centers of Roman civil and religious power. They were the churches that were experiencing hardship. Instead of dismissing the crisis as a psychological one, perhaps the solution is more a geographical one.

2.3.5 Conclusion

The twelve examples of internal evidence provide important, yet inconclusive, data regarding the date of Revelation. The examples suggest, however, that the early date in the 60s is more consistent with the literary, numismatic, and historical sources. John's most prominent internal clue is the cipher of the seven emperors in chapter 17. To start with Augustus and include the three Civil War emperors, thereby making Otho the emperor who is and Vitellius the emperor to come, is significant evidence for accepting the early date in the late 60s.

The situation of the Roman empire in the 60s was indeed a tumultuous one, with five emperors ruling and a massive Christian persecution occurring. While there was a limited persecution by Domitian in the 90s, it is doubtful if Christians were killed as Christians. The hy-

²¹Regarding the later letters of Ignatius to the Asian churches, C Trevett (1989:120) notes that 'the relative lack of reference to external pressures on the churches is one of a number of peculiarities of his letters.'

pothesis that the situation in the Asian churches was simply a perceived crisis is untenable. The testimony of Irenaeus to a Domitianic date is the strongest argument in favor of the late date; however, a viable reinterpretation of that testimony has been presented to accord with the early date. When the rhetorical situation of the churches is viewed together with the historical situation of the Roman empire, the late 60s appears a more viable date for Revelation than the 90s. This is likewise the conclusion of the Roman historian B W Henderson (1927:45): 'But the earlier dates are to be preferred, and all that is left as authority for the "squall of persecution" under the Flavian Emperor is too remote to be of value.'

2.4 THE APOCALYPTIC SITUATION OF JESUS

Having looked at the situations of the church and the Roman Empire, we will next examine the apocalyptic situation of Jesus and the prophetic situation of John. What is meant by these designations will be defined and expanded. Opening these sections will be a brief discussion of each genre (*Gattung*) of apocalypse and prophecy. Understanding which genre(s) John casts his Apocalypse into gives insight into his presuppositions concerning the churches. In Chapter 4 the epistolary form will be discussed in relationship to the seven letters.

2.4.1 The literary genres of Revelation

Scholarly attempts to locate the Apocalypse within the defined genres of apocalypse and prophecy have been inconclusive because Revelation is a combination of both. Isaiah (esp chs 24–27), Daniel, and Zechariah, important sources for John, are likewise of a mixed form. Regarding Daniel, Goldingay (1989:321) points out that 'the apocalypse may be an example of a genre that becomes simpler as it develops, and the subsequent development of the apocalypse form must not obscure for us the nature of this early example.' But as we will see, it is quite the contrary. Revelation, like its antecedent, is not simpler. While it does not incorporate stories like Daniel, it employs other genres such as letter and poetry to make it a mixed form also.

2.4.2 The genre 'apocalyptic'

2.4.2.1 The word 'apocalypse'

The word 'apocalypse' (ἀποκάλυψις) appears only in Revelation 1:1. However, 1 Peter uses 'apocalypse' three times (1:7, 13; 4:13), yet it is clearly an epistle. Obviously the frequency of

the word's usage does not determine genre. Because the predominant style of Revelation is apocalyptic, it is usually identified with this genre. The Apocalypse Seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature developed a generic paradigm whose sectors included form and content. The working definition developed by the Seminar (Collins 1979:9) is: ' "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other-worldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.' The key word in this definition, according to Collins (:10), is transcendence.

Hellholm (1987:27) later proposed that an addition be made to address function: '*intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority.*' Aune (1987:87) also suggested other language that addressed function. Utilizing these two suggestions, the Seminar on Early Christian Apocalypticism in its definition of 'apocalypse' added that it was 'intended to interpret present earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority' (Yarbro Collins 1986:7).

Apocalyptic literature shares a number of common features—visions, ecstatic states, pseudonymity, symbolism, diverse tradition-sources, angels and demons, and cosmic dualism (Lombard 1981:27–29). While Revelation shares such features as revelatory character and symbolism with Jewish and Christian apocalyptic, it also differs in its lack of artificial nature, pseudonymity, and pseudo-prophecy (Ladd:1979:1.151–52). Another shared feature is that each author of an apocalypse thought his generation was the last. 'The climactic eschaton was imminent and with it mankind's eternal destiny' (Mazzaferri 1989:183). Only the Testament of Naphtali and 2 Enoch give no hint that the eschaton is near. Between creation and eschaton 7000 years were to pass (2 En 33:1–2) , which implies delay rather than imminence (:182)

The element that perhaps most disassociates Revelation from other apocalypses is one pertinent to our study—an explicit hortatory element. As Collins (1979:8) writes, 'paraenesis by the mediator to the recipient in the course of the revelation is relatively rare and is prominent only in a few Christian apocalypses.'²² J C H Lebram (1983:193) points to Enoch's counsel to the righteous (1 En 94:3–5) as the most prominent parenetic example outside of Revelation. Yet even Lebram concedes that 'we are not dealing with an admonition in the true sense of the

²²Charts prepared by Collins (1979:28) and Yarbro Collins (1979b:104–5) show, apart from Revelation, only 4 Ezra among the Jewish apocalypses and Hermas, Testament of the Lord 1:1–14, and Questions of Bartholomew among the Christian apocalypses as containing parenesis by a mediator.

term, but with the announcement of a judgement.’ Aune (1986:91), however, disagrees with this analysis. Because apocalypses are basically ideological, he contends they are likewise basically parenentic, even though parenentic features at first seem sparse. ‘Viewed from this perspective, paraenesis, though existing in its own distinctive literary forms, exhibits an affinity for apocalypses which are particularly concerned with behavioral aspects of human experience’ (:91). All agree, however, that parenesis is integral to Revelation.

Mazzaferri (1989:258), after an extensive examination of the case for Revelation as classical apocalyptic, concludes: ‘In terms of actual generic definition, Rev cannot be equated with apocalyptic in form....Neither does it qualify in contents....Accordingly, it fails to qualify as well in function....Rev completely fails to qualify as a genuine apocalypse. Moreover, it inspires little confidence even as a proximate apocalypse.’ We conclude also that from a generic perspective Revelation should not be classed as apocalyptic. Yet the title of this genre is derived from Revelation 1:1 although, according to Mazzaferri (:258), ἀποκάλυψις was ‘not a technical term in John’s day.’ We will next explore an alternate understanding of this verse.

2.4.2.2 The Apocalypse’s superscription

The single use of ‘apocalypse’ in Revelation is found in the opening words, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:1). This phrase has received attention from commentators in several ways. Boring (1989:35) writes: ‘“Apocalypse,” then, is not only a technical word used by Bible scholars, but is John’s own designation of his writing.’ Much discussion (cf Johnson 1981:418n1) also centers on whether the genitive here is subjective or objective—‘from Jesus Christ’ (subjective) or ‘about Jesus Christ’ (objective).

Fekkes (1994:106–7) sees this superscription as similar to that in other Old Testament prophetic books. The pattern most closely follows that in Hosea, Joel, Micah, and Zephaniah: ‘The word(s) of’ + divine revealer (=Yahweh) + ‘which came unto’ + prophet. John substitutes ἀποκάλυψις for λόγος and uses Jesus for Yahweh as the divine revealer. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:151) thinks that John deliberately chose this superscription ‘in order to characterize his own experience as a Christian prophetic experience similar to the call-experience of Paul.’ Because of this similarity, she believes that John was familiar with Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

Regarding Paul’s use of this phrase in Galatians 1:12, δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ describes the gospel which Paul received. It did not come through natural means such as teaching by the apostles, but it came supernaturally through a revelation. That it was God who

revealed this gospel is stated in 1:15–16 (Bruce 1982:89). This meaning of ἀποκάλυψις as divinely revealed truth is clearly a dimension of Revelation 1:1. Here too God is the source of the revelation given to his servant(s).²³

In his teaching on the Corinthians' use of tongues and prophecy in the assembly, Paul enjoins the prophets to judge their prophecies. However, if a prophet receives an ἀποκάλυψις, another prophet who might be speaking should immediately defer to him (1 Cor 14:30). It is the function of prophets to receive revelations, hence an indirect validation that John is a prophet (cf supra 1.2.4).

But another understanding is also evident from the four other uses of the phrase in the New Testament. In one of Paul's earliest letters he exhorts the Thessalonians that relief from their persecution is coming ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (2 Th 1:7). Here the revelation is an event describing the future coming of Jesus Christ, that elsewhere in the Thessalonian letters is called ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ (1 Th 3:13; cf 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Th 2:1, 8).

In 1 Corinthians Paul likewise speaks of Christ's coming as τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:7). This reference is particularly significant since Paul wrote the letter while residing in Ephesus. The Ephesian congregation was therefore familiar with Paul using this phrase synonymously with Christ's *parousia*. Apparently Paul's exhortation to use spiritual gifts fully while awaiting Christ's revelation was 'that some among them do not have such eager expectation' (Fee 1987:42). This observation is important because a similar problem, we contend, existed among the Asian churches under John's care.

A reference in 1 Peter is likewise significant for its geographical link. Peter's address mentions five Roman provinces in Anatolia including Asia (1 Pt 1:1). These churches are undergoing persecution for the faith and are twice exhorted that rewards are forthcoming ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1 Pt 1:7, 13). Again Christ's revelation is seen as a future event. A Oepke (1965:3.583) sums up the meaning of this phrase: 'In the epistles, too, its true *locus* is in eschatology'

Given this background, would the original audience be stirred with questions of genre or type of genitive upon hearing Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ? John's use of this familiar eschatological phrase suggests not. Park (1995:21) adds that 'it still is doubtful that the first word of

²³What is not a dimension is the suggestion by B Malina (1995:6) that 'our author uses it [revelation] for revealing these astronomical and astrological secrets as well, for celestial entities such as stars were equally regarded as living, "personal" beings.'

Revelation would have referred to a genre as understood today in the minds of John or his readers.' It is probable that the rhetorical effect of hearing this phrase at the inception would suggest to the hearers that the book concerned Christ's future coming. J A Seiss (1900:vi) noted in the preface of his turn-of-the-century commentary that this observation was its key: ' *"The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ,"* does not mean a communicated message, but the *coming, appearing, manifestation, uncovering, presentation* of Jesus Christ in person.' This conclusion is sustained by the three uses of ἔρχομαι in chapter 1. In verses 4 and 8 the Lord God is said to be the 'coming one' (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). In verse 7—a messianic reference drawn from Daniel 7:13 and Matthew 24:30 (cf 1 Th 4:17)—Jesus Christ is declared to 'be coming with the clouds.'

Revelation closes with a threefold declaration by Jesus: ἔρχομαι ταχύ (22:7, 12, 20). These are followed by a threefold response by the bride: ἔρχου (vv 17 [2x], 20). The final invitation is expanded to ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ, which are the final words in Revelation apart from the benediction in verse 21. In Chapter 3 a chiasmic structure for the book will be suggested. This correlation between chapters 1 and 22 is but one example where this structural device is apparent. The thematic significance of the book's opening and closing phrases is significant: ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ and ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ. Both indicate a future expectation of Christ's parousia. For as Oepke (1965:3.588–89) writes concerning John, 'His understanding of revelation relates to the future.' Ἀποκάλυψις to John therefore is not a literary genre or a body of revealed truth but the coming of Jesus, the subject of the prophecy, particularly in the seven letters.

2.4.2.3 The identity of 'him' in 1:1

Closely related to this interpretation of Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is the identity of 'him' in 1:1. Here the dative pronoun αὐτῷ is ambiguous. Who is the referent of 'him'—Jesus Christ, an angel, or John? Each is mentioned in the verse. The consensus of commentators is that 'him' is to be understood as Jesus Christ.

R Bauckham (1993b:1) sees within this first verse a chain of revelation: God → Christ → angel → John (the writer) → the servants of God. K H Rengstorf (1971:7.264) rightly observes that ἔδωκεν and ἐσήμανεν are formally parallel, stating: 'But the subject of the first verb is God and of the second Jesus, since only thus do we have the chain of revelation which is obviously important to the seer of Revelation.' But does this chain of revelation necessarily include Jesus here? And is it possible that God is likewise the subject of clause 2? An examination of John's

use of δείκνυμι as well as parallel passages in Revelation will, we believe, provide the answers to these questions.

Verse 1 is a compound sentence and an example of a hendiadys, that is, two phrases expressing one idea. The second clause reads ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ..., and in it the intermediary is explicitly mentioned—an angel. A diagram of verse 1 shows the similarity of expression:

- a. 1 ἦν ὁ θεός ἔδωκεν 2 αὐτῷ 3 δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ 4 ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει
 b. 1 καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας 2 διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ 3 τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ

The clauses are coordinate except for a.4; also 3 is plural in a. and singular in b. Mazzaferri (1989:314) rightly observes that ‘both σημαίνειν and δεικνύειν are equivalent and bear the same prophetic connotation.’ A preliminary conclusion then is that ‘him’ in verse 1 might be understood as the angel and not as Jesus.

Understanding Revelation’s structure as chiasmic aids in interpretation here (cf infra ch 3). The book’s complementary section begins in 22:6. The second clause of this verse bears remarkable similarities with 1:1, and the two verses share sixteen words in common. A comparison of the two verses follows with the common words underlined:

- 1:1** a. 1 ἦν ὁ θεός ἔδωκεν 2 αὐτῷ 3 δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ 4 ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει
 b. 1 καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας 2 διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ 3 τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ
22:6 1 καὶ ὁ κύριος ὁ θεός ἀπέστειλεν 2 τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ 3 δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ 4 ἃ δεῖ
γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει

It is evident that John has conflated clauses a and b of 1:1 in 22:6. The participial verb and prepositional object of b.1 and 2 have been combined with the subject of a.1 and the verbatim infinitive clauses of a.3 and 4 to form 22:6. Thus God is now the subject of the verb ‘sent’ (ἀπέστειλεν). The ambiguous αὐτῷ in 1:1 is clearly identified as the angel by the speaker here. The identity of ‘him’ in 1:1, we conclude, is that he is the angel and not Jesus Christ. Thus the genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (whether subjective or genitive) does not link with the dative αὐτῷ. Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ therefore stands independent and alerts the audience to a key theme in the book—the coming of Jesus Christ (cf infra 8.2.2).

Mazzaferri (1989:294) points out that in 1:1 ‘the angel and John alike are qualified by the possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ, whose referent is Christ.’ But could this referent not be God as well? Even though Mazzaferri (:294) recognizes 22:6 as a ‘chiasmic reflexion of the prologue,’ he fails to note that in 22:6 ‘Lord God’ is in fact the referent of the pronoun αὐτοῦ which qualifies ‘angel’

and 'servants' (here John is not mentioned by name). This explicit identification in 22:6 strongly suggests that the referent in 1:1 is likewise God.

2.4.2.4 Other uses of δείκνυμι

δείκνυμι is used seven other times in Revelation (4:1; 17:1; 21:9, 10; 22:1, 6, 8), and in each case connotes prophetic revelation (cf Mazzaferri 1986:276, 298). A parallel to 1:1 is found in 4:1 where the main vision begins with an invitation to John: 'Ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δείξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. Immediately John finds himself in the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι) before the heavenly throne. The speaker who shows John the heavenly vision is identified as the initial voice sounding like a trumpet heard by John in 1:10 when he first experiences being in the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι). When John turns to identify that speaker, he sees a glorified 'son of man' whose voice is like the sound of many waters (1:15ff, perhaps the sea, a river, or a waterfall).²⁴ This latter speaker is clearly the risen Jesus, who proceeds to dictate the seven letters. But commentators are divided over the identity of the first voice.

I T Beckwith (1919:436; cf Mazzaferri 1989:277–78) identifies the voice as 'that of Christ who speaks in the following scene.' On the other hand, J Roloff (1993:33) states that 'the voice is not that of Christ but that of the angel of God.' Even though the two voices are distinctly different—the first sounding like a trumpet while the second like many waters—there is sufficient ambiguity in 1:10 and 4:1 to suggest either interpretation. Therefore identification must be based on an investigation of related passages.

Two parallel visions of the prostitute and the bride begin in 17:1 and 21:9 respectively. In each, one of the seven angels who holds a bowl invites John: 'Come, I will show (δείξω) you' the prostitute/bride. The angel in both texts is explicitly said to show John the visions while he is ἐν πνεύματι (17:3; 21:10; cf supra 1.2.4.2.) In 22:8 John attempts to worship this angel who has shown him the visions but is forbidden to do so. Mazzaferri (1989:278–79) identifies the angel of 1:1 with the mighty angel involved with the sealed book in 5:1–2 and 10:1ff.

In six of the eight uses of δείκνυμι in Revelation it is the angel, not Jesus, who shows the visions to John. Two of the four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι (17:1; 21:9) explicitly state that the angel is the mediator for the visions. The conjunction of δείκνυμι and ἐν πνεύματι in 1:10 and 4:1 provides a verbal key to the identity of the voice. The first trumpet-like voice

²⁴The only other occasions when John hear a voice like many waters are when the 144,000 sing (14:2) and when the great multitude shouts (19:6), in both case heavenly martyrs and not angels.

should be identified as an angel, not the son of man. And the speaker who presents the heavenly throne scene of God and the Lamb is likewise an angel. The chiastic structure of the book, to be discussed in the next chapter, validates this interpretation. What is ambiguous in the early chapters is clarified later in the book. Roloff (1993:33) concurs with our assessment, saying 'the ideas of transmitting the revelation by means of an angel is consistently followed throughout the entire book.'

2.4.3 The Synoptic apocalypses

Over a century ago Alford (1874:1.248) observed, 'The close connexion between our Lord's prophetic discourse on the Mount of Olives, and the line of apocalyptic prophecy, cannot fail to have struck every student of Scripture.' The Synoptic apocalypses found in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 represent an important source tradition for John. The connection between these and Revelation results from both 'being revelations from the same Lord concerning things to come, and...corresponding as they do in order and significance, answer to one another in detail' (:1.248). These include war, famine, persecution, and cosmological phenomena. In this section we will explore the apocalyptic situation of Jesus which produced the Synoptic apocalypses and Revelation.

2.4.3.1 Revelation 6 and the Synoptic apocalypses

Many commentators make some sort of comparison between Revelation 6 and the Synoptic apocalypses. Charles (1920:1.158) presents them as a fourfold chart with the comparative elements of each pericope numbered. His numbering in the Synoptics is misleading because only in Revelation are the elements of the seals numbered. The following chart is adapted from that of Charles. The only significant difference is the identification of the first seal as the 'False Christ' rather than 'Wars,' an identification which is much disputed. Vos (1965:187–91) surveys the interpretive options and likewise identifies the rider on the white horse as a pseudo-messiah. Such an identification seems conclusive when the seven seals are compared to the ordering of the Synoptic apocalypses.

<u>Seals--Revelation 6</u>	<u>Matthew 24</u>	<u>Mark 13</u>	<u>Luke 21</u>
1. False Christ (2)	False Christs (4–5)	False Christs (5–6)	False Christs (8)
2. Wars (3–4)	Wars (6–7a)	Wars (7–8a)	Wars (9–10)
3. Famine (5–6)	Famines (7b)	Earthquakes (8b)	Earthquakes (11)
4. Pestilence ²⁵ (7–8)	Earthquakes (7b)	Famines (8b)	Famines (11a)
5. Persecutions (9–11)	Persecutions (9–10)	Persecutions (9, 11–13)	Pestilences (11a)
6. Earthquake, solar eclipse, ensanguinal moon, stars falling (12–13)	Solar & lunar eclipse, stars falling, heavenly bodies shaken (29)	Solar & lunar eclipse, stars falling, heavenly bodies shaken (24)	Solar, lunar, & astral signs; heavenly bodies shaken (11b, 25–26)
7. Heavenly silence (8:1)	Son of man appears (30)	Son of man comes (26)	Persecution (12–19) Son of man comes (27)

Vos (1965:191) presents a similar chart and concludes that 'the Apocalypticist was acquainted with the subject matter of the Apocalyptic discourse of Jesus, and that he was influenced by it in his presentation of this vision.' The Synoptic apocalypses all conclude with the appearance or coming of the Son of man. Although the opening of the seventh seal does not announce such a coming, it is clearly portended as at the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl. As we suggested earlier (cf supra 2.4.2.2), the ἀποκάλυψις of Jesus is directly related to his coming.

2.4.3.2 Synoptic omissions in Revelation 6

The coming of the Son of man is preceded by the appearance of the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 and by the desolation of Jerusalem in Luke 21:20–24 (cf Mt 23:37–39). The vision in Revelation 6 fails to present these events. Vos (1965:187) believes this omission occurs because of their 'historical fulfillment by the time of the writing of the Apocalypse.' But is this necessarily so? Wenham (1984:218n 2) suggests another solution: 'Revelation 6 echoes much of the eschatological discourse, and Revelation 13 echoes the desolating sacrilege passage and the following warnings of false prophets.' Indeed the second beast who sets up an image to honor the beast (Rv 13:14) is later called the false prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; cf Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22). Kerkeslager (1993:118) also sug-

²⁵Literally, 'death' (θάνατος) which 'can be used in the same sense, as it frequently appears in the LXX as a translation of דָּבַר' (Charles 1920:1.170). BAGD (s v) states: 'θάνατος can, through the context, come to mean a particular kind of death; e.g. *fatal illness, pestilence*.'

gests that false prophecy is an inherent part of the first seal and makes a strong case for identifying the bow with Apollo, the god who inspired prophecy (cf supra 2.3.2.6). Whatever elements are omitted in chapter 6 are introduced later in the book. Thus it unnecessary to postulate a late date based on this omission (contra Beasley-Murray 1954:239).

2.4.3.3 Synoptic apocalyptic themes reoccurring in Revelation

While the Synoptic apocalyptic themes may be concentrated in chapters 6 and 13, they nevertheless appear throughout Revelation. A list of these apocalyptic themes follows:

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Revelation</u>	<u>Synoptics</u>
Jesus coming with the clouds	1:7	Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27
Every eye sees him	1:7	Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27
All tribes of earth will mourn	1:7	Mt 24:30
Loss of love	2:4	Mt 24:12
Delivered to synagogues and prisons	2:9, 10; 3:9	Mk 13:9; Lk 21:12
Persevering to the end	2:26	Mt 24:13; Mk 13:13
Lord eating with servants	3:20	Lk 12:36
False Christs	6:2	Mt 24:4–5; Mk 13:5–6; Lk 21:8
Wars and revolutions	6:3–4	Mt 24:6–7; Mk 13:7–8; Lk 21:10
Famines, earthquakes, [pestilences]	6:5–8	Mt 24:7; Mk 13:8; [Lk 21:11]
Persecutions	6:9–11	Mt 24:9–10; Mk 13:9, 11–13; Lk 21:12–19
Time of punishment	6:10; 19:2	Lk 21:22
Great earthquake	6:12; 16:18	Lk 21:11; cf Mt 24: 7; Mk 13:8
Signs in sun, moon, and stars	6:12–13	Mt 24:29; Mk 13:24; Lk 21:11, 25–26
Example of fig tree	6:13	Mt 24:32; Mk 13:28; Lk 21:29
Islands removed	6:14; 16:20	cf Lk 21:25
Earth's inhabitants fearful	6:15	Lk 21:26
Call to mountains to 'fall on us'	6:16	Lk 23:30
Divine wrath against people	6:16–17; cf 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15	Lk 21:24
Angels and four winds	7:1	Mt 24:31; Mk 13:27
Standing before Jesus	7:9	Lk 21:36
Great tribulation	7:14	Mt 24:21; cf Mk 13:19; Lk 21:23
Hour and day	9:15	cf Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32
Angel sounds last trumpet	10:7; 11:15	cf Mt 24:31
Jerusalem trampled by Gentiles	11:2	Lk 21:24
Pregnant woman	12:2	Mt 24:19; Lk 21:23
Killed by a sword	13:10	Lk 21:24
Call to endurance	13:10; 14:12	Lk 21:19
Deceptive signs and wonders	13:13	Mt 24:24; Mk 13:22

Gospel preached to every nation	14:6	Mt 24:14; Mk 13:10
False prophet	16:13; 19:20; 20:10	cf Mt 24:11, 24; Mk 13:22
Lord's coming as a thief	16:15; cf 3:3	Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39
Be dressed for service	16:15	Lk 12:35
Blessing for watching	16:15; cf 3:2–3	Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35, 37; cf Lk 12:37
Earthdwellers drunk with wine	17:2	cf Mt 24:49; Lk 21:34
Babylon, mother of abominations	17:4–5	cf Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14
Elect with Jesus	17:14	Mk 13:27
Coming in heavenly clouds	19:11	Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27
Heaven and earth pass away	21:1	Mt 24:35; Mk 13:31; Lk 21:33

A review of John's use of apocalyptic themes indicates that his allusions show a preference for the Lucan form of the narrative. However, he also indicates a familiarity with the traditions underlying the Matthean and Marcan accounts by referring to them on occasion. Wenham (1984:209) summarizes: 'But the suggestions that the author of Revelation was familiar with a version of the eschatological discourse which included elements attested separately in Matthew and Mark on the one hand and in Luke on the other hand is plausible.'

2.4.3.4 The meaning of 'this generation'

The crux interpretum for the Synoptic apocalypses is found in Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, and Luke 21:32. What is the meaning of ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη? J A Fitzmeyer (1981:2.1353) call this 'the most difficult phrase to interpret in this complicated eschatological discourse.' Commentators have interpreted it non-chronologically as unbelieving Jews or chronologically as Jesus' generation (cf Ellis 1974:246; Nelson 1995:380–84). Jesus uses the phrase elsewhere in the Synoptics (Mk 8:12 [2x], 38; 9:19 par) and, according to E Lövestam (1980:405), it functions almost as a *terminus technicus*. Beasley-Murray (1993:44) convincingly argues that the phrase uniformly signifies Jesus' contemporaries and always carries an implicit criticism. Yet at the beginning of the Olivet Discourse the disciples inject a time aspect by asking when (πότε; Mt 24:3; Mk 13:4; Lk 21:7) these events will take place. Thus this *terminus technicus* seemingly has both a nonchronological and a chronological dimension.

Does the phrase ταῦτα πάντα refer only to the events preceding Jerusalem's destruction, or is the parousia also in mind here? After a survey of the options Lövestam (1980:404) concludes 'that ταῦτα πάντα in its present context embraces the totality of eschatological events, including the Parousia.' Dumbrell (1985:28) likewise contends that in the Synoptic apocalypses Jesus

'emphasized the close relationship between the destruction of Israel and the parousia. By eschatological telescoping, the one virtually follows the other.'

First-century Jews well understood the meaning of the abomination of desolation. The blasphemous behavior of Antiochus Epiphanes was recalled annually at the Feast of Dedication (cf Jn 10:22–23). In AD 40 Caligula attempted to replicate Antiochus' blasphemy by setting up his image in the temple. Only the persuasive intervention of Agrippa prevented another Maccabean rebellion. Beasley-Murray (1993:367) observes, 'To a people under the heel of an imperium far more powerful than that of Antiochus, the possibility of a repetition of that history, prior to the ultimate deliverance described in Daniel, was evident.' If we are correct in locating the empire's (and Revelation's) historical situation in the late 60s, the encirclement and imminent destruction of Jerusalem by Roman armies must surely have been regarded as prophetically significant in Asia. Jesus' emphasis on his coming in Revelation would appropriately complement Christian eschatological expectations. Therefore John and his audience would legitimately be expectant that in their lifetimes the parousia would occur, fulfilling Jesus' prophecy in the Synoptic apocalypses.

2.4.4 The Lamb's role with the seven-sealed scroll

In Revelation 5 John first sees the seven-sealed 'scroll of destiny' (Peake 1920:262), but soon learns that no one in heaven is worthy to open it (v 4). An elder declares that the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered (ἐνίκησεν) and can open the scroll with its seals (v 5). The nature of this scroll, according to Beasley-Murray (1978:129), is 'God's disposition of the kingdom to man. The judgments of the seals are but the precursors of the salvation of the world.'

The Lamb's victory was secured because he was slain and with his blood purchased people from every tribe and nation (5:9). It is this victorious Lamb who now begins to open the seals one by one. Bruce (1986:1607) observes, 'Since He is envisaged as taking the scroll in A.D. 30, it is not surprising to find a rather close correlation between the first six seals and the forecast of the immediate future to be fulfilled within a generation, presented in the eschatological discourse of the Synoptic Gospels.' By opening the seal Jesus has precipitated the apocalyptic situation prophesied in the Synoptic apocalypses and now being fulfilled in Revelation. The 'birth pains' have indeed begun (Mt 24:8; Mk 13:8).

2.4.5 Conclusion

That John would begin the Apocalypse with such an ambiguous opening may seem unsettling to those seeking precision of language and meaning. But given the chiasmic structure of the book, John knew that any ambiguities in the prologue would become clear as the vision progressed, being resolved at the conclusion of the epilogue. This interpretation of 1:1 directly contradicts that of E Corsini (1983:33) who suggests that the 'revelation of Jesus Christ' refers to 'his death in which the "mystery of God" is brought to its fulfilment.'

Although the language in 1:1 is ambiguous, we have presented textual evidence that 'him' can be identified as the angel, not Jesus. The chain of revelation indicated is: God → angel → John (the writer) → the slaves of God.²⁶ Identification of the dative pronoun *αὐτῷ* as the angel and not Jesus provides an important insight on the thematic emphasis that opens the book.

The apocalyptic situation of Jesus in Revelation reveals that he is coming soon. The Synoptic apocalypses are an important source particularly for the seven seal judgments. The order and elements of these closely follow Jesus' Olivet Discourse. This teaching begins with a prediction of the destruction of the temple and capture of Jerusalem as a prelude to the parousia, all of which is to occur in this generation. It is Jesus who opens the seven seals, thus initiating the fulfilment of the divine destiny of humanity and the earth. According to the late date for Revelation, the Synoptics were already written; according to the early date one or more may have been written. John indicates a knowledge of a pre-synoptic apocalyptic tradition. The revelation given to John functions as a prophetic update on the Synoptic apocalypses. The judgment upon Jerusalem that was to precede Jesus' coming has been broadened to include a universal judgment upon the beast and his kingdom—the Roman Empire.

2.5 THE PROPHETIC SITUATION OF JOHN

We use the phrase 'prophetic situation' differently than E Corsini (1983:21), who uses it to describe occasions when John had experiences as a prophet in the Apocalypse such as 1:9ff; 4:1ff; 10:4ff. Instead we follow Boring (1986:261) who observes: 'The prophet in Israel did not

²⁶ Note, however, that a variation on this chain is found in 22:16: Ἐγὼ Ἰησοῦς ἔπεμψα τὸν ἄγγελόν μου . . . ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Here Jesus replaces God as the initiator: Jesus → angel etc., which is also seen in the seven letters. Beckwith (1919:419) links 22:16 back to 1:1, but instead its referent is 1:11: πέμψον ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις. We have suggested above that an angel, not Jesus, is probably the speaker here. The Holy Spirit is also noticeably absent in this chain. Yet Mazzaferri (1989:300) is surely correct when he observes that in the seven letters 'Christ's words are equated precisely with those of the Spirit,' hence 'he is certainly an agent but in a different capacity.'

begin with some personal experience of revelation which had mediated curious information from the other world. He or she began with the historical crisis in which both prophet and people lived, and interpreted it as the acts of God.' Thus the Old Testament prophets to whom John alludes prophesied about specific prophetic situations.

2.5.1 The genre 'prophecy'

Our discussion of prophecy begins by quoting another comment by Boring (1986:261): 'Without minimizing its apocalyptic traits, a proper understanding of Revelation must grasp its nature as Christian prophecy.' It is this genre that Revelation calls itself six times (cf supra 1.2.4.1). Regarding the book's continuity with the past, D A Hayes (1917:224–25) makes this interesting observation: 'All the historical books of the Old Testament are anonymous, except Nehemiah. All the prophetic books, on the contrary, have the author's name prefixed.' He notes that this pattern follows in Revelation: 'As a prophet he puts his name at the very forefront of his work.' This is the profound difference with apocalyptic literature. If Revelation is regarded as an apocalyptic work, it is the sole example of that genre that is published under the author's real name. G B Caird (1966:10–11) cogently observes: 'If Old Testament scholars are right in drawing a sharp distinction between apocalypse and prophecy, John would insist that his book was prophecy.'

2.5.2 Old Testament prophetic situations

2.5.2.1 The use of intertextuality

Throughout Revelation John uses the literary device of intertextuality to bring Old Testament associations to his readers.²⁷ The numerous Old Testament sources²⁸ for Revelation have been conveniently tabulated by Mazzaferri (1989:41). Using Trudinger's list of quotations and allusions, he notes that the major prophets account for almost half of John's sources. The thematic analogues indexed by Fekkes (1994:101–2) similarly bear out these conclusions.

²⁷ Intertextuality was likewise common in ancient Greek literature, such as the novels mentioned earlier (cf supra 1.4.8). The *Odyssey* and *Illiad* are frequent co-texts in them (e g, Reardon 1989:133, 176).

²⁸ For a recent discussion of these sources, see Mazzaferri (1989:39–42) and Fekkes (1994:61ff). Mazzaferri (:385–86), following Trudinger, numbers 68 quotations and 72 allusions; Fekkes (:70) counts approximately 150 Old Testament source texts with many of these being reused 1–7 times for a total of about 72 recapitulations.

Such frequent references presuppose a thorough familiarity with the Old Testament by John's audience (cf supra 1.4.1). As Fekkes (1994:67) notes, 'His knowledge and particular use of the OT cannot have been completely new to the communities in which he had previously worshipped and exercised his prophetic gifts.' An economy of language results in which the current prophetic situation in the local and universal church can be likened to similar prophetic situations in the Old Testament. We begin our discussion with Moses, the prophet par excellence of Israel. Then we review the three classic prophets of Israel—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—before concluding with Daniel who, though not a prophet in the traditional sense, nevertheless is a seer whose apocalyptic visions greatly influenced John.

2.5.2.2 Moses

The book of Exodus opens with Israel, once a favored people in Egypt, now in bondage to Pharaoh. At the burning bush God reveals himself to Moses and gives him a prophetic call to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 3:1ff; cf supra 1.2.4.6). God promised the people that he would liberate them: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God' (6:6–7). This deliverance was preceded by ten plagues (7:14–11:10) whose purpose was to change the mind of the recalcitrant Pharaoh. Only with the final plague on the firstborn did Pharaoh finally agree to their departure (12:29–32). As the firstborn of the Egyptians were dying, the Israelites were celebrating the Passover in their homes protected by the blood of the lambs over their doorposts (12:1ff). Following their miraculous passage through the Red Sea, Moses led Israel in a song of praise to the Lord (15:1ff).

The Exodus tradition is an important background to Revelation. Ulfgard (1989:150) in fact calls John's depiction of Christian existence in the Exodus pattern 'the main key to the temporal perspective in Rev as a whole.' The Passover typology is initially introduced in 5:6 where John see a slain lamb standing in the center of the throne. 'Lamb' then becomes the predominant name for Jesus, being used twenty-seven times by John. The two witnesses, like Moses, are empowered to turn the waters into blood and to smite the earth with plagues (Rv 11:6). The song of Moses also becomes the song of the Lamb (15:3). And it is the plagues against Egypt that provide a prophetic background for the serial judgments of the seven trumpets and the

seven bowls. The following outline enumerates these judgments sequentially with the comparable Egyptian plagues aligned in the center column.

<u>Trumpets (Revelation)</u>	<u>Plagues (Exodus)</u>	<u>Bowls (Revelation)</u>
1. Earth hit with hail, fire, and blood (8:7)	7. Hail (9:24–25)	1. Earth afflicted with sores on inhabitants (16:2)
2. Sea turned to blood and sea creatures die (8:8–9)	6. Boils (9:10)	2. Sea turned to blood and all sea creatures die (16:3)
3. Fresh waters embittered (8:11)	1. Blood (7:17–21)	3. Fresh waters turned to blood (16:4)
4. Sun, moon, and stars darkened (8:12)	1. Blood (7:17–21)	4. Sun scorches people like fire (16:8–9)
5. Locusts released on earth (9:3–11)	9. Darkness (10:22)	5. Darkness on earth and sores break out (16:10–11)
6. Troops at Euphrates River released (9:14–16)	8. Locusts (10:13–15)	6. Kings at Euphrates River led by 3 unclean spirits resembling frogs (16:12–13)
7. Heavenly temple opens accompanied by earthquake and hail (11:19)	9. Darkness (10:22–23)	7. Severe earthquake and plague of large hail (16:18–21)
	2. Frogs (8:6)	
	7. Hail (9:23–25)	

A number of comparisons between the serial judgments in Exodus and Revelation can be made. The rod used by Moses to initiate the plagues became a serpent (*δράκων*), but the sorcerers (*φαρμακοῦς*; cf supra 1.5.3.3(a)) produced counterfeit serpents to deceive Pharaoh (Ex 7:9–13 LXX). In Revelation the dragon is behind all the deceptive signs practiced on the earth's inhabitants (Rv 13:11–15; 16:13). Although the order is different in Exodus, six of the ten plague elements are replicated in Revelation. Like Exodus, John arranges his judgments in increasing degrees of intensity. This is true within each series of seven trumpet and bowl judgments; likewise, while only one-third are affected by the trumpet judgments, everyone on earth is affected by the bowl judgments. Like the pharaoh whose heart became hardened (Ex 7–14 passim), the inhabitants of the earth refuse to repent (Rv 9:20–21; 16:9, 11).

For the Jews the deliverance from Egyptian bondage was the preeminent event of salvation history under the old covenant. God sent the plagues as judgment on Egypt because Pharaoh refused to acknowledge his lordship and persecuted his chosen people. Fekkes (1994:81) effectively summarizes, 'John sees the Roman Emperor and his empire as the spiritual reincarnation of Pharaoh and Egypt, persecuting God's people and replacing the duties of their divine calling and citizenship with forced allegiance to the state.'

2.5.2.3 Isaiah²⁹

Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of the following kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1) and probably Manasseh (cf 37:38; ca 740–681 BC). His life paralleled the Assyrian expansion into Palestine, which culminated in the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC. Chapters 36–37 describe the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib and its miraculous deliverance. Babylon was a rising power that threatened the Assyrian hegemony in the region. Implicit in Babylon's overtures of alliance with Judah was the impending threat of its dominance over the southern kingdom (ch 39). To the south lay Egypt and its ongoing political aspirations in the region. To the north lay Tyre with its designs of economic imperialism. In the midst of this international power struggle Isaiah began to prophesy.

Fekkes (1994) has made an exhaustive study of the Isaianic prophetic traditions in Revelation. He notes that John employed traditions from several thematic analogues in Isaiah (:101–2). Because our focus is on John's present situation, we will examine the analogue concerning oracles against the nations, particularly Babylon and Tyre. Since Judah's struggle with these two nations also provides part of the prophetic situation for Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is especially significant.

Isaiah gives three oracles against Babylon (13:11–14:23; 21:1–10; 47:1–15) and one against Tyre (23:1–18). Babylon's challenge was political domination while Tyre's was economic monopoly. Fekkes (1994:90) writes: 'Babylon is the symbol of a proud, idolatrous empire which flaunts its power at the expense of others and scoffs at the thought of its own downfall or judgment....Tyre, on the other hand, is a symbol of international trafficking, opulent wealth, and commercial hegemony.' John makes use of both traditions in two proleptic pronouncements of Rome's fall (14:8–11; 16:19) and in the extended depiction of Rome's judgment (17:1–19:4). The imagery of Rome as a harlot (Rv 17:2ff) is probably drawn from Tyre's similar characterization by Isaiah (23:15–17).

2.5.2.4 Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (1:2; 627/26 BC) through the destruction of Jerusalem (39:1ff; 587 BC) to his probable death in Egypt (43:4ff; ca 570 BC). With the collapse of Assyria in the late 7th century, Babylonia and Egypt vied for control of its

²⁹The historical background for the major prophets can be found in any Old Testament introduction; my source is the recent introduction by Dillard and Longman (1994).

old empire. After the Babylonians captured Ninevah in 612 BC, the Egyptians advanced northward to claim Haran. When Josiah attempted to stop Neco's army, the young king of Judah was killed at Megiddo (2 Ki 23:29–30; cf Rv 16:16). At the battle of Carchemish (605 BC) the Babylonians assumed undisputed control of the Near East.

After Josiah's death in 609 BC a series of four vassal kings reigned: Jehoahaz II (609 BC), Jehoiakim (609–597 BC), Jehoiachin (597 BC), and Zedekiah (597–87 BC). Political instability characterized this period, with the reigns of Jehoahaz II and Jehoiachin being three months each. The year 609 BC was the year of the three kings for Judah, even as the year AD 69 was the year of the four emperors for Rome. Judah's fate was sealed when the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC. Three forced exiles (605, 597, 587 BC) took the elite of Judah's society to Babylon. Only the poor were left on the land, and Jeremiah was allowed to remain with them (40:6). When Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonians, was assassinated by a band of dissidents (41:1ff), Johanan and other army officers forced Jeremiah and the survivors to flee to Egypt where he probably died (43:4ff).

Jeremiah likewise was an important literary source for John. His oracles against the nations produced one of Revelation's most important thematic analogues. Two texts speak of judgment against Babylon—25:12–38 (which includes Judah and other nations) and 50:1–51:64. These two long chapters, according to Fekkes (1994:90), are John's foundational text, 'which is the most extensive of the five Babylon oracles.'

2.5.2.5 Ezekiel

Ezekiel was born shortly before Josiah began his reform in 621 BC. The son of a priest, he undoubtedly witnessed the effects of renewed piety in the land. Josiah was probably a hero to this teenage priest, and news of the king's death at Megiddo in 609 BC undoubtedly came as a shock. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and probably heard their prophecies. Ezekiel was one of 3,000 leading Jews taken into exile in Babylon when Jehoiachin was dethroned in 597 BC. His prophetic call took place in 593 BC (1:1–2) with his final recorded vision occurring about 573 BC. Ezekiel was living with the Jewish exiles near Nippur in the heart of Nebuchadnezzar's empire when the final Babylonian onslaught destroyed Jerusalem.

The oracle against Tyre found in Ezekiel 26–29 is a probable important source for John's oracle against Rome in chapter 18. The lament concerning the merchants (Ez 27:1–36) finds

particular expression in Revelation 18:11–19. Ezekiel 38–39, which describes the destruction of the armies of Gog, is a likely source for the final battle against the beast, the kings, and their armies (Rv 19:17–21). These nations gathered for battle are called Gog and Magog (Rv 20:8).

2.5.2.6 Daniel

Daniel tells the story of a young man from the Judean royal family who was taken to Babylon during the first exile in 605 BC (1:1).³⁰ He was trained with other Jewish young men in the Babylonian language and culture for placement in royal service. He became an interpreter of the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar when the king's own coterie of occultists failed him.

Two incidents of resistance to governmental authority stand out in the first half of the book. In chapter 3 Shadrach, Meshech, and Abnego refuse to worship an image of the king and are cast into a fiery furnace for their disobedience. They are miraculously preserved by a 'son of the gods' (v 25) who joins them in the furnace. In chapter 6 the enemies of Daniel prepare a trap to discredit him before the king. When Daniel disobeys an ill-conceived decree to worship only King Darius and continues to pray publicly toward Jerusalem, he is thrown into a lions' den as punishment. Daniel is again miraculously delivered, and his enemies instead meet death in the jaws of the lions.

Daniel's dream of the four beasts in chapter 7 and his dream of the ram and goat in chapter 8 are the probable sources for John's depiction of the eschatological enemies of God and his people in Revelation 12–13. The imagery of the beasts (Rv 13:1ff) derives particularly from Daniel's description of the four beasts who represent successive kingdoms that rule before the eternal kingdom is established (Dn 7:17–18). The fourth beast is particularly oppressive toward the saints (vv 19–25), and this beast becomes the prototype for John's beast in chapter 13 and throughout the book. The similarities between the two beasts are outlined in the following chart, adapted from Fekkes (1994:82–83):

<u>Description</u>	<u>Revelation</u>	<u>Daniel</u>
Comes out of the sea	13:1	7:3
Ten horns	13:1; cf 12:3; 17:3, 7, 12, 16	7:7
Resembles a leopard	13:2	7:6
Resembles a bear	13:2	7:5
Resembles a lion	13:2	7:4

³⁰Whether the dating of Daniel belongs in the sixth or second century is immaterial to our discussion, since John was only interested in the canonical source tradition.

Given authority	13:2, 4, 5	7:6
Fatally wounded	13:3	7:11
Mouth speaks great things	13:5	7:8
Rules for 42 months (time, times, & 1/2 a time)	13:5; cf 12:14	7:25
Blasphemes (speaks) against God	13:6	7:25; 11:36
Wars against the saints	13:7; cf 11:7; 17:14	7:21
Every tribe, people, language, & nation worship	13:7–8	7:14
Goes to destruction	17:8, 11	7:11
Ten horns are ten kings	17:12	7:24
Beast thrown into lake of fire	19:20; cf 20:10	7:11

2.5.3 John's prophetic situation

In our earlier examination of the apocalyptic situation of Jesus, we suggested that he began to open the seven seals following his exaltation to heaven. Throughout Revelation Jesus continues to oversee the implementation of the remaining judgments from heaven.

What is John's prophetic situation in relationship to the judgment cycles? It is in the fifth seal that the martyrs first appear. Some had been killed but a larger number of servants will join them in a short time (μικρον χρονόν; 6:11). 'The Apocalyptist presents this persecution as already having begun, but also as a continuing infliction upon the believers' (Vos 1965:184). The interlude after the sixth seal presents compatible visions—144,000 sealed servants (7:3–4) become a great multitude martyred in the great tribulation (7:9, 14). Thus John's prophetic situation is somewhere after the fifth seal. This conflicts with Holman's (1982:357) assessment 'that chapters 6–22 do *not* describe the situation of the church in John's day, either in Asia or anywhere else.'

The judgment of the fifth trumpet (9:1ff) presupposes the giving of a seal of God, which in the earlier cycle was not given until after the sixth seal (7:3). We agree with Holman (1982:376) that the great tribulation begins when the demonic hordes are released from the Abyss (9:2–11). The three woes occur during the beast's reign which is yet to begin from John's perspective (cf Holman 1982:371–72). Following the sixth trumpet the angel tells John that the promise given to the martyred servants in 6:11 (in 10:7 called 'his servants the prophets') will be fulfilled because the μικρον χρονόν will be χρονος ουκέτι (10:6; 'time has run out'). The translation 'no more delay' fails to make the proper link back to 6:11 (cf Holman 1982:363) and forward to 20:3 where μικρον χρονόν is also used.

John's vision in 10:1–7 indicates the consummation is near. Bauckham (1980:35) rejects any suggestion that 'in chapter 10 John stands at the end of the three and a half years and then in chapter 11 recapitulates the three and a half years.' He terms John's situation as a conscious

literary contradiction. However, the angelic announcement (10:7) is surely proleptic and anticipatory rather than actual. John must then eat the scroll and prophesy once again (10:9–11). The content of this prophecy deals specifically with the period of tribulation forecast in chapters 11–13. Thus instead of being at the end of the tribulation, John stands at the brink of it, warning his audience of its approach.

A period of persecution—42 months, 1260 days—is mentioned in the interlude following the sixth trumpet (11:2, 3). Following the seventh trumpet an identical period of tribulation is mentioned in 12:14, where the designation ‘time, times, and half a time’ (καίρος) describes the period when the woman is cared for in the wilderness.³¹ From the perspective of the dragon who is pursuing her, it is a short time (ὀλιγον καιρὸν; 12:12). The ὀλιγον καιρὸν of the dragon clearly seems synonymous with the μικρον χρονόν of God’s slaves (6:11).

One of the beast’s heads has already suffered its fatal wound, yet was healed (13:3) and still lives (v 14). The beast can be identified by his number—666 (13:18). Immediately following is another vision of the 144,000 (14:1ff) who are described as the firstfruits (v 5) of the martyrs.

The seven bowls of chapter 16 are yet future. The vengeance that was promised to the martyrs in the fifth seal now begins to be exacted. And the judgments that are wrought against the earth and its inhabitants now affect everything and are no longer partial (e.g., 16:3).

In chapter 17 two new clues to John’s situation are given. John sees a beast who ‘was, is not, and will come’ (v 8) who is the eighth emperor going to his destruction (v 11; cf supra 2.3.4.5). And in the sequence of the seven emperors (17:10; cf supra 2.3.2.10) five have fallen, thus John is prophesying in the period of the sixth emperor who ‘is.’ When the seventh emperor comes, he will remain for only a little while (v 10). The eighth emperor to come will be a beast who once was but in John’s time ‘now is not’ (v 11). Thus John ‘foresees the great tribulation ahead in the not-too-distant future’ (Holman 1982:375). This description of the beast/emperor is directly related to the beast who wars against the saints in 13:7.

The final clue comes in chapter 20. In language remarkably like that in chapter 12, Satan is bound by an angel for a thousand years and thrown into the Abyss (20:3). During this period the souls (ψυχάς) of those beheaded for their testimony reign on thrones with Christ (v 4). After the

³¹Vos (1965:129n73) observes: ‘Why John uses three different time designations will perhaps also remain an enigma.’ John shares this Elijah tradition with Jesus (Lk 4:25) and James (Js 5:17) who both state that the prophet shut up heaven from raining for three years and six months. 1 Kings 18:1 states only that the drought under King Ahab lasted approximately three years (:127–29).

thousand years, Satan is freed from the Abyss (cf the fifth trumpet in 9:1ff) for a short time (μικρόν χρόνον) so that he might deceive the nations (20:3, 8; πλανάω). This period is identical to that in which the heavenly souls (ψυχάς) slain for their testimony are told to rest a little while (6:9–11) and in which Satan the deceiver (12:9) pursues the offspring of the woman (v 13) through the beast *redivivus* (13:3–7) and the deceiving false prophet (13:14; 19:20; πλανάω).

The thousand years is a period related only to Satan and the heavenly saints. But Satan's binding surely affects the earthly church. During this period of respite the Asian churches now live, but the lull will soon be over. John is thus prophesying near the end of the thousand years after which Satan will gather the nations (cf 16:12–16) for the final battle against God's people (20:7–9).

A chart of the time periods of persecution follows:

<u>Time periods</u>	<u>Holy participants</u>	<u>Unholy participants</u>	<u>Outcome</u>
Short time (χρόνον μικρόν; 6:11)	Souls of slain	Earthdwellers	Fellow servants and brothers killed
Time has run out (χρόνος οὐκέτι; 10:6)	Servants the prophets	————	Mystery of God accomplished
42 months (11:2)	Holy city	Gentiles	Holy city trampled
1,260 days (11:3)	Two witnesses	Beast	Two witnesses killed
1,260 days (12:6)	Woman	Dragon/serpent/ devil/Satan	Woman flees to desert for protection
Short time (ὀλίγον καιρὸν; 12:12)	Woman	Devil/dragon	Dragon pursues woman
Time, times, and half a time (12:14)	Woman	Dragon/serpent	Woman protected from serpent
42 months (13:5)	Saints	Beast	Beast wars against saints conquering them
1000 years (20:2ff)	Souls of beheaded	Dragon/serpent/ devil/Satan	Souls reign; Satan bound
Short time (μικρόν χρόνον; 20:3)	God's people	Satan	Nations surround holy city

2.5.4 John's prophecy as prediction

The popular exposition of Revelation largely emphasizes that it is a book of predictions (e g, H Lindsay, *The Late Great Planet Earth* [1970]). An objective review of Old and New Testament prophetic texts reveals that prediction is an element of prophecy, although perhaps not the pre-

dominant one.³² For example, prediction is seen in the Old Testament when Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in exile for seventy years (29:10; cf Dan. 9:2). In the New Testament Paul describes the primary purpose of Christian prophecy as 'upbuilding, encouragement, and comfort' (1 Cor 14:3), yet prediction is clearly also at work in the ministry of Agabus (Ac 11:27–30; 21:10–11) and of Paul in Miletus (20:29–31).

Scholars have approached the question of Revelation as predictive prophecy from several perspectives. Swete (1909:xx) asserts that acknowledging the prophetic character of Revelation 'does not require us to expect direct predictions of future events.' Scott (1939:55) sees Revelation as a failure at prophecy: 'It is always dangerous to predict the future, and there has never been a prophecy so completely falsified by the event (i e, the destruction of Rome) as that of Revelation.' On the other hand, Selwyn (1900:44) affirms Revelation's unique predictive character, asking, 'Where then is "the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven" foretold by Christ or His Apostles?' The choice should be with neither extreme—all prediction or none.

If in fact predictive elements occur in Revelation, what are they? And what prophetic situation(s) in the first century would warrant a prophecy like Revelation? Given the momentous situations of John's Old Testament prophetic models, we should surely expect John's to be of a similar magnitude. The singular *heilsgeschichtliche* event in the latter half of the first century, according to Robinson (1976:13), was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. This is, of course, the event predicted in the Synoptic apocalypses. However, many Gospel scholars regard these prophecies as *vaticinium ex eventu*. For example, D E Nineham (1969:339) writes concerning Mark 13: 'Many of the things mentioned in the chapter were known to them [the readers] from bitter personal experience and very likely the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple were to them already things of the past.'

Because of this, Charles and others have argued that Revelation 11:1–2 must be a later gloss because the temple is presented as still standing. As we suggested earlier (cf supra 2.3.2.7), the images in this text are multivalent and may or may not refer to a physical temple and city. The primary focus of the phrase, 'the treading upon the holy city by the Gentiles,' according to Vos (1965:124), is that it 'is to be interpreted as the oppressions and persecutions which are to come upon the Christian church.' De Young (1960:110) asserts that 'The "primitive" Christian Church had not only been taught by Christ and his Apostles to expect the

³²G V Smith calls prophecy's predominant aspect 'God's method of changing human thinking and behavior through a deeper understanding of His mighty acts in the past, present, and future' (1986:3.1002).

destruction of the city and temple, but a new city and a new temple had been provided as objects for their faith and hope....Christians had been taught to forsake the earthly city and the temple and to hold fast by faith to a new temple...and the heavenly Jerusalem.' Holman (1982:376) rightly observes that 'The directness of the prologue, letters, and epilogue do not lend themselves to the conclusion that the message of chapters 4–22 is to a great extent an *ex eventu* prophecy.' With our post-70 perspective it is difficult for us to appreciate the sense of immediacy and urgency felt by John and his audience.

2.5.5 Conclusion

Although B Newman (1963:134) cautions that 'similarity of form does not necessarily indicate similarity of background'; nevertheless, political and religious conflicts characterize the periods when the Old Testament prophets prophesied. Mazzaferri (1989:145) notes that 'in general the classical prophets ministered in the critical years of the rise of Assyria and Babylon, and suffered the unprecedented catastrophe of the fall of Jerusalem.' At the call of each prophet God indicates that some historical crisis lies behind his commission. For Isaiah the destruction and exile of Israel lay ahead (6:11ff); for Jeremiah the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem is impending (1:14ff), and for Ezekiel the Jews in exile are living in rebellion (2:3ff). (Daniel does not experience a prophetic call *per se*, but the canonical historical setting reveals conflicts experienced by the exiles under the Babylonians and Persians.) Indeed a significant exigence lies behind the ministry of each of these prophets.

The prophetic oracles they delivered were conditional and not deterministic. E Käsemann (1969:79) suggests that 'The stylistic form in which prophecy found it possible to express this message was offered by the Old Testament, i.e., by those sayings in which the fulfilment of some condition on earth was to be followed in the eschatological future by promise or threat, blessing or curse.' Through his threats God hopes that his people will repent, thereby receiving the promised future blessings. Mazzaferri (1989:144) similarly concludes that 'The consistent movement of the three classical prophetic books is from pervasive threat to pervasive promise.'

John receives his call while on the island of Patmos 'because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (1:9). His message likewise contained threat and promise. A political crisis has befallen the Roman Empire, the 'Babylon' of his day. And because of the Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is at hand. John's prophetic

situation resembles that of the classical prophets, and Revelation fittingly stands as the climax of prophecy.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Four situations related to Revelation have been developed in this chapter. The rhetorical situation of the seven churches is largely characterized by internal threats of false teaching and external threats of persecution, while that of the heavenly church reflects persecution and violent death. Proposed dating for Revelation locates the historical situation of the Roman Empire either early around AD 69 or late around AD 95. Twelve texts in Revelation were examined for potential clues as to date. While none is conclusive, their cumulative evidence points to the early date. Likewise, Roman and Greek literary sources establish that the historical situation in the empire during the 60s better accords with the anarchy and tribulation portrayed in Revelation.

The apocalyptic situation of Jesus was proposed to be related to his soon coming. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple along with the parousia, all predicted in the Synoptic apocalypses, were at hand. Updating his earlier prophecy, Jesus sought to prepare the largely Gentile Asian churches for the judgment and tribulation that would precede his return. John's prophetic situation paralleled that of the Old Testament prophets whom God called to prophesy to his covenant people during particular historical and spiritual crises. His prophetic perspective in relationship to Revelation was deemed to be somewhere after the fifth seal. Using threat and promise, John prophesied judgment to those who failed to repent and rewards to those who persevered in doing good works.

The exigences of the rhetorical, historical, apocalyptic, and prophetic situations described in this chapter show that the crisis facing the Asian churches was not just a perceived one. Mazzaferri (1989:249) concurs: 'Indeed, it is by no means extreme to conclude that, were it not for such circumstances [need to repent and persecution], Rev would simply not have been penned.' The identification of key themes related to these four situations is an exegetical by-product of our investigation. However, a discussion of these themes will be delayed until the final Chapter 8. With the foundation of the background and situations of Revelation laid, we will now look at the structure of Revelation, particularly the seven letters.

CHAPTER 3: THE STRUCTURE OF REVELATION AND THE SEVEN LETTERS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The problem of structure

One of the most vexing problems regarding the book of Revelation is its structure. In spite of a growing mass of research, little consensus exists regarding structuration. J R Michaels (1992:69) in his exegetical guide to Revelation makes this pessimistic assessment: 'There are as many different outlines as there are interpreters.' And D L Barr (1994:1), chairman of the Society of Biblical Literature seminar on Reading the Apocalypse, states in a recent paper: 'There is no consensus on how we should organize or outline the material in the book. There are almost as many outlines as there are commentators doing the organizing.'

The truth of these statements is clearly seen in the analysis by H A Lombard (1988:154–57) of structural outlines by five leading commentators. Lombard includes H Kraft, F Hahn, J Lambrecht, E Schüssler Fiorenza, and D Hellholm. While certain similarities are apparent, one is struck by the profound differences among the outlines of these five authors. Add the eight others whom Michaels (1992:69n 9) references plus his own (:69–71), and it is apparent that a major interpretive problem is at work. If scholars cannot agree on a structural approach, it is understandable that the average reader can make little sense of the book's organization. Yet as M Rissi (1966:1) acutely observes, 'In scarcely any other biblical book are the method of exposition and the understanding of the book's literary structure so thoroughly intertwined as they are in the Revelation to John. The question of construction deeply touches the highly problematic character of the book.'

3.1.2 Revelation 1:19 as a structural key

Many commentators consider Revelation 1:19 as a structural key to the book, 'Therefore, write what you have seen, what is and what is about to happen after this.' E Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:175) affirms this, 'The passage most generally used for dividing the book is Rev. 1:19.' Whether it suggests a twofold or a threefold division is hotly debated, and G K Beale (1992:360–87) has provided a complete discussion of the options.

In his popular commentary J Walvoord (1966:48) advocates a threefold division: 'The things referred to as having already been seen are those contained in chapter 1....The second division, "the things which are," most naturally includes chapters 2 and 3....The third division, "the things

which shall be hereafter," would naturally include the bulk of the book which was to be prophetic.' The futurist interpretive view, which Walvoord represents, sees the events of chapters 4–22 as occurring in the period immediately preceding the parousia. The church is seen as raptured in chapter 4 and thus out of the picture during the judgments depicted in the seals, trumpets, and bowls. Because the word 'church' does not appear after chapters 1–3, Walvoord (1966:103) concludes 'that the church may be considered as in heaven and not related to events which will take place on the earth in preparation for Christ's return in power and glory.' Discontinuity between chapters 1–3 and 4–22 is the hallmark of this perspective, which from a literary perspective is difficult to sustain. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:172) rightly points to the continuity: 'As the seventh element of the preceding seven-series opens up a new series of visions in the plague septets of the book, so the seventh element of the letter vision opens up a new series of visions. It is therefore inappropriate to separate the letter septet from the following visions of the book.' She (:173) also observes that this division suborns authorial intent 'since it separates parenthesis and apocalyptic vision.' While 1:19 can assist in understanding the temporal perspectives within the prophecy, it cannot provide a macrostructure for the book.¹

3.2 CHIASMUS AS A RHETORICAL STRUCTURAL DEVICE

The burgeoning interest in rhetorical criticism has led to increased focus on the role of chiasmus as a structural device in ancient literature. G A Kennedy's favorable mention of chiasmus in his influential *New Testament interpretation through rhetorical criticism* (1984:11–12, 28–29) has certainly spurred interest in it. The nature of chiasmus and its structural place in classical and biblical literature, particularly Revelation, are discussed next.

3.2.1 The definition of chiasmus

Chiasmus derives its name from its likeness to the Greek letter *chi* (X). E W Bullinger (1898:374) classified chiasmus under 'Introverted Correspondence,' declaring:

This is where there are two series, and the first of the one series corresponds with the last of the second; the second of the first corresponds with the penultimate (or the last but one) of the second; and the third of the first corresponds with the antepenultimate of the second. That is to say, if there are six members, the first corresponds with the sixth, the second with the fifth, and third with the fourth, and so on.

¹In spite of hermeneutical evidence to the contrary, Walvoord's approach remains the prevailing one among many readers today. In my wing of Christendom, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement, this perspective is nearly the exclusive one and others are largely unknown. A recent example that adopts a futurist perspective is the 1991 commentary *The ultimate victory* by Pentecostal scholar S M Horton.

Chiasmus as thus broadly defined includes direct, inverted, and antithetical parallelism. J Breck (1987:71), however, seeks to narrow the common definition, insisting that chiasmus can be distinguished from other parallel structures by a 'pivotal theme, about which the other propositions of the literary unity are developed.' Genuine chiasmus, Breck continues, has a central focus at its 'crossing point,' which sets 'in relief the central idea or theme the writers tries to express.' Chiasmus therefore has a rhetorical force distinct from other structural devices.

3.2.2 Chiasmus in ancient literature

Kennedy (1984:28) notes that chiasmus is an example of a literary figure 'commonly found in ancient texts and given labels by modern critics [but] not identified at all in handbooks of the classical period.' The importance of chiasmus has been identified by Stock (1984:23) as 'a seriously needed element of internal organization in ancient writings, which did not make use of paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization and other such synthetic devices to communicate the conclusion of one idea and the commencement of the next.'

According to Parunak (1981:168), chiasmus is a simple structural form 'used to divide, unify, and emphasize biblical texts.' Modern readers, accustomed to visual interpretive aids such as punctuation, parentheses, and paragraphs, can little understand the situation of the first-century reader or listener. Speaking of Revelation Bauckham (1993a:1) writes, 'It is important to realise that the essential structure of the book...must have been intended to be perceptible in oral performance.' For the ancient audience external structural features were necessary to introduce and close pericopes, to signal emphasis, and to define argumentation.

The importance of chiasmus as a rhetorical device in classical and biblical literature has been increasingly noted. Numerous books and articles on chiasmus have appeared in recent years. The following sections summarizes the scope of those inquiries.

3.2.2.1 Chiasmus in classical literature

Since Revelation's audience was raised in a Greco-Roman literary environment (cf supra 1.4.8), it is important to look at the rhetorical background in classical literature. Chiasmus was used in classical Greek literature as early as Homer and was very common in Latin literature, especially in poetry of the Augustan period. Classical scholars often term such structuration as 'ring composition.' Talbert (1974:67ff) calls this 'the principle of balance' and lists a number of classical works, using Vergil's *Aeneid* as an example. Homer, whose home was Smyrna, used it extensively in the

Illiad (Whitman 1958:249–84 *passim*). Hesiod, according to R Hamilton (1989:40), used chiasmus to organize his digressions in his *Theogeny*. E B Holtsmark (1970) has detected chiastic structure in Aeschylus' *Persae* and W R Connor (1984:251ff) in Thucydides' works. And N J Kernell gives numerous examples of chiasmus at macro and micro levels in Euripides' *Bacchae* (1992).

3.2.2.2 Chiasmus in Old Testament literature

Because of the many allusions and possible quotations in Revelation from the Old Testament (cf supra 2.5.2.1), his audience's familiarity with this literature is presumed by John. Chiasmus, often in ABA' form, has been identified in much Old Testament literature. The following are some of the books identified by their commentators as displaying chiastic structure: Deuteronomy (Christensen 1991:xli), Ruth (Luter & Rigsby 1996:15ff); Job (Andersen 1976:20–22; Clines 1989:xxxv–xxvii), Ecclesiastes (Fredericks 1989:19), Isaiah (Laaton 1990:212–13), Daniel (Baldwin 1978:59–62; Goldingay 1989:325), and Zechariah (Baldwin 1972:75–81).

The use of chiasmus in prophetic literature is noteworthy, particularly the ABA' format. The classical prophets generally fell into a threefold pattern: (1) God's threats against his people, (2) oracles against the nations, and (3) promises of restoration. Such a pattern is seen in Ezekiel:

- (1) Chapters 1–24,
- (2) Chapters 25–32
- (3) Chapters 33–48

Wolf (1985:40) presents a variation of this outline in Isaiah:

- Judgment with Assyrian backdrop as poetry (chs 1–35)
- Historical interlude as prose (chs 36–39)
- Comfort with Babylonian backdrop as poetry (chs 40–66)

Goldingay (1989:325) has noted chiastic structure even in the languages of Daniel:

- Hebrew (1–2:4a)
- Aramaic (2:4b–7:28)
- Hebrew (8:1–12:13)

Baldwin (1972:74) observes that Zechariah begins with an appeal for repentance while 'the closing verses look ahead to the time when all men will worship the true God.' She then notes how Daniel and Revelation follow a similar progression.²

²Another remarkable feature of these prophetic books is that a structural break occurs in the middle of the prophecy. Isaiah divides into chapters 1–39 and 40–66; Daniel into chapters 1–6 and 7–12; Zechariah into chapters 1–8 and 9–14. Likewise Revelation can be divided into chapters 1–11 and 12–22.

3.2.2.3 Chiasmus in New Testament literature

Commentators have likewise found examples of chiasmus throughout the New Testament. A representative list follows: Matthew (Gundry 1994:164–67; J C Anderson 1985:75–76), Mark (Dewey 1980 passim), Luke (Bailey 1976:63), John (Culpepper 1980–81), Acts (Wolfe 1980), 2 Corinthians (Blomberg 1989:8ff), Ephesians (Porter 1990:273), James (Davids 1982:25–29), and Jude (Bauckham 1983:5–6; cf Wendland 1994:211–12). R Longnecker (1990:213) sees an example of chiasmus in Paul's argument about Jerusalem in Galatians 4:25–26, though with an anomaly, i e, an antithetical parallelism, in the second part:

- A Hagar
- B Mt Sinai
- C slavery
- D the present city of Jerusalem
- D¹ the Jerusalem that is above
- C¹ freedom
- B¹ (Mt Zion)
- A¹ our mother

Other examples are listed by D M Scholer and K R Snodgrass (1992:xvii–xviii) and by C Blomberg (1989:5–8). It is evident that the New Testament authors by virtue of their background and training were also familiar with chiasmus as a rhetorical structural device.

3.3 LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF CHIASMUS

How do interpreters recognize the presence of chiasmus in biblical literature? This important question will be answered in the next section. Laws and criteria governing chiasmus will be examined before we began our discussion of chiasmus in Revelation.

3.3.1 Lund's seven laws

In his seminal study of biblical chiasmus *Chiasmus in the New Testament*, N W Lund (1942:40–41) notes seven laws of chiastic structure:

1. The center, which may consist of up to four lines, is always the turning point.
2. At the center a change of thought often occurs and an antithetic idea introduced. After this the original trend is resumed and continued until the system is concluded.
3. Identical ideas often occur in the extremes and at the center and nowhere else in their respective system.

4. Ideas often occur at the center of one system and recur in the extremes of a corresponding one, the second system evidently constructed to match the first.
5. Certain terms tend to gravitate toward certain positions within a given system, e g, the divine names in the Psalms and quotations in the New Testament at the center.
6. Larger units are frequently introduced and concluded by frame-passages.
7. A mixture of chiasmic and alternating lines frequently occurs within the same unit.

