

# THE PROPHETIC LAWSUIT IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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New Testament Monographs, 29

*Series Editor*  
Stanley E. Porter

To my loving, enduring, and faithful wife Necoe  
and to my four children, Alexandra,  
Josiah, Victoria, and Mackenzie—  
ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας

# THE PROPHETIC LAWSUIT IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Alan S. Bandy



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## ABBREVIATIONS

AAJ	Approaches to Ancient Judaism
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANET	James B. Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950)
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ANRW	Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase (eds.), <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1972–)
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATS	Altertumswissenschaftliche Texte und Studien
AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAGD	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. William Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1958)
BARev	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BDAG	Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. William Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, <i>Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3rd edn, 1999)
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)
BDF	Friedrich Blass, A. Debrunner and Robert W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961)
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHS	<i>Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibB	Biblische Beiträge

BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BibRes</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTheo	Bibliothèque de théologie
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>ZAW</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur <i>ZNW</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
<i>CIG</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum graecarum</i>
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
<i>EDRL</i>	<i>Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law</i>
EHAT	Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
EKKNT	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios biblicos</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides theologicae lovanienses</i>
EvK	Evangelische Kommentare
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
EUS	European University Studies
<i>FN</i>	<i>Filologia neotestamentaria</i>
GHAT	Göttinger Handcommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HALAT</i>	Ludwig Koehler <i>et al.</i> (eds.), <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> (5 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967–95)
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>HeyJ</i>	<i>Heythrop Journal</i>
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HKNT	Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC	Harper's NT Commentaries
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>

<i>JPTSup</i>	<i>Journal of Pentecostal Theology</i> , Supplement Series
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSJSup</i>	Supplements to the <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i> , Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> , Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
<i>JSPSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i> , Supplement Series
<i>JTC</i>	<i>Journal for Theology and the Church</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LN</i>	Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i> (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988).
<i>LNTS</i>	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LPGL</i>	G.W.H. Lampe, <i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961)
<i>LSJ</i>	H.G. Liddell, Robert Scott and H. Stuart Jones, <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 9th edn, 1968)
<i>MNTC</i>	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NCBC</i>	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIBC</i>	New International Biblical Commentary
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	Colin Brown (ed.), <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> (3 vols.; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1975)
<i>NIGTC</i>	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i> , Supplements
<i>NPNF</i>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
<i>NTD</i>	Neue Testament Deutsch
<i>NTL</i>	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>ÖTK</i>	Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar
<i>OTP</i>	James Charlesworth (ed.), <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> (2 vols.; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1983, 1985)
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische studiën</i>
<i>PG</i>	J.-P. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologiae cursus completus . . . Series graeca</i> (166 vols.; Paris: Petit-Montrouge, 1857–83)
<i>PTMS</i>	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>

<i>RGG</i>	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>RivB</i>	<i>Rivista biblica</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
<i>RSA</i>	<i>Religion in Southern Africa</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
SBANT	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände Neues Testament
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLEJL	SBL Early Judaism and its Literature
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBLSP	SBL Seminar Papers
SBLSS	SBL Semeia Studies
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SCHNT	Studia ad corpus hellenicum Novi Testamenti
SCJ	Studies in Christianity and Judaism
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SFSHJ	South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
<i>SR</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
STR	Studia. travaux de recherche
Str-B	[Hermann L. Strack and] Paul Billerbeck, <i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> (7 vols.; Munich: Beck, 1922–61)
StudNeot	Studia neotestamentica
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigrapha
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TBü	Theologische Bücherei
<i>TDNT</i>	Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–)
<i>TDOT</i>	G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (trans. J.T. Willis, G.W. Bromiley, and D.E. Green, 8 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–)
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TRu</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
<i>TTZ</i>	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i>
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UNT	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

VTSup	<i>Vetus Testamentum, Supplements</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAG	<i>Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZRGG	<i>Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i>
ZST	<i>Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie</i>
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

## INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation provides a fertile field for exegetical and theological harvesting due to its allusive imagery and complex genre. Although containing no direct quotation from the Old Testament, the book of Revelation is commonly regarded as more dependent on the OT than any other New Testament writing.<sup>1</sup> This observation has led to suggestions that the author viewed himself following in the same tradition of OT prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others.<sup>2</sup> John, the prophet of Patmos, composed his prophecy drawing from the language, imagery, literary conventions, theology, and genre of Israel's prophetic heritage.

The book of Revelation exhibits elements consistent with apocalyptic, prophetic, and epistolary genres. Because the book begins with the word

1. G.K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, 'Revelation', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. D.A. Carson and G.K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 1081-1161 (1081); David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5* (JSNTSup, 238; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003); G.K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup, 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Beale, 'Revelation', in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (ed. D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 318-37; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup, 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSNTSup, 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); Adolf Schlatter, *Das Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912).

2. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC, 52a; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 19; Aune, 'The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22.16', *JSNT* 37 (1989), pp. 103-116; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 36; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), p. 13; Mark Wilson, 'Revelation', in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. IV. Hebrews to Revelation* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), p. 247; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1993), pp. 88-91; François Bovon, 'John's Self-Presentation in Revelation 1.9-10', *CBQ* 62 (2000), pp. 693-700 (700); David Hill, 'Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St John', *NTS* 18 (1972), pp. 401-18; Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), p. 75.

Ἀποκάλυψις (Rev. 1.1), some have maintained that it suggests an immediate genre classification, especially given the use of apocalyptic language and imagery. In 1979, John J. Collins, in conjunction with a group of noted scholars, authored the first standardized definition for the apocalyptic genre.<sup>3</sup> This definition emphasized the form as a narrative framework involving an otherworldly mediator and the content as containing both temporal (eschatological salvation) and spatial (supernatural world) elements. It lacked, however, any reference to the function of an Apocalypse. As such, a subsequent study group lead by A.Y. Collins, David Hellholm, and David E. Aune added an amendment in 1986 stating that an apocalypse is ‘intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence the understanding and behavior of the audience by means of divine authority’.<sup>4</sup> The identification of the apocalyptic genre, therefore, must include the form, content, and function of the literature.<sup>5</sup>

The apocalyptic genre exhibits several *formal* features including visionary accounts, otherworldly mediators, and symbolic language. The book of Revelation is a visionary account involving heavenly mediators and it is replete with symbolic imagery. The apocalyptic genre also expresses *content* depicting dualism between the temporal and spatial realities to emphasize the heavenly realities in such a way as to devalue earthly circumstances. John presents a vision of a future vindication comprised of eternal rewards in a blissful paradise for faithful Christians, contrasting their present sufferings in the midst of an unbelieving society. Finally, the apocalyptic genre *functions* to encourage piety and faithfulness in the midst of suffering or during times of crisis (real or perceived). The book of Revelation functions in the same way as evidenced by the promised rewards to the overcomers, the repeated exhortations for patient endurance, and the depiction of the reward for faithful Christians in the New Jerusalem. Although these generic features play a prominent role throughout the book, its apocalyptic character stems from its prophetic nature.

Perhaps a better identification for the overall genre of the book of Revelation, however, is signaled by Rev. 1.3 and 22.7, 10, 18-19 (cf. 11.6; 19.10) where John clearly identifies the book as τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας. This close association between an apocalypse and prophecy is a natural one

3. John J. Collins, ‘Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre’, *Semeia* 14 (1979), pp. 1-20 (9).

4. Adela Yarbro Collins, ‘Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism’, *Semeia* 36 (1986), pp. 1-11 (7).

5. Lars Hartman, ‘Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre’, in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), pp. 332-36. So David E. Aune, ‘The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre’, *Semeia* 36 (1986), pp. 65-96.



because the apocalyptic genre stems from and remains under the rubric of OT prophecy.<sup>6</sup> Because the apocalyptic writings most likely derive from the prophetic genre the lines of demarcation separating these genres are not bold and straight but rather fuzzy and squiggled. Therefore, the book of Revelation constitutes a mixed genre. The book falls into the overall genre of prophecy, but it clearly corresponds with apocalyptic writings in many respects.<sup>7</sup> George Ladd correctly argued for the designation of 'prophetic-apocalyptic'.<sup>8</sup> Fiorenza, likewise, contends that the either 'apocalyptic' or 'prophecy' dichotomy cannot be sustained in the book of Revelation, but a blending of both.<sup>9</sup> The best overall dictum regarding the genre of the book of Revelation is that it constitutes 'a prophecy cast in an apocalyptic mold and written down in a letter form'.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between the genre of John's Apocalypse and the OT allows for the possibility to explore the presence of certain literary conventions common to the prophetic genre. Scholars have identified that within the prophetic genre a subgenre exists sometimes referred to as the prophetic lawsuit (*Gerichtsrede*).<sup>11</sup> During the mid-twentieth century a flurry of scholarly articles and monographs focused on the *rib*-pattern in the OT.<sup>12</sup>

6. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn, 1998), p. 138. Regarding the apocalyptic-prophetic nature of the Book of Revelation she writes, 'The understanding of prophecy in Rev. is apocalyptic insofar as it is bound to the imminent return of the resurrected Lord who now speaks to the Christian community through the prophets. Its theological impact derives from apocalyptic conviction of living in the last times and of the impending eschatological salvation in the very near future'.

7. George E. Ladd, 'Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?', *JBL* 76 (1957), pp. 192-200; Fredrick David Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (BZNW, 54; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989); David Mathewson, 'Revelation in Recent Genre Criticism: Some Implications for Interpretation', *TJ* 13 (1992), pp. 193-213; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 37; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 12; Aune, *Revelation* 1-5, p. lxxxix; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1974), pp. 19-29.

8. Ladd, 'Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?', pp. 192-200.

9. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 133-56.

10. Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 479.

11. Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels* (GHAT; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), p. 329; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), pp. 215-16; contra Dwight R. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', *ZAW* 99-100 (1987-88), pp. 339-60; Michael DeRoche, 'Yahweh's *RİB* against Israel: A Reassessment of the So-Called "Prophetic Lawsuit" in the Preexilic Prophets', *JBL* 102 (1983), pp. 563-74.

12. B. Gemser, 'The *Rîb*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality', in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas; Leiden: E.J. Brill,

Based on the occurrence of the root רִיב in the prophetic books, scholars have concluded that prophets frequently evoked lawsuit and juridical imagery in their oracles.<sup>13</sup> God is often depicted as bringing charges against Israel or the nations, whereby he finds them guilty and subsequently renders a just verdict (Isa. 1.2-3, 18-20; 5.1-7; 41.5, 21-29; 42.18-25; 43.8-15, 22-28; 44.6-8; 50.1-3; Jer. 2.5; 25.31; Hos. 2.4-17; 4.1-6; Mic. 6.1-5; Mal. 3.5). God also defends his people from the accusations of the surrounding nations and thus vindicates Israel (Isa. 3.13-15; Judg. 6.30). The lawsuit reveals the justice of God as judge over all creation with particular concern for his own people.

Lawsuit motifs abound in the OT narratives, poetry, and prophetic forms of literature. This may plausibly indicate that the lawsuit motif was a common literary device utilized frequently when considering matters of judgment and God's justice. Lawsuit speeches sometimes span across a large block of literature (Isa. 40-55) and in other places may only appear in individual verses (Hos. 4.1-3). This relative flexible use demonstrates the versatile nature of the lawsuit motif. It provides a conceptual framework whereby anyone could grasp the logic behind the imagery. The form and content varies in each context depending upon the message the prophet intended to convey.

Lawsuit speeches target both Israel and the nations, declaring Yahweh as the universal sovereign judge. In them, Yahweh summons, investigates, and indicts his chosen people for their covenant violations. The bulk of lawsuit speeches are directed at Israel for the purpose of provoking the people of God to repentance by establishing the justness of the ensuing judgment. Yahweh stands as the judge of the whole earth and consequently all nations fall under his jurisdiction (Gen. 18.25; Ps. 50.4; 82.8; 110.6). He judges all the inhabitants of the earth with righteousness and equity (Ps. 96.13; 98.9), resulting in all people getting what they deserve (Ps. 94.2). By judging the nations,

1955), pp. 120-37 (134-35); Ernst Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede', *ZTK* 49 (1952), pp. 1-16; Herbert B. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 285-95; G. Ernest Wright, 'The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32', in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), pp. 26-67; Julien Harvey, 'Le Rib-Pattern, réquisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l'alliance', *Bib* 43.2 (1962), pp. 172-96; Jared J. Jackson, 'Yahweh v. Cohen et al.', *PP* 7.4 (December 1966), pp. 28-32; James Limburg, 'The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches', *JBL* 88 (1969), pp. 291-301; James Limburg, 'The Lawsuit of God in the Eighth Century Prophets' (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1969); Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)*, (JSOTSup, 9; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

13. The root רִיב typically expresses a controversy between individuals. Although this word has a broad definition of 'strive', or 'contend', many scholars prefer a more narrow definition of 'bring an accusation', 'accuse', 'to dispute', or 'to engage in a lawsuit or legal process'. See Ringgren, *TDOT*, XIII, pp. 473-79.

Yahweh proves the impotence of their gods and idols (Isa. 45.20). Although the lawsuits have immediate consequences, they also anticipate a final day of judgment when Yahweh will fully establish justice throughout the entire earth (Isa. 11.4; 42.4).

The pioneering work of Jacques Vermeylen and Pierre-Maurice Bogaert has helpfully demonstrated a pattern in prophetic oracles, which is also reflected in the prophetic lawsuits (see Table 1).<sup>14</sup>

Table 1. *A Common Macrostructure for the Books of the Major Prophets.*

<i>Oracles of Judgment to Judah and Jerusalem</i>	<i>Oracles of Judgment to the Nations</i>	<i>Promises of Salvation/Vindication</i>
Isa. 1–12	Isa. 13–27	Isa. 28–35
Jer. LXX 1–25; 13	Jer. LXX 25; 14–32; 38	Jer. LXX 33–42
Jer. MT 1–25; 13a	Jer. MT 25; 13b–38; 46–51	Jer. MT 26–35
Ezek. 1–24	Ezek. 25–32	Ezek. 33–48

Prophetic oracles, therefore, exhibit a threefold pattern: (1) oracles of judgment against Judah/Jerusalem; (2) oracles of judgment against the nations; and (3) promises of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

There are three distinct types of prophetic lawsuits that form a pattern throughout the prophetic oracles. The first type of prophetic lawsuit accuses, indicts, and threatens the people of God for violations of covenantal stipulations. The second type of prophetic lawsuit specifically addresses the pagan nations. In addition to idolatry, the nations stand trial for their harsh treatment of God's people. These lawsuit speeches are typically succeeded by oracles promising salvation/vindication to the faithful covenant people (Deut. 32.31–43). The prophetic lawsuits may be described as also following a threefold pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit; (2) lawsuit against the nations; and (3) the vindication/salvation of the saints.

John writing as a prophet presents a vision of final judgment in a manner that conforms to this threefold pattern of a prophetic lawsuit. Revelation consists of four separate interrelated visions introduced by the phrase 'in the Spirit' (Rev. 1.10; 4.1; 17.3; 21.10). The four major visions of Revelation are posited as the major literary divisions: (1) Rev. 1.9–3.22 envisions the glorified

14. Jacques Vermeylen, 'L'unité du livre d'Isaïe', in *The Book of Isaiah (Le livre d'Isaïe: Les oracles et leurs relectures; unité et complexité de l'ouvrage)* (ed. Jacques Vermeylen; BETL, 81; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), pp. 11–53 (28–29). See also Pierre-Maurice Bogaert, 'L'organisation des grands recueils prophétiques', pp. 147–53 (152), in the same volume. Cf. Alain-Marie de Lassus, 'Le septénaire des lettres de l'Apocalypse de Jean: de la correction au témoignage militant' (PhD diss., Université Strasbourg II, 2005), pp. 147–53.

15. See Chapter 1.

Christ who investigates his churches; (2) Rev. 4.1–16.21 portrays the divine court proceedings and the trial of the nations; (3) Rev. 17.1–21.8 describes the sentencing and destruction of Babylon; and (4) Rev. 21.9–22.5 presents the vindication and reward of the saints comprised of the new heaven and new earth. These four visions conform to the threefold pattern of the prophetic lawsuit in that vision one corresponds to the covenant lawsuit. Visions two and three comprise the lawsuit against the nations. The final vision represents oracles of vindication and salvation.

Revelation 1.9–3.22 represents the covenant lawsuit addressed to new covenant congregations. The inaugural vision of Christ (Rev. 1.9–3.22) establishes John as a prophetic witness heralding the lawsuit from the eschatological judge. Although Christ is the judge of the universe, the first vision emphasizes his role as the judge of the churches. This becomes clear in the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, which occupies the central focus of the second half of this first vision report (Revelation 2–3). The seven letters exhibit a form and content closely resembling the covenant lawsuit. Christ investigates his churches and audits them based on their faithfulness to covenantal stipulations. Churches facing charges are admonished to repent or else face judgment. The purpose of the covenantal lawsuit is so that ‘all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds’ (Rev. 2.23). Therefore, the first vision corresponds to the covenant lawsuit speech designed to promote repentance and faithfulness.

Revelation 4.1–16.21 constitutes God’s lawsuit against the nations. God judges the nations based on the charges of idolatry, obstinacy and the shedding of innocent blood. John’s entrance into the heavenly courtroom enables him to witness an extended session of the divine council (Rev. 4.1–5.14). This session convened for the purpose of installing Christ as the Davidic king and the only one worthy to execute God’s judgment on humanity. The series of septets represents a sequence of judgments designed to provoke repentance and also to satisfy the just requirements of God’s wrath. These septets function as investigative judgments to determine the guilt of the inhabitants of the earth and enter their failure to repent as evidence in the lawsuit against them. The interludes pertain primarily to the saints (Rev. 7.1–17; 10.1–11.19). The signs narrative (Rev. 12.1–15.20) provides the final evidence necessary to convict the nations and render judgment: (1) failure to worship God; (2) idolatry; and (3) the slaughter of the saints. The third vision, then, presents the verdict and sentencing of the nations.

Finally, Rev. 17.1–21.8 and Rev. 21.9–22.5 depict the final judgment of the world and the complete vindication/salvation of the people of God. The final two visions represent literary parallels contrasting the judgment of the nations with the vindication of the saints. This forms the climatic rendering

of justice as the lawsuit against the nations, which results in a guilty verdict. Babylon is indicted for intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication and rendering unjust verdicts against the saints (Rev. 18.6). Christ returns to earth as the divine warrior, king, and judge to execute the sentence decreed against Babylon. After the final resurrection of all individual humans, the saints dwell with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem as their eternal reward.

This monograph attempts to demonstrate that the book of Revelation contains a lawsuit motif stemming from the language, imagery, and pattern of the prophetic lawsuit.<sup>16</sup> It derives from that use of the prophetic lawsuit in the OT as a common literary and theological convention within the prophetic genre. Since the book of Revelation belongs to the tradition of the OT prophets, it tends to exhibit the same kind of lawsuit imagery when describing God's judgment of the world and the vindication of his people. N.T. Wright helpfully captures the Jewish and Christian conception of God's salvation by asserting that it involves a forensic component related to a lawcourt proceeding:

The church appropriated for itself the Jewish belief that the creator god would rescue his people at the last, and interpreted that rescue in terms of a great lawcourt scene... The major underlying difference between Christian and Jewish views at this point was the early Christians believed that the verdict had already been announced in the death and resurrection of Jesus... First-century Jews look forward to a public event... in and through which their god would reveal to all the world that he was not just a local, tribal, deity, but the creator and sovereign of all... The early Christians... looked back to an event in and through which, they claimed, Israel's god had done exactly that.<sup>17</sup>

Wright describes the differences between the Jewish and Christian conception of this lawcourt scene as one looking forward and the other as looking backward. For Christians, however, the past verdict rendered at the death and resurrection of Christ anticipates and ensures the future vindication of all believers. Therefore, Christians still look forward to a future lawcourt scene where the creator God and the victorious Lamb will vindicate those who have been justified by faith in Christ. The book of Revelation vividly envisions

16. Andrew T. Lincoln demonstrated a very plausible case for the lawsuit motif in the Fourth Gospel based on the prophetic lawsuit of Isaiah. His work paves the way for additional studies in other NT writings on the use of lawsuit motifs drawn from the OT (*Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000]). For another recent work also focusing on the lawsuit motif in the Fourth Gospel stemming from the *rib*-pattern in the OT see Martin Asiedu-Peprah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (WUNT, 132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

17. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 110.

this final tribunal. If the forensic language and imagery of Revelation gives evidence of a lawsuit motif, then it could shed significant light on the literature, theology, and purpose of this enigmatic book of prophecy.

### *1. Scholarship and the Lawsuit Motif in the Book of Revelation*

The concept of a lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation is not entirely unique to this present volume in that scholars have pointed out the forensic imagery evident in various passages. Several commentaries, monographs, dissertations, and articles have noted the juridical language and lawcourt metaphors as significant features of the Apocalypse.<sup>18</sup> These studies have left a dotted trail throughout scholarship on the Apocalypse. The following survey attempts to demonstrate the trajectory of research, indicating the need for a robust investigation to connect the dots and reveal the presence of a lawsuit motif. This survey includes a variety of works from the twentieth century, narrowly focusing on research pertaining to lawsuit themes, language, and metaphors in the Apocalypse.<sup>19</sup> It is divided into three broad categories based on how scholars have interpreted the lawsuit themes. The first category summarizes those who have indicated that the lawsuit imagery is featured throughout the entire book of Revelation. The second category traces those who view Revelation as a covenantal lawsuit. The third section highlights how smaller sections of Revelation exhibit lawsuit imagery.