3.3.2 Stock's rules

Because ancient writing was meant to be read aloud, rules of rhetorical discourse invaded all fields of literature. A Stock (1984:26) identifies two primary rules. First, 'a literary work should begin and end in the same way, with similar material (and so should smaller passages within the work), with the most important material in the middle.' Second, 'each unit begins and ends with narrative material between which discourse material will be framed.' Stock's first rule accords with Lund's rules 1 and 3, and his second with rule 6.

3.3.3 Clark's criteria

D J Clark (1975:63) identifies three types of criteria for identifying chiasmus: (1) content, (2) form or structure, and (3) language. Two other identifiable features of pericope are setting and theology. All of these criteria, according to Clark (65), are *'to be seen as a cline with varying degrees of strength and persuasiveness rather than as a feature which is definitely either present or absent.'* Chiasmic structure, undoubtedly apparent to ancient readers, often becomes difficult for modern interpreters to delimit exactly, even in the same pericopes. An example is Mark 2:1–3:6 where differing chiasmic structures are identified by J Dewey (1973:396) and W Harrington (1979: 24–25).

3.3.4 Blomberg's criteria

The rising interest in chiasmus as a structural device has produced a downside. Chiasmus is now being found everywhere in Scripture, with many suggestions being improbable. Such abuse has prompted C Blomberg (1989:5–7) to suggest nine criteria that must be met before hypotheses of extended chiasmus can be considered credible. These criteria are summarized as follows:

1. A problem must be perceived in the structure of the text in question, which more conventional outlines fail to resolve.

2. Clear examples of parallelism must be evident between the two 'halves' of the hypothesized chiasmus, to which commentators call attention even when they propose quite different outlines for the text overall.
3. Verbal (grammatical) and conceptual (structural) parallelism should characterize most if not all of the corresponding pairs of subdivisions.
4. Verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology, not peripheral or trivial language.
5. Both verbal and conceptual parallelism should involve words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere within the proposed chiasmus.
6. Multiple sets of correspondences between passages opposite each other in the chiasmus as well as multiple members of the chiasmus itself are desirable.
7. The outline should divide the text at natural breaks which would be agreed upon even by those proposing very different structures to account for the whole.
8. The center of the chiasmus, which forms its climax, should be a passage worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance.
9. Ruptures in the outline, such as shifts between the forward and reverse parts of the structure, should be avoided if possible.

Adherence to Blomberg's sensible criteria will assist interpreters in finding valid examples of chiasmus in Scripture. Later in the chapter our proposed chiastic outline will be examined in light of each of these criterion.

3.4 CHIASMUS IN REVELATION

These laws and criteria will serve as a starting point for our discussion in Revelation, where illustrations of these criteria will be pointed out. Most commentators on Revelation have largely ignored discussion of rhetorical figures such as chiasmus. The indexes of such standard commentaries as Charles, Kiddle, Tenney, Mounce, Beasley-Murray, Sweet, and Ford omit any reference to chiasmus. It is largely newer commentators who include discussions of the subject.

3.4.1 Chiastic examples

R Wall in his 1991 commentary, speaking of John's rhetorical devices generally, observes: 'The author often repeats similar words and phrases in inverted (ABCC'B'A') or chiastic (ABCDC'B'A') order' (:15). Three examples of chiastic structuration found by interpreters in Revelation follow.

3.4.1.1 The beatitudes

C Giblin (1991:217n164) suggests a modified chiasmic structure for the seven beatitudes.

- A Beatitude 1 (1:3)
- B Beatitude 2 (14:13)
- C Beatitude 3 (16:15)
- D' Beatitude 4 (19:9)
- B' Beatitude 5 (20:6)
- A' Beatitude 6 (22:7)
- C' Beatitude 7 (22:14)

Giblin explains that beatitudes 1 and 6 deal with an expected response to the reading of the book, beatitudes 2 and 5 speak of a heavenly reward prior to the general resurrection, and beatitudes 3 and 7 refer to guarding (keeping) and washing one's own clothes. Beatitude 4 highlights the invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb and is the only beatitude with no explanation given. Though it stands alone among the seven and in the center, it does not appear to have central importance. 'Nonetheless, it does stand out as a uniquely arresting statement of God's "grace" or blessing' (:217n164). Giblin argues that beatitudes 3 and 7—those which deliberately upset the concentric order, especially 7 (C')—seem to be underscored in the progression of the series. Giblin's observations concerning structuration in the beatitudes is valid and significant. A relationship between the beatitudes and the promise sayings will be presented in the next chapter (cf *infra* 4.9.6).

3.4.1.2 The enemies of God

R Mulholland, Jr (1990:38), following G Bornkamm, portrays the rebellion against God in the form of a chiasmus, beginning with the introduction of Death and Hades in 6:8 and concluding with their destruction in 20:14. However, Death and Hades in 6:8 are named in the context of the fourth seal, and their mention does not appear to begin a chiasmic sequence. Therefore the chiasmus proposed by Bornkamm and Mulholland seems unconvincing.

Strand and others have proposed another model called 'the great chiasmic symmetry of the second half of the Apocalypse' (Gaechter 1947:559). Here the dragon, the two beasts, and Babylon are destroyed in the reverse order of their appearance. Such a model also validates that John himself saw a division in his document following chapter 11. Strand (1978:403) diagrams this chiasmus as follows, with only the first verse of multi-verse references given:

- A Dragon (12:3)
- B Sea-beast (13:1)
- C Earth-beast = false prophet (13:11)
- D Babylon (14:8)
- E Beast-worshipers (14:9)
- E' Beast-worshipers (16:2)
- D' Babylon (16:19)
- C' Earth-beast = false prophet (19:20)
- B' Sea-beast (19:20)
- A' Dragon (20:2)

One flaw in Strand's diagram is that the sea-beast is reintroduced in 19:19–20 before the false prophet, hence C' and B' should be switched. This chiasmic anomaly is understandable because the two beasts 'work so closely together that they might be considered a unit' (:403). Strand demonstrates convincingly that chiasmus is used for thematic structuration in the second half of Revelation. Such an observation lends credence to the suggestion that chiasmus might likewise serve as the book's macrostructure.

3.4.1.3 The new Jerusalem

R Wall (1991:244) sees chiasmus shaping both the prologue (21:1–5a) and the main body (21:5b–22:6a) of the vision of the new Jerusalem. The chiasmus in the prologue, which is composed of a series of contrasts, is presented first.

- A Confirmation of promised new creation (21:1a)
- B Negation of old creation (21:1b)
- C Passing away of the sea (21:1c)
- D Coming of new Jerusalem (21:2a)
- D' Confirmation of God's eschatological dwelling (21:3)
- C' No effects of evil (21:4a, b)
- B' Passing away of evil (21:4c)
- A' God's transformation of old things into a new order (21:5a)

The center of this initial chiasmus focuses on a bride rather than a city, hence '[t]he reader is drawn to John's real concern' (:244). Wall believes John's emphasis here accords with 19:6, where the eschatological community is explicitly called the bride of the Lamb.

The second chiasmus shapes the main body of the vision, which follows from and expands upon the prologue.

- A John's recommissioning to write (21:5b)
- B Water of life given (21:6)
 - C Inheritance of the community of overcomers (21:7)
 - D Overcomers escape the second death because not evildoers (21:8)
 - E Extended description of new Jerusalem (21:9–26)
 - D' Impure do not inherit new order (21:27a)
 - C' Overcomers found in Lamb's book of life (21:27b)
- B' Water of life in garden given to overcomers (22:1–5)
- A' John's vision of new order called trustworthy and true (22:6a)

The center of this second chiasmus likewise equates the new Jerusalem with the bride found in the vortex of the prologue. Wall (:245) thinks John's vision here has been crafted to underscore one foundational eschatological principle—'the primary result of God's coming triumph over evil is a redeemed and transformed people, who live forever with God and God's Lamb.'

Wall's attempt to find John's emphasis here by using chiasmic structuration is creatively executed, yet flawed. Without doing an in-depth analysis utilizing Blomberg's criteria, suffice it to say that Wall's proposal fails Blomberg's first criterion. Conventional outlines typically break after 21:8, with verse 9 beginning a new section. J E Botha (1988:135) correctly notes that '21:1–8 forms the link between the visions of the ultimate salvation and the foregoing visions of judgment.' This is the pericope's inherent structure because 21:1–22:6 is another example of a double vision, in this case of the heavenly city/bride. Vision 1 comprises 21:1–8; vision 2 consists of 21:9–22:6. The emphases of this double vision will be discussed later (cf *infra* 7.8.3.3–4). Because the chiasmus does not follow the natural literary division, its elements must be forced into artificial parallelisms.

3.4.2 Chiasmus as the macrostructure

3.4.2.1 E W Bullinger

Chiasmus as Revelation's macrostructure has been proposed by several interpreters in this century. In 1898 Bullinger published his major study on biblical rhetoric, *Figures of speech used in the Bible*, which featured a discussion of chiasmus illustrated with numerous Old and New Testament examples (:374–79). His commentary on Revelation appeared in 1902, and insights gained from the study of rhetoric are apparent in his structuration of the book. His basic outline is (1902:116):

- A Introduction (1:1–20)
- B The people on earth (2:1–3:22)
 - C Visions (4:1–20:15)
- B' The people on the new earth (21:1–22:5)
- A' Conclusion (22:6–21)

Bullinger divides the central C section into seven visions, wherein each vision alternates between heaven and earth (:118). Of these the middle fourth vision covers 12:1–13:18. 'As to position, it occupies, literally and actually, the central part of the book; while as to its subject matter, we shall see...that it is as important as its position declares it to be' (:119). In this outline the seven trumpets and seven seals are paired—'the two most solemn portions of all the judgments which the book contains' (:120). A major weakness of Bullinger's outline, however, is designating only the C section as 'Visions.' John's first vision of Christ occurs in 1:9ff (A), and chapter 21 (B') is likewise a vision. Thus visions are found outside the central section.

Bullinger's outline is a pioneering one for chiasmic studies in Revelation. His identification of chapter 12 as the center of the book and the pairing of the trumpet and seal judgments find common ground with our proposed outline. His idiosyncratic exegesis of Revelation has undoubtedly caused many interpreters to ignore his attempt to structure the book chiasmically.

3.4.2.2 N W Lund

The most famous exponent of chiasmus is N W Lund who published his outline in 1942 (:325–26). Lund fails to cite Bullinger's work on Revelation, although he shows familiarity with two other books by Bullinger. Lund's detailed outline is largely repeated in his later volume *Studies in the book of Revelation* (1955:34–35). Both outlines largely agree; however, the earlier one projects some transposition of text based on source-critical analysis, an approach he later discarded. Lund's proposed chiasmic outline in simplified form (1955:27) is:

- A Prologue (1:1–20)
- B Seven epistles (2:1–3:22)
- C Seven seals (4:1–8:5)
- D Seven trumpets (8:2, 6–11:19)
- E The little book (10:1–11)
- F The two witnesses (11:1–13)
- F' The dragon and the woman (12:1–17)
- E' The two beasts (13:1–18)
- C' Seven angels (14:1–15:4)
- D' Seven bowls (15:1, 5–16:21)
- B' Seven angels (17:1–22:5)
- A' Epilogue (22:6–21)

Of significance in Lund's outline are two points shared with the other outlines that follow. At B and B' are chapters 2–3 and chapter 21 through at least 22:5. The complementarity of these two sections, no matter what form the remainder of the outline takes, is important to our discussion of the

promise sayings and their fulfillment. The second observation is that chapter 12 appears at the center of each outline.

3.4.2.3 E Schüssler Fiorenza

Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:35–36) likewise recognizes a concentric ABCDC'B'A' structure, although she does not call it chiasmus. The following outline is simplified from the original, which included subpoints:

- A Prologue and epistolary greeting (1:1–8)
 - B Rhetorical situation in the cities of Asia Minor (1:9–3:22)
 - C Opening the sealed scroll: Exodus plagues (4:1–9:21; 11:15–19)
 - D The bitter-sweet scroll: 'War' against the community (10:1–15:4)
 - C' Exodus from the oppression of Babylon/Rome (15:5–19:10)
 - B' Liberation from evil and God's world-city (19:11–22:9)
- A' Epilogue and epistolary frame (22:10–21)

In another essay 'The composition and structure of Revelation' Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:175) further simplifies her outline, providing only the letter and scripture reference. There she also includes 15:1 under C'. In the same place she argues further that 'the whole book is patterned after the epistolary framework which represents an inclusion.' While limiting a chiastic outline to these seven elements is debatable, I nevertheless agree with her assessment that 'the structure of the book underscores that the main function of Rev. is the prophetic interpretation of the situation of the community' (:175; my emphasis—MWW).

3.4.2.4 K Strand

K Strand (1978:401) has also proposed a chiastic structure with a sevenfold form for Revelation's structure, although his center D has four elements. This central section likewise has symmetry. Da and Da' include the trumpet and bowl judgments, while Db and Db' deal with the evil forces. Apart from the prologue and epilogue, the sections follow his projection of eight visions in the book.

- A Prologue (1:1–11)
 - B Church militant (1:12–3:22)
 - C God's salvatory work in progress (4:1–8:1)
 - Da Trumpet warnings (8:2–11:18)
 - Db Aggression by evil forces (11:19–14:20)
 - Da' Plague punishments (15:1–16:21)
 - Db' Judgment on evil forces (17:1–18:24)
 - C' God's salvatory work completed (19:1–21:4)
 - B' Church triumphant (21:5–22:5)
- A' Epilogue (22:6–21)

In a later study Strand (1987a:108) modified the names of several of the pericopes, although the blocks of text remained unchanged.

3.4.2.5 J Ellul

J Ellul (1977:45–52) has proposed an axial structure for Revelation based on theological criteria. Chapter 12 forms the main theological focus of the book because the birth and exaltation of Christ are described. Ellul's outline³ is as follows:

- A The church and her Lord (1:4–4:11)
- B The revelation of history (5:1–7:17)
- C Jesus Christ, the keystone (8:1–14:5)
- B' Judgment and destruction of evil (14:6–20:15)
- A' The new creation (21:1–22:16)

According to Ellul (:100), each section contains a vision of Jesus Christ; for example, in A a vision of the omnipotent Lord is found (1:4–20) while in A' the Lord of the end time is seen (22:6–16). Ellul (:234–55) sees these five sections framed by eight liturgical texts; for example, a revelation on the church is found in 1:5–6 and in 4:1–11.

Ellul's divisions seem arbitrary from a literary perspective, but again his approach is theological. However, his axis corresponds to the center of other chiastic models, so this observation confirms the importance of chapter 12 to Revelation's structure.

3.4.2.6 Other interpreters

In recent years other interpreters working in Revelation have also proposed chiasmus.⁴ J Lambrecht (1980:85–86) refines U Vanni's structuration and presents it in a concentric framework, although he includes only 4:1–22:5. A Beagley (1987:30–31, 181) has adopted a seven acts outline and combined it with chiastic structure. Without mentioning chiasmus Park (1995:258) suggests that the letters (chs 2–3) and the new Jerusalem section (21:1–22:5) 'frame and encircle the central portion of the book.' This central portion—4:1–22:5—describes both what will happen before the end of time and what the church is to conquer. Park's structuration, however, is confusing because his frame section is also included as part of the center.

³Since Ellul never provides a diagram of his outline, one must be assembled from the text, which is somewhat confusing to follow. Hence, my outline differs somewhat from the one given by du Rand (1991:303).

⁴The increased interest in Revelation's chiastic structure is evidenced through two papers presented by B Luter (1994) and M Lee (1995) at recent annual meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society. My proposed outline that follows was also presented initially as a paper at the 1994 ETS annual meeting.

3.4.2.7 M W Wilson

My own chiastic outline is now offered:⁵

- A Prologue and greeting (1:1–8)
- B Seven churches (1:4–4:2)
- C Seven seals (3:21–8:5)
- D Seven trumpets/two witnesses (8:2–11:19)
- E Woman, dragon, and the male child (12:1–18)
- D' Two beasts/seven bowls (13:1–16:21)
- C' Destruction of Babylon (16:18–19:10)
- B' New Jerusalem (19:6–22:9)
- A' Closing and epilogue (22:6–21)

This outline seeks to preserve several of the key structural observations that commentators have made. First, it recognizes the sevenfold structure of sections B, C, D, and D', but does not force the unnumbered sections into a similar pattern (contra Yarbro Collins [1979a:xiii et al]). Second, the overlapping of sections avoids the rigid demarcations inherent in most structuration and instead suggests the fluidity of John's structuration. Bauckham (1993a:5) makes this key observation: 'To insist on assigning these verses only to one or other of these sections...is to misunderstand John's literary methods, among which are the overlapping and interweaving of the sections of his work.' Note that E—the center of the chiasmus—is the only section with a clearly defined beginning and end. This section has always proved problematic as Bauckham (1993a:15) further notes: 'Most attempts to discern the structure of Revelation have found it particularly difficult to see how chapters 12–14 fit into the overall structure. The beginning of chapter 12 seems an uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start, devoid of literary links with anything that precedes.' Third, these sectional overlaps allow identification of inclusios at the sectional transitions. These are either verbal or thematic or both. The eschatological earthquake with its cosmic phenomenon of thunder and lightning functions as an inclusion following the seven seals (8:5), the seven trumpets (11:19), and the seven bowls (16:18; cf Bauckham 1993a:202ff).

⁵In an earlier version of this outline I divided sections D and D' into two sections:

- D Seven trumpets (8:2–9:21)
- E Two witnesses (10:1–11:19)
- F Woman, dragon, and the male child (12:1–18)
- E' Two beasts (13:1–14:20)
- D' Seven bowls (15:1–16:21)

Since the seventh trumpet with its inclusio is found in 11:15–19 (E), the sevenfold structuration of the trumpets was ignored in this draft. The present outline omits that defect as well as preserves the structuration of the book in seven units, apart from the prologue and epilogue.

3.4.3 Evaluation of the outline

Using the criteria developed by Blomberg (cf supra 3.3.4), we will next evaluate my proposed outline using a question-and-answer approach.

1. *Is there a problem in Revelation's structure that more conventional outlines have failed to resolve?* Yes, as noted in 3.1, no consensus exists among commentators regarding the structure of the book.
2. *Are clear examples of parallelism evident between the two 'halves' of the hypothesized chiasmus, even to commentators who propose quite different outlines?* Yes, commentators invariably note the relationships between the prologue/epilogue (A/A'), the seven trumpets/seven bowls (D/D'), and the promises/fulfillments (B/B'); outlined in 3.5.6).
3. *Does grammatical and structural parallelism characterize most of the corresponding pairs of subdivisions?* The structural parallelism between A/A' and D/D' will be demonstrated in 4 and 6 respectively. Problematic are the unnumbered sections C' and B'. There is parallelism between C and C'. C begins with a scene depicting God sitting upon his throne surrounded by his heavenly court; C' begins with the great prostitute Babylon sitting upon many waters presiding over her earthly coterie. Although within B seven churches are enumerated, some interpreters (cf Boring 1989:31) see within B' seven unnumbered scenes of final victory.
4. *Does verbal parallelism involve central imagery or terminology, not peripheral or trivial language?* The following chart shows significant verbal parallelism in the Greek text of the prologue and epilogue.

A Prologue (1:1–11)

1:1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός, δείξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ

1:3 μακάριος ὁ ἀναγινώσκων καὶ οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας καὶ τηροῦντες τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ γεγραμμένα, ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς.

1:4 Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ταῖς ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ.

χάρις ὑμῖν... 1:5 ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

1:8 Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ

1:9 Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης

A' Epilogue (22:6–21)

22:6 καὶ ὁ κύριος, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν προφητῶν, ἀπέστειλεν τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ δείξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει

22:7 μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου.

22:10 ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν

22:16 Ἐγὼ Ἰησοὺς ἔπεμψα τὸν ἄγγελόν μου μαρτυρῆσαι ὑμῖν ταῦτα ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις

22:21 Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ...

22:13 ἐγὼ τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ

22:8 Κἀγὼ Ἰωάννης

5. Does verbal and conceptual parallelism involve words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere within the proposed chiasmus? Yes, one example is 'church' (ἐκκλησία) which appears nineteen times in chapters 1–3 and does not reappear until 22:16.

6. Are there multiple sets of correspondences between passages opposite each other in the chiasmus as well as multiple members of the chiasmus itself? Yes, an excellent example of such correspondences is found in D/D', although they are not an exact match (such variations are normal in chiasmus).

D Seven Trumpets

1. Fire hurled to earth which is burned up
2. Sea turns to blood, living creatures die
3. Rivers and springs become bitter
4. Sun, moon, stars turn dark
5. Locusts afflict people without mark of God on their foreheads
6. Four angels released at great river Euphrates to kill 1/3 of humanity
7. Flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, earthquake, and great hailstorm

D' Seven Bowls

4. Sun scorches people with fire
2. Sea turns to blood, living creatures die
3. Rivers and springs become blood
5. Beast's kingdom turned to darkness
1. Ugly, painful sores afflict people with mark of the beast
6. Great river Euphrates dried up to gather kings for battle of Armageddon
7. Lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, great earthquake, great plague of hail

7. Does the outline divide the text at natural breaks which would be agreed upon even by those proposing very different structures? Most proposed structures have breaks at or near the divisions suggested in the outline.

8. Is the climactic center of the chiasmus worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance? The British novelist D H Lawrence in his idiosyncratic work *Apocalypse* (1931:85) identifies the myth in chapter 12 'as the centre-piece of the Apocalypse, and figures as the birth of the Messiah.' The literary instincts of this noted author are sustained in each of the above outlines. Certainly the Incarnation is *the* preeminent theological event of Christianity.

9. Are there ruptures in the outline, such as shifts between the forward and reverse parts of the structure? Ruptures involving reorganization of the text to harmonize the two halves of the outline have been avoided.

3.5 CHIASMUS IN THE SEVEN LETTERS

The seven letters of chapters 2–3 are perhaps the most familiar portion of Revelation. Some of the studies dealing with these chapters have already been noted in Chapter 1. Lund himself devoted a chapter to 'The structure of the seven epistles' (1955:66–84). While many studies note the

the unique structuration of the seven letters for rhetorical effect (this will be developed in Chapter 4), few consider this structure in terms of chiasmus. We will next discuss the heuristic value of chiasmus for exegesis by critiquing several chiastic models proposed to interpret the letters.

3.5.1 The portrayal of Jesus

A Farrer has extensively examined the literary structure in Revelation. He sees chiasmus at work in the portrayal of the divine speaker from heaven to John and to the churches. Farrer (1954:166) observes this as beginning in the initial vision:

- A 'One like a son of man...his eyes as flaming fire and his feet like burnished brass' (1:13–15)
- B 'And out from his mouth a sharp double-edged sword proceeding' (1:16)
- C 'I am the first and the last and the living, and I was dead and lo am alive' (1:17–18)
- D 'The secret of the seven stars thou sawst at my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks' (1:20)

The first four letters, then, repeat and reverse the order of these statements:

- D' To Ephesus: 'Thus saith the holder of the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks' (2:1)
- C' To Smyrna: 'Thus saith the first and the last who was dead and lived' (2:8)
- B' To Pergamus: 'Thus saith he who hath the sharp two-edged sword' (2:12)
- A' To Thyatira: 'Thus saith the Son of God who hath his eyes as flaming fire and his feet like burnished brass' (2:18)

J W Welch (1981:243) has uncritically accepted Farrer's proposal and states that 'precise inverted repetition such as this is common in the book of Revelation.' Upon closer examination, Farrer's neat arrangement is not so precise. What has become of the speaker in the final three letters? The Sardian portrayal dealing with the seven spirits and seven stars is drawn from 1:4, 16 (B) and 1:20 (D) above. The Philadelphian portrayal, which speaks of the key of David, echoes 1:18 (C) where the keys of death and Hades are mentioned. The final Laodicean portrayal—of Jesus as the faithful witness—first appears in 1:5. Portrayals used in the seven letters in order of appearance are:

Sardis (3:1)	1:4	Seven spirits
Laodicea (3:14)	1:5	Faithful witness
Ephesus (2:1)	1:12	Seven golden lampstands
Thyatira (2:18)	1:14	Eyes as flaming fire
Thyatira (2:18)	1:15	Feet like burnished brass
Ephesus (2:1), Sardis (3:1)	1:16	Seven stars in right hand

Pergamum (2:12)	1:16	Double-edged sword out of mouth
Smyrna (2:8)	1:17	First and the last
Smyrna (2:8)	1:18	Dead and now alive
Philadelphia (3:7)	1:18	Holds the keys

Welch (1981:243) concludes that, while such an example is 'relatively facile, [it] shows the writer's proclivity to use chiasmus.'

The order proposed by Farrer and approved by Welch seems problematic given the interrelatedness of the derived texts. John seems to have borrowed freely from the imagery of the opening vision without following a structural plan. John may tend to use chiasmus but such use cannot be validated from this example. Even if it were, recognition of chiasmus gives little help in understanding why a particular identification of Jesus had relevance to the life setting of each individual church. As G Kennedy (1984:12) states: 'If rhetorical criticism is to be valid, it must be practiced with some awareness of the traditions of Jewish speech of which chiasmus is one, and if it is to be useful it must embrace more than style.'

3.5.2 A spiritual gauge of the churches: The heuristic value of chiasmus for exegesis

In his introduction to chapters 2–3 L Morris (1987:58) notes that a literary pattern is to be observed in the sevenfold arrangement: 'Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger, churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, churches 3, 4, and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad.' Wall (1991:69) uncritically accepts Morris's observation concerning the spiritual condition of the Ephesian church and labels the unnamed pattern as chiasmic (ABCB'A'). The chiasmic patterns proposed by Morris and Wall might be outlined thus:

<u>Morris</u>		<u>Wall</u>
1 Ephesus	Danger	A Ephesus
2 Smyrna	Excellent	B Smyrna
3 Pergamum	Middling	C Pergamum
4 Thyatira	Middling	C Thyatira
5 Sardis	Middling	C Sardis
6 Philadelphia	Excellent	B' Philadelphia
7 Laodicea	Danger	A' Laodicea

Wall's (:69) conclusion is quoted at length to show how he draws an application for a canonical reading:

Chiasmus calls the reader's attention to the vortex of the pattern (C), where one finds what is most important for the author: that is, John is calling our attention to those churches with a 'middling' spirituality. His purpose is certainly pastoral: most congregations do not find themselves on the margins of spiritual excellence (with the congregations at Smyrna and

Philadelphia) or apathy (with the congregations at Ephesus and Laodicea), but rather in the mainstream of spiritual mediocrity (with the congregations at Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis). This is, then, the nature of the spiritual crisis for most of John's readers, who constantly struggle against those forces and factors which might prevent the maturing of faith and keep our witness 'middling.'

The problem with this approach is twofold. First, it circumvents the sevenfold pattern in these chapters (and the book) by assigning C collectively to the three middle churches rather than dealing with each church individually. Second, its approach is deductive, basing the pattern on an analysis of church A, Ephesus, and not on John's structural emphasis. Wall predicates his conclusion on the acceptance of Morris's assessment of the spiritual condition of the Ephesian church.

It is difficult, however, to see how the Ephesian church is in 'grave danger' or apathetic. E W Bullinger (1898:978) cites the praise in 2:6, after the reproof of verses 4–5, as an example of *pali-nodia*—'the approval of one thing after reproof for another thing.' Thus the Ephesian situation cannot be totally negative. Indeed the church is commended for its works, labor, and endurance (v 2), the opposite of apathy which is defined as 'lack of interest or concern; indifference.'

The translation of ἀφῆκες in 2:4 as 'you have abandoned' (NRSV) or 'forsaken' (NIV) unfortunately suggests a graver situation than is the case. Both of these English verbs suggest intentional, willful desertion. Unconscious neglect seems to characterize better the Ephesian situation as the translations 'left' (KJV, NASB) or 'lost' (REB) suggest. Louw and Nida (1989:1. §68.43) assign it to the semantic domain of 'Cease and Stop,' suggesting this translation: 'you have stopped loving me (as you did) at first.' As R H Charles (1920:1.50–51) acutely notes, 'Though the Church in Ephesus has preserved its moral and doctrinal purity and maintained an unwavering loyalty in trial, it has lost the warm love which it had at the beginning.' The Ephesians remain zealous, but their zeal is lacking the dimension of love.

The problem of the Laodicean church, on the other hand, is that it is a 'middling' church: 'because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot...' (3:16). Apathy *may* characterize this church, but materialism and self-sufficiency better diagnose the problem: 'I am rich, I have prospered, I have need of nothing' (3:17). To call the Pergamene church 'middling' also is problematic. Like the Smyrmean and Laodicean churches, they had suffered for the faith. In fact, the only martyr mentioned by name in the book—Antipas—was from Pergamum (2:13). Though a minority was promulgating false teaching, the majority had remained faithful to the Lord. Concerning only the Thyatiran and Sardian churches would I concur that 'middling' is an accurate portrayal.

Therefore the interpretation of the chiasmic construct suggested by Morris and developed by Wall breaks down when the text is carefully examined. A better chiasmic outline might be:

A Ephesus
 B Smyrna
 C Pergamum
 D Thyatira
 C' Sardis
 B' Philadelphia
 A' Laodicea

Since chiasmus typically focuses on the central element (D), Thyatira should be the point of emphasis among the seven. A breakdown of these letters by word count bears this out: Ephesus—147, Smyrna—98, Pergamum—147, Thyatira—230, Sardis—143, Philadelphia—196, and Laodicea—188. J T Kirby (1988:204) concurs, 'Thyatira, in the central position of the list, receives the lengthiest message.' Although quantity of words does not alone signify preeminence, it is an important factor. We will next discuss an important term in the letters that is highlighted semantically in the Thyatiran letter.

3.5.3 The Nicolaitan problem

An interpretive problem in chapter 2 is the mention of the Nicolaitans. In the Ephesian letter John writes, 'You hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate' (v 6). No elaboration or clarification is provided; the presupposition is that this group and its activities are well known. In the Pergamene letter John writes: 'You have there those who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel by eating food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans likewise' (vv 14–15). The parallelism in the Greek text is noted below:

2:14 ἔχεις ἐκεῖ
 κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ,
 ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλάκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον
 ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ,
 φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι.

2:15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ
 κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν
 ὁμοίως.

The heteropraxy of a group within the church is first compared to the teaching of the prototypical Old Testament false prophet—Balaam (cf 2 Pt 2:15; Jude 11). His counsel to Balak was that Israel could be seduced by laying a snare involving food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality

(Nm 25:1–3). The Nicolaitans were likewise (ὁμοίως) promoting similar doctrines. Two groups are not being suggested here. Rather current false teaching is analogously compared with one of Israel's past moral failures. Nicolaitanism receives further definition here, albeit a link with sexual immorality and food sacrificed to idols.⁶

This false teaching is fully developed in the Thyatiran letter without mention of Nicolaitanism. Interestingly, in it John again uses the verb ἀφιῆμι (ἀφείλες; 2:20) to begin the blame saying, however with a different connotation ('tolerate' [NIV, NRSV]⁷). The Thyatirans had compromised spiritually and morally through the teaching of a prophetess called Jezebel, after the prototypical Old Testament false prophetess. Her teaching advocated compromise like Balaam's—to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. This inversion is perhaps related to the predominant problem in each city. That Jezebel was an actual person is evident from the seven feminine personal pronouns used in verses 20–23 to describe her. Jezebel is therefore a prophetess in the Thyatiran church who is using her authority to teach error. That the content of her teaching is exactly the same as the Nicolaitans suggests that she belongs to the same party. Watson (1992:4.1107; cf Hemer 1986:91) concludes similarly that 'it is probable that, although not specifically named, the Nicolaitans were present there also, and that she [Jezebel] was a Nicolaitan prophetess.'

The fullest explication for this false teaching threatening three Asian churches is reserved for the central church in the chiasmus. Unless the Thyatirans repent, judgment in the form of physical death is forthcoming. They will be made an example to the other six churches, particularly to those believers in them who are tempted to follow the Nicolaitan teaching (2:23; cf Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:1–11]). Apart from the mention of the churches in the greeting and closing of each letter, this is the only reference to the other churches in the *narratio* of the seven letters. Thyatira is to be made an example to the other churches over this issue of accommodation.

Lund (1942:337) perceptively observes, 'It is significant that the strongest representation of idolatry...and the ultimate doom of that perversion of worship...should be found in the central epistle of the seven.' For unless compromise is forestalled, the Son of God knows that the very

⁶The later tradition regarding Nicolaitanism is confused. Eusebius (*HE* 3.29) recounts, on the one hand, that the sect practices promiscuity, but his own sources depict Nicolaus and his wife as monogamous and their children as chaste.

⁷The suggested translation of Louw and Nida (1989:1.§13.140), 'you let the women Jezebel...teach,' making διδάσκει an infinitive rather than a coordinate verb, seems less satisfactory here. Incidentally, this wordplay certainly evidences John's literary skill with Greek, which is often maligned because of the book's poor grammar and syntax.

existence of the church in Asia is threatened. Lund also points out that 'in no other epistle is the person who was presented in the vision in 1:14–16 identified and *named* [i.e., 'the son of God]....In six other epistles the identification could have been introduced, but the author chose the fourth epistle, because it was the pivot in his scheme' (1942:337, 338). Therefore John's use of chiasmus points to the Thyatiran conflict as paradigmatic for the other churches.

3.5.4 Chiasmus in the Greek text

3.5.4.1 The chiastic template in two letters

While heeding Kennedy's warning that chiasmus must embrace more than style, we will here show that chiastic structure is evident in the Greek construction of the seven letters. First, note the chiastic template found in the Ephesian letter (2:1–7) and the Pergamene letter (2:12–17).

A τῷ ἀγγέλῳ...
 B τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν (ἔχων)...
 Ca οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου...
 Cb ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ...
 Cc μετανόησον οὖν...
 B' ὁ ἔχων...τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει...
 A' τῷ νικῶντι

A and A' are in the dative case and begin with τῷ. B and B' both have a declaration function signified by λέγει whose subject is a present participle. Ca and Cb are both first-person declarations with paronomastic qualities centered around ἔργα σου and κατὰ σοῦ. These are followed by the imperative μετανόησον (preceded in the Ephesian letter by the imperative μνημόνευε). This template found only in these two letters is the ideal model and delineates the seven sayings in the letters (cf infra 4.12).

The Smyrnean letter (2:8–11) contains no blame saying (Cb), so John modifies the template in this letter. The final dative is changed to a nominative participle, providing a parallel with B'. The possessive pronoun σου now appears after οἶδα as it does for the rest of the letters (except Pergamum).

A τῷ ἀγγέλῳ...
 B τάδε λέγει...
 Ca οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν...
 Cc μηδὲν φοβοῦ...
 B' ὁ ἔχων οὐς...τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει...
 A' ὁ νικῶν...

The original template returns in the Pergamene letter, except for the omission of τὰ ἔργα σου in Ca. However, the rhyming words ποῦ and ὅπου are inserted.

In the final four letters the template is further modified. The promise and hearing sayings are reversed. Section Cc shows the most variation in language, although an imperative still typically is found. The Thyatiran letter (2:18–29) combines the two earlier templates:

- A τῷ ἀγγέλῳ...
 B τάδε λέγει ὁ...
 Ca ὶδα σου τὰ ἔργα...
 Cb ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ...
 Cc ἰδοῦ...ἐάν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν...
 A' ὁ νικῶν...
 B' ὁ ἔχων...τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει...

The Philadelphian letter, like the Smyrmean letter, has no blame saying so Cb is omitted. Interestingly, in these two letters a reference to “crown” is made preceding the two final sections. These are the only two places στέφανος appears in chapters 2–3.

The final Laodicean letter is a further modification because Ca is omitted. Because there is no praise saying, the blame saying Cb begins immediately after A and B. The chiasmic template seen in the first letter is freely modified by John depending on the church and its situation. We will next examine these sections Ca and Cb in the Ephesian letter for evidence of chiasmic structure.

3.5.4.2 The letter to Ephesus

The praise saying in the Ephesian letter (2:2–3) can be structured thus:

- οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου
 A καὶ τὸν κόπον
 B καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου,
 C καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακούς,
 D καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσίν,
 D' καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς.
 B' καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις,
 C' καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου,
 A' καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες.

Chiasmic structure based on wordplay (underlined) is evident throughout. Commenting on these same examples, Thompson (1990:49) confirms that ‘the seer often creates puns and plays on different meanings of the word.’ Poirier (1943:26n35) also observes, ‘On constate qu’il y a interversion des éléments...le parallélisme est dans les mots ou dans les idées, parfois dans les deux.’ The ninefold repetition of καὶ separates positive qualities on each occasion. ‘Clearly

Ephesus possesses qualities of ultimate importance in terms of the values of the narrative' (Long 1994:406–7).⁸

The stylistic inversion of B' and C' is to be noted. Such stylistic anomaly may seem to argue against a conscious design. However, as C H Talbert (1974:78) has noted, such anomalies are the norm: 'Imperfections of form are the rule in antiquity. Though the symmetry is often near perfect, it is no surprise to find asymmetrical elements amid the most elaborate architectonic schemes. The classical mind seems adverse to perfect symmetry.' Such asymmetry appears in the other chiasmic models that appear in the book. The exposure of the false apostles by the Ephesians (at the center D and D') is the positive work that John commends here.

3.5.4.3 The letter to Pergamum

The praise saying in the Pergamene letter (2:13) can likewise be structured chiasmically:

οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς,

A ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ,

B καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου,

C καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου

C' καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου,

B' ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν,

A' ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

Two elements are emphasized here. In A and A' is the recognition that the Lord knows the spiritual and physical circumstances in which the church is struggling. In C and C' he commends faithfulness both in the church and in a martyr named Antipas. Only through faith will the Pergamene church survive in the midst of its satanic environment.

3.5.4.4 The letter to Laodicea

The blame saying in 3:17 starkly portrays the Laodiceans perception of themselves (the I's of A, B, C) with that of Christ ('you' followed by five adjectives). Sections A, B, and C contrast nicely with their counterparts.

⁸Long (1994:406n27) notes further, 'Smyrna and Pergamum have καὶ 3x each in the parallel parts of the letters; Thyatira has its 5x, Sardis has no positive qualities, Philadelphia has καὶ twice, and Laodicea, of course, also has no positive qualities.'

ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι

A Πλούσιός εἰμι

B καὶ πεπλούτηκα

C καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω,

D καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος

D' καὶ ἔλεεινός

C' καὶ πτωχός

B' καὶ τυφλός

A' καὶ γυμνός

Bullinger (1898:227) notes the reason for the polysyndeton is 'to bring out the Laodicean condition of soul.'

3.5.5 Intentionality in chiastic structure

Certainly a legitimate question to ask is whether John consciously planned the various chiastic structures in Revelation. Clark (1975:71) suggests that the answer regarding biblical literature in general is not simply yes or no; rather 'such patterns may surely be the result of subconscious effort on the part of an author or redactor.' Stock's description (1984:25) of education in antiquity demonstrates how years of mnemonic repetition would result in assimilation of such literary configurations. Likewise today when we compose a personal or business letter, we adopt accepted stylistic forms to which we usually give little thought. Our writings simply reflect prevailing literary conventions taught through years of education. Although it cannot be proved conclusively, from the internal evidence John appears to have consciously structured Revelation as a chiasmus on a macro level. For the more stylistic chiastic examples it is probable that John, with his mind saturated particularly in the Old Testament, simply reflects the stylistic devices of that literature.

3.5.6 The seven promise sayings

We close this examination of chiasmus with a look at our topic and its place in the structure of Revelation. The promises in chapters 2–3 and their eschatological fulfillments in the final chapters are universally noted, and the text of both will be examined in depth in chapters 6 and 7. This relationship is one of the clearest and strongest evidences for chiasmus as Revelation's macrostructure, depicted as B and B' in all the outlines presented above except Ellul's. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:175) observes concerning this special relationship: 'The promises of the letters to the victorious one recur in 19:11–22:9. The first unit and the last unit of Rev. are thus related to each other as promise and fulfillment.' Wall (1991:258n) likewise observes that 'John has constructed a parallelism, vaguely chiastic, between key phrases found in Christ's exhortations to

overcome, transmitted to the seven churches through their angels (Rev. 2–3), and John’s vision of the new Jerusalem....’

Promises with verse references and their fulfillments are shown in the following chart. Only promises with obvious fulfillments are used, but these comprise the majority. Promises whose fulfillments are debatable are excluded.

B Seven Churches (1:4–4:2)

Promise

1. Tree of life (2:7)
2. Exemption from second death (2:11)
3. New name (2:17; 3:12)
4. Rule nations with rod of iron (2:26); Morning Star (2:27);
5. Dressed in white; name in book of life (3:5)
6. New Jerusalem down from heaven (3:12)
7. Sit on throne (3:21)

B’ New Jerusalem (19:6–22:9)

Fulfillment

- Tree of life (22:2, 14, 19)
 Second death (20:6, 14; 21:8)
 New name (19:11–16)
 Judge nations with Christ who holds rod of iron (20:4; cf 19:15); Morning Star (22:16)
 Dressed in white, as a bride (19:7–8; 21:2); names in book of life (20:15; 21:27)
 New Jerusalem down from heaven (21:2, 10)
 Martyrs seated on thrones (20:4)

From the chart it is apparent that the promises and their fulfillments are themselves not organized chiastically, e.g., A–G/G’–A’.

Continuity between each promise in the seven letters and its fulfillment in the future eschaton can be clearly seen from this chart. The promises are given to the members of the seven Asian churches, and their fulfillments at the book’s conclusion is clearly intended for the same audience. Therefore the Asian Christians are the primary recipients of the final chapters, contrary to the futurist view.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The structure of Revelation has remained problematic for interpreters, with little consensus emerging. Chiasmus has been proposed as a structural device because of its frequent usage in classical and biblical literature. A number of rules and criteria for recognizing valid chiasmus were listed. Five examples of chiasmus as the macrostructure for Revelation were presented before my own outline was proposed. It incorporates many elements of the others while seeking to include other unique literary characteristics of the book. This outline was then evaluated for congruency with Blomberg’s nine criteria. Three examples of the heuristic value of chiasmus for exegesis were discussed. The chapter closed with the most obvious pointer to chiastic structure in the book—the seven promises in chapters 2–3 and their fulfillments in chapters 19–22. Chiasmus therefore is a

viable way to view the structure of Revelation. Adoption of this perspective allows readers today to make valuable insights into John's emphases. It also validates the conclusions of Chapter 2 concerning the rhetorical situation of the churches.

Regardless of which chiastic outline is most correct, it is likely that the Asian Christians would have recognized chiasmus in the Apocalypse. Such a recognition would allow the audience to develop a strategy for 'hearing' the book. Mealy (1992:82) observes that 'the reader is being trained from the start to expect the same reality to be re-expressed under different figures and to be viewed from different aspects....and is being required to pick up a piece of terminology, [e.g.], "the second death," which will only much later...be given an explicit context.' Thus chiasmus through repetition, analogies, and recapitulation establishes via its frame of reference in the ancient literary culture an effective rhetoric of persuasion in Revelation.

As the reader proceeded through the document, his progress could be tracked by the listeners. That is why the explicit sevenfold structure predominates in the upper half of Revelation's chiasmus. The audience would be aware of the center or pivot point at chapter 12 and then be able to follow John out of the document, especially after the seven trumpets. Revelation's verbal and grammatical repetition and structural parallelisms would facilitate understanding for ancient audiences. With the listeners tuned into chiasmus as the macrostructure, it would be easier for them to follow the rhetoric of the smaller units. It is the rhetorical form of the seven letters that will be addressed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: THE FORM OF THE SEVEN LETTERS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 we discussed the literary genre of Revelation concluding that, while the book has apocalyptic traits, its predominant genre is prophecy. In Chapter 3 we examined the internal chiasmic structure of chapters 2–3, noting the common structural features among the seven letters. In this chapter we will develop the external literary form of these letters, looking particularly at ancient literary antecedents. Our review begins with four suggested affinities, namely, **wisdom instruction**, **Near East covenants**, **Greek rhetoric**, and **church liturgy**. We will next examine the literary connections with **imperial edicts** and **prophetic oracles** before looking at **ancient letters**. Within all these categories the features shared with the seven letters will be noted, especially as we try to determine what forms John would most probably know and utilize. The observation of D Bach (1981:294) speaks to the uniqueness of chapters 2–3: ‘Les critiques s’accordent à reconnaître une certaine parenté, pour ne pas dire unité, entre les sept lettres d’Ap 2–3. En effet, elles sont toutes construites selon le même plan et la symétrie est à peu près parfaite.’ We will close with a brief discussion of the address, epithet, and hearing sayings.

4.2 WISDOM INSTRUCTION

The seven letters, according to Comblin (1965:120), ‘ressemblent très fort, par leur object et par les thèmes qu’elles mettent en œuvre, aux instruction de la sagesse. Elles sont l’exercice de la *paideia* caractéristique des livres de la Sagesse.’ Appearing as Wisdom, Jesus sends the letters as wisdom instruction. The intention and content of the letters is summed up in the statement, ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω (3:19). ‘Les lettres elles-mêmes constituent un exemple concret de cette forme d’éducation’ (:121). Because instruction is a central theme of the Wisdom books, the letters are an example *par excellence* of New Testament wisdom instruction.

Comblin presents a number of thematic parallels, with references, between the seven letters and Wisdom literature: (1) the attention to good works, (2) with the contrasting denunciation of evil works, (3) the appeal to conversion, (4) testing, and (5) rewards. He also shows that such Christological epithets as the ‘Beginning of God’s creation’ (3:14; cf Hemer 1986:186) is likewise an attribute of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22. While never denying the apocalyptic or prophetic character of the letters, Comblin convincingly demonstrates their sapiential

quality as well. While making this important observation, he never suggests though that wisdom literature provides the form of the letters.

A peculiar parallel is found in Proverbs 9:1: 'Wisdom has built a house for herself, and she has set up seven pillars (στύλους).' Skehan (1971:9–14) has suggested that the extended wisdom discourses of Proverbs 1–9 have an architectural balance resembling chiasmus. The discourses in chapters 1 and 8–9 frame seven others in chapters 2–7, which Skehan identifies as the 'seven columns' of the house of Wisdom. (In 3:18 Wisdom is called a 'tree of life'; cf Rv 2:7.) Because of the subjective nature of Skehan's divisions, it is difficult to believe John would see such a sevenfold division in Proverbs. The promise that the victors would become pillars (3:12) has a more probable explanation (cf *infra* 6.8.3). Wisdom sayings, as Comblin has shown, do constitute a source for the body of the letters.

4.3 NEAR EAST COVENANTS

W H Shea (1983) uses the landmark studies of G E Mendenhall on law and covenant to suggest the presence of covenant formulary in the letters to the seven churches. The form of the Israelite covenant found in Exodus parallels closely a Hittite suzerainty treaty (:71). Because of the numerous Old Testament allusions in Revelation, Shea (:72) believes 'the presence of the covenant concept is reasonably to be expected in it.' John's only use of διαθήκη is found in 11:19 where, following the seventh trumpet, the ark of the covenant is seen in the heavenly temple.

The five elements of the treaty with the parallels Shea (:72–75, 81) finds in Revelation are outlined below:

Israelite/Hittite treaty

1. Preamble
(royal author of covenant identified by name, titles, attributes, and genealogy)
2. Historical prologue
(describes past relations between the two contracting parties)
3. Stipulations
(detail the obligations imposed upon the vassal)

Letters to the seven churches

- 'The word of him who...'
(a new and different title for Jesus follows)
- 'I know your works...'
(refrain implying past relations between suzerain Jesus and his vassal the church)
- 'Repent,' 'remember,' 'be faithful,' etc
(instructional imperatives to rectify deficiencies previously described)

4. Witnesses (pagans invoked their god; Jews substituted other elements)	'Hear what the Spirit says to the churches' (Spirit is obvious witness)
5. Blessings and curses (occur in the case of loyalty to, or breach of, the covenant)	'To him who overcomes I will grant...' (blessing pronounced upon the overcomer) 'If..., 'if not...' or 'because...' (curse pronounced upon disobedient)

Shea (:76–80) divides each of the seven letters into these five covenantal treaty elements, with the hope that 'more meaningful labels can be drawn very appropriately from the designations given to the sections of the suzerainty covenant' (:76). The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia most clearly illustrate this model; within the other letters there is considerable variation between the prologue, stipulation, and curse sections. Shea (:82–83) acknowledges this variation, saying 'this is in reality quite natural, for ancient covenant statements did not slavishly follow exactly the same order in every instance.'

Shea's suggestion of covenantal form is an attractive hypothesis. We have already noted John's use of the plagues of Exodus as a background for the seven trumpets and seven bowls (cf supra 2.5.2.2). He also closes with the curse that Moses uttered when he began the covenant renewal with Israel at Beth Peor (cf supra 1.2.4.6). The five parts of an ancient treaty do suggest some parallels in the seven letters. However, to find these parallels Shea ignores the address saying that opens each letter. This section clearly adds at least one other element to the form. To connect the blessing section with the promise sayings is also problematic, since Shea had already recognized its connection with the seven beatitudes (:74). Aune rightly (1990:182n4) makes this analysis: 'Shea has forced the structure of the seven proclamations into a framework which is essentially alien to them (the seven proclamations deal primarily with a temporary situation rather than the legal establishment of a long-term relationship), and his verse-by-verse analysis reveals far too many exceptions to the overall schema.'

Most damaging to Shea is the lack of covenant language here. The standard Hebrew phrase ברית ברית (LXX διατίθεμαι διαθήκη) is found at the initiation of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 24:8) and at its renewal at Beth Peor (Dt 4:23; 5:2). Covenant language is an integral part of the final promise found in Revelation 21:7 (cf infra 7.2.3.1). But the absence of such language in chapters 2–3 suggests strongly that the seven letters do not constitute a covenant renewal.

4.4 GREEK RHETORIC

4.4.1 Rhetorical style

M Diefenbach (1994:52) has recently asserted that 'der Seher Johannes kennt die antike Rhetoriklehre.' He assumes that John wrote as a diaspora Jew who was a hellenistically trained author. To prove his thesis, he enlists the seven letters as an example of Greek rhetoric. After doing a form critical analysis of the microstructure of chapters 2–3, Diefenbach observes the repeated use of anaphora (A) and epiphora (E) in them.¹ He (:55–56) outlines each of the letters, like the first to Ephesus, in the following way:

- A 2:1: Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ...
 2:2: Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ...
 E 2:7 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.
 τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ + infinitive...

Diefenbach's analysis relates primarily to the aspect of style in ancient rhetoric (cf Quintilian *Orat* 3.3.1). John's adoption of such stylistic devices did not require rhetorical training, however, for numerous examples of anaphora and epiphora can be found in the Old Testament (cf Bullinger 1898:199–201, 241–42). Since the Old Testament seems to have been John's predominant influence and his orientation more semitic than hellenistic, Diefenbach's thesis is overstated. His identification of anaphora and epiphora is an important observation, however. Bullinger (1898:346) prefers to call anaphora by the term *epibole*, which 'differs from *Anaphora* in that it consists of the repetition of several words, whereas in *Anaphora* only one word is repeated.' An interesting example of *epibole* is found in Psalm 29:3ff where the phrase 'the voice of the Lord' begins seven successive clauses and is a possible influence on John's sevenfold form.

Diefenbach (1994:53) importantly notes that repetition was good rhetorical style in Greek, whereas in languages such as German and English it is not. Repetition likewise is important in terms of modern information theory. Anderson (1985:84) explains, 'Verbal repetition increases predictability, creates expectations, eliminates noise, persuades, and reduces alternative inter-

¹Anaphora, from ἀνά, 'again,' and φέρω, 'to bring or carry,' is defined by Bullinger (1898:199) as 'The Repetition of the same Word at the beginning of successive Sentences.' Epiphora (or epistrophe), from ἐπί, 'upon,' and φέρω, he defines as 'The Repetition of the same Word or Words at the end of successive Sentences' (:241).

pretations' and teaches 'the implied reader how to "read" the text.' John *in absentia* effectively utilizes repetition to convey his message to his audience.

4.4.2 Rhetorical form

J T Kirby (1988) has likewise examined the form of these chapters from a rhetorical perspective. While conceding that hellenistic epistles and royal decrees contributed to their final form, Kirby believes the letters are more vivid than an ordinary letter or decree. Because the processes of dictation and public reading are right before us, 'the opening of the *Revelation* is, then, a *narration* of an event of primary rhetoric' (:200). He (:200) identifies four approximate rhetorical correspondences in each letter:

1. προοίμιον ('proem' or introduction)
2. διήγησις ('narration' or statement of facts)
3. πρόθεσις ('proposition' or major point[s])
4. ἐπίλογος (epilogue)

Kirby (:201) breaks down each letter into these four sections in a table with the promise and hearing formula found in the epilogue of each letter. Ramsay (1994:147) also recognized rhetorical form in the seven letters and stated that the peroration (epilogue) of each 'is modeled in the same way; all contain a claim for attention and promise.'

The arrangement of Kirby (1990:200) assumes that the rhetorical species of Revelation is deliberative, 'focusing on future action and concerned with expediency.' Kennedy (1984:24), however, notes that the deliberative structure usually has four sections—proem, proposition, proof, and epilogue adding, 'Occasionally a narration is employed; when it does occur, it is often after rather than before the proposition.' Kirby's analysis obviously strays from the pattern, omitting the proof while including a narration out of the usual order (cf Aune 1990:183n5).

The two other species of rhetoric are judicial and epideictic. Kennedy (1984:19) describes these: 'The species is judicial when the author is seeking to persuade an audience to make a judgment about events occurring in the past...it is epideictic when he seeks to persuade them to hold or reaffirm some point of view in the present, as when he celebrates or denounces some person or some quality. Praise or blame is taken by Aristotle to be the characteristic feature of epideictic.' The admonition to remember (μνημόνευε; 2:5; 3:3) is clearly an entreaty regarding the past of the Ephesian and Sardian churches. And the praise and blame sayings, so prominent in the letters, points to an epideictic form. Kennedy (:19) summarizes: 'In a single discourse there

is sometimes utilization of more than one species, and the definition of the species as a whole can become very difficult.'

Kirby's identification of a single rhetorical species in the letters—deliberative—conflicts with the evidence. Clearly the species of both judicial and epideictic are also evident. We conclude with Aune (1990:183n5) that the rhetorical form of the seven letters is a *mixtum compositum*.

4.5 SACRAMENTAL LITURGY

The influence of Exodus on John has already been noted in the content of the seals (cf supra 2.5.2.2). P Prigent (1964:36) believes it is also reflected in the numerous paschal references in Revelation. Thus the literary scheme of the seven letters conforms to the examination of the believers before the eucharist. Its elements are: (1) appreciation directed to the community, and (2) affirmation of the coming of Christ involving (a) warning, threat, and exhortation to repentance, and (b) a gift of the graces conferred by the sacraments. He observes that the leitmotiv, 'I am coming' and the eucharistic image, 'tree of life,' are likewise found in chapter 22, where the liturgical form is most fully developed (:42–43; but cf infra 7.3.1). The exhortation to repentance received particular attention at the annual Easter occasions, which were the principal celebrations of the early Christian community. 'Les chrétiens doivent participer à l'eucharistie en écoutant l'exhortation que la liturgie leur adresse' (:45). Prigent (:44) concludes that the primary eschatological teaching in the book is sacramental.

Thorough investigation showed that Prigent's observations concerning the presence of paschal imagery in Revelation are valid and important. This is especially proven by the fact that 'Lamb' is the most frequent name for Jesus in the book (28x). However, his observations on early liturgical form, drawn from texts such as 1 Corinthians 16:20 and Didache 10:6, are highly speculative. The celebration of Christ's resurrection on Passover rather than Easter Sunday (i.e., quartodecimanism; cf Bruce 1958:211) gives some insight on the paschal practices of the Asian churches. However, too little is known about other early liturgical practices to affirm that the seven letters derive their form from them.

4.6 IMPERIAL EDICTS

G A Deissmann (1901) was one of the first biblical scholars to use an Asian decretal inscription to illuminate a biblical text—2 Peter. While he could not affirm a direct dependence on the decree, he (:367) believed 'the author of the Epistle, like the author of the Decree before him,

simply availed himself of the familiar forms and formulae of religious emotion.' G Rudberg (1911:171) likewise saw in a decree of Darius from Magnesia ad Meandrum (5th century BC) a relationship with the seven letters: 'Ich glaube, dass wir unter den noch vorhanden kleinasiatischen Inschriften wenigstens *ein* konkretes Vorbild oder eine Parallele besitzen.' Rudberg's linkage of the form of the seven letters to a royal decree has recently been revived by Aune. This necessitates extended discussion of the matter in this thesis.

4.6.1 Definition

The noted classical historian E A Judge (1981:39–40) defines an edict as 'the proclamation of a magistrate. It is used to regulate the behaviour or thinking of the community under his jurisdiction.' The edict differs from a letter in that it is essentially an oral statement and does not make reference to particular individuals. The seven letters are edicts, according to Judge (:40), and open 'with the characteristic verb of declaration, λέγει.' M Benner (1975:25, 30) notes three important features of Roman edicts that bear on Revelation:

1. They were originally read aloud by the magistrate in person or in his presence by a herald;
2. They were directed to everyone; even though their content might not affect everyone, it was supposed that all should know about them;
3. They were always published publicly.

4.6.2 Elements

E Stauffer (1955:181) sees similarities between the form of chapters 2–3 and that of imperial edicts: 'The preamble of the seven decrees is in unmistakable contrast to the opening words of the edicts of Domitian: "So speaks he who holds the seven stars in his right hand".' Stauffer (:158) quotes two such edicts: 'The Lord our God commands' (Suetonius *Dom* 13.2) and 'Edict of the Lord our God' (Martial *Ep* 5.8). There are several problems with this comparison. First, the date of Revelation is assumed to be Domitianic, which is less preferable (cf supra 2.3.5). Second, B W Jones (1992:108) calls Suetonius' report, repeated by Dio (67.4.7, 13.4), to be 'all but incredible.' Martial's testimony is that of a flatterer seeking to secure favor from an autocrat. Jones (:109) concludes: 'He (Domitian) obviously knew that he was not a God, and, whilst he did not ask or demand to be addressed as one, he did not actively discourage the few flatterers who did.' Like the myth of the Domitianic persecution (cf supra 2.3.4), the *Dominus et Deus* nomenclature of the imperial decrees is also doubtful (cf Thompson 1990:105–7). Stauffer

(1955:158) sees another feature: 'The negative continuation with the threat of punishment (2.5, 16) is in the same style as the usual imperial announcements.' He appeals to the letters of Darius in Herodotus and the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenidae in Behistun as his examples, but how John was to know these documents is left unstated.

D E Aune (1990:198ff) updates and broadens the work of Stauffer and Judge, providing an in-depth comparison between imperial edicts and the seven 'proclamations.' Following Benner (1975:17), Aune (1990:201) identifies the following elements in a typical edict:

1. *Praescriptio* ('introduction')
2. *Prooemium* (a 'preface' to produce benevolence and interest in the addressees)
3. *Promulgatio* (a 'proclamation' using a phrase such as 'I make known that,' etc.)
4. *Narratio* (brief account of the 'facts' which caused the enactment)
5. *Dispositio* ('arrangement' expressing the decision, centrally located in the document)
6. *Sanctio* or *corroboratio* ('sanction' or 'corroboration'—end clauses used to bring about the observance of the enactment)

4.6.3 Examples

While this analysis of imperial edicts is no doubt correct, it again begs the question, what imperial edicts would John be aware of? Aune's examples—Marcus Aurelius and Xerxes—are royalty removed in time and place from John. The decree of Darius Hystaspes was found in Ephesus' sister city Magnesia, so John might have seen it on public display there.

However, the Roman edicts with which John and his Jewish audience would most likely be aware were those that guaranteed their rights in the empire (cf supra 1.5.2.1). Josephus (*Ant* 14.188, 265–66) mentions that these decrees (δόγματα, not διάταγμα; however, cf *Ant* 16.165) were engraved on bronze tablets in the Capitol in Rome² as well as displayed in public places in the cities. If Josephus is correct, and the letter of Octavian to the Asian proconsul Norbanus and Norbanus' subsequent letters to the Sardian and Ephesian magistrates (Johnson et al 1961: §§129, 130, 134) were generally known, Aune's (1990:200) claim that 'edicts are formal and public, whereas letters are informal and private' is overstated. This is because Aune fails to mention that some official documents are a *mixtum compositum* of letter and edict. Antony's communication on Jewish rights with the Tyrian magistrates, senate, and people opens with a letter directing that his edict be published in Latin and Greek in a very conspicuous place before it gives the text of the edict (*Ant* 14.319–22). A number of other documents to cities showing

²These archives were destroyed when the Capitol burned in AD 69, but were later replaced by Vespasian (Suetonius *Ves* 8.4).

this letter/edict form have been found (cf Johnson et al 1961:§§104, 111, 128). The apostolic letter/decreed issued by the Jerusalem council is an early Christian example (Ac 15:23–29).

4.6.4 An edict compared with the Ephesian letter

One noteworthy edict on Jewish rights was issued by Augustus about 1 BC. The following chart correlates portions of this Augustan edict (Jos *Ant* 16.162–165) with the Ephesian letter (Rv 2:1–7). On sound academic grounds we have adopted the nomenclature of decretal analysis utilized by Benner (1976:66–67) and Aune (1990:201–2).

<u>Sections</u>	<u>Augustus' decree to Ephesus</u>	<u>The Ephesian letter</u>
<i>Praescriptio</i>	Caesar August, Pontifex Maximus with tribunician powers says (λέγει)	Thus says (Τάδε λέγει) him who holds the seven stars in his right hand
<i>Prooemium</i> ³	Absent	Absent
<i>Promulgatio</i>	Absent	Absent
<i>Narratio</i> ⁴	Since the Jewish nation has been found (εὐρέθη) well disposed to the Roman people not only at the present time but also in time past...	I know (οἶδα) your works—your toil and your endurance and that you are not able to tolerate evil deeds...
<i>Dispositio</i>	it has been decided (ἔδοξε) by me and my council under oath, with the consent of the Roman people... And if anyone is caught stealing their sacred books or their sacred monies... he shall be regarded as sacrilegious and his property shall be confiscated to the public treasury.... I order (κελεύω) that it and the present edict be set up in the most conspicuous part of the temple constructed for me by the <i>koinon</i> of Asia in Pergamum ⁵	Remember from where you have fallen; repent and do your first works. If you do not, I am coming to you and I will move your lampstand from its place, that is, if you do not repent.
<i>Sanctio</i>	If anyone transgresses any of the above ordinances, he shall suffer (δώσει) severe punishment	To the victor I will grant (δώσω) him to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

³Aune (1990:202) notes, 'No counterpart to the *prooemium* is found in any of the seven proclamations.' Aune never mentions the *promulgatio*, so he evidently regards it as absent also.

⁴Aune (1990:202) believes the *narratio* has 'a clear functional counterpart in the οἶδα-clauses in each of the seven proclamations.' Although he lists several verbs in the semantic domain of 'Learn' (Louw & Nida 1989:§27.A), Aune fails to mention the one found in this edict, εὐρίσκω.

⁵Josephus' original reading 'Ancyra' is problematic here; cf Mommen (1883:x): 'expectandum certe id quod Petitus restituere ausus est ἐν Περγαμῶ.' First, Censorinus was never a proconsul for Galatia; however, he died as proconsul of Asia in AD 3. Second, the *koinon* of Asia met in Pergamum, not in Ancyra. Augustus probably sent copies of his edict to be placed in each of his Anatolian temples, with only the names of the governors and destinations changed in the text. Josephus has mistakenly conflated the Galatian and Asian texts. This seems to be born out by Philo (*LegGaj* 311) who states that Augustus 'sent commandments to all the governors of the different provinces throughout Asia.'

The characteristic verb of the *dispositio*—‘I command/enjoin (κελεύω/διακελεύομαι)—found in the edicts of Augustus, Caligula, and Claudius to the Jews (*Ant* 16.165; 18.304; 19.285; cf 19.307) is conspicuously absent in the seven letters.⁶ Instead they are influenced ‘by the conditional style of prophetic speech consisting of ethical exhortations, usually matched by conditional threats’ (Aune 1990:202).

A section similar to the *sanctio* is ‘regularly found at the close of each proclamation in the conditional promise of victory’ (Aune 1990:203). However, a difference of tone distinguishes the decretal sanction from the promise sayings in the seven letters. The typical sanction is negative while the promises are positive.

One example of such a sanction is found in the loyalty oath to Augustus (3 BC) taken by the citizens of Gangra in Paphlagonia (Johnson et al 1961:§149; cf the sanction in §183):

If I do anything contrary to this oath or not consonant with what I have sworn, I invoke complete and utter destruction upon myself, my body, my soul, my life, my children, and all my family with their possessions in every generation of mine and of my descendants. And may neither land nor sea receive my body, or those of my descendants, nor may they bear fruit for them.

Similar sanctions are found in a decree of Octavian found in Rhodus (:§129.2.7): ‘If any city or any magistrate does not do what should be done in accordance with this ordinance...they shall be liable to a fine of 100,000 sesterces to be paid to the Roman people,’ and in an edict to the citizens of Pisidian Antioch (:§198): ‘But if anyone does not obey....’ The prophetic curse (22:18–19; cf supra 1.2.4.6) that closes the entire book more closely approximates the decretal sanction.

4.6.5 Domitian’s edict

An edict often cited in relation to Revelation is that issued by Domitian in the spring of 92. The previous harvest had produced an abundance of wine, but a dearth of wheat. To correct a perceived imbalance in production, Domitian ordered that half the vineyards in the provinces be cut down (Suetonius *Dom* 7.2; 14.2; Philostratus *VitAp* 6.42; *VitSoph* 1.21). This order provoked outrage in Asia, and a delegation headed by the Smyranean orator Scopelianus was sent to Rome to protest the action. Rostovtzeff (1926:1:201–2) and others see this edict behind John’s reference in 6:6, ‘Do not harm the olive oil (or ‘olive orchard’ [BAGD s v ἔλαιον] and the wine.’⁷

⁶Cf Josephus (*Ant* 12.120) who paraphrases an earlier edict of Seleucus Nicator (312–281/280 BC) in which he gives an order (ἐκέλευσεν) to the Syrian Jews regarding the purchase of oil.

⁷Rostovtzeff (1926:1:201) also says that the third seal (6:8) ‘is proved to refer to a widespread famine in Asia Minor by a Latin inscription of A.D. 93, discovered at Antioch of Pisidia.’ His confidence regarding the

While reference to this edict is one of the few tangible pieces of evidence that points to a late date (cf Hemer 1986:158), it provides no assistance regarding the form of the letters, for the text of the edict is lost.

4.6.6 A banishment edict

A final possible parallel unmentioned by Aune is the edict used by the Roman authorities to banish individuals. Certainly John's *relegatio* would have necessitated an official document (cf supra 1.3.2). The poet Ovid mentions that such an edict relegated him to the port of Tomis on the Black Sea (*Tr* 2.135–38; 5.2.60–61). The edict was issued neither by the senate nor by a special court but by the *princeps* himself, Augustus. Because the actual form of a banishment edict is unknown, it cannot be determined whether or not John imitated such an edict in composing the seven letters.

4.6.7 Conclusion

Aune (1990:204) concludes his discussion of edicts: 'The seven proclamations of Rev 2–3 are similar in form to ancient royal or imperial *edicts*, in that they exhibit formally and structurally similar *praescriptiones*, *narrationes*, *dispositiones* and *sanctiones*.' Aune, however, fails to provide a single edict that parallels the consistent form found in the seven letters. Instead he produces parallels from sections of different decrees. We have attempted to take a decree known to first-century Jews and compare it to one of the letters. While some parallels do exist, there are significant differences as well. Thus Aune's (:183) conclusion that the literary genre to which the seven letters belong is that of the imperial edict remains unproved.

If the edict model is accepted, a significant weakness is the psychological effect its use might have on his Christian audience. The Roman state is depicted as an adversary throughout Revelation, and to adopt such a form might cause confusion since it seemingly suggests complicity rather than hostility. The only valid interpretation for the letters as edicts would suggest that they are parodies of the imperial edict and that John's audience is to appreciate the irony behind use of this literary form. While possible, this seems unlikely since more probable models exist.

book's date is overstated given the frequency of famine in the East because, as he himself writes, 'the Greek cities, even in some parts of Asia Minor, never produced sufficient corn for their population' (:1.147). Earlier famines might easily be the referent.

4.7 PROPHETIC ORACLES

In Chapter 2 (cf supra 2.5.2) we noted the influence of the Old Testament prophetic traditions upon John. It should not be surprising then that the form of the seven letters is often seen as based on Old Testament prophetic oracles. Aune (1983b:326) in fact earlier classified the seven letters as 'parenthetic salvation-judgment oracles.' In this section we will look at several texts that have been proposed as models for the seven letters.