#### *a. Studies Related to the Lawsuit Imagery throughout the Book of Revelation*

1. *Joseph Comblin*. In his work on the Christology of Revelation, Comblin argues for the presence of a lawsuit motif in which Christ is depicted as the cosmic judge engaged in a legal battle with Satan.<sup>20</sup> According to Comblin, the Apocalypse constitutes a testimony in that it depicts a cosmic debate between God and Satan regarding who has the proper jurisdiction over humanity.<sup>21</sup> Christians serve as witnesses on trial who testify, to the idolaters, that God is

18. For a comprehensive survey of scholarship on the lawsuit motif in Revelation see Alan S. Bandy, 'The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation: An Analysis of the Lawsuit Motif in Revelation with Reference to the Use of the Old Testament' (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), pp. 4-79.

19. The interest in the prophetic lawsuit and lawsuit motifs is a relatively new field of study in the history of interpretation. Therefore, almost all relevant and significant works related to this topic are from twentieth-century scholarship.

20. Joseph Comblin, *Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse* (BTh, 6/3; Tournai: Desclée, 1965).

21. Comblin, *Le Christ*, p. 7.

the only true God.<sup>22</sup> Christians thus render this testimony on earth when they face public tribunals before the nations because of their faith.<sup>23</sup>

Comblin devotes the entirety of his third Chapter to the concept of ‘testimony’ or ‘witness’ in Revelation. Comblin reviews the various occurrences of words in the μαρτ- word group to assess the sense of its meaning in Revelation.<sup>24</sup> He favors an understanding of ‘testimony’ in the sense of an official legal and public declaration.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of the testimony is to convert the nations from idols to the true and living God. Those who refuse to repent are without excuse and will be rightly condemned in the final judgment.<sup>26</sup> Christians follow the example of how Jesus conducted himself during his earthly trial (Rev. 11.8).<sup>27</sup> Their martyrdom results from their testimony.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, this serves as an impetus for the outpouring of God’s wrathful vengeance upon the nations.<sup>29</sup>

2. *George B. Caird.* This commentary by G.B. Caird provides one of the most consistent explorations of the courtroom imagery in the book of Revelation.<sup>30</sup> Caird, commenting on Rev. 1.5-6, observes similarities between the juridical language in both the Fourth Gospel and Revelation and contends that the courtroom setting is even more realistic in Revelation.<sup>31</sup> He entrenches the

22. Comblin, *Le Christ*.

23. Comblin, *Le Christ*.

24. Comblin, *Le Christ*, pp. 132-42.

25. Comblin, *Le Christ*, p. 137. He argues that the adjectives ὁ πιστός and ἀληθινός (Rev 3.14) are not only applied to the one who is a witness, but also to the Word of God (Rev. 19.11) and therefore this affirms the verbal nature of the concept of the testimony.

26. Comblin, *Le Christ*, p. 157.

27. Comblin, *Le Christ*.

28. Comblin, *Le Christ*, pp. 158-59.

29. Comblin, *Le Christ*, p. 159. Incidentally, Comblin sees a connection between this aspect of the martyr theology in Revelation with the Jewish writings of R. Aqiba concerning the Maccabean martyrs.

30. George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1966/1999). Cf. George B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980/1997), pp. 157-58. The foundation for the presence of this imagery is explained in his later book, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, where Caird observes that the lawcourt metaphor is frequently employed by the biblical writers. He cites numerous examples of this forensic metaphor in the OT. The appeal of the lawcourt imagery stems from its function as a means for arbitrating between truth and falsehood when establishing justice. The NT writers similarly utilized lawcourt language in maintaining the veracity of their witness and claims (Acts 5.32; Heb. 2.3-4; Rev. 11.3-12; 2 Cor. 13.1). Caird posits, ‘It is in the Fourth Gospel, however, that we find the most elaborate use of forensic metaphor. For one of the strands which John weaves into his rich tapestry is the Old Testament theme of God’s lawsuit: he presents to us the case of God v. the world’. It is this theme of God’s lawsuit that Caird highlights throughout his commentary on Revelation.

31. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 18.

lawsuit in the historical setting of the local and imperial persecution of the churches in Asia.<sup>32</sup> Caird notes that the legal standing of Christians lays entirely in the hands of the local *imperium* of the provincial Roman governors.<sup>33</sup> John, therefore, writes to encourage believers to remain faithful to Christ when they stand before Roman judges because God will ultimately reverse their unjust verdicts.

Caird identifies two passages (Rev. 12.7-17 and 18.20–19.21) as depicting lawcourt scenarios.<sup>34</sup> These two scenes are cross-referenced, according to Caird, and are related to the respective realms of heaven and earth where they occur. The first scene presents a legal contest in heaven between Michael and Satan. Satan functions in his traditional role as the accuser, but ‘because the accused are those redeemed ‘by the life-blood of the Lamb’, he loses both his case and his standing in court’.<sup>35</sup> The second scene presents ‘the contest between the martyrs and their earthly accuser Babylon’.<sup>36</sup> Caird describes it as God reversing Babylon’s sentence in the final court of appeals.<sup>37</sup> Justice is accomplished when the saints are acquitted and Babylon is condemned. Overall, Caird’s treatment of the lawcourt themes is consistent, but not comprehensive.

3. Allison A. Trites. In his monumental book, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, Trites provides the most comprehensive treatment of the use of the μαρτ- word group in the NT and argues that it is a living metaphor drawn from forensic settings. He devotes twenty pages to the concept of witness in the book of Revelation.<sup>38</sup> He depends primarily upon Caird’s commentary especially in regard to the legal metaphors.<sup>39</sup> John is writing to Christians, according to Trites, who will soon be hauled into legal courts and so he wants to

32. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 20.

33. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 22-23.

34. For examples of the why he consistently foregrounds the lawcourt metaphors and historical background see his commentary on the letters to Smyrna and Pergamum and the section on Rev. 6.9-11.

35. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 229.

36. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*.

37. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 230. Caird posits, ‘Babylon has brought a malicious accusation against the martyrs, which has resulted in their death. But the case has been carried ‘before the Lord’, to the court of final appeal, where judgments are true and just. There Babylon has been found guilty of perjury, and God has therefore required from her the life of her victims, exacting from her the penalty she exacted from them’.

38. Erik Peterson, *Zeuge der Wahrheit* (Leipzig: Verlag Jakob Hegner, 1937), pp. 33-52.

39. Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (SNTSMS, 31; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 154. Almost all of Trites’s comments regarding Revelation are drawn from Caird’s commentary.



encourage them to remain faithful as they testify while on trial.<sup>40</sup> Trites argues extensively for the juridical sense of the ‘witness’ terminology based on frequent forensic language and imagery throughout the entire book of Revelation.

b. *Studies Related to the Covenant Lawsuit and the Book of Revelation*

1. *Meredith Kline*. The classic study by Meredith Kline delineates a five-point structure for all ancient covenants and subsequently applies it to Deuteronomy’s structure.<sup>41</sup> The five points of the covenant structure include (1) a preamble to identify the king; (2) a historical prologue; (3) ethical stipulations (i.e., the terms of the covenant); (4) sanctions (outlining blessings and cursings); and (5) succession arrangements dealing with future generations. If the covenanters violated the terms of the divine covenant, then God sent prophets as prosecuting attorneys who announced the covenantal lawsuit. Kline hinted at a potential relationship between the covenant lawsuit and the book of Revelation when he observed that it is replete with treaty analogues, prophetic sanctions, and a concluding curse.<sup>42</sup>

2. *J. Du Preez*. In a brief article by J. Du Preez, he attempted to associate ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties [ANEVT] with the covenantal imagery in the book of Revelation.<sup>43</sup> J. Du Preez observed some striking parallels between the book of Revelation and ancient Near Eastern international suzerainty treaties (especially ‘late-second-millennium international vassal treaties between Hittite sovereigns and their vassals.’)<sup>44</sup> He suggested that the most striking similarities between these treaties and Revelation is seen by a comparison of the structure of the seven letters. Following the work of McCarthy,<sup>45</sup> Du Preez lists nine aspects usually found in the Hittite vassal treaties.<sup>46</sup>

40. Trites, *Concept of Witness*, p. 156.

41. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

42. Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), p. 74.

43. J. Du Preez, ‘Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties and the Book of Revelation’, *RSA* 2 (July 1981), pp. 33-43.

44. Du Preez, ‘Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, p. 33.

45. D.J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the O. T.* (AnBib, 21A; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), pp. 51-85.

46. Du Preez, ‘Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, pp. 33-34. These include: (1) The titulary, in which the Hittite king presented himself, with his glorious titles, as the one proclaiming the treaty; (2) historical prologue, in which the relations between the contracting parties prior to the treaty were recounted; (3) statement of relationship whereby the treaties carefully stated, in various ways, the basic juridical relationship; (4) treaty stipulations with regard to a number of points, including military help; (5) a clause of protection; (6) the promise of a land; (7) the document clause, which required that the

Subsequently, he attempts to demonstrate how the book of Revelation exhibits these same nine aspects.

3. *William H. Shea*. Writing a few years after Du Preez, William H. Shea suggested that the letters to the seven churches exhibited a covenantal form similar to the Hittite suzerainty treaty.<sup>47</sup> Shea presents a better case than Du Preez, although he shows no awareness of Du Preez's work. He closely follows George E. Mendenhall who argued that the OT covenant in Exodus parallels Hittite suzerainty treaties.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, Shea follows Mendenhall's outline of five components typical of these treaties, which in turn influenced the OT covenant.<sup>49</sup> Shea reviews each component drawing relevant parallels between the Hittite treaties and Revelation.<sup>50</sup>

Shea suggests that the letters to the seven churches include these five principle propositions which correspond to the five basic elements of the suzerainty covenant formula.<sup>51</sup> After outlining these five elements in each letter (preamble, prologue, stipulations, witness, blessings), he identifies the introductory formulaic statement that recur as a quasi-refrain.<sup>52</sup> He concludes that these letters represent covenant renewal messages and give evidence of the

tablet recording the treaty be preserved in a temple and read occasionally; (8) the list of divine witnesses, who sanctioned the treaty; and (9) blessings and curses, invoked on a suzerain who kept or violated the treaty.

47. William H. Shea, 'The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches', *AUSS* 21/1 (1983), pp. 71-84.

48. George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

49. Shea, 'The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches', p. 72. Cf. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, pp. 32-34. These include: (1) The *preamble* to the Hittite suzerainty treaty identified the king who was the author of the covenant by giving his name, titles, attributes, and genealogy; (2) the *historical prologue* described the past relations between the two contracting parties; (3) the *stipulations* detailed the obligations imposed upon the vassal; (4) the *witnesses* to the extra-Biblical treaties were the gods of the participants...and (5) the treaties then concluded with their religious sanctions, the *blessings and cursings* that would occur in the case of loyalty to, or breach of, the covenant.