4.7.1 The prophecies of Balaam

The reference to Balaam in the Pergamene letter (2:14) suggests that John was familiar with his wilderness encounter with Israel. The Christological title, the Morning Star (2:28; 22:16), is a likely allusion to Numbers 24:17 (cf infra 6.6.3.1). In Numbers 22–24 seven oracles of Balaam are recorded. The first four oracles are longer, while the last three against foreign nations are brief (24:20–25).

Several similarities exist between the prophecies in Numbers and in Revelation. *First*, both prophecies number seven. Wenham (1981:180) writes: 'It is difficult to know why they are included, except that they ring up the total of oracles to the mystic number seven.' *Second*, the first three lines of the third and fourth oracles (24:3–4; 15–16) are identical, like the identical openings of the seven letters. *Third*, comparing oracles 4–7 to Amos' oracles, the topic of the next section, G V Smith (1989:30) writes: 'The prophecy of victory or defeat, found in the Balaam oracles in Numbers 24:15–24, has the most similarities with Amos....His oracle served as a discouragement to Balak and as a message of assurance to Israel.' This emphasis on victory is most pronounced in the fourth oracle: 'Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered' (24:11 NIV; 'be a conquered land' [NJB]; שִׁיר). The seven letters likewise close with promises of victory. The oracles of Balaam may be a possible influence on the form of Revelation's seven letters.

4.7.2 The prophecies of Amos

J I Rife (1941:180) suggests that the prophecies to the seven nations in Amos 1–2 provide the best literary background for the seven letters. He identifies six formulaic elements found in Amos which simply required John to fill in the blanks:

Amos 1–2

Thus saith the Lord,
for three transgressions....,

Revelation 2–3

To the angel of the church at....
write:

yea for four, I will not turn away the
punishment thereof; because they (he)....
But I will send a fire...,
and it shall devour the palaces...,
saith the Lord.

So says the....:

I know....
The one who conquers....
Whoever has ears, listen what the Spirit is
saying to the churches.

Rife (1941:181) names other areas that Amos and Revelation share—'number, brevity, formulae, prophecy, geographical destination, and use as introduction to a book.' Two linguistic similarities are remarkable: the opening formulas are both *τάδε λέγει* (LXX; cf supra 1.2.4.3) and the closing formula of Amos *λέγει κύριος* is paralleled by the Apocalypse's *τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει*. Two contrasts are that Amos' prophecies are uniformly hostile and that they are shorter in length than the letters, except for the final prophecy against Israel which is longer. In comparing the two, Feuillet (1965:48–49) states that 'we must be careful to distinguish between the similarity of form and the great difference between the intentions of the respective authors: foretelling of divine punishment on the one hand, and, on the other, pastoral exhortations, and consoling promises, both rendered with an inimitable religious fervor.'

Rife's comparison has much to commend it. Yet the most obvious question is whether Amos delivers seven or eight prophecies to Syro-Palestinian nations. D A Hubbard (1989:127), like Rife, adopts a sevenfold judgment pattern. D Stuart (1987:308), however, finds eight, making the prophecy to Israel the climax of the group because Israel was his primary audience. Smith (1989:29) observes regarding these eight prophecies: 'The uniformity of structure within each oracle is very consistent, thus the final expanded and irregular prophecy against Israel stands out from the rest.'

Stuart (1987:308–9; cf Barton 1980:36) prefers to call these oracles to foreign nations rather than messenger speeches and lists five aspects to their general format:

1. The messenger introduction (*כה אמר יהוה* 'This is what Yahweh said')
2. Certainty of deserved punishment
3. Evidence (specification of crimes)
4. Announcement of curse (punishment)
5. A concluding formula (*אמר יהוה* 'Yahweh said'; or *נאם יהוה* 'oracle of Yahweh')

Like John's letters, these oracles exhibit minor individual peculiarities. The fifth element is missing with Tyre, Edom, and Judah. This is no problem, according to Stuart (:309), because 'variations of style and structure are so common among individual oracles of given prophets....' Barton (1980:36) notes insightfully that 'these oracles build up to a climax in the oracle against

Israel, and that the prophet's intention is to startle his hearers by suddenly turning on them after lulling them into a false sense of their own security by denouncing their neighbors.' In a similar manner John startles the Laodiceans in the final letter by failing to give them praise like the other churches. Amos is not a major source for John, apart from the reference to 'his servants the prophets'; however the form of these prophetic oracles may be a possible influence on the seven letters.

4.7.3 The prophecies of Ezekiel

John frequently alludes to Ezekiel throughout Revelation (cf supra 2.5.2.5). The center section of Ezekiel—the oracles against the nations in chapters 25–32—is perhaps a literary influence on John. J B Taylor (1969:184–85) notes two features of these oracles—seven addressees and a geographic design:

There is probably some significance in the fact that...the number of nations dealt with is seven....A further sign of editorial planning is the geographical pattern of the oracles, beginning with Ammon to the north-east of Jerusalem, swinging southwards through Moab to Edom in the south-east, then round to Philistia in the west, and finally going farther afield in a northerly direction to Tyre and Sidon, before ending up with the distant major power, Egypt, in the south.

D Stuart (1989:247) finds sixteen nations, not just seven, mentioned in these chapters. However, as he says (:248), many of these are only mentioned in passing as they relate to the nations prominently addressed.

A look at a map of the Near East from Ezekiel's 6th century BC perspective in Babylon shows that geographic design may be a structural factor but not the only one. The first three—Ammon, Moab, and Edom—make geographical sense. Next should come Egypt, but Philistia appears instead. The ordering proceeds up the Mediterranean coast to Tyre and Sidon before moving far south to Egypt. The longest oracle against Egypt—four chapters or one-twelfth of the book—is reserved for the end.

The first four oracles in chapter 25 have a similar form. Stuart (1989:247) identifies four features:

1. 'Messenger speech' introduction ('Thus says the Lord God')
2. Crimes of attitude and/or action against the Lord and/or against his people ('because')
3. Announcement of punishment ('therefore')
4. Conclusion ('Then you shall know that I am Lord' or 'Then they shall know my vengeance')

These elements likewise appear in the final three oracles but because the oracles to Tyre and Egypt are so lengthy, they are not as pronounced. John's familiarity with Ezekiel suggests that these oracles to the seven nations might have influenced the form of the seven letters.

4.7.4 New Testament prophetic forms

F Hahn (1971:391–92) has suggested that the seven letters altogether are a typical prophetic *gattung*, 'wie eine Rede urchristlicher Propheten an eine Gemeinde aussah und welcher Formelemente sie sich bediente.' He seeks to find in the letters expressions characteristic of prophetic speech forms. His analysis of the letters, particularly the body, helpfully focuses attention on the formulaic language. Yet to characterize the letters as a whole as typical of early Christian prophecy is problematic.

Aune (1983b:275–76), in his examination of the prophetic character of the letters, notes the particular relationship of the commissioning formula to prophetic speech. The Christological predication that follows begins with the *τάδε λέγει* formula, used by both Old and New Testament prophets (cf supra 1.2.4.3). Yet the *Weckformel* in the closing is not found anywhere else in early Christian literature (:278). The New Testament tells us little about the form of early Christian prophecy. Paul's directions to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:29–33) about prophetic revelations in the assembly addresses use rather than content. Thus it is doubtful that the seven letters assist us in determining the larger form of early Christian prophetic speech.

4.7.5 Conclusion

Aune (1990:204) believes that the seven letters derive their form from imperial *edicts*; '[i]n content, however, the *narrationes* and *dispositiones* exhibit the complex characteristics of the *paraenetic salvation-judgment* oracles widely used by early Christian prophets.' The examples we have examined suggest that Old Testament prophetic oracles influenced the form of the letters more than Aune allows. That John adapts and organizes these oracles to fit his creative purposes is evident, yet the underlying influence of the Old Testament is apparent in the seven letters as in the other parts of the book.

4.8 ANCIENT LETTERS

The contents of chapters 2–3 are commonly referred to as letters. In this section we will examine Greco-Roman letter forms and attempt to determine their relationship to Revelation,

particularly these two chapters. The influence of other New Testament epistolary traditions upon John will also be discussed.

4.8.1 Individual letters?

Charles (1920:1.46–47) proposed that each of the seven letters was sent at an earlier time to its respective church. John then revised the beginning and ending of each letter to bring the group into conformity with the initial vision of Christ in 1:14–18 and with the theme of conflict between Christ and Caesar. Charles uses the longer Ignatian letters to support his hypothesis.

Surveying the evidence for this theory, Court (1979:23–24) writes: ‘When allowance is made for all these features of pattern imposed in the letter collection, what remains of the individual letters, discounting any further patterns in content as well as form, is so small a unit that it is most unlikely to resemble an original letter transmitted independently.’ For this reason the source analytical approach of earlier commentators has been largely abandoned today. Boring (1989:85) speaks for the modern consensus: ‘Yet none of the messages in chapters 2–3 are independent letters addressed to a single church. Revelation is one unitary composition addressed, like all the messages, to all the churches.’ The findings of our research likewise validates the book’s unity.

4.8.2 Pauline letters?

E J Goodspeed (1927:21) calls the strangest feature of Revelation ‘that it began with a *corpus* of letters to churches.’ He (:23) suggests that John’s model was a Christian collection of letters to churches, which ‘can only be the newly formed Pauline *corpus*.’ His main evidence is John’s unique use of the typical Pauline greeting ‘Grace and peace to you’ (:24; cf supra 1.2.3.3). From this he (:25) concludes that ‘the writer of it (Revelation) has before him the collected letters of Paul and is strongly influenced by their form.’

We noted previously (cf supra 1.2.3.5) that the Muratorian writer reversed the relationship. Paul wrote to seven churches because John had earlier done so. Goodspeed (1927:22) acknowledges the Muratorian Fragment, but answers: ‘Modern historical study would invert the order, but the coincidence remains striking.’

The Muratorian statement is problematic in several ways. *First*, Paul was dead by the time John wrote Revelation unless a Claudian date is adopted (cf Epiphanius *Haer* 51.12, 33), which is most unlikely. *Second*, to make the number seven fit, the Galatian churches must be consid-

ered as one. *Third*, Crete is not reckoned because the letter to Titus is considered a personal one.

Goodspeed's reconstruction is likewise problematic. If an early date is adopted for Revelation, it is improbable that a Pauline collection could be collected and edited by this time. Even a late date is problematic. Although Paul's letters circulated in some form among clusters of churches by the end of the first century (cf Col 4:16; 2 Pt 3:16; 1Cl 47:1–4), it is unlikely that Paul's letters circulated as a collection until the early second century (Bruce 1988:130). Although highly imaginative, Goodspeed's suggestion fails to answer satisfactorily why John wrote in letter form.

4.8.3 One letter or seven letters?

At first glance Revelation displays the tripartite form of Greek documentary letters with an opening, body, and closing (White 1986:198). Following the *titulus* in 1:1–2 and the first macarism in 1:3, the opening in 1:4–5 and the closing in 22:21 display familiar biblical epistolary forms (cf Hartman 1980:132–35). For most of the book John reverts to the mixed genres of prophetic and apocalyptic, and the audience knows this is no ordinary letter. Ramsay's (1994:25) comment that 'the form of letters had already established itself as the most characteristic expression of the Christian mind, and as almost obligatory on a Christian writer' is perhaps overstated. Yet by adopting Christian epistolary forms John is clearly identifying his work with other apostolic letters (cf supra 1.2.3.3).

J H Roberts (1988) recognizes the Pauline epistolary opening in 1:4 and suggests that the first vision with the seven letters is really the body of a single letter. 'A letter ending is missing, but this is not surprising since the letter is followed by other material. In view of this, it would have been inappropriate to include a letter ending' (:21). Roberts, however, overlooks the typical ending in 22:21. This indicates that the body extends past chapter 3 to include the entire book. The entire book is thus framed in an epistolary form, albeit an artificial one. Roberts also fails to recognize the individual character of each of the seven letters. While some situations in the churches are shared (cf supra 2.2.2.8), others are unique to the church addressed. To classify the letters as one is thus to ignore their individuality. White (1986:19) observes three characteristics of Christian letters that are apparent in Revelation—friendliness, a discrete body of information, and a longer length.

4.8.4 Letter or epistle?

Deissman pioneered the study of ancient letters in relationship to the New Testament. He (1901:21ff) distinguished between 'letters' (private personal correspondence) and 'epistles' (public literary artifices). Deissman (:42–49) classified the Pauline corpus minus the Pastorals as genuine letters. Regarding Revelation, however, he (:54) determined that chapters 2–3

differ from the rest in the fact that they do not form books by themselves, nor constitute one book together, but only a portion of a book. It is still true, however, that they are not letters. All seven are constructed on a single definite plan,—while, taken separately, they are not intelligible, or, at least, not completely so; their chief interest lies in their mutual correspondence, which only becomes clear by a comprehensive comparison of their separate clauses: the censure of one church is only seen in its full severity when contrasted with the praise of another.

Deissman's observation that the seven letters are highly stylized is a useful starting point for investigating the form of these letters.

Deissman's two divisions—today referred to as 'real' and 'nonreal'—'are still the most important genre categories in use' (Stowers 1986:18). However, Stowers (:18–20) mentions three limitations of Deissman's approach:

1. Papyri from rural Egypt provide only a partial view of ancient epistolography, so letters from urban centers such as Ephesus that are preserved by literary transmission must be taken into account.
2. The modern sociological distinction between public and private does not hold for Greco-Roman society in general or for ancient letter writing.
3. All letters are literature in the broadest sense because they adopt stylized writing conventions; hence the distinction between warm, personal letters and artificial, impersonal epistles is misleading.

Stowers (:25) rightly concludes that New Testament letters as a whole 'resemble neither the common papyri from the lowest levels of culture and education nor the works of those with the highest levels of rhetorical training. They fall somewhere in between and have the cast of a Jewish subculture.'

4.8.5 Epistolary types

One possible category for chapters 2–3 is that of accusing and apologetic letters which fall under **judicial rhetoric**. Regarding the presence of this type of letters in the New Testament, Stowers (1986:173) states there are none 'unless one considers the letters in Revelation 1–3 [sic] to be accusing letters.' Since the Smyranean and Philadelphian letters contain no words of

accusation, such a description could only apply to the other five letters. However, a better alternative exists.

A more probable category is that of **epideictic rhetoric**—letters of praise and blame. An important social context for ancient letter writing was the client-patron relationship. This hierarchy is reflected in Revelation where God and Jesus are called ‘Lord’ (e.g. 1:8; 22:5) and John and his fellow believers ‘slaves’ (e.g. 1:1). The giving of praise and blame was essential to Greco-Roman institutions. ‘To praise meant to bestow honor; to blame meant to take away honor and cause shame....Honor provided a person with a status in society’ (Stowers 1986:27). Since epideictic is the rhetoric of praise and blame, most ancient letters are this epistolary type.

In his letters Paul often incorporated words of praise (e.g. Phlp 1:3ff; Col 1:3ff; 1 Th 1:2ff) and words of blame (e.g. 1 Cor 1:10ff; 5:1ff; 6:1ff; Gal 1:6ff). Stowers (1986:80–81) categorizes John’s letters as letters of praise and blame: ‘Six of the seven letters of Revelation 2 and 3...mix praise with something else such as blaming, threatening, consolation, or promising. In good epistolary form they begin with praise and then turn to blaming or threatening.’ However, John fails to use such characteristic terms of praising letters as ‘admire’ (θαυμάζω) and ‘honor’ (τιμάω; :83). Based upon such information, it seems the tendency of some recent commentators (cf Aune 1990:204) to dismiss Revelation 2–3 as letters is not practicable. It is likely that the praise and blame sayings would suggest at least some letter function to the initial Asian audience. Insights from the social scientific approach have thus validated the continued use of the word ‘letters’ to refer to these two chapters.

4.8.6 Papyri letter forms

J L White’s *Light from ancient letters* (1986) draws his examples exclusively from Egyptian papyri (cf Welles [1934:xli–l] for the form of Hellenistic royal correspondence, although these letters appear to share fewer similarities with John’s. While noting Stowers’s warning that such papyri may not adequately represent letter writing in a province like Asia, it is nevertheless instructive to note some similarities between Egyptian papyri and the seven letters. For example, the information formulas typically use a form of γράφω (White 1986:204) and the persuasion statements a form of οἶδα (:205). However, these formulas typically concluded the letter body. A formulaic construction of coercion or persuasion is found in several letters and, according to White (:206), warns the recipient ‘to attend to some duty or request which was earlier specified in the letter.’ These expressions urging responsible behavior often include imperatives, and

conditional clauses sometimes accompany these. Such warning constructions are found in Revelation 2:5 (εἰ δὲ μή...ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς), 2:16 (μετανόησον οὖν εἰς δὲ μή...), 2:22 (ἐὰν μὴ μετάνοήσωσιν...), and 3:3 (...καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς...).

White gives two first-century examples to illustrate this formula. PTebt II 408 (AD 3) is from Hippolitos to Akousilaos and in lines 14–15 he wrote: ‘Therefore, do not act otherwise’ (μὴ οὖν ἄλλως ποιήσῃς). The second is PFay 110 (AD 94) from Lucius Bellenus Gemellus, a landowner, to Epagathos, his steward. The letter likewise closes: ‘Therefore, do not act otherwise’ (μὴ οὖν ἄλλως ποιήσῃς). The latter example confirms White’s statement that such phrases ‘tend to occur more often in letters from superiors and in administrative correspondence’ (:206). This precisely accords with the relationship of Jesus and John to the seven churches. The appearance of the construction here is common: ‘They do not always stand in final position in the body, but they almost always depend upon earlier instructions or requests in the body, and consequently, they gravitate toward the end of the message rather than the beginning’ (:206).

4.8.7 Conclusion

The seven letters, while employing recognizable epistolary forms, have clearly been adapted by John to fit his purposes for the overall work. Rhetorical style is clearly evident, and perhaps decretal forms are borrowed. The letters likewise clearly draw from prophetic messenger oracles. The resulting work is a *mixtum compositum* in form (to borrow Aune’s phrase), yet with a clearly recognizable structure. As Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:165) observes cogently, ‘In spite of this uniformity in structure the seven prophetic letters are not monotonous.’ To classify Revelation 2–3 as **prophetic letters** is perhaps the closest we can come to describing the form and content of these chapters.

4.9 THE SEVEN PROPHETIC LETTERS⁸

4.9.1 Letter divisions

From a literary perspective each letter is one unit, so chapters 2–3 can be divided into seven letters. As we have seen in the proposals reviewed earlier in this chapter, depending on which literary form is adopted, the letters themselves divide into varying numbers of rhetorical sections. The chart below represents the attempt by five leading commentators on the letters to

⁸The outline at the end of this chapter (cf *infra* 4.12) is a useful tool for evaluating the discussion on the seven letters particularly in this section.

divide them—Aune (1990:184); Boring (1989: 86ff); Hubert (1960:349–50); Roberts (1988:27); and Hahn (1972: 366–90). We will interact with these outlines and then suggest a synthesis drawn from the text of these prophetic letters.

Aune ⁹	Boring	Hubert	Roberts	Hahn
1 <i>Adscriptio</i>	Address to the angel	L'adresse	Instruction to write	die Botenformel
2 Command to write	The city	La titulature du Christ	Announcement of sender	ὁἰδα-Abschnitt
3 τὰδε λέγει formula	Prophetic messenger formula	Le bilan positif	Diagnosis of the situation	der Weckruf
4 Christological predications	Christological ascription	Le bilan négatif	Call to conversion (not to T)	der Überwinderspruch ¹⁰
5 <i>Narratio</i> begun by οἰδα-clause	The divine knowledge	Les exhortations	Threats, rewards, encouragements, counsel ¹¹	
6 <i>Dispositio</i>	The 'body'	Les menaces	Warning to listen	
7 Proclamation formula	The call to attention and obedience	La récompense	Promise to those who triumph	
8 Promise of victory	Eschatological promise to the victors			

The three parts of the hellenistic letter—the greeting, body, and closing—can be observed in the seven letters. However, it is apparent that each of these can again be subdivided. In the greeting is the address and epithet sayings; in the body is the praise, blame, and coming sayings, and in the closing is the hearing and promise sayings. The greeting and closing sections each consist of two sentences, making the address, epithet, hearing, and promise sayings easily recognizable grammatical units. A textual analysis of the seven letters seems to support best the models of Aune and Hubert, although I remain unconvinced that Aune's decretal paradigm is the predominant form of chapters 2–3. In the following discussion we will interact primarily with these two models.

⁹Aune's (1983:275–79) earlier prophetic outline is: 1) commissioning formula with Christological predications; 2) central 'I know' section: a) praise, b) censure, c) demand for repentance, d) threat of judgment, e) promise of salvation; 3) call for attention; 4) exhortation to conquer.

¹⁰A Pohl (1969:1.105) calls the saying 'der Siegerspruch.'

¹¹Threats to Philadelphia, Thyatira, and Laodicea; rewards for obedience to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea; encouragement to Sardis; and counsel to Laodicea.

4.9.2 Aune's model

The analysis of Aune is the most comprehensive, so we will interact the most with his outline. Like Boring, he identifies eight structural features to the letters. Unfortunately, these stereotypical phrases and formulas do not conform to the observable literary units, but rather are elements in them. For example, the *adscriptio* and the command to write comprise the letter address, and the *τάδε λέγει* formula and the Christological predication comprise the letter sender (Boring makes a similar distinction). In our proposed model we delineate two sections, not four, here—the address and epithet sayings. These follow the natural grammatical units found in each letter.

The final two sections—the proclamation formula and the promise of victory—likewise fall into distinct literary units. These are called the hearing and promise sayings in our model. The promise to the Smyranean church is an anomaly, however. The verb in every other promise saying is in the future tense except here. The future *δώσω* is used in four other letters (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Laodicea), yet its use in the letter to Smyrna is outside the promise section (2:10). Because the promise of the crown of life is clearly eschatological and links the concepts of the first and second death, this appears to be a promise placed outside its defined saying (cf *infra* 6.4.1). Aune's model fails to account for this exception, and the entirety of 2:10 is placed in the *dispositio*. This tendency toward structural 'bleed' was likewise noted in our discussion of chiasmic structure (cf *supra* 3.4.2.7). Outlines proposed for Revelation must of necessity be flexible enough to incorporate such structural anomalies.

The center section—the body—is difficult to analyze. The *οἶδα*-clause and the *dispositio* are distinguished, even though this is difficult because the latter 'is not formally marked with a stereotypical phrase used consistently in all seven proclamations' (Aune 1990:192). While Hahn's outline may be the briefest, he (1972:370–77) compensates by identifying six major elements in the *οἶδα* section (abbreviations utilize each church's first letter[s]):

1. The church's situation either with approval (E, T, Ph, L) or disapproval (Sa, L)
2. The phrase 'but I have against you' (E, P, T)
3. The call to repentance (E, P, Ph, L)
4. The 'behold' clause (S, T, Ph, L)
5. The statement 'I am coming quickly' with variations (all but S)
6. A statement about what each church has and should keep (all but S)

Although the οἶδα-clause begins the body in all seven letters, the clause functions differently among the letters. In the letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia (2:1, 9, 13, 19; 3:8) the οἶδα-clause initiates a word of praise; however, in the letters to Sardis and Laodicea (3:1,15) it initiates a word of blame. Even the five uses of the expanded phrase οἶδα σου τὰ ἔργα (or ἔργα σου) fail to clarify here because Ephesus, Thyatira, and Philadelphia are positive while Sardis and Laodicea are negative. Thus stereotypical language alone cannot determine the form of the letters; the function of such language must also be addressed.

The adversative ἀλλά begins a second distinguishable section of the body. Its fullest form—ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ (ὀλίγα) ὅτι—is found only in the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira (2:4, 14, 20). In these letters the adversative begins a blame section. However, in the Smyrnan letter (2:9) ἀλλά is found in the praise saying while in the Ephesian and Sardian letters (2:6; 3:4) ἀλλά begins a brief praise before the letter closing. The negative and positive uses of the adversative again highlights the different functions that a stereotypical word might perform. Because there is no blame given to Philadelphia or praise to Laodicea, neither form used either negatively or positively is found in these letters.

4.9.3 The coming sayings

Aune (1990:191) perceptively notes that these positive uses of ἀλλά in the Ephesian and Sardian letters form an *inclusio* to frame a third section which he identifies as the *dispositio*. Often this third section, which Aune calls ‘the central section of the proclamations, the reason for which they were written’ (:191), is overlooked because it is so amorphous in the other letters. Since these two letters are clearly marked, let us examine them for distinguishing words or phrase. Following the brief blame saying (2:4) is a section (v 5) beginning with the imperatives μνημόνευε¹² and μετανόησον. Following these are two conditional conjunctions εἰ δὲ μή and ἐὰν μὴ. The verb ἔρχομαι (a present with future implications) and the future κίψω then follow. The Sardian letter (3:2–3) likewise displays this pattern: a string of five imperatives including the same two followed by the conditional ἐὰν οὐκ μὴ and the future ἴξω (2x).

Having identified stereotypical language in the demarcated section of these two letters, let us seek to distinguish this section in the other letters. The imperative μετανόησον followed by a

¹²Aune’s (1991:192) comment on the use of μνημόνευε is specious: ‘This emphasis on remembering the past constitutes the idealization of the past implying that all perceived forms of slippage including the appearance of dissident views and behaviours are based on a nostalgic conception of the purity of the pristine era (compatible with the composition of Revelation later than earlier in the first cent. A.D.).’

conditional conjunction and a future form of ἔρχομαι occurs also in the letters to Pergamum and Laodicea (2:16; 3:19b–20).¹³ The break after the praise section in the Philadelphian letter is difficult to determine. Aune (:192) begins the new section in 3:9 with ἰδοὺ διδῶ. My preference is to leave this sentence in the praise section with the initial phrase ἰδοὺ δέδωκα and begin the coming section with the third phrase ἰδοὺ ποιήσω in the future tense. In the Laodicean letter Aune (:192) begins this section in verse 16 largely because of the use of μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι following a causal clause. While a future act is indicated here, the main perspective in 3:16–19a is a present one dealing with correction and instruction (v 19a). A better start for this section is with the two imperatives, ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον (v 19b). The emphasis on the coming of Jesus is significant in this section. Only in the letter to Smyrna is a form of ἔρχομαι absent. Hemer (1986:74) attributes this absence to the fact ‘that the Parousia was expected to terminate the church’s interim period of suffering. That would be the occasion when Christ would bestow the crown of life. There was no need to stress it as a warning or threat.’ However, imminent persecution and martyrdom, not the parousia, better account for the preclusion of judgment upon the Smyrneans.

4.9.4 Thyatiran letter divisions

The letter to Thyatira is the longest and most complex of the letters ‘because the author carefully distinguishes *two* groups within that community and delivers a different message to each’ (Scobie 1993:613). Besides speaking to Jezebel and her followers as well as the faithful, he also addresses the other six churches. As a result, several of the sections are repeated. To the first group the use of singular pronouns, as in the other letters, is maintained. The second group (the other churches and the faithful in Thyatira) is easily identified through the use of plural pronouns. The following chart demonstrates this:

¹³Note that in Aune’s demarcation of these texts in the first sentence of paragraph 2 (1990:192), the two Greek verbs are accidentally juxtaposed.

<u>Address</u>	<u>Epithet</u>	<u>Praise</u>	<u>Blame</u>	<u>Coming</u>
<i>Jezebelites</i>				
Καὶ τῷ <u>ἀγγέλῳ</u> τῆς ἐν <u>Θυατείροις</u> <u>ἐκκλησίας</u> γράψον·	Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρός καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·	<u>Οἶδά σου τὰ</u> <u>ἔργα</u> καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπο- μονὴν σου, καὶ τὰ <u>ἔργα σου</u> τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.	ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἑμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἶδ ωλόθυτα. καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.	ἰδοὺ <u>βάλλω</u> αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἔαν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ.
<i>Faithful</i>				
καὶ γνώσονται πάσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι	ὅτι <u>ἐγὼ εἰμι</u> ὁ ἐραυνῶν νε- φροὺς καὶ καρδίας	ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σᾶ τανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν·	<u>Promise</u> καὶ <u>δώσω</u> ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, <u>δώσω</u> αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔθνων καὶ ποι- μανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾶ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συν- τριβεται, ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ <u>δώσω</u> αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν.	οὐ <u>βάλλω</u> ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὐ ἂν ἦξω.
<u>τοῖς λοιποῖς</u> <u>τοῖς ἐν</u> <u>Θυατείροις,</u>	ὑμῖν δὲ <u>λέγω</u>			

There is a double address in the letter—first to the angel in Thyatira and then to the rest in Thyatira. The verb λέγω is used twice in the double epithets. This is also the only use of ἐγὼ εἰμι in the letters; in its other four occurrences in Revelation it is always used with other Christological epithets (1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:16). Two sets of works are commended. The initial laudatory remarks seem problematic if they are addressed only to the Jezebel party. There is no blame saying for the faithful group, and only to them are promises given. The word βάλλω sets apart the coming section. The Jezebel party is told to repent, while the others are told to hold on until Jesus comes. The complex construction of this letter shows John's ability to adapt his letter structure when needed, and its threefold nature is not mentioned by Aune in his analysis.

4.9.5 Hubert's analysis

Hubert (1960:350) suggests that the letters be divided into seven columns with seven sectional rows, which produces forty-nine blocks of text. This is produced in the letter sayings outline (cf

infra 4.14). Such a parallel format allows a ready verbal and subject comparison among the letters.

Hubert's analysis is not as in-depth as Aune's and difficult to follow since he fails to give verse references for his discussion. Nevertheless, he makes several important observations. The verb that characteristically begins the exhortation section is μετανοεῖν, which is found in letters 1, 3, 5, 7. It is altogether lacking in letters 2 and 6, yet found three times in letter 4, the central letter. But in the Thyatiran letter only the Jezebel party is directed to repent and not the church itself. This is consistent with our earlier observation that the Thyatiran letter is essentially two letters. Hubert (:351) shows the symmetry of this relationship between these two groups of churches like this:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	S		T		Ph	
E		P		Sa		L

The bottom row of churches likewise demonstrates an interesting arrangement concerning the praise sayings. Ephesus receives the most—8; Pergamum—2; Sardis—1; and Laodicea—0. The scheme is thus one of diminishing order. This observation is confirmed by noting the word count in the praise sayings of the respective churches.

The promise sayings display a unique relationship between Smyrna and Philadelphia. A crown is mentioned only in these two letters. The Smyrneans are promised a crown, while the Philadelphians already possess it. Both of these churches are likewise being harassed by the Jews who are called the synagogue of Satan.

Hubert's (:352) examination of the threats of chastisement is not convincing. Making Ephesus the benchmark, he sees the tone of the threats to churches 2, 4, and 6 becoming less negative while that to churches 3, 5, and 7 more negative. It is difficult to see how the removal of the Ephesian lampstand (if this is the correct understanding) can be better than Jesus spitting the Laodiceans out of his mouth. He rightly notes the entreaty to all the churches in the Thyatiran letter, but according to his diagram the placement of this church is not central. The chiasmic structure proposed in Chapter 3 better accounts for the position of this entreaty.

4.9.6 The seven beatitudes and the coming/promise sayings

Little recognized is the verbal and thematic relationship between the seven beatitudes and the seven letters, particularly the coming and promise sayings (cf Mazzaferri 1989:299). Beatitudes

1–4 and 6 are related to the coming sayings, while beatitudes 5 and 7 are related to the promise sayings. The following chart outlines the thematic relationships:

<u>Beatitude (Blessed...)</u>	<u>Church</u>	<u>Coming/promise sayings</u>
1 Those who hear the words of the prophecy and keep them (1:3)	Sardis	You have heard, now keep and repent (3:3)
2 The dead who die in the Lord from now on (14:13)	Smyrna	Become faithful until death (2:10)
3 Those watching for his coming as a thief (16:15)	Sardis	Become watchful or Christ will come as a thief (3:2–3)
4 Those invited to the marriage dinner of the Lamb (19:9)	Laodicea	Christ will dine with him (3:20)
5 Those in first resurrection because second death has no authority over them (20:6)	Smyrna	Second death will not harm victors (2:11)
6 Those keeping the words of the prophecy (22:7; cf 22:9)	Philadelphia	You have kept my word (3:10; cf 3:8)
7 Those washing their robes have the right to the tree of life (22:14)	Ephesus	Victor to eat from the tree of life (2:7)

The following observations are further evidence of such verbal and thematic relationships:

- Example 1 has the only two uses of ἀκούω and τηρέω together.
- Example 2 has a thematic relationship of death.
- Example 3 has the only two uses of κλέπτῃς and the three uses of γρηγορέω.¹⁴
- Example 4 has the only use of δειπνέω and its noun form δέϊπνον (apart from 19:17)
- Example 5 features the use of the distinctive phrase 'second death' (also in 20:14; 21:18)
- Example 6, apart from the first beatitude, has the only other conjunction of λόγος and τηρέω.
- Example 7 features the use of the distinctive phrase 'tree of life' (also in 22:2, 19).

A relationship connected to the chiasmic structure of the book also exists. In terms of the outline presented earlier (cf supra 3.4.2.7), sections A and B contain one beatitude and seven promise sayings; while B' and A' contain one promise saying and four beatitudes. While the balance is not exact, it strongly suggests that the recipients of the beatitudes and the promise sayings are one and the same—the victors. In the letters the promises are couched in imagery addressed to the victors in each local church; in the beatitudes many of these same images are applied to the blessed victors in all the churches. John uses these exhortations in the form of beatitudes to 'bring pressure upon the readers both to perceive the crisis and to act with total resolution' (Minear 1968:214).

¹⁴A connection also exists between this beatitude and the blame saying of the Laodicean letter (3:17, 18). Here are found the two references to believers as naked (γυμνός/γυμνότητος) with its resulting shame (αἰσχύνῃ/ἀσχημοσύνην).

4.9.7 Faithful works and the promise sayings

R C Trench (1883:97) suggests another internal thematic relationship in the letters: 'It is deeply interesting and instructive to observe how in this [Ephesus], and probably in every other case, the character of the promise corresponds to the character of the faithfulness displayed.' Charles (1920:1.45n1) likewise believes that the form of the letter endings 'may in some cases be determined by the diction or thought of the respective letters of which they form the close.' Trench (1883:97–98) delineates such a correspondence in the first six promises, which is outlined next. An asterisk (*) denotes my additions or corrections.

<u>Church</u>	<u>Faithful works</u>	<u>Promise</u>
Ephesus	Abstain from works of Nicolaitans, i.e., eating idol meat	Eat from tree of life
Smyrna	Do not fear suffering and death	Not harmed by the second death
Pergamum	Abstain from eating idol meat (Hold on to my name*)	Eat hidden manna (New name written on white stone*)
Thyatira	Not vanquished by the world (Ignorant of deep things of Satan*)	Have dominion over the world (Has the morning star*)
Sardis	Keep garments white (Negatively, name alive but dead*)	Clad in white and shining garments (Positively, name not erased from book of life*)
Philadelphia	Overcome Jewish pretensions	Made free of a heavenly Jerusalem
Laodicea	(Focused on temporal wealth & power*)	(Given eternal throne*)

Trench concludes that 'the only Church in which any difficulty occurs in tracing the correlation between the form of the victory and the form of the reward, is the last' (:98). Since the Laodiceans are not commended for any faithful works, their preoccupation with temporal status is instead contrasted with eternal rule. The letters therefore demonstrate an inner coherency and show a relationship between the faithful works of the victors in each church and the promises they receive.

4.9.8 Conclusion

The analyses of Aune and Hubert have significantly advanced our understanding of the letters. While our division of the letters resembles their outline, nevertheless we have made significant modifications. Our model has seven sections divided into the following sayings: (1) address, (2) epithet, (3) praise, (4) blame, (5) coming, (6) hearing, and (7) promise. The text of the seven

letters divided into these seven sections is found in section 4.14 at the end of the chapter. The word length of each letter and its seven sections is presented for purposes of comparison.

<u>Churches</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Epithet</u>	<u>Praise</u>	<u>Blame</u>	<u>Coming</u>	<u>Hearing</u>	<u>Promise</u>
Ephesus	147	7	20	54	11	28	10	17
Smyrna	98	8	12	26	0	25	10	17
Pergamum	147	8	10	38	36	18	10	27
Thyatira	230	13	36	41	38	41	10	51
Sardis	143	8	13	21	12	46	10	33
Philadelphia	196	8	22	47	0	57	10	52
Laodicea	188	8	16	0	97	33	10	24

While length must be recognized as only one criterion for evaluation, it is significant that the central letter to Thyatira is the longest. Its promise saying is second in length (by one word) only to that of Philadelphia.

The elements of the praise and blame sayings were mentioned while discussing the rhetorical situation of the seven churches (cf supra 2.2.2). The coming sayings will be touched on in future discussions. Christ's warnings to come in judgment undoubtedly had a great impact on the Asian miscreants, since his judgment against the Jews was in the process of being fulfilled at Jerusalem. The address, epithet, and hearing sayings will be discussed briefly next before we focus on the promise sayings.

4.10 THE ADDRESS SAYINGS

4.10.1 The phrase τῷ ἀγγέλῳ

Each letter begins with the dative phrase τῷ ἀγγέλῳ. This dative singular is used again only in 9:14 where the sixth angel is told to release four angels. In the New Testament the only other occurrence is found in Luke 2:13 at the angelic announcement of Jesus' birth. This form is found six times in the Old Testament (Nm 22:34; 2 Sm 11:18; 24:16; 1 Chr 21:16; Zch 1:11, 13) and twice in the Apocrypha (Tob 6:6, 14). Only 2 Samuel 11:18 refers to a human messenger. The reference in Numbers is found in the Balaam account. The first reference in Zechariah is in the context of the report of the four colored horses, while the second relates to God's word to the angel who was interpreting the visions to Zechariah. The dative plural is found three times in Revelation—7:2, 15:7, and 16:1. In each of these texts the angels are charged to carry out

activities related to divine judgments. The phrase τῷ ἀγγέλῳ thus serves a dispatch function in biblical literature, whereby angels are sent as divine messengers.

4.10.2 Angels in biblical and apocalyptic literature

Angelic mediators have a rich background in the Old Testament. The law was given through angels (Dt 33:2 LXX; cf Ac 7:53; Gl 3:19; Heb 2:2). Angels were sent to interpret the visions of Daniel (Dn 10:4ff) and of Zechariah (Zch 1:8ff) among others. The presence of angelic intermediaries is a characteristic of apocalyptic literature. As J J Collins (1979:21) notes, 'In every apocalypse the revelation is mediated by an otherworldly, angelic figure.' The multiplicity of angels in Revelation is one of the most prominent features linking it with the apocalyptic genre.

Paul's enigmatic remark in 1 Corinthians 11:10—a woman should wear long hair 'because of the angels'—is understood by some commentators to indicate that angels were in attendance at early church meetings. Witherington (1995:236) suggests that in Christian worship 'even angels, as guardians of the creation order, are present, observing such worship and perhaps even participating in it.' While such an interpretation provides some insight into the functional relationship between the angels and the seven churches, one cannot be dogmatic given the multiplicity of suggested interpretations for this text (cf Fee 1987:521–22).

4.10.3 Angels in Asia

Ἄγγελος was also an important word for the residents of Asia. C E Arnold (1992)¹⁵ recently reviewed a number of inscriptions from Asia Minor that speak of angelic mediators. His epigraphic evidence is drawn not only from pagan sources, but also from Jewish and Christian ones. In all three contexts Arnold notes that angels 'were perceived as accessible supernatural beings who came to the aid of people in need....In the Jewish and Christian texts, the angels are best interpreted as the supernatural servants and emissaries of Yahweh' (:26). He concludes that ἄγγελος 'was an important term in the religious life of the people of Asia Minor' (:27).

Although Arnold's research focuses primarily on the angel cults associated with the Colossian church, his study may have implications for our understanding of angels in Revelation. Clearly John's congregations were not venerating angels as had Laodicea's sister church in the Lycus valley (Col 2:18). Yet the prominent mention of angels at the beginning of each letter

¹⁵This paper was presented to the Society of Biblical Literature consultation on Jewish and Christian mediator figures in Greco-Roman antiquity.

suggests that the Asian audience was familiar with their mediatorial role in the churches. Such cognizance is consistent with the Anatolian inscriptional evidence described by Arnold and others (cf Mitchell 1993:2.46).

4.10.4 Angels in Revelation

Ἄγγελος is a common noun in Revelation used sixty-seven times. An angel is identified in 1:1 as the mediator for John's vision (cf supra 2.4.2.4). The 'son of man' figure that John sees in his opening vision is holding seven stars (1:16).¹⁶ The use of metaphorical language here is evident because, when the speaker now places his same right hand on the prostrate John, he never drops the stars (1:17). Instead he comforts the seer and interprets the stars to be the ἄγγελοι of the seven churches (1:20). Thus each church has its complementary ἄγγελος. The attempt by M Wojciechowski (1988:48) to identify the seven stars with the sun, moon, and five planets lacks any textual basis and thereby seems improbable.

Seven angels are connected later with the seven trumpets (8:2, 6) and the seven bowls (15:1, 6, 7; 16:1). It is unlikely that these are the same angels as those assigned to the churches. For these angels are said to be standing before God (8:2) and coming out of the heavenly temple (15:6). A review of every other occurrence in Revelation indicates that an ἄγγελος is a celestial being rather than an earthly one, hence 'angel' is the proper translation.

4.10.5 Angels: Church leaders or heavenly representatives?

The identification of the ἄγγελος as the human leader (e.g., the bishop) in each church is clearly inadequate (cf Trench 1883:58–61). Widely accepted today is the view 'that the angels are personifications of the prevailing spirit of the churches, the spiritual counterpart of the earthly reality' (Watson 1992:1.255). This position is alien to the reality of angels as spiritual beings as seen in Revelation and in the rest of the Bible. Throughout Revelation angels are the exclusive agents in executing the divine commands. Stuckenbruck (1995:234–38) plausibly suggests that the angel in each congregation, to whom John is instructed to write, serves as a mediator—patron or guardian—who ensures that Christ's message is safely and accurately delivered. Just

¹⁶Beasley-Murray (1978:70) asserts that seven stars were 'a symbol of the political power exercised by the Roman Caesars over the world, and in this sense the seven stars often occur on imperial coins.' He draws his information from Stauffer (1955:150–53) who refers specifically to a coin type of Domitian honoring his dead son (illustrated in Ehrman 1997:405 fig 27.2). However, Burnett et al (1992) give no examples of Flavian *provincial* coinage inscribed with seven stars.

as John is sent an angel to mediate God's word to him (1:1), so the churches are similarly sent an angel to mediate Jesus' word to each. Finally, Park (1995:285n67) argues convincingly that the use of angel reflects John's tendency to emphasize 'that there is a heavenly representative reality (seemingly better) for an earthly transient entity.'

4.10.6 The command to write

The command to write (γράφειν) to the angel of each church reiterates an earlier command given to John who is in the Spirit on the island of Patmos. He hears a loud voice behind him: 'Write (γράφειν) what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches' (1:11). What follows is the initial listing of the seven churches in the same order as they are addressed in chapters 2–3. Here John is commanded to write directly to the churches without mention of angelic mediators. The command is renewed in 1:19 when the First and the Last again commands: 'Write (γράφειν) therefore the things you saw.' This literary device of addressing each church through an ἄγγελος using second person singular verbs and singular pronouns breaks down within the messages. A plural pronoun is first used in 2:10 when the Smyrneans are warned that the devil is going to throw some ἐξ ὑμῶν into prison. These will be tested and experience tribulation for ten days. Thereupon 'the author seems to forget his angelic addressee and refers to the entire community using second-person plural forms' (Aune 1990:186n16).

The command to write occurs on three other occasions in the book.¹⁷ In 14:13 John is commanded by a heavenly voice to record the contents of the second beatitude. In 19:9 an angel commands him to write the fourth beatitude. And in 21:5 John receives the final command: 'Write, "These words are faithful and true".' This oath precedes the final promise saying to the victor given by the one sitting on the throne, who identifies himself as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, and is a chiasmic complement to the opening command.

4.11 THE EPITHET SAYINGS

4.11.1 The epithets in the seven letters

Following the τάδε λέγει saying most letters include a present participle in the presentation—ὁ κρατῶν...ὁ περιπατῶν (2:1), and ὁ ἔχων (2:12, 18; 3:1, 7). These participles have a structural

¹⁷A similar command to write is found in *Hermas* (*Vis* 8.3): 'Therefore you will write two books, and you will send one to Clement and one to Grapte' (γράψεις οὖν δύο βιβλαρίδια καὶ πέμψεις ἓν Κλήμεντι καὶ ἓν Γραπτῇ).

symmetry with the present participle ὁ ἔχων that begins the call to hear. Aune (1990:189) assigns the use of ὁ ἔχων in 2:12 and 3:7 to the semantic subdomain of Grasp, Hold, like that of ὁ κρατῶν (Louw & Nida 1989:§18.A) This seems questionable since ὁ ἔχων in both cases better fits the semantic subdomain of Have, Possess, like 2:18 and 3:1 (:§57A). In 2:12 Jesus does not hold the sword, for it proceeds out of his mouth (cf 1:16; 2:16). In 3:7 Jesus does not literally hold the key; he holds the seven stars. Rather the key of David is a metaphor of the authority he possesses (cf 1:18).

4.11.2 The epithets in Revelation

The presentation of Christ in each letter is drawn from the opening vision in chapter 1. Many of the names and images are likewise depicted in the closing visions of the book. The following chart shows the intratextuality related to the epithets in Revelation.

<u>Church</u>	<u>Epithets</u>	<u>Opening epithets</u>	<u>Other epithets</u>
Ephesus	Holds 7 stars in right hand; walks among 7 golden lampstands (2:1)	Has 7 stars in right hand (1:16); among 7 golden lampstands (1:13)	Has the 7 stars (3:1)
Smyrna	First and Last; dead and lived again (2:8)	First and Last (1:17); dead and now lives again forever (1:18)	First and Last (22:13)
Pergamum	Has sharp double-edged sword (2:12)	Sharp double-edged sword out of mouth (1:16)	Sword of his mouth (2:16); sharp sword out of mouth (19:15)
Thyatira	Son of God; eyes like blazing fire; feet like bronze (2:18)	Son of man (1:13); eyes like blazing fire (1:14); feet like bronze in a blazing furnace (1:15)	Eyes like a blazing fire (19:12)
Sardis	Has 7 spirits of God and 7 stars (3:1)	7 spirits (1:4); has 7 stars in right hand (1:16)	7 spirits (4:5; 5:6); holds 7 stars in right hand (2:1)
Philadelphia	The Holy, the True; has key of David; opens and closes (3:7)	Has keys of death and Hades (1:18)	Holy and True (6:10)
Laodicea	Amen; faithful and true witness; beginning of God's creation (3:14)	Faithful witness (1:5)	Faithful and True (19:11; cf 21:5); Beginning and End (21:6; 22:13)

In the opening vision Christ is depicted as the eschatological judge. Features of this vision are seen in each of the seven letters, where both temporal and eschatological judgment are in view. The appearance of these epithets in chapters 19–22, where the eschaton itself is depicted, is equally significant. Mazzaferri (1989:243) overstates when he writes that the primary purpose of the eschaton is ‘divine judgment upon the wicked, especially as they persecute believers.’ While such judgment is an aspect, more importantly it is a time of reward for the believers who have maintained their witness.

4.11.3 The epithets in the Old and New Testaments

Revelation’s intertextual use of the Old and New Testaments can again be observed in the epithet sayings. In the chart below such allusions are noted.

<u>Church</u>	<u>Epithets</u>	<u>Epithet Backgrounds</u>
Ephesus	7 stars in right hand; 7 golden lampstands	12 stars = 12 tribes? (Gn 37:9); golden lampstand with 7 bowls (Zch 4:2)
Smyrna	First and Last; dead and lived again	First and Last (Is 44:6; 48:12); cf died and lived again (Rm 14:9)
Pergamum	Sharp double-edged sword	Mouth like sharp sword (Is 49:2; cf Ps 149:6); cf rod of mouth (Is 11:4)
Thyatira	Son of God; eyes like blazing fire; feet like bronze	My son (Ps 2:7); eyes as lamps of fire and feet as bronze (Dn 10:6)
Sardis	7 spirits of God	7 spirits of God? (Is 11:2–3 LXX; cf Zch 4:2, 10)
Philadelphia	The Holy, the True; has key of David (3:7); opens and closes	Holy (Is 40:25; Hab 3:3); True (Ex 34:6; Ps 86:15; Is 65:16); key of the house of David that opens and closes (Is 22:22)
Laodicea	Amen; faithful and true witness; beginning of God’s creation (3:14)	God of Amen? (Is 65:16 Sym); faithful witness in heaven? (Ps 88:38 LXX); firstborn of all creation...the beginning (Col 1:15, 18)

Although it is difficult to identify the precise background of all of the epithets, it appears that John again relies on the Old Testament for many of these names and images.

The reference in the Laodicean letter to Jesus as the ‘beginning of God’s creation’ has a striking parallel in the use of *κτίσις* and *ἀρχή* in Colossians 1:15, 18. Regarding John’s possible acquaintance with Paul’s letter to Colossae, Charles (1920:1.94) believes it highly probable,

while Mounce (1977:124) thinks it all but certain. Based on geography and verbal parallelism, it is an attractive hypothesis that the source of the Laodicean epithet is the Colossian letter.

4.12 THE HEARING SAYINGS

4.12.1 Co-texts in Revelation

The use of the plural ἐκκλησίας in the hearing saying—ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις—contrasts with its singular form in the address. Does this mean that each letter is directed not only to the addressed church, but also to all the churches? The unique situation of each church makes this unlikely. The only other use of ‘churches’ in the seven letters is found in the Thyatiran letter (2:23) when Jesus wishes all the churches to understand the error of Jezebel and her followers. Does the plural form perhaps point to the universal nature of the promises then? Is it these that are available to every Asian believer who overcomes? This perspective seems more viable. That the promise sayings follow the hearing sayings in the first three letters points to such a logical progression.

Another hearing saying is found in 13:9 following John’s vision of the first beast. Its length is abridged—εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω—with the refrain mentioning the Spirit omitted. Enroth (1990:605) accounts for its distinctiveness saying, ‘In chapter 13 the prophet himself is speaking in his own person and not through a supernatural authority as in the letters.’ The participial form found in the letters has been changed to a conditional sentence beginning with εἴ τις (cf Mk 4:23), which introduces the two succeeding sentences adapted probably from Jeremiah 15:2 and 43:11.

Here it precedes the first of four Ὡδέ sayings: ‘Here is the obedience and faith of the saints’ (13:10). A similar saying without the hearing saying is found in 14:12: ‘Here is the obedience of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith in Jesus.’ The plural ‘saints’ functions as the equivalent of ‘churches’ in these hortative texts. And, to make a word play in English, the ‘here’ functions as an attention device just like the ‘hear.’

The two other Ὡδέ sayings are likewise instructive. The first in 13:18 follows John’s vision of the second beast: Ὡδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν. ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ θηρίου. The pattern of the present participle of ‘have’ plus a cognitive body part, here ‘mind’ instead of ‘ears’ plus an aorist imperative singular, here ‘let him calculate,’ clearly suggests a modified hearing saying. The final saying in 17:9 incorporates the first seven words of 13:18: Ὡδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν.

Bauckham (1993a:394) observes, 'The resemblance between the two passages is clearly deliberate, and the variation between them typical of John's stylistic habit of varying the precise form of expressions he repeats.' Enroth (1990:607), however, sees a subtle change of purpose between these two latter sayings and 13:9: 'When the author wants to indicate a deeper meaning to his hearers and readers, he directs his call the "understanding" (νοῦς) not to the "ear" (οὖς).' Whether to the ears or to the mind, the hearing sayings and their variations were designed to gain the attention of the same intended audience.

A final, but condensed, hearing saying—ὁ ἀκούων εἰπάτω, ἔρχου—is found in 22:17. ἀκούων is substantival participle, not an imperative; the command is to 'speak,' not to 'listen.' The Spirit is again speaking to the Asian churches, with the bride, saying 'Come.' The faithful hearers are likewise invited to say, 'Come.' Two other substantival participles with imperative verbs follow: καὶ ὁ διψῶν ἐρχέσθω, ὁ θέλων λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν. This couplet contains imagery related to the final promise saying in 21:6–7 (cf *infra* 7.2). The hearing sayings placed throughout Revelation underscore that the believers in the seven churches remain the intended audience.

4.12.2 The role of the Spirit

The initial presentation of the Spirit in 1:4 is as the seven spirits (cf 4:5; 5:6), a symbol probably derived from Zechariah 4:1–10 (cf Bruce 1973:336). However, in the seven letters the Spirit is presented in the singular, τὸ πνεῦμα. The plurals of chapter 1—seven Spirits, seven churches, seven angels, indicating totality and completion—become singular in chapter 2. While Jesus speaks (λέγει) to each individual church, it is the Spirit's role to speak (λέγει) also, applying the message to the other churches.

The relationship of Jesus to the Spirit in the letters has occasioned much discussion. 'When John writes what Christ dictates to each church, it is equally the Spirit who speaks. So there is no need for a distinct position in the hierarchy' (Mazzaferrri 1989:300). This interrelationship is also depicted in 5:6 where the slain Lamb has eyes which are the seven Spirits of God. These eyes sent throughout the earth symbolize divine omniscience. A related Christological epithet—eyes of blazing fire (2:18)—combines the aspect of omniscience with that of purification, since fire is often a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (e.g., Mt 3:11; Ac 2:3; cf Williams 1990:145).

Kirby (1988:206n29) sees in the hearing saying an early formulation of trinitarian doctrine. The warning/refrain 'is also important for Jesus' *ethos* because it represents the collocation of

two elements: [1] the phrase familiarly associated with him in the Gospels: “He who has ears to hear”, and [2] the identification of the speaker here in *Revelation* as *the Spirit*.¹ The presence of other trinitarian collocations (cf Rv 1:4–5 and 5:6) make this observation highly likely.

In neither the eighth hearing saying nor the ὁδὲ sayings is the Holy Spirit identified as the speaker. In fact, no one is explicitly mentioned so the Spirit could well be the speaker. Following the declaration of the second beatitude (14:13), the Spirit responds by sayings, ‘Yes.’

4.12.3 Co-texts in the Synoptics

This aphorism occurs seven times in the Synoptics (Mt 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mk 4:9, 23; Lk 8:8; 14:35) and occurs as a variant reading six times (Mt 25:29; Mk 7:16; Lk 12:21; 13:9; 21:4). Hadorn (1928:40) declares, ‘Die Mahnung zu hören, schliesst an ein bekanntes Jesuswort an.’ This relationship with the Synoptic sayings has likewise been noted by Vos (1965:74): ‘With respect to the speaker of this characteristic exhortation, it is significant that in the synoptic Gospels it is found only in contexts which are ascribed to our Lord.’ He (:74) observes also that this ‘exhortation is not used by the apostles in their speeches, as they are recorded.’ The similarity between Matthew 11:15, which speaks of John the Baptist as the expected Elijah, and the ‘endings of the prophecies to the seven churches’ provides evidence to Ford (1975:29) that the Baptist was the author of *Revelation*. Such a conclusion seems unwarranted given the phrase’s usage in the parable tradition, particularly in the parable of the sower, which has no relationship to the Baptist. Enroth (1990:601) rightly infers from the Synoptic background that John took the hearing formula from tradition ‘but he edits it and uses it in a new context.’

4.12.4 Co-texts in Old Testament literature

Mazzaferri (1989:121) believes the ‘call to hear’ (*Weckruf* or *Weckformel*) has much in common with the Old Testament ‘attention formula’: ‘The AF builds on the imperatival שמע and the object דבר. It occurs at least 40 times with seven variants. Most common is שמעו דבר יהוה....The AF appears in the major prophets some 31 times in all.’ Aune (1990:193) disagrees, however: ‘The formula has no close verbal parallel in ancient literature with the exception of the parable tradition in the Synoptic Gospels.’ Aune overlooks the strong verbal tie to this Old Testament form. The most familiar verse in the Torah—the Shema (Dt 6:4; Ἰσραὴλ...—) was a hearing saying that could be heard in the synagogues of the Diaspora every sabbath.

4.12.5 The 3 + 4 Pattern

An interesting change in pattern occurs between the final two sayings of the letters. In the first three the call to hear precedes the promise saying; in the last four letters the promises to the victors come first. 'This grouping of the sections into 3 + 4 (messages) or 4 + 3 (seals and trumpets) is found in three series; it is entirely absent from three other sections (vials, voices and vision)' (Loernetz 1948:xviii). Whether there is any significance to this switch in the letters has been debated. Bauckham (1993a:10) concludes that 'it is difficult to discern any reason within the messages for this distinction between the first three and the last four churches.' Giblin (1991:51n 44), however, suggests the change 'helps show that the promise is tied to the Lord's communication as a whole, not just to the last thing he said, and indeed, that the promise is paired with the hearing-formula.'

A Farrer (1964:11), commenting on John's use of the half-week pattern, notes that within the four sequences of seven, each is divided into a greater and lesser half-week ($4 + 3 = 7$). About the letter sequence, 'the messages fall into two cycles, the last three going back over the ground traversed by the first four' (:83). This analysis is problematic both structurally and thematically. The half-week is broken differently in the letters than in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. The division here is $3 + 4 = 7$. And the Nicolaitan/Balaam/Jezebel problem found in three of the first four letters is unmentioned in the last three.

Given John's conscious manipulation of structure, some purpose probably lies behind this setting apart of the first three city churches. Benedict (1966:6, 23) suggests that 'in the first three letters an understanding of the truth leads to an appropriation of the promise and so to victory...in the last four letters obedience leads to victory and is the key to the understanding of the truth.' While understanding and obedience are doubtless the keys to victory, their use here appears undesigned. Even Benedict admits that Philadelphia is an exception in the final group. With Ramsay (1994:148), I believe John is reflecting the historical reality that Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum were the 'First of Asia' featured on coinage of the province (:125), with each having a neocorate in the first century. These cities 'étaient trois métropoles, des centres important du point de vue politique, culturel et religieux' (Bach 1981:295).

Another deviation is the twofold use of the dative τῷ νικῶντι only in the promise sayings of the letters to Ephesus and Pergamum. Again, is there a reason for this stylistic variation or it simply an example of a figure of speech called polyptoton—the repetition of the same noun in several cases (cf Bullinger 1898:267)? Perhaps Ephesus and Pergamum are further distin-

guished from Smyrna because these two cities were the political centers in Asia both for the Romans and for the *koinon* of Asia.

4.13 CONCLUSION

The literary influences upon the letters to the seven churches have been found to be diverse. John has not slavishly adopted a specific form because he prefers to be eclectic in his sources. However, we have determined that Old Testament prophetic oracles and Greco-Roman letters, with particular indebtedness to the Pauline correspondence, were the predominant forms behind the letters. We have accepted Schüssler Fiorenza's term 'prophetic letters' as the best description for the contents of chapters 2–3

At first glance the seven letters appear to follow a stereotypical form with familiar phrases and catchwords. However, the letters are in fact amazingly complex with varying patterns adapted to the individual churches. The letters are interconnected with the rest of the book through the Christological epithets and the coming, hearing, and promise sayings. Such intratextuality proves that the letters never existed apart from the book. In the next chapter we will begin our investigation of the promise sayings by looking at the identity of the victors and the background of victory in the ancient world.

4.14 LETTER SAYINGS OUTLINE

An analysis of the seven letters follows, delineated according to the seven elements of the sayings mentioned earlier (cf supra 4.9.8). This outline is a helpful tool in evaluating the discussions on the seven letters, particularly those in 4.9.

Address

Ephesus

2:1 Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Smyma

2:8 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Pergamum

2:12 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Thyatira

2:18 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Θυατείροις ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
24 τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις

Sardis

3:1 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Philadelphia

3:7 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Φιλαδελφείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Laodicea

3:14 Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξείαν·

Epithet

Τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρός καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ·
23 καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας... 24 ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει·

Τάδε λέγει ὁ Ἄμην, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·

2 Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπίρρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, 3 καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες.

9 Οἶδά σου τὴν θλιψὶν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ.

13 Οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἄντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

Praise

19 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν διακονίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, καὶ τὰ ἔργα σου τὰ ἔσχατα πλείονα τῶν πρώτων.

24 ὅσοι οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, οἵτινες οὐκ ἔγνωσαν τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν·

4 ἀλλὰ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν ἃ οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν, καὶ περιπατήσουσιν μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς, ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

8 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ἐνώπιόν σου θύραν ἠνεωγμένην, ἣν οὐδεὶς δύναται κλείσαι αὐτήν, ὅτι μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν καὶ ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου. 9 ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ Σατανᾶ, τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται.

6 ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις, ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν ἃ καγῶ μισῶ.

Blame

Ephesus

2:4 ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες.

Smyrna

Pergamum

2:14 ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκειν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι. 15 οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν [τῶν] Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

Thyatira

2:20 ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι ἀφείς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἣ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν καὶ διδάσκει καὶ πλανᾷ τοὺς ἑμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα. 21 καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ χρόνον ἵνα μετανοήσῃ, καὶ οὐ θέλει μετανοήσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.

Sardis

3:1 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ.

Phila-
delphia

Laodicea

3:15 Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἢ ζεστός. 16 οὕτως ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρὸς, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου. 17 ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι Πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρεῖαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός, 18 συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσοῖον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχρὴ τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς. 19 ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω.

Coming

5 μνημόνευε οὖν πόθεν πέπτωκας καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσων· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς.

10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε καὶ ἔξετε θλιψὴν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου,

16 μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

22 ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, 23 καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ.

24 οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος, 25 πλὴν ὃ ἔχετε κρατήσατε ἄχρι[ς] οὗ ἂν ἦξω.

2 γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὔρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. 3:3 μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον. ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσῃς, ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης, καὶ οὐ μὴ γνῶς ποῖαν ὥραν ἦξω ἐπὶ σέ.

9 ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε. 10 ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. 3:11 ἔρχομαι ταχύ· κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου.

19 ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον. 20 ἰδοὺ ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐὰν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.

Hearing

Ephesus

7 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Smyrna

2:11 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Pergamum

2:17 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Thyatira

2:29 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Sardis

3:6 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Philadelphia

3:13 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

Laodicea

3:22 ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.

τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

10 καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.
11 ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

Promise

23 καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστω κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν...
26 καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν
27 καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, 28 ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἄστέρα τὸν πρωτόν.

5 ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρός μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

12 ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς καινῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ ἣ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν.

21 ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

CHAPTER 5: THE VICTORS AND THE PROMISE SAYINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the promises in the seven letters are commonly called victor sayings (*Siegersprüche*), it is necessary to examine the meaning of victor in its biblical and cultural context. We begin by examining two Greek verbs prominent in the sayings—*δίδωμι* and *νικάω*—focusing especially on *νικάω*. Because of the centrality of *νικάω* to our topic, we will look at its usage first in Revelation and other Johannine literature as well as in the New Testament, Intertestamental, and Old Testament writings.

The second section of the chapter deals with the victor motif in three contexts—Christian, Greco-Roman, and Jewish. Important here is the value placed on victory in the ancient world. First the subject of the victors in the church is discussed. Whether the reference to Laodicean nakedness has any relevance to Greek athletics is questioned. An important issue concerning the identity of the victors in Revelation is reviewed. The internal evidence relating the victor to other names of Christians is first detailed. Then the two predominant views—victors as only martyrs and victors as all Christians—are evaluated. This chapter then provides an important link between our discussion in the previous chapters and the promise sayings themselves.

The background of athletic games in Greece is presented. The honor attached to victory within Greek culture is noted. As in Greece, agonistic games were popular in Asia, and their role in the Asian cities is discussed. We conclude with the Jewish perspective on victory. The Jews initially had strong feelings regarding athletic games in Judea, and the games served as a flashpoint when attempts to hellenize the Jews were made. The reaction of the Jews in the Diaspora was less polemical, and their situation will be examined.

5.2 THE VERBS *δίδωμι* AND *νικάω*

5.2.1 The verb *δίδωμι*

The verb *δίδωμι* occurs frequently in Revelation (57x). Its passive form *ἐδόθη*, used twenty times beginning in 6:2, has much theological significance. The opening of the seven seals and the blowing of the seven trumpets is totally under the control of the risen Lamb. The resultant judgments that fall upon the earthdwellers are therefore divine in origin. Likewise, whatever authority accrues to the beast and false prophet is derived from the dragon (cf 13:2, 4–5), who

himself is portrayed under divine authority bound with a chain (20:1–3). Finally, the privilege of the saints to wear white garments (6:11; cf 19:8) and to judge from thrones (20:4) is given from God. This use of the passive form appears to indicate ‘that which has already been fixed in the will of God’ (Beckwith 1919:599).

The future δώσω is found in every promise saying except those to Sardis and Philadelphia where other future verbs are used. Its eight occurrences include once in the promises to Ephesus (2:7), Smyrna (2:10), and Laodicea (3:21), and twice in the double promises to Pergamum (2:17) and Thyatira (2:26, 28) with an additional use in the promise to all the churches (2:23). Its use in the Smyranean letter outside the promise saying helps to identify the phrase as part of the saying.

Black (1976:146) calls the verb’s occurrence in 2:7 and 3:21, where δίδωμι = יתן, the ‘best-known and best-attested Hebraism in the New Testament.’ δίδωμι when followed by an infinitive, according to Charles (1920:1.280), means ‘to permit’ and ‘is the normal construction in this sense in our book.’ This sense is in fact conveyed in two contemporary translations—‘give permission’ (2:7 NRSV) and ‘give the right’ (2:7; 3:21 NIV). δώσω is used in two other places in Revelation—11:3 and 21:6. The former is not a promise per se, but a familiar Hebraism which means, ‘I will commission my two witnesses to prophesy’ (Charles 1920:1.280); the latter is part of the final promise saying (cf *infra* 7.2).

The first promise to Thyatira (2:26) apparently alludes to a promise found in Psalm 2:8–9 (LXX): δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου. The text of this promise will be developed later; here we wish simply to show the verbal relationship. The epithet in the Philadelphian letter seems to be an allusion to Isaiah 22:22. This Isaianic reference is preceded by a number of promises including: τὸν στέφανόν σου δώσω αὐτῷ καὶ τὸ κράτος καὶ τὴν οἰκονομίαν σου δώσω εἰς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ...καὶ δώσω τὴν δόξαν Δαυιδ αὐτῷ... (vv 21–22 LXX). A related promise by Jesus, likewise alluding to Isaiah 22, is found in Matthew 16:19: δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν. The promises of Jesus using δώσω found in Revelation 2–3 and Matthew 16 show a probable verbal dependence on Psalm 2 and Isaiah 22.

The high usage of δίδωμι marks it as a verb of special importance in Revelation, particularly in the promise sayings where it is the predominant main verb (8 out of 19). A final note concerns the secular usage: Roman magistrates used δίδωμι in their letters ‘to grant or confirm privileges of various kinds upon cities, organizations, and individuals’ (Sherk 1969:193). God

likewise is seen in Revelation as the Giver of both punishment and reward. To the victors he promises to give privileges in the heavenly kingdom.

5.2.2 The verb νικάω

5.2.2.1 Usage in Johannine literature

νικάω, according to Sweet (1990:80), is 'a keyword in Revelation (and) practically confined to the Johannine writings.' The νικ- word group is in fact used forty-four times in the New Testament. Of these occurrences ten are the roots in five proper names—Nicanor, Nicodemus, Nicolaitans, Nicolaus, and Nicopolis. These proper names are mentioned simply because the possibility of a wordplay involving Nicolaus ('victor over the people') and the Nicolaitans is often mentioned by commentators (cf Charles 1920:1.52–53; Kraft 1974:72–74). The thirty-four other uses reflect two verbs, νικάω (28x) and ὑπερνικάω (1x), and two nouns, νίκη (1x) and νίκος (4x). Four of these are citations from the Old Testament (Mt 12:20; Rm 3:4; 1 Cor 15:54, 55). The remaining twenty-nine are distributed thus in the canonical New Testament: Synoptics (1x); Pauline (4x); and Johannine (25x). The predominant Johannine usage is broken down as follows: Gospel (1x); 1 John (7x); and Revelation (17x).

5.2.2.1(a) Usage in Revelation

The formulaic use of τῷ νικῶντι and ὁ νικῶν is found at the beginning of each of the seven promise sayings. John does not use τῷ νικήσαντι or τῷ νενικηκότι, for 'the pres. part. here is timeless' (Swete 1909:29). Charles (1920:1.54), however, sees John being influenced by the use of a Hebrew participle here, which can have either a perfect or imperfect sense: 'in our author ὁ νικῶν = ὁ νενικηκώς.' The participle does not suggest completed action; in fact, the example Charles rightly cites from 4 Ezra 7:127 suggests that the struggle for victory is ongoing. The observation of Mulholland (1990:96n) is well taken: 'The verb tense in Greek stresses the continuous nature of the conquering. *Jesus is not giving promises to the ones who have conquered, but to the ones who are in the process of conquering*' (my emphasis—MWW). This discussion of tenses may, however, be irrelevant to John's meaning. For in Revelation 12:11 the martyrs in heaven are said to have triumphed (ἐνικήσαν; aorist) over Satan the accuser through the blood of the Lamb and their testimony. This same group is portrayed in 15:2 as victors (νικῶντας; present) over the beast, his image, and the number of his name. With

these martyrs 'it is the abiding character of "conqueror" on which emphasis is laid, and not the fact of conquest' (Swete 1909:194).

In the final promise saying in the seven letters (3:21) Jesus ties his promise to the Laodiceans to his own victory—ὡς καὶ γὼ ἐνίκησα. Caird (1968:58) states that here John explicitly defines what he means by the mysterious title, the conqueror, or victor: 'The Conqueror is one who follows Christ along the road which leads to that victory; or rather, because Christ comes in all his victorious power to those who open the door to him, the Conqueror is one in whom Christ wins afresh his own victory, which is also God's victory.' This victory is first announced in chapter 1 where Jesus is called the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (v 5; cf v 18). The use of the aorist in 3:21 verbally ties the seven letters to the vision that follows in chapters 4–5. This triumph is reiterated in 5:5 when John is told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah is able to open the sealed scroll because he was victorious (ἐνίκησεν). Yet when he looks to behold this Lion, John instead sees a Lamb looking as if it had been slain. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross is the reason for his triumph. 'Lamb' now becomes Jesus' title of victory throughout the rest of the book—his most frequently ascribed divine title (28x).

The rider on the first white horse goes out conquering so that he might conquer (6:2). Interestingly he is given the crown of victory before he departs. This accords with our interpretation that the rider is the false Christ (cf supra 2.3.2.4). His victory is only illusory and transitory. Although the beast seemingly triumphs over the two witnesses at the end of 1260 days by killing them (11:7), the witnesses are resurrected after three days and taken up into heaven (vv 11–12). In 12:11 the means by which the martyrs were victorious is told: through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. The first beast is given authority to make war against the saints and to conquer them (13:7). 'The word "conquer," it should be observed is ironical: the true conqueror is the martyr' (Kiddle 1940:250). In 15:2ff John sees a vision of those who were victorious over the beast and his image standing on the heavenly sea of glass singing with harps. In 17:14 the Lamb is said to conquer the beast and his allied kings because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings. Leivestad (1954:231) persuasively argues that the understood verb in 14b should be νικήσουσιν, not εἰσιν: 'and the elect, chosen, and faithful with him (will conquer them).' The final use in 21:7 is a present participial promise like those in the seven letters (cf infra 7.2.1).

To conclude, in Revelation *νικάω* is used in three different senses—*first*, of a moral, spiritual victory by Christ and the saints; *second*, a physical, military victory by the beast; and *third*, a moral **and** military victory by Christ and the saints (cf Leivestad [1954:212] who sees only the first two).

5.2.2.1(b) Usage in the Fourth Gospel and 1 John

The single use in the Gospel is found in 16:33. After first warning the disciples that they will encounter tribulation in the world, Jesus exhorts them to be courageous (cf Ac 23:11) because he has conquered the world. Westcott (1881:234) poignantly observes, ‘Thus in His last recorded words of teaching before the Passion, the Lord claims the glory of a conqueror.’ In 1 John the verb is used five times (2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4, 5) and the noun *νίκη* once (5:4). In each case the subject is the believers, not Jesus. They have triumphed over the evil one (2:13, 14), the false prophets/spirits (4:4), and the world (5:4). Their victory over the world has occurred because they have conquered with their faith (5:4) whose object is Christ, the victor for all time. 5:5 displays the same participial form used in Revelation: *τίς [δέ] ἐστιν ὁ νικῶν τὸν κόσμον εἰ μὴ ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ*. The use of this word group is one of the striking similarities among the Johannine writings (cf du Rand 1991:246).

5.2.2.2 Usage in the context of New Testament literature

5.2.2.2(a) Pauline usage

Four uses of *νικάω* are found in Romans. In 3:4 Paul cites the Septuagint reading of Psalm 51:4 (v 6 MT), ‘So that you may be justified in your words and victorious when you judge.’ Here *νικήσεις* translates the Hebrew *זכה*. This verb, in parallelism with *צדק*, means ‘be justified=be regarded as just, righteous’ (BDB 1906:269). The root in Aramaic and Syriac supplies the verb for ‘to conquer,’ and, according to Black (1976:139), the Septuagint ‘has given this Aramaic meaning to the verb, no doubt because *νικᾶν* is a much stronger expression.’ Black sees in this Pauline usage a possible implication for interpreting *νικᾶν* in Revelation. He (:140) asks if its meaning in the promises, where the context is forensic and related to the final Assize and its aftermath, is a nuance which is ‘the author’s equivalent of the Pauline *δικαιόσθαι* (*δικαιοσύνη*), the divine acquittal, the “winning of the verdict”.’ While such a nuance is possible, we believe an interpretation emphasizing judicial rhetoric (cf supra 4.8.5) or juridical function (cf infra 8.3.7) is

unlikely. In 8:37 is found the single use of ὑπερνικάω, where Paul declares that believers are 'super-victorious' in the face of constant martyrdom. Finally, in 12:21 he gives an ethical exhortation to the Romans not to be conquered by evil but instead to conquer evil with good.

νίκος is used three times in Paul's teaching on the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15. In verse 54, which quotes Isaiah 25:8a, when the believers are clothed with imperishability and immortality, 'death has been swallowed up in victory.' This Isaianic text is the probable source for Revelation 21:4 (Isaiah 25:8b is likewise alluded to in Revelation 7:17; cf Fekkes 1994:170–72; 253–55). Hosea 13:14 is freely rendered in 1 Corinthians 15:55, 'Where, O death, is your victory?' Paul translates the Hebrew קַטְבָּךְ ('your destruction') as τὸ νίκος, forgoing the Septuagint's δίκη ('penalty,' judgment'). This taunt looks ahead to the ultimate victory of the believers at their resurrection. In verse 57 Paul affirms that God gives victory over death through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The use by John and Paul of the same Old Testament texts emphasizing victory over death suggests a common eschatological *testimonia*. Victory over death is a noteworthy theme in Revelation, particularly in the Smyranean promise (2:10–11).

5.2.2.2(b) Synoptic usage

There is only one example of νικάω in the Synoptics—in the parable of the strong man (Lk 11:22). The context is the exorcism of a mute man by Jesus (v 14). Some in the crowd accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (v 15). Jesus responds with a saying about a kingdom divided against itself (vv 17–18). The parable of the strong man follows, with Satan representing the strong man and Jesus the stronger one (cf Marshall 1978:477–78). The imagery clearly depicts a spiritual warfare occurring in the heavenly realms that Jesus has already won. The parallel passages in Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27 use δέω synonymously with νικάω (cf Bauernfeind 1967:4.944). In Revelation 20:1–2 an angel seizes Satan and binds (ἔδησεν) him for a thousand years. John's use of the same verbs for conquering and binding Satan, which are found in the Synoptics, again suggests the prophet's likely familiarity with the Synoptic tradition, particularly Luke (cf supra 2.4.3.3).

5.2.2.3 Intertextual usage in the co-text of Intertestamental literature

The word group is found in each of the four books of Maccabees—1 (1x), 2 (8x), 3 (2x), and 4 (17x)—books that recount the Jewish struggle against Seleucid hellenization. Probably

contemporaneous with Revelation and also originating in the coastlands of Asia Minor, 4 Maccabees deals with the subject of martyrdom—that of Eleazar, the mother, and her seven sons (1:8; cf H Anderson 1985 2.533–37). The struggle of these martyrs against the Antiochus Epiphanes is portrayed as an athletic contest. In 1:11 they conquered (νικῆσαντες) the tyrant by their endurance (ὑπομονῆς). The elderly priest Eleazar is severely tortured by Antiochus, yet like a noble athlete he is victorious over his tormentors (6:10). Likewise, the brothers, in spite of torment and pain, are not conquered (11:20). Through their endurance victory (νίκος) is accomplished resulting in immortal life (ζωῆ; 17:12, cf v 15). The concept of the martyrs as victors permeates this document. Although these remarkable parallels in terminology do not imply John's dependence on 4 Maccabees,¹ such Jewish martyrological literature provides one of the 'nearest material analogies' (Leivestad 1954:216). It likewise demonstrates an existing mind-set of resistance and martyrdom among the Hellenistic Jewish communities of Anatolia. According to Pfitzner (1967:64), here are the beginnings of the standard vocabulary of Christian martyrdom and the first coupling of this tradition with the athletic metaphor.

1 Enoch 50:2 declares that 'the righteous ones shall be victorious in the name of the Lord of the Spirits.' 4 Ezra 7:127 also states, 'This is the meaning of the contest which every man who is born on earth shall wage, that if he is defeated he shall suffer what you have said, but if he is victorious he shall receive what I have said.'

5.2.2.4 Intertextual usage in the co-text of Old Testament literature

According to Bauernfeind (1967:4.943), the use of the νικάω word group in the Old Testament Greek translations yields 'no very striking data.' However, an interesting midrashic tradition emerges in the New Testament period which may provide a clue to Johannine usage. The Hebrew word נָצַח 'be preeminent, victorious' derives from the root meaning 'shine, be bright, brilliant' (Brown et al 1906:663). Its most prominent use is found in the titles of fifty-five psalms (Ps 4:1 et al²) and at the end of Habakkuk's prayer in 3:19. Here נָצַח is translated as a piel participle, 'to the chief musician' (KJV), 'for the director of music' (NIV), 'to the choirmaster'

¹Such dependence, however, may be found in the second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and patristic authors such as Augustine and Jerome 'treat the Maccabean heroes as Christian protomartyrs' (Stowers 1988:925).

²The 55 psalms are: Book 1 (19x): 4–6, 8–9, 11–14, 18–22, 31, 36, 39–41; Book 2 (25x): 42, 44–47, 49, 51–62, 64–70; Book 3 (8x): 75–77, 80–81, 84–85, 88; Book 5 (3x) 109, 139–40. Tate (1990:4) does not identify the individual psalms and miscalculates their occurrences in Books 1 and 2. Of these 55, 39 are of David, 9 of Korah, and 5 of Asaph; only 2 are anonymous (Brown et al 1906:664).

(RSV), 'to/for the leader' (NRSV, REB). The root also conveys the concept of 'everlastingness, perpetuity' (Brown et al 1906:664), 'which is reflected in the noun נצח and the expression נצח־ל' (Tate 1990:4). Tate then points out that the Septuagint follows this second line of meaning, translating εἰς τὸ τέλος ('until/for/regarding the end') in the titles of the psalms. Habakkuk 3:19 alone is translated τοῦ νικῆσαι. He also notes Delekat's suggestion that after the exile נצח lost its original connotation 'for evermore' and was reinterpreted as 'victorious one' to designate David or another figure associated with the psalm.

If this were true, why has the Septuagint—a postexilic work—consistently translated εἰς τὸ τέλος in the psalms? The translation in Habakkuk 3:19 suggests that the tradition is in its incipient stage and that by the first century it was widely disseminated. In the later Greek revisions (2nd cent) Theodotion translated נצח־ל as εἰς τὸ νίκος while Aquila translated it as τῷ νικοποιῶ (Bauernfeind 1967:4.943). This translation tradition is further evidenced in Paul's quotation of Isaiah 25:8 in 1 Corinthians 15:54 (cf Black 1976:139–40). The Hebrew text נצח־ל נומה is translated in the Septuagint as κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας. 1 Corinthians 15:54, however, reads: κατεπόθη ὁ θάνατος εἰς νίκος, reflecting the text both of Theodotion and the Peshitta (Archer & Chirichigno 1983:§217). Though these versions are postapostolic the substitution of εἰς νίκος for נצח־ל 'is obviously common enough that it makes little sense to refer to Paul's text as "pre-Theodotion" ' (Fee 1987:803–4). These 55 psalms—the director's psalter—were part of the prayer book of the synagogues in the Diaspora. Thus Jews and God-fearers regularly heard the exhortation to be victors during the reading of scripture on the sabbath. The Jewish and Gentile believers likewise would hear this exhortation when the psalms were read in the Christian assembly.

5.2.2.5 The Nicolaitans

The Nicolaitans (literally, 'victors over the people') are mentioned by name in the Ephesian and Pergamene letters and by practice in the Thyatiran letter (cf supra 3.5.3). Bauckham (1993b:124) convincingly argues that Nicolaitan alludes to Revelation's keyword νικάω and suggests that 'Their teaching made it possible for Christians to be successful in pagan society, but this was the beast's success, a real conquest of the saints, winning them to his side, rather than the only apparent conquest he achieved by putting them to death.' The particular mention of Nicolaitans in 2:6 is a dualistic construct providing a parallel to the theme of the victors in the

promises. The Asian audience would appreciate the irony of these would-be victors over the people contrasted with the true spiritual victors over the beast and false prophet.

The Nicolaitans, according to Boring (1989:93), ‘may like “Balaam” and “Jezebel,” be John’s own symbolic name for his opponents, since “conquer” is a key word in John’s theology and since “Nicolas” is the rough equivalent of “Balaam” in Hebrew (“ruler of the people”).’ Kirby (1988:207n41) approaches from a different tact, ‘The paronomasia of Νικολαϊτῶν/νικῶντι in this context would have not a whimsical but an oracular tone for the ancient ear. That word-play is audial; Νικόλαος/נבֿבֿ is conceptual.’ The insights of both Boring and Kirby are valid; for the word play is audial *and* conceptual. Nicolaus need not simply be a symbolic name, however, but was probably an actual person who promulgated such teaching in the churches. ‘Indeed, supposing his existence, we may see a play on an actual man’s name as a suitable basis for a slogan of current controversy’ (Hemer 1986:89). By mentioning the Nicolaitans, John establishes a contrast between two groups (at least) in the Asian churches—those victorious over the people and those victorious unto God. The Nicolaitans’ solution to conflict is compromise. Their victory is only apparent though; the true victors will be manifested at the Lord’s coming.

5.2.2.6 Translations of ὁ νικῶν and τῷ νικῶντι

The substantival participial phrases ὁ νικῶν and τῷ νικῶντι have been translated variously in different language versions.

- ‘He who overcomes’ (AV, NASB, NIV), ‘wer überwindet’ (Lutherbibel 1984; 1994 Elberfelder), ‘hom wat oorwin’ (1933 Afrikaans translation)
- ‘One who conquers’ (NRSV)
- ‘Victor’ (NAmb), ‘Victorious’ (Phillips), ‘those who are victorious’ (REB), ‘those who prove victorious’ (NJB), ‘Qui vaincra’ (Segond), ‘wer siegt’ (Einheitsübersetzung), ‘die wat die oorwinning behaal’ (NAB)

The versions adopt one of three basic translation options—overcomer, conqueror, or victor. ‘Overcomer’ is the most general of the three and conveys little of the connotation of ancient usage. However, in modern therapy parlance it suggests someone who has overcome some addiction such as drugs, alcohol, or gambling. ‘Conqueror’ brings a militaristic connotation favored by Giblin (1991:52): ‘The promise is couched, of course, in militant terms, as befits an apocalyptic document.’ It suggests the spiritual nature of the believer’s warfare; however, military imagery is a lesser aspect of the promise imagery. ‘Victor’ has an agonistic connotation

and best fits with the related imagery of the ancient games—wreaths, palm branches, and white robes. It is a comprehensive term that incorporates the strengths of all the options while avoiding their weaknesses. It is therefore the translation preferred in this thesis.

5.3 VICTORS IN THE FIRST-CENTURY CHURCH

5.3.1 The Asian Christians and the games

The Asian Christians, particularly the Gentiles, would be well-acquainted with Greek athletic games because 'spectacles were public institutions, organized (and sometime financed) by government authorities' (Veyne 1987:201). Like Plato (*Phaed* 256A) and Philo (*Praem* 13 passim), the early church came to see the human struggle between virtue and vice in terms of the Greek games. Paul is on record writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus: 'Don't you know that although all run the race in the stadium, only one receives a prize? Run therefore to win the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They run to win a perishable crown; but we run to win a perishable crown' (1 Cor 9:24–25). He follows with an analogy of himself as a boxer who buffets his body, so 'I myself will not be disqualified for the prize' (v 27).³

Likewise, the victor sayings (and Revelation in general) prominently utilize athletic motifs to portray the Christian life. If it was a great distinction then to compete in the Greek athletic competitions, how much more so to compete in the spiritual race for an immortal, heavenly reward! And if death was an honored outcome of the games, how much more was martyrdom to be honored by the community of saints! Thus arose the predilection in the postapostolic church to compete until death, if that was called for. The attitude of Ignatius toward martyrdom has been characterized by his translator M Holmes as 'vivid, almost macabre eagerness' (Lightfoot et al 1992:131). That this ideal was practiced is evident in the second century when bishops had to forbid saints from willingly offering themselves up to martyrdom, even though it was unnecessary (*MPol* 4).

³Paul was ministering in Corinth in AD 51 when the Isthmian Games were held. Thus he probably had firsthand experience with the athletic images he later uses here writing from Ephesus (cf Chambers 1980:63). Paul might have also witnessed games in Ephesus during his stay there (cf *infra* 5.4.3).

5.3.2 The Laodicean nakedness: A possible symbol of irony for victory

In his prophetic word to the Laodiceans, Jesus criticizes the church members for their nakedness and exhorts them to buy white garments (3:17). In the related third beatitude the believers are likewise exhorted to keep their garments, lest they walk naked and reveal their shame (16:15). The final horror for the prostitute is that she is left naked (17:16). For both Jesus and John shame and disgrace is associated with nakedness.

Athletic exercises were conducted in the gymnasium, derived etymologically from the Greek word γυμνός, 'naked.' The athletes in the gymnasium and in the games always participated in the nude. Chambers (1980:34) asserts that the impulse to nudity was primarily philosophical. 'Nudity allowed the athlete to demonstrate how near he came to the ideal of man as the gods had made him' (:33). One of the Maccabean objections to Jason's hellenizing efforts was that he made his fellow Jews conform to Greek customs (2 Macc 4:10ff). Jewish athletes now began to compete in the nude, greatly offending traditional sensibilities. 'The fact that Jewish epebes attempted to undo the effects of circumcision by epispasm shows how far the tendency to assimilation went' (Hengel 1974a:1.74). The author of Jubilees was later to write that 'all who will know the judgment of the Law that they should cover their shame and they should not be uncovered as the gentiles are uncovered' (Jub 3:31). The Jews of the Dispersion were probably more accommodating to the practice of nudity. Chambers (1980:55–56) effectively underscores this point: 'If Greek gymnasium life could induce Romans to abandon the mores of their ancestors to the extent that they were not ashamed to exhibit themselves nude before women (Plut. *Cat. Mai.* 3), it is unreasonable to assume that among the Jews there would not be many who could be lured away from the traditions of their fathers.'⁴ Although Pfitzner (1967:188) rejects the thesis that Paul had firsthand experience with Greek athletics, a more likely perspective is that Paul viewed them as *adiaphora*, amoral conduct that was permissible for the strong in faith while perhaps problematic for the weak (cf 1 Cor 8:1–13; 10:23–11:1).

Returning to the Laodicean letter: perhaps one reason for the church's apathy was an over-enthusiasm for athletics. Maybe its members were encouraged to compete because victory in the games would bring honor to the fledgling Christian community and approbation from the Roman authorities. Thus Jesus, through the ironic contrast of nakedness/clothing, is calling the

⁴One paradox of Greco-Roman culture was that while men could be seen naked, even husbands could never see their wives totally nude. Only true libertines 'made love to a woman from whom he had removed every stitch of clothing' (Veyne 1987:203).

believers to reorder their priorities and gain the true honor given to the spiritual victors. Even though 'naked' has verbal links with the imagery of the games in the Laodicean letter, its use as a compound predicate adjective with 'poor' and 'blind' suggests that an interpretation connecting it with the consequence of poverty is still preferred. Its use in the third beatitude (16:15), however, points to a generalization of the problem among all the Asian believers.⁵

The Old Testament background of this image should also be noted. In Isaiah 47:1–3 nakedness and shame are mentioned as the result of the judgment on Virgin Babylon, also images prominent in Revelation. Ezekiel assails unfaithful Jerusalem, threatening that her nakedness will be exposed if she does not repent of her idolatrous practices (Ezk 16:37; 23:29; cf Mi 1:11). And Nahum warns the harlot Ninevah that, unless she repents of her witchcraft, her nakedness and shame will be shown (Nah 3:4–5). Therefore to 'walk naked' suggests moral and spiritual turpitude. John's frequent use of imagery from the prophetic books makes this is the likely background for the allusion to nakedness in Revelation. However, given John's propensity to use multivalent imagery, a reference to Greek athletics might also be found in this language.

5.3.3 The identity of the victors: A description of their nature and role in Revelation

5.3.3.1 Victors correlated with other names for believers

The identity of the victors in Revelation has been much debated. The designation 'victor' is but one of many descriptions given to believers in Revelation. The following chart presents the range of names with their location, either on earth or in heaven.

⁵Charles (1920:1.188) believes, however, that the reference to nakedness in these two passages is 'the same thing as in 2 Cor. v. 1–5, and denotes the loss of the spiritual body.' The objection to this interpretation, of which Charles is aware, is that the context in Revelation is the present, not the future.

<u>Name</u>	<u>On Earth</u>	<u>In Heaven</u>
Slaves	1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 7:3; 10:7; 15:3; 19:2, 10; 22:6, 9	6:11; 11:18; 19:5; 22:3
Hearers of the word	1:3; 22:8, 17, 18; cf 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9	
Keepers of the prophecy/ works/commandments	1:3; 2:26; 12:17; 14:12; cf 16:15; 22:7, 9	
Church(es)	1:4, 11, 20; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16	
Kingdom	1:6; 5:10	
Priests	1:6; 5:10	20:6
Brothers	1:9; 6:11; 12:10; 19:10; 22:9	[6:11]
Sharer in tribulation	1:9	
Apostles	2:2	18:20; 21:14
Victors	2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7	15:2
Witnesses	2:13; 11:3; 17:6; cf 12:17; 22:20	
Watchers	3:2; 16:15	
Saints	5:8; 8:3, 4; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9; 22:11, 21 var	11:18; 18:20; 20:6
Souls slain and beheaded 144,000	18:24 7:4	6:9; 20:4 14:1, 3
Sealed	7:4, 5, 8	
Tribes of sons of Israel	7:4, 5, 6, 7, 8	21:12
Great multitude		7:9; 19:1, 6
Comers out of tribulation		7:14
Prophets	10:7; 11:10; 16:6; 18:24; 22:6, 9	11:18; 18:20
Fearers of his name/him		11:18; 19:5
Small and great		11:18; 19:5
Woman?/Wife	?12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	19:7; 21:9
Offspring of the woman	12:17	
Virgins		14:4
Followers/firstfruits of Lamb		14:4
Bride		21:2, 9; 22:17
Holy city, new Jerusalem?		21:2, 10
A people	18:4	21:3
Thirsty	21:6; 22:17	
Sons	21:7	
Righteous ones	22:11	
Washers of robes	22:14	
Desirers of water of life	22:17	

Several observations can be made from this chart. Like victors, descriptions such as slaves, priests, and saints are used whether on earth or in earth. 'Saints' is the most common name

and is used twelve times. The reference to the first beast conquering the saints in 13:7 is particularly illuminating. Looking backward, the verse's language is nearly identical to that in 11:7, which speaks of the beast conquering the two witnesses. The beast makes war and conquers both groups, indicating the witnesses/saints have a singular identity. Looking forward to 13:9, before the second beast is seen, a hearing saying similar to that found in the seven letters is interjected. This is followed by a Ὡδὲ saying to the saints (cf supra 4.12.1). The saints and the victors are one and the same. Likewise, in 17:6 saints and witnesses are linked, and in 20:6 priests and saints associated.

'Slaves' is the second most common designation and the one used in 1:1. It is used in 2:20 to describe the Thyatirans whom Jezebel was attempting to deceive, thus the same audience to whom the promise of victory was given. It is difficult to conclude, as Swete does (1909:262), that two groups are depicted in 20:4. He believes οἵτινες... distinguishes a group who, while persecuted and despoiled, were not martyred. A group, with similar characteristics, is depicted as martyrs earlier in 12:11. Apart from Jesus (cf 4:11; 5:2, 9, 12), no one is found worthy (ἄξιος; 5:4) except the faithful in Sardis (3:4) and the martyred saints and prophets.

5.3.3.2 The victors as only martyrs

Tertullian advances the view of the victors as only martyrs in his treatise on martyrdom *Scorpiace*. After recalling the promises to the victors, the church father asks, 'Who, pray, are these so blessed conquerors, but martyrs in the strict sense of the word? For indeed theirs are the victories whose also are the fights; theirs, however, are the fights whose is also the blood' (Scor 12).

J E Rosscup (1982:261) likewise asks the question, 'Who is the overcomer who receives the reward?' The three options he (:261–63) proposes are admittedly from a pastoral perspective: (1) a saved person who retains salvation, which some forfeit; (2) a saved person who conquers, distinguished from a defeated Christian; and (3) every saved person. His theological presuppositions, however, lead him to adopt the third view before even reviewing the evidence in Revelation.

A F Johnson (1983:40) shares this view but seeks to answer the question from a biblical perspective: 'Certainly they are Christ's true disciples, those who are fully loyal to Him, and who are identified with Him in His suffering and death (1 John 5:4–5). Compare those who do not

overcome in the letters (e.g., the “cowardly” 2:10, 13; the “sexually immoral,” 2:14, 20; the “idolaters,” 2:14, 20; and the “liars,” 2:2, 9, 20; 3:9) with those in 21:8.’

This latter comparison of the victors in 21:7 with those specified sinners in 21:8 indicates that the former have a specific moral quality to their witness that is absent from their counterparts. This moral erosion prompted by false teaching is what is threatening the churches. The victors are to withstand such error in their congregations. Conquering, as defined by Mulholland (1990: 96), is ‘the experience of living fully as citizens of New Jerusalem unencumbered by the bondages of Fallen Babylon though not removed from their sphere of activity.’ Kiddle (1940:61–62) concurs with this definition: ‘The conqueror must vanquish the temptations of this life, and demonstrate in action his possession of the Christian virtues. This idea is implicit in all the promises to the conqueror. It is a necessary qualification of the second meaning of “conqueror”—that is, he who wins a victory over persecution and death, the martyr.’ Kiddle believes that in the promises to Laodicea and Thyatira, the conqueror can only be the martyr: ‘if in two, then in all’ (:63).

5.3.3.3 The victors as all Christians

Beasley-Murray (1978:76–79) gives an extended discussion concerning the identity of the martyrs and reaches the conclusion that the victors are all Christians. After rejecting Kiddle’s assertion that the victors are only martyrs, he (:78) observes that ‘the promises to the conquerors are fundamentally assurances to the faithful of the benefits of Christ’s redemption, expressed in the language of apocalyptic.’ The letters never suggest that all Asian believers will die or that participation in Christ’s redemption is restricted to a select group. Rather ‘the essential characteristic of the conqueror, therefore, is that he participates in Christ’s conquest by faith, and through persistence in faith he continues to share in Christ’s victory to the end—whether the end be death or the parousia of Christ’ (:79). Laws (1988:67) correctly apprehends the dilemma for modern readers: ‘[Martyrs] dominate his vision, at times it seems to the exclusion of all else. We cannot look to the author of the Apocalypse for an exposition of Christian living as the imitation of Christ by those who live everyday lives and may expect to die peacefully in their beds.’ A comparison of the descriptive names for Christians in the chart above reveals that the victors are all the Asian believers who by faith enter into Christ’s victory. The conclusion from John’s perspective is that “every disciple of Jesus must be in principle a martyr and be ready to lay down his life for his faith’ (Ladd 1972:41).

5.3.4 Symbols of victory as used in Revelation

5.3.4.1 The color white

White was a color of victory in the ancient world. When the Lamb opens the first seal, a rider on a white horse goes out as a victor bent on conquest (6:1–2). He is given a crown, or wreath, another prominent symbol of victory to be discussed later (cf *infra* 6.4.2). Earlier we suggested that this rider is the Antichrist going forth in apparent victory, not the Parthians (cf *supra* 2.3.2.4). In 19:11 the Word of God is seen riding a white horse. Swete (1909:250) rightly suggests that ‘In both passages the “white horse” is the emblem of victory.’ Likewise the armies of heaven that follow are riding white horses (19:14). Since angels are never seen in Revelation riding horses, this group should best be identified as the victors. 17:14 confirms this, stating that the elect and called and faithful followers of the Lamb will make war with him against the beast and the ten kings.

Vergil (*Aen* 3.537) mentions how the appearance of four snow-white horses was viewed as an omen of victory. Plutarch (*Cam* 7.1) describes how Camillus celebrated a triumph by hitching four white horses to a chariot and driving through Rome, although he states that no commander either before or after did such a thing. Yet Cassius Dio (43.14.3) writes that the senate granted Julius Caesar permission to drive a chariot drawn by white horses through Rome to celebrate his victory in north Africa. During such triumphs Rome became a *candida urbs*, ‘city in white,’ which Juvenal (*Sat* 10.45) describes as ‘the imposing procession of white-robed citizens marching.’ Ramsay (1994:283) summarizes: ‘Thus though the triumph itself could never have been seen by the readers of this letter, they knew it as the most typical celebration of complete and final victory, partly from report and literature, partly from frequently seeing ceremonies in the great imperial festivals which were modeled after the triumph.’

Arnold (1972:21), however, cites inscriptional evidence that suggests that the Asians might have had firsthand knowledge of such triumphs. Ephesus and Laodicea were centers of the ἐπιλυκία festivals, which ‘were no doubt instituted on the occasion of some military victory of the Romans’ (:21). Although these inscriptions date later than the first century AD, Arnold believes the ἐπιλυκία festivals had their forerunner in Boeotian contests celebrating a Roman victory in the Mithridatic War (1st cent BC). Thus such triumphs with their attendant appearance of white horses and clothing might have been observed by John’s audience.

5.3.4.2 The palm branch

A large multitude out of the great tribulation is seen in 7:9 standing before the throne in white robes with palm branches in their hands. The palm tree is indigenous to the tropical Mediterranean climate, and its range extends as far as Smyrna (Post 1898:3.656). To the ancient Greeks and Romans the palm tree was a symbol of victory, and they gave 'palm leaves to the victors in athletic games' (Hepper 1992:117). Pausanias (8.48.2–3) provides the background:

But at most games they use a wreath of palm, and everywhere the winner has a palm branch put in his right hand. The reason for the tradition is this: they say when Theseus came home from Crete he held games at Delos for Apollo, and crowned the winners with palm. They say it started from there, and even Homer mentioned the palm tree at Delos in Odysseus's prayer to Alkinoos's daughter.

At the beginning of the third century BC in the Roman games 'for the first time palm branches were presented to the winners, a custom taken over from the Greeks' (Livy 10.47.3). One of the supernatural events that foreshadowed Julius Caesar's defeat of Pompey at Pharsalus (48 BC) was the spontaneous growth of a palm tree out of the pavement inside the temple of Victory at the Asian city of Tralles (Caesar *BC* 3.106; Plutarch *Caes* 47; Dio 41.61.4).

Palm branches are often found on the obverse and reverse of provincial coin types. A particular favorite with issues from nearly forty cities was a standing Nike, both left and right, with a wreath and palm (Burnett et al 1992). Examples from Asia are Smyrna (l 2465/1; r 2473), Sardis (l 3010), Laodicea (l 4403A–14), and Colossae (r 2891). In fact, Burnett et al list thirty-seven coin issues of Nike that include a palm branch.

The palm branch likewise became a symbol of victory for the Jews. After Simon captured Gaza in 141 BC, he and his men entered the city rejoicing and carrying palm branches 'because a great enemy was crushed and removed from Israel' (1 Macc 13:51; cf 2 Macc 10:7). When Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem shortly before his passion, the crowds heralded his arrival by waving palm branches (Jn 12:13). It is this victorious Jesus (Rv 5:5) who is the focus of the heavenly choir in chapter 7. Coupling this Jewish background with the aforementioned Greco-Roman background, the palm branches in the hands of the martyrs are a powerful statement of their victory over the forces of evil. Likewise, they depict 'a victory celebration, in which Jesus and the Father are being welcomed' (Mealy 1992:217).

Ulfgard (1989:90), however, questions whether an anti-pagan document like Revelation would use such non-biblical symbolism to describe the people of God before the throne. While not excluding the symbolic meaning of victory, he prefers to associate the palm branches with

lulavs used by the Jews in their celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. This association of palm branches with the Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7 garners little enthusiasm among interpreters, however.

5.4 VICTORS IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

5.4.1 The goddess Nike

Nike was the Greek goddess of victory and often identified with Athena. Statues represent her as a winged maiden, usually as alighting from flight, holding in each hand her most frequent attributes—a palm branch and a wreath, or crown (Avery 1962:752). Hesiod (*Th* 383ff) says Nike was the daughter of Pallas and Styx; her siblings were Rivalry, Strength, and Force. She and her family were honored by Zeus for fighting with the gods against the Titans. 'She is here an abstraction or symbol of decisive victory for the gods' (Hammond & Scullard 1970:735).

Her role in the athletic games is strikingly portrayed by the poets. Standing next to Zeus on Olympus, she judges the award for excellence both to gods and people (Bacchylides 11.1). Pindar (*Nem* 5.42) describes the victorious athlete Euthymenes falling twice from Aigina into the arms of Nike. 'Here Nike is already victor of an athletic, not only of a military, contest. She rules over all contests' (Hammond & Scullard 1970:735). Cults of Nike flourished at Olympia and Athens (Pausanias 5.14.8) as well as in the Asian city of Tralles, between Ephesus and Laodicea.⁶ Athena Nikephoros was the chief goddess of Pergamum and her temple, patterned after the Parthenon, is the oldest known temple in the city. Following Eumenes II's military success against the Seleucids, he constructed new stoas at the Athena temple (ca 160 BC). A restored inscription from its architrave reads, 'King Eumenes to the victory-bringing Athena' (Akurgal 1993:77).

5.4.2 The motivation for victory

What was the value of victory in the ancient Mediterranean world, and how was the victor thought of by his fellow men and women? This is an important question regarding a culture described as *agonistic* (Pilch 1992:128). Pilch (:128) has recently examined the phenomenon of lying and deceit in the seven letters and notes that honor-status was important to the residents

⁶To visitors to Ephesus today, one of the most familiar images is the 2nd century AD marble of the flying Nike holding a wreath, which was part of the Heracles Gate located at the beginning of Curetes Street (cf Erdemgil 1995:55).

of Asia, and that 'everyone seeks to augment honor.' One way to achieve honor was victory in the public games (*ἀγῶνες στεφανίται*). '[F]ame and victory itself are the true goals, because they grant the victor that which is in essence the goal of every Greek, that he might become the object of awe and admiration, and that his name might be remembered even in death' (Pfitzner 1967:17).

Regarding the role of the games, Young (1988:2.1131) writes, 'Perhaps nothing else is more distinctive of ancient Greece than athletics.' Competition in the Greco-Roman world was followed with passionate interest. Veyne (1987:200) describes how 'Greeks flocked not only to great games (*isolympicoi, periodicoi*) and lesser games (*stephanitai*), which were associated with fairs, but also to minor games (*themides*).' The most prestigious athletic event at the Big Four Crown games—Olympian, Isthmian, Nemean, and Pythian—was a sprint of 192 meters called the *stade*. The victor of this event was listed first on the Olympic summaries, and a nearly complete list of these victors remains for the millennium that the games were held (776 BC–AD 217; Young 1988:1134). The great lyrical poet Pindar (ca 518–438 BC) wrote odes to celebrate the victors in each of the crown games. These odes follow a literary form known as the Epinician Ode: 'a reference to the victor is required and to the place and nature of his victory; allusions to other victories won on earlier occasions may be added, as may compliments to his trainer' (Grant 1980:332). A standard Epinician motif is the *Siegewunsch*, which makes 'specific and unambiguous reference to hoped-for future victories' (Miller 1989:462n3).

The victors at the Big Four games, also called *ιεροί*, received no rewards except a symbolic crown (*στέφανος*) made of olive, pine, wild celery, or bay leaves respectively (Young 1988:1140). In his conversation with Solon, Anacharsis mocks the insignificance of such a prize (Luc *Anach* 10). Although Lucian writes in the middle of the second century AD, Solon's reply epitomizes the Greek attitude to victory from the seventh century BC onwards:

They are merely tokens of the victory (*νίκης*) and marks to identify the winners. But the reputation that goes with them is worth everything to the victors (*νενικηκόσιν*), and to attain it, even to be kicked is nothing to men who seek to capture fame through hardships. Without hardships it cannot be acquired; the man who covets it must put up with many unpleasantnesses in the beginning before at last he can expect the profitable and delightful outcome of his exertions.

However, at other games called *θεματικικοί*, lucrative prizes were awarded. A well-known inscription IG II².2311 (400–350 BC) lists the amphorae to be given to the victors at the Panathenaic games. Noteworthy about this inscription is the repetition of ΝΙΚΩΝΤΙ in the list of awards (cf Johnston 1987:126–27). In another type of contest called *eiselastic*, the victor was

accorded a triumphal entry into his native city as well as other civic privileges. In Sibylline Oracle 2:39 entry into the heavenly city is likened to that of the victor in the eiselastic games.⁷ Vitruvius (*Arch* 9.1) observed about these victors 'that they not only receive praise publicly at the games, as they stand with palm and crown, but also when they go back victorious to their own people they ride triumphant with their four-horse chariots into their native cities, and enjoy a pension for life from the State.' Inscriptions found in mainland Greece show residents of Asia traveling as far as Thessaly (Ringwood 1927:16), Boeotia (:45), Aegina (:62), and Arcadia (:96) to participate in the agonistic festivals there.

5.4.3 Agonistic games in Asia

The cities of Asia had enthusiastically embraced the Greek athletic tradition, especially after Greece's conquest by Rome. 'The celebrations appear to have followed the traditional mainland program; there is little indication that any strictly local customs...were introduced' (Arnold 1972:17). This Hellenistic conservatism in maintaining traditional celebrations likewise characterized the Asian attitude to victory in athletic competition.

The principal festivals in Ephesus were the Ephesia, dating to the early fourth century BC, and the Artemesia. These festivals included all types of contests. In the latter half of the first century AD the Balbillea festival gained prominence. The emperor Vespasian gave a citizen and benefactor of the city named Balbillus permission to begin these games. (Balbillus was an astrologer of Nero, procurator under Claudius, and prefect of Egypt.) Inscriptional evidence shows that gymnastic contests comprised most of the events (Arnold 1972:19–20).

The *κοινὰ* festivals were initiated in 29 BC by the *koinon* of Asia. The chief priest of the emperor cult and leader of the *koinon* often served as the *agonothetes* of the festival. The principal festivals were celebrated every five years (penteteric) in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, with each city having its own cycle. The Ionian games in Smyrna are given particular mention by Pausanias (6.14.3). Lesser *κοινὰ* festivals were also held in Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Sardis (Arnold 1972:20). Thus each of the seven cities except Thyatira is known to have sponsored such games. Gladiatorial combats and fights were also held at Ephesus, Pergamum, and Laodicea, with Ephesus being the first site in Asia where this brutal sport was introduced (71/70 BC; :22).

⁷An inscription found in Pergamum contains a decree of the Senate and an edict and letter of Trajan (AD 112/117) giving instructions concerning the Pergamene eiselastic games (Johnson et al 1961:§221; cf Pliny *Ep* 10.118–19).

A letter of Antony to the *koinon* of Asia (ca 42/42 or 33/32 BC) highlights the extraordinary status of athletes in the Greco-Roman world (cf Millar 1977:454; Sherk 1969:291):

On a former occasion also I was petitioned in Ephesus by Marcus Antonius Artemidorus, my friend and gymnastic trainer, along with the eponymous priest of the synod of sacred victors and crown-winners (ιερονικῶν καὶ στεφανειτῶν) from the inhabited world, Charopinus of Ephesus, to ensure that the existing [privileges] of the synod should remain untouched, and to request, concerning the other honours and privileges which they asked from me, exemption from military service, from all liturgies, and from providing lodgings, as well as the rights of truce, asylum and the wearing of the purple in relation to the festival, that I should agree to write at once to you.

The participants in the games were all volunteers. Thus it was not considered cruel for gladiators to die in the arenas; they had volunteered to commit murder and suicide. 'In Greek regions the death of a boxer during a match was not a "sports accident." It was a glory for the athlete to die in the arena, just as if he had died on the field of battle. The public praised his courage, his steadfastness, his will to win' (Veyne 1987:202). Plutarch (*Mor* 239D; cf Lucian *Anach* 38) describes an annual Spartan competition called 'The flagellation' or 'Contest of endurance,' where boys were lashed all day at the altar of Artemis Orthia, with some even dying. Plutarch states the consequence: 'And the one who was victorious was held in especial repute.' Christian martyrdom thus had an athletic antecedent.

5.5 VICTORS IN THE JEWISH WORLD

5.5.1 The games and the perception of idolatry

What would be the reaction of the believing Jews in the seven churches to the exhortation to be victors? Although we have demonstrated a more general background to such imagery from Old Testament and Intertestamental literature, relating particularly to spiritual endurance and persecution, connotations regarding Greek athletics nevertheless persist.

Most of the games were held in connection with the worship of a local deity. Before the deity's image the contestants brought offerings and prayers for victory and, if successful, their statuettes and crowns (Pfitzner 1967:19). If possible, games were held near the sanctuary, and 'it became a firm practice to cut the victor's crown, wreath or palm branch from a tree in the sacred grove' (:20). For example, in Pergamum the middle city, which contained the three gymnasia and the fields where the athletic games took place, was dominated by the temple of Hera (Akurgal 1993:90–101; cf Chambers 1980:18–21). Such idolatrous veneration was

guaranteed to provoke Jewish sensibilities. Josephus (Ap 2.217–218) expressed the alternative Jewish hope:

For those, on the other hand, who live in accordance with our laws the prize is not silver or gold, no crown (στέφανος) of wild olive or of parsley with any such public mark of distinction. No; each individual, relying on the witness of his own conscience and the lawgiver's prophecy, confirmed by the sure testimony of God, is firmly persuaded that to those who observe the laws and, if they must needs die for them, willingly meet death, God has granted a renewed existence and in the revolution of the ages the gift of a better life.

Although Pfitzner (1967:20) insists that the religious significance of the games persisted into the Christian era, Ringwood (1927:12) avowed several decades before that by this time 'the great majority of contests are of purely secular significance.' In his study Chambers (1980:30) adopts the latter perspective—the essential genius of the Greek games was humanistic. However, 'it is important to know that enthusiasm for either the gymnasium or the public games would involve some degree of compromise on the part of a Jew if he identified himself with the religious tradition of his people' (:30). Yet it is noteworthy that the synagogue in Sardis is located in the monumental bath and gymnasium complex (dating, however, third century AD; cf Seager & Kraabel 1983:168ff). The proximity of the synagogue and the gymnasium in Sardis suggests little tension between the two in the early Christian era.

5.5.2 Athletics in Judea

During the Intertestamental period the attempt by the Seleucids to hellenize Judea brought them into sharp conflict with the Jews. As we have seen, athletics epitomized the Greek spirit so the vanguard of hellenization became the establishment of a gymnasium in Jerusalem at the foot of the citadel (2 Macc 4:9–12). The best of the Jewish young men participated, and even the priests forsook their temple duties to seek Greek prizes instead of traditional honors (vv 12–15). The subsequent Maccabean rebellion (166–60 BC), exacerbated by religious persecution, owed one root cause to the provocation given by Greek athletics.

Greek athletics were absent from Judea until 25 BC when Herod the Great reintroduced quinquennial games in honor of Caesar (Jos *Ant* 15.268). Athletes were attracted from throughout the Greco-Roman world, lured by the glory of victory (τῆς νίκης εὐδοξία; 15.269). Although upset by the games in toto, the Jews were most offended by the trophies, which they considered idols (15.276). Herod diffused their anger by showing the complainants the true nature of the trophies (15.277–80) and thwarted an assassination attempt by a core of traditionalists who refused to concede (15.281–91). Greek athletics were in Judea to stay.

'The intermingling of Jewish and Greek culture may not have gone so far in Palestine as in the Dispersion, but it had gone far enough to permit the Jews there a considerable experience of Greek athletics' (Harris 1975:95). Thus Paul, a Pharisee trained in the school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem, could feel no qualms about using athletic imagery. And John, especially if he is the apostle whose origins are in Judea, likewise uses athletic imagery without hesitation.⁸

5.5.3 Athletics in the Diaspora

The Diaspora, which sent Jews into Asia (cf supra 1.5.2) and throughout the Mediterranean, gave them an even greater exposure to athletics. The writings of the Alexandrian Jew Philo are a case in point. He refers numerous times to the games and uses such imagery to commend virtue.⁹ In the contest of evil he states ironically that the real victor is the one who loses to the evildoer: 'do not allow either the herald to announce or the judge to crown the enemy as victor, but come forward yourself and present the prizes and the palm, and crown' (*Agric* 112). Old Testament figures such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joseph are commended as moral victors in the holy contests, where victory is of the soul rather than the body. For their triumph these victors along with other Old Testament role players receive prizes that include a crown. 'But the decisive point is that the prize or crown is *not claimed* by the athlete, *but granted* by God, for it is God who rewards and crowns all toil' (Pfitzner 1967:48). Philo is significant because, though he still thought of himself as a Jew, he could appreciate Hellenism and use its images as examples in his teaching. As Chambers (1980:143) observes, 'He was not attacking or abusing the religion of Israel but uncovering and revealing its true meaning and significance.'

5.6 CONCLUSION

The numerous references to victory in Revelation shows that *νικάω* was an important word for John. The Nicolaitans were a heretical group condemned for seeking temporal victory through accommodation rather than spiritual victory through resistance. In 1 Corinthians Paul uses victory in an eschatological sense regarding the resurrection of the dead, while the sole use of the motif in the Synoptics centers around victory over Satan. 4 Maccabees uses the victor motif

⁸Harris (1976:95) makes a fanciful suggestion that 'when St John outran Peter in their rush to the empty tomb on the first Easter morning, he was using a skill which he had acquired in the days when as a boy he imitated the runners he had watched in the stadium of Tiberias.'

⁹A full discussion of these texts can be found in Pfitzner (1967:38–57) and Harris (1976:51–95).

extensively in its portrayal of Jewish martyrs resisting hellenization. The promises of Jesus found in Revelation 2–3 bear a striking resemblance to promises found in Psalm 2 and Isaiah 22, particularly the language of giving some reward to the victors. The victor motif is likewise found in a midrashic tradition which occurs in the headings to fifty-five psalms. In the course of their *Wirkungsgeschichte* these psalms would be heard regularly in the Asian synagogues of the first century and later in the Christian assemblies.

An examination of the descriptions for believers in Revelation shows that ‘victors,’ ‘saints,’ and ‘slaves’ are used synonymously. Thus the identification of the victors as only the martyrs is problematic, for John presents the victors as being all Christians. This has important implications for the promises, because they are addressed to all believers in the seven churches who persist in doing good deeds and in remaining faithful. The reference to nakedness in the Laodicean letter seems to be primarily a metaphor related to spiritual poverty, although an allusion to Greek athletics is still possible.

Athletics were the quintessence of the Greek experience of victory and pride, and victors in the games were highly honored within the culture. Athletic contests were held throughout Asia, with the most prominent being the *koinon* games in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. Although the Jews under the Maccabeans initially rebuffed the establishment of athletic traditions in Judea, under Herod such games were finally accepted. Jews in the Diaspora became very familiar with the Greek games. Thus the victor motif is found in the two most prominent Jewish writers of the first century—Philo and Paul. In the next chapter we will look at the focus of our thesis—the promise sayings and their background in biblical literature.

CHAPTER 6: THE TEXT OF THE PROMISE SAYINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will examine the text of the promise sayings in chapters 2–3, particularly the key images. The preceding chapters have laid the necessary foundation for such a discussion. As Ulfgard (1989:1) has well observed, 'no attempt at understanding a part of Rev can be made without having a general idea of its place within the whole book.' Contemporary readers seldom attempt to interpret the promises apart from their fulfillment in the later chapters of Revelation. But upon the initial reading of the letters, what might be the response of the Asian audience to these promises? Such a response would be based on a number of literary, cultural, and historical factors. In this chapter we will seek to gain an understanding of the promises from these backgrounds as well as from the first three chapters of Revelation. In Chapter 7 we will use subsequent references to the promises in Revelation to sharpen our understanding of these images. Our overview cannot be comprehensive in the sense of including every comment and opinion on these texts. So much has been written that such a treatment would be impossible. Therefore the most viable perspectives compatible with sound hermeneutics have been selected. Several of the images are difficult to interpret, and new lines of interpretation are presented. Before our discussion of the promise sayings begins, we first examine the question of local references and whether they play a legitimate role in interpreting the letters.

The promise sayings of the letters are investigated in turn. General matters including textual issues are examined first. Local references related to the immediate context of each church are discussed next. Then the co-texts of each image in New Testament, Intertestamental, and Old Testament literature are presented. These co-texts are often presented with minimal comment. Although these presentations may not necessarily present fresh evidence, such a compilation is useful to show the development of these images in the Jewish and Christian communities. The heading 'Intertestamental' is used as a catchall for works in the Apocrypha and Pseudipigrapha as well as nonbiblical historical and literary writings of the Greco-Roman world originating from that approximate period. An occasional reference from the apostolic fathers is also utilized. We conclude each section by suggesting how the promises were understood by the audience in the Asian churches.

In Chapter 2 the influence of Old Testament prophetic literature on John was emphasized, while that of Intertestamental apocalyptic literature was minimized. Yet it would be imprudent to

ignore totally the numerous verbal parallels with the promises found in Intertestamental literature. It is clear that John dips into a common well of language and imagery. Charles (1920:1.lxv) argues persuasively that 'without a knowledge of the Pseudipigrapha it would be impossible to understand our author.' Therefore, how the Jewish apocalyptists used various symbols *may* guide us in understanding John's symbolism. Yet John's Revelation stands apart from these works both from a literary and a spiritual perspective. As G B Caird (1966:10) has observed about certain of these apocalypses, 'The *Book of Enoch* has been justly called one of the world's six worst books. The *Ezra Apocalypse*, which somehow found its way into the Vulgate, and so into the Apocrypha under the title of 2 Esdras, is responsible for many of the most deplorable features of mediaeval theology. It is therefore quite unjust to John to insist that he must be judged by such company as this.' Circumspection is therefore called for in drawing any parallels between this literature and Revelation.

6.2 THE QUESTION OF LOCAL REFERENCES

W M Ramsay (1994:28) is well known for his advocacy of local references: 'The letters were written by one who was familiar with the situation, the character, the past history, the possibilities of future development, of those seven cities. The church of Sardis, for example, is addressed as the church of that actual, single city: the facts and characteristics mentioned are proper to it alone, and not common to the other churches of the Hermus valley.' M J S Rudwick and E M B Green (1957–58), P Wood (1961–62), and S E Porter (1987) have built upon Ramsay's labors, refining the understanding of the local references in Laodicea, Pergamum, and Sardis.

The outworking of Ramsay's view was a sort of environmental determinism to which

J M Court (1979:27) responded:

Expressed in its most extreme form, this belief in the determining influence of the environment would leave little opportunity or justification for a pastor's praise or blame. In a situation where, granted the weakness of human nature, conformity was almost inevitable, the function of a writer in letters such as these would amount to stating the reality of the situation for those who had failed to recognize it. The characteristic expression of the promise to the one who overcomes cannot have been made with much hopefulness or conviction.

D L Barr (1986:245–46n9) has likewise sought to discredit the theory: 'These places and their associated ideas are not merely historical correlations, as Ramsay saw, but they are an oratorical device which would enable easy memorization of the order and scope of these letters.'

C J Hemer (1986) recognized the weaknesses in Ramsay's approach and updated and expanded his focus. The result was to make the recognition of local references historically and hermeneutically more credible. He has refined this approach to audience criticism by reconstructing a viable social history of the seven churches, asserting that 'the symbolism of the letters was forcibly applicable to the original readers' (:210).

C H H Scobie (1993:616–17) has recently answered the objections of P Prigent concerning local reference by contending, 'If only two or three local references can be convincingly demonstrated this would be sufficient to uphold the theory of local references; these would then greatly increase the possibility that at least some further such references exist.' Although he discusses only a few of the fifty or so suggested local references (of which many are 'farfetched'), the recognition of such references 'does shed light on the nature of the letters as Christian prophetic oracles and on John's relation to the local situations addressed' (:624). Rowland (1993:63) rightly explains how the inclusion of local color highlights the close link between religion and culture: 'It is expected that the Christians in Laodicea will have imbibed the dominant ethos of the place in which they live, and so their outlook will be more governed by that than by Christ.' Thus the risen Christ must directly and forcefully challenge those situations and experiences that have impeded the spiritual development of each church.

The matter of local references in the seven letters is analogous to the question of historical references in Revelation (cf supra 2.3.2). The fact that John had firsthand knowledge of events happening in the Roman Empire, especially in Asia, is an important consideration in interpreting the so-called local references. We accept the likelihood of local references as the direct context for the promise sayings and therefore in our discussions will present suggested references in the seven cities. Are the promises individualized to each church? Ramsay (1994:179) believes so: 'The promise contained in the perorations of the seven letters is different in every case, and is evidently adapted in each instance to suit the general tone of the letter and the character and needs of the city.' Hemer (1986:42) agrees that in the letters 'we find a pointed appropriateness in the promises to the conquerors' because 'John is deeply concerned with the specific needs of his readers.' The suggestions of these and other scholars will be scrutinized for each promise. The ultimate question we will attempt to answer is, What would this promise have communicated to the initial Asian audience, and what would their response have been?

6.3 THE EPHESIAN PROMISE SAYING

6.3.1 The Text

The promise saying is found in 2:7: τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. Jesus promises to grant (δώσω; cf supra 5.2.1) the victor permission to eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God. Some texts include μέσῳ in the final clause: ἐν μέσῳ τῷ παραδείσῳ and ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ παραδείσου. These variants¹ undoubtedly arose from an attempt to harmonize the text with the Septuagint readings of Genesis 2:9 and 3:3 (cf 3:8).

This is the first of six uses of αὐτῷ in the promises (cf 2:17 [2x], 26, 28; 3:21). Speaking of its use here and in 2:17; 2:26; and 3:21 (cf 21:7), Benedict (1966:42) suggests this explanation: 'Without the use of the pronoun, the meaning would have been clear, but its usage is an emphatic, specific and restrictive way of showing that the promised reward applies only to the conqueror.' Zerwich (1963:§26) provides a more likely explanation. Here and in 2:17 use of τῷ νικῶντι δώσω with the pleonastic addition of αὐτῷ 'shows that the participle, although put in the dative, is in the author's mind pendent, in accordance with the Semitic idiom of nominal sentences.' The pendent logical subject is normally followed by a sentence which takes it up by using a pronoun.

6.3.2 The tree of life

6.3.2.1 The context of local references

The possibility of a local reference has been challenged by Beckwith (1919:451): 'This promise, like the epithet of Christ in v. 1, does not have specific reference to the circumstances of the Ephesians, it is applicable to all alike; and it is placed appropriately in this introductory epistle as fundamental to the promises in all the others.' Lilje (1957:72) likewise notes its importance: 'The greatest promise, which will be the last to be fulfilled (Rev. 22:14) stands first in the letters; for the tree of life is the sign of the restoration of Paradise.' Although the primary reference is to the creation account in Genesis, a local reference need not be precluded. In this section we will explore several possibilities.

The Nicolaitans (cf supra 3.5.3; 5.2.2.5) are first mentioned in this letter. Eating in the pagan temples was a major concern for John. An implicit contrast is drawn between those who com-

¹The manuscripts supporting the variants here and in subsequent references can be found in NA²⁶.

promise now by eating idol meat, thereby forgoing their heavenly reward, and those who abstain, thus gaining the right to eat from the tree of life for eternity. Thompson (1990:48) identifies such a reversal of truth as irony: 'The irony of Christian proclamation and imitation occurs in a more subtle form in the message to the Ephesians where those conquering are promised to eat from the "tree of life"....'² However, the Nicolaitans were also a problem in Pergamum as well as in Thyatira (i.e., the Jezebelites). The believers in these churches would likewise understand the irony of this promise to the Ephesians. Hence, while there is a local reference, its scope encompasses more than just one church. We find this true in the promises in the other letters as well.

The tree of life imagery may also have some parallels in the local Artemis context. Outside of Ephesus was the grove Ortygia, the traditional birthplace of Artemis (cf supra 1.5.3.2.(d)). The site of this sacred grove called a *paradeisos* was still known in the first century, according to Strabo (*Geog* 14.1.5, 20). The background of the Artemesium as a tree shrine is mentioned both by Callimachus (*Hm* 237–39) and Dionysius Periegetes (826–29).

Ford (1975:388) postulates that the tree of life symbol was perhaps suggested 'because the sacred tree associated with the worship of the nature goddess appears on Ephesian coins.' Hemer (1986:45–46) likewise cites the abundant evidence for use of the tree on coinage, but his evidence is all pre-Roman dating from 400–350 BC. An examination of Roman coins mainly from the Ephesian mint, shown in Trell and Burnett and depicting the Artemesium, produced no evidence suggesting that the tree of life was a motif connected to Artemis.³ It is doubtful whether John's audience would be familiar with the symbolism of pre-Roman coinage because it was no longer in circulation. The purpose of the large-scale production of imperial coinage in first-century Asia was to establish a uniform coinage there (Burnett et al 1992:23).

6.3.2.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

The phrase 'tree of life' is used nowhere outside of Revelation. ξύλον is used five times in reference to the crucifixion of Jesus, both in a Petrine (Ac 5:30; 10:39; 1 Pe 2:24) and a Pauline (Ac 13:29; Gal 3:13) context. Its use by Paul in Galatians follows the Septuagint reading of Deuteronomy 21:23, a text clearly alluded to in the other four uses as well.

²Thompson (1990:48) cites other examples of irony in the letters to Smyrna, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

³Hemer (1986:46), however, cites an issue from Elagabalus showing the huntress Artemis standing beneath the palm. His other example better shows the relationship of the palm tree to Nike (cf 5.3.4.2).

Some expositors have suggested a relationship between the tree of life and the cross. R Roberts (1913–14:332) asks, 'May it not be that the word was used in this special sense by the early Christians, and that John is also thinking of the Cross when he speaks of the "tree of life"?' Although John never uses the word *σταυρός*, the redemptive sacrifice of the Lamb is clearly presented in his second vision (5:6–12). Giblin (1991:54) likewise writes, 'Ultimately, the tree of life is the cross as bearing the fruit of salvation, namely, the resurrection. Its placement in God's garden, paradise, symbolically includes both the abode of the just in the heavenly kingdom (cf. Luke 23:42–43) and the new creation at the final resurrection (cf. Rev 22:2).' The source of this association is found in early Christian art—a common motif shows the living trunk of the cross bearing twigs and leaves.⁴ Schneider (1967:5.40–41) relates how 'In the tomb paintings of the 2nd century it is thus depicted for the first time as the symbol of victory over death.' This devotional association, though theologically intriguing, is anachronistic and belies a background different than John's use in Revelation. It therefore must be rejected.

6.3.2.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

The ministry of the new priest mentioned in the Testament of Levi 18:11 is that he will open the gates of paradise and *δώσει τοῖς ἁγίοις φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τοῦ ζωῆς*. The similarity of the language in this text to Revelation is remarkable. In 4 Ezra 2:12 (cf 8:52) the tree of life providing fragrant perfume is but one benefit Ezra promises to the people in the restored Jerusalem. What distinguishes these texts from Revelation is that the tree of life is transferred to the temple in the earthly Jerusalem rather than to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Enoch in his vision saw seven mountains resembling a throne, and on the highest was a special tree that looked and smelled like no other (1 En 24:3–5). The angel Michael tells Enoch that following the great judgment the righteous will be presented with the tree's fruit for life (1 En 25:4–5). In 2 Enoch 8:3 the tree of life, found in paradise, 'is indescribable for pleasantness of fragrance.'

6.3.2.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

This promise has its initial background in the creation account which tells how God planted a garden (*παράδεισον*) for Adam in Eden and therein grew *τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ἐν μέσῳ τῶ παραδείσῳ*

⁴Such a tree/cross, dating from the early fifth century AD, is depicted on a large flask found in the residence of a Byzantine dye merchant in Sardis (Crawford 1996:41, 44).

beside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:8–9 LXX). Although forbidden to eat from the latter tree, Adam and Eve, goaded by the serpent, ate its fruit and the fall of humanity resulted. Because of their transgression, God declared the tree of life out of bounds for Adam and Eve lest they eat of it and live forever (3:22). The two are then banished from paradise, and cherubs and a flaming sword are placed before the tree of life to guard it (3:24–25).

Another reference to the tree of life is found in the Septuagint reading of Isaiah 65:22, where the translators have given an eschatological reading to the Masoretic text שׁוֹמֵר 'the tree.' In the new heaven and new earth, referred to as Jerusalem (vv 17–18), κατὰ γὰρ τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς ἔσονται αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ λαοῦ μου. The people will grow old laboring at their works (ἔργα), suggesting that immortality is conferred by the tree.

6.3.3 The paradise of God

6.3.3.1 The context of local references

At the nearby temple of Apollo at Didyma, 'while the questioners waited and sacrificed, they could lodge in the housing which we know to have spread on the second-century [BC] precinct, or *paradeisos*, as it was still touchingly described, in a word of Greco-Persian origin' (Fox 1986:182; cf Iamblichus *Myst* 3.11). The designer of this sanctuary was Paionius, who was also one of the architects of the Artemis temple in Ephesus (Akurgal 1993:225). The temples in Ephesus and Didyma were the first and third largest temples in the ancient world respectively, and the remains of the Didyma temple 'convey a striking impression of what the Artemesion itself may have looked like' (Yamauchi 1980:130). It is probable that the Artemesium likewise contained a *paradeisos* precinct for lodgers to dwell in.

6.3.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Paradise is mentioned in only two other New Testament passages. On the cross Jesus tells the repentant thief that 'today you will be with me in paradise' (Lu 23:43). Paradise is thus portrayed as the place of the righteous dead (Hades the place of the unrighteous; cf Lu 16: 23). And Paul, describing a visionary experience, states that he was caught up to paradise (2 Cor 12:4). In these texts paradise is a heavenly rather than an earthly reality, and in Paul's case spiritually present rather than a future expectation.

6.3.3.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Paradise imagery is found throughout Intertestamental literature. The Testament of Levi 18:11 predicts the raising up of a priestly Messiah who will open the gates of paradise by removing the sword that has threatened since Adam. F I Andersen (1983:115n8b) gives this extended summation of the paradise traditions in 1 Enoch:

It has the 'garden of life' (60:23; 61:12), 'the garden where the elect and just live' (60:8), 'the garden of justice' (77:3). It is across the ocean (77:3) 'at the extremities of the earth' (106:7–8). This sounds more like the place where Gilgamesh goes to consult Utnapishtim. This is where Enoch himself eventually goes (1En 60:8), and presumably the paradise to which Michael took Melkizedek in 2En 72:9. This is where Methuselah and Noah go to consult Enoch (1En 65:2).

Paradise is differently located in other parts of 1En. In chs. 37–71 he goes to the west (52:1), 'to the extremity of the skies' (39:3). But in 70:1–4 he goes northwest. In the mythological journey of Enoch in 1En 17f., 23–25, Paradise is a marvelous garden to the northwest, near the divine mountain. It has the tree of life, and rivers come from it.

In 2 Enoch 8:1–8 (cf 42:3) paradise is located in the third heaven, with four rivers flowing with honey, milk, oil, and wine; in 65:10 the righteous will be collected to live for eternity in a great and incorruptible paradise.

4 Ezra has several passages that mention paradise. In 6:3 God contrasts the beginning of the earth when the foundations of paradise were laid with the coming end of the age. In chapter 7 the furnace of hell and its opposite, the paradise of delight, are disclosed on the day of judgment (v 36), and Ezra laments that because of Adam's sin many will not enter paradise, with its unspoiled fruit, abundance, and healing (v 123). Upon the opening of paradise the tree of life is planted (8:52).

In Ode of Solomon 20:7 the reader is exhorted to put on the Lord's grace and 'come into his Paradise, and make for yourself a crown from his tree.' 2 Baruch, though later than Revelation (2nd cent AD), likewise has several references to paradise. God created paradise but denied it to Adam after he sinned (2Bar 4:3). God subsequently showed it to Abraham and Moses (vv 4–5). Paradise, like the new Jerusalem, is preserved for the future (v 6).

6.3.3.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

Paradise (παράδεισος) is an Old Persian loan word (*pāri-daeza*) meaning 'enclosure,' then 'park' or 'garden.' The etymology and background of the word is surveyed thoroughly by Jeremias (1967:5.765ff). The shift from a secular to a religious meaning is seen in the Septuagint rendering of the creation account where paradise is seen as God's garden. This religious meaning,

according to Charlesworth (1992:5.154), 'entered Jewish thought and vocabulary after the Babylonian Exile' and 'combined with the hope of a blessed eschaton.'

Paradise is the setting for the tree of life. The phrase ὁ παράδεισος τοῦ θεοῦ is found only in the Septuagint reading of Genesis 13:10 and Ezekiel 28:13; 31:8 (2x; cf Is 51:3, ὡς παράδεισον κυρίου). In Genesis 2:15 and 3:24 it is also called the paradise of delight, translating τρυφῆς for עֵדֵן ('Eden'; cf Ez 31:9). The restoration of Eden is a theme found in the Prophets. In Isaiah 51:3 the deserts and wastelands of Zion are to become a paradise of God; in Ezekiel 36:35 'Eden follows desolation in a promise oracle' (Stuart 1997:251). The curse upon the earth resulting from the Fall is finally counteracted in eschatological redemption.

This distinctive Old Testament background has prompted Hemer (1986:37ff) to link its usage here with the long-established presence of a Jewish community in Ephesus (cf supra 1.5.2.2). The numerous other Old Testament allusions throughout the book make it unlikely that John has especially singled out Ephesus for this promise.

6.3.4 Conclusion

What would the Ephesians have made of this promise when they heard it? The imagery of the tree of life and paradise was no doubt familiar through Old Testament and Intertestamental literature. A total reversal of the Fall that had occurred in Eden would probably be suggested. Swete (1909:30) allows further that 'Man's exclusion from the Tree of Life...is repealed by Christ on condition of a personal victory over evil. To eat of the Tree is to enjoy all that the life of the world to come has in store for redeemed humanity.' By giving this promise to give the victors, Jesus shows he is the expected messiah-priest prophesied in the Testament of Levi.

Lilje (1957:72) rightly points to the eschatological nature of the motifs: 'Thus all the promises about "victory" point beyond this world to another, and this first one most decidedly of all.' Although we have yet to examine the other promises, Lilje's claim about this one is overstated because several others also have a clear eschatological focus. Rather, as Mealy (1992:82) has pointed out, 'this is a promise of everlasting life in God's presence. Everything else from now on will be seen to build on this basic promise.' Interpreting this promise from an anthropological perspective, J J Pilch (1992:130) writes, 'The reward of eating...suggests that truly honorable people will not allow themselves to be taken advantage of, but will have food in abundance.' This observation seems mundane in light of the theological and eschatological implications of the motifs.

6.4 THE SMYRNEAN PROMISE SAYING

6.4.1 The text

As discussed earlier (cf supra 4.9.3), the first part of this promise lies between the coming and hearing sections: *καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς...ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου* (2:10, 11). The promise thus consists of a positive and a negative element. According to Rissi (1972:108n209), 'The message to the church in Smyrna is dominated by the life-death motif.' This tone is set in the epithet saying where Jesus declares he was dead and now lives again (v 8). Hemer (1986:59) says it even more strongly, 'The themes of suffering, death and resurrection pervade every verse of our letter.'