50. Shea, 'The Covenant Form', pp. 72-74. Concerning the *historical prologue*, he cites the prominence of the redemption motif in Revelation (1.17-18; 5.9-10; 7.14-17; 12.7-11), similar to Exodus 20, as an example of a historical review (p. 73). Contra Du Preez, 'Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties', p. 35.

51. Shea, 'The Covenant Form', p. 76.

52. Shea, 'The Covenant Form', p. 81. *Preamble*: 'The Word of him who...' (titles follow). *Prologue*: 'I know your works...' (details follow). *Stipulations*: 'Repent, [etc.]...' (other imperatives follow). *Witness*: 'Hear what the Spirit says to the churches'. *Blessing*: 'To him who overcomes I will grant...' (details follow).

theme and form of the covenant throughout the OT and NT descriptions of God's dealings with his people.<sup>53</sup>

4. *David Chilton*. David Chilton proposed that the book of Revelation represents a covenant lawsuit against Israel, which he attempts to prove throughout his entire commentary.<sup>54</sup> Chilton dates Revelation to the time of Nero as a warning to apostate Israel about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. John receives his prophetic vision to function as the prosecuting attorney in God's lawsuit against Israel for her rejection of Jesus as Messiah.<sup>55</sup> The key to interpreting Revelation, according to Chilton, depends upon acknowledging its covenantal framework.

Chilton bases his analysis of Revelation's covenant structure on significant OT texts regarding covenant sanctions. He compares Revelation's series of seven judgments occurring four times (the letters, seals, trumpets, bowls) with the covenant sanctions described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.<sup>56</sup> The phrase 'I will punish you seven times for your sins' is repeated four times in Leviticus 26 when describing the consequences of covenant rupture (Lev. 26.18, 21, 24, 28). Therefore, in Revelation, John has combined the four-part curse outline of Leviticus 26 with the five-part outline of the covenant lawsuit.<sup>57</sup> Revelation's covenant lawsuit against apostate Israel incorporates the judgments normally reserved for pagan nations and applies them to the lawless covenant people.<sup>58</sup>

5. *R. Dean Davis*. This revision of Davis's Andrews University doctoral dissertation provides an analysis of Revelation 4–5 in light of the OT imagery employed to depict the divine covenant process of judgment, redemption, and the establishment of the final messianic kingdom on earth.<sup>59</sup> His analysis of

53. Shea, 'The Covenant Form', p. 83. See also Kenneth A. Strand, 'A Further Note on the Covenantal Form in the Book of Revelation', *AUSS* 21/3 (1983), pp. 251–64. Strand advances and augments Shea's thesis by arguing that the covenantal form comprises a constitutive pattern for the entire book of Revelation. He detects additional covenantal formulas in the prologue (1.5–6) and the epilogue (22.6–21). He suggests an outline of a covenant pattern in Revelation. Revelation 1.5a forms the preamble, and Rev. 1.5b–6a is the historical prologue. Chapters 2–3 represent the stipulations of the covenant. The witnesses to the covenant are indicated in Rev. 22.16a, 17a, 20a. Finally, he suggests that the blessing and curse formula for the entire book occur in Rev. 22.7b, 14a, 18–19.

54. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987).

55. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 20.

56. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 16.

57. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*.

58. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 143.

59. R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4–5* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992).

the heavenly courtroom scene focuses on the presence of the divine council. In Chapter 4, Davis reviews 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1–11, and Daniel 7 as significant OT passages for interpreting the role of the divine council in Revelation 4–5. In these OT passages, the council convenes before divine actions are taken suggesting that its primary function is executive/judicial decision-making.<sup>60</sup> The council passes judgment within the context of the covenant and on that basis a verdict is followed by subsequent actions.<sup>61</sup> The heavenly court scene of Revelation 4–5, depicting a divine council session, provides the key element in the overall portrayal of divine judgment and covenant fulfillment.<sup>62</sup> Once the judicial investigation is completed the following judgment patterns in the rest of the book correspond to the dispensing of the covenant rewards of blessings or curses.

6. *Joel Nobel Musvosvi*. The revision of Musvosvi's dissertation examined the concept of vengeance in the Apocalypse based on Rev. 6.9–11 and 19.2.<sup>63</sup> He aims to present a thematic study of the vengeance motif in Revelation in light of the OT and ancient Near Eastern [ANE] literature.<sup>64</sup> The problem he attempts to address relates to how the attitude of vengeance corresponds to the NT ethic of love and mercy towards one's enemies. Musvosvi's analysis of the Hebrew and Greek words for vengeance offers a covenantal view for interpreting the concept of vengeance. His study of ANE literature reveals that the objects of the curses include those who have broken the covenant or aggressors who have threatened the rights of the king's subjects.

Vengeance in the Apocalypse, according to Musvosvi, directly relates to the suffering and persecution of God's covenant people. He argues that in the OT God exercised vengeance on Israel's oppressors as a means of protecting his covenant people.<sup>65</sup> The NT provides evidence of persecution coming from Jewish and Roman sources, whereas all the instances relate to issues of legality.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, he interprets the cry of the martyrs in Rev 6.9–11 as a legal appeal to the Supreme Court of heaven in which God will reverse the unjust verdict.

60. Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 109.

61. Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 110.

62. Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 214.

63. Joel Nobel Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse* (AUSDDS, 17; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993).

64. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, p. 1.

65. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, p. 149. On page 153, he highlights the common pattern associated with persecution and vengeance: (1) covenant broken by Israel; (2) God exacts vengeance on the covenant violators, usually by sending foreign armies; (3) the call for and performing of repentance on Israel's part; and (4) God brings vengeance upon those who shed Israel's blood.

66. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, pp. 154–66.

7. *Gordon Campbell*. In a well-written article, Gordon Campbell develops the covenantal nature of the series of sevens in Revelation 1–16, and argues that these septets constitute ‘mini covenant lawsuits’.<sup>67</sup> He proposes that Leviticus 26 serves as a *Vorlage* for the four septets of judgment regarding covenant rupture.<sup>68</sup> The phrase ‘I will punish you for your sins seven times over’ recurs four times (Lev. 25.18; 21; 24; 28) as a means to bring God’s people to repentance. Campbell highlights a number of juridical images apparent in the first septet, which he labels as ‘findings for churches’.<sup>69</sup> This establishes a ‘legal framework’ carefully structured with Jesus as the mediator of the covenant between God and humanity (Rev. 1.5; 22.16; 18–20; cf. Deut. 4.2; 12.32).<sup>70</sup> The letters to the seven churches form ‘mini covenant lawsuits’ where Christ, the mediator, provides a detailed audit of the churches to declare them ‘judicially innocent or culpable’.<sup>71</sup> He, therefore, suggests that Revelation employs a covenant lawsuit based on the *rib* pattern found predominantly in the OT prophetic writings.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the purpose of the lawsuit would be to warn of the impending judgment for covenant rupture and call for repentance among God’s covenant people.<sup>73</sup>

8. *David E. Graves*. David Graves provides one of the best examinations of the covenant lawsuit in the seven letters of Revelation.<sup>74</sup> Graves’s work builds on an earlier article by William H. Shea where five *ancient Near Eastern vassal treaty* elements were identified (*preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, witness, and blessing and cursing*) in each of the seven messages. However, Graves takes an interdisciplinary approach, further developing this approach, arguing that the genre of the seven messages in Revelation 2–3 is hybrid prophetic oracle, influenced by the Torah.

Graves argues that John is not duplicating either OT prophetic oracles or the message of Deuteronomy, but rather combining the covenant lawsuit message of the prophets with the covenant formulary structure of the ANEVT

67. Gordon Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls: Variations upon the Theme of Covenant Rupture and Restoration in the Book of Revelation’, *WTJ* 66 (2004), pp. 71–96.

68. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 72. Major commentators who likewise suggest Leviticus 26 as the background for the series of seven judgments include Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 373; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (AB 38; New York: Doubleday, 1975), p. 282.

69. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 72.

70. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 72.

71. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 75.

72. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 78.

73. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, p. 80.

74. David E. Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties on the Seven Prophetic Messages in Revelation’ (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2008). Graves completed his work on the Book of Revelation under I. Howard Marshall.

found in Deuteronomy to construct his own unique genre of hybrid lawsuit oracle. The ANEVT structure within the seven messages is appropriate for prophetic oracles that call the churches to repentance and covenant faithfulness. John delivers the prophetic oracles using the *metaphor* of the ANEVT entrenched in the covenant lawsuit framework (*form*) to present the *content* of the prophetic message to the seven churches in Revelation.

*c. Studies Related to the Lawsuit Imagery in Revelation 18*

1. *Kenneth A. Strand.* Kenneth A. Strand writes on the judgment of Babylon, highlighting the judicial aspects portrayed in Revelation 18.<sup>75</sup> He begins by suggesting a chiasmic structure of Revelation 18 with the central section (vv. 9-19) focusing on the ‘actual *execution* of judgment’, in the sense of when a verdict is passed.<sup>76</sup> Strand demonstrates the juridical nature of this chapter with the two appeals in Rev. 18.4-8 and 18-20. He contends that the situation they describe indicates that there has been *inquiry* or *investigation* and now the *verdict* has been announced.<sup>77</sup> Babylon is declared guilty because she served as a malicious false witness by rendering verdicts against God’s people. In addition, Strand attempts to distinguish between the words *krisis* and *krima* by surveying its occurrences from Revelation 15 through 19. He concludes that *krisis* (18.10) is used to describe the execution of judgment taking place; and that *krima* (18.20) is used as the ‘literarily paralleling counterpart to the court-inquiry, verdict-rendering type of judgment dealt with in vss. 6-7’.<sup>78</sup>

2. *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.* E.S. Fiorenza argues for the existence of lawsuit themes in Revelation as part and parcel of the overall vision of social justice. She maintains that Revelation provides a vision of an alternative world and power system that serves to strengthen Christians in their ‘consistent resistance’ against the oppressive power of the Roman Empire.<sup>79</sup> Based on the rhetorical situation, she maintains that it was ‘written for those ‘who hunger and thirst for justice’ in a socio-political situation that is characterized

75. Kenneth A. Strand, ‘Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment Portrayed in Revelation 18’, *AUSS* 20/1 (1982), pp. 53-60.

76. Strand, ‘Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment’, p. 55. Strand’s breakdown of the chiasm includes the introduction and conclusion addressing the situation of Babylon (vv. 1-3, 21-24), an interlude consisting of an appeal (vv. 4-8, 18-20), and the central section of mourning at the Judgment scene (vv. 9-19).