What type of genitive is *τῆς ζωῆς*? It could be one of quality—'the crown is an enduring and living one, in contrast to a crown that fades or tarnishes' (cf Laws 1980:68). However, Zerwick (1963:§45), with Laws, thinks that in the New Testament it is more probably epexegetical—the crown consists of life itself or the life of the age to come. Swete (1909:33) sees the phrase as practically equivalent in meaning to 'tree of life' (2:7). The similar construction of 'book of life' (3:5 et al) is also comparable. The epexegetical construction in these texts suggests the likelihood of a similar meaning for the images.

The phrase *οὐ μὴ* with the aorist subjunctive or future indicative, according to Blass, Debrunner & Funk (1961:§365), 'is the most definite form of negation regarding the future.' In some examples the future and aorist subjunctive forms are so similar they are difficult to differentiate; here 'the subjunctive is absolutely certain due to its distinctive form' (:§365). This construction is used eighteen times in Revelation; twice in the promises to Sardis (3:5) and Philadelphia (3:12). The reference in 3:5 is a clear example of a future following the negation.

There are ten occurrences of *ἀδικέω* in Revelation. Charles (1919:1.59) says that it is always used in the sense of 'to hurt,' except in 22:11 where it means 'to act unjustly,' 'to sin' (:2.222). M Black (1976:143–44) rightly doubts whether 'hurt' or 'harm' does full justice to John's usage of this verb. He points to the stronger Hebrew sense 'to smite' that is reflected in the hiphil verb *הכה* in Isaiah 10:20, translated by *ἀδικέω* in the Septuagint (cf TSim 5:4). Because this sense is required in 7:2, 3 and 9:4, 10, Black suggests that a similar nuance is required in 2:11—'he who is victorious will not be stricken down by the second death.' His alternate suggestion, 'destroy in judgment,' seems preferable given the use of *κρίνω* with 'second death' in 20:13–14.

6.4.2 The crown of life

6.4.2.1 The context of local references

The condition of faithfulness is linked to the promise of the crown of life. The faithfulness of Smyrna is linked to her faithfulness to Rome (cf supra 1.5.3.3(b)). Jesus is perhaps calling the Smyrneans to a new allegiance related to their heavenly, rather than to their civic, responsibilities. Because of the familiarity of the crown image in antiquity, Beckwith (1919:455) thinks it is not necessary to look for a local origin of the metaphor, for example, in the games for which Smyrna was famous. Numerous suggestions have been advanced, however. Hemer (1986:72–73) mentions seven possibilities, and of these only three appear plausible. Our discussion will center around these.

6.4.2.1(a) Crown as a symbol of victory

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the crown was a familiar image of victory in antiquity. 'A victor's crown in the games was regarded as supreme earthly fortune' (Grundmann 1971:7.620). The most famous of the athletic contests held throughout the Greco-Roman world was the Olympics. Pausanias (5.15.3) mentions a wild olive tree, 'called the crown olive, from which tradition dictates that the Olympic winners should be given their wreaths.' In Revelation 'the figure appears to be borrowed from the wreath awarded to the victor in the games' (Charles 1920:1.58). These games were held in nearly all of the seven cities (cf supra 5.4.3). Because of such associations, the wreath was also a popular image on the reverse of provincial coins. The standing Nike with wreath and palm was a popular issue (cf supra 5.4.1). Burnett et al (1992) list twenty-three coin types of Nike holding a wreath and a palm branch.

6.4.2.1(b) Crown as a symbol of honor

When Antony visited Ephesus in 41 BC, the Judean Jews sent an embassy to petition Antony regarding an injustice to the Jews. This delegation brought him a golden crown (Josephus *Ant* 14.304). In his reply to Hyrcanus the high priest and the Jewish nation Antony acknowledged that τὸν δὲ στέφανον ὃν ἔπεμψας ἔδεξάμην (*Ant* 14.313). 'A gift of this kind was a common practice, for the historian records this gesture of nearly every Jewish embassy' (Johnson et al 1961:§126n8).

The Smyrneans gave a golden crown to distinguished individuals to bestow civic honor. Cicero (*Flac* 75) refers sarcastically to this practice in the context of a state funeral for a businessman named Castricius upon whose corpse was placed the city's crown. Hemer (1986:74) comments, 'The promise of a "crown of life" might readily be contrasted with this institution of a city whose highest honour was awarded posthumously.'

The Asiarchs (cf Ac 19:31) were the leading Roman citizens of Asia who served as high priests of the *koinon* and presided over the imperial cult. Candidates for this prestigious office were elected to represent the cities of the province. Dio Chrysostom (35.10) describes this honored group: 'I refer to the "blessed ones,"⁵ who exercise authority over all your priests, whose title represented one of the two continents in its entirety. For these men too owe their "blessedness" to crowns (στέφανος) and purple and a throng of long-haired lads bearing frankincense.' According to Yamauchi (1980:110), 'These priests wore unusually ornate crowns adorned with miniature busts of the imperial family, and were given the title *stephanophorus*.'

6.4.2.1(c) Crown as a topographical reference

Apollonius (Philostratus *VitAp* 4.7) encouraged the Smyrneans to take pride in themselves rather than in the beauty of their city: 'It was more pleasing for the city to be crowned with men than with porticos and pictures.' Concerning 'the crown of Smyrna,' Ramsay (1994:186) writes, 'there can be no doubt that the phrase arose from the appearance of the hill Pagus, with the stately public buildings on its rounded top and the city spreading out down its rounded sloping sides.' Aristides gives varied descriptions of the city in his *Orations* (15.20–22). 'Several of his highly ornate sentences become clearer when we notice that he is expressing in a series of variations the idea of a crown resting on the summit of a hill' (Ramsay 1994:186–87).⁶

Another topographical reference is sometimes observed in the Pergamene letter. 'The expression "Satan's throne" may well bear reference to the strength and multiplicity of pagan cults, but could it not also bear reference to the actual shape of the city-hill towering, as it still does, like a giant throne above the plain?' (Wood 1961–62:264). We suggested earlier (cf supra 1.5.3.4(d)) that the reference is to the emperor cult. And as Hemer (1986:238n39) correctly ob-

⁵It is interesting that Dio calls these representatives of the imperial cult 'blessed ones' (μακαρίους). Perhaps God's 'blessed ones,' to whom John directs the seven beatitudes (cf supra 4.9.6), are contrasted with the Asiarchs.

⁶Similarly, Young (1969:2.264) suggests that the reference in Isaiah 28:1–4 to Samaria as a crown is 'a topological reference, for Samaria was situated on a hill, which is thought to have suggested a crown.'

serves, 'A topographical understanding of the "crown" at Smyrna is better founded, the use of the metaphor being authenticated by ancient evidence.'

6.4.2.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Four references to 'crown' are found in an eschatological context. Paul calls the Thessalonians his crown of boasting at the parousia (1 Th 2:19). All those who long for the appearing of the Lord as righteous judge will receive a crown of righteousness (2 Tm 4:8). Deissman (1927:369) notes that the official visit of a ruler was called a parousia and upon his arrival he was given a golden crown. He finds such a background for these Pauline verses: 'While the sovereigns of this world expect at their parusia a costly crown for themselves, "at the parusia of our Lord Jesus" the apostle will wear a crown....'

Peter tells his Anatolian audience that at the appearing of the Chief Shepherd, they will receive an unfading crown of glory (1 Pt 5:4). And James 1:12 contains a beatitude using language and imagery similar to that in Revelation: Μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς ὑπομένει πειρασμόν, ὅτι δόκιμος γενόμενος λήμψεται τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς ὃν ἐπηγγείλατο τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν αὐτόν. R P Martin (1988:33) observes regarding this promise: ' "life" belongs to the world of victory enjoyed by those who win through in their battle with temptation (πειρασμός) to emerge as victors.'

Vos (1965:192) believes the references in Revelation, 2 Timothy, and James recall a promise given by Jesus during his earthly ministry. He finds three analogous features between the three texts: '1) a promise is made to those who endure temptations, sufferings, or persecution; 2) a crown of life/righteousness is the reward, 3) the Lord is both the one who apparently makes the promise and the bestower of the crown' (:193). The text in 1 Peter also shares these features. It is probable that these four texts are based on a common saying of Jesus.⁷

Beasley-Murray (1978:83) suggests that the symbol may be 'the representations applied in the ancient world, alike to divine beings and to blessed mortals, of a crown of light surrounding the head, to indicate the glory of the one on whom it rests.' The meaning would be: 'I will crown you with glory in the life of the age to come.' This meaning is tenuous since the eschatological sense is already present as it is written, and the phrase 'crown of light' has no background in the Old and New Testaments.

⁷Another reference is found in the Shepherd of Hermas 68.1, where the angel of the Lord crowns the faithful with crowns made of palm leaves.

6.4.2.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

The immortal righteous in Wisdom of Solomon 5:15–16 receive their rewards of a glorious kingdom and a beautiful crown. In 4 Ezra 2:42–47 the Son of God places a crown on the head of each person in the heavenly multitude. The reference to the goal of a crown of glory in Testament of Benjamin 4:1, according to Charles (1920:1.129), indicates ‘the idea of crowns as the reward of righteousness is pre-Christian.’ Ascension of Isaiah 9:24–26 refers to three elements found in the promises—crowns, robes, and thrones. Many in the world will receive these rewards through believing. And the odist in Odes of Solomon 9:11 exhorts, ‘Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, and all those who have conquered will be inscribed in his book.’ The Odes emphasize a present experience of immortality, unlike Revelation where the presentation is largely future (cf Aune 1982:455).

6.4.2.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

‘Einen „Lebenskranz“ oder eine „Lebenskrone“ kennt das Alte Testament nicht’ (Kraft 1974:61). However, there is much crown imagery related to the monarchy; for example, God gives a crown of precious stone to the righteous king (Ps 20:4 LXX). In its metaphorical use it symbolizes blessing and honor (cf Pr 1:9; 4:9; 12:4; 16:31; 17:6).

A possible background for the crown imagery is Isaiah 22:21,⁸ Ezekiel 28:12, and Zechariah 6:10–11, all sources for other imagery in the letters. In Isaiah Eliakim is promised, καὶ τὸν στέφανόν σου δώσω αὐτῷ.⁹ The passage in Ezekiel speaks of the ruler of Tyre possessing a crown of beauty in the paradise of God: καὶ στέφανος κάλλους ἐν τῇ τρυφῇ τοῦ παραδείσου τοῦ Θεοῦ εγενήθης. In both texts the present holder of the crown is losing possession of it for disobedience. Zechariah is commanded to garnish silver and gold from several newly arrived exiles and to make it into a crown (στέφανους). He is then to set the crown on the head of the high priest Joshua. Another possible source is Isaiah 62:3: καὶ ἔσῃ στέφανος κάλλους ἐν χειρὶ κυρίου καὶ διάδημα βασιλείας ἐν χειρὶ θεοῦ σου. Here crown and diadem are used in parallelism. In the

⁸Young (1969:2.111) makes this interesting observation: ‘note the chiasmic structure of the verse: verb, prepositional phrase; prepositional phrase, verb.’

⁹However, the Hebrew text יָרִיבֵק תַּבְּנִיבֵק reads ‘sash’ instead of ‘crown.’ The promise immediately preceding this, καὶ ἐνδύσω αὐτὸν τὴν στολήν σου, is a possible source for the imagery of the white robes (στολή) found in 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; and 22:14.

Septuagint the two words are often used interchangeably,¹⁰ unlike the New Testament where a distinction in meaning is preserved (Purves 1898:1.530; cf infra 7.4.1).

6.4.3 The second death

6.4.3.1 The context of local references

A connection between death and Smyrna existed in antiquity. This resulted from its etymological link to the Greek word for myrrh *σμύρνα*. Myrrh was commonly used for embalming, and was one of sweet-smelling spices in which the body of Jesus was wrapped (Jn 19:39; cf Michaelis 1971:7.458). After summarizing several such proposed links, Hemer (1986:58) suggests 'that the name of Smyrna was fitting and expressive to the ancient mind for a city which seemed to exemplify characteristics which myrrh symbolized.' A number of mourning myths became associated with the city. Perhaps the best known was the story of Niobe, whose children were killed by Leto and Artemis. Following their funeral Niobe wandered to Mount Sipylus, northeast of Smyrna, where Zeus changed her into a marble statue whose face was continually wet with tears (cf Avery 1962:754). Such myths 'suggested and perpetuated the picture of a city of suffering, a concept symbolized by its very name' (Hemer 1986:59).

6.4.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

There is no mention of 'second death' outside of Revelation. Paul reiterates the Genesis account that death entered the human race through Adam in 1 Corinthians 15:21.

6.4.3.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

The phrase occurs in Plutarch's *Moralia* (Fac 9434F), where he says that after death the good lead a most easy life, but are not blessed or divine ἄχρι τοῦ δευτέρου θανάτου. From Plutarch's Platonist perspective the righteous, not the unrighteous, experience the second death. At the first death all humans, who are tripartitely constituted, lose their body; at the second death the righteous have their minds separated from their souls, which have been living on the moon (:943C). Certain of this group are called victors (νικηφόροι) for their steadfastness and are crowned with wreaths (στεφάνοις).

¹⁰The translators failed to distinguish between *στέφανος* and *διάδημα* when translating עשרה (cf Pfitzner 1967:51).

Philo likewise mentions two deaths in his treatise on rewards and punishments. In his discussion of the punishment of Cain, Philo writes: θανάτου γὰρ διττὸν εἶδος, τὸ μὲν κατὰ τὸ τεθάναι...τὸ δὲ μετὰ τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν, ὃ δὴ κακὸν πάντως (*Praem* 70). While the first death is either good or indifferent, the second death is entirely bad because it is painful and perpetual punishment given in Cain's case for fratricide (*Praem* 71). In an earlier section on rewards (*Praem* 52) Philo declares that the virtuous man in the sacred contests was proclaimed the winner of the crown (στεφανωθεὶς). The use of the twin images of crown and two deaths together in both Plutarch and Philo suggests that John is using associations familiar to his audience.

Several targumic parallels are cited by Charles (1920:59): 'let Reuben live in this age and not die the second death' (TgJ on Dt 33:6); 'let them die the second death and not live in the next world' (TgNeb on Jr 51:39, 57), and 'this sin shall not be forgiven you till you die the second death' (TgNeb on Is 65:6, 15). The frequency of 'second death' in the Targums indicates it was 'a common Jewish phrase denoting a second and retributive death in the future state' (Hort 1908:26). Calling the targum on Deuteronomy 33:6 the Old Testament *locus theologicus* in rabbinic Judaism that proves the resurrection of the dead, Johnson (1981:12:585) rightly states, 'Not to die the second death, then, means to rise again to eternal life.'

6.4.3.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

There is also no mention of the phrase 'second death' in the Old Testament. Death first came to the human race following the fall of Adam and Eve (Gn 2:17). Here John follows up his use of Fall imagery in the initial promise to the Ephesians. Because of the link with fire and brimstone in Revelation 20:14, Peake (1920:240) sees the second death as a reminder of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Hort (1908:27), following Temple, sees the allusion as also referring to the flood, with fire and flood commonly linked in Jewish eschatology (cf 2 Pt 2:5–7; Jude 7). These interpretations find their origin in the typological approach, and are thus inadequate.

6.4.4 Conclusion

The familiarity of the images in this promise saying assured their comprehension by the Smyrneans. Beckwith (1919:455) rightly states that this promise 'is determined directly by the peril of the readers.' Although the Smyrneans face a period of testing, 'to die under the wrath of man is small compared with the prospect of suffering the judgment of God' (Beasley-Murray 1978:83). Charles (1920:1:59), following Bousset, correctly understands the crown as one

which belongs to eternal life: 'As the tree of life...is a symbol of the blessed immortality in Christ, so the crown of life appears to symbolize its full consummation.'

The flipside of the promise of a crown of life is the promise of escape from the second death. Impending physical (first) death for some is contrasted with the promise that none will be harmed by a future (spiritual) second death. 'To participate in the first death is also to escape the second death and to enter into the promised reign of God's grace and peace' (Wall 1991:74). A fuller explication of the 'second death' is reserved for chapters 20–21, where John himself defines 'second death' (21:8; cf *infra* 7.4.2). If the audience perceived that the document had a chiasmic structure, they would then anticipate such a definition to come.

The mention of 'your crown' in 3:11 is significant because it is found in the complementary letter to Philadelphia and 'states negatively the possibility which the promise to Smyrna puts positively' (Beasley-Murray 1978:101). It is not found in the promise section and presupposes knowledge of its mention in the Smyrnan letter. This is another indicator of the interrelationship among the letters, that their message is not totally individualized to each church but applicable to the others. Kiddle (1940:53) believes that the Philadelphians already possess their crown, while the Smyrneans have yet to earn theirs. John, however, asserts that both ideas are true. Like those whose names are written in the book of life (Rv 3:5), believers are already marked out for membership in the messianic community. 'But the name could be erased. The crown could be lost, through unworthy conduct' (Kiddle 1940:53). Because neither Smyrna nor Philadelphia receives any censure, their promised reward is guaranteed if they persevere in their trial with the synagogues in their cities.

6.5 THE PERGAMENE PROMISE SAYING

6.5.1 The text

The promise is found in 2:17: τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων. The promise saying to the church of Pergamum is one of the most obscure sayings. It and the promise saying to Thyatira are the only examples of double promises introduced by δώσω. Hemer (1986:252n67) rightly observes, 'The corresponding promises in the other letters, even when complex, as at Philadelphia, are developments of a single concept.' The two concepts in this double promise, with the second complex promise divided also, are:

1. Jesus will give the victor (to eat) the hidden manna.
2. (a) He will give the victor a white stone, and
(b) upon the stone he will write a new name known only to its receiver.

Several variants are found in this promise. The first is ἀὐτῷ φαγεῖν. This is a probable scribal attempt to bring agreement with the language in the Ephesian promise (2:7). The second is ἀπό τοῦ μάννα. According to Blass et al (1961:§169), the partitive genitive with verbs meaning 'to eat of' has been replaced in the New Testament with prepositional phrases using ἀπο or ἐκ, therefore Blass argues that the adopted reading 'is not credible' (:§169.2). Charles (1920:1.65), however, contends that τοῦ μάννα is the only example of a simple partitive genitive after δίδωμι in the New Testament. Hemer (1986:241n78) additionally cites the example of ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς in 3:9. However, the latter is not an example of a partitive genitive, which Blass et al (1961:§164) states 'is being driven out by the use of the preposition ἐκ.' Stuart (1843:464–65) correctly sustains John's use of the genitive case here to speak partitively, claiming 'This belongs to Attic writers of the nicest idiom' (:465).

6.5.2 The hidden manna

6.5.2.1 The context of a local reference

Court (1979:33), citing Galen of Pergamum and Pliny the Elder, mentions that manna in pagan Greek and Latin indicated a crumb of frankincense or pinch of incense used to prove loyalty to the emperor. The citations could not be found to verify such a reference.

6.5.2.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

In John 6:31 Jesus speaks of the manna given in the wilderness and quotes Exodus 16:15. He tells his audience that Moses did not give the true bread of heaven; the Father has now given it through his Son who is the bread coming down from heaven (vv 33, 41, 58). He is the bread of life (ἄρτος τῆς ζωῆς; vv 35, 48). Those who come to him and believe will never hunger or thirst again (v 35; cf 7:37–38 where Jesus is likewise the source of living water). Israel ate the manna in the desert and died; those who partake of his flesh which is the living bread will not die but live forever (vv 50–51, 57–58). Jesus here corrects erroneous thinking about manna and its source—that he himself is the true bread of God who gives life in the age to come. Beasley-Murray (1978:88) gives the reason, 'It is hidden from the Jews, and can be received only

through the confession of Jesus as Lord.' The promise of the bread of heaven/life is a realized one in the Fourth Gospel, while the promise of hidden manna in Revelation is future, though the second is obviously predicated on the first.

In the context of teaching on idolatry and the Lord's Supper, Paul makes a historical reference to Israel's wilderness wanderings and calls manna 'spiritual food' (1 Cor 10:3). The writer of Hebrews mentions the gold jar of manna that rested in the ark (Heb 9:4).

The adjective 'hidden' suggests the veiled nature of Jesus' teaching. The meaning of the parables was mostly hidden to his audience (Mt 13:34–35). His teaching on his coming death was also hidden from his disciples (Lk 18:34). The verb κρύπτω is used in an eschatological context in Colossians 3:3. Since the Colossians have died through identification with Christ's death in water baptism, their life is hidden in Christ who is seated at the right hand of God (vv 1–3). At Christ's appearing, they will also appear in glory (v 4). In conclusion I approve of the comments of J D G Dunn (1996:208) regarding the Colossians, which likewise have relevance to John's audience: 'Despite the present hiddenness of their "life," which might make their attitudes and actions in their present living somewhat bewildering to onlookers, they could nevertheless be confident that Christ, the focus of their life, would demonstrate to all the rightness of the choice they had made in baptism.'

6.5.2.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC, Jeremiah rescued the ark and other sacred objects such as the pot of manna and hid them in a cave on Mount Nebo until God should regather his people (see 2 Macc 2:4–8). Another tradition states that an angel hid these sacred temple objects in the earth and was to guard them 'until the last times' (2 Bar 6:8). 1 Maccabees 1:23 speaks of the hidden treasures from the temple that Antiochus took to Syria. Although these accounts use the 'hidden' imagery related to the temple objects, none mentions manna specifically. We conclude that these descriptions are too generalized to provide a background for the promise of hidden manna.

2 Baruch speaks of a twelvefold period of tribulation (26:1–27:15) after which the Messiah will be revealed (29:3). During a period of earthly restoration 'the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time' (29:8). Similarly Wall (1991:76) concludes that the hidden manna imagery 'probably draws upon rabbinic commentaries on Exodus 16:31–35 by

which Jews expected to be nourished by this same manna in the age to come.' Beckwith (1919:461) thinks the reference to 'a delightful drink of sweet honey from heaven' in Sibylline Oracle 3.746 may refer to manna. While these suggestions demonstrate the vitality of the manna image in Jewish communities, they fail to provide a convincing connection to our text.

6.5.2.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

During their forty years of wilderness wanderings God gave Israel manna to eat every day except the Sabbath (Ex 16:31; Nm 11:6–9; Dt 8:3, 16; Jos 5:12; Neh 9:20; Ps 78:24). It is called 'bread from heaven' (Ex 16:4; Neh 9:15; Ps 78:24 LXX) and 'bread of angels' (Ps 78:25). The tradition preserved in Psalm 78 and Nehemiah 9 links the provision of water from the rock with that of the manna. A golden pot of manna was to be set aside by Aaron as a testimony to future generations (Ex 16:32–34). Charles (1920:1.65) rightly suggests that our text refers to the heavenly manna of the wilderness, not to this later pot of manna which was in the ark.

6.5.3 The white stone

The identification of the white stone is very difficult, and many interpretations have been proposed. Because of this, our format will be modified in this section. Tenney (1957:189) justifiably calls the white stone and the pillar (3:12) the two unexplained symbols in the seven letters.

6.5.3.1 The general background

The main difficulty relates to the meaning of $\psi\eta\phi\omicron\varsigma$. Although its primary sense is a 'stone' or 'pebble,' the $\psi\eta\phi\omicron\varsigma$ was used in counting, in games, and in voting for acquittal or condemnation (cf Ac 26:10) and thus acquired those meanings. Pythagorean mathematics represented numbers using figures made with pebbles (Bauckham 1993a:391). Hence the verbal form $\psi\eta\phi\iota\zeta\omega$ is used in 13:18 to mean 'count up, to calculate' (cf Lk 14:28) the number of the beast.

$\psi\eta\phi\omicron\varsigma$ likewise stood for a resolve or decree (Liddell & Scott 1889:901–2). A further use was as an amulet (BAGD s v). This variety of meanings is reflected in the various interpretations for this promise. Hemer (1986:96) has compiled the seven most significant suggestions:

1. A jewel in Old Testament or rabbinic tradition (Ex 28:17–21; Yoma 75a).
2. The judicial *calculus Minervae*, the casting vote of acquittal (Ovid *Met* 15:41–42; Theophrastus *Char* 17.8; Heliodorus *Aeth* 3.3ff; Aeschylus *Eum* 744).

3. A token (*tessera*) of admission, membership, or recognition (*CIG* 3173=*IGRR* IV.1393; *IGRR* IV. 353d14; *CIG* 3278).
4. An amulet with a divine name (*Artemidorus Onirocr* 5.26).
5. A token (*tessera*) of gladiatorial discharge (*Horace Ep* 1.1.1–3).
6. Allusion to a process of initiation into the service of Asclepius (*Aristides Hym Asklep* 6.69).
7. Simply as a writing material whose form or color was significant.

Hemer (:96–102) provides a comprehensive review of these suggestions. After evaluating each, he discounts views 1 and 5; allows as possible views 2, 3, 4, and 7; and thinks view 6 most likely. Given the background of the athletic games, a version of view 3 is attractive. Swete (1909:40) cites Arethas regarding the white stone as a symbol of victory. Apparently victors at the games were given tokens entitling them to rewards courtesy of the cities. However, Hemer (1986:243n96) can find no other authority mentioning such a use of *tesserae*, so this view founders on lack of evidence. View 4, which proposes that the white stone is a Christian magical amulet, has been adopted by both Beckwith (1919:461) and Charles (1920:1.66–67). This interpretation seems unlikely given John's frequent denunciation of sorcery in Revelation (cf supra 1.5.3.3(a)). View 7 relates to the subject of decrees, which we will address next.

6.5.3.2 The context of a local reference

Reference was made earlier (cf supra 2.3.2.10(a)) to a decree *OGIS* 458¹¹ issued by the *koinon* of Asia confirming an epistolary request of the proconsul Fabius. This letter/decreed has several verbal parallels with Revelation. In his letter Fabius calls the birth of Caesar Augustus the beginning of breath and life (ἀρχὴν τοῦ βίου καὶ τῆς ζωῆς, I 10; cf Rv 3:14). The honor of Augustus should remain forever (εἰς τὴν τεμὴν...αἰώνιον, I 28; cf Rv 4:9; 5:13; 7:12). In the decree the birthday of the god Augustus is declared the beginning of good news (εὐαγγελί[ων]; Rv 14:6) for the world (I 41–42). At the end of this decree is a statement directly related to our promise: 'The tablet-writing of the proconsul and the decree (ψήφισμα) of Asia are to be inscribed (ἀναγραφῆναι) on a white-stoned stele (στήλη λευκολίθωι), which is to be set up in the temenos of Rome and the emperor' (I 63–64; cf 65–67).

¹¹The inscription was found in 1826 at Apamea, a conventus city, with damaged copies also being found at Priene, Dorylaeum, Eumeneia, and Maionia (Hemer 1986:87; cf Boring 1995:§225). We wish to thank the staff at the Manisa Museum for permission to examine the Maionian fragment of the marble *tabula* in its collection (cf Malay 1994:§5).

A cognate of ψήφος, ψήφισμα, is used in this inscription (cf Est 3:7; 9:24; 2 Mac 6:8; 12:4; Josephus *Ant* 16.165). This decree was to be placed in the temple of Rome and Augustus in Pergamum, which 'served as a repository for decrees of the Koinon, letters from Rome and decrees honoring provincial priests or other officials of the Koinon, with stelai set up in the temenos or even in the temple itself' (Mellor 1975:141). The Pergamenes, as well as the other Asian Christians, probably had knowledge of this inscribed stele displayed in the central Augustan temple in Pergamum. The promise of a new name written on a white stone thus stands in contrast with that of the emperor Augustus written on a white stone. Whose new name is written on the white stone—that of Christ or the believer—will be addressed in 6.5.4.

6.5.3.3 Rock as a source of water

Fekkes (1994:128) declares that 'There is no OT or early Christian parallel to the motif of the white stone....' However, two motifs of the rock/stone as a Christological image are prominent in Scripture, so these will be briefly explored next.¹² Since the manna imagery comes from the wilderness context (Ex 16:1–36), might not the imagery of the white stone come from that context also? Immediately following the manna story is the account of Moses bringing forth water from a rock (πέτρα; Ex 17:1–7). Because the Israelites complain about the lack of water, God provides water from a rock. This miraculous provision of drink is repeated in Numbers 20:1–13, wherein Moses is disciplined for striking the rock rather than speaking to it. In Deuteronomy 8:15–16 the miracles of rock and manna are again recounted regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. This miracle is also recalled in Psalm 78:15–25 and 105:40–41.

Israel's wilderness experience is treated as typological for the church by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. They all ate the same spiritual food—manna—and drank the same spiritual drink—water from the rock (vv 3–4). Then Paul provides a Christological interpretation of this spiritual rock: it was Christ in a pre-incarnate manifestation (v 4). This perspective grows directly out of Jesus' teaching about himself in John 6, reviewed earlier. He is the bread of heaven, but in John 7:37–39 Jesus also presents himself as the source of living water. The linkage of manna and water in all these texts is noteworthy.

¹²Jeremias (1967:4.274) identifies a third motif—one which speaks of Christ as the stone which crushes. 'In Christ God's goodness and wrath are both revealed. Christ the stone is at one and the same time a symbol of salvation and perdition' (:4.276).

6.5.3.4 Stone as a building material

Jesus is described figuratively as the chief cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαίος) in Ephesians 2:20. A spiritual temple is being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The believers are the building materials—the stones—being used to construct the dwelling place of God (v 22).

A catena of Old Testament scriptures is used in 1 Peter 2:6–8, which presents Jesus in imagery like that in Ephesians. Isaiah 28:16 is quoted first: God will lay a stone (אבן; λίθος LXX) in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone (ἀκρογωνιαίος). This stone is then personalized: whoever trusts in him will never be shamed. Psalm 118:22 is quoted next: the stone (אבן; λίθος LXX) rejected by the builders has become the capstone. Isaiah 8:14, quoted last, speaks of a stone (אבן; λίθος LXX) that causes people to stumble and a rock (צור; πέτρα LXX) that makes them fall. Peter uses these texts to support his identification of Jesus as the Living Stone (λίθον ζῶντα, v 4). By extension then his Asian audience is to be living stones built into a spiritual house as a holy priesthood (v 5). Three Greek words referring to the rock/stone as a building material—ἀκρογωνιαίος, λίθος, and πέτρα—are used in these texts.

6.5.3.5 God as the Rock and the Stone

God as the Rock—a source of protection and strength—is also a prominent Old Testament motif (עֶבֶד, Ps 18:2; 31:3; 42:9; 71:3; צור, 2 Sm 22:3; Ps 18:31, 46; 28:1; 31:2; 61:2; 62:2, 6, 7; 71:3 78:35; 89:26; 92:15; 94:22). However, according to Mundle (1978:3.381), ‘the LXX avoids the word *petra* in translating these passages, and makes use of circumlocutions.’ Two references to God as the Stone (אבן) are found in Genesis 49:24 (untranslated in the Septuagint) and in Zechariah 3:9 (λίθος LXX). In the Genesis text God is also called Shepherd, the identification in the next Thyatiran promise.

The passage in Zechariah 3 begins with the *Weckformel*, ‘Listen’ (ἄκουε LXX; cf supra 4.12.4). Then an oracle with messianic implications promises unconditionally that God will send ‘my servant the Branch’ (v 8). A promise to set a stone before Joshua comes next. The stone has seven eyes (cf Zch 4:10), even as the slain Lamb seen by John in Revelation 5:6 has seven eyes (the sevenfold Spirit; cf supra 4.12.2).¹³ Then God promises to engrave an inscrip-

¹³Baldwin (1972:117–18) discusses another possible translation of עינים as ‘springs.’ This association with water unifies the message of verses 8–10; the living water of the fountains causes the Branch to shoot up. ‘The stone, according to this translation, is no longer an engraved jewel but rather takes its meaning from the rock struck by Moses in the desert....It is not impossible that Zechariah was incorporating both meanings, in a play on the word’ (:118).

tion on the stone. (The Septuagint omits this reference to an inscription, translating instead 'Behold, I am digging a pit.')

After reviewing a few of the interpretations for this inscribed stone, D L Petersen (1984:212) concludes that the inscription relates to the stone in the high priest's headdress inscribed with the name 'Holy to Yahweh' (Ex 28:36–38).¹⁴ This explanation seems likely since this stone is linked with the bearing and removal of Israel's guilt. 'What Israelites and the high priest were to do from the perspective of Ex. 28 is, from the perspective of this writer, to be undertaken by Yahweh....Yahweh will do that which no human could accomplish, even if he were the high priest' (:212). This expiatory role has strong links with John's portrayal of Jesus as the slain Lamb.

A relationship between the Pergamene promise and these Rock/Stone traditions seems attractive except for one thing—ψῆφος is used instead of πέτρα or λίθος. The mention of white is easily explained because of its symbolic use throughout Revelation. However, πέτρα is used only in 6:15–16 to speak of a place of hiding from the wrath of the Lamb. λίθος is used eight times to speak of precious stones, with the most significant usage to be discussed in Chapter 7. The verbal cognate of ψῆφος is used in 13:18, where the saints are encouraged to calculate (ψηφίζω) the number of the beast's name—666. The verbal relationship in 13:18 with the promise of a new name written on a white ψῆφος must have been apparent to the Asian audience. Genesis 49:24 and Zechariah 3:9 provide the most probable biblical background for the image of an inscribed stone. Because the Septuagint failed to translate 'Stone' in Genesis 49:24 and deleted the inscription imagery in Zechariah 3:9, perhaps John chose to translate חֲבֵט as ψῆφος. The divine Jesus could be the messianic white Stone promised to the victors in Pergamum.

6.5.4 The new name

ὄνομα is used eleven times in the seven letters and found in two other promises. The Sardians are promised that their names will never be blotted out of the book of life and that their names will be acknowledged before God and his angels (3:5). The phrase 'new name' is also used in the Philadelphian promise where the reference is to Jesus (3:12). Both of these texts will be discussed later in turn.

¹⁴Petersen (1984:212) attempts to link the seven eyes with the name ' "Holy to Yahweh" [which] can be construed as having seven consonants.' The explanation is unconvincing because the inscription actually has eight (קדש ליהוה).

6.5.4.1 The use of 'new' in Revelation

'New' (καλινός) is used nine times in Revelation to speak of the coming age when all things become new (21:5)—new name (2:17; 3:12), new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2); new song (5:9; 14:3); new heaven and new earth (21:1). Mulholland (1990) points out that two words exist in Greek for 'new'—νέος indicates something brand new that has never existed before, while καλινός indicates something new in quality or nature. Revelation always uses the latter because 'the "new name" is something that is new in quality or nature' (:110). Louw and Nida (1989:1.594n9), however, avoid such a contrast: 'Though this distinction may be applicable to certain contexts and is more in accordance with classical usage, it is not possible to find in all occurrences of καλινός and νέος this type of distinction.' While exegetical judgments should be avoided based on such tenuous distinctions, it is nevertheless true, as Behm (1965:3.449) states, ' "new" is a leading teleological term in apocalyptic promise [e.g., in Revelation].'

6.5.4.2 The context of local references

The magical papyri demonstrate a belief in the ancient world that names have power. To know someone's name gives power over that person. Acts 19:13–20 describes how Jewish exorcists in Ephesus attempted to use the name of Jesus to cast out evil spirits. A demon responded that he knew the names of Jesus and Paul, but not their names. When the demonized man beat up the exorcists, the name of the Lord Jesus became honored in the city. An account immediately follows of the Ephesians burning their magical scrolls. They exchanged their magical names for the more powerful name of the Lord Jesus.

The Ephesian *grammata* with their occultic powers were closely linked with Ephesus. These 'letters' consisted of six magical names—ἄσκιον, κατάσκιον, λιξ, τετράξ, δαμναμενεύς, and ἄλσια (cf. Arnold 1992:15). Two of the letters 'Lix Tetrax' are coupled in Testament of Solomon 7:5 to name the demon of the wind. Beckwith (1919:461–63) sees a background of magic behind this promise—the white stone is 'a secret charm which will give him power against every assailant and avert every evil' (:461). Yet in paradise what need is there for protection against the fornicators and idolaters outside the walls of the messianic kingdom?

Court (1979:33) notes that Aristides received a vision of Asclepius during incubatio at Pergamum. To commemorate this occasion he was given a token associated with his new name Theodorus (*HymAsk* 518). Ramsay (1994:227–30) discusses at length the transformation of Aristides' life as a consequence of this experience. Hemer (1986:100) concludes that this ex-

ample 'probably offers the most complete analogue for our passage and sets it in sharp contrast with a practice likely to have been current in Pergamum.' He concedes, however, that 'the evidence for the postulated custom remains circumstantial and inferential' (:101). Without further information it is not possible to choose this interpretation conclusively.

6.5.4.3 The co-text of New Testament literature

In the kenosis passage in Philippians 2:5–11 Paul describes how, after Jesus Christ's death on a cross, God exalted him to the highest place, giving him a name above every name—Lord—the equivalent of Yahweh (v 11).¹⁵

6.5.4.4 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Levi is told that his posterity will be divided into three offices (TLevi 8:11). The third will be given a new name, 'because from Judah a king will arrive and shall found a new priesthood in accord with the gentile model and for all nations' (v 14). Kee (1983:791n d) explains, 'That new role, which is said to follow the model of the gentiles, may allude to the Maccabean priest-kings, with their increasingly secular discharge of the dual role.'

6.5.4.5 The co-text of Old Testament literature

In the Old Testament and in other ancient literature 'the name of a person sometimes revealed his character, his personality, even his destiny. In fact, a person's name was often considered to be but an expression, indeed a revelation, of his true nature' (Hawthorne 1986:481). When God gave the covenant promises to the patriarchs, he gave them new names—Abram became Abraham (Gn 17:5) and Jacob became Israel (Gn 32:28). Jacob's new name is given after he wrestles all night with an angel (vv 24–26).¹⁶ In Isaiah two promises are given to God's people concerning a name. God promises the eunuchs who keep his sabbaths: 'I will give them an eternal name' (ὄνομα αἰώνιον δώσω αὐτοῖς; 56:5 LXX). And before the creation of the new heavens and new earth, 'my servants will be called a new name (ὄνομα καινὸν; 65:15 LXX).

¹⁵Fee (1995:221–22) discusses whether 'Jesus' or 'Lord' is the name and opts for 'Lord,' the name often given to Caesar. 'Paul well knows to whom he is writing these words, especially since he is now one of the emperor's prisoners and the Philippians are suffering at the hands of Roman citizens as well' (:222–23).

¹⁶Neall (1983:133) makes this interesting analogy with Revelation, 'As Jacob in his time of trouble (Jer 30:7), under threat of death (Gen 32:6–7), obtained victory by weeping, seeking a blessing, and prevailing with the angel (Hos 12:4), so the saints in their great tribulation obtain victory through the persistent struggle with God which issues in divine blessing.'

6.5.5 Conclusion

The reference to 'hidden manna' in the promise is obscure. A spiritual victual now concealed will be restored for the victors to partake of. Boring (1989:90) proposes that this image reflects 'the Jewish despair over the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 586.' Such a historical allusion seems too obscure to be viable. The image of manna naturally follows the reference to Balaam, both being notable aspects of Israel's wilderness wanderings. The Asian churches in a sense are in a wilderness period with obstacles and enemies seeking to turn them aside. The goal of the victors will not be the Promised Land, but the soon-to-be-mentioned New Jerusalem. Charles (1920:1.66) suggests that part of the victory of the Pergamenes consists in their abstinence from forbidden meats eaten by the unfaithful; the faithful will eat of the heavenly manna. This meaning is sustained by Fekkes (1994:128) and best fits the context: the hidden manna 'is an appropriate spiritual compensation for those who have refused the earthly sustenance of food sacrificed to idols....' This is also the second promise with a food motif.

The image of the white stone remains obscure. The white stele in the temple of Augustus is a promising local reference for this image. Because of the Pauline and Petrine letters to the Asian churches, John's audience would be familiar with the traditions of the rock as the source for water and the stone as a building material. The use of ψήφος does not seem to fit these traditions, however. To alleviate this impasse, we proposed that John himself translated into Greek the familiar reference to God as a Stone that was untranslated in the Septuagint. A fuller identification, perhaps related to John's prophetic ministry in the church, may be lost, making a conclusive determination for this image impossible to resolve.

Is the new name on the white stone to be that of the believer or of Jesus? Trench (1883:141) answers that the understood object of λαμβάνων which ends the promise should be 'white stone' and not 'new name.' The new name is therefore not the victor's but something better: 'It is the new name of God or of Christ, "*my new name*" (cf. iii.12); some revelation of the glory of God, only in that higher state capable of being communicated by Him to his people, and which they only can understand who have actually received' (:141). Fekkes (1994:128–29), however, responds, 'Despite the similar terminology, it seems best to see 2.17 and 3.12 as separate promises, each with a different focus and aim.' In the Gospel of John Jesus presents himself as the manna and the living water; in the epistles he is the living Stone and the Rock. The listeners at this point would probably be thinking of these Jesus traditions as well as the various names under which Jesus is presenting himself in the epithets, rather than their own

new names. Since a reference to the new name arises again in the Philadelphia letter, we will defer further discussion until then.

6.6 THE THYATIRAN PROMISE SAYING

6.6.1 The text

The promise saying is found in 2:26–28: Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτούς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται, ὡς καὶ ἐγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἄστέρα τὸν πρωΐνον. Hemer (1986:124) justifiably calls this promise ‘probably the most difficult of the seven.’

Zerwick (1963:§25) cites the opening of the main promise as an example of pendent nominative. It is a form of anacoluthon consisting ‘in the enunciation of the local (not grammatical) subject at the beginning of the sentence, followed by a sentence in which that subject is taken up by a pronoun in the case required by the syntax’ (:§25). This is seen in ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν...τὰ ἔργα μου...δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν....

This is the only promise where the present participle τηρῶν is added. The verb τηρέω is a key word in Johannine literature—Gospel (18x), 1 John (7x), and Revelation (11x). Noteworthy is its usage in four beatitudes—1:3; 14:12; 16:15; and 22:7. These are likewise closely linked to the promises (cf supra 4.9.6), because the blessings of the beatitudes are going to the victors.

ἔργον is likewise a prominent word in Johannine literature—Gospel (27x), epistles (5x), and Revelation (20x), with 12 occurrences in the seven letters. Earlier in the Thyatiran letter (2:23) Jesus declares to all the churches that he searches the hearts and minds. He promises them that rewards will be issued based on each person’s works (cf Is 40:10; Rv 22:12). This reference in 2:23 suggests a likely reason that works are also mentioned at the beginning the victor saying. Jesus emphasizes that the victor must keep his works until the end (cf Mt 24:13). This ‘must mean that he does the same works as Jesus did or acts according to his will’ (Leivestad 1954:214). Beasley-Murray (1978:93) cogently states that ‘this is the nearest we have in the seven letters to a definition of the conqueror.’

6.6.2 Shepherd the nations with a rod of iron

6.6.2.1 Authority over the nations

The initial clause promises authority over the nations, while the second clause describes how the victor will exercise that authority. Charles (1920:1.75) makes a point regarding the use of 'authority' in Revelation: 'when a limited authority is implied, ἐξουσία stands without the article..., with the article full authority in the circumstances defined in the context is implied.' His examples in 9:3 (without) and 9:19 (with) contravene his point: the locusts of the fifth trumpet and the horses of the sixth trumpet receive similar authority to work their judgments. Again, the authority mentioned in 17:12 (without) and 17:13 (with) is identical, so any variation is related to style rather than to meaning.

The substitution of ἐξουσία for κληρονομία lies in the Septuagintal background of Psalm 2:8. The idea there is one of lasting possession obtained through conquest, expulsion, and extermination, particularly in relation to the conquest of Canaan (cf Nm 34:2). Foerster (1965:3.778) also cites Ezekiel 25:4 where inheritance 'can be used of the possession of alien peoples.' The inheritance of the victors is in fact rule over the nations. The conjecture of Hemer (1986:124)—that the substitution might be noteworthy because 'the Christian in Thyatira might have seemed in a condition of powerlessness'—seems to miss the point.

6.6.2.2 The co-text of Old Testament literature

This promise shows the clearest relationship to an Old Testament text—Psalm 2:8–9. Whether it is a quotation or an allusion is debatable. Many commentators (cf Caird 1966:45) echo the familiar truism that no quotations from the Old Testament are found in Revelation. Fekkes (1994:68), however, argues convincingly otherwise: 'Thus the contextual visibility of this messianic promise based on a messianically understood OT text is undoubtedly intentional and goes beyond the bounds of an allusion.' Archer and Chirichigno (1983:57) assign an A/A- rating to the two parts of the quotation, which indicates a reasonably or completely accurate rendering from the Masoretic text and the Septuagint.

The textual basis of this promise—whether the Masoretic text or the Septuagint—is a matter of intense debate.

Psalm 2:8–9 MT

וְאָתָּה נָה גּוֹיִם נִחַ לְחַדָּךְ
 תְּרַעַם
 בְּשֶׁבֶט בְּרִזְלֶךָ
 כִּכְלֵי יוֹצֵר
 תִּנְפָצֵם

Revelation 2:26–27

δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἔθνων
 καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς
 ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ
 ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ
 συντρίβεται

Psalm 2:8–9 LXX

δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου...
 ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς
 ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ
 ὡς σκεῦος κεραμέως
 συντρίψεις αὐτούς

The Septuagint translators derived תְּרַעַם from רָעָה and vocalized it תְּרַעַם, hence ποιμανεῖς, while the Masoretic text derived it from רָעַע and vocalized it תְּרַעַם, hence Symmachus' translation συντρίψεις (Swete 1909:46; Charles 1920:1.75–76). Black (1976:137) states: 'There seems little doubt that ποιμαίνεις at Revelation 2:27=LXX Psalm 2:9 is a *mistranslation* of the Hebrew word (*ra'ah* or *ra'a*), taken over by the writer of the Apocalypse.' However, Archer and Chirichigno (1983:57) maintain that תְּרַעַם is from רָעָה, not רָעַע (=רָעַץ). Craigie (1983b:64) summarizes persuasively, 'Although either reading is possible...the context as a whole suggests the more powerful "break them".'

Caird (1966:45) presents a novel alternative: 'The preferable theory is that John, independently of the Septuagint, made the same mistake which the Septuagint translator made before him—a perfectly understandable mistake for one to whom Greek was a foreign language—of supposing that, because the Hebrew *r'h* can mean both to pasture and to destroy, its Greek equivalent must be capable of bearing both meanings also.' Caird presents a good argument on the level of practical likelihood; however, it seems unrealistic to suppose John had no knowledge of the Septuagint reading, which he appears to have followed here. Trudinger (1966:84–85), however, argues that the quotation as a whole is closer to the Hebrew original than to the Septuagint.

What then did John mean by ποιμαίνω? Johnson (1981:12:446) calls a paradox the combination of this mild word with those of 'iron rod' and 'shatter.' The word is used positively in 7:17 where, speaking of the white-robed survivors of the great tribulation (7:17), the Lamb will shepherd them and lead (ὁδηγήσει) them. Mealy (1992:175n2) calls this 'a veiled promise that Jesus will lead the overcomers to himself and to God the Father (as similarly in 2:17, etc.).' Both of these verbs are found in the shepherd Psalm 23 (22 LXX), where the rod (ῥάβδος; Heb שֶׁבֶט) is likewise mentioned. While rod originally described a shepherd's club tipped with iron nails (cf Mi 7:14), the term came to be associated with authority (Ps 45:6 [44:7 LXX]), hence the translation

'scepter,' and punishment (2 Sm 7:14; cf Mackie 1898:4.291). The rod (טבש) in Genesis 49:10 was already understood messianically when it was translated as 'ruler' (ἄρχων). It seems clear that John gives two meanings to ποιμαίνω—the first pastoral towards his people and the other authoritarian toward the nations.

Instead of translating 'rule' for the latter, Charles (1920:1.170) argues that the secondary Hebrew meaning of רעה 'to devastate' (usually 'to shepherd') should be understood in 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15 (cf Beasley-Murray 1978:93). The parallel verbs συντρίβω and πατάσσω, he believes, point to such a stronger translation. To translate as 'destroy' in 19:15 is particularly attractive since the scene is one of total annihilation. Yet Black (1976:137) questions whether John understood the word in this sense or intended to convey this meaning to his readers. Since John has already rejected the stronger Hebrew connotation by following the reading of the Septuagint in 2:27, Charles's suggestion must be qualified.

The latter half of the quotation might have been omitted; in fact, it is not repeated in 12:5 and 19:15. It is a metaphor of the Messiah's rule over the nations. Again the translation is problematic. In the Septuagint the verb συντρίψεις is future and a coordinate of 'will rule'; in Revelation it is a present passive. Charles (1920:1.77) recommends that συντρίβεται be taken as a Hebraism and therefore regarded as a future συντριβήσεται, a reading favored by a number of later manuscripts. He rejects a translation like 'as pottery is broken,' preferring one like 'he will break them as pottery.' In Jeremiah 19:11 both verbal forms are used: συντρίψω τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ τὴν πόλιν ταύτην καθὼς συντρίβεται ἄγγος ὀστράκινον. Here the judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem is also likened to broken pottery (cf Is 30:14; Jr 18:1–11). Determining which translation to adopt in the promise is difficult because both are defensible. It seems best, however, to read it as a present passive—'is broken'—even though it produces an awkward translation.

A final text that speaks of authority over the nations is Daniel 7:14. The nations serve the Son of Man because his authority is everlasting. In 7:27 he hands over this authority to the saints.

6.6.2.3 The context of local references

Under the Attalids Thyatira associated itself with Pergamum and was regarded as the most southerly city in the district of Mysia, although later it was considered a city of Lydia. This relationship between the two cities is seen by Ramsay (1994:241–42) as also evident in Revelation:

'There may be traced a common type both in the preliminary addresses and in the promises at the end of those two letters. The spirit...is throughout of dazzlingly impressive might, the irresistible strength of a great monarch and a vast well-ordered army.' The promise sets the victorious Christian in the place of the Roman emperor, who was the ruler of the nations and destroyed his enemies with his legions. Ramsay (1994:243) sees irony here because Thyatira (perhaps also Philadelphia) was the smallest, weakest, and least distinguished of the seven cities. Thyatira 'seemed in every way the least fitted by nature and by history to rule over the nations' (:244). Such an explanation, while possible, remains indeterminate.

The image of the shepherd's rod must have been a familiar one to the Thyatirans. As a city noted for its trade guilds (Lydia the purple seller [Ac 16:14–15]; cf Ramsay 1994:238), and the preparation of garments made from wool supplied by local shepherds was undoubtedly a thriving industry. For wool was the material most used by the Greeks for warm clothing (Bonfante & Jaunzems 1988:3.1376). Sardis was likewise noted for its garment industry, and Laodicea, as we will see, was famous for the wool of its black sheep. That the rod of authority used by such local shepherds symbolized the future rule of the victors must have been astounding to the Thyatiran believers.

6.6.2.4 The co-text of New Testament literature

Psalm 2, because of its messianic nature, played a visible role in early Christian *testimonia*. Verses 1–2 are quoted in Acts 4:25–26 and verse 7 in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5; 5:5. These New Testament texts emphasize the relationship between the Father and the Son regarding Jesus' resurrection, superiority over angels, and eternal priesthood. This emphasis is likewise seen in Revelation 2:28, which states that the victor will receive even as Jesus did from the Father. Such a qualifying statement in the promise is similar to that in 3:21. Because of ellipsis, the object of his reception must be supplied. Authority, or a rod of iron, are the most obvious choices from the preceding verse, but as we have seen, the figure represents the same reality.

Jesus' reception of authority from the Father is a theme in the Gospels. The so-called Great Commission in Matthew 28:18 begins, 'All authority has been given to me.' And in his high priestly prayer following the Last Supper Jesus emphasizes that his authority over all people has been given him by the Father (John 17:2; cf 3:35; 13:3).

6.6.2.5 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

In Psalm of Solomon 17:22–24 the messianic king is 'to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles...to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; To shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth.' Testament of Judah 24:6, after referring to a Star from Jacob, reads, 'and from your root will arise the Shoot, and through it will arise the rod of righteousness for the nations, to judge and to save all that call on the Lord.'¹⁷

6.6.3 The morning star

6.6.3.1 The co-text of Old Testament literature

Bauckham (1994:323ff) says that the morning star is generally taken to be an allusion to Balaam's third oracle: 'a star will rise out of Jacob' (Nm 24:17). The certainty of this observation is reinforced when the next line is noted, 'and a rod (שֵׁבֶט) will rise out of Israel.' The image of the rod figured prominently in the first promise drawn from Psalm 2:9. Reference to the morning star seems less obscure and out of place when this dynamic relationship is understood. As already noted, the rod was interpreted messianically in Genesis 49:10 (LXX) which reads, 'a ruler (ἄρχων) will not fail from Judah.' Here the rod is likened to a man destined to rule. Philo (*Praem* 95) says that this man will come forth 'leading a host and warring furiously, who will subdue great and populous nations.' John's use of the prophetic form (cf supra 4.7.1) and the prophetic curse (cf supra 1.2.4.6) in the Balaam chronicle plus his mention of Balaam by name in the Pergamene letter (2:14) make this allusion certain.

Daniel 12:3 speaks of the wise who will shine as stars forever. The immediate background is 11:33–45 which describes the end time when these same wise saints will fall by sword, fire, and captivity at the hands of the wicked king of the north.¹⁸ Young (1949:256) summarizes, 'Those who during the period of persecution have dealt prudently and wisely...shall receive the glorious reward of their labors in that they shall shine eternally as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars.'

¹⁷Collins (1995:63, 91–92) states that, although there are Christian elements in this text, this verse is part of its Jewish core which preserves Jewish traditions.

¹⁸The reference in 11:30 to the ships of Kittim (Cyprus) is based upon Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:24.

6.6.3.2 The context of local references

Ramsay (1904:245) links this part of the promise saying with the military imagery found in the city's history and in the earlier promise to rule: 'The brightness, gleam, and glitter, as of "an army with banners" which rules through the opening address and the concluding promise, is expressed in a milder spirit without the terrible character, though the brilliance remains or is even increased in the images of "the morning star".' Such an interpretation is a bit fantastic!

Lohmeyer (1953:30) links the morning star to the planet Venus, which from Babylonian times was a symbol of rule: 'In römischer Zeit ist deshalb Venus die Verleiherin von Sieg und Herrschaft.' The victorious generals Sulla and Pompey erected temples to Venus, and Julius Caesar erected a temple in her honor before the battle of Pharsalus (Appian *BCiv* 2.68–69). The Roman legions carried her zodiac sign, the bull, on their standards. The morning star was thus a familiar image of victory and rule throughout the Greco-Roman world. The contrast between the sovereignty of Christ and the prevailing Roman powers 'would help to explain how the language of Num. 24.17 had been brought into the arena of the church's current conflict' (Hemer 1986:126).

6.6.3.3 The co-text New Testament literature

Luke 1:78 refers to Christ's birth as the 'dayspring' or 'dawn' (ἀνατολή). This Christian messianic interpretation of ἀνατολή is based on the Septuagint translation of 'shoot' (קמץ) as 'a rising' (ἀνατολή) in Numbers 24:17, Jeremiah 23:5, and Zechariah 3:8; 6:12. Schlier (1964:1.353), after reviewing the interpretation of ἀνατολή among various church fathers, opts for the translation, 'star shining from heaven.' The verb form is found 2 Peter 1:19: 'and the morning star will rise (καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλη) in your hearts.' This is again a probable allusion to Numbers 24:17, whose messianic interpretation seems to have become a fixed Christian exegetical tradition (cf Bauckham 1983:226).

6.6.3.4 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

4 Ezra 7:97 speaks of the seven orders of the sleep of the righteous dead, the sixth being they are 'made like the light of the stars.' 1 Enoch 104:2 states that the suffering righteous will 'shine like lights in heaven.' These two texts have an obvious dependence upon Daniel 12:3. For his service in the temple, Simon the high priest is likened to the morning star (ἀστὴρ ἑωθινός; Sir 50:6). Testament of Levi 18:3 states of the coming priest: 'His star shall rise in heaven like a

king,' while Testament of Judah 24:1 reads: 'And after this there shall arise for you a star from Jacob in peace' (cf 1QM 11:6–7; 4QTestim 9–13). The Damascus Document calls the star the interpreter of the law (CD 7:18–19). After reviewing these texts, Collins (1995:64) persuasively concludes that 'Balaam's oracle was widely understood in a messianic sense.'

6.6.4 Conclusion

The double promise to Thyatira is the only saying with proximate co-texts in the Old Testament. The Asian audience must have recognized the ambivalence in the main verb—'rule' or 'destroy.' Trench (1883:157) proposes: 'Instead of the mere unmingled judgment which lay in the passage as it originally stood in that Psalm, He expresses by it now judgment mingled with mercy, judgment behind which purposes of grace are concealed, and only waiting their due time to appear.' The transfer of rule from the Son of Man to the saints in Daniel is likewise seen in Revelation. Johnson (1981:12:514) notes that 'John seems to alternate between the rule of Christ (1:5; 11:15) and the rule of the saints (1:6; 2:26–27).' This promise in Revelation, according to Craigie (1983b:69), 'contains an anticipation of the ultimate rule and triumph of the man born to be King in the language and imagery of Ps 2....' Those who are victorious are promised a share of that rule and triumph at his coming.

Ancient expositors presented a range of interpretations for the image of the morning star. Victorinus thought it was the first resurrection, Andreas suggested the saints putting the fallen Lucifer under their feet, and Beatus and Bede thought it Christ himself (Swete 1909:47). The star motif in the scriptural background cited indicates rule and sovereignty. Wall (1991:79) suggests that the morning star 'again symbolizes the eschatological situation of the community of overcomers by pointing to its future participation in the triumph of God's rule over all those secular and materialistic pretenders to the Lord's throne.' Yet above all, the Septuagint reading of Numbers 24:17 suggests that the star is a person. An important part of the reward given at the parousia is the presence of Jesus himself. Mealy (1992:215) thinks 'it is more than conceivable that along with the promise of the morning star, two other cryptic promises refer to Jesus as well, namely the promise of a white stone, and the promise of hidden manna (Rev. 2.17).' We have made a similar suggestion in our discussion of the white stone and hidden manna. However, any definitive conclusion regarding the morning star will be deferred until the next chapter.

6.7 THE SARDIAN PROMISE SAYING

6.7.1 The text

The text of the Sardinian promise is found in 3:5: ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ.

A variant of οὕτως, perhaps early, is οὗτος. Hemer (1986:147–48) suggests it ‘could easily have arisen from dictation, being easier and a phonetic equivalent.’ Beckwith (1919:476) questions whether οὕτως should be translated ‘likewise’; to do so (1) ‘would imply a certain distinction between the ὁ νικῶν and the unsullied, whereas the latter must be included in the former,’ and (2) ‘blending of the class introduced by the formula ὁ νικῶν with the preceding sentence is at variance with the usage of all the other epistles.’ He proposes that οὕτως be understood to repeat the participle νικῶν, ‘thus,’ for example, being a conqueror. In the two other occurrences of οὕτως in the letters—2:15 and 3:16—both link what precedes. If the usage is debatable here, it would be best to follow these other examples. The ‘unsullied’ in Sardis will be among the victors, if they continue to walk worthily. There is no distinction of persons, only of time—present and future.

Beckwith’s second objection is invalid, because ‘promise bleed’ was shown to occur in both the Smyranean (2:10) and Thyatiran (2:23) letters. In fact, John specifically moves the praise saying to precede the promise saying in this letter because of the connection in imagery (cf the outline in 4.14). Beckwith (1919:475) invalidates his point by acknowledging that an eschatological promise is introduced before the victor formula in 2:10 as well as in 3:4 and 3:20. οὕτως should therefore be translated ‘likewise’ or ‘in this manner.’

The fourfold use of ὄνομα is noteworthy. The Sardians have a name (i e, a reputation) that they are alive, but in fact are dead (v 1). A few names (i e, individuals) in the city have not compromised but remain worthy (v 4). The other two uses are in the promise saying. The promise not to have the victor’s name erased from the book of life alludes to Deuteronomy 9:14 (LXX), which likewise uses ὄνομα. Swete (1909:52) pointedly comments, ‘The “few names” in Sardis which are distinguished by resisting the prevailing torpor of spiritual death find their reward in finally retaining their place among the living in the City of God.’

6.7.2 White garments

The ἱματίον was the most common outer garment for men and women in the Greco-Roman world. This rectangular garment came in various sizes and was draped around the body. The quality of the fabric distinguished the social status or wealth of the wearer. Related terms are ἔνδυμα, ἑσθής, and χιτῶν—all used almost synonymously in the biblical literature (Louw & Nida 1989:§6.162). Besides ἱματίον (3:4, 5, 18; 4:4), στολή (6:11; 7:9, 13) and βύσσινος (19:14; cf 19:8) are two other words used for clothing in Revelation. The adjective λευκός is found in each of these texts, suggesting that their meaning is synonymous. The semantic relationship between these terms will be developed further in Chapter 7 (cf *infra* 7.7.1.1).

6.7.2.1 The co-text of Revelation 1–3

White is used five times in chapters 1–3 (out of fifteen times in the book). In 1:14 the Ancient of Days is pictured with hair white as snow and wool. White is here portrayed as a color both heavenly and divine. The Pergamenes are promised a white stone (2:17). In the Sardian praise saying (3:4), the image of white garments is first used. A few have not soiled (ἐμόλυναν) their garments and thus walk with Christ in white. Those in white are called worthy, in contrast to those called to repent who are living in sin. Garber (1974:257) comments, ‘The white clothing marks their identification with the cause of God and his kingdom. It is a gift and cannot be earned, although the character of the heavenly robe or body is conditioned by the character and actions of the earthly body (cf. I Cor. 6:18).’ Garber’s linkage of the soiled garments to unfaithfulness to baptismal vows draws too heavily on Pauline imagery (e.g., Gal 3:27; Rm 13:14) and fails to grasp John’s perspective.

This promise is reiterated in the final letter where the Laodiceans are told to buy white garments to hide the shame of their spiritual nakedness (3:18). This may be an allusion to the Fall account in which God clothes Adam and Eve after they discover they are naked (Gn 3:10–11, 21; cf *supra* 5.3.2 regarding nakedness in athletics). While the Laodiceans are exhorted to purchase their white garments, the Sardians will be given theirs. In both cases white garments are related to moral worthiness. These statements regarding white garments are two sides of the same spiritual coin. As Ulfgard (1989:81) fittingly states, white garments are ‘both an earthly possession which qualifies for heavenly existence and a feature of heavenly existence.’

6.7.2.2 The context of local references

In the last chapter (cf supra 5.3.4.1) we discussed the relationship of the color white to victory; here we will examine its significance in antiquity as the color of purity and innocence. Thus Ramsay (1994:282) asserts that wearing white garments 'was appropriate for those who were engaged in the worship of the gods, for purity was prescribed as a condition of engaging in divine service, though usually the purity was understood in a merely ceremonial sense.'

Deissman (1901:368–70) explains the scene of the white-robed multitude in Revelation 7 as a heavenly panegyric modeled after religious ceremonies seen throughout Asia Minor. He quotes a decree from the Asian city of Stratonicea prescribing that hymns be sung daily in the bouleuterion to honor the city's patron deities by thirty boys, 'clothed in white and crowned with a twig, holding a twig in their hands.' He suggests that John modeled his heavenly choir after similar choirs of sacred singers. What his audience 'beheld in heaven was something that had, by association with their native soil, become familiar and dear to them—a choir of pious singers in festive attire; and if they had an ear to hear what the Spirit said to the churches, they could also, of course, surmise that in this instance what came from holy lips was a new song' (:370). Charles (1920:1.211) rightly calls this suggestion 'a complete misconception of our text.' Moffat (1910:5.364) suggests another ceremonial function, that 'the language reflects that of the votive inscriptions in Asia Minor, where soiled clothes disqualified the worshipper and dishonoured the god.'

Philostratus describes a visit by Apollonius to a cave at Lebadea. Those who visited the oracle were dressed in white raiment (*VitAp* 8.19).

The allusion to the wool industry at Sardis, according to Johnson (1981:12.449), 'intensifies the image of soiled and defiled garments.' Sardis and Laodicea were noted for their wool, and the image of white garments appears in both letters. Commentators as early as Trench (1883:212) saw a reference in 3:18 to the black sheep for which Laodicea was famous. Their wool was used to make expensive black glossy garments. After surveying the ancient literary sources, Hemer (1986:199–201) accepts the premise of a contrast between the white garments and the black wool. Beckwith (1919:490), however, challenges that application because 'in that case we should expect in the following purpose clause reference to such garments rather than to nakedness.' What is more probable here is the use of irony—the Laodiceans, who come from a place noted for its clothing, are found naked by Jesus. The mention of white garments in this promise diminishes the likelihood of an individualized local reference in the Laodicean letter.

Yet it is significant that the reference to white garments is found in the letters to Sardis and Laodicea, both of which were textile centers.

6.7.2.3 The co-text of New Testament literature

White is an eschatological or heavenly color in every New Testament text except Matthew 5:36 and John 4:35, according to Michaelis (1967:246–47). In the parable of the weeds Jesus tells how after the harvest at the end of the age, the righteous will shine like the sun in the heavenly kingdom (Mt 13:43). At his transfiguration Jesus' garments appeared dazzlingly white as light (Mt 17:2; Mk 9:3; Lk 9:29). The reference to the glistening character of Jesus' clothing reflects the Old Testament concept that 'the glory of God is always conceived as shining brilliance or bright light' (Lane 1974:318). The angel standing outside the empty tomb was wearing a white garment (Mk 16:5; cf Lk 24:4; Jn 20:12). The two angels who spoke to the disciples at Jesus' ascension were also dressed in white clothing (Ac 1:10). These white garments worn by the angels 'are not so much descriptive as an expression of the transcendent character of their δόξα' (Kittel 1964:1.84n67).

In the parable of the wedding banquet every guest except one is wearing a wedding garment; that one is thrown into the outer darkness (Mt 22:1–13). Hill (1972:302–3) points to the likely interpretation: 'The wedding garment probably symbolizes righteousness (*dikaiosune*), that faithfulness and obedience which can be expected of those who are members of the Kingdom, or Church.' In Hermas' vision (68.3) the faithful are rewarded with white garments.

6.7.2.4 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

In 2 Maccabees 11:8 God sends a good angel dressed in white to lead the Jews to victory. Ezra sees those at the messianic feast clothed in white (4 Ez 2:38–40), in garments called 'immortal clothing' (v 45). Enoch sees the Great Glory sitting on his throne wearing a gown that was shining more brightly than the sun and whiter than snow (1 En 14:20; cf 71:1 for a similar description of angels). In 1 Enoch 62:15–16 the righteous are said to wear garments of glory, which will become garments of life that will never wear out. The Lord tells Michael to remove the earthly clothing from Enoch and put him into clothes of glory (2 En 22:8), no doubt a heavenly, or spiritual, body (cf Garber 1974:45). Regarding the Ascension of Isaiah, 'the heavenly robes which the saints put on after death are a symbol of their transformed state; they are mentioned frequently in the Christian portions of Ascens; cf. 3:25; 4:16f.; 7:22; 8:14, 26; 9:2, 9–11,

17f., 24–26; 11:40' (Knibb 1985:157n p). 1QS 4:7–8 speaks of a 'crown of glory with majestic raiment in eternal light.' Philo (*VitCon* 66) describes a monastic group called the Therapeutae who dressed in white garments for their greatest feast on the fiftieth day. Rabbinic sources reflect a great fondness for white clothes. 'They are worn on joyous occasions or feast days, but they are also regarded as a mark of distinction' (Michaelis 1967:244). In first-century Judaism the dead were buried in white clothing.

6.7.2.5 The co-text of Old Testament literature

Job is asked by the Lord if he is able to adorn himself with glory and splendor (Job 40:10). And the psalmist declares that God is 'clothed with splendor and majesty; He wraps himself in light as a garment (Ps 104:2). 'Job agrees with Psalms in linking God's sovereignty with imagery of glorious clothing' (Garber 1974:23). The preacher enjoins his audience that their garments should always be white (Ec 9:8). Isaiah 61:10 combines wedding imagery with that of clothing: 'for he has clothed me with a garment of salvation (ἱμάτιον σωτηρίου) and a tunic of joy.' The Ancient of Days sat on a throne wearing white garments, with hair white as wool (Dn 7:9). The angelic messenger whom Daniel sees is clothed in (white) linen (βύσσιννα; Dn 10:5). Zechariah sees a vision of Satan accusing the high priest Joshua (Zch 3:1–2). The high priest's sin is represented as dirty garments (ἱμάτια ῥυπαρά; v 3). After God takes away Joshua's sin, he commands that the high priest be clothed with a new robe.

6.7.3 The book of life

6.7.3.1 The context of local references

The Sardians have a name (i.e., reputation) for being alive but are in fact dead (Rv 3:1). Those who are worthy are promised that their name will be maintained in the real book of life. Ramsay (1994:274–75) finds the contrast between life and death in the Sardian letter significant. The history of Sardis was in the past; she was a dying city.