77. Strand, ‘Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment’, p. 57.

78. Strand, ‘Two Aspects of Babylon’s Judgment’, pp. 58-59. He concludes with a minor excursus on Minear’s and Caird’s treatment of chap. 18, and faults them for failing to see the parallel between vv. 4-8 and v. 20.

79. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 4.

by injustice, suffering, and dehumanizing power'.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, '[t]he central images and theological motifs of Rev 15.5–19.10 are the splendor, wealth, and power of Babylon/Rome, and the justice of God's judgments'.<sup>81</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza describes the scene depicted in Rev. 15.5–19.10 as a universal courtroom where a 'class-action' lawsuit takes place.<sup>82</sup> This universal lawsuit pictures the saints as representative of all who are killed on the earth, and acting as the plaintiffs against Babylon/Rome (18.20). Babylon is charged with exploitation in the interest of power and idolatry. God, the judge, acknowledges the legal complaints and claims for justice and passes a sentence against Babylon/Rome to the choruses of delight proclaimed by the heavenly hosts. Schüssler Fiorenza also acknowledges the centrality of the theme of final judgment as a constituent part of Revelation's eschatology based on the predominance of judicial terminology.<sup>83</sup>

3. *Barbara R. Rossing*. A student of Schüssler Fiorenza, Barbara R. Rossing, has conducted a feminist-critical analysis of the two cities in Revelation (Babylon and New Jerusalem) and views the judgment of Babylon in terms of a lawsuit.<sup>84</sup> Her analysis of the imagery of Revelation's Babylon shifts between political (Babylon as πόλις) and personified (Babylon as γυνή), and it primarily functions as a political and economic critique against Rome.<sup>85</sup> She notes that '[a] reference to 'Fallen Babylon' in Rev. 14.8 and a longer reference in Rev. 16.19 establish a context of a legal trial and judgment for the entire Babylon vision'.<sup>86</sup> At the heart of the lawsuit against Babylon is the proper claim to the divine throne. The one who sits upon a throne maintains the judicial authority to condemn or vindicate, but Babylon has sat as an unjust and wicked judge.<sup>87</sup>

80. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 6.

81. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*.

82. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*.

83. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 47.

84. Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (HTS, 48; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999). This book is a revision of her doctoral dissertation from Harvard Divinity School written under the supervision of Schüssler Fiorenza.

85. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 62.

86. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*.

87. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 68. She finds grounds for this theory in the OT. She writes, "'Sitting' also holds significance as a term for the political fortunes of cities and nations. In the Hebrew Scriptures, nations 'sit' (יָשַׁב) enthroned to dethrone or unseat one another militarily. Defeats and victories are described in terms of dethronements and enthronements. In the book of Revelation no one sits without the explicit permission of God or by command of God's angels. Babylon's 'sitting' and her boast of invincible enthronement thus constitute a direct affront to God's political dominion and divinity'. Cf. Jer. 48.18; Ezek. 27.3; Isa. 14.13-15; 52.2; Rev. 3.21.

Revelation 18 comprises the lawcourt trial<sup>88</sup> of Babylon, borrowing from Jeremiah 50–51, but transforms the military images into legal imagery.<sup>89</sup> The shift from a military siege to a lawcourt setting is evident in the way that John reworks the imperatives in Jeremiah and Revelation.<sup>90</sup> Rossing insightfully observes, ‘The several allusions to Jeremiah 50–51 in the sequence of imperatives in Rev. 18.4–7 suggest that Jeremiah’s imperative strings serve as a model for the imperatives of Rev. 18.4–7’.<sup>91</sup> Rossing argues that the legality of these imperatives is emphasized by the repeated correlatives ‘just as’ (ὥς, Rev. 18.6; ὅσα, Rev. 18.7) as well as the note of Babylon’s fate ‘in accordance with its deeds’ (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς).<sup>92</sup> Thus, Revelation pictures the fair trial and ultimate condemnation of Babylon as well as portraying the glorious vindication of the New Jerusalem.

## 2. *The Case for a Lawsuit Motif in the Book of Revelation*

A case for the validity of a lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation may be plausible in light of this survey. Interpreters frequently observe language, imagery, and themes drawn directly from forensic settings. Remarkably, the multiple attestation of this phenomenon reveals a basic lack of an analysis of the lawsuit in Revelation. Some scholars such as Caird, Trites, and Schüssler Fiorenza maintain that the historical setting of the early church explains the juridical nature of the imagery. Others, such as Shae, Chilton, Campbell, and Graves set the lawsuit themes within the context of a covenant lawsuit. On the one hand, one may posit a unified acknowledgment by interpreters that John utilizes language and imagery infused with jurisprudence. On the other hand, diversity exists among scholars concerning the purpose and scope of what, why, and how this lawcourt imagery effects the interpretation of Revelation. So far no extensive analysis exists that examines the lawsuit motif throughout the book of Revelation. This study will seek to fill the apparent void.

88. Rossing (*The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 100) notes that, ‘The legal trial setting is intensified with a series of woes (Rev. 18.10, 16, 19) and the repeated use of ‘judgment’ language (κρίσις, κρίμα, κρίνω; Rev. 18.8, 10, 20)’.

89. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 118.

90. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 119. Jeremiah 50–51 employs a number of imperatives (e.g., ‘raise shouts’, ‘take up positions’, ‘shoot’, ‘come against her’, ‘kill’, ‘sharpen arrows’, ‘prepare ambushes’, ‘blow the trumpet’, ‘bring up horses’) that clearly connote Babylon’s destruction via a military campaign. Revelation 18.6–7 contains four imperatives (i.e., ‘ἀπόδοτε’, ‘διπλώσατε’, ‘κεράσατε’, ‘δότε’), all of which relate to rendering to Babylon what she has rendered to others.

91. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*.

92. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities*, p. 125.



Various studies have revealed that certain clusters of Revelation exhibit more lawsuit imagery than others. Chapters 2–3 present Christ as judge of his churches and the warnings/encouragement remain relevant throughout the book. Chapters 4–5 portray the divine courtroom from where the investigation occurs and the verdicts are rendered. Chapters 6.1–17; 8.1–9.21; 15.1–16.21 describe a series of seven judgments designed to indict the guilty and promote repentance. Chapter 11 presents the church delivering prophetic testimony in a trial-like setting before the nations. Chapter 12 reveals the heavenly legal battle between God, Satan, and the saints. Chapter 18 constitutes the trial, sentencing, and execution of God’s judgment on Babylon. Chapter 20 also evokes juridical imagery when describing the final judgment. In addition, the prologue (Rev. 1.1–8) and the epilogue (Rev. 22.6–16) resound with forensic connotation with a solemn testimony regarding the truth of the vision. These clusters bespeak a thematic and literary phenomenon signaling a motif intentionally woven into the fabric of John’s vision.

Almost every study related to the lawsuit in Revelation affirms the OT for its basis. The influence of the OT on the content of the Apocalypse can hardly be overstated. John uses language saturated with OT imagery. Interestingly, the majority of the OT allusions come from the prophetic writings.<sup>93</sup> This fact merits the affirmation that John viewed himself in the same tradition as the OT prophets, and possibly functioning in the capacity of rendering a divine lawsuit against the nations. Since the prophets frequently announced God’s judgments in terms of a lawsuit, it follows that John may have appropriated this familiar technique. Still more significant is the number of works that relate the prophetic *rib*-pattern with Revelation (Comblin, Trites, Chilton, Campbell). Both Comblin and Trites suggest that the lawsuit of Isaiah 40–55 is the backdrop for Revelation’s lawsuit structure. Others, such as Chilton and Campbell, base the lawsuit in Revelation more broadly on the basic structure of a covenant lawsuit. However, no prior study appears to trace the prophetic lawsuit as an integrated motif throughout the book of Revelation.

### 3. Methodology

The tripartite scheme of literature, theology, and history constitutes the warp and woof of the basic methodology employed. Schlatter helpfully outlined his approach to New Testament theology in terms of historical, theological, and literary analysis.<sup>94</sup> In his magisterial *The New Testament and the People of God*, Wright articulated a very intricate methodology that fully fleshed out

93. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 13–16; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 49–57.

94. Adolf Schlatter, *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology* (trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), pp. 17–20.

how each of these components contributes to understanding the text and the theology of the NT.<sup>95</sup> More recently, Lincoln argued that '[i]f the three main types of investigation of the NT can be said to be the literary, the historical (including the sociological), and the ideological or theological, then...the trial motif is peculiarly appropriate as a meeting place for all three'.<sup>96</sup> This study seeks to trace the intent of the text with an emphasis on theological concerns, yet taking its cues from the literary strategies and historical referents. Therefore, this study approaches the stated task using an integrated system, incorporating tools from a variety of hermeneutical disciplines.

The lawsuit motif derives from a combination of the literary, theological, and historical dimensions of the text. The language, metaphors, and narrative storyline of the text evoke a cosmic lawcourt setting, making the lawsuit imagery a consistent literary feature throughout the Apocalypse. The use of OT allusions also contributes to the literary development, structure, imagery, and meaning of John's vision (see Appendix). These allusions are not limited to prophetic lawsuit speeches because they are drawn from a broad spectrum of OT subtexts, but careful attention should be given to those allusions related to prophetic genre. Theologically, the lawsuit motif is deeply rooted in the canonical portrait of the justice, righteousness, and judgment of God. These themes run throughout the OT and appear to be central to the message of the book of Revelation. The socio-historical situation also contributes to the lawsuit motif because John's vision was intended for believers in Asia Minor who may have been victims, or at least perceived that they were victims of injustice because of their faith. This investigation, therefore, employs a methodology that examines the literary, theological, and historical data related to all juridical language and imagery in the book of Revelation.

#### 4. Conclusion

An integrated, comprehensive analysis of the prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation fills a gap in scholarship in several ways. First, the lawsuit motif may provide an appropriate framework for reading this book; setting Revelation against a courtroom backdrop could enable readers to interpret the juridical images as consistent features in the overall narrative. As such, the Apocalypse tells the story of God the Creator and sovereign Judge who will ultimately render justice over all his creation. He will vindicate his saints for the unjust suffering they have endured at the hands of the pagan nations because of the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4). The Dragon and all his followers will face God's righteous wrath

95. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 31-144.

96. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 7.

because of their sin, mistreatment of God's people, and failure to worship God (Rev. 18.19-24; 19.1-3, 22.9). Therefore, the purpose of the lawcourt imagery would be to demonstrate God's sovereignty, encourage the suffering saints, and reveal the justice of God's activity in the final eschatological judgment.