The Jews around AD 85–90 adopted Eighteen Benedictions, the twelfth enjoining that 'the Nazarenes and the *minim*...be blotted out from the book of life' (Barrett 1987:§200). This 'Heretic Benediction' was 'probably intended as a means of marking out Jewish Christians and excluding them from the synagogue community' (Barrett 1978:362). If Revelation is dated late and the synagogues in Smyrna, Sardis, and Philadelphia were using this injunction for exclu-

sionary purposes, this promise by Jesus counters the attempt to write off Asian believers from their heavenly reward (cf Hemer 1986:9). Though this interpretation is attractive, it is precluded because the earlier date was found to be more consistent with the historical evidence. Because this image is so pervasive in biblical literature, its background is probably not found in the twelfth benediction.

Greek cities maintained a list of its citizens in a public register. When someone committed a criminal action and was condemned, he lost his citizenship and his name was subsequently erased from the register. Moffatt (1910:5.365) cites several inscriptions that mention this action, which interestingly use the Greek verb *ἐξαιείφω* to describe the act of removal.

6.7.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Following the return of the seven-two, Jesus tells them to rejoice because their names are written in heaven (Lk 10:20). Concerning this verse, Schrenk (1964:1.770) writes that 'we have a particularly solemn image which carries with it the thought of the ancient custom of inscribing in a list of citizens, but which is also linked with the idea of the book of life.' Paul similarly tells the Philippians to rejoice always because his fellow workers, like themselves, have *τα ὀνόματα ἐν βίβλῳ ζωῆς* (Phlp 4:3). Hawthorne (1983:181) sees the background of Philippi being a Roman colony as important here: 'Just as Philippi, and other cities like it, must have had a civic register that included all the names of its citizens, so the heavenly commonwealth (cf. 3:20) has its own roll where God inscribes the names of those to whom he promises life.'

The writer of Hebrews tells his audience that they have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, as members of the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:23). The perfect *προσεληλύθατε* used in verse 22 suggests the writer's eschatological perspective differs from John's—that the believers are already enjoying the benefits of heavenly citizenship. The writer of Hebrews, like John, understands that it is through faith these blessings are enjoyed (cf 11:1ff) and that the full manifestation of the heavenly city is yet to come (13:14). Smith (1985:221–22) rightly summarizes, 'There is a general consensus that all of the NT references to the book of life, including Luke 10:20 and Heb 12:23 which do not use the exact phrase, designate the same book.'

6.7.3.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

1 Enoch makes a number of references to the heavenly book: In 47:3 Enoch sees the Ancient of Days sitting on the throne with the books of the living ones open before him. Again Enoch is shown the heavenly tablets and told to read them: 'I read that book and all the deeds of humanity...' (81:2; cf 90:20; 93:1–3; 103:2). In 108:3 Enoch is told that 'the names of (the sinners) shall be blotted out from the Book of Life and the books of the Holy One.' Jubilees 5:13 states that judgment upon people is based on their works written in the heavenly tablets (cf 16:9; 23:32). 1QM 12.2–3 refers to a book with the names of the heavenly armies who, after receiving their rewards, will rule for eternity.

6.7.3.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

After Israel had sinned at Mount Sinai by making the golden calf, Moses interceded with God for the nation. If God would not forgive the people's sin, Moses asked that his name be erased from God's book (Ex 32:32). The Lord replied, 'If anyone has sinned before me, ἐξαλείψω αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς βίβλου μου' (v 33; cf Dt 9:143, ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῶν ὑποκάτωθεν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Jesus' promise in Revelation is the denial (οὐ μὴ) of these statements in the Pentateuch. Isaiah declares that on the day when the Branch appears in Jerusalem, ἅγιοι κληθήσονται πάντες οἱ γραφέντες εἰς ζωὴν (Is 4:3; cf 48:19). Lightfoot (1868:159) summarizes, 'The "book of life" in the figurative language of the Old Testament is the register of the covenant people.... Hence "to be blotted out of the book of the living" mean "to forfeit the privileges of the theocracy," "to be shut out from God's favour".'

Daniel sees books opened in the heavenly court (7:10); Michael tells him what is written in the book of truth (10:21). Following the great distress everyone whose name is written in the book will be delivered (12:1). Goldingay (1989:306) makes an unwarranted distinction between this latter book and the first two. He (:306) states that the book in 12:1 is 'not the "reliable book" of 10:21, which included the future acts of the wicked as well as those of the people of God, nor one of the "books" mentioned in 7:10, which recorded the past basis for God's judgment, but a list of those who belong to God's people, the citizen list of the true Jerusalem.' Beale (1984:239) correctly observes 'That the book of Daniel 12 should be thought of in relation to that of Daniel 7 is natural since both appear in contexts of eschatological persecution.'

6.7.4 The confession of a name

6.7.4.1 The co-text of New Testament literature

Jesus' statement to the Twelve in Matthew 10:32 is a closely related text, 'Therefore everyone who confesses me before others, ὁμολογήσω καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔμροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς μου in heaven.' Whoever denies Christ will likewise be denied by him before the heavenly Father (v 33). This eschatological promise has both a positive and a negative side. The parallel in Luke 12:8 reads ἔμροσθεν τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ rather than 'my Father in heaven.' The preposition ἐνώπιον is used synonymously with ἔμροσθεν in the denial clause (v 9). The use of ἔμπροσθεν, according to I H Marshall (1978:515), 'stresses that a public acknowledgement is meant, and it may refer specifically to standing before a judge; the fact that the second part of the saying alludes to the heavenly court does not demand that a forensic situation be seen on the earthly level also, but it is not impossible that Jesus may have had this in mind.' In these sayings 'importance is attached to the correspondence between human conduct here on earth and the eschatological word of the Judge or Witness' (Michel 1967:5.208). The promise in Revelation conflates a Jesus word found in these two Synoptic sources, without mentioning the aspect of denial. Also, by adapting the Jesus saying into a victory saying, John 'has destroyed the verbal correspondence of protasis and apodosis that characterized the Synoptic *logion*, though it is possible that he intended his readers to recall the original protasis' (Bauckham 1993a:95–96).

A negative form of this saying is found in Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26: ὅς γάρ ἐάν ἐπαισυνθῆ με.... These words are mercifully withheld here, Swete (1909:52) observes, where 'the last note is one of unmixed encouragement and hope.'

The use of ἐνώπιον in the Sardian promise similarly puts the setting in a heavenly courtroom with Jesus before the Father and his angels. Giblin (1991:61), who interprets the seven spirits in the epithet as the angels of the presence, says, 'The promise to the victor repeats the motif of the seven spirits by assuring the faithful of public proclamation of the victor "before my God and before his angels".' The link between the Sardian epithet and the promise here is probable, although his denial of the pneumatological reference is unnecessary. Angels are already in the epithet because the seven stars were previously identified as angels (1:20). It is doubtful that there are two angelic references here. Jesus who hold the angels will also confess the victor before them.

6.7.4.2 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

During the Seleucid rule in Palestine it was illegal for people to profess that they were Jews (2 Macc 6:6).

6.7.5 Conclusion

The metaphor of garments is closely related to that of light. Clothing in a literal sense is unnecessary in heaven, for there believers are clothed with the imperishable (cf 1 Cor 15:53–54). The glory of Jesus at his transfiguration and of his angels at the resurrection and ascension hints at the meaning of white garments. They speak of transformation into a heavenly sphere. Charles (1920:1.82) rightly links white garments with ‘the spiritual bodies in which the faithful are to be clothed in the resurrection life.’ Ladd (1972:57) also sees this as ‘a promise of victory and purity in the messianic Kingdom...’ The future verb περιπατήσουσιν should therefore be understood eschatologically. Swete (1909:52) expressively describes the end of the victors: ‘The “few names” in Sardis which are distinguished by resisting the prevailing torpor of spiritual death find their reward in finally retaining their place among the living in the City of God.’

Smith (1985:229) contends that the grammar and context of the verse, particularly the emphatic double negative οὐ μή (cf 2:11; 3:12), deny any possibility of blotting from the book of life. ‘It is not a threat; rather it is an emphatic promise that the names of overcomers (i.e., Christians) will *never*, under any circumstances, be blotted from the book.’ The promise is not unconditional to all Sardian believers, however; it is only directed to those who are victorious.

The phrase ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρός μου finds its antecedent in 3:2 where Jesus finds the works of the Sardians fulfilled ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. The confession of the victor’s name is thus linked to the successful completion of his or her works. O Michel (1967:5.207–8) appropriately includes this promise under the classification ‘judicially “to make a statement,” in the legal sense “to bear witness”.’ Jesus as the eschatological Witness or Judge will proclaim the righteousness of each victor before the heavenly throne.

6.8 THE PHILADELPHIAN PROMISE SAYING

6.8.1 The text

The promise saying is found in 3:12: ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω στήλον ἐν τῷ ναῶ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ ἔτι καὶ γράψω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου, τῆς

καινης Ἱερουσαλήμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ μου, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά μου τὸ καινόν. Gundry (1987:262) make this grammatical comment regarding the verse: ‘Christ promises to make overcomers pillars “in the temple of my God,” which in view of 21:22 we should read as ‘the temple that is my God’ (genitive of apposition).’ To translate this as an objective genitive rather than a subjective genitive based a future text is exegetically flawed. The phrase τοῦ θεοῦ μου is used as a subjective genitive three other times in this verse, and this is the likely reading in Gundry’s example too.

Some manuscripts show the variant ποιήσω αὐτῷ for ποιήσω αὐτόν. This appears to be a scribal attempt to put the pronoun in the promise sayings in the same case following the future verb, as in δώσω αὐτῷ (2:7, 17 [2x], 26; 3:21). Since John had already correctly put the pronoun in the accusative case in 3:9 (ποιήσω αὐτούς), it is clear that αὐτόν is the correct reading.

The lack of grammatical concord in appositives, especially with participles, occurs frequently in Revelation (Zerwick 1983:§13; cf 9:14; 11:15; 14:6; 19:20). An example is found in this promise saying: τῆς καινης Ἱερουσαλήμ ἡ καταβαίνουσα.... Instead of agreeing with the genitive case of its antecedent, a nominative participle is used. The scribal attempt to bring agreement has produced the textual variant τῆς καταβαίνουσης here. Such confusion is understandable given the agreement found in two parallel verses—τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἱερουσαλήμ [καινήν] καταβαίνουσαν... (21:10; cf 21:2). A final variant ἀπὸ for ἐκ before τοῦ οὐρανοῦ found in several manuscripts is unlikely given the reading καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, which is found in the two parallel texts just mentioned (21:2, 10).

The first half of the promise saying combines two aspects:

1. The victor will be made a pillar in the temple of the Lord,
2. The victor will never go out of the temple anymore.

Since pillar is apparently used metaphorically, temple is likewise presumed to be used metaphorically (cf Charles 1920:1.91). In the second half ἐπ’ αὐτόν could refer either to στῦλον or to ὀνικῶν. The distinction is really immaterial because the two merge in the first half of the saying—the victor *is* a pillar metaphorically.

In the second part of the saying Jesus promises to write upon the pillar/victor three things:

1. The name of his God,
2. The name of his heavenly city,
3. His own new name.

Numbers 1 and 3 will be considered in one section; number 2 will have its own section. Ramsay (1994:302) asserts that one, not three, names, are implied—a name that has all three characters and is simultaneously the name of all three. This assertion will be investigated. Four times in the promise Jesus refers to God as ‘my God’ (cf Mk 15:34; Jn 20:17). This suggests that the intimacy Jesus has with God will become the privilege of the priestly ‘pillars’ who serve in the heavenly city.

6.8.2 The hour of trial

Though not part of the promise saying, Johnson (1981:12.453) believes the pledge to keep the believers from the coming hour of trial (3:10) ‘may be taken as a promise to all the churches.’ The Philadelphians have met the condition—to heed Christ’s command to endure patiently. The hour of trial to come upon the earth unfolds through the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. The distinctive substantival participle *κατοικοῦντες* is found here and in ten other texts (6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [2x]; 13:8, 12, 14 [2x]; 17:2, 8). Exemption from the hour of trial is not deliverance from persecution, because the slain souls given white robes were martyred at the hands of the earthdwellers (6:9–11). We agree with Johnson (:12.455) that the hour of trial is ‘a specific type of trial (God’s wrath) that is aimed at the rebellious on the earth.’ Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:48) rightly observes, ‘In the “hour of trial” which is coming on the whole world (3:10) only the Christian community will be saved (7:1–8; 11:1–2).’ Because this promise is not eschatological, it will not be discussed further.

6.8.3 The pillar in the temple

6.8.3.1 The context of local references

Tenney (1957:190) points out that the temple symbolism is taken directly from contemporary architecture: ‘Every city in the Roman world had temples adorned with colonnades which supported the roof of the shrine or which made the porches where the public assembled.’ Coin types from the Asian cities often featured their temples. The Artemesium appears on many coins of Ephesus. Some coins show the correct number of eight pillars fronting the temple, while other types are miniaturized, showing only four (cf Trell 1988:91). According to Pliny the Elder (*NH* 36.96), the Artemesium contained 127 support pillars, which were 60 feet high, slender and beautifully fluted. Trell (1988:80–81) describes their uniqueness: ‘Their elaborate bases

consisted of mouldings like rings of marble supporting sculptured reliefs that “ran around” the bottom drums, an architectural delight almost but not entirely without precedent in the ancient world. Exquisite Ionic capitals with their expertly and gracefully carved circular sides (volutes) protected the columns and supported the marble horizontal beam above (entablature).’ Upon entering the temple the visitor would literally be surrounded by a forest of pillars. Today only a lone pillar stands at the site of the Artemesium. To experience the visual impact of such pillars today, one must visit the temple of Apollo at Didyma, connected in antiquity to Miletus by an eleven-mile sacred road. Its designer was Paionios, one of the architects of the Artemesium. The Didymaion was the third largest structure of the Greek world. The temple was designed for 124 pillars, although some outer ones were never completed (Akurgal 1993:227). Smaller temples likewise contained pillars, albeit a fewer number. These pillars could be comprised of drums or chiseled from a single piece of marble.

Inscribed pillars, both fluted and smooth, are found throughout western Turkey. This author has observed such pillars *in situ* at Ephesus, Claros, Euromos, Hierapolis, and Pergamum, and in the archaeological museums at Izmir and Manisa. In the upper agora at Ephesus two smooth inscribed Doric pillars are found in the Prytaneion. Some of the inscriptions found on these pillars list the names of the members of the League of Curetes, a class of priests affiliated with the Artemesium. ‘The main function of the league was to celebrate the birth of Ephesian Artemis in Ortygia, near Ephesus, each year’ (Erdemgil 1995:52; cf :50 for a photograph of the inscriptions). A dramatic example of fluted inscribed pillars is found at the temple of Zeus in Euromos (2nd cent BC). Ten of the eleven outer standing pillars on the north and west sides have a placard-type inscription at the same height facing outward on the pillars.¹⁹ A similar fluted inscribed pillar is found at the oracle site of Claros, near Ephesus. It is apparent that the imagery of inscribed pillars was familiar to the Asian believers. Temples were a prominent part of public life in the seven cities, although our knowledge about temples in Philadelphia is limited (cf supra 1.5.3.3(f)).

The assertion that believers will never have to leave the temple is likened by J Moffatt (1910:5.369) to local practice in the imperial cult: ‘The provincial priest of the Imperial cultus erected his statue in the temple at the close of his year’s official reign, inscribing on it his own name and his father’s, his place of birth and year of office.’ He applies this imagery to Christians

¹⁹Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to locate the publication of these inscriptions and to determine their content.

as priests in the next world. Although not explicit in this promise, priestly imagery does pervade the letters. However, the criticism of Beckwith (1919:485) is apropos: 'The circumstances of the victor entering triumphantly into the eternal kingdom are too unlike those of the priest passing out of all relation to the temple, to justify a comparison.' Hemer (1986:166) has found no evidence for the existence of this oft-cited custom. An imperial temple never existed in Philadelphia in the first century (cf Price 1984:259), and the imperial shrine which Ramsay (1994:301) so confidently mentions is only a conjecture.

Barclay (1957:98) recounts a supposed custom regarding Philadelphia's temples. 'When a man had served the state well, when he had left behind him a noble record as a magistrate or as a public benefactor, or as a priest, the memorial which the city gave to him was to erect a pillar in one of the temples with his name inscribed upon it.' He suggests that this honorific custom formed the background for Christ's promise. Since Barclay gives no source for his reference, it is difficult to validate.

Wilkinson (1988:499) has recently offered another possible interpretation—the pillar analogy is rooted in established coronation rituals practiced in ancient Israel and throughout the ancient Near East. At his coronation Josiah stood by a pillar as was the custom (2 Kgs 11:14). The proximity of the king to the pillar perhaps signified the monarch's relationship to the cult or maybe suggested the stability and duration of his rule. The kingship/coronation theme found throughout Revelation and particularly in the seven letters reflects this ancient perspective. Wilkinson believes such coronational connections would be apparent to anyone versed in Hebrew scriptures, such as John was. 'Whether the allusion of the pillar would in fact be clearly understood by the readers of Revelation seems beside the point, in regard to such an opaque work' (:500). For the readers to respond positively to the promise, the allusion must not be oblique, but understandable. Actual pillars inscribed with names provide a more likely reference than Wilkinson's.

The word that the victor will no longer go out is seen by Ramsay (1994:298–99) as a promise of stability in the presence of regular earthquakes attributable to Philadelphia's location in the Catacecaumene. The people would naturally be fearful to stay in their city following such seismic shocks (cf Strabo 12.8.18; 13.4.10). Both Ramsay (1994:291) and Hemer (1986:264n14) share firsthand accounts of the trauma following a modern earthquake in the city. The traditional Greek method of building temples was designed to withstand earthquakes. The temple foundations were designed to 'float' on the soil like a raft. Each block was joined to

another by metal cramps, so that the platform was a unity. For example, the sub-foundation of the Artemesium was built of charcoal covered with fleeces to protect it, not only from earthquakes, but also from sinking into the marshy shoreline (Ashmole 1972:7; cf Pliny *NH* 36.95). Thus the temple was probably the most secure structure in the city.

6.8.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Paul in Galatians 2:9 calls James, Cephas, and John the reputed pillars of the Jerusalem church. Wilckens (1971:7.734–35) comments, ‘Presupposed here is the idea of a heavenly building—the Church as God’s temple (cf. 1 C. 3:10 ff., 16 ff.; Eph. 2:21; Rev. 3:12)—which the three who are mentioned bear up as basic pillars.’ In 1 Timothy 3:15 the image is less defined; the house of God as the church of the living God is called the pillar and ground of the truth. Clement describes Peter and Paul as the greatest and most righteous pillars who were persecuted and struggled until death (1C/ 5:2).

6.8.3.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Godly people characterized as pillars is similarly portrayed in several texts. The mother of 4 Maccabees 17:3 was able to withstand her persecution because she was built on the pillar of her seven children. R le Déaut (1982:32) helpfully points out that ‘in the targum passage for Numbers 20.29 Aaron is called the “pillar of the prayer of the children of Israel”.’ And in the messianic kingdom Enoch sees the ancient house transformed with new pillars set up in the new structure (1 En 90:29).

6.8.3.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

The literal use of *στῦλος* predominates in the Old Testament. Two well-known pillars named Jakin and Boaz stood on the porch to the north and south outside the Solomonic temple (1 Ki 7:21; 2 Chr 3:15–17). Upon the temple’s destruction these pillars were broken up and their bronze removed to Babylon (Jr 52:17). This reference is an improbable source for the promise. The metaphorical use is suggested when David (Ps 144:12) speaks of a day of victory when the daughters of Israel will be like pillars²⁰ carved to adorn a palace (*ναός*; 143:12 LXX). In Proverbs 9:1 Wisdom stands on seven pillars (cf supra 4.2). God makes Jeremiah an iron pillar in his prophetic role against Judah (Jr 1:18).

²⁰*στῦλος* normally translates עמוד; however, יתד is used here.

Accepting a suggestion by Kraft (1974:82) who sees an allusion here to Isaiah 22:23, 'I will fasten him (as) a peg in...his father's house,' Fekkes (1994:133) writes, 'The common image of a peg as a symbol of stability, the promise-form, and the fact that John has already used the previous verse of Isaiah (22.22) in the same letter, all support the conclusion that Isaiah's peg metaphor is unlikely to be an accidental parallel to John's pillar metaphor.' However, the peg in Isaiah's prophecy will be sheared off and fall (v 25), unlike the pillar which will never (οὐ μὴ) lose its position in the temple. Because of the inadequacy of the peg imagery in Isaiah 22, the allusion in Revelation moves from the key of David to the pillar in the temple.²¹

6.8.4 Divine names written

6.8.4.1 The context of local references

In the first century Philadelphia on two occasions adopted a new name. An earthquake in AD 17 destroyed the city, and in gratitude for Tiberius' generosity Philadelphia added 'Neocaesarea' to its name (Strabo *Geog* 12.8.18; 13.4.10). Under Vespasian 'Flavia,' the emperor's family name, was also adopted, undoubtedly because of his largesse following a similar natural disaster (Suetonius *Vesp* 17). Philadelphia was the only one of the seven cities to take a new name, although Sardis took the temporary epithet 'Caesarea' (cf Ramsay 1994:300). The validity of such a reference is weakened when we recall that the new name imagery was first used in the letter to Pergamum (2:17), a city that had no name changes.

The fourfold use of the possessive pronoun 'my' parallels the paternalistic relationship the emperor had with his imperial cities. Inscribed on the Archive Wall at Aphrodisias, just south of Philadelphia, are Augustus' words that Aphrodisias is 'the one city from all of Asia that I have selected to be my own' (Erim 1986:30).

6.8.4.2 The co-text of postapostolic literature

A possible reference has been found in Ignatius (Phild 6.1). The bishop looks upon those who are silent about Christ as tombstones and graves of the dead, ἐφ' οἷς γέγραπται μόνον ὀνόματα ἀνθρώπων. While this link is attractive, Charles (1920:1.92) rightly finds no common idea between the two: 'Ignatius is comparing false teachers to sepulchres, whereas our text declares

²¹Wilkinson (1988:500n14) notes, 'It is possible, however, that the Greek text of Isaiah available to the author of Revelation actually read στηλω at this point—as does Codex Vaticanus.'

that the victors shall be upholders of the spiritual temple of God, with the name of their God blazoned on their brows.'

6.8.4.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

When the people of Israel wanted to honor Simon and his sons, they inscribed a record of his deeds on bronze tablets and put it on 'pillars' on Mount Zion (1 Macc 14:27 NRSV, NAB, NJB). However, the text has *στῆλαις* (v 26 LXX), not *στῦλοις*. The additional instructions in verse 48 suggest that 'steles' is the preferred translation. Josephus (*Ant* 16.165; cf *supra* 4.6.5) likewise mentions a decree of Augustus installed in his temple at Pergamum that concludes, 'This was inscribed upon a pillar in the temple of Caesar' (*ἔστηκελογραφήθη ἐν τῷ Καίσαρος ναῶ* LCL). Again the better translation is probably 'inscribed upon a stele.'

6.8.4.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

As part of his high priestly garb Aaron wore a gold mitre with the words 'Holy to the Lord' engraved over his forehead (Ex 28:36–38). The purpose of the priestly blessing to be offered by Aaron and his sons was to put the name of the Lord upon the children of Israel (Nm 6:27). Before Ezekiel sees the wicked destroyed in Jerusalem, God commands an angel to place a mark on the forehead of the righteous, sparing them from the coming slaughter (Ezk 9:4).

6.8.5 The New Jerusalem coming down from heaven

6.8.5.1 The co-text of New Testament literature

In the New Testament Jerusalem is found in two different forms—*Ἱεροσόλυμα* (63x) and *Ἱερουσαλήμ* (76x). The former was the preferred Hellenistic form (although the LXX did not use it), while the latter was the more Judaistic (de Young 1960:12). John consistently uses the Hebrew form in Revelation²² and in this case *τῆς καλυψῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ*. Jeremias (1974:275) accounts for such usage here and in Hebrews as follows: 'Beide Autoren hatten überhaupt keine Wahl, weil sie von der himmlischen (Hebr) bzw. eschatolgischen (Apk) Gottesstadt reden, für die nure die sakrale hebräische Namesform in Frage kam.'

²²The Gospel of John, however, uses *Ἱεροσόλυμα* twelve times exclusively. De Young (1960:13), assuming the traditional Johannine authorship, accounts for this distinction because 'this writer intentionally chose the first form for the earthly, and the other for the heavenly and eschatological city.'

Paul contrasts the earthly Jerusalem in slavery with the free Jerusalem that is above (Gal 4:26). Bruce (1982:221) comments, 'In our present text, just as ἡ νῦν Ἱερουσαλήμ is not primarily the geographical site, so ἡ ἄνω Ἱερουσαλήμ is not spatially elevated but is the community of the new covenant.' To bear the name of a city is to declare oneself as one of its citizen. Such a heavenly citizenship for believers is assumed by Paul (Philp 3:20). The writer of Hebrews tells his readers that they have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb 12:22; cf 11:10; 13:14). As in the Old Testament, Zion and Jerusalem are linked and the terms 'probably synonymous' (Ellingworth 1993:677). In contrast to the promise in Revelation, here 'This is not our author's perspective: the new Jerusalem has not yet come down to men, but in the spiritual realm they already have access to it' (Bruce 1964:375). Such participation is now possible for those who believe in Jesus because he is the bread who has come down from heaven (καταβαίνων ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; Jn 6:33, 41, 58). Unlike the nonbiblical writings, 'these two passages show no concern for the earthly Jerusalem as a city to be rebuilt, but are solely concerned with the heavenly Jerusalem' (Park 1995:136).

6.8.5.2 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Tobit 14:5 speaks of a restoration to the land of Israel, after which Jerusalem will be rebuilt in splendor and the temple in it. In an allegory of Israel's history found in 1 Enoch 89–90 Jerusalem is repeatedly referred to as a 'house.' In the messianic kingdom that ancient house will be transformed in 'a new house, greater and loftier than the first one' (90:29; cf TLevi 10:5). '[I]t is obvious that the "ancient house" and the "new house" are symbols of the old and the new Jerusalem which teaching is in line with that of the OT' (Park 1995:93). 1 Enoch 91:16 predicts, 'The first heaven shall depart and pass away; a new heaven shall appear.' Testament of Dan 5:12 makes an explicit reference: 'And the saints shall refresh themselves in Eden; the righteous shall rejoice in the New Jerusalem.' The Lord, the Holy One of Israel, will live and rule in their midst (v 13). Here the New Jerusalem is equated with an Edenic paradise.

4 Ezra 8:52 speaks of an age to come when a city is built (i.e., a new Jerusalem; cf 10:27), following the opening of paradise and the planting of the tree of life. This newly established city is Zion (10:44). In 2 Baruch 4 the Lord tells Baruch that the earthly Jerusalem will be delivered up temporarily (v 1) to be replaced by another city prepared from eternity at the time he decided to create paradise (vv 2–3a; cf 6:9; 32:2–5). This new Jerusalem was revealed to Adam before he sinned, as well as to Abraham and to Moses (4:3b–5). Park (1995:112) aptly summarizes:

'In many cases, due to the ambiguity of the extant expressions, we cannot ascertain whether Jerusalem/Zion is presented as descending from heaven as in Revelation or as a reconstruction of the earthly city, although in some cases the city has a copy in heaven, i.e., is pre-existent.'

6.8.5.3 The co-text of Old Testament literature

Jerusalem is found 660 times in the Old Testament; its synonym Zion 154 times (Fohrer 1971:7.319). David captured the city from the Jebusites and reigned there as king of the united monarchy of Israel and Judah for thirty-three years (2 Sm 5:5ff). He made the city his capital and called it the city of David. Jerusalem was not only the political center of the Jewish people but also its religious center. The ark of the covenant rested on Mount Zion (2 Sm 6:17–19) before Solomon built a temple to contain it (1 Ki 6:19). Jerusalem is identified numerous times as the place where God's name dwells (cf Dt 12:11; 1 Ki 9:3; Ps 74:7; Jer 3:17; 7:12). The complete history of the city can be found in any Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.

Of particular importance for our discussion is the place of a 'new' Jerusalem/Zion in the prophetic books, already determined to be a primary source for John's imagery (cf supra 2.5.2). For example, Dumbrell (1985:5) observes that 'Isaiah is dominated by Jerusalem imagery. The book's structure is...informed by Jerusalem orientated theology.' Chapters 1–39 describe the rejection of Jerusalem, chapters 40–66 its restoration. For her future reward Zion/Jerusalem is promised that 'he will call you a new name (τὸ ὄνομα τὸ καινὸν) which the Lord will name' (62:2). Park (1995:72–77) suggests three points regarding the restoration motif in Isaiah:

1. A new and glorified Jerusalem is presented as the world's center attracting all nations in the last days (2:1–5; 18:7; 59:20; 60:1–62:12).
2. The continuity of the new Jerusalem with the earthly, national capital is unclear; however, it seems to transcend the bounds of the earthly realm (51:3; 53:1, 7; 55:1–3). The life promised in the new heavens and new earth (65:17–25) is described with paradise motifs.
3. No distinction exists between Zion/Jerusalem as a city (i.e., a sacred space; 46:12–13; 52:1) and the saved community (i.e., a sanctified people; 51:16; 59:10). The two concepts are used interchangeably and simultaneously.

Park (:77) summarizes his finds: 'Although there is the impression of an unquestioned elevation of the historical Jerusalem as the place of God's special favor, it is superficial since *the idea of*

God's presence with his people is more important although it is depicted in Jerusalem language.' Park correctly elucidates an Isaianic emphasis likewise found in Revelation.

Historically the book of Ezekiel is written during the period of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (586 BC). Chapters 1–32 deal largely with the themes of judgment and destruction. Only in the final sixteen chapters does the hope of restoration appear. This hope centers on the rebuilding of a new temple described in chapters 40–48. The book closes with a revelation of the new name of the city where the temple resides, 'The LORD is there' (יהוה שמה; 48:35).

Zechariah 14:5–21 also gives a picture of a restored Jerusalem, which follows the defeat of the nations when the Lord himself comes.

6.8.6 Conclusion

To the Philadelphians a pillar would be a familiar metaphor for worthy persons. Being likened to a temple pillar would assure the victors of stability and permanence as they endure the coming hour of trial. As pillars, each believer is 'built permanently into its structure and bearing its proportion of responsibility for the maintenance of God's worship' (Tenney 1957:190). Their present worship was disrupted through strife with the Jewish community. 'To compensate for exclusion from the place of honour in the synagogue Christ promises them a place (as pillars) in God's temple' (Farrer 1964:80). Finally, as Swete (1909:57) astutely quips, 'a *λυχνία* may be removed (ii.6), but not a *στύλος*.'

The Pergamenes had been promised a new name written on a white stone (2:17); the Philadelphians are now promised names to be written on pillars, including the new name of Jesus. In the ancient world '[t]o know the name of a deity was to share his power—to be enabled to invoke him successfully, to enjoy a consequent security and protection' (Kiddle 1940:54). The victor is assured that he belongs to God, the heavenly city, and to Christ, and 'that he will everlastingly share in all the blessings and privileges of all three' (Hendrickson 1940:75). We have earlier seen that a name symbolizes the essential nature of a person. Wall (1991:85) aptly states that 'in this case, it indicates the identity of the community of current overcomers as the eschatological community that will experience transformed human existence at Christ's return.'

R H Gundry (1987:256) asserts about this promise: 'At 3:12 he presented Christ's promise to write on the overcomer—i.e., on the professing believer who proves to be genuine—the name of the New Jerusalem as well as the name of God and his own (i.e., Christ's) new name.' In other words, 'Christ identifies the New Jerusalem with the person who overcomes much as

he identifies his own person and that of God his Father with the overcomer.' Turner (1992:287) effectively responds, 'John does not mean to assert that the overcomer is the new Jerusalem but rather that the overcomer is associated with his or her ultimate destiny, the new Jerusalem, as well as with Christ and God.'

6.9 THE LAODICEAN PROMISE SAYING

6.9.1 The text

The final promise saying is found in 3:21: ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς καὶ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ. As in 2:7, δώσω here means to 'permit,' 'grant' (cf supra 5.2.1).

6.9.2 Another promise to eat?

In 3:20 Jesus promises the repentant Laodiceans that he will come in and eat with them. Gager (1975:56), quoting Schweitzer, believes this verse refers to a primitive form of an eschatological sacrament, which 'anticipated the return of Jesus and the messianic feast with him in the immediate future.' Wall (1991:87) denies the eucharistic imagery; 'rather it celebrates the restoration of fellowship.' However, both perspectives are possible because in the early church the most intimate picture of fellowship surrounded the Lord's supper (cf Ac 2:42ff).

What is the relationship between the promise to eat in verse 20 and the promise saying in verse 21? Beckwith (1919:492) states that here are brought together the two promises of eating with the Messiah and sharing his rule, as Luke 22:29–30 does also. He (:475) believes Revelation 3:20, along with 2:10 and 3:4, are examples of an eschatological promise being introduced 'before that connected with the formula ὁ νικῶν.' Charles (1920:1:100), however, suggests that verse 20 refers to repentance in the present; it is not eschatological and thus does not refer to the messianic banquet in chapter 19. Charles's perspective best accords with the function of the other coming sayings in the letters (cf supra 4.9.3). Jesus is presently at the door of the church, knocking and asking it to repent. If the Laodiceans heed his reproof and correction, Jesus promises to renew his spiritual presence with them at the Lord's table. Because verse 20 is not eschatological, it is not included in the Laodicean promise saying.

6.9.3 The divine throne

6.9.3.1 The context of local references

Most commentators see little evidence of a local reference in this promise. Brewer (1936:80) describes how in the ancient theaters the seats in the front row were often shaped like thrones. These would be occupied by city officials, leading officials, or priests. For example, the Ephesus theater had twelve thrones for accommodating dignitaries. The victors on their heavenly thrones would thus receive the honor and status accorded to those who occupied them in the Asian civic theaters. Such an association appears to have little warrant, although I agree with Brewer that many of the believers would be acquainted with Greek drama in the Asian theaters.

Hemer (1986:205–6) recalls the elevation of a citizen Zeno to the kingship of Cilicia in 39 BC and of Pontus in 36 as a reward for barring Laodicea's gates to the invading Labienus Parthicus in 40 (Strabo 14.2.24). Although the Zenoid family continued to play some role in the rule of Anatolia over the next century, its history is sketchy. The branch of the family that remained in Laodicea figures prominently on its coinage. Because the city produced a dynasty of kings who greatly influenced its character, Hemer (:206) sees the appropriateness of the promise of thrones to the Laodicean believers. Yet he rightly concedes that the application of this background is still questionable.

Perhaps another tack may be tried. *θρόνος* was used in 2:13 to describe Pergamum as the throne of Satan. The latter was interpreted (cf supra 1.5.3.4(d)) as related to the city's centrality in the emperor cult, the imperial government, and the commune of Asia. As a conventus city Laodicea was a secondary 'throne' in the province. The Romans had established textile factories there to manufacture the sleeved tunic (*dalmatica*) and the hooded cloak (*birrus*), making the city an economic center as well (Bonfante & Jaunzems 1988:3.1402). For the Laodicean church to be prospering to the degree it was, its members must have been well connected politically and economically. This preoccupation with influence and money was wreaking spiritual consequences.²³ The promise of authority in the messianic kingdom might well be a counterbalance to the temporal power upon which the church was now focused. Boring (1989:94) seems to have overestimated the Laodicean's spirituality. He thinks that their riches 'were probably not only or even primarily material riches but the spiritual riches enjoyed by Christians

²³Despite the shortfalls of the historical-prophetic interpretation, it is nevertheless apparent why people continue to be attracted to its perspective. The European/North American church, with its materialistic orientation and concern with temporal power, rings true as a type of the lukewarm Laodicean church.

who supposed they were already living in the fulfilled time of prophetic phenomena and spiritual bliss.' Such a realized eschatology does not appear to be the problem of the Laodiceans.

6.9.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Jesus is presently exalted on his heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father (Ac 5:31; Rm 8:34; Heb 4:16; 8:1; 12:2). At the renewal of all things Jesus will sit on his glorious throne. He promised the apostles that they too would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28; cf 1 Cor 6:2–3). From his throne in glory the Son of Man will judge the nations, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The criterion for his judgment is whether righteous works such as feeding the hungry or visiting the prisoner were done. The wicked are sent to eternal punishment while the righteous receive eternal life (Mt 25:31–46). The faithful saying written to Timothy in Ephesus has a remarkable thematic parallel: 'If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him' (2 Tm 2:11–12).

6.9.3.3 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Wisdom is said to be a co-adjudicator (παράδορον) on the throne (Wis 9:4). The Maccabean martyrs, who triumphed in the contest (ἀγῶν) through endurance, now stand around the divine throne living a blessed life (4Mac 17:18). Hellenistic writers, such as Josephus and Philo, did not speak of the throne of God, believing the concept to be too anthropomorphic (cf Schmitz 1965:3.163).

Among the writings of Palestinian Judaism 'ein Sitzen des Messias auf dem Thron der göttl. Herrlichkeit kennen nur die der vorchristl. Zeit angehörenden Bilderreden des Buches Henoch' (Strack-Billerbeck 1926:1.978). In 1 Enoch the Son of Man is seated on his glorious throne executing eschatological judgment on the unrighteous (45:3), the righteous (51:3), the fallen angels (55:4; 69:29), the holy angels (61:8), and the rulers and landlords (62:2–5). 1 Enoch closes with this promise: 'I shall bring them out into the bright light, those who have loved my holy name, and seat them each one by one upon the throne of his honor' (108:12). 4Q521 2.ii.7 promises that the Lord 'will honour the devout upon the throne of eternal royalty.'

6.9.3.4 The co-text of Old Testament literature

The throne was the most visible symbol of the power and authority of the earthly king. The two are closely linked in the Old Testament: 'as soon as he (Zimri) began to reign and was seated

on the throne...' (1 Ki 16:11; cf 2 Sm 14:9). The king could share his throne with his son (Ex 11:5; 2 Ki 21:1) or his mother (1 Ki 2:19), and co-regencies were a common feature of the southern kingdom (e.g., Asa/Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat/Jehoram, etc). By metonymy, the throne of David stands for the eternal dynasty promised by God to David (1 Chr 17:12–14; Pss 89:4, 29, 36; 132:11–12). The Messiah accedes to the throne of David when he comes (Is 9:7).

The Old Testament conception of the throne of God derives its imagery from the earthly throne, as seen in the juxtaposition of the two in 1 Kings 22:10 and 19 (cf Schmitz 1965:3.162). God declares that 'heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (Is 66:1). When Isaiah saw the Lord, he was seated on a throne in the heavenly temple (6:1). And when Ezekiel saw the glorious likeness of the Lord, he appeared to be seated on a throne of sapphire (1:26; 10:1).

The core of the whole issue is: the throne of God thus functions as an important symbol of the eschatological kingdom and judgment. At Israel's restoration Jerusalem will again become the throne of the Lord, where all nations will gather to worship him (Jr 3:17). In Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple God shows the prophet where his throne will sit forever in the midst of his holy people Israel (Ezk 43:7). In his night vision Daniel sees multiple thrones set up, with the Ancient of Days seating himself on a throne as the heavenly court opens the books (Dn 7:9–10). The vision's interpretation emphasizes that the saints are to receive a kingdom that they will possess forever (v 18). The court strips the fourth beast and its ten kings of their authority to blaspheme the Most High and to oppress the saints, who are at last given total sovereignty and power to rule in the everlasting kingdom (vv 23–27).

The clearest announcement of the messianic co-regency is found in Psalm 110:1: 'The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet".' D Kidner (1973:392) explains, 'King David speaks in the psalm as the prophet who declaims the enthronement oracle to the Messianic King.' This psalm, quoted by Jesus (Mt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42–43) and the basis of apostolic teaching on his exaltation and session (Ac 2:34–35; Eph. 1:20; Heb 1:13), is one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament.

6.9.4 Conclusion

The concept of messianic reign is articulated earlier in Revelation where the believers are declared to be 'a kingdom, priests to his God and Father' (1:6). Beckwith (1919:429) makes a likely proposal that 'The past tense in ἐποίησεν denotes what has been ideally or potentially accomplished in the act or purpose of God, while the actual realization is in the future.' The

promise to the Thyatiran church likewise concerns sharing Christ's future reign in the eschatological kingdom (cf Johnson 1981:12.459). Thus victory in the Laodicean promise, according to Roberts (1988:31), 'consists of partaking in the rule of the Lord who Himself has triumphed.'

The promise in Revelation is an extension of the one given to the apostles in Matthew 19:28 (cf Swete 1909:64). This scriptural background would no doubt be familiar to the Laodiceans. In Intertestamental literature the function of the throne is summed up in Wisdom 3:8: the righteous 'will judge the nations and have power over the peoples, and their Lord will reign forever.' In the Old Testament the image of the throne as the seat of judgment is found throughout, with Psalm 110:1 being a primary text.

U Vanni (1988:162) reiterates an important point made earlier (cf supra 5.2.2.1(a)): 'tra la vittoria e l'intronizzazione di Cristo e del cristiano c'è un nesso di dipendenza. La vittoria del cristiano è determinata dalla vittoria di Cristo, che sola la rende possibile.' The reward for Jesus' victory over death and the grave was to sit with his Father on the heavenly throne. A difference in rewards is articulated here: the victor is not said that he will share the throne with the Father.

Black (1976:140) believes the context here is forensic: 'the victory is that of one who shares Christ' "session" with God in heaven after the Judgement.' Collins (1995:144) qualifies this observation: 'The function of judgment is often associated with enthronement but is not necessarily implied.' Concerning this closing promise, E Lohmeyer (1953:40) states: 'Dieser Spruch verheißt die letzte und höchste Würde; er schließt so wirkungsvoll den Kranz der 7 Ueberwindersprüche wie der 7 Sendschreiben.' Whether or not the Asian churches would have seen this promise as an especially appropriate conclusion is unknown.

6.9.5 An epilogue to the seven letters?

Ramsay (1990:318) sees the final promise as part of an epilogue to the seven letters that begins in verse 19 because it 'has no apparent relation to their situation and character.' His conception of the letters as a literary composition demands that an epilogue complete them. Even Ramsay admits it is difficult to separate the Laodicean letter from the epilogue but uses the criterion of local reference to make that distinction. He argues that surely after such a sharp condemnation, 'it seems hardly consistent to give it the honor which is awarded to the true and courageous church of Philadelphia alone among the seven, and to rank it among those whom the author loves' (:318–19). Such specious reasoning precludes God's divine grace; it also fails

to see chiasmic emphasis on the subject of love in the first (2:4), fourth (2:19) and seventh (3:19) letters. We disagree with Ramsay that the promise in 3:21 is part of an epilogue but find it an integral part of the Laodicean letter.

Commentators have also debated the transitional character of the promise saying. Charles (1920:1.102) characterizes the transition to chapter 4 as 'an entire change of scene and subject. The dramatic contrast could not be greater.' On the other hand, Bauckham (1993b:6) proposes: 'Whereas the others are framed in terms appropriate to the church addressed, this last promise seems to be placed last, not because of any special appropriateness to the church at Laodicea, but rather because it anticipates chapter 5. Christ's own "conquest" and his consequent enthronement with his Father in heaven is what John sees announced and celebrated in chapter 5.' While we are unwilling to concede that the promise has no individual characteristics, it seems incontrovertible (contra Charles) that the promise functions as a transition to the rest of the book. Hence commentators who artificially divide the book at this point are mistaken. Williamson (1993:135) astutely observes that the promise 'provides a compact summary of some of the heart of Revelation's theology.' The thrust of the whole argument in the visionary John's mind is: the way to victory so as to join Jesus on the throne is to follow him. By willingly laying down his life Jesus became victorious and was then himself enthroned with the Father in heaven.

6.10 CONCLUSION

The key images of each promise saying have been presented. Crucial textual and grammatical matters were discussed. The relevant literary co-texts for each image were presented. All the images except the second death and the white stone had recognizable associations in biblical literature. For the white stone, traditions related to Jesus as the Stone/Rock were presented and a new solution proposed. Although the promise of the confession of a name has no Old Testament background, it clearly refers to a Jesus saying in Matthew. Most of these images were found in Intertestamental literature, usually within eschatological texts.

Clusters of images were found in certain texts in Intertestamental and Old Testament literature. Texts with three or more image clusters are presented next. There are three texts from Intertestamental literature that feature promise clusters—1 Enoch 90, 4 Ezra 8, and Ascension of Isaiah 9.

<u>1 Enoch 90</u>	<u>Ezra 8</u>	<u>Ascension of Isaiah 9</u>
Shepherd with a rod (v 18)	Paradise opened (v 52)	Robes (vv 9–11, 17–18, 24–26)
Throne (v 20)	Tree of life planted (v 52)	Crowns (vv 12, 18, 24–25)
Books opened (v 20)	City built (i e, New Jerusalem, v 52)	Thrones (vv 10–12, 18, 24–25)
Abyss of fire (v 24)	Death of unrighteous (v 58)	Books (v 22)
New house (i e, Jerusalem, v 29)		
New pillar (v 29)		
Snow-white (clothes, v 31)		

There are four Old Testament passages that feature promise clusters—Isaiah 60–62, Ezekiel 28, Daniel 7, and Zechariah 3–6.

<u>Isaiah 60–62</u>	<u>Ezekiel 28 LXX</u>	<u>Daniel 7</u>	<u>Zechariah 3–6</u>
Morning star (60:3)	Crown (v 12)	Thrones (v 9)	Rich garments (3:4)
Garments (61:3, 10)	Paradise (v 13)	White garments (v 9)	Inscribed stone (3:9)
New name (62:2)	Stone (v 13)	Books opened (v 10; cf 12:1)	Crown (6:11)
Crown (61:3; 62:3)	Holy mountain (i e, Zion, v 14)	Authority over nations (v 14)	
Jerusalem established (62:7)			

Additional promise imagery is found in these documents because of their prophetic and apocalyptic nature. However, these charts focus on the promise clusters in particular texts.

Promise images recur within the seven letters and are presented on the next chart.

<u>Image</u>	<u>Ephesus</u>	<u>Smyrna</u>	<u>Pergamum</u>	<u>Thyatira</u>	<u>Sardis</u>	<u>Philadelphia</u>	<u>Laodicea</u>
Life	2:7 (tree)	2:10 (crown)			3:5 (book)		
Crown		2:10				3:11	
Garments					3:4, 5		3:18
Death		2:10, 11		2:23			
Name	2:3		2:13, 17		3:1, 4, 5	3:8, 12	
Star	2:1			2:28	3:1		
Throne			2:13				3:21

The significance of this observation relates to the question of local references. Because images

like 'crown,' 'new name,' and 'white garments' are used in more than one letter, this diminishes the likelihood of a local reference in these cases. It does not exclude one either; for example, both Sardis and Laodicea were textile centers and familiar with garment production. The images related to local references were either generic or familiar enough to the other churches that the entire Asian audience could understand the references in the letters. Thus U Müller (1984:94) can write regarding each promise, 'Es geht nicht mehr um die Glieder dieser oder jener Gemeinde, sondern um die Überwinder in der kirche überhaupt.'

Minear (1968:60) observes that each reward involving a share in Jesus' power (e g, rod, throne) 'links its recipient to God so that an unbroken communion is established from the lowest participant to the highest. This communion clearly provides the essentials of life: food, clothing, home, name, security, power.' Such essentials, more or less, are presently being denied the believers in every church except Laodicea. Minear's list of essentials suggests the possibility of classifying the promise images in three areas—provision, place, and person. These are outlined in the following chart.

<u>Provision</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Person</u>
Tree of life	Paradise of God	Hidden manna
Crown of life (no second death)	Pillar in the temple	White stone?
White stone?	New Jerusalem	New name
Shepherd the nations		Morning star
White garments		Divine names
Book of life		
Confession of name		
Divine throne		

Concerning the provision images, we can relate only those of shepherd the nations and divine throne directly to ruling.

The phenomenon of restating the same promise using different images is particularly seen regarding immortality. The characterization by Mealy (1992:170) that these are all promises of eternal life is too broad. However, the images of tree of life, crown of life, second death, book of life, and confession of name all assure the victor of the same reality—eternal life in the new Jerusalem. Roloff (1993:237) suggests that 'in the final analysis in these promises the important matter is not receiving certain gifts from God but rather the relationship to God himself, the giver of all gifts.' Yet this is not the case, given that the preponderance of the images relate to

the victor's spiritual provisions in the heavenly kingdom. This emphasis is seen even more if the images of the pillar in the temple as well as the new Jerusalem and divine names, both to be written on the victor, are shifted to the first column (they could be placed in either).

A crucial and fundamental question which should be asked here is: Would the promises at their original hearing in the opening letters be understood by the Asian audiences? Charles (1.44-45) thinks not, 'The endings would in many respects be incomprehensible but for the later chapters, to which in thought and diction they are most intimately related, and apart from which they would be all but inscrutable enigmas.' This assessment is certainly true regarding several of the images. But, as we have demonstrated, most of the images were familiar enough to the believers that they could be largely comprehended. Regarding the audience's recognition of such imagery, Mealy (1992:82n2) well states, 'This is not to claim that they would necessarily be unfamiliar with the term or its significance, but only that they would be forced to wait to see exactly how it would be developed *in Revelation*' (my emphasis—MWW). This development in Revelation is the subject of the next chapter on the fulfillment of the promises.

CHAPTER 7: THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROMISE SAYINGS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 6 the promise sayings were examined within the context of the seven letters. This chapter surveys the development of the promise themes in the rest of Revelation, culminating with their fulfillment in chapters 19–22. We, like the original audience, encounter a plethora of promise imagery after the seven letters in chapters 2–3. Such imagery is there for a reason, according to Fekkes (1994:92): 'The expectation of this future consummation and renewal is kept alive in earlier parts of the book by John's strategic placement of eschatological "reminders".' Were these promises merely vain pines in a very bleak sky? We will demonstrate that the fulfillments relate fundamentally to the integrity and trustworthiness of Jesus' promises to the Asian believers, especially those encountering severe tribulation.

John's frequent use of *intratextuality* reminds us that the primary grid for interpreting Revelation is the book itself. Because of this, reference to outside literary sources will be minimal in this chapter. In Chapters 6 and 7 the promises and their fulfillments are organized in a specific sequence which stems from the hermeneutical concept of *co-textuality*. This should minimize the need to provide continual cross references between the chapters. Fekkes (1994:92) aptly summarizes, 'Thus, the manifestation of divine renewal and reward outlined in Rev. 21.1–22.5 was already presupposed in the promises of chs. 2–3....These promises serves as a preview to the main presentation and development of salvation oracles in Revelation 21–22.' While disagreeing with Fekkes's demarcations in the final chapters, we concur that a unique relationship exists between the two sections. Before examining these fulfillments, we must first look at a final promise given in Revelation's closing chapters.

7.2 A FINAL PROMISE SAYING

7.2.1 The text

A final promise saying resembling the promise sayings in Revelation 2–3 is found in section B'. This is 'an eighth promise that completes and in effect embraces the rest' (Swete 1909:281).¹

¹Beasley-Murray (1978:313) likewise states that 'The promises to the conquerors, declared in the seven letters in chapters 2–3, therefore find their summary expression at this point.'

This final victor saying is found in 21:6–7: ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν. ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός. Apart from a missing hearing formula, it is similar to the promises in chapters 2–3. The characteristic δώσω and ὁ νικῶν are found. In the Ephesian and Pergamene letters the dative participle τῷ νικῶντι was used to begin the promises; here τῷ διψῶντι is used. The seven letters do not contain an explicit promise of living water. Here the victor who is thirsty for God will be allowed to drink freely from the spring of the water of life. This promise is repeated under the image of inheritance as God's son in verse 7. Thus 'the thirst for God will be satisfied in the relation of perfect sonship with God' (Beckwith 1919:752). Mealy (1992:263) identifies the thirst here as 'not so much a symbol of their *desire* for God as it is emblematic of their *weary condition*, which is the result of earthly faithfulness.' However, it is surely the victor's desire for God that sustains him or her through persecution (cf Mt 5:6).

It is introduced by the epithets, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.' In 1:8 'Alpha and Omega' is also used as an epithet for the Lord God Almighty. Fekkes (1994:262) comments, 'The promise follows the same structural pattern as the eschatological rewards of the letters (Rev. 2–3), except that here God is the speaker.' But can Jesus be ruled out definitively as the speaker? 'Beginning' (ἀρχὴ) is likewise an epithet for Christ in the Laodicean letter (3:14). Both God and the Lamb occupy the same heavenly throne in 22:3. And the similar declaration containing the epithets 'Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End' is repeated in 22:13, but here Jesus is clearly the speaker. Beasley-Murray (1978:338–39) rightly observes, 'Accordingly as judge of the world the Christ claims the divine title affirmed by the Lord God Almighty in 1:8.' Jesus can do this because he shares God's nature. The change of language from 'father' to 'God' (cf *infra* 7.2.3.1) suggests that ambiguity concerning the speaker's identity is deliberately introduced.

The new Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth and the victors' place there are briefly introduced in the opening verses of chapter 21. But before the heavenly city can be described more fully, the Asian audience is once again confronted with a choice. With which city are they going to align themselves—Babylon/Rome or the new Jerusalem? 'Each has its inhabitants and its destiny. Those who drink from salvation's springs supplied by God himself are true followers of Christ' (Johnson 1981:12.594). The fate of the sinners is spelled out in verse 8; their promise is the water of the second death—the lake of fire.

7.2.2 The spring of the water of life

7.2.2.1 The co-text of Revelation

In 7:16–17 the multitude out of the great tribulation is told that they will never again thirst. For the Lamb shepherding them ὀδιψήσκει αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ ζωῆς πηγᾶς ὑδάτων (v 17). During the judgments of the trumpets (8:10–11), the two witnesses (11:6), and the bowls (16:4–5), the earthdwellers are deprived of their water supply. They instead become intoxicated on the wine of the prostitute (17:2). 'Perhaps a contrast is intended with those who drink from the golden cup full of the wine of impure passion (17:4; 18:3) offered men by the great harlot' (Ladd 1972:279).

The promise in 21:6 is repeated in contracted form in 22:17: καὶ ὁ διψῶν ἔρχέσθω, ὁ θέλων λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν. John invites those who are thirsty and willing to come and partake freely of the water of life. The threefold invitation to 'Come' begins with that of the Spirit and the bride. The Spirit is always mentioned in connection with the hearing sayings in Revelation 2–3. Here it is no different, and what follows is a modified hearing saying, καὶ ὁ ἀκούων εἰπάτω, Ἔρχου (cf supra 4.12).

Charles (1920:2.180) believes these ἔρχου sayings are directed 'to the world of men that were still thirsting for life and truth or were willing to accept them.' This identification seems improbable because of the interplay between Jesus' threefold announcement 'I am coming soon' (22:7, 12, 20) and the threefold invitation 'Come' (vv 17, 20). The object of the invitation is specifically identified in verse 20, 'Come, *Lord Jesus*.'

7.2.2.2 The context of local references

The image of water is considered to be particularly significant in the Laodicean letter. Because they are neither hot nor cold but lukewarm, Jesus is going to spit them out of his mouth (3:15–16). The travertine hot springs at Hierapolis, in view six miles north of Laodicea, are mentioned both by Strabo (13.4.4) and Vitruvius (8.3.10). Colossae, about ten miles to the east, was known for its cold pure waters. Laodicea, on the other hand, received its water supply through an aqueduct, whose source lie in some warm springs near the modern city of Denizli. This water arrived in the city lukewarm, and its high mineral content made it petrifying (cf Strabo 13.4.14). Hemer (1986:186–91) gives a notable summary of the water situation in Laodicea. Rudwick and Green (1957–58:178) convincingly suggest that lukewarmness is not a reference to believers who lack zeal or are halfhearted, but rather to those whose works are barren and

ineffective. For the Laodiceans who were spiritually parched but did not know it, this final promise to quench their thirst would have been especially significant.

7.2.2.3 The co-text of New Testament literature

The saying in Revelation 21:6 and its couplet in 22:17 echo a familiar word of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel: Ἐάν τις διψᾷ ἐρχέσθω πρὸς με καὶ πινέτω. ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, καθὼς εἶπεν ἡ γραφή, ποταμοὶ ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας αὐτοῦ ρέουσιν ὕδατος ζῶντος (Jn 7:37–38; cf 6:35). Mealy (1992:260) notes that determining a specific Old Testament antecedent for these two ‘thirst’ passages in Revelation ‘is somewhat complicated by the possibility that John is adopting the conventional vocabulary of a living water tradition which was already current in Johannine circles.’

Because Jesus’ invitation to drink in John 7:37–38 is directed to thirsty unbelievers, Beasley-Murray (1978:346) believes the invitation to drink in Revelation likewise ‘is extended to any who have not yet responded to the appeal of Christ in the gospel.’ Such an identification is problematic, however. The synonyms—bride, hearer,² and thirsty—are all names used earlier in Revelation for the faithful victors and not for unbelievers.³ Wall (1991:268) rightly identifies one audience as immature believers who have compromised their faith. He points to a similar interplay in James between an invitation for Christ to return and for backslidden believers to return to God: ‘The imminence of the Lord’s parousia (James 5:7–9) provides incentive to bring back those believers who “wander from the truth” (James 5:19), since they will be saved from the eschatological consequences of “a multitude of sins” (James 5:20).’

The reference to water here makes explicit a possible inference of the meaning of ‘white stone’ discussed earlier (cf supra 6.5.3.3). There the tradition of the rock as a source of living water, which Jesus develops in John 6–7, was examined. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:100) notes that ‘Whereas the author of Rev. understands it [‘living water’ or ‘water of life’] as an image for eschatological salvation...the Fourth Gospel clearly understands the metaphor in a christological sense....’ Such a marked dichotomy cannot be sustained. For in John’s Gospel living water is likewise a soteriological image (cf 4:10–15), whereas in Revelation rock as a source of water may be a Christological image.

²The reference to the hearers in 22:17–18 again forms a chiasmic frame with the initial mention in 1:3. This reiterates that the same Asian audience is in view throughout the prophecy.

³Didache 10:6 likewise exhorts, ‘If anyone is holy, let him come (ἐρχέσθω); if anyone is not, let him repent.’

7.2.2.4 The co-text of Intertestamental literature

Enoch sees a fountain of righteousness that never becomes depleted and is surrounded by many other fountains of wisdom. 'All the thirsty ones drink (of the water) and become filled with wisdom' (1En 48:1). Ode of Solomon 30:1–2 invites, 'Fill for yourselves water from the living spring of the Lord, because it has been opened for you. And come all you thirsty and take a drink, and rest beside the spring of the Lord' (cf 6:8–18).

7.2.2.5 The co-text of Old Testament literature

Water and thirst are familiar Old Testament metaphors for spiritual life. The psalmist declares that all the righteous will drink from God's river, because with him is the fountain of life (Ps 36:8–9; πηγὴ ζωῆς, 35:10 LXX). Barrett (1978:327) sees a probable indirect allusion here and in 22:17 to Isaiah 55:1, οἱ διψῶντες, πορεύεσθε ἐφ' ὕδωρ...καὶ πίετε ἄνευ ἀργυρίου. Although Mealy (1992:260–61) believes that use of the verb διψᾶω in these passages is not distinctive enough to confirm an allusion to Isaiah 55:1, he contends, however, that the use of δωρεάν = ἄνευ ἀργυρίου (בלוֹא כֶסֶף) 'is most significant and changes the character of the allusion from possible to probable' (:261). John uses Isaiah's water metaphor to symbolize the restored covenant between the victors, the new remnant Israel, and God (cf Wall 1991:248). Joel 3:18 declares that on the day of the Lord a spring (πηγὴ; 4:18 LXX) will flow out of the house of the Lord. Both Ezekiel (47:1ff) and Zechariah (14:8) see waters of life flowing out of the eschatological Jerusalem. These depictions of life-giving waters are hyperboles, according to Stuart (1989:412), used 'as a symbolic depiction of the coming age of abundance.'

7.2.3 Inherit all things as God's son

7.2.3.1 The co-text of Old Testament literature

The words ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός closely parallel those spoken to David through the prophet Nathan: ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν (2 Sm 7:14). Here David is told that God will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (v 14). Further, 'because of its typological use in 2 Corinthians 6:18 and Hebrew 1:5, v. 14a has long been considered messianic in a Christological sense' (Youngblood 1992:3.891). Anderson (1989:122) suggests that the father-son terminology may be an adoption formula based on a

legal covenant. Such covenant language is found in similar divine promises to Abraham (Gn 17:7–8) and to Solomon (2 Chr 7:14).

The term 'father' in 2 Samuel is replaced by 'God' in Revelation. This change of idiom for God is required 'when John transfers the messianic formula from Christ to Christ's bride' (Wall 1991:248). To John, Jesus alone has the right to regard God as Father (cf Ps 2:7; Heb 1:5). Beasley-Murray (1978: 313–14) aptly summarizes, 'Believers are God's sons, but derivatively through their relation to the Christ, who is the unique Son of the Father.'

7.2.3.2 The co-text of New Testament literature

Paul also speaks of the relationship between the heavenly Father and his adopted sons and daughters (2 Cor 6:18). V P Furnish (1984:374) comments, 'Here and in Rev 21:7 it is cited as a promise that those who are faithful to God's will shall know him as their father.' Paul likewise speaks of their inheritance: 'Since you are a son, then also an heir through God' (Gl 4:7). He shares a similar sentiment in Romans 8:17, 'If we are sons, then also heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.' The single usage of κληρονομέω in Revelation where the word has the same reference as these texts 'is one indication among many of the radical agreement between St John and St Paul' (Swete 1909:281).

7.2.4 Conclusion

The promise of the water of life complements the earlier 'life' promises—tree of life (2:7), crown of life (2:10), and book of life (3:5). These 'life' metaphors emphasize that quality of life will be a hallmark of the new Jerusalem. The divine promise to quench the thirst of the saints (7:16; 21:6) is here realized. Does this promise apply only to the right to drink from the spring of living water? The promise to inherit all things (ταῦτα) seems to be broader. Johnson (1981:12.594) believes the victor 'will inherit all the new things of the city of God,' that is, everything described in verses 1–4. Mounce (1977:374) suggests that 'all this' refers to the promises in chapters 2–3; they are 'the inheritance of those who remain constant in their faith during the period of final testing.' As we have found, each of these fulfillments points to a similar spiritual reality. These rewards follow the reward of the unrighteous—second death in the lake of fire—described immediately before (20:11–15). The victors are promised an inheritance because they are sons of God. Given the repeated emphasis on deeds in the seven letters, it is noteworthy here that only

the deeds of the unrighteous are mentioned (21:8). Instead the relationship between God and his children is highlighted.

7.3 THE EPHESIAN FULFILLMENT

7.3.1 The tree of life

Three references to the tree of life are found in chapter 22—verses 2, 14, 19. These verses will be discussed in turn around the specific themes which they address. Nicol (1983:136) recalls that the tree of life in Genesis 3, guarded by the cherubim and the flaming sword, symbolizes a threat: 'In Rev 22, however, the image is of free access to the tree of life....[and] symbolizes a promise.'

7.3.1.1 The location of the tree

The first reference (v 2) mentions the location and purpose of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem: ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα, κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδιδούν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἔθνων. In verse 1 John is shown a river of the water of life proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. Charles (1920:2.175) observes that 'it is noteworthy that no spiritual significance is attached to this river here, whereas the tree of life (xxii.2) is full of significance in this respect.' Yet earlier Charles (:1.55) made a careful distinction between the tree of life and the water of life: 'The latter is a free gift (xxii. 17, xxi. 6), given without money and without price to every one that thirsteth for it. It symbolizes the divine graces of forgiveness and truth and light, etc. (cf. vii. 17). If a man is faithful to the obligations entailed by these graces he becomes a victor (νικῶν) in the battle of life, and thus wins the right to eat of the tree of life.' We agree and believe the river seen by John *is* spiritually significant: it contains the water of life promised in 21:6.

Whether the words ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν should be construed with verse 1 or 2 is debated. If with verse 1 the phrase ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν has a prepositional force (cf Dn 12:5 Th; Jos 8:33); if with verse 2 the words function as adverbs (Ex 26:13; Ezk 47:7; cf Charles 1920:1.176). Beckwith (1919:765) prefers to link with verse 1, referring to the waters 'proceeding out...in the midst of the street thereof.' The rivers thus run down the street, lined on both sides with trees of life. Swete (1909:299), however, prefers to align with verse 2, translating 'between the street of the city and the river, on this side and on

that.' The river flows across the broad street intersecting the city, each bank lined with a row of trees. Beasley-Murray (1978:331) suggests a third option, 'In the midst of the city's street stands a single tree, the tree of life, *situated between either side of the river*, which at this point has diverged into two branches.' Since the city's street is earlier described as made of pure gold, like transparent glass (21:21), the view that places the river in the street seems most problematic.⁴

The image appears to be drawn from Ezekiel 47:12: καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἀναβήσεται ἐπὶ τοῦ χείλους αὐτοῦ ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν πᾶν ξύλον βρώσιμον. In his vision Ezekiel first sees the waters flowing from the temple (v 1), then into its courts and the city (v 2) before moving beyond the eastern gate (v 3). There is no mention of a street, and multiple fruit trees are growing on both banks of the river. Through Ezekiel's influence, Charles (1920:2.176) suggests that 'our author departs here from the conception of a single tree of life as in Gen. ii.9, iii.22; I Enoch xxiv.4, xxv.4–6.' Tree of life is thus used collectively. Hendrickson (1940:206) takes this collective sense a step further—'the city is full of rivers of life. It is also full of parks containing trees of life.' In 4 Ezra 2:18 the single tree of life likewise becomes twelve trees, each loaded with various fruits. But given its function in Revelation as the antitype of the tree in Eden and the two subsequent references that suggest a singular use like in the Ephesian promise, the tree of life should be regarded as one, not many (cf 1 En 24:4).⁵

Because the difficulty of the grammar precludes a definitive translation, perhaps a commonsensical reading should be adopted which preserves the image of a single tree: 'in between the street and the river, along the side of each, stood the tree of life.' A reading similar to this has been proposed by Delebecque (1988). He argues that the best translation for ἐν μέσῳ A καὶ B, where A and B are genitives, is 'between A and B' (:128; cf Xenophon *An* 2.2.3). Comparing the adverbial expression ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν to a similar one in John 19:18, he suggests the location of the tree should be in relation to the river and the street. His proposed translation reads: 'Au milieu, entre son esplanade et le fleuve, en venant d'ici et en venant de là, un Bois de vie' (:129).⁶

⁴If the river does in fact flow down the street, the words of the popular hymn promising that Christians will walk on streets of gold must be corrected to say they will swim over streets of gold.

⁵The thought of the prophecy from *Barnabas* 6:13 is appropriate here: 'He made a second creation in the last days. And the Lord says: "Behold, I make the last things as the first".'

⁶My translation was composed before I discovered Delebecque's article, thus corroborating my own conclusion.

7.3.1.2 The purpose of the tree

In 22:2 the purpose of the tree of life is given—to bear twelve fruit, one each month. The clause *κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδίδου τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ* renders freely the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 47:12 *לְחַרְשׁוֹ יִבְכֵר*, where the Septuagint has *τῆς καινότητος αὐτοῦ πρωτοβολήσει*. Charles (1920:2.177) sees this as further evidence of John's independent usage of the Hebrew text. The number twelve is used repeatedly in chapter 21 to speak of gates (vv 12, 21), angels and tribes (v 12), foundations and apostles (v 14), and pearls (v 21). The city is a cube measuring 12,000 stadia. The reference to twelve fruit in 22:2 is the final use of twelve and 'seems to indicate that the provisions of the city for the nurture of its people are adequate. Just as its people are twelve, so is its capacity to sustain the life of those people' (Turner 1992:289). The tree of life with its continuous fruit-bearing epitomizes the transformation in the new order by forgoing the seasonal cycles of seedtime and harvest (Ec 3:2).

The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, an image probably drawn from Ezekiel 47:12 (cf 4 Ez 7:123; ApMos 6:2). The Hebrew *וְעִלְהוּ לְחַרְפָּה* is again followed rather than the Septuagint *ἀνάβασις αὐτῶν εἰς ὑγίαιαν*. When John speaks of healing here, Ladd (1972:288) is surely correct in his observation that 'we are not to think of nations of men living on the new earth in the age to come who will need healing from pain, sickness, and dying. The contrast is between this age, inhabited by suffering and dying peoples, and the age to come.' Freedom from sickness and pain has already been promised (21:4). Thus the imagery of abundant fruit and medicinal leaves symbolizes the far-reaching effects of Christ's death among the redeemed (cf Johnson 1981:12.599).

The nations, according to Mulholland (1990:331), are 'a consistent image for the realm in opposition to New Jerusalem.' These nations were destroyed by the smiting of Jesus (19:15) at the battle of Gog and Magog (20:8; cf 16:14). Now in the New Jerusalem the nations have been transformed—populated by victors who walk by the light of the glory of God (21:24; cf Tob 14:6–7). The victors were seen proleptically as those redeemed from every nation (5:10; 7:9). The kings of the earth bring the splendor of their nations into it (21:24). Du Rand (1988:81) reflects that 'It is odd for kings to bring glory when the kings of the earth were relegated to the lake of fire (cf 19:11–26; 20:1–15).' These kings are again the victors whose previously announced kingdom is finally realized and who will reign forever and ever (1:6; 5:10; 22:5; cf Kiddle 1940:439). This understanding goes against du Rand's (1988:82) view that 'the kings who were once enemies in chapter 16 and 19 become worshippers in chapter 21.'

This perspective that the healing of the nations means their conversion is likewise held by Bauckham (1993a:238–336), who believes the universalistic hope of the Old Testament prophets, yet unrealized, is taken up by John. 'It will not be Israel alone that will be God's people with whom he dwells. It will not even be the eschatological Israel, redeemed from every nation. Rather, as a result of the witness of the church called from every nation, all nations will be God's people' (:311). Bauckham cites the account of the two witnesses (typifying the church) as an example *par excellence* of such a conversion. Following the miraculous resurrection and ascension of the witnesses (11:11–12) and a destructive earthquake (v 13), the nations became fearful and gave glory to the God of heaven. 'In 11:13 we see that what judgments alone failed to effect (9:20–21), the witness of the two witnesses does effect' (:279). However, Kiddle (1940:206) issues a strong rebuttal:

But this is not what it seems; John does not share the optimism of Isaiah and the psalmists. In fact, he knows that the great mass of mankind will have committed the unpardonable crime of deifying evil. They will have pledged themselves to the cause of Satan, and damned themselves eternally (xiii. 8, 14, xiv. 9–11). In these circumstances, there is no question of any general 'conversion' of mankind in the last days. Men give *glory to the God of heaven* when it is too late for their own salvation—when they are compelled by overriding terror to recognize that the true Lord is Christ and not Antichrist. Remorse and not repentance is their condition. The scene should be compared with that in vi. 15–17, where the terror of men is equally an acknowledgment that at last they have understood God's omnipotence and the approach of inexorable judgment.

Jesus, at the conclusion of the Olivet discourse, likewise speaks of a judgment of the nations at the parousia (Mt 25:31–46). As the nations are gathered before his throne, Jesus separates the righteous from the unrighteous, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Although the people are first gathered collectively in nations, they are judged individually on the basis of their works. The wicked receive eternal punishment, while the righteous go to eternal life (v 46). Blomberg (1992:379) comments, 'The upshot here, then, as with the culmination of all Scripture in Rev 20–22, is to assert that ultimately there will only be two kinds of people in the world. These will be distinguished on the basis of their response to the gospel and its emissaries, and their eternal destinies will be as distinct as is conceivable.' Revelation 21:27 substantiates this: no abominator or liar among the nations shall enter the city except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Giblin (1991:193) astutely observes that John never attempts to resolve the interplay between human free will and God's grace. 'Nevertheless, the promises to the "victor" enunciated in the seven proclamations to the Churches and the "inheritance" (a gracious gift) promised to the "victor" in 20:7 suppose that the apparent duality does not entail a dichotomy.'

7.3.1.3 A blessing

The second reference (22:14) is found in the midst of the seventh and final beatitude: Blessed are those who wash their robes ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς. The mixture of constructions—the future after ἵνα—is frequent in Revelation (3:9; 6:4, 11; 9:5, 20; 13:12, 14:13). Swete (1908: 307–8) comments, ‘And if it is to be distinguished in meaning from the conjunctive, it may point to the certainty, the actuality, of the result, while the conjunctive suggests that there are conditions which must be fulfilled first.’

The close relationship between the promises and the beatitudes was noted previously (cf supra 4.9.6). Their purpose in Revelation is very similar. Here in the midst of the description of the New Jerusalem is a hortative reminder to the Asian believers to purify themselves lest they be unable to enter the city and partake of the tree of life. Hatfield (1987:166) fittingly mentions, ‘Access to the tree of life in the holy city is a measure of divine forgiveness that expresses the full delight of paradise’ The authority to partake of the tree, denied after the Fall, is now restored by Jesus to those who live in faith and righteousness.

7.3.1.4 A curse

The final mention of the tree of life (22:19) is found in the prophetic curse (cf supra 1.2.4.6) that closes the book. The reading of the King James version here, ‘book of life,’ has absolutely no manuscript support. It follows the Textus Receptus based on Erasmus’ reconstruction of the Greek text which follows the Vulgate (cf Johnson 1981:12.603n). Those who take away from, that is, distort or minimize, the words of John’s prophecy, God will take away his share (τὸ μέρος) in the tree of life and in the holy city. This is the third and final use of μέρος as part of fulfillment imagery. The beatitude in 20:6 declares that the blessed are those who have a share in the first resurrection. Benedict (1966:9) makes this association: ‘μέρος is the same word used by the Lord in John 13:8 in reference to *fellowship*. The thought is similar in Revelation 22:19.’

At the Fall humanity lost access to the tree of life and received the curse of death (Gn 3:22), perhaps alluded to by the difficult term κατάθεμα (22:3). The share of the tree—the right to live forever—promised to the believers contrasts with that share of the lake of fire and brimstone—the second death—consigned to the unbelievers (21:8; cf Mt 24:51; Lk 12:46). This warning is addressed to his opponents in the Asian churches, such as the Nicolaitans and the followers of Jezebel (cf Kiddle 1940:457). Whatever opposition they might muster is tempered with a fear

that resistance to John's prophetic authority may well result in eternal exclusion from the new Jerusalem.

7.3.2 The paradise of God

The phrase 'paradise of God' is not found again in Revelation. Even though the word 'paradise' is not used in these latter chapters, Jeremias (1967:5.770) believes 'the garden of God is in Rev. the epitome of the glory of the consummation. The Jerusalem of the last time is depicted as Paradise when ref. is made to the trees of life by the water of life (22:1 f., cf. 14, 19), to the destruction of the old serpent (20:2 cf. 10), and to freedom from suffering, affliction and death (21:4).' He lists a number of paradise motifs found in the Old Testament (:5.767n15). These are correlated with similar motifs in Revelation 20–22.

<u>Paradise motif</u>	<u>Revelation</u>	<u>Old Testament</u>
Great fruitfulness	22:2	Hs 2:24; Am 9:13; Is 7:15; Jl 3:18
Abundant water	21:6; 22:1, 17	Is 35:1–2, 6–7; 41:18–19; Ez 47:1–12; Ps 46:4; Zch 14:8
Peace between the nations	21:24–26	Is 2:4; 9:6; Mi 5:9–10
Peace between animals		Is 11:6–7; 65:25
Peace between men and animals		Is 11:8; cf Hs 2:20
Longevity	20:6; 22:5	Is 65:20, 22
No disease	21:4; 22:2	Zch 8:4
No death	20:14; 21:4	Is 25:8; 26:19
Fellowship with God	21:3, 7; 22:3	Hs 2:21–22; Jr 31:31–34

All the paradise motifs identified by Jeremias are found in chapters 20–22 except those involving animals. This omission is inexplicable except that perhaps John failed to see animals as part of the new earth and he therefore reinterprets the Isaianic prophecies. Regarding this issue, Young (1965:1.391) suggests that animals in the new order are 'no longer are at enmity one with another, because evil has departed from men.' Dispensationalists (cf Martin & Martin 1983:65) see this transformation of the animal kingdom occurring during the millennium, but this is unlikely because their scenario still envisions sin upon the earth during the thousand years. Only after the thousand years following the arrival of the New Jerusalem will paradise be established (cf Dumbrell 1985:31). It is the aggregate of motifs that describe the heavenly city, not the specific phrase, that fulfills the promise of paradise, for it heralds the advent of the age of paradise (cf Kiddle 1940:442).

7.3.3 Conclusion

To interpret the fulfillments of the promises in each letter, we must recognize the multivalence of the imagery. The predominance of the chiliastic method of interpretation in the early church shows that these images were taken literally. 'They believed that, when Christ returned to earth, Christians who had died would rise from the grave and inherit an earthly paradise together with believers who were alive' (Wainwright 1993:23). From the perspective of the first hearers then, it is likely the promises would not just be interpreted metaphorically or spiritually.

For example, Ladd (1972:41) suggests that the tree of life 'is a biblical way of expressing the promise of eternal life in the consummated Kingdom of God,' while paradise describes 'the dwelling place of God' and is 'equivalent to the heavenly Jerusalem.' Yet the antitype of the tree of life in the paradise of God in Genesis suggests that the Ephesian audience would anticipate some tangible expression of a similar reality in the eschaton. Renewed spiritual life through the Holy Spirit had been experienced by the congregation. Yet the complete expression of that now lay ahead. The fruit produced each month by the tree is to be consumed by the nations for their healing. Since Jesus ate food while in his resurrection body (Lk 24:42–43; Jn 21:13–15), it was perhaps reasonable for the audience to expect some sort of heavenly repast like this and manna to feast on at the heavenly banquet.

While paradise is not specifically mentioned in the new Jerusalem, the concept is conveyed effectively through the numerous motifs from the Old Testament that suggest the heavenly city is a paradise. The original garden of Eden, lost in the Fall, is regained in a garden city given as the new and eternal home of the victors. Gundry (1987:264) fittingly summarizes, 'As often in apocalyptic, *Endzeit* recaptures *Urzeit*.'

7.4 THE SMYRNEAN FULFILLMENT

7.4.1 The crown of life

The crown or wreath (στέφανος) is mentioned seven other times in Revelation. The Philadelphians are told to hold on so they might receive their crown (3:11). The twenty-four elders seated on thrones wear golden crowns (4:4) and later lay them around the heavenly throne as they worship its occupant (4:10). The rider on the first horse (6:2) likewise wears a crown in his conquering role as a false Christ, and the locusts of the fifth trumpet have golden crowns upon their

heads (9:7). The celestial woman of 12:1 wears a crown of twelve stars. Finally, the Son of Man seated on the white cloud is wearing a golden crown (14:14).

Another headdress called a diadem is found in the New Testament only in Revelation. Some English translations (e.g., NIV) fail to distinguish between the two and translate *διάδημα* as 'crown' also. In 12:3 the dragon wears seven diadems, in 13:1 the beasts wears ten diadems on his horns, and in 19:12 Jesus mounted on his white horse has many diadems on his head. The diadem was always the sign of ancient royalty, and in Revelation 'it symbolizes respectively the empire of "the dragon," "the beast," and of the royal Christ' (Purves 1898:1.604). Trench (1883:115) questions whether crown in the Smyranean promise is the diadem of royalty or the garland of victory. He chooses the former while acknowledging that *στέφανος* is seldom used in this sense. John's clear distinction between the two in Revelation obviates the choice as a garland of victory.

The phrase 'crown of life' is not used outside the Smyranean promise. Yet the picture of the martyrs wearing white robes and holding palm branches (7:9) is closely related. As mentioned earlier (cf supra 5.3.4.2), the images of the wreath and the palm appear together frequently in literary and numismatic sources. This proleptic glimpse of the future inheritance of the victors shows the victorious church, which has survived the great tribulation, now alive and standing before the heavenly throne (cf Fekkes 1994:172). This same group is seen again in 20:4–6 (cf supra 2.2.3.1(b), 2.2.3.8). The occasion when they 'came to life,' or 'lived again' (*ἐζησαν*; v 4), is called the first resurrection. The rest of the dead did not 'live again' until after the thousand years (v 5), thus implying a second resurrection. According to Ladd (1972:268), 'The New Testament does not elsewhere clearly teach a twofold resurrection, although it is implied in such passages as John 5:29 and I Cor. 15:24–25.'

This latter text is part of Paul's teaching on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:12ff, the most extensive passage on the resurrection in the New Testament. It concludes with quotations in verses 54–55 from Isaiah 25:8a and Hosea 13:14 which declare victory over death (cf supra 5.2.2.2(a)). Isaiah 25:8b provides the allusion that John uses in Revelation 7:17 and 21:4a regarding the victors: God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. In Revelation 21:4b, *ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι* is a probable paraphrase of Isaiah 25:8a. It is likely that John was familiar with Paul's use of this text, since both use 'death' as the subject (cf Fekkes 1994:254). The intertextuality exemplified in these passages establishes that the crown of life is received at the first resurrection.

Whether the first resurrection includes only the martyrs or all believers is debated. Does the 'rest of the dead' (20:5) include believers, or are they only the unrighteous? Charles (1920:2.184; cf Mounce 1977:360) sees this resurrection as a special one for the martyrs which precedes the general resurrection of the dead: 'Therefore not even the righteous, who had died a peaceful death, have part in this first resurrection.' Wall (1991:238) counters: 'This resurrected body is not the martyr church as some argue...; rather, this is the whole community of "overcomers." The eschatological community is composed of two groups of believers, the martyred and unmartyred faithful.' We concur because the victors have already been identified as all the saints, not just the martyrs (cf supra 5.5.3.3). Also, given the use of the same Old Testament texts by Paul and John emphasizing victory over death at the resurrection, it is difficult to imagine John presenting two separate resurrections of believers in this passage. That all faithful believers are included in the first resurrection best agrees with the scriptural evidence.

7.4.2 The second death

7.4.2.1 Resurrection and death

The expression 'second death' is used three times in chapters 20–21. In 20:6 it is found in the fifth beatitude: 'Blessed and holy are those who have a part in the first resurrection; ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν.' Whatever juridical authority sin had to produce death is now broken for the saints who participate in the first resurrection. Here, as already mentioned, the second death is contrasted with the first resurrection. Does the mention of a first resurrection and a second death suggest their numerical counterparts? The first death is presumed for all; for some of the Smyrneans that death is imminent (2:10). While the first resurrection is selective and the second universal, the first death is universal (except for those raptured at the parousia; cf 1 Th 4:17) and the second is selective (cf Farrer 1964:206). The time of the first resurrection is neither the intermediate state after death nor the believer's spiritual resurrection following his or her baptism (contra Ulfgard 1989:63); rather it occurs at the parousia.

M Rissi (1966:124–28) presents a curious twist to the concept of the second resurrection. He says both resurrections can only designate the bestowal of eternal life. 'Since the first resurrection brings redemption from the first death situation, it is proper to understand the second resurrection as redemption from the second death situation' (:124). According to Rissi, the purpose of the second resurrection is to redeem those suffering under God's judgment and to bring

reconciliation to all humanity, even the universe. Beasley-Murray (1978:304) provides an appropriate response: 'Candour compels us to state that John has given no clear indication of any such teaching.' Rissi fails to preserve the antimony present in Revelation between the Lamb who loved and shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins (1:5) and the Lamb whose wrath is so great that no one can stand against it (6:16).

7.4.2.2 The recipients of the second death

In 20:11–15 the last judgment following the thousand years is depicted. This is the punishment Jesus warned about: 'Fear the One⁷ who can to destroy the soul and body in Gehenna' (Mt 10:28). All the dead, excluded from the first resurrection, are given up by the sea and the grave to appear before the heavenly throne for resurrection bringing eternal death. Daniel 12:2 speaks of multitudes sleeping in death who will awake to shame and eternal contempt. Upon hearing the voice of the Son of Man, those practicing evil will come out their graves to be condemned to the resurrection of judgment (Jn 5:28–29). The dead are judged according to their works (Rv 20:12–13). These ἔργα, according to Rissi (1972:36), 'are, therefore, in all likelihood to be understood only in the negative sense as *sinful "works"* and the "books" as *registers of sins*.' Those whose names are missing from the book of life are condemned to the lake of fire (20:15). Lastly, death and hades are cast into the lake of fire, specifically called the second death (v 14).⁸ He who holds the keys of death and Hades (1:18) has finally turned the lock.

The lake of fire is first mentioned in 19:20, where following the defeat of the beast and the false prophet by the rider on the white horse, the two are cast alive into the lake of fire, described as burning sulfur or brimstone (θεῖον). Jesus makes a curious statement about the last judgment: the King will ask the cursed to depart from him into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). Speaking of these texts, Swete (1909:274) observes, 'It is remarkable that here as in Mt. *l.c.* the qualification for the Second Death is a negative one (οὐχ εὐρέθη, οὐκ ἐποιήσατε). The negation of eternal life is eternal death.' Whereas God was forced in the beginning to provide a place of punishment for Satan and his rebellious angels, that abode was never intended for humanity which was created for fellowship in the eternal kingdom. But

⁷The NIV rightly capitalizes "One" as referring to God and not the devil (cf. Jas 4:12) (Blomberg 1992:178).

⁸The order of resurrection and judgment in chapter 20 parallels that given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:23–26 (contra Swete 1909:263): first, Christ; at the parousia those who belong to him (the saints in the thousand years); then the end when all dominion, authority, and power are destroyed (Armageddon, Gog and Magog); finally, death, the last enemy, is destroyed (the lake of fire).

following the Fall, those who freely chose to rebel found themselves likewise destined to the eternal fire.

Following the battle of Gog and Magog, the devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where he joins the beast and the false prophet (20:10). The three will be tormented (βασανισθήσονται) day and night forever. 'In justice to John let it be noted that the lake of fire is not for men, as it is for the demonic enemies of God, a place of torment' (Caird 1966:260). Caird, however, overlooks 14:10 where an angel announces that anyone who worshipped the beast and received his mark would be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and the Lamb. To suggest that the second death is annihilation, as Caird does, is to import a theological concept absent in the text. Rissi (1966:124) responds to the annihilationist perspective: 'The wording of 20:10 forbids thinking of a dissolution into nothingness.' Swete (1909:283) adopts a mollifying tone on this issue, 'Whether the function of the fire is to destroy or to punish or to purify is not within the scope of the revelation entrusted to the Seer.' Yet Swete's statement regarding the function of the lake of fire is unsatisfying. Whatever its ultimate outworking in the divine plan, for John's audience the lake of fire was meant to be a hard saying to dissuade false teachers and to frighten potential apostates.

7.4.2.3 The lake of fire

The initial vision of the new Jerusalem brings an announcement that there will be no more death for God's people (21:4). The victors addressed in the final promise saying (vv 6–7) are contrasted with the sinners whose lot is the lake of fire (v 8). This antithetical formula 'shows clearly the character of those slaves who do not become victors' (Minear 1968:61). Here is the final mention of the second death—it is the lake of burning fire and brimstone.

This is the first of three vice lists that conclude the book (cf 9:20–21). Park (1995:183) makes an interesting observation that the unique vices—cowardice and faithlessness, uncleanness and baseness—stand at the head of each list and 'are closely related to the context in which the list is given.' Certainly cowardice and faithlessness would be temptations to the Asian believers facing the pressures of the imperial cult; uncleanness and baseness are perhaps synonymous with the fornication and idolatry of Jezebel and the Nicolaitans. 'To save their necks, they [professing Christians] participated in the vile practices of non-Christians and murderously betrayed their fellow Christians to the persecuting authorities and practiced the sexual immorality and magic that went along with idolatry' (Gundry 1987:258).

The three lists are compared for similarity, not for order, in the following chart. Texts in the seven letters that mention these vices are also included in the left column.

<u>21:8</u>	<u>21:27</u>	<u>22:15</u>
	Common (e g, unclean)	Dogs (e g, base)
Cowards (cf 2:13)		
Faithless (cf 2:10)		
Abominators (cf 3:4, 18)	Abominators	
Murderers		Murderers
Fornicators (cf 2:14, 20)		Fornicators
Sorcerers		Sorcerers
Idolaters (cf 2:14, 20)		Idolaters
Liars (cf 2:2, 9, 20; 3:9)	Liars	Liars

Regarding the initial list, '[m]ost of the terms are traditional in the descriptions of paganism (cf. Rom. 1.28 ff.), but the first two in particular make it clear that the loser means primarily the faithless, he who has failed to keep the words and works of Christ to the end, who has denied his name and become "conformed to this world" ' (Leivestad 1954:214). The cowards and unfaithful are undoubtedly those who have apostatized in the face of the beast's threats.⁹

The source of the lake of fire imagery is obscure. Gehenna, the usual biblical expression for hell (cf Mt 5:29–30; Mk 9:43–49), is missing in Revelation. The linkage with brimstone/sulfur suggests the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah upon which God rained fire and brimstone (Gn 19:24; cf Dt 29:23; 3Mac 2:5; Lk 17:29; 1 Cl 11:1). The psalmist (11:6; cf 1QpHab 10:5) states that the Lord will rain fire and brimstone upon sinners. The final verse of Isaiah 1 (v 31) and the book's final verse (66:24) both state that the fate of the wicked is to burn and no one can quench the fire (cf Mk 9:48). Isaiah (34:9; cf 30:33) prophesies the destruction of Edom with sulfur and burning pitch that will never be quenched. And Ezekiel (38:22) prophesies to Gog that God will rain fire and brimstone upon him and his allied nations. A similar judgment is declared by the angel of the sixth trumpet—plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur kill one-third of humanity (Rv 9:17–18). The combined allusions in chapter 20 to Gog and to fire and brimstone suggest dependence by John in part on Ezekiel.

1 Enoch contains several examples of this theme. In 10:12–13 the unrighteous burn and die for eternity as their punishment on the day of judgment; 48:9 paints a macabre portrait of the

⁹False teachers may also be in view. Ignatius (*Eph* 7.1), speaking of false teachers, says, 'For they are mad dogs that bite by stealth; you must be on your guard against them, for their bite is hard to heal.'

unrighteous burning in the presence of the righteous. In 90:25–26 the guilty shepherds and their blinded sheep are cast into the fiery abyss to burn in the sight of Enoch. The great judgment into which the souls of the sinners are cast is characterized as darkness, nets, and burning flame (103:8).

The background of 'lake' is even more difficult. In 1 Enoch 67:13 Michael says that the punishment of the angels will be an example to the kings and rulers: 'For these waters of judgment are poison to the bodies of the angels as well as sensational to their flesh; (hence) they will neither see nor believe that these waters become transformed and become a fire that burns forever.'

Tenney (1957:192) suggests this local background: 'Perhaps the imagery was affected by the widespread knowledge of the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, when the city of Herculaneum perished in a flow of molten lava.' If the early dating of the book is held, such a connection would be invalid.

7.4.3 Conclusion

The first resurrection is contrasted with the second death in 20:6. The juxtaposition of first resurrection/second death parallels that of crown of life/second death in the Smyranean promise. Participation in the first resurrection is thus the fulfillment of the promised crown of life. Perhaps at that first resurrection the Smyrneans hoped for a crown to be placed on their heads, like that placed on the victors at their own Smyranean games. Such would be the public acknowledgment for their willingness to suffer.

The second death is the final penalty of the ungodly, an eternal death in the lake of fire. According to Wall (1991:239), it is a euphemism 'for the fate of those who do not share in the eschatological blessing of eternal life.' The juxtaposition seen most basically in the life/death motif is likewise developed in the holy city/unholy lake of fire imagery. A thick and high wall surrounds this city (21:12) to keep out the unholy (22:15). 'Thus, for the seer, the wall of jasper does not serve as a menacing defence against enemies, but rather as an announcement to the world of condemnation outside the city of the radiant glory of God's community in the new Jerusalem' (Rissi 1972:71). An eternal demarcation exists then between those experiencing the first resurrection and the second death. Whereas the crown is the prize for the victor, the lake of fire is the awful reward for the sinner.

7.5 THE PERGAMENE FULFILLMENT

7.5.1 The hidden manna

There are no further references to manna in Revelation. For a fulfillment Meyer (1967:4.466) suggests, 'As in contemporary Jewish literature, the manna of Rev. 2:17 has a counterpart in water.' The failure to mention water in the promise sayings in chapters 2–3 need not preclude its connection in the minds of John and his audience (cf supra 6.5.3.1). Whereas the image of manna disappears, the image of water appears in later chapters. In 7:16–17 the martyrs out of the great tribulation are promised that never again will they hunger or thirst because the Lamb would lead to springs of living water (cf Jn 6:35). The final promise in 21:6 reiterates the sense of this promise. It is further realized in chapter 22 with the appearance of the river of living water (v 1) which is freely given to those who are thirst (v 17).

A number of commentators see the fulfillment of this promise in the messianic banquet. Giblin (1991:227n 185) believes that 'since all the other promises to the victor have a fully eschatological sense, referring to one's final status in heaven and/or the new Jerusalem the "hidden manna" probably refers directly to the wedding-feast of the Lamb, and would only *connote* the Eucharist as an anticipation of that event.' Caird (1966:42) suggests that the main course at the messianic banquet will consist of heavenly manna. Without knowing how delectable such an entrée might be, we should hope it is more appetizing than the manna the Israelites received. Johnson (1981:12.442) spiritualizes the purpose of this metaphor, 'To those at Pergamum who refused the banquets of the pagan gods, Christ will give the manna of his great banquet of eternal life in the kingdom (John 6:47–58).' Because John fails to make an overt connection between the two, such a linkage remains inconclusive.

7.5.2 The white stone

In the last chapter we examined the scriptural prominence of the theme of stone as a building material (cf supra 6.5.3.4). It should not be surprising then that such imagery is also prominent in John's vision of the new Jerusalem. In chapter 21 is found an amazing list of twelve stones, which form the twelve foundations of the heavenly city. The following chart compares this list with that of the twelve stones found on the high priest's vestment in Exodus and the identical list that adorned the king of Tyre (Lucifer?) in Ezekiel (cf also Is 54:11–12).

Rv 21:19–20

ἴασπις (6)
 σάπφειρος (5)
 χαλκηδών
 σμάραγδος (3)
 σαρδόνυξ
 σάρδιον (1)
 χρυσόλιθος (10)
 βήρυλλος (11)
 τοπάζιον (2)
 χρυσόπρασος
 ὑάκινθος
 ἀμέθυστος (9)

Ex 28:17–20; 39:10–13 LXX

1. σάρδιον
 2. τοπάζιον
 3. σμάραγδος
 4. ἄνθραξ
 5. σάοφειρπς
 6. ἴασπις
 7. λιγύριον
 8. ἀχάτης
 9. ἀμέθυστος
 10. χρυσόλιθος
 11. βηρύλλιον
 12. ὀνύχιον

Ezk 28:13 LXX

σάρδιον
 τοπάζιον
 σμάραγδον
 ἄνθρακα
 σάπφειρον
 ἴασπιν (+ ἀργύριον, χρυσίον)
 λιγύριον
 ἀχάτην
 ἀμέθυστον
 χρυσόλιθον
 βηρύλλιον
 ὀνύχιον

Charles (1920:2.167) draws a correspondence between the jewels in Revelation and the signs of the zodiac, stating that the former list is exactly the reverse of the usual zodiacal order. John 'regards the Holy City which he describes as having nothing to do with the ethnic speculations of his own and past ages regarding the city of the gods' (:2.168). Jart (1970:163–64) counters this assertion by pointing to zodiacs arranged both clockwise and counterclockwise that decorated synagogues between the third and sixth centuries AD: 'Thus, Charles' theory according to which an ulterior motive might be involved in the "counter-clockwise" arrangement is hardly tenable' (:164). Why John reordered the stones remains open, although various other explanations have been proposed (cf Swete 1919:291; Farrer 1964:219).

The ascription of the title 'priests' to the saints in Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:6) suggests a possible relationship to the high priestly vestment. However, John's rearrangement and omission of the stones suggests that he had other purposes in mind. John rearranged the traditional order of the tribes in 7:5–8 to emphasize Judah, the tribe from which the messiah Jesus came (cf Swete 1909:98). Here his rearrangement emphasizes the jasper stone. When John has his initial vision of the One seated on the throne (4:3), the first image given of his likeness is that of jasper and carnelian (σάρδιον), the two stones that head the lists in Revelation and in the Old Testament. When this throne is seen again in 20:11, it is described as great and *white*.¹⁰ In 21:11 the New Jerusalem descends shining with the glory of God, brilliant like jasper said to be clear as crystal. Thus the colors suggested in 4:3 are probably transparent white and red (cf

¹⁰The throne of God seen in 1 Enoch 18:8 is made of alabaster. Alabaster was used in antiquity for making ointment jars and various ornaments. 'When pure it is white or translucent' (Bowes 1976:1.95).

Beasley-Murray 1978:113). 'Der Jaspis ist in der Apokalypse nicht der unansehnliche Stein, den wir so nennen, sondern einer der edelsten Steine, der nach Ansehen und Aussehen auf den Diamanten hinausläuft' (Kraft 1974:268). The objections of Jart (1970:171–72) to this identification as a diamond are unconvincing, so Kraft's conjecture remains just that.

The walls of the New Jerusalem are composed of jasper (21:18),¹¹ and jasper is then mentioned as the first precious stone to decorate the foundations of the wall (v 19). The walls contain twelve gates inscribed (ἐπιγεγραμμένα) with the names of Israel's twelve tribes; the foundations are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles (vv 12–13). Apart from the Pergamene promise (2:17), this is the only text in Revelation that speaks of a stone being inscribed. Finally, the city has no sun or moon for light because the glory of God, permeating its walls of jasper, lights it (21:23). John's description of the New Jerusalem suggests that the city's beauty comes from the dwelling of God from which the light of his glory emanates throughout the city (cf Park 1995:212).

7.5.3 The new name

Although ὄνομα is used twenty-six times outside the seven letters, there appear to be no other occurrences directly related to this image. The reference in 19:12 to a name not known to anyone but himself pertains to Christ only and not to the victor. Our discussion of 2:17 left unresolved whether the new name applied to the individual believer or to Christ. The lack of any individual fulfillment and a fulfillment related to Christ's new name leads to the conclusion that the promise of such a new name is not individualized. The names written in the book of life are probably each believer's given personal name. The names of the twelve tribes written on the gates and the names of the twelve apostles written on the foundations of the new city are likewise known (21:12, 14).

7.5.4 Conclusion

Because manna is never mentioned again in Revelation, proposed links with the messianic banquet are only speculative. Hidden manna, like the fruit of the tree of life, is the spiritual sustenance of the heavenly city. It suggests fellowship with Jesus himself, the bread of life. The identification of the white stone remains problematic. The list of twelve inscribed stones that

¹¹In Zechariah 2:5 God declares that, because Jerusalem will be a city without walls, he himself will be a wall of fire around it and its glory within.

form the foundation of the new Jerusalem presents intriguing parallels. Perhaps the white stone inscribed with a new name is related to the victor's place in the holy city, where he or she becomes a part of the foundation of the city with the twelve apostles. White jasper is associated in several texts with the throne of God. Perhaps the promise to sit on a throne is to join Jesus in ruling from a white throne, following the great white throne judgment. The new name is probably not a personal one given to believers, but related to Christ's new name.

7.6 THE THYATIRAN FULFILLMENT

7.6.1 Shepherd the nations with a rod of iron

The Old Testament scholar P Craigie (1983:69) observes 'that one of the NT books which contains many references to Ps 2 is the Revelation of St. John.' Besides the Thyatiran promise, he references among others 12:5 and 19:15, both verses to be examined in this section. The placement of these references (2:27; 12:5; 19:15) in the key places of chiasmic structuration (B, F, B') suggests their significance in the book. Although this theme of the judgment over the nations is an important eschatological role for the victors, Mealy (1992:80) believes 'the eschatological role which *is* most emphasized is that which the overcomers are to enter in relationship to God and Christ.' We agree with Mealy that the interpretation of 2:26 suggesting that the nations survive to be ruled by the saints 'is not at all a likely reading of the promise, since in this context it would connote despotism, which is highly out of character for Revelation' (:121n1).

7.6.1.1 The male child

In 12:5 the woman gives birth to a male child, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδῆρου. The child is then snatched up to God and his throne (θρόνον). The purpose for the birth of the Messiah is singular—to rule the nations. Mounce (1977:238) fittingly comments, 'As a shepherd defends his flock against the wild beasts of prey, so will Christ at his return strike the nations which oppress and persecute his church...(in 2:27 the overcomers at Thyatira are promised a part in this rule).' Nothing is mentioned of a sacrificial death for redemption of the nations (the song of the martyrs does so in verse 11, however).¹² The immediate reference to throne indicates that 'rule' is the verb's meaning here.

¹²The song in 1 Timothy 3:16 also passes directly from incarnation to resurrection. 'The stanza contains no mention of the life and death of Christ' (Beasley-Murray 1978:200n1). The historical church is likewise

This promise shares an affinity with the Laodicean promise which also speaks of thrones. The fulfillment of that promise is found in chapter 20, whose language closely parallels this text. A precondition for ruling the nations with a rod of iron is the defeat of Satan, a theme found in both chapters. J E Botha (1988:138) rightly observes, 'The names given to Satan in 12:9 are here repeated—thus identifying him as one and the same adversary.' The verbal relationship between chapters 12 and 20 are outlined below:

<u>Satan</u>	<u>Chapter 12</u>	<u>Chapter 20</u>
Names	καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς (v 9)	καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη (v 2)
Activity	ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην (v 9); εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλιγον καιρὸν ἔχει (v 12)	ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον (v 3)
Heavenly action	ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν (v 9)	καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἐκλείσεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ (v 3)

Whereas the fall of Satan in chapter 12 is from heaven to earth, the fall in chapter 20 appears to be from the earth to the Abyss. Both passages are difficult to interpret, yet the similarity of language and subject indicates that they are closely related.

7.6.1.2 The sharp sword

In 2:12 and 16 Jesus vows to use the sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth to rebuke the unrepentant in the Pergamene congregation. In 19:15 the purpose of the similar sharp sword is that he might smite (πατάξῃ) the nations and ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, again following 2:27. The actual destruction of the heathen is likened to a trampling in the winepress of God's wrath (cf 14:19–20). The holy war motif is prominently seen here, according to Giblin. Like the classic example in the Exodus, 'God's people do not engage in belligerent action here. Their role is to follow God's directives, and their physical activity amounts to little more than local motion from one dwelling to another' (1991:250).

Caird (1966:46) asks when the victor will smash the nations with an iron rod, and concludes it cannot be either in the heavenly city or in the millennial kingdom. 'We are compelled therefore

never depicted in Revelation 12. The account passes directly from the church's birth at Christ's ascension to its persecution by the dragon during the period of the great tribulation (cf supra 2.5.3).

to look for the fulfilment of this promise *within the present order*, and since the Christian becomes a Conqueror in this world only in the moment of his leaving it, the fulfilment must be the actual death of the martyrs.' He overlooks the preceding verse 19:14 where the armies of heaven, riding white horses and wearing white garments, both symbols of victory, are following the messianic rider on the white horse. This is the one who smites the nations (v 15). I agree with Mealy (1992:238) that the Thyatiran promise is 'exhausted in the picture of their participation with Christ in the "battle of the witnesses" in ch. 19.' Likewise, nothing in verses 1–6 beginning Revelation 20 suggest that the nations of the world are spared the parousia. The nations mentioned in chapters 21–22 are comprised of the redeemed, not unbelievers.

7.6.2 The morning star

The fulfillment of the promise is found in 22:16 where Jesus says ἐγώ εἰμι...ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωῒνός. The adjective λαμπρός is added here. Earlier it is used positively to speak of shining garments (15:6; 19:8) and shining crystal (22:1) or negatively of the splendors of Babylon (18:14). The noun form is used in Isaiah 60:3 which says that 'kings will come to your light and nations to your brightness' (λαμπρότητί LXX). Bauckham (1993a:325) writes, 'It is worth noticing that the last two words of Isaiah 60:3, which are paraphrased by this designation of Jesus, are precisely those which were omitted from John's adaptation of Isaiah 60:3 in Revelation 21:24. He has saved them for this designation of Jesus as the one who draws the nations into the New Jerusalem.' Speaking of Jerusalem, 1 Baruch 5:3 says that God will show her brightness (λαμπρότητα) to every place under heaven.

Bauckham (1993a:323) notes an interesting pattern in Revelation of combined allusions to pairs of prophecies of the Davidic Messiah:

Rv 2:26–28	Ps 2:9	+	Nm 24:17
5:5	Gn 49:9	+	Is 11:10
19:15	Ps 2:9	+	Is 11:4
22:16	Is 11:10	+	Nm 24:17

These four Old Testament passages share in common the catchword שֶׁבַע (rod or scepter). Because these passages refer to a destructive judgment on the nations, allusions are made to them in the first three texts to advance the theme of messianic victory over the nations. However, in 22:16 the image is positive. Jesus' coming precipitates the arrival of the multinational church (7:9) into the heavenly city.

Speaking of this image in Jude, Bauckham (1983:226) comments: 'Thus the rising of the morning star is a symbol for the Parousia of Christ which inaugurates the eschatological age.' The reference in 21:24 validates this: 'the nations will walk (περιπατήσουσιν) by its light.' The future of περιπατέω is found only in the Sardian letter, where those who have not soiled their garments 'will walk with me in white' (3:4). The victors are those who will walk in the glorious light of Jesus, the bright morning star.

Finally, a ligature, or abbreviation, consisting of the initial Greek letters—iota (I) and chi (X)—of the name Jesus and his title Christ is known from Christian antiquity. Finnegan (1992:353) describes it as 'essentially the combination of a cross mark and a vertical stroke and, in its simplest form, would look like a six-pointed star.' The star thus symbolized Jesus Christ.

7.6.3 Conclusion

That the oppressive world system would soon come under the lordship of Christ would be eagerly anticipated by the Thyatirans. At his appearing they would constitute the heavenly army that would shatter the strength of the ungodly nations and establish a godly rule. It must have been reassuring that with all the military imagery, an actual battle is never depicted. The nations led by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet simply dissolve at the word issuing from Christ's mouth.

In the last chapter (cf supra 6.6.3) we concluded that the promise of the morning star certainly pointed to a person, an opinion validated here. Trench (1883:160) sustains this opinion that Christ himself will be given to the victor, although Beckwith (1919:471) demurs, 'The meaning cannot be, as some take it, that he will give himself to the victor, a conception not possible in our Apocalyptic's idea of the eschatological kingdom.' However, Lenski (1943:124–25) rightly affirms that 'The Victor King Jesus is the brilliant Morning Star in royal splendor; and he gives to every faithful believer the gift to be like him in royal splendor. He and all these other victors shall shine together, all being as morning stars in brilliance, our brilliance being derived from him.' This seems the most satisfactory explanation of the image.

7.7 THE SARDIAN FULFILLMENT

7.7.1 White garments

7.7.1.1 Synonyms of ἱματίων

Besides ἱματίων (3:4, 5, 18; 4:4; 16:15; 19:13, 16), three other words are used in Revelation for clothing—στολή (6:11; 7:9, 13, 14; 22:14), βύσσινος (18:12, 16; 19:8 [2x], 14), and λίνον (15:6). Charles (1920:1.186–87) regards the first three as synonymous, although βύσσινος and λίνον are also synonymous (cf Louw & Nida 1989:1.73n16). This example again demonstrates John's propensity to use synonyms throughout the book (cf 'dragon,' etc; Rv 12:3ff, 20:2). The rider on the white horse is dressed in a ἱματίων at his return (19:13) and inscribed on the garment over his thigh is the name 'King of kings and Lord of lords' (v 16). Angels are robed in white linen in 15:6. The references in 15:6 and 19:14 contain the characteristic verb of clothing or dressing ἐνδύω (cf Louw & Nida 1989:§49.1)

7.7.1.2 The twenty-four elders

The twenty-four elders (4:4), ministering around the heavenly throne with the four living creatures, are wearing white garments. Because of this, Michaelis (1967:4.249n56; cf Charles 1920:1.130) believes they are probably angels because 'the white clothes show that the elders belong to the heavenly world.' However, the elders are wearing crowns and sitting on thrones—rewards likewise promised to the victors. And the elders are clearly distinguished from the angels who appear in 5:2 and 11,¹³ so to identify them as angels seems improbable. If human, who are they? And what does their number represent, since twenty-four is never used as a symbolic number except in Revelation?

Ford (1975:80) writes, 'Just as the creatures represent the universe, so do the elders represent Israel.' Such an exclusive identification is unprecedented in Revelation. Swete (1909:69) concludes that this vision is proleptic and represents the whole church, Jew and Gentile, 'seen as already white, crowned, and enthroned in the Divine Presence—a state yet future (ὅτι δεῖ γενέσθαι), but already potentially realized in the Resurrection and Ascension of the Head.' When

¹³Johnson (1981:12.470n) rightly notes that the proper reading of 5:10 is crucial to the identification of the elders. 'If *hemas* is original, it would be difficult to argue that the elders are angelic beings.' He adopts the shorter reading (like NA²⁶), yet still views the elders as angels. He likewise concedes that white garments and crowns of gold generally belong to the saints in Revelation, yet begs an exception in the case of the elders.

the martyrs first appear in 6:9–11, they are under the altar, not seated on thrones. When they appear again in chapter 8, the elders are clearly distinguished from this group (v 13). Some connection may exist between these twenty-four elders and the twenty-four courses of priests which ministered in the temple (1 Chr 24:1ff; cf Thompson 1990:70). For the elders function as representative priests who hold golden incense bowls containing the prayers of the saints, who themselves are priests (Rv 5:8, 10).¹⁴ These elders later give thanks for the vindication of the saints (11:16–18). The twenty-four elders are last seen in 19:4. After the rider on the white horse appears, the elders disappear.

The imagery of the four living creatures is clearly adapted from Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10. But what about the twenty-four elders? In chapters 8 and 11 Ezekiel is taken by the Spirit to the temple in Jerusalem. In 8:11–13 the prophet sees a group of seventy leaders called elders (πρεσβύτεροι). These elders have censers in hand from which incense is emanating. In 8:16 he sees another group of about twenty-five men, who are most probably priests.¹⁵ The elders and the priests are both engaged in idolatrous worship. Another group of twenty-five men is seen in chapter 11:1ff. Craigie (1983a:74) identifies them as princes of the people, 'in effect ministers of state, and their meeting is thus an assembly of the national council ruling Judah and Jerusalem, under delegated authority.' These leaders have acted wickedly and have now fallen under divine judgment. It is these groups of elders, priests, and leaders after which John has probably patterned his heavenly council of elders, who in contrast are godly. He has rounded off the number to twenty-four to conform with his symbolic use of twelve and its multiples, since the characteristic number of the heavenly city is twelve.

In 21:12–14 the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles represent the collective people of God. John's elders probably symbolize a similar reality of the twelve Old Testament patriarchs and the twelve apostles. Wall (1991:93), however, takes the view that heavenly elders exemplify the community of true Israel that has remained faithful to the apostolic witness of Christ: 'the elders are not specifically the risen apostles, long since martyred; rather, they represent the community they founded and continue to nourish through their memories and teachings.' We disagree, believing that Jesus' promise (Mt 19:28) of thrones to his apostles in the eschaton is

¹⁴The saints are likewise seen holding harps and singing the song of Moses (Israel) and the Lamb (the church) in 15:3 (cf 14:1–2).

¹⁵The Hebrew text says about (→) twenty-five in 8:16 but drops the 'about' in 11:1. The Septuagint reads twenty men in 8:16 and about (ὡς) twenty-five men in 11:1. Alexander (1986:6.784) makes a likely suggestion that this number is 'representative of each of the twenty-four courses of the priests plus the high priest (cf. 1 Chron 23).'

here seen fulfilled. If John the Revelator is John the apostle, his appearance among the Twelve here is certainly a proleptic one.

7.7.1.3 The martyrs

In 6:11 the martyrs are each given white robes as they rest, awaiting other martyrs to join them. These white robes indicate the group's blessedness as they patiently await the consummation (cf Beckwith 1919:527). Charles suggests that because the martyrs have already reached the stage of perfection, here and in 7:9, 13 they are shown clothed in heavenly bodies. However, 'from the rest of the faithful this gift was withheld till the end of the world, as they were still in a state of imperfection, even though redeemed.' (1920:1.97; cf 1.187). This conclusion is based on his distinction between the saints and the martyrs. However, as we have argued (cf supra 5.5.3.3), this group in white robes includes all believers. The white robes depict that 'the honours of victory have already been conferred upon them individually (ἐκάστω), though the general and public award is reserved for the Day of the Lord' (Swete 1909:91).

7.7.1.4 The great multitude

In 7:9–14 a great multitude dressed in white robes and holding palm branches is seen by John standing before the throne of God and the Lamb. 'These are marks of festal rejoicing, especially in victory' (Beckwith 1919:544). One of the elders asks John to identify this multitude dressed in white robes. When John is unable to respond, the elder answers that this multitude has come out of the great tribulation.¹⁶ 'This group seems to complete the full circle of participants before the throne begun in chapter 4' (Johnson 1981:12.486). Mealy's suggestion (1992:217) that this vision is a representation of the parousia is probably correct.

This group has 'washed (ἐπλυναν) their robes and whitened (ἐλεύκαναν) them in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), hence the imagery seems paradoxical—clothing is reddened, not whitened, when dipped in blood. The symbolism is obviously spiritual and not literal. Two Old Testament allusions are possible. In Genesis 49:11 (LXX) Judah 'will wash (πλυνεῖ) his robe (στολήν) in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape.' And when the law was given at Mount Sinai, the Israelites consecrated themselves by washing their clothes and abstaining from sexual relations (Ex 19:14–15). In 7:14 the two aorist verbs 'look back to the life on earth when the

¹⁶Whether ἔρχομαι should be translated as a present or a perfect is often discussed. A present indicates an ongoing process, while a perfect suggests the victory of the multitude is accomplished. The two aorists that follow lend certainty to the latter view. The vision is thus proleptic and anticipatory.

cleansing was effected' (Swete 1909:103). This is the positive aspect of those said not to have defiled their garments (cf 3:4). Kraft (1974:130) believes the explanation of these white garments relates to baptism, 'daß sie ihre Gewänder gebleicht haben; die weißen Taufgewänder sind ein Bild für die verklärten Leiber.' Because first-century liturgical practices are obscure, it is difficult to make such a positive correlation. The final beatitude (22:14) likewise pronounces a blessing on those who wash (πλύοντες) their robes. This picture continues to show the victors as active, not passive, participants in their salvation.

7.7.1.5 The virgins

In 14:4 the followers of the Lamb who have not defiled themselves with women (γυναικῶν) are called virgins. Yarbro Collins (1984:129–31) interprets this sexual imagery literally, suggesting that continence is advocated for those men ('John's patriarchal point of view') engaged in the holy war. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:88) prefers a metaphorical interpretation: the virgins are God's people of either sex who have not committed spiritual fornication with the woman (γυνῆ/γυνή 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18) Babylon/Rome, the mother of all harlots. Neither Yarbro Collins nor Schüssler Fiorenza links this verse to the Sardinian letter where the only other use of μόλυνω is found. In 3:4 the verb describes those in the church who have not defiled their white garments. For the Asian churches the idolatry associated with the imperial cult was a signal temptation (cf 2:14). However, in Thyatira the γυνή Jezebel also threatened the churches with her false prophecy. Contact with either woman, Babylon or Jezebel, would soil their garments or, to change metaphors, lose their virginity. Nakedness and shame would be the result (cf supra 5.3.2).

7.7.1.6 The bride of Christ

With the arrival of the wedding of the Lamb (19:7–8), the bride receives a gift of a clean shining linen garment (βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν) to wear. The bride's apparel contrasts with the purple and scarlet linen in which the harlot is dressed (Rv 17:4; 18:16). Both here and in 3:5 the verb περιβάλλω occurs, which 'can possibly be understood as a direct middle and accords with the idea of worthiness in the last phrase of 3:4' (Benedict 1966:30). What these fine linen are is finally defined: they are the δικαιώματα of the saints. This explanatory note was apparently added by John. Because Charles (1920:2.128) believes such garments are spiritual bodies, he considers 8b a gloss. Charles's attempts to manipulate the text around his presuppositions has

been rightly criticized by later commentators. The plural form here 'may indicate that the bride's garment is woven of the innumerable acts of faithful obedience by those who endure to the end' (Mounce 1977:340).

Δικαιώματα is understood by commentators either as an existential or a forensic reality (cf Wall 1991:222). Benedict (1966:31) affirms the former, 'Therefore the garments of Revelation 3:5 and 19:8 are not a reference to justification nor to character, but to the deeds or acts which flow out of these two.' Mealy (1992:79n2), however, claims that the translation 'righteous deeds' found in most English versions obscures the point of this verse: 'the word normally means "valid legal claims" or "just decrees".' Hence, he (:79–80) states, 'the meaning is that the saints display the credential recognized by God himself as those which make one worthy of acquittal in his court: faith in Christ's atonement, and a life lived in consistent profession of that faith, even to the point of death (cf. 3.4–5; 7.14).'

Δικαιώματα is used one other time in Revelation—15:4. Here the victors over the beast sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. The song opens, 'Great and marvelous are your deeds' (ἔργα; v 3) and closes, 'for your δικαιώματα were revealed.' A relationship between these two words is evident. As Swete (1909:197) states, 'a δικαίωμα is a concrete expression of righteousness, whether in the form of a just decree...or a just act, as here and in xix. 8.' The antonym of δικαιώματα is used in 18:5. The sins of Babylon's residents are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her unrighteous acts (ἀδικήματα). A cry is then heard to repay them double for their deeds (ἔργα; v 6). Again deeds is found in the immediate context. Mealy fails to discuss 18:5, which essentially nullifies his point. Thus it is problematic to translate 19:8 as 'fine linen is the valid legal claims of the saints' (cf Ladd 1971:249). These claims, these credentials, are in fact the worthy deeds that flow out of justification.¹⁷ Indeed, as Revelation 22:11 says, the righteous (i e, the justified) are to practice righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) manifested in righteous deeds (δικαιώματα).

7.7.1.7 The armies of heaven

In 19:14 the armies of heaven riding white horses follow the rider on a white horse. They are dressed in clean white linen garments. The vision clearly has a thematic and verbal relationship with 19:8. Here λευκόν is substituted for λαμπρόν, indicating that the terms are synonymous. Likewise, in 17:14 when the Lamb triumphs over the beast and the ten kings, he is accompa-

¹⁷As Wall (1991:222) aptly says, 'The church is given the garment to wear, but it must still put it on!'

nied by his called, chosen, and faithful followers. The army is thus to be identified as the bride, the saints, and not as an angelic host (contra Swete 1909:253–54). That the victors will rule with Christ as his co-adjudicators is suggested throughout Revelation. Mealy (1992:80) rightly observes that ‘this ongoing process of confirmation and extension serves to prepare the reader to recognize the theme’s presence when it appears for the first time in imagery in ch. 19.’

7.7.1.8 The washers of robes

The final beatitude in 22:14 commends those who are washing their robes (οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν).¹⁸ Charles (1920:2.177) appropriately calls this phrase the spiritual equivalent of οἱ νικῶντες: ‘Each class alike has endured and overcome, and as access to the tree of life is here promised to those who have cleansed their robes, so in ii.7 the right to eat of the tree of life is given to those who have overcome.’ Swete (1909:307) suggests this is another version ‘interpreted in the light of the Cross,’ of the beatitude of Jesus, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God’ (Mt 5:8). This is the positive aspect of those said not to have defiled their garments (3:4; 14:4). Meeting this condition is a prerequisite for realizing two other promises—partaking of the tree of life and entering the holy city, new Jerusalem.

The blessed are again contrasted with individuals outside who are practicing certain sins, the first of which is called ‘dogs.’ The baseness of this group who roll in the filth of their sins is juxtaposed with the victors who wash their garments in the blood of the Lamb. In Matthew 7:6 (cf 15:26–27) Jesus compares people to unclean dogs; in Revelation it sounds ‘like apostolic exposition of this mysterious saying’ (Michel 1965:1104).

7.7.2 The book of life

7.7.2.1 The beast and the Lamb

The Sardian promise has a negative side, and this perspective is presented in several of the later uses of the book of life in Revelation. The appearance of the first beast (13:1ff) induces deception upon the earthdwellers and provokes persecution on the saints. Those earthdwellers who worship the beast do not have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life. In 13:8 and

¹⁸Benedict (1966:8n4) adopts the reading: ποιῶντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ, citing the support of a majority of manuscripts. Apart from manuscript evidence and on stylistic grounds alone, such a reading is unlikely. In the two earlier uses of ἐντολή John uses the verb τηρέω both times (12:17; 14:12). Since this beatitude relates to the Ephesian promise (cf supra 4.9.6), for the variant to work the object should have been ἔργα to conform to its use with ποιέω in the letter (2:5).

21:27 the book of life is specifically called the Lamb's book. Mention of the book of life is somewhat incongruous in 13:8, where 'the purpose may be to minimize the significance of the general acceptance of the Caesar-cult, or possibly to call attention to the individual responsibility of the worshippers' (Swete 1920:166).

This passage forms a remarkable doublet with 17:8. The two passages are presented next, and it is clear that 17:8 condenses elements of the same vision presented in chapter 13.

13:1, 3, 8

1 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον,

3 καὶ ἐθαυμάσθη ὅλη ἡ γῆ ὀπίσω τοῦ θηρίου
8 καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ
κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, οὐδ' οὐ γέγραπται τὸ
ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνί
ου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου

17:8

8 τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδες ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει
ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου

καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς
ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, βλέπόντων τὸ θηρίον
ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται

The unusual prepositional phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου is found in several other New Testament texts. Jesus' teaching in Matthew 25:31ff has already provided a background for the images of shepherd and judgment by fire. Verse 34 provides another verbal parallel—at the last judgment the king will invite the blessed at his right hand to inherit the kingdom prepared for them ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. Carson (1984: 8.521) elaborates, 'This glorious inheritance, the consummated kingdom, was the Father's plan for them from the beginning.'

The kingdom is the reward for being written in the book of life; the choice of being written therein relates to the doctrine of election. Ephesians 1:4 addresses this, stating that Jesus chose us to be holy and blameless before him πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. Lincoln (1990:23) notes that 'This phrase indicates an element in the thinking about election which cannot be found in the OT and occurs only later in Jewish literature.' The language of this verse, he continues, 'by making the pretemporal aspect of election explicit, sets salvation in protological perspective.' In Ephesians the Gentile and Jewish audience is assured of God's eternal elective plan for them; a reverse assurance is provided for perhaps the same audience reading Revelation.¹⁹

¹⁹This suggestion is based on the premise that Ephesians is probably the Laodicean letter referred to in Colossians 4:16, which also was circulated among the churches of Asia.

A final related verse is found in 1 Peter 1:20.²⁰ The readers are assured that their redemption was secured by the precious blood of Christ the lamb chosen *πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου*. Michaels (1988:67) cautions, 'Rev 13:8, despite its reference to Jesus as the Lamb, is a doubtful parallel: the phrase *ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου* ("ever since [not 'before'] the beginning of the world") refers not to the death of the Lamb (or to God's knowledge of it), but simply strengthens "not" to "never"...in asserting the nonelection of those not inscribed in the Lamb's book of life (cf. Rev 17:8).' Michaels overstates the force of *ἀπό*, since the prepositions *ἀπό* and *πρό* are interchangeable in these texts (cf Lk 11:50; Jn 17:24), therefore Petrine use may be a background for the phrase's appearance in Revelation.

An interpretive problem in 13:8 concerns the referent of this prepositional phrase. Is it the 'Lamb slain' or the verb 'written'? If the latter, twelve words separate the modifier from its antecedent. Johnson (1981:12:528) sets forth the conundrum, 'In the former instance, the emphasis would rest on the decree in eternity to elect the Son as the redeeming agent for mankind's salvation (13:8; 1 Peter 1:20); in the latter, stress lies on God's eternal foreknowledge of a company of people who would participate in the elect Son's redeeming work (17:8).'²¹

Regarding the sentence's structure, Swete (1908:167) notes that 'the order suggests that the words should be taken with *τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου*, in the sense indicated by I Pet. i. 18 f....but the close parallel in xvii. 8...seems to be decisive in favour of connecting *ἀπὸ καταβ. κόσμου* with *γέγραπται* in this context also.' Caird (1966:168; cf Charles 1920:1354), adopting the other view, believes that John is speaking here about the means of the elect's redemption, a thought complementary to 17:8. Besides the change of placement of the prepositional phrase, in 13:8 the relative pronoun is the singular *οὗ*²² while in 17:8 it is the plural *ᾧν*. Another difference is that the Lamb slain is mentioned only in 13:8, contra Beckwith's (1919:638) comment concerning 'precisely parallel words in 17:8.' Perhaps the ambiguity in meaning is intentional. John knows his Asian audience is familiar with the Ephesian and Petrine passages and allows both the elective and redemptive purposes to be suggested. In the end it seems best to adopt the most natural grammatical reading—it is Lamb who is slain from the foundation of the world.

²⁰Testament, or Assumption, of Moses 1:14, referring to Moses as the first redeemer, says, 'But he did design and devise me, who (was) prepared from the beginning of the world, to be the mediator of his covenant.'

²¹Johnson (1981:12:528) provides this further theological reflection, "the words "from the creation of the world" cannot be pressed to prove eternal individual election to salvation or damnation since 3:5 implies that failure of appropriate human response may remove one's name from the book of life.'

²²Mounce (1977:256) suggests that the unexpected shift in the Greek text from the plural to the singular 'is perhaps intended to emphasize the individual responsibility of each one who worships the beast.'

7.7.2.2 The beast and the elect

The relationship between 17:8 and 13:8 has already been noted. The earthdwellers marvel at the revived beast. Again this group consists of those whose names are not written in the book of life. Whereas in 13:8 it was the Lamb's sacrificial mission which was recorded from the foundation of the world, here it is the name of the victor recorded ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. Because election is from the beginning, Charles (1920:1.354) observes that 'the presupposition is that only the elect can withstand the claims of the imperial cult backed by the might of the empire itself.' John, however, never presents a deterministic doctrine of election wherein passivity may result; obedience, here resulting in martyrdom at the hands of the beast, is continually advocated.

7.7.2.3 The great white throne judgment

John sees a vision of the great white throne judgment with all the dead standing before the throne (20:12). As they await their fate, books are opened and they are judged according to their individual deeds, both good and evil, recorded in the books. 'The sentence of the Judge is not arbitrary; it rests upon written evidence' (Swete 1908:272). 2 Baruch 24:1 similarly speaks of books that will be opened 'in which are written the sins of all those who have sinned.' Salvation is never presented as based on good works in Revelation, but is always related to the blood of the Lamb. In the Testament of Abraham 13:9–14, however, two angels weigh the righteous deeds against the sins of each individual. Those whose deeds are burned up by fire are consigned to punishment with other sinners, while those whose works survive are placed with the other righteous. Smith (1985:220) rightly distinguishes this type of record of deeds from similar biblical references to a list of persons.

Another book—the book of life—is likewise opened.²³ Nothing more is said of this book until verse 15. Here is stated the disqualifying factor for being cast into the lake of fire: εἴ τις οὐχ εὐρέθη ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος.... The co-text for this reference is Daniel 12:1 where God's people will be delivered, those εὐρεθῆ ἔγγεγραμμένος ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ. Daniel 12:3 was likewise found to be a source of the morning star imagery found in the Thyatiran promise. The risen Jesus suggests in Revelation 3:5 that a person's name could be erased from the book of life. The consequence of that erasure—the lake of fire—is starkly portrayed here. 'For such

²³Beasley-Murray (1978:302) gives this theological comment regarding the testimony of the two books: 'In the judgment God's justice and grace are neither divorced from one another, nor set in conflict with each other, but are harmonious, uniting in a single voice in their declaration of the destiny of every child of man.'

people the presence of God could be nothing but a horror from which they, like the earth they made their home, must flee, leaving not a trace behind' (Caird 1966:260).

The English translation, 'If anyone is not found written in the book of life,' might suggest doubt whether anyone will be thrown into the lake of fire. Johnson (1981:12:590) asserts that the Greek construction is not so indefinite: 'John uses a first-class condition, which assumes the reality of the first clause and shows the consequences of the second class.' He paraphrases, 'If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, and I assume there were such....'

The vision of the new heaven and new earth immediately follows in chapter 21. John's purpose is clearly to juxtapose the punishment of those not written in the book of life with the reward of those whose names are written in the book of life. In the book of life 'are the names of those who have reserved space in the new Jerusalem because of their faith in and faithfulness towards God and God's Lamb' (Wall 1991:241). This insight is assured through the final reference to the book of life in the midst of this vision.

7.7.2.4 The heavenly city

John in his vision of the heavenly city sees the nations walking by the light of the glory of God (21:24). 'The community of overcomers exists in harmony with the character of a holy God, disclosed in the life of God's Lamb' (Wall 1991:255). No one, especially the abominators and liars, can enter the city, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Isaiah's vision (65:8–25) of the new Jerusalem likewise contrasts the sinners who are judged with the servants who inherit the blessings of the new heaven and new earth.

John's brief list of the excluded is a condensation of the longer vice list in 21:8 (cf supra 7.4.2.3). There the destiny of the sinners is the second death in the lake of fire. 'The phrase "except those who are inscribed" implies that it is possible for those of the first category to become part of the second group. This is consistent with the vision's portrayal of the redeemed as those who have been purchased from "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" ' (Mulholland 1990:331). To the end, John's portrait of the redeemed is one of inclusive exclusivity.

7.7.3 The confession of a name

The verb *ὁμολογέω* found in the promise (3:5) is never again used in Revelation. The only text in the fulfillment section that uses the preposition *ἐνώπιον* is found in 20:12. Here the reference is not to the Father, but to the One sitting on the great white throne. The dead, great and small,

are standing before him awaiting their judgment. The link in the promise between the confession of the victor's name and the book of life suggests that fulfillment is probably found in a text which likewise speaks of the book of life. The book of life is mentioned both in 20:12 and 20:15. While the consequences of the opening of the book of life are left unstated, perhaps a roll call of the names of the victors is conducted. Jesus confesses each name found in the book of life before his Father and the angels.

7.7.4 Conclusion

The image of white garments is closely linked with the future resurrection body. Garber (1974:274) concludes that 'the white garments or robes in the Apocalypse are to be understood as spiritual bodies, in the tradition of the Jewish apocalypses.' But again, would the Sardians have understood any literal sense to the image? Adam and Eve were naked in paradise before the Fall, so perhaps the Edenic restoration would bring back the innocence of nakedness. However, the shame connected to nakedness throughout the book suggests that the audience would not view nakedness as a virtue. The white garments seen on the elders and martyrs would indicate that a spiritual and glorious garb is found in heaven. Jesus was seen in a white robe at his transfiguration and appeared in clothing following his resurrection. The immortal, imperishable body was certainly expected at the first resurrection, but that this resurrection body would be clothed in pure white linen was probably also anticipated.

The book of life seems a needless reminder for a God who is omniscient. Yet the book is not to refresh his memory at the last assize, but to demonstrate his justice to saint and sinner alike. The victors are assured that they are enrolled in the heavenly register. They probably have an expectation that their names will be confessed publicly at the final roll call. Contrarily, another book contains the names of those who resisted God and persecuted his people. Their deeds are likewise made public, they are judged for what they have done (and have not done), and they receive their final allotment to the lake of fire.

7.8 THE PHILADELPHIAN FULFILLMENT

7.8.1 The pillar in the temple

There no further mention of the victors as pillars in Revelation. P Prigent (1988:71) notes a small difficulty for this promise to be fulfilled: 'en effet la Jérusalem céleste qui descend du ciel

et que mentionne la fin du verset (3:12, ne comporte pas de temple (Ap. 21, 22...).' The answer, he believes, is that the temple is simply the sign of God's presence among his people. The fulfillment is that 'C'est pourquoi les hommes qui vivent en étroite communion avec le Christ peuvent être regardés comme étant dès à présent et à jamais dans le temple' (:71).

The heavenly temple of God is associated with the people of God in 15:2ff. Mealy (1992:84) likewise asserts that 'to overcome so as to be made part of God's temple is thus to be a member of the eschatological community of God, the intimacy of whose experience of his presence can only be suggested by the way in which God's glory used to fill his tabernacle/temple in times past.' The verb λατρεύω is used twice in Revelation. A proleptic view is given in 7:13ff of the victors—those out of the great tribulation—in the heavenly city, who are worshiping (v 15) day and night in the temple. In 22:3 the slaves of God worship before his throne which has supplanted the temple (21:22). The close relationship between this group worshiping and mention of the divine name written on their foreheads (as in the promise) suggests strongly that this understanding of the fulfillment is correct.

In the promise (3:12) the victors are affirmed ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ from the temple of God. In 21:27 whatever is unclean οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ into the holy city, New Jerusalem. The final beatitude, which assures the victors that they will enter the gates of the city, is juxtaposed with the types of sinners who will be outside (ἔξω; 22:14–15). 'To enter the city is to help make it up—and there is nothing about leaving it once the glory and honor have been brought in' Gundry 1987:264). These are the only two occurrences of the preposition ἔξω in Revelation.

7.8.2 Divine names written

7.8.2.1 The name of the beast

Even as the victors are promised that the name of God and the new name of Jesus will be inscribed on them, the followers of the beast have his name written on them. In order to buy and sell, the earthdwellers are forced to have the mark of the beast—his name or the number of his name (as grammatical appositives)—inscribed on their right hand or forehead (13:16–17). J Finnegan (1992:346) writes, 'The position of these marks reflects the Jewish phylacteries...but the manner of the followers of the beast is a travesty of the Jewish custom, for here the one mark is on the right hand, not the left, and the other mark is on (ἐπί) the brow, not over the

brow.²⁴ The purpose of the mark here is probably to parody the sealing of the God's slaves in chapter 7 (cf Mounce 1977:262).

The saints are encouraged to calculate (ψηφίζω) his number—666 (13:18). Earlier (cf supra 2.3.2.9) we identified Neron Caesar as the most likely solution of this gematria and noted that this name was inscribed on the coinage of Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. Some commentators have suggested that to buy and sell using such 'marked' Roman coinage was to participate in the beast's system. This explanation is too facile, however, since Jesus sanctioned the use of Roman coinage that bore the emperor's image (Mt 22:18–21). Deissman's (1901:246) explanation seems most plausible: 'χάραγμα is the name of the imperial seal, giving the year and the name of the reigning emperor (possibly also his effigy), and found on bills of sale and similar documents of the 1st and 2nd centuries.'

The verbal relationship here with the Pergamene promise suggests that the new name written on the white stone (ψηφος) is also perhaps some type of gematria. Examples of such gematria are known from antiquity. A graffiti from Pompeii (c AD 79) reads, 'Amerimnus thought upon his lady Harmonia for good. The number of her honorable name is 45 (μϵ).' Another example reads, 'I love her whose number is 545 (φμϵ).' After mentioning these gematria, Johnson (1981:12:533) comments, 'In these cases, the number conceals a name, and the mystery is perhaps known for certain only by the two lovers themselves.'

There is further mention of the beast's mark. Ugly and painful sores break out on the bodies of those who receive his mark (16:2). Those so marked are said to be deceived by the beast and the false prophet (19:20). Finally, only those who did not receive the beast's mark on their hand or forehead reign in the thousand years (20:4). The followers of Jesus receive his mark on their foreheads to show they belong to him instead of the beast and to protect them from God's wrath (cf Ladd 1972:63).

7.8.2.2 The 144,000 on Mount Zion

John sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion accompanied by the 144,000 who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads (14:1). A stark contrast is presented between

²⁴The *tefillah*, or phylacteries, worn during the first century were inscribed and knotted to form the letters of the divine name Shaddai (יְהוָה), translated παντοκράτωρ in the Septuagint. 'So the faithful Jew wore the divine name upon his forehead in the form of an abbreviation consisting of the first letter (shin) of that name or, if the knot be counted as making a dalet, an abbreviation consisting of the first two letters of the name, while the knot on the arm could be considered as completing the spelling of the name' (Finnegan 1992:345).

those who take the name of the beast and those who take the name of God and the Lamb. 'The Divine name on the forehead suggests at once the imparting of a character which corresponds with the Mind of God, and the consecration of life to His service' (Swete 1909:177). Reference to the two divine names is reminiscent of the language of the promise in 3:12. Whereas the third name given there is the new Jerusalem, here the name of Jerusalem as Mount Zion is realized. Mount Zion, according to Ladd (1972:189), 'stands for the eschatological victory which, according to the Revelation, is in the new Jerusalem....'