Second, analyzing the lawsuit motif in light of the prophetic genre may provide a contribution to the discussion of how the OT functions in the book of Revelation. Most of the discussion on this topic has focused on analyzing specific allusions in Revelation, the use of specific OT books (i.e., Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Psalms), or how the author reinterprets the OT passages for his own purposes. In addition to these concerns, this study will also focus on how the author utilizes a specific genre in the OT prophets. It might provide some insights into why John often combines allusions found scattered throughout the OT into one composite image. More likely, however, it reveals how John, as a prophet, utilized a familiar technique when describing his vision as it pertained to God's judgment on sinners and the vindication of the saints.

A final contribution is that this study will explore the purpose of the theological themes in Revelation as they relate to the socio-historical situation of the original recipients. John did not write his prophetic vision in a vacuum. While experiencing some form of persecution, he was writing to churches that also lived under a threat of persecution (Rev. 1.9). Christians faced the possibility of being dragged into court before an unjust judge for their refusal to worship the emperor.<sup>97</sup> This would have naturally provoked temptation to cower to the socio-religious norms by renouncing, or at least accommodating, their faith in Christ.<sup>98</sup> Although it appears as if Christians will always face injustice, John received a vision of the glorified Christ who sits on Heaven's throne with the authority to unleash the wrath of God (Revelation 1-5). This message would have served as an encouragement to remain faithful to Christ and trust in him as the Sovereign King who will one day vindicate his people.

Chapter 1, 'The Lawsuit as a Prophetic Subgenre', will locate the lawsuit motif in Revelation within the context and in continuity with the OT. The

97. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 193, argues that the exigency of the rhetorical situation is best characterized by the letter of Pliny to the emperor Trajan that specifically describes how Christians were dragged before him (as judge) and interrogated: Pliny, *Pan.* 10.96. See also Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Paradosis, 23; Fribourg: University Press Fribourg, Switzerland, 1974), pp. 50-154; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (JSNTSup, 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). For an argument against an official persecution, see Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 11-34; David A. deSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John', *JSNT* 71 (1998), pp. 79-110 (82 n. 9).

98. deSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', pp. 90-103.

first section surveys the history of scholarship related to the *Gerichtsrede* as a prophetic subgenre. Particular attention will be given to the format and structure of the lawsuit speech. Since juridical language and imagery occur in narrative sections as well as prophetic oracles, the remainder of the Chapter will survey how the OT writers often used forensic metaphors in matters of justice and judgment. An analysis of selected passages in the prophetic oracles will indicate that the prophets employed two types of lawsuit speeches: (1) covenantal lawsuits directed at Israel in relation to violations of the covenant stipulations; and (2) lawsuit speeches directed at the pagan nations especially in regard to their oppression of Israel. Often the lawsuit against the nations would then be followed by oracles of salvation announcing the vindication of God's faithful servants. Thus, the prophetic lawsuit typically followed a broad threefold pattern.

Chapter 2 examines the historical, cultural, and sociological influences that may have contributed to the presence of the lawsuit motif. Most notably, the question concerning the nature of the persecution that the Christians may have been experiencing deserves consideration. Were the churches facing persecution sanctioned through the threat of emperor worship? What were the possible situations that the author of Revelation sought to address? This context will help determine the legal status of believers in Asia Minor. What is more, the relationship between the imperial cult and the seven churches of Asia provides a possible backdrop for the nature of issues addressed in the Apocalypse. In assessing all the relevant historical data as well as sociological factors, the writer's analysis of Roman legal procedures may shed light on the juridical language and imagery in Revelation.

Chapter 3 investigates the structure and presence of juridical language in Revelation to establish the plausibility of the lawsuit motif. The first section will involve a detailed analysis of the structure of the Apocalypse. It will be argued that the structure divides itself into four separate but interrelated visions. The structure, then, provides a framework for interpreting John's vision especially in terms of its rhetorical effect. The second section consists of a semantic field analysis of significant word groups in Revelation. A semantic field analysis will serve to adjudicate the intended connotations in the contextual usages of words in the groups studied. This Chapter sets the stage for the exegetical survey of the Lawsuit motif throughout the four visions of Revelation.

Chapter 4 begins an exegetical survey of the lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation by examining the first vision (Rev. 1.9–3.22). John witnesses a vision of Jesus as the eschatological judge standing in the midst of his churches. Jesus commissions John to record the entirety of the vision he received, but then proceeds to write letters specifically addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor. These letters correspond to the covenant lawsuit

speeches of the OT prophets. Jesus conducts his investigation of his churches in a lawsuit format to encourage their faithful endurance and warn of judgment unless they repent. The first vision represents the first element of the prophetic lawsuit by first addressing the covenant people of God before turning to a lawsuit against the nations.

Chapter 5 continues this exegetical survey by examining the second vision (Rev. 4.1–16.21). The second vision depicts the divine courtroom proceedings during the trial as it relates to the lawsuit against the nations. Vision two opens with a grand depiction of the heavenly courtroom with the judge of the universe seated on his throne. The Lamb unleashes a threefold series of seven investigative and punitive judgments against the inhabitants of the earth. Interludes between each series of judgments depict the role of the saints as sealed prophetic witnesses engaged in a holy war with the Dragon and his beasts. The septets along with the interludes comprise the evidence submitted in the lawsuit against the nations.

Chapter 6 concludes the exegetical survey of the final two visions. The third (Rev. 17.1–21.8) and fourth visions (Rev. 21.9–22.5) constitute literary parallels contrasting the judgment of the nations and the vindication of the saints. The third vision recounts the trial, sentencing, and judgment of Babylon. Babylon and the earth's inhabitants are indicted for three specific crimes. First, they refused to worship God, who is the sovereign creator. Second, they mistreated and even slaughtered the people of God. Finally, they refused to repent from their wicked deeds. Therefore, the nations, comprised of all humanity, must face the certainty of God's justice. The final vision (Rev. 21.9–22.5) depicts the restoration, vindication, and ultimate reward awaiting the people of God.

Chapter 7 constitutes the conclusion of this study of the prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation. This begins with a summary of the arguments presented in each Chapter. After positing some of the possible contributions of this study, it attempts to develop some of the potential literary, historical, and theological implications of the prophetic lawsuit motif. This study modestly attempts to instigate a dialogue on the presence, nature, and significance of the lawsuit motif in the Apocalypse. This Chapter will conclude by offering several suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 1

### THE LAWSUIT AS A PROPHETIC SUBGENRE

The subgenre of the lawsuit speech in the prophetic writings of the OT comprises a natural starting place for the background of the prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation. John's Apocalypse is thoroughly saturated with the language, imagery, and theology of the OT. This sustained allusion to the OT indicates that John was immersed in the Scriptures of Israel and sought to maintain some sense of continuity with the prophets. One may plausibly suggest that the inclusion of the lawsuit motif also stems from his appropriation of themes and literary conventions residing in the text of the OT. It will be argued that the prophetic lawsuit was an established prophetic subgenre as well as a common metaphor in the stock of biblical imagery. In order to establish the validity of this thesis, the following investigation will attempt to establish that the prophetic lawsuit constitutes a subgenre in prophetic writings by assessing OT scholarship and surveying examples of the prophetic lawsuit in the canonical texts.

#### 1. *The Identification of the Lawsuit as a Prophetic Genre*

The identification of the prophetic lawsuit originated from the enterprise of form criticism in OT studies. The concept of the prophetic *Gerichtsrede* (lawsuit speech) quickly attained the status of an established subgenre in OT literature, especially the prophetic writings. Hermann Gunkel was the first to popularize the notion of the *Gerichtsrede* (lawsuit speech) as a type of literary style (*Gattung*) in the Psalms and Prophets.<sup>1</sup> The works of Gressmann,<sup>2</sup> Köhler,<sup>3</sup> Begrich,<sup>4</sup> Würthwein,<sup>5</sup> Cross,<sup>6</sup> Gemser,<sup>7</sup> and Huffmon<sup>8</sup> all contributed

1. Gunkel and Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, p. 329.

2. Hugo Gressmann, 'Die literarische Analyse Deuterocesajas', *ZAW* 34 (1914), pp. 254-97.

3. Ludwig Köhler, *Deuterocesaja: Jesaja 40-55 stilkritisch untersucht* (BZAW, 37; Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1923). See also Antoon Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour: A Form-Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. xl-lv* (VTSup, 24; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), p. 182.

4. Joachim Begrich (*Studien zu Deuterocesaja* [TBü, 20; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer,

significantly during the early formative period. By the 1960s, scholars were already speaking of the 'prophetic lawsuit', or the '*riḅ*-pattern', as an accepted subgenre.<sup>9</sup> The works of Julien Harvey (1967),<sup>10</sup> James Limburg (1969),<sup>11</sup> and Kristen Nielsen (1978)<sup>12</sup> constitute three of the most significant monographs concerning the prophetic lawsuit. Although many have accepted the prophetic lawsuit as a valid OT subgenre, some have questioned whether or not the term רִיב (*riḅ*) suggests a lawsuit and if a lawsuit genre actually exists.<sup>13</sup> These critiques, however, do not warrant a jettisoning of the lawsuit speech as a prophetic form used to announce judgment and demonstrate God's justice.

Scholars derive the notion of the lawsuit from the occurrence of juridical language in various contexts.<sup>14</sup> Most notably, the root רִיב typically expresses a controversy between individuals thereby prompting some to suggest that it

1938], pp. 26-48) furthered the initial work of Gunkel in *Einleitung in die Psalmen* and was the first to offer a full-fledged treatment of the *Gerichtsrede*.

5. Ernst Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede', *ZTK* 49 (1952), pp. 1-16.

6. Frank Moore Cross, 'The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah', *JNES* 12 (1953), pp. 274-77. Cross compares the divine assembly with other ANE conceptions and argues that 'the prophetic 'lawsuit' (*riḅ*), a familiar oracle type, undoubtedly has its origin in the conceptions of the role of Yahweh's heavenly assembly as a court'.

7. Gemser, 'The *Riḅ*- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality', pp. 134-35.

8. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 285-95.

9. Hans Jochen Boecker, 'Anklagereden und Verteidigungsreden im Alten Testament', *EvT* 20 (1960), pp. 398-412; Wright, 'The Lawsuit of God', pp. 26-67; Harvey, 'Le *Riḅ*-Pattern', pp. 172-96; Eberhard von Waldow, *Der Traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der prophetischen Gerichtsreden* (BZAW, 85; Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1963); Hans Jochen Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT, 14; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964); Jackson, 'Yahweh v. Cohen et al.', pp. 28-32; Julien Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance* (Studia: travaux de recherche, 22; Montréal: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967); Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (trans. Hugh Clayton White; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p. 199.

10. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*.

11. Limburg, 'The Lawsuit of God'; Limburg, 'The Root רִיב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches', pp. 291-30.

12. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*.

13. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's *Riḅ* against Israel', pp. 563-74; Dwight R. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', pp. 339-60; Meindert Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse in Second Isaiah', in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A.M. Beuken* (ed. J. van Ruiten and M. Vervenne; BETL, 132; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), pp. 251-71.