These names are evidently the content of the seal (σφραγίς) which this group received earlier on their foreheads (7:2–8; 9:4). The nature of this seal has long been debated. Its Old Testament background is probably to be found in Ezekiel 9:1–11 where an angel is told to put a mark on the foreheads of Jerusalem's residents who grieve over evil. The angel is to slaughter those who do not receive the mark (תָּו; v 5). Taw is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and in the Old Hebrew script was written in the form of a cross (X) during Ezekiel's day until the New Testament period. The Greek letter chi was recognized as an equivalent to taw. 'This was the more readily possible because, on the one hand, in early Greek the chi was often written as an erect cross mark, and because, on the other hand, the taw itself was often written in the sideways position, so that it was already like the later more usual form of the chi (χ) and like the Latin x' (Finnegan 1992:343). The Damascus Document (19.12) states that at the time of the Messiah's coming, quoting Ezekiel, the only ones to be spared the sword are those marked by the taw (תָּו; adding the article).²⁵

Craigie (1983a:68) likewise suggests a relationship between Ezekiel's vision and John's vision in 14:1: 'The names of the Lamb and his Father were written on the foreheads of the faithful, and the sign X, in Greek script, is the first letter of the name *Christ*. Without delving into the complexities of St John's vision, there is clearly continuity with that of Ezekiel.' Interestingly, John does not use the Septuagint reading of σημεῖον for 'mark' (Ezk 9:4; cf TSol 15:7), but instead uses σημεῖον for supernatural signs as does the Fourth Gospel (cf Rv 12:1; 13:13, etc).²⁶ Rather John uses χάραγμα, a word not used in the Septuagint and only in Acts 17:29, apart from

²⁵Finnegan (1992:344) explains, 'While the statement may be only figurative, it is at least possible that the taw mark was literally put upon the foreheads of the members of this community, perhaps at the time of their initiatory baptism, as a sign to guarantee their salvation in the final Judgment.'

²⁶Origen (*Se/Ez* 9.13.800) tells us that Aquila and Theodotion translated the Hebrew *taw* in Ezekiel 9:4 as τοῦ θὰυ. Tertullian (*Marc* 3.22) likewise refers to the mark Tau when quoting the Ezekiel text. These other renderings of Ezekiel's text understand the mark (*taw*) as 'nothing other than the alphabetic character, taw, a mark in the form of a cross, standing for protection, deliverance, and salvation' (Finnegan 1992:344).

its seven uses in Revelation. Perhaps this is because chi is its first letter, also the first letter of Χρίστος, and another clue to the identification of the mark and of the name. A Jewish Christian told Origen that 'the form of the Taw in the old [Hebrew] script resembles the cross, and it predicts the mark which is to be placed on the foreheads of the Christians' (*Se/Ezk* 9.13.801).

The group on Mount Zion is likewise represented as the virgins who have not defiled themselves (14:1–5), who are contrasted with those who take the mark of the beast's name (13:16–17). These idolatrous worshipers will receive no rest from their torments (cf 9:4; *PssSol* 15:9), unlike the saints who will receive rest (14:11–13).

7.8.2.3 Faithful and True

At the last battle Jesus, described as Faithful and True (19:11), appears astride a white horse followed by the armies of heaven. Both names are given as epithets in 1:5 and 3:7, 14 so they are not secret or unknown. The mention of Faithful and True seems to contradict the claim they are known only to Jesus. Symbolically this is fitting, however, because 'The unknown name of the Christ comports with the fact that his nature, his relationships to the Father, and even his relationship to humanity, transcend all human understanding' (Beasley-Murray 1978:280; cf Mt 11:27). However, upon him is written a new name known only to himself (v 12). We should probably rule out the suggestion of Alford (1875:4.727) that John saw the name but did not reveal it because he did not know its import—'some new and glorious name, indicative, as appears from the context there, of the completed union between Him and His people, and of His final triumph.' Wall (1991:231) observes that Jesus does name himself the Alpha and the Omega in 22:13, the name of the Lord God (1:8). 'Perhaps this is the unknown name disclosed only after the "Day of the Lord" is completed and Christ's full equality with god is disclosed in the new Jerusalem.'

According to 19:13, the secret name is the 'Word (λόγος) of God' (cf Jn 1:1, 14). Earlier commentators (cf Charles 1920:2.132–33) suggested that this name was interpolated because of the inconsistency of a secret name being named. Kiddle (1940:385), however, rightly asserts, 'Such misunderstandings arise out of a failure to do full justice to John's cryptic and subtle style. He has told us the name is secret, but he wishes also to indicate the extent of the power which is implied by this secret name.' Although this expression is found earlier in the book (e g, 1:2, 9), it is not found as a personal name until here. Mounce (1977:345) points out that Word as the title used in Revelation 'emphasizes not so much the self-revelation of God as it does the

authoritative declaration by which the nations of the world are destroyed.' Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:105) postulates that Wisdom of Solomon 18:15–16 may be the source for John's image here. E G Clarke (1973:121) defines the meaning of Word here in Wisdom: 'The concept of both idea and action being inseparable in *Word* is Hebraic. Here *Word* is linked with action; the *Word leapt* and is personified as *a relentless warrior*.' The convergence of similar imagery is striking, but use of the Wisdom of Solomon as a co-text cannot be proven.

In 19:16 another picture is presented. Upon the garment and thigh (μηρόν) of Jesus is written another name—*King of kings and Lord of lords*. This image is perplexing. That this name is literally tattooed on his thigh must be ruled out (contra Wall 1991:232), given the Jewish aversion to marking the body permanently (cf Lv 19:28). It might possibly signify a sword sheath (cf Charles 1920:2.137 for this and other suggestions). Cicero (*Verr* 4.43) mentions a statue of Apollo that had a name written on it in small silver letters.

This picture contrasts with that of the beast covered with blasphemous names and the woman who sat upon it, having the following titles on her forehead—*Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth* (17:3–5).

7.8.2.4 Name in the heavenly city

In the heavenly city the slaves of God and the Lamb will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads (22:4). Du Rand (1988:78) suggests that 'This probably alludes to the name of God on the forehead of the high priest (cf Ex 28:36). Now all the righteous are priests in the presence of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.' It is remarkable that this mark continues into the eschaton, apparently marking the victors for eternity. The pronoun is singular here—'his name'—yet refers both to God and the Lamb. Beasley-Murray (1978:222) errs when he says 'in 22:4 only the Father's name is mentioned.' Finnegan (1992:346) believes that, since the law sign stood for the name of God in Jewish thought, it probably also came to stand for the name of Christ in Jewish Christian thought. Speaking of 22:4 where God's name is upon their foreheads, Finnegan (:346) notes that 'the reference in the immediately preceding verse was not only to God but also to the Lamb.'

7.8.3 The new Jerusalem coming down from heaven

The promise of the New Jerusalem is fulfilled in a number of references in chapter 21 to the heavenly city. In 21:2 the τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν (cf Is 52:1), also called the Ἱερουσαλὴμ καινὴν, is

revealed. In 21:10 (cf 22:19) this city is called τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἱερουσαλήμ. An alternate name in 3:12 is τῆς πόλεως τοῦ θεοῦ μου. Another variation is ἡ πόλις (21:14, 15, 16 [2x], 19, 21, 23; 22:14).²⁷

7.8.3.1 Zion

Zion is used once in 14:1. Like the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews, Revelation links Zion with Jerusalem. 'As the earthly Zion was the meeting point for the tribes of the old Israel [cf Ps 122:3–4], so the heavenly Zion is the meeting point for the new Israel' (Bruce 1964:373). As indicated earlier, the promise of the threefold names of God, city, and Jesus are realized here. Beckwith (1919:647) encapsulates, 'Mount Zion, synonymous with Jerusalem, is one of the standing terms to designate the central seat of the eschatological kingdom.'

7.8.3.2 The new heaven and new earth

In 21:1 John sees the new heaven and new earth, and from this new heaven the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descends (v 2, καταβαίνουσιν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Earlier other things also came out of heaven. An angel was seen descending out of (ἐκ indicating direction, not source) heaven in 10:1; 18:1; and 20:1. The second beast causes fire to fall out of heaven (13:13), during the seventh bowl huge hailstones fall out of heaven (16:21), and fire falls out of heaven to devour God's enemies at the battle of Gog and Magog (20:9). Wall (1991:245) incisively notes, 'Because it comes down out of heaven from God to earth, the reader assumes the realization of God's promised salvation will be historical and public rather than spiritual and private.'

As in 20:5–6 where the first resurrection and second death are mentioned, in 21:1 a first heaven (πρῶτος οὐρανός) and a first earth (πρῶτη γῆ) pass away (ἀπῆλθαν) to reveal a new heaven and new earth, that is, a second heaven and a second earth. The coming of a new, second Jerusalem thus implies the passing away of an old, first Jerusalem (cf v 4, τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν). The threefold use of καινός in verses 1–2 (cf v 5, ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα) shows an emphasis on newness, 'new' being an eschatological catchword (Wall 1991:247; cf supra 6.5.4.1). This newness suggests not only renewal and renovation, but also replacement. Irenaeus (*Haer* 5.36.1) likens the new order to the resurrection body, an apt analogy since John dealt with it first in 20:5–6. The spiritual body has both continuity and discontinuity with the natu-

²⁷Of all the promises and fulfillments more has probably been written on this one than all the others. The major perspectives are reviewed here. A complete overview of recent discussion on the New Jerusalem can be found in the PhD dissertation by Sung-Min Park, *More than a regained Eden* (1995).

ral body, according to Paul (1 Cor 15:42–44). The spiritual body necessarily follows the natural body (v 46), but they are of two different worlds—the first heavenly, the second earthly (v 48). A similar concept of the new pervades the realities of which John is speaking here. ‘Revelation...makes it clear that the NJ is present in heaven and is being prepared through the sole creation of God, and awaiting the moment of manifestation at the consummation of God’s *Helisgeschichte* [sic]’ (Park 1995:165).

The descent of the new Jerusalem to the new earth brings an end to the former division between heaven and earth. God was formerly in heaven and humanity on earth, with the cosmic heaven in between. With the descent of the new heaven, the sun and moon are no longer needed to give their light (Rv 22:5), for God and the Lamb through their glory provide light in the new creation.

7.8.3.3 New Jerusalem as a bride

Bridal imagery is first presented in 19:7 where the great multitude in heaven rejoices because the marriage of the Lamb has come and ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἠτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν. Because the bride has prepared herself through her righteous deeds (v 8), her wedding garment is given to her. ‘The meaning is that the wedding garment will be in keeping with, resultant upon, and conditioned by the character or righteous deeds of the saints, which are an expression of their faith, their watching, and God working in them through his Spirit’ (Garber 1974:271).

This proleptic announcement leads into the fourth beatitude,²⁸ which speaks blessing on those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (19:9). Who is the bride? The text itself supplies the answer: she is the great multitude drawn from every nation. Beasley-Murray (1978:345) further defines, ‘The Bride is the Church viewed in the light of her destiny to share life with her divine Bridegroom in the city of God...already essentially that which she is destined to be in the day of Christ’

In 21:2 the new Jerusalem which John sees descending from heaven is ἠτοιμασμένην ὡς νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς. The imagery of the bride adorned for her husband is probably drawn from Isaiah 61:10. There the writer rejoices that he has been clothed with salvation and joy and adorned with ornaments like a bride (ὡς νύμφην κατεκόσμησέν LXX). In Isaiah

²⁸Giblin (1991:217n164) writes concerning this beatitude: ‘It is the only beatitude in which *no explanation* is stated—either negatively or positively, either in a causal clause or in a purpose clause, or in helpfully explanatory *adjuncta*.’

and here in Revelation a simile is used—'as (ὡς) a bride,' while in 21:9–10 the city is called 'the bride,' a metaphor.

The imagery is repeated again in 21:9 where John is again shown τὴν νύμφην τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀρνίου. Here an explicit link is made between the bride and the wife.²⁹ A duplicate vision of the holy city descending from heaven is seen by John.³⁰ Note, however, that the order of the images seen by John is reversed. In 21:2 John first sees the new Jerusalem, then the bride; here John is shown the bride first (v 9) before he sees the holy city descending from God. Park (1995:187n109) initially attributes no significance to this reversal, pointing to a similar reversal in the presentation of the wall and the gates. Yet he later suggests that 'by way of introducing the NJ [New Jerusalem] by means of the Bride, John may hint that his concern for the NJ is more as people rather than as place' (:191). However, where the bride is first linked with city imagery (21:2) a reference to the holy city comes first. Such a reversal of images indicates for John that the New Jerusalem is both a people *and* a place.

This vision is contrasted deliberately with the vision of the woman, the mother of harlots, in chapter 17. Both visions are introduced by εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῷ ἔξόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας (17:1; 21:9). The angel ἀπήνεγκέν...ἐν πνεύματι John to see the visions (17:3; 21:10). Park (1995:56) rightly points out that these peculiar structural markers 'should be seen as an indication of the presence of an antithetical relationship between Babylon and the NJ as "whore" and "bride." Beasley-Murray (1978:314–15) suggests that the section 21:9–22:5 is an extended exposition of the paragraph in 21:1–8. However, he properly acknowledges its affinities with other texts, particularly chapter 17. 'He [John] could not but believe that the overthrow of the harlot-city and the Antichrist would be followed by the establishment of the bride-city in the rule of Christ' (:315).

²⁹A similar connection between city, bride, and wife is found in Joseph and Aseneth. Aseneth is renamed the City of Refuge because many nations will find refuge in her (15:7). She is promised as a bride for Joseph (15:9; 18:11) and later becomes his wife after Pharaoh blesses their union and stages a seven-day wedding feast in their behalf (21:4–9). 'The tradition of Sion, the City of God, also described under the figure of a woman, lies behind this concept' (Burchard 1985:189).

³⁰This illustrates the weakness of the proposed structuration of Revelation around four main visions marked by the phrase ἐν πνεύματι. In this view the fourth and final vision is thus found in 21:9–22:5. However, 22:9ff is a re-vision of 21:1–8, with both sections ending with inclusios of vice lists (cf Turner 1992:281–83).

7.8.3.4 New Jerusalem as a city

The contrast between two women—the harlot and the bride—was noted in the last section. Here we note the contrast between two cities—Babylon and the New Jerusalem. While the fall of adulterous Babylon is depicted in chapter 18, the establishment of the New Jerusalem is described in chapters 21–22. The alternate name of the new Jerusalem is the holy city (21:2, 10). Following the second vision of the descent from heaven, imagery related to a city predominates. The city has walls, gates, foundations, and a street (21:12–25; 22:2). It is lit by the glory of God and the lamp of the Lamb (21:23; 22:5). People are walking in it (21:24). A paradisiacal park boasts a river of living water and the tree of life (22:1–2). And the throne of God and the Lamb sits within its boundaries (22:3). These detailed features of the city seem to contradict Park's view (1995:191) that John is describing an enormous Holy of Holies. Further examination of these features is beyond the scope of this study.

Charles (1920:2.150ff) believes the twin descriptions of the heavenly Jerusalem are due to the inept efforts of John's literary executor. He claims the heavenly city depicted in 21:9–22:2, 14–15, 17 is the seat of the millennial kingdom on the present earth. 'It is manifest that since sin, and therefore death, prevail outside the gates of the Heavenly City, the present order of things still prevails, the first heaven and the first earth are still in being' (:151). He asserts that another heavenly city is depicted in 21:1–4; 22:3–5. 'This second Heavenly City does not appear *till the first heaven and the first earth have vanished and their place been taken by the new heaven and the new earth*' (:151). Charles's distinction between the heavenly and the new Jerusalem, according to du Rand (1988:67), 'is based on the influence of a theological reading of chapter 20.' Likewise, his preoccupation with redaction overwhelms any attempt to understand how John has structured the dual visions for his own purposes. Beasley-Murray (1978:305) believes this second vision has primarily a pastoral purpose: 'It guarantees the truth of the prophecy contained in the first paragraph, promising participation in the blessings of the new world to all who exercise faith and maintain it in face of discouragements, and warning of the doom which will overtake all who apostatise and persist in the ways of Antichrist.'

This picture of a renewed city fulfills numerous Old Testament prophecies (cf supra 6.8.5.3). Jesus himself declares in the Fourth Gospel that his Father's house has many rooms. He promised to prepare a place (τόπος) for his disciples and to return to bring them to that place (Jn 14:2–4). R Gundry (1987) has also asked the important question whether the New Jerusalem is a 'place for people' or 'people as place.' He disclaims that 'the city even partly symbolizes the

place where the saints will dwell forever'; rather it exclusively symbolizes the saints (:255). This assertion is not tenable given John's presentation of both dimensions of the New Jerusalem. We agree with Dumbrell (1985:3) that the imagery oscillates between city and community.

7.8.4 Conclusion

The promise that the victors would become a pillar in the heavenly temple, never to leave, would suggest safety and security to the Philadelphians. The divine names written on them confirm their role as priests. As priests they would enjoy close fellowship with God and the Lamb who are the temple in the new Jerusalem. As the image of the pillar is both an object and a person, so is the heavenly city both a people and a place. As a people she is a glorious bride betrothed for marriage. As a place she is the domicile both for God and his people for eternity. In this city as a people and a place is found the fulfillment of every other promise. It is the all-encompassing reality that is the sum of existence in the eschaton following the coming of Jesus.

7.9 THE LAODICEAN FULFILLMENT

7.9.1 The divine throne

Schmitz (1965:3.166) denies any fulfillment of the promise in 3:21: 'But this participation of the company of overcomers in the throne of Christ is not depicted in the visions of Rev.' Apart from the victor saying, three other texts relate thrones to individuals connected to God and the Lamb. These texts—4:4, 11:16, and 20:4—are short and undeveloped, but the persons on the thrones seem to represent all the redeemed (cf Williamson 1993:131). We proceed with an examination of these texts plus several others that mention the related theme of kingdom.

7.9.1.1 A heavenly throne

In John's initial vision of heaven (4:1ff) the divine throne in heaven is central. Beale (1982:189) sees the *Vorbild* of Daniel 7 behind the repeated references to 'throne' in chapters 3–5. Encircling it are twenty-four other thrones upon which are sitting the twenty-four elders (v 4). Earlier we identified these elders as representatives of the total people of God—the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the church (cf 21:12–14). This text suggests that the old covenant people of Israel are part of the heavenly community. These elders are distinguished by two

other features of the victors—white garments and golden crowns. They function as ‘a heavenly chorus that continually sings God’s praises on behalf of God’s people’ (Wall 1991:92). When the elders lay down their golden crowns before the throne, they exclaim, ‘Worthy are you, O Lord’ (4:11).

The elders sing a song in 5:10 extolling Christ for purchasing with his blood individuals from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. He has made them a kingdom and priests, and they will reign on earth, a statement clearly proleptic. This recalls 1:6 where Christ’s beloved, whom he has loosed from their sins with his blood, are made a kingdom. The elders exercise priestly duties holding the golden incense bowls, which are the prayers of the saints (5:8). In 11:16 the twenty-four elders seated on thrones again are portrayed worshiping God. They give thanks because the time of judging the unrighteous and rewarding the redeemed has come.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:59) likens these elders to angelic vassal-kings who mimic the court ceremony of Hellenistic-Oriental kingship rituals. She cites the account of Tacitus concerning the Armenian king, the Parthian Tiridates (*An* 15.28). Following his defeat by Corbulo, Tiridates was forced to lay down his diadem before the image of Nero that rested on the Roman official ‘throne.’ Later he journeyed to Rome to receive his crown back from Nero in person (*An* 16.22). This account suggests an interesting correlation; however, the careful distinction John makes between crown and diadem in Revelation undermines such an interpretation.

7.9.1.2 Heavenly thrones

This heavenly scene in 20:4–6 shows a marked dependence on Daniel 7:9ff. Williamson (1993:142) questions whether the location of this scene is heaven or earth: ‘Since 20:4 follows Dan. 7:9...the likelihood that this is an earthly scene is enhanced.’ However, in Chapter 2 this group was identified as part of the heavenly church, and their continuity with the martyrs of the fifth seal was likewise noted. Those seated on thrones are given authority to judge. J E Botha (1988:139) aptly catches the irony here: ‘The power to judge has now shifted from the champions of the imperial cult and power into the hands of the martyrs.’ In 20:6 those participating in the first resurrection lived again (cf Rv 2:8) and reigned (ἐβασίλευσαν) with Christ for a thousand years. While they are given authority to judge, the martyrs are never shown to be judging. No judgment actually occurs until that of the great white throne; then the dead are judged (vv 11–12). Schüssler Fiorenza (1991:108) rightly notes that ‘the image of the great white throne in the

universal judgment scene of 20:11–15 parallels the throne image in 20:4 and recalls the throne room of chapters 4–5.’

Those seated on thrones are said to reign a thousand years. The issue of the martyrs reigning on thrones during this period is perhaps the *crux interpretum* of the book. For all the saints to be reigning during this period seems premature. As Mealy (1992:116) importantly observes, ‘Yet it is noteworthy that in terms of concrete pictures the promises of the good anticipated for the parousia remain absent. In preference to this, the essence of the promised role and status of the overcomers is expressed: they are blessed, they are holy, they are resurrected to life, they are invulnerable to the second death, they are priests and kings, and they are together with Christ.’ Earlier (cf supra 2.5.3) we suggested that the time periods mentioned in Revelation were co-terminus. Revelation, according to Jeremias (1967:5.770n42), ‘uses eschatological ideas proleptically to depict the intermediate state of the martyrs (e.g., 6:11), so that intermediate and eschatological statements are intermingled in what is said about the martyrs.’ The passage before us is best understood proleptically: the martyrs are guaranteed to reign with Christ after Satan has finally been disposed of in the lake of fire.

Ulfgard (1989:44) denies the future sense here, arguing that John’s emphasis is on the present royal dignity of the Christian. To bolster his case, he adopts a variant reading not found in NA²⁶/UBS⁵. Park (1995:304n100) takes issue with this: ‘Although the present tense βασιλεύουσιν is attested by the best textual witness, codex Alexandrinus, the future tense βασιλεύσουσιν is found in most of the manuscripts and is preferred by the majority of the commentators of Revelation.’ The beatitude abruptly moves the time frame from a visionary future reign to a present reminder to the victors. The use of the future is appropriate here, and it functions like the future περιπατήσουσιν in 3:5.

Johnson (1981:12.583; cf Ulfgard 1989:61) believes the καὶ οἵτινες clause here introduces a special class of the beheaded—those who did not worship the beast. Ladd (1972:263), however, suggests another identification—all the saints to whom judgment is given and a smaller group of martyrs. Such suggestions attempt to alleviate the problem of why only the martyrs should live and reign with Christ. Although Johnson admits that in Revelation the relative pronoun οἵτινες usually refers to the preceding group and adds some further detail, he appeals to 1:7 as an exception. Yet this echo of Zechariah 12:10 scarcely singles out a special group or class either in 1:7 or in its source context. In 20:4 the reason for the beheading of the saints is stated positively and negatively: they bore testimony about Jesus and the word of God, while

refusing to worship the beast or to receive his mark. It *is* possible that a second group is spoken of here. Such an interpretation is not problematic, since we have earlier concluded that not everyone will be martyred. However, it seems best to view this as one group, the beheaded, who by metonymy represent all the saints who potentially must be prepared to follow Christ by giving up their lives.

In 19:14 the victors were portrayed as an army accompanying Jesus at his parousia. Mealy (1992:108) aptly summarizes, 'If they have seen themselves pictured as coming back to *judge* with Christ, they will be open to seeing a picture of themselves *reigning* as well. Both roles are promised equally in the letters (2.26–27; 3.11, 21), and the second has been prophesied in 5.10.'

7.9.1.3 The throne of God and the Lamb

The throne appears as the central object in the New Jerusalem and is twice said to be shared by God and the Lamb (cf Park 1995:233). In 22:1 the river of the water of life is seen flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. And in 22:3 the slaves of God serve around the throne of God and the Lamb located in the midst of the holy city. Because Jesus himself triumphed (3:21), he was able to join his Father on the throne. Therefore it is now announced that the victors will be part of this regnal state, likewise promised to the Laodiceans, and will reign forever (22:5).

7.9.2 Conclusion

The reference to thrones during the thousand years remains problematic. It is a proleptic reality realized at Christ's coming with his heavenly army. Divine rule is finally established when the enemies of God are disposed of. The promise of kingship in a heavenly kingdom is finally realized. Giblin (1991:226n183) writes: 'The victory promised the lax Laodiceans if they change their ways should astound any reader: they will share the *same throne* as God and the Lord Jesus! The underlying notion, of course, is the regal status of those in heaven (20:6) and in the New Jerusalem (22:3–5).' This is the white throne from which God dispenses his judgment.

7.10 CONCLUSION

Yarbro Collins (1979:144) denies that such images as the new creation and the New Jerusalem describe the way things will be at some future time; '[r]ather, they say that, in a way we cannot

fully understand, creation and life do, in the present, have the victory over chaos and death.' We have proposed just the opposite. Her conclusion presupposes a realized eschatology characteristic of other Johannine literature. However, such a perspective does not predominate in Revelation. Questions regarding the functions of the promises will be addressed in the next chapter.

In Chapter 3 we suggested that the promises and their fulfillments are an important evidence that the structure of Revelation is chiasmic. The chart there (cf supra 3.5.6) is again presented, now with all the promises and fulfillments filled in. Minear (1968:61) rightly exclaims, 'Not a single promise in this list is missing from the rest of the Apocalypse!'

B Seven Churches (1:4–4:2)

Promises

1. Tree of life in paradise of God (2:7)
2. Crown of life (2:10); second death (2:11)
3. Hidden manna; white stone; new name (2:17)
4. Authority over the nations; rod of iron (2:26); Morning Star (2:27);
5. White garments; book of life; confession of name (3:5)
6. Pillar in the temple; divine names written; New Jerusalem descending from heaven (3:12)
7. Divine throne (3:21)

B' New Jerusalem (19:6–22:9)

Fulfillment

- Tree of life (22:2, 14, 19)
 First resurrection (20:5–6); second death (20:6, 14; 21:4, 8)
 River of living water (22:1, 17); wedding supper (19:7–9); precious stone? (21:19); new name (22:4)
 Judge nations with Christ who holds iron scepter (20:4; cf 19:15); Morning Star (22:16)
 Dressed in white, as a bride (19:7–8; 21:2; cf 7:9, 13), names in book of life (20:12, 15; 21:27; cf 13:8)
 Divine names written (22:4; cf 14:1); New Jerusalem descending from heaven (21:2, 10)
 Martyrs judge seated on thrones (20:4)

These relationships, according to Ulfgard (1989:103n442), demonstrate 'how the promises to the conquerors in the letters to the seven churches refer to concepts in chs 21–22, another way of showing how the faithful confessor shares Christ's victory.'

Other commentators have suggested additional fulfillments, although we are not convinced of their applicability. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:65n129) suggests these—2:17 by 22:2; 2:26 transformed in 21:24; and 3:21 by 22:5.³¹ Wall (1991:45n10) suggests these further relationships—the image of 'name' (2:17) is parallel to 21:27 and the subjection of the 'nations' (2:26–27) is parallel to the salvation of the 'nations' (21:24).

³¹An editorial error has made senseless the sequence between several of the scriptures here. 3:5 is not fulfilled by 21:10 but by 3:12 which is accidentally omitted, thus no fulfillment for 3:5 is given.

Two of the promises find their initial fulfillment outside the final new Jerusalem section (19:6–22:9) in the proleptic appearances of the heavenly saints. The image of white garments is seen in two passages—6:11 and 7:9, 13. The image of the divine name written, through the sealing of the saints, is most obviously seen in 14:1. These early iterations of two promises act as a down payment, in a sense, that all the rest of the promises will be given in the new Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 8: THE APPROPRIATION OF THE PROMISE SAYINGS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter examines possible ways that the promises could have been appropriated by the Asian believers in their distinctive churches and communities. In Chapter 2 the situations in Revelation were examined from several perspectives. In presenting these situations we purposely delayed drawing any conclusions regarding the themes of Revelation. What kind of message would the Asian audience derive from the book, particularly the seven letters and their promise sayings? Thompson (1990:6; cf 179ff) declares, 'Most of the key words and root metaphors used throughout the book are introduced in the letters to the seven churches.' It is therefore appropriate to examine the seven letters, particularly the promises, regarding *macrodynamic theme development*. Three proposed themes for the book will be discussed. We then look at the function of the promises within the book. This discussion is an outgrowth of Chapter 4 with its review of proposed forms for the seven letters. Discovering their function will lead to the likely appropriation of the promises.

8.2 THREE MAJOR THEMES OF REVELATION

Several themes have been proposed for Revelation. We will next discuss three of the most significant—**persecution, the coming of Jesus, and victory.**

8.2.1 Persecution

Caird (1966:12) asks what it was that John expected to happen soon. He rejects the answer that it was the return of Christ in victory and judgment; rather 'he expected persecution of the church by the Roman Empire.' All the book's imagery including that of the promises has only one purpose—'to disclose to the prospective martyrs the real nature of their suffering and its place in the eternal purposes of God' (:12). Likewise, the purpose of the seven prophetic letters is not to investigate whether the churches are ready to meet Jesus; instead Jesus is seeing 'whether they are strong enough to survive a thorough-going persecution' (:27). Caird gives four reasons why he chooses persecution.

1. Christ, who knows the churches' strengths and weaknesses, conducts the examination himself. They are being prepared by him, not for him.

2. Four letters contain a conditional threat that Christ will come in judgment unless there is repentance. This seems out of keeping with a belief in an imminent parousia.
3. The virtues most frequently praised are patience, endurance, constancy, and loyalty, not love or joy, which are virtues for normal times. These stern virtues, important when the church is struggling for survival, would not be the only ones that matter at the last assize.
4. The climactic promises to the conquerors determine the character of the letters. But the conqueror is the martyred Christian who testifies concerning Christ and thus wins the victory over temptation and death.

Caird thus sees the promises as directed to believers destined to give up their lives in the coming tribulation. Trites (1977:167) concurs with this assessment, that 'basically the Revelation is a prophetic book for prophets, which is another way of saying that it is written to prepare Christians for martyrdom.'

A response to each of Caird's points is called for. *First*, the bridal imagery found in chapters 19–20 is negated if point 1 is true. 19:7 states clearly that the bride, through her righteous deeds, has made herself ready for the wedding of the Lamb.

Second, our outline of the coming sayings (cf supra 4.14) do indicate localized comings to five churches—Ephesus (2:5); Pergamum (2:16); Thyatira (2:22–23); Sardis (3:3), and Laodicea (3:20). However, such local comings for judgment of the unrepentant are easily distinguished from references to the final parousia (2:25; 3:11). Holman (1982:340) rightly suggests 'it is likely that some of the "comings" are *anticipatory* of the parousia at the end....Such preliminary "parousias" are specifically directed to individual churches and are conditional upon failure to rectify some deficiency.'

Third, it is true that such stern virtues as endurance and loyalty are repeatedly praised. But the Thyatirans are commended for their love (2:19), while the Ephesians are specifically chastised for loss of their love (2:4). And by implicit contrast other virtues are indeed commended in light of the last judgment. The vice lists (21:8; 22:11, 15; cf supra 7.4.2.3) comprise unrighteous acts that will exclude their perpetrators from the heavenly city. Contrarily, those who are pure, loving, chaste, devout, honest, etc. will become citizens of the new Jerusalem. As we will see next, not all believers were destined to become martyrs, hence more 'normal' virtues are likewise important for Jesus and John.

We will elaborate a bit more on the *fourth* and final point. J H Roberts (1988:18) critiques Caird's viewpoint, stating that 'when he sets up the eschatological perspective and his own un-

derstanding of the impending crisis as mutually excluding viewpoints, he is, I believe, in the wrong.' With Caird, Roberts identifies the crisis as one of Roman persecution, not of the coming end. Roberts (:18) adds this qualifier, 'However, the reality of the coming end and the return of Christ in victory was the perspective by means of which the author was trying to consolidate the endurance of his readers so that they would experience his victorious reign in the moments of their deepest despair' (:18). As noted before, persecution had already been experienced in Pergamum and was at hand in Smyrna; indeed John's own penal situation on Patmos was possibly precarious. In his visions of the martyrs in heaven John sees a great multitude drawn from every nationality on earth. Yet it is doubtful if universal martyrdom is ever implied here. Some churches, like the Thyatirans and the Sardians, would be little affected by persecution. Within a given rhetorical situation, Bitzer (1968:7) states, 'there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected.' While persecution is certainly the historical exigence that gives rise to Revelation, there are other more important themes.¹

8.2.2 The coming of Jesus

C Holman (1982:338) asserts, 'The hope of the imminent return of Christ is presented more forcefully in the New Testament Apocalypse than in any other canonical document.' While the development of a delay motif in the Pauline and Synoptic apocalypses was in part prompted by a false eschatological enthusiasm, John apparently addresses no comparable problem in Revelation.² Rather 'John seems to desire to *rekindle* expectation which has grown lax and cold (over the years?) and in the face of worldly pressures' (:378).

Revelation's opening words, 'Ἀποκάλυψις of Jesus Christ (understood as 'coming'; cf supra 2.4.2.3), and the closing invitation, 'Amen. Come, Lord Jesus,' frame the book and focus the audience on this theme. The phrases ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (1:1) and ὁ ὄ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγυς (1:3) found in the opening verses are repeated in 22:6 and 22:10 respectively. 'Such balance makes prominent the "imminence" motif, while the climactic conclusion serves to underscore the idea

¹Bitzer (1968:13) speaks about rhetorical situations that persist, 'which are in some measure universal.' That is why Revelation is still relevant today. The persecution of Christians remains prevalent in many countries, and Christ's parousia still lies ahead.

²While divine judgment fell on Jerusalem in AD 70 and perhaps unknown localized judgments on some of the Asian churches, the expected parousia did not occur. How was this disappointment handled in the late first century? Westcott (1881:lxxxvii) believes the Gospel (and the epistles) of John provide the answer. 'In the Apocalypse that "coming" of Christ was expected, and painted in figures: in the Gospel the "coming" is interpreted.' Thus the Fourth Gospel is the spiritual interpretation of the Apocalypse.

further' (Holman 1982:339–40). In 22:10 the book is not to be sealed because the time is near. Here ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς 'is used unambiguously to denote the nearness of the end of the world' (Kümmel 1961:20).

The beatitude in 1:3 is likewise paired with the beatitude in 22:7, which is linked with the threefold declaration, 'I am coming soon' (22:7, 12, 20). Mazzaferri (1989:237) writes, 'Jesus' promise, ἔρχομαι ταχύ, is scarcely intelligible, let alone a motivation for perseverance, except in the sense of imminence.' Other references to Christ's coming are found throughout the book—1:7–8; 2:25; 3:11; and 16:15. All this leads Gager (1975:153) to claim: 'The one undeniable fact is that the attention of the community...was entirely on the imminent End.'

The historical situation in the Roman Empire surrounding Nero's demise probably evoked an expectant response among the Asian Christians. Robinson (1976:281) describes it this way:

[A]ll the evidence suggests that the latter 60s of the first century (not unnaturally in the light of what was happening both in Rome and Jerusalem) saw a quickening of the expectation that the end could not now be long delayed (I Peter 4.7) but that Christ would come very soon to his waiting church (Rev. 1.7; 3.3; 22.7, 20), in fulfilment of the promise that the first, apostolic generation would live to see it all (Mark 9.1; 13.30; etc.). When therefore all the other 'pillars' (Gal. 2.9) had been removed by death (James in 62, Peter and Paul in 65+) and John only 'remained', a supposed promise of Jesus that he would not die, but that the end would come first, must have fed fervid expectations of an imminent consummation.

Mazzaferri (1989:236) likewise claims 'There is sufficient unequivocal, explicit evidence firmly to establish that Rev stresses an eschaton imminent in John's very day.'

Coming to the seven letters, the use of the present tense in Jesus' instructions to the churches implies imminence. The coming sayings that refer to the parousia (2:25; 3:11) immediately precede the promise sayings. 'In hearing the seven letters, therefore, the reader will naturally find him- or herself being trained to associate promised rewards with the parousia' (Mealy 1992:215). What might the Asian audience know about the parousia after the opening vision and the seven letters have been read? Mealy (1992:215–16) responds:

They know that the parousia is the public revelation of Jesus from heaven as king and judge of all humankind. They also know that, if they remain true to him, it will be: the time of their reunion with him, the time of their participation with him in his kingly rule, the time of their confirmation as royal priests and citizens of his kingdom, and the time of their confirmation as people of the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven.

Earlier we concluded that persecution was the historical exigence that gave rise to Revelation; now we suggest that the soon coming of Jesus was the spiritual, or apocalyptic, exigence likewise involved. Without repentance many of the Asian churches were to receive a localized

coming in judgment with a view to purifying and preparing them for the eschatological coming that loomed in the not-too-distant future.

8.2.3 Victory

By this time it is evident that the theme of victory is significant in Revelation. Its importance has been observed by a number of commentators. Swete (1909:29) notes that 'the book is a record and a prophecy of victories won by Christ and the Church.' Perez (1911:285) adds, 'And it is then this victory of the Church that is foreshadowed in, and forms the subject of, the whole book....Christ's victory is to be achieved through His Church.' And Bauckham (1980:29) sees a movement in Revelation's later chapters 'from Christ's victory on the cross towards the fulfilment of that victory at the *parousia*, and he structures that movements in the series of sevens.' We will next look at the observations of P Minear and K Strand.

8.2.3.1 P Minear

In the chapter titles of his commentary *I saw a new earth* Minear (1968:xvii) suggests that victory is the theme of Revelation's six visions. These titles are: (1) The promise of victory, (2) The Lamb as victor, (3) The prophets as victors, (4) The faithful as victors, (5) Victory over Babylon, and (6) Victory over the devil. Unfortunately Minear provides no explanation regarding why he chose victory as the overriding theme for the book's divisions.

8.2.3.2 K Strand

Acknowledging his debt to Minear, K Strand (1990) has proposed that victor, or overcomer, is the macrodynamic theme developed in Revelation. Strand builds upon his earlier study wherein he structures the book chiastically (cf supra 3.5.2.4). For purposes of discussion the following chart is provided. It combines two charts supplied by Strang—the first illustrates the development of the overcomer theme (:240) and the second the book's chiastic structure (:239), which Strand has modified slightly from its initial presentation.

		Vision 4			Vision 8		
Visions 1–3	↗			Visions 5–7	↖		
Process of overcoming during the historical era		Overcomers in the present age		Judgment and doom on the hierarchy of evildoers during the eschatological-judgment era		Overcomers in the eternal age	
		Vision 3	Vision 4	Vision 5	Vision 6		
	Vision 2	8:2–11:18	11:19–14:20	15:1–16:17	16:18–18:24	Vision 7	
Vision 1	4:1–8:1	Trumpet warnings	Evil powers opposing God and his saints	Bowl plagues	Evil powers judged by God	19:21–21:4	Vision 8
1:10b–3:22	God's ongoing work of salvation					God's judgment finale	21:4–22:5
Church militant							Church triumphant

Strand divides the two major parts of Revelation into 'historical-era visions' (visions 1–4) and 'eschatological-judgment visions' (visions 5–8). In the first group vision 1 gives the requisites for becoming a victor in the promise sayings of the seven letters (:241). The seals septet in vision 2 emphasizes victory through the blood of the Lamb; the trumpets septet in vision 3 emphasizes victory through the prophetic word of the two witnesses (:244). The blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony are set out in vision 4 as the two elements by which the saints triumph over the dragon and the two beasts. These two elements, basic to the process of conquering, establish a connection with the central elements in visions 2 and 3 (:245). However, like vision 8, vision 4 'also indicates results of overcoming, albeit in a different way and context' (:241). This concession is the first indication that this schema has problems.

The second half of eschatological-judgment visions begins with the vindication of the victors from the wrongful verdicts and punishments they have suffered (:246–47). In vision 5 the plagues of the six bowls fall upon the earthdwellers who have taken the beast's mark; vision 6 describes the judgment of Babylon wherein she is rewarded for her evil deeds (:248). In vision 7 the beast, false prophet, and finally the dragon are thrown into the lake of fire (:248). Strand's chiasmic diagram of the rise and demise of this evil hierarchy (:254; cf supra 4.1.2) does not ac-

cord with his division of the visions, another weakness of his hypothesis. In vision 8 'Revelation's "overcomer" theme reaches its ultimate climax and conclusion in the granting to the overcomers all the things promised to them in the letter to the churches in the introductory vision of the book' (:249).

Strand's observation concerning the importance of the victor theme to Revelation is significant; however, we disagree with his methodology. We have already proposed an alternative chiastic structure (cf supra 3.4.2). Strand's arbitrary division between the two eras in the book—the historical and the eschatological-judgment—also does not hold up, because considerable overlap exists between the two. For example, the judgments of the seals and trumpets are likewise eschatological. The fifth trumpet in vision 3, like the bowl judgments, brings suffering on the earthdwellers who do not have the seal of God but instead possess the mark of the beast. Such hortatory elements as the *ὁδὲ*-sayings and the beatitudes inject a present emphasis to the visions of his supposedly future era in section 2.

8.2.3.3 An alternate outline

The following chart, based upon our proposed chiastic structure, shows the victor theme in present and future time as described in the book. It also presents the past victory of Jesus, which is the basis for the present and future triumph of the saints. References to blood and piercing in A, the prologue (1:5, 7), anticipate fuller explications of Jesus' propitiatory role. Note that explicit reference to his victory is found only in sections B and C. Every use of the title 'Lamb' after that implicitly refers to Christ's victory at the cross. The beast's present victory is also pointed out as a minor theme. But his victory is transient and quickly fades.

A	B	C	D	E	D'	C'	B'	A'	
				<u>12:1-18</u>					
			<u>8:2-11:19</u>	Present 12:11	<u>13:1-16:21</u>				
		<u>3:21-8:5</u>	Present 11:3-6		Present (Beast) 13:7	<u>16:18-19:10</u>			
	<u>1:4-4:2</u>	Past (Lamb) 5:5-6	Present (Beast) 11:7		Present 13:9-10, 18; 14:12- 13; 16:15	Future 19:1-2, 5-8	<u>19:6-22:9</u>		
<u>1:1-8</u>	Past (Lamb) 1:18; 3:21	Present (Beast) 6:2	Future 11:11-12, 18		Future 15:2-5	Present 19:9	Future 20:4-6; 21:2-4	<u>22:6-21</u>	
Present 1:3	Present 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 19, 24-25; 3:4, 8- 10	Future 6:9-11; 7:9-14					Present 21:6-7	Future (Jesus) 22:7, 12, 20	
Past (Lamb) 1:5	Future 2:7, 10- 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21							Present 22:7	
Future (Lamb) 1:7								Future 22:14	

Each section has an overt reference to victory. Those texts marked present, except for the references to the beast, refer to the believers' ongoing witness before martyrdom. Those texts marked future show the heavenly victors and their rewards after death. The praise sayings in the seven letters describe the deeds, past and present, that produce victory. The promise sayings show the rewards of the victorious life. A constant interplay between the present and future aspects of victory is seen throughout the book. Such a diagram betters accords with the literary development of victory as a macrodynamic theme. Victory is therefore a prophetic theme that reverberates throughout Revelation.

8.2.4 Conclusion

While past and future persecution is an important historical exigence for the writing of Revelation, it fails as an encompassing theme. For while persecution generated by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is a real threat, it is transitory in the face of overwhelming heavenly realities. From the apocalyptic situation of Jesus it is his coming that is all important. At his parousia heaven will be on earth. To ensure that the saints will be a part of this new heaven and earth, they must be victorious over the temptations and persecution perpetrated by the unholy trinity. From John's prophetic situation exhortations toward that victory are necessary to ensure readiness for Christ's parousia. Thus we conclude that the coming of Jesus and the victory of the saints are the two macrodynamic themes of Revelation.

8.3 The function of the seven letters and the promise sayings

8.3.1 Introduction

What is the function of the seven letters, particularly the promise sayings, in Revelation? Various functions have been suggested. For example, White (1986:19) concludes, following his examination of ancient epistles generally, that the longer length of Christian letters is 'directly related to their function as letters of instruction.' And L Hartman (1980:143–44) believes the seven letters have a double function: '[O]n the one hand they engage the readers/listeners, so that they become directly and explicitly involved in the prophecy; their own and their neighbors' virtues and vices are mustered. On the other hand, the messages correspond to a common phenomenon in revelatory literature, viz., that the divine revelation usually responds to problems and situations presented before or brought forward during the visions.'

Earlier (cf supra 2.2) we discussed the rhetorical situation of each of the seven churches. Here we stress that a collective situation was likewise shared among the churches. According to M Goguel (1963:167), 'The Letters to the Seven Churches...show that the Churches of Asia felt that they were members of an organic group which could be addressed as a single body.' From the mutuality of the problems faced, it is clear that the churches interacted with each other (cf Rv 2:23). Park (1995:258) believes 'the book as a whole may be understood as being written to challenge the Christian of the seven churches to enter the NJ.' Hence the promises are given generally to all the Asian believers, yet each letter has elements individualized to that particular church.

Scobie (1993:622) suggests that the local references employed in the letters serve as a 'collective reinforcement' of John's message. 'The various churches would immediately note the advice and warnings, reinforced by local references, given to the other communities. John seeks in a sense to shame each church into complying with his demands by creating a situation in which the various churches will be closely watching each other. In this way he reinforced his appeal to each individual community' (:623). While Scobie's language about shaming is too strong, nevertheless his point is well taken. In his absence John calls the churches and their prophets to be mutually accountable to one another, so that the challenges facing them individually and collectively might be faced and overcome.

Building upon these general suggestions, we will now examine twelve functions proposed for the promises. While some proposed functions are demonstrated to be unlikely, several appear equally plausible and in fact complement each other. Hermeneutically this concept of multiple functions is valid. Such a perspective does justice to the exegetical procedure of a **pluralism of methods**. Using such a methodology pays high heuristic dividends as we try to understand the probable spiritual outcomes in the Asian churches.

8.3.2 A rhetorical function: Argumentative/persuasive nature of Revelation 2–3

Earlier (cf supra 4.4.2) we evaluated Kirby's suggestions regarding the rhetorical form of the seven letters; here we discuss those related to their rhetorical function. Kirby (1988:200), after identifying Aristotle's three *species* of oratory—judicial, epideictic, and deliberative, opts for deliberative as the overall rhetorical species of Revelation 'since it is concerned with events in the future (Rev 1.1, 3) and with a course of action expedient to the audience (22.11–12).' He argues that, although the seven letters may at first seem to have a judicial aspect because of their juridical evaluation of past action, 'finally their thrust is deliberative, for each letter purports to stir its audience to a course of action' (:200).

The praise and blame sayings in the letters, however, are typical of epideictic rhetoric. 'Moralists argued that praise and blame were harmful unless employed as a kind of exhortation' (Stowers 1986:77). The praise given to every church but Laodicea was therefore viewed as a type of exhortation.

Regarding the promises, Kirby (1988:201) believes they 'function rhetorically as epilogues to each letter, and consequently it is not surprising to find the argument from *pathos* developed in them.' Aune (1990:183n5) though criticizes Kirby for failing to see that 'the "epilogue" section

has no typical rhetorical function at all.' Yet, according to most rhetoricians, Kennedy (1984:62) claims, 'An epilogue has two functions: it recapitulates the major point or points of the speech, and it seeks to stir the audience to action.' While not speaking specifically of the epilogue, Bitzer (1968:3–4) states that a work of rhetoric 'functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality.' This is an apt description how the promises function rhetorically in the letters and in the book.

8.3.3 A covenant renewal function

Shea's suggestion that the form of the seven letters followed ancient Near East covenants was evaluated previously (cf supra 4.3). Based on his analysis, Shea (1983:83) concludes that the letters of chapters 2–3 function as New Testament covenant renewal messages for each of the seven churches. However, the covenant in Revelation is the new one prophesied by Jeremiah in 31:31ff., which is not like the covenant made with Israel. This covenant is based on relationship, 'I will be their God and they will be my people' (31:33), language echoed in the final promise saying in Revelation 21:7. This new covenant was initiated through the Lamb who triumphed through the shedding of his blood. It centers not in the earthly temple in Jerusalem but in the heavenly temple. The blessings of the promises are not fulfilled by command as in law but through persuasion and exhortation. We therefore reject Shea's contention that in Revelation 2–3 we see a 'function of the ancient suzerainty covenant has been carried out on a rather sweeping scale in a major block of material from the last book of the NT' (1983:83–84).

8.3.4 A liturgical function

Earlier (cf supra 4.5) we examined Prigent's proposal that the form of the seven letters follows that of early liturgical practices. Sweet (1979:42) summarizes Prigent's view of their function: they evoke 'the message of Christian worship, i.e., that the final coming of Christ and the blessedness of the heavenly banquet are anticipated here and now in his eucharistic presence.' We found little evidence of explicit eucharistic imagery in the promise sayings and therefore must reject attempts to give a liturgical function to the letters.

8.3.5 A warfare function

A number of recent commentators have found evidence of the holy war theme in Revelation. For the Asian believers Yarbrow Collins (1979a:xiv) sees the story about combat functioning as a

model 'for understanding and coming to terms with powerlessness, suffering and death.' While the bulk of the Holy War imagery is usually found in chapters 4–22, Giblin (1991:29n29) observes that such imagery is somewhat discernible in the promise sayings of chapters 2–3: 'These promises, most of which John later depicts as verified in a heavenly state after death and/or in the new creation...serve to predict the "promised land," which is the positive results or fruit of the term and goal (*telos*) of the Holy War.'

Bauckham (1993a:213) sees a much more explicit linkage between the promises and Holy War: 'They function to invite the readers to participate in the eschatological war which is described in the central part of the book, where the vocabulary of conquest (*νικᾶν*) is frequent, and so gain their place in the new Jerusalem.' We agree that John is calling his audience not to be spectators, but to participate actively in the struggle which some may seek to ignore or evade. Bauckham likens John's use of the Holy War tradition to that found in the War Scroll from Qumran (1QM), although John makes the warfare metaphorical rather than literal. 'But in religious function there is a certain parallel between the two works' (:213). In Chapter 5 we interpreted the *ὁ νικῶν* motif in terms of athletic games rather than military conquest, preferring the translation 'victor' rather than 'conqueror.' Although warfare imagery is explicitly used in the Pergamene letter (e.g., 'sword,' 'war' [2:16]), it is absent in the rest. Therefore, while acknowledging Holy War plays a thematic role in such chapters as 12, 16, and 19, it does not function as a significant theme in the promise sayings.

8.3.6 A salvation history function

An older interpretive approach with few adherents today sees the promises functioning as a type of God's historical dealings with humanity in the Old Testament. Poirier (1943:43) represents this view: 'Les promesses entre elles offrent le phénomène singulier d'un développement historique basé sur l'Ancient Testament, depuis Adam jusqu'au Christ.' A progressive development is seen in the Old Testament allusions and quotations in the seven promises. The following chart gives three outlines of this development suggested by Bullinger (1902:86–102), Crosthwaite (1910–11:397–99), and Poirier (1943:49–50).

<u>Church</u>	<u>Bullinger³</u>	<u>Crosthwaite</u>	<u>Poirier</u>
Ephesus	Eden	Creation and fall	Paradis et chute
Smyrna	Fall	Capitivity in Egypt	Captivité en Egypte
Pergamum	Wilderness	Wilderness	Exode et conquête de Canaan
Thyatira	Wilderness/Davidic reign	Conquest (Joshua)	Royaume uni
Sardis	End of Davidic reign	Judges	Royaume divisé
Philadelphia	Temple of Solomon	Kings	Exil et retour
Laodicea	Throne of Solomon	Exile and restoration	Restauration

The lack of agreement between these three interpreters exemplifies the difficulty of typological interpretation. Even Poirier (1943:49) acknowledges regarding the Laodicean promise, 'le rapprochement avec l'Ancien Testament ne peut être très parfait.'

A further refinement of this approach is advanced by Trench (1883:229), who sees 'an order parallel to that of the unfolding of the kingdom of God from its first beginnings on earth to its glorious consummation in heaven.' The 4 + 3 plan he (:229–31) sees is this: E—creation, S—fall, P—wilderness, T—united kingdom, Sa—judgment day, Ph—new Jerusalem, L—eternal reign. A glaring omission in this scheme is the church age, which is totally absent.

Such approaches are the antithesis of the historical-prophetical interpretations first popularized by Joachim of Fiore (ca 1135–1202), who used a principle of recapitulation which argued that the different prophecies in Revelation referred to the same event (cf Wainwright 1993:53). His successor Alexander the Minorite (d 1271) abandoned Joachim's method and sought to link the prophecies with events in chronological order. Wainwright (1993:53–54) explains, 'The letters to the seven churches, he explained, represent the life of the early church, and their angels were bishops.' Numerous permutations of this interpretation evolved, and are found in Trench's excursus (1883:232–49). That John used Old Testament imagery in the promise sayings was demonstrated in Chapter 6. However, that he consciously constructed the letters and their promises around the history of Israel (or of the church!) is doubtful nor would his audience have read such an intent in them.

³ According to Bullinger (1902:73–86), the references to the Old Testament in the seven letters likewise follow the historical order of events, yet are different than those in the promises: E—Israel's espousal (Ex); S—Israel's wanderings (Nm); P—wilderness (Nm); T—Israel's kings (1 & 2 Ki); Sa—Israel's removal (1 & 2 Chr); Ph—Judah's king's (2 Chr); L—Judah's removal (Minor prophets).

8.3.7 A juridical function

E Käsemann (1969:77) likens the promise sayings to sentences of holy law (*Sätze heiligen Rechtes*)⁴ found in the Old Testament and in the Synoptics: 'It is therefore prophecy's function of leadership in the community which finds expression in the sentences of holy law.' Citing Matthew 10:32, he writes that 'confession of Christ is estimated to be the standard of judgment at the Last Day, and also in the form of the sentence. Prophecy proclaims blessing and curse on those members of the community who confess and those who deny by establishing within it the eschatological *jus talionis*' (:77). Bauckham (1993a:95; cf Aune 1983:239) thinks the Sardinian saying (3:5) wherein Jesus promises to confess the victor's name before his Father and the angels (cf supra 6.7.4.5) is 'just such a sentence of eschatological divine law as Käsemann has identified as characteristic of early Christian prophetic pronouncements.' However, Bauckham believes that the stylistic form of holy war sentences and the idea of eschatological *jus talionis* can be found in purer forms than in the promises (e g, 11:18; 16:6; 22:18–19). Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:101) characterizes the additional promise saying in 21:6–7 as 'a "Sentence of Holy Law" similar to that found in Paul.' Beasley-Murray (1978:339) likewise finds juridical language in the last beatitude which mentions the tree of life. He (:315) accordingly believes that John's purpose in writing the book was 'to inspire in his readers the faith that the empire of the Antichrist and his minions is destined to be replaced by the rule of the Christ and his saints.'

Regarding John's use of supposed sentences of holy law, Hill (1974:271–73) notes that 'at best it is only a hypothesis, but one which has been elevated to the level of assumed fact by reason of its frequent reiteration.' Aune (1983b:238–39) cites several weaknesses with the holy law proposal—its origins are in Wisdom, not prophetic, literature; its features are fluid, not stable; and its use is found in Greco-Roman prophetic speech also. That the Sardinian promise alone functions as a sentence of holy law seems unlikely, given the interrelatedness of the promises. This perspective is thus unsatisfactory as an approach to all the promises.

8.3.8 A therapeutic function

Pointing to a sociological solution, Gager (1975:56) suggests that Revelation had a therapeutic function for the community. He states that 'a simple message of consolation, encouraging believers to stand firm and reiterating earlier promises, would have been inadequate to the needs

⁴Such sentences of holy law are typically structured in the form of a chiasmus (a b b a) (cf Aune 1983b:237).

of the occasion. Indeed, these traditional hopes and promises were very much a part of the crisis, for their credibility had been called into question by the fact of persecution, and simply to repeat them would have been to compound the agony' (:52). John's answer, according to Gager, is to construct a Christian myth. A rhythmic contrast between victory and oppression oscillates throughout the book. Gager believes this pattern commences in the seven letters before its main development in seven visions from 4:1–22:5. This oscillation is depicted in the following chart (:53):

<u>VICTORY/HOPE</u>	<u>OPPRESSION/DESPAIR</u>
4:1–5:14 Throne and the lamb	6:1–17 First six seals
7:1–8:4 Multitude of the faithful and the seventh seal	8:5–9:21 First six trumpets
10:1–11:1 Dramatic interlude in heaven	11:2–14 Attack of the beasts
11:15–19 Seventh trumpet	12:1–17 Dragon assaults the woman
14:1–7 Mount Zion and the Lamb	13:1–18 Beast with horns
15:2–8 Martyrs worship God	14:8–15:1 Destruction and judgment
19:1–16 Worship in heaven	16:1–20 Seven bowls of wrath
21:1–22:5 New heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem	17:1–18:24 Fall of Babylon
	19:17–20:15 Final judgment

By depicting such an oscillation, Gager clearly captures the importance of the victory theme in Revelation, something we have likewise pointed out. Gager is also to be commended for understanding the persecution against the Christians is real and not perceived.

That Jesus would speak to the churches individually and declare his personal knowledge of their situations must have provided spiritual and psychological therapy to them. Yet, as we have demonstrated, this so-called 'myth' that he has constructed is little more, in one sense, than an updating and recycling of traditional apocalyptic and prophetic motifs. John, in fact, reiterates earlier Old Testament promises by re-presenting them through the risen Christ as applicable for the Asian churches in their situation. Persecution was one thing Jesus promised repeatedly to his disciples (e.g., Mt 5:10–12; 10:33; 23:34). So the Asian believers should not have been sur-

prised at their present trouble. Jesus was seeking to shake their spiritual lethargy and to stimulate, not mollify, them toward action and repentance.

Du Rand (1991:286) likewise points to the cathartic value of the divine victory over evil depicted repeatedly in Revelation: 'The readers' actual emotions of fear and humiliation are psycho-therapeutically released through the theological content of the literary enactments.' Du Rand wisely grounds the catharsis of the audience, not in myth, but in their faith in Jesus' victorious death and resurrection. Hence, '[t]he Christian's perspective of his destination of the heavenly Jerusalem, however, is not merely psychological compensation but divine fulfilment' (:286). We agree that the promises with their fulfillments have a therapeutic aspect, which seeks to transform the readers in their socio-historical situation in first-century Asia.

8.3.9 An ethical function

The nature of Jesus' eschatological teaching in the Gospels has been discussed by New Testament scholars for many years. The particular link between eschatology and ethics has been developed by A N Wilder in a book by that name. Ethics were important, he (1950:1) noted, because 'pressing problems of social ethics and public order, and of the proper message of the church with regard to them, create a responsibility for biblical scholarship in this field.'⁵ Wilder (:11) found it difficult to deny 'that Jesus' whole call to repentance and his urgent summons to the righteousness he preached were set against a background of vivid eschatological rewards and punishments which he saw as imminent.' However, he believed that the relationship between eschatology and ethics in Jesus' teaching is best illustrated in the immediate connection established between the coming event and the ethical reform involved in repentance (:74). This is demonstrated in five of the seven letters where the word *μετανοέω* occurs (2:5 [2x]; 2:16; 2:21 [2x], 22; 3:3 [2x]; 3:19). Only the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia are excluded because they receive no words of blame. For a prophet/apocalyptist like John, the kingdom of God always had a double aspect of promise and warning. Wilder (:81) adds, 'It was a supreme good whose coming meant reward and vindication for the righteous, and it was therefore a threat to all unrighteousness.'

The importance of virtuous deeds is emphasized repeatedly in Revelation both by Jesus and John. The praise/blame sayings of five of the letters begin with the phrase, 'I know your

⁵If Wilder's statement was true in 1949 when he penned those words, how much more true is it today with the moral declension of home and society a universal phenomenon!

deeds....' Only the letters to Smyrna and Pergamum—churches which have suffered persecution—fail to mention their deeds. Such deeds 'are regarded by our author simply as the manifestation of the inner life and character' (Charles 1920:1.cxv). Boring (1989:95) likewise affirms: 'This insistence on the importance of Christian action shows that even in his situation of persecution, threat, and expectation of the near End John does not understand the Christian life to be simply passive waiting....John calls his churches to do more than endure; there is a ministry to be performed in the meantime.' This view is consistent with our perspective that the victors were not just the martyrs, but all the saints. Surely ethical concerns were important, given the emphasis on deeds in Revelation and the vice lists at the end of the book. Righteous deeds though were a means to an end for the victor, that of preparing for the coming of Jesus and receiving the promised reward.

8.3.10 A character development function

Closely related to the ethical function is that of character development. B S Neall (1983) has analyzed the concept of character in the Apocalypse against the background of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies. In Revelation's typical dualistic style, two types of character are presented—likeness to God, personified in Christ the Lamb, and likeness to Satan, personified in the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. In the Pergamene and Thyatiran churches believers were indulging in practices that compromised their character. She (:70) writes, 'This perverse doctrine that advocated the most debasing sins—idolatrous feasting and immorality—called forth the divine wrath (Rev 2:16, 22–23).' Likewise, spiritual declension was evident in the Ephesian, Sardian, and Laodicean churches. 'All three churches had suffered a decline in the commitment, love, and earnestness that mark the true Christian' (:75).

Neall believes that to discourage actions that brought spiritual declension, while encouraging deeds that result in virtuous character, John employed exhortations in the seven letters,⁶ which are amplified and reinforced throughout the rest of the book. One of the most prominent is the victor sayings, which show that 'Righteous character is developed through conquering' (:126). Four foes are to be conquered: (1) sin, with apostasy being the most prominent, (2) the fear of death, (3) the accusations of Satan, and (4) the beast, its image, and the number of its name. The victory of the saints rests on Christ's prior victory at the cross and his future victory

⁶Apollonius of Tyana likewise addressed letters to several Asian cities, including Ephesus (*Ep* 37, 65) and Sardis (*Ep* 38–41, 56, 75–76), which criticized their perceived character faults and moral failures.

in the eschaton (:126). Conquering these four foes of the saints comes 'by participating in and appropriating Christ's victory to themselves through connection with Him (3:21; 17:14)' (:127). Just as Christ's death was not a defeat but a victory, so will be the death of the saints. Working from her educational perspective, Neall presents an effective argument that the promises played a role in developing the Christian character of the Asian audience. Nevertheless, we do not believe that character development was the primary function of the promises.

8.3.11 An eschatological function

Commentators are divided over the eschatological import of the promises. Feuillet (1965:38) writes: 'Some such as Gelin, Loisy, Boismard, see them as referring exclusively to the future life. Others (Allo, Bonsirven) are aware that, in Johannine thought, eternal life begins here on earth. Thus they think that these promises are directed at the same time to the life of Christians as it is here on earth.' Jeremias (1967:5.768) concludes that 'all the victor sayings in the seven letters of Rev. have an eschatological character,' even as Leivestad (1954:216–17) suggests that 'eternal life is the reward for which the victor has qualified himself, and there is in fact no victory at all if the reward is missing.'

The imminent coming of Jesus Christ is a predominant theme in the book, as we have seen. The Asian churches, like the Corinthians, seem to have had a diminished expectation of that coming (cf 1 Cor 15:1ff; 2 Pt 3:3ff). Most of the churches had so accommodated themselves to the surrounding culture that they had lost the proper eternal perspective. Yarbro Collins (1979a:x) believes 'the visions concern the future, but they were written down in order to illuminate the present experience of the author and the first readers and to evoke a particular response to that experience.' It is this tension between present and future that Revelation seeks to maintain. John thus speaks of a future 'whose prolepsis is already at work in the present' (Stuckenbruck 1995:37n). The eschatological rewards are therefore promised to those victorious in their present circumstances.

8.3.12 A parenetic function

Parenetic, pastoral, hortatorical—such words describe the particular function considered in this section. Earlier (cf supra 2.4.2.1) we reviewed the characteristics of apocalyptic literature and noted that parenesis is a distinctive feature of Revelation. Minear (1968:215–21) accounts for at least eight literary forms in Revelation that fit this description, including the promise sayings.

Goldingay (1989:320) points to the revelatory material in Daniel as the background for the parenesis in Revelation 2–3: 'Revelation incorporates parenesis in its visions; Daniel presents its parenesis in story form, in keeping with OT precedents.' Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:176) believes that John's choice of the concentric, or chiasmic, pattern of structuring his visions emphasizes the hortatorical element: 'The basic movement of the narrative represents the prophetic movement from promise to fulfillment.'

But what is the focus of the parenesis and exhortation both in the letters and specifically in the promises? Endurance is suggested by Holman (1982:362)—'there is a strong parenetic emphasis upon endurance, with the encouragement of future rewards and with warnings to avoid any compromise which held out hope of circumventing suffering.' Rogers (1990:73) believes that the readers are assured 'that God's justice will be done on behalf of the faithful, who suffered because of their faithfulness....Even those who suffered unto death are promised eventual resurrection in the last days when the new city of God is established.' The parousia is another proposed parenetic focus. The prophet John, writing as a pastor, is not interested in calculating the time of Jesus' return, according to Wall (1991:263); '[r]ather he is interested to motivate his audience to respond to Christ immediately and properly in the light of his soon and sudden return.' Persecution is another. Aune (1983:278) believes that the basic purpose of the exhortation to conquer 'is to encourage Christians to meet the challenges which face them in circumstances of religious and political oppression.' Finally, du Rand (1988:70) concludes that the function 'is to provide consolation and to suppress the distinction between the flawed present and the ideal future....The imagery of the heavenly Jerusalem is in that sense a persuasive expression for the readers to identify with.'

The use of local background fulfills a particular pastoral function. Because Jesus has knowledge of the personal situations in each of the seven cities, he can be trusted to know the future with certainty. While the believers may not know what is going on in Rome or the empire at large, they can rely upon the omniscient and omnipotent Lord to look out for their best interests. Jesus likewise presents himself as the Shepherd in Revelation who will lead and guide his people to security and safety.

8.3.13 A prophetic function

Closely related to the parenetic function is the prophetic function. John regarded himself as a prophet to the seven churches (cf supra 1.2.4), prophesying during a volatile and unstable pe-

riod (cf supra 2.5.3). In our discussion of Revelation's chiasmic structure we agreed with the assessment of Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:175; cf supra 3.4.2.3) that 'the structure of the book underscores that the main function of Rev. is the prophetic interpretation of the situation of the community.' It follows logically that the seven letters with their promise sayings should serve a prophetic function. Mazzaferri (1989:170) thinks that John's central purpose is not just to strengthen the saints; instead 'he delivers a forceful, prophetic message in typical conditional style to both the righteous and the wicked, urging the first to remain steadfast and the second to repent.' Mealy (1992:84) likewise affirms that 'The promises contained in the seven letters are thus intended to spur the Christian readers on toward becoming overcomers at any cost, and toward seeing themselves throughout the text as those who stand to receive the blessings promised to the overcomer alone.' Fekkes (1994:69) doubts if John merely borrows such Old Testaments texts as Psalm 2:8–9 found in the Thyatiran promise for their poetic effect or metaphorical force; '[i]t seems more likely that John highlights these particular OT consolations because he wants the readers to appreciate the prophetic foundation of his statements.' We concur that the letters with their promises function as prophetic statements to the Asian congregations.

8.3.14 Conclusion

The multiplicity of functions suggested for the seven letters and their promise sayings belie the various interpretive perspectives brought to Revelation. We have found that many of these suggestions have little or no validity. Minear (1968:213) warns that when the interpreter attempts to reconstruct the full scale of the conflict seen in Revelation, 'he is almost bound to exaggerate one thesis concerning John's purpose in writing.' Hopefully we can avoid exaggeration by suggesting not one, but three purposes. The three final functions reviewed—eschatological, parennetic, and prophetic—are most consistent with our earlier analysis of the form of the letters in Chapter 4 and our subsequent discussion of the book's themes earlier in this chapter. Because the seven letters are a *mixtum compositum*, we should expect several functions to be apparent. Du Rand (1988:70) concurs with this assessment, stating that Revelation combines 'a prophetic eschatological aim and a pastoral touch presented in the framework of a letter.'

8.4 CONCLUSION

Revelation was written in response to a crisis, but one that was not unanticipated. For the crisis had been predicted by Jesus in the Synoptic apocalypses. It is a reiteration, an update, a contemporization of that prophetic word to 'this generation' who received the initial prophecy.

Were the Asian churches successful in appropriating the promises given by Jesus through the prophet John? An immediate historical answer comes in the form of other letters written to the Asian churches by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (ca AD 110). Three of the seven churches are addressed by Ignatius—Ephesus, Philadelphia, and Smyrna—as well as two other churches that lie between Ephesus and Laodicea—Magnesia and Tralles. The Asian churches had endured! John's audience had apparently repented and spared themselves of Christ's coming in judgment. They had resisted the beast and his mark and survived the ensuing persecution until another day.

As was seen in Chapter 7, some of the promises find a proleptic fulfillment as the persecuted church waits in heaven. However, most of the promises await fulfillment at the parousia and the concomitant arrival of the new Jerusalem. Hence, the cry of the church remains, 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Rv 22:20). In summation, the promises to the victors prove not at all to be 'pies in a very bleak sky!'

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