14. Cf. L. Seeligman, 'Zur Terminologie für das Gerichtsverfahren im Wortschatz des biblischen Hebräisch', in *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (VTSup, 16; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1967), pp. 251-78.

signals the presence of a lawsuit.<sup>15</sup> Although this word has a broad definition of 'strive', or 'contend', many scholars prefer a more narrow definition of 'bring an accusation', 'accuse', 'to dispute', or 'to engage in a lawsuit or legal process'.<sup>16</sup> The verb occurs sixty-six times in the qal and twice in the hiphil; the noun occurs sixty-two times.<sup>17</sup> Gemser argued that the use of ריב in legal contexts demonstrates its juridical connotation (e.g., Exod. 23.2-6; Deut. 25.1; Isa. 1.17, 23; Job 31.35).<sup>18</sup> He indicated that the *rib*-pattern parallels the lawsuit proceedings in ancient Israel and was used as a metaphor in the prophets to proclaim a controversy whereby God summons, accuses, threatens, and decides against his chosen people.<sup>19</sup> He concluded that the *rib*-phraseology reveals a particular frame of mind in which Israel sought to express how justice, especially God's justice, is decided, maintained, and executed.<sup>20</sup>

Limburg has helpfully adjudicated between the theological and non-theological contexts where the root ריב occurs.<sup>21</sup> He conducted an impressive syntactical analysis of the root ריב in a variety of contexts and demonstrated that in almost every instance it conveys the sense of 'to make an accusation'.<sup>22</sup> He observed that when used in a verb-preposition combination it reinforces the sense of 'making an accusation against' or 'making an accusation on behalf of someone'.<sup>23</sup> Regarding the prophetic lawsuit passages, Limburg observed that ריב is syntactically bound to Yahweh (ריב ליהוה) because Yahweh is the one

15. For occurrences of the root ריב see Gen. 13.7; Exod. 17.7; Deut. 21.5; 25.1; Judg. 12.2; 1 Sam. 25.39; 2 Sam. 15.2, 4; 2 Chr. 19.10; Prov. 15.18; 17.1; 25.9; 26.17, 21; 30.33; Jer. 15.10; 25.31; 50.34; Ezek. 44.24; Hos. 4.1; Mic. 6.1; Hab. 1.3.

16. Cf. Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens*, p. 54 n. 2; Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 117; Limburg, 'Lawsuit of God', pp. 291-92.

17. Ringgren, *TDOT*, XIII, p. 474.

18. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 122-25. He also provides an extensive list of legal vocabulary in the OT as it pertained to court proceedings.

19. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 128-29.

20. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 136-37. Gemser, unfortunately, uses the term 'pattern' not in the sense of a literary structure, but as a psychological frame of mind in that the Hebrews were predisposed to controversy. Harvey equates the *rib*-pattern with the German term *Gerichtsrede* to refer to a specific literary structure (Harvey, *Le plaidoyer*, p. 172). Due to the general confusion over terminology, Limburg attempted to abandon the terms '*rib*-pattern' and *Gerichtsrede* in favor of the more specific 'lawsuit-speech' (Limburg, 'Lawsuit of God', p. 51).

21. Limburg, 'Lawsuit of God', pp. 57-58. In addition to the theological and non-theological contexts, Limburg also delineates between narrative, legal, poetic, and liturgical contexts.

22. Limburg, 'Root ריב and Lawsuit Speeches', pp. 293-96. Cf. Gen. 26.17; 31.36; Neh. 5.6; 13.11, 17; Judg. 6.25, 30, 31; 8.1; Job 13.6, 7-9.

23. Limburg, 'Root ריב and Lawsuit Speeches', p. 296.



with the contention.<sup>24</sup> Although one should avoid translating רִיב as ‘lawsuit’,<sup>25</sup> the juridical connotations imply some sort of intended legal metaphor or process. Other words closely associated with the lawsuit speech include terms for judgment (מִשְׁפָּט), righteousness (צִדְקָה), and witness (עֵד).

Another question scholars addressed is the *Sitz im Leben* of the *Gerichtsrede*. This issue pertains to the conceptual background of the lawsuit and what the situation was that prompted its composition.<sup>26</sup> Concerning the conceptual background, scholars typically adhere to one of three choices: (1) the covenant lawsuit stemming from legal proceedings conducted at the city gate (Gunkel, Begrich, Köhler, Boecker, Westermann); (2) the covenant lawsuit locating the lawsuit within the framework of the cultic life of Israel (Würthwein, von Waldow, Nielsen); and (3) the covenant lawsuit compared with ancient Hittite Suzerainty treaties (Huffmon, Mendenhall, Harvey, Limburg).

#### a. *The Covenant Lawsuit and the City Gate*

Some scholars maintain that the prophetic lawsuit derived from legal procedures at the city gate and thus mirror a secular or civic context.<sup>27</sup> The premise behind this view is that the lawsuit speech was borrowed from the legal proceedings in ancient Israel. Köhler saw the disputation speech (*Streitgespräch*) in Isaiah 40–55 as stemming directly from the juridical world (*Rechtswelt*) of the Hebrews.<sup>28</sup> He contends that the juridical process as conducted at the city gate significantly shaped Hebrew thinking (even evident in Paul’s doctrine of justification), which eventually impacted the literary forms.<sup>29</sup> Boecker provided the most extensive exploration of city gate court proceedings and its relationship to the prophetic lawsuit.<sup>30</sup> The administration of justice represented a

24. Limburg, ‘Root רִיב and Lawsuit Speeches’, p. 301. Cf. Hos. 4.1; 12.3; Mic. 6.2; Jer. 25.31.

25. See arguments in DeRoche, ‘Yahweh’s RîB against Israel’, pp. 564–71.

26. For example see Wright, ‘The Lawsuit of God’, pp. 36–49.

27. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja*. For Gunkel, however, the lawcourt proceedings at the gate may have only served as the formal *Sitz im Leben* and not necessarily where it was delivered.

28. Köhler, *Deuterocesaja*, p. 110. Cf. pp. 110–16.

29. Köhler, *Deuterocesaja*. He writes, ‘Das im Torstatthabende Recht... ist die eine große Angelegenheit des hebräischen Mannes, die Sammelstätte seiner Gedanken, Quell seines Scharfsinns und Schule seiner Beredsamkeit. Daher die juridizelle Haltung der hebräischen Ausdruckswelt (noch in der ‘Rechtfertigung’ des Paulus) und ihre Bedeutung für die literarischen Formen’.

30. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens im Alten Testament* (WMANT, 14; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964); Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East* (trans. Jeremy Moiser; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980). See also Boecker, ‘Anklagereden und Verteidigungsreden im Alten Testament’, pp. 398–412. He categorizes the forms of speech to either a pre-trial setting, during the trial setting, or at the conclusion of the trial setting.

significant aspect of life in Israel, but the OT does not offer a step-by-step explanation of how the court was conducted. A somewhat accurate picture, however, may be construed by piecing together the legal portions of the Torah, historical narratives, wisdom literature, poetry, and prophetic writings.<sup>31</sup> When someone had a dispute with another, they would either bring their case before the town elders or to the king, bring forth witnesses, and the judge(s) would render a verdict of guilt or acquittal.<sup>32</sup>

Israel's juridical procedures certainly provide the conceptual framework for the lawsuit speech of the OT prophets, but it does not constitute a likely *Sitz im Leben* for the situation surrounding its composition or delivery. The Torah not only revealed God's law but also established Israel's justice system. The prophets, no doubt, would demonstrate a familiarity and consistency with the processes outlined in the Torah. Naturally, a Hebrew prophet would share a number of affinities with Israelite court procedures when framing his lawsuit speech. But to speak of the juridical component of the Hebrew mind is regrettable. Are Hebrews any more concerned with justice and legality than other cultures, nationalities, or religions? All societies require a justice system as well as a process for regulating conflict. Therefore, legal metaphors evince universal components of any justice system.

#### *b. The Covenant Lawsuit and Israel's Cult*

Other form critical scholars maintain that the prophetic lawsuit derived from the cultic setting in the life of ancient Israel.<sup>33</sup> Würthwein agreed with Gunkel that certain pericopes constitute a *Gerichtsrede*,<sup>34</sup> but argued that the lawsuit was mediated through the cult because the language is so closely tied with the covenant and commandments.<sup>35</sup> He broadens his study to include a

31. Ludwig Köhler, *Hebrew Man* (trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 128-50; D.A. McKenzie, 'Judicial Procedure at the Town Gate', *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 100-104; Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice*, pp. 27-52; Arnold Gamper, *Gott als Richter in Mesopotamien und im Alten Testament: Zum Verständnis einer Gebetsbitte* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1966); Seeligman, 'Zur Terminologie für das Gerichtsverfahren', pp. 251-78; Anthony Phillips, 'Some Aspects of Family Law in Pre-Exilic Israel', *VT* 23 (1973), pp. 349-61; Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, pp. 20-24; Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (SFSHJ, 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), pp. 378-410.

32. Köhler, *Deuteriojesaja*, pp. 110-12. He outlines the court gate proceedings as (1) summons to court (Isa. 1.18); (2) the opening of the juridical assembly (Isa. 3.13-14); (3) the call for witnesses (Isa. 1.2, 10; 5.3; 18.3; 32.9; Mic. 1.2; 3.1; 3.9; 6.2); and request for a verdict (Isa. 5.3).

33. Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung der prophetischen Gerichtsrede', pp. 1-16; Franz Hesse, 'Wurzelt die prophetische Gerichtsrede im israelitischen Kult?', *ZAW* 65 (1953), pp. 45-53.

34. Cf. Hos. 4.1; 12.3; Isa. 3.13; Mic. 6.1; Jer. 2.5, 25, 30; Mal. 3.5.

35. Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung des prophetischen Gerichtesrede', p. 6. He agreed with

number of Psalms (50, 76, 96, 98) connected with Yahweh's judgment of Israel as evidenced by a cultic dramatization.<sup>36</sup> Würthwein maintains that since the accusation pertained to a breach of the covenant stipulations it must have occurred in a cultic setting where the Torah would have been read.<sup>37</sup> Hesse, however, quickly faulted Würthwein's thesis and consequently prevented it from ever gaining full acceptance.<sup>38</sup> Essentially, Hesse contended that the cultic prophets did not pronounce judgment on the people of God and that the Psalms (esp. 50 and 82), if they are prophetic lawsuits, make accusations against Israel's enemies instead of Israel.<sup>39</sup> As such, the cultic background for the *Sitz im Leben* proposed by Würthwein has failed to garner much support.

Würthwein, nevertheless, established a trajectory by connecting the prophetic lawsuit with the covenant traditions that was further advanced by von Waldow, who offered a mediating position between Gunkel, Boecker, and Würthwein.<sup>40</sup> Although the language and imagery stems from the secular lawcourt, von Waldow argued that it is specifically related to the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>41</sup> He suggested that the *Gerichtsrede* constitutes

Bergrich that the lawsuit speech in Isaiah 40–55 seems to be patterned after the style of speech rendered at the city gate. See also Boecker's rejection of Würthwein's thesis in *Anklagereden*, pp. 400–12.

36. Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung'. Würthwein depends heavily upon the works of Mowinkel and Weiser for this section. Cf. Limburg, 'Lawsuit of God', pp. 11–12.

37. Würthwein, 'Der Ursprung', p. 15. He concludes, 'So ergibt sich uns folgender Tatbestand: auf der einen Seite steht ein Kult mit Gerichtsreden, die sich in ihren Formen und Gedanken eng mit dem berühren, was man früher als „prophetisch“ bezeichnete, was aber wohl richtiger auf den altisraelitischen Bundesglauben zurückgeführt wird. Auf der anderen Seite haben wir Gerichtsreden der Propheten, die wiederum nicht aus einer besonderen prophetischen Eigenart zu erklären sind, sondern, wie sich uns oben ergab, denselben Bundesglauben zur Voraussetzung haben. Was liegt nun näher, als beide miteinander zu verbinden, d. h. die prophetischen Gerichtsreden ebenso wie die Gerichtsreden der Psalmen aus dem Kult herzuleiten? Jedenfalls scheint sich mir nach all dem, was sich zeigen ließ, die These geradezu aufzudrängen, daß die prophetische Gerichtsrede nicht eine Nachahmung der profanen Gerichtsrede ist, die damit zum Ausdruck eines Sachverhaltes werden würde, für den sie eigentlich unangemessen ist, sondern daß ihr Ursprung in einer kultischen Gerichtsszene gesehen werden muß.'

38. Hesse, 'Wurzelt die prophetische Gerichtsrede?', pp. 45–53.

39. Hesse, 'Wurzelt die prophetische Gerichtsrede?', pp. 20, 46.

40. Von Waldow, *Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund der prophetischen Gerichtsreden*, pp. 1–18. He rejects Würthwein's notion that Israel's cult employed a lawsuit format. Cf. pp. 25–26.

41. Von Waldow (*Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund*, p. 20) states, 'Allein schon die Tatsache, daß Erörterungen über das Gott-Volk-Verhältnis im Rahmen rechtlicher Institutionen und in der Terminologie des Rechtslebens erfolgen können, setzt voraus, daß die Gerichtsreden die Beziehung zwischen Jahve und Israel in rechtlichen Kategorien

a collective term (*Sammelbezeichnung*) including three distinct types of lawsuit speeches: (1) the accusatory address (*die Anklagereden*); (2) the defense speech (*die Verteidigungsreden*); and (3) the judge's verdict (*die Reden des Richters*).<sup>42</sup> More importantly, he argues that Yahweh is cast in the role of both prosecutor and judge in order to prosecute violations of the covenant stipulations.<sup>43</sup> Nielsen affirms that von Waldow clearly distinguishes between the formal *Sitz im Leben*, the lawcourt conducted at the gate, and its conceptual background, the covenant traditions.<sup>44</sup>

Nielsen faulted von Waldow's thesis arguing that a trial to actualize the curses of the covenant is superfluous unless the Israelites were completely unaware of the reasons they were suffering a certain catastrophe. The only suitable situation for a prophetic lawsuit was if the Israelites failed to realize that they have violated the covenant. Nielsen countered that prophets not only announced judgment but also warned of impending judgment if the people did not repent. The ריב, then, not only functions to make the Israelites aware of their covenant violation and to explain the current crisis, but also to warn of consequences. She claims that the New Year Festival's ceremony of covenant renewal best accounts for the actual *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic lawsuit because it would have also included a ceremony of repentance.<sup>45</sup> Although, most OT scholars reject Würthwein's hypothesis, he helped establish a trajectory away from the arena of the secular lawcourt into the more viable connection with the legality of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

### *c. The Covenant Lawsuit and International Vassal Treaties*

Finally, many scholars maintain that the prophetic lawsuit derived from ANEVT. In 1955, George E. Mendenhall compared the covenant of the Israelites with that of the Hittite suzerainty vassal treaties and concluded that they share an almost identical structure.<sup>46</sup> He posited that the 'Covenant Code

sehen. So werden wir von den prophetischen Gerichtsreden unmittelbar zur Vorstellung des Bundes Gottes mit Israel geführt. Werden in den Anklagereden der Gerichtsreden Anklagen gegen Israel erhoben, so setzt das voraus, daß denn 'nur wo eine Verpflichtung besteht, kann eine Anklage erhoben werden'.

42. Von Waldow, *Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund*, pp. 10-11.

43. Von Waldow, *Der traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund*, pp. 12-19. Sometimes Israel stands as the accused with Yahweh as both prosecutor and judge. In other instances, Israel plays the role as the prosecutor, but Yahweh is the defendant and also the judge. He rejects the notion that the natural elements function as judges and instead maintains that they are called as witnesses to the covenant.

44. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, p. 21.

45. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, p. 60.

46. George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955), pp. 31-34. First published in *The Biblical*

is actually a description of legal policy...showing us the concepts of legal, religious, and moral obligation which were regarded as those norms'.<sup>47</sup> This covenant comports well with the Hittite suzerainty treaties (1450–1200 BCE), according to Mendenhall, whereby a king/suzerain binds his servants/vassals to faithfulness and obedience to himself:

The primary purpose of the suzerainty treaty was to establish a firm relationship of mutual support between the two parties...in which the interests of the Hittite sovereign were of primary and ultimate concern. It established a relationship between the two, but in its form it is unilateral. The stipulations of the treaty are binding only upon the vassal, and only the vassal took an oath of obedience....Consequently for him [the suzerain] to bind himself to specific obligations with regard to his vassal would be an infringement upon his sole right of self-determination and sovereignty. A most important corollary of this fact is the emphasis upon the vassal's obligation to *trust* in the benevolence of the sovereign.<sup>48</sup>

The covenant represents not only the religious dimension of Israel's relationship with Yahweh but also functions as a legal code, warranting divine punishment should Israel transgress the stipulations. Thus, the 'messages of the prophets are essentially indictments of Israel for breach of covenant'.<sup>49</sup>

Mendenhall's thesis quickly converged with OT scholarship on the prophetic *Gerichtsrede*.<sup>50</sup> Herbert Huffmon discussed the natural elements in the lawsuit passages (Deut. 32.1; Ps. 50.4), but he rejected Gunkel and Begrich's theory that the heavens and earth function as judges. He also dismissed Wright's<sup>51</sup> and Cross's suggestions that they are demythologized members of the divine council.<sup>52</sup> Instead, following Mendenhall, Huffmon contended that the heavens and earth are called upon because they are witnesses to the initial

*Archaeologist* 17/2 (May 1954), pp. 26-46; and 17/3 (September 1954), pp. 49-76. So also George E. Mendenhall, 'The Suzerainty Treaty Structure: Thirty Years Later', in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (ed. Edwin B. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss, and John W. Welch; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 85-100.

47. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, p. 17.

48. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, p. 30. Mendenhall depends heavily upon Viktor Korošec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer juristischen Wertung* (Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1931).

49. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, p. 19.

50. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 285-95; Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', pp. 172-96; Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 27; Waldow, *Der traditions-geschichtliche Hintergrund der prophetischen Gerichtsreden*, pp. 17-19; Limburg, 'Root ריב and Lawsuit Speeches', pp. 297-304.

51. G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1950), p. 36.

52. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 290-91.

covenant sealing ceremonies (Deut. 4.26; 30.19; 31.28).<sup>53</sup> He observed that some lawsuits relate to a breach of the covenant (Hos. 4.1-3) while others do not give any such indication (Isa. 1.18-20; 3.13-15; Mic. 1.2-7). This leads to the conclusion that two distinct types of lawsuits exist based on different Near Eastern backgrounds: (1) *a lawsuit involving the divine council to judge the nations*;<sup>54</sup> and (2) *a covenantal lawsuit to judge Israel*.

Julien Harvey, building upon the work of Mendenhall and Huffmon, provided the best and most comprehensive treatment of the covenant lawsuit. He argued that the *rib*-pattern invoked by the prophets followed the same structure of indictments when the stipulations of international treaties had been breached.<sup>55</sup> He surveyed the texts of Tukulti-Ninurta<sup>56</sup> and the Mari records<sup>57</sup> to find examples of a ריב functioning as a legal ultimatum or declaration of war from kings who believed that a vassal country had violated international law.<sup>58</sup> Harvey further demonstrated the similarities between the structure of these texts and the ריב texts of the OT.<sup>59</sup> He maintained that setting the prophetic lawsuit against the backdrop of international law sufficiently answers all the questions not satisfactorily treated by prior scholarship concerning the

53. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', p. 292. Mendenhall states that the natural elements were invoked in the international vassal treaties as witnesses of the contract. See also M. Delcor, 'Les attaches littéraires, l'origine et la signification de l'expression biblique, prendre à témoin le ciel et la terre', *VT* 16 (1966), pp. 8-25.

54. Cf. Psalm 82; Zech. 3.1; Cross, 'Council of Yahweh', pp. 274-77.

55. Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', p. 180. He states, 'En d'autres termes, cette hypothèse de travail, c'est qu'il faut chercher l'origine de la *Gattung* dans le droit international, et plus précisément dans le même droit international qui a fourni le schéma de l'alliance. Dans ce contexte, le *Rib* à condamnation est le formulaire de la *déclaration de guerre* du suzerain au vassal infidèle, et le *Rib* à avertissement est celui d'un *ultimatum* au vassal qui a commencé à s'écarter des stipulations fondamentales de l'alliance. Ceci posé, on peut maintenant tenter de vérifier l'existence de parallèles extra-bibliques, en se limitant au deuxième millénaire'.

56. Tukulti-Ninurta, king of Assyria, *Die Inschriften Tukulti-Ninurtas I. und seiner Nachfolger* (trans. Ernst F. Weidner; AfO, 12; Graz: im Selbstverlage des Herausgebers, 1959).

57. Georges Dossin, *Archives royales de Mari: Textes* (Paris: P. Geunthner, 1941), with specific reference to the letter from King Yarîm-Lim of Alep to Yašûb-Yahad the king of Dîr.

58. Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', pp. 182-88. For a more detailed analysis of extra-biblical parallels see Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 119-43.

59. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 31-56. These include complete accusatory addresses like Deut. 32.1-25; Isa. 1.2-20; Mic. 6.1-8; Jer. 2.4-13.29; Ps. 50.1-23. He identifies incomplete accusatory addresses because they do not contain all of the standard elements. These include Isa. 42.18-25; 48.12-19; 57.3-13; 58.1-14; 66.1-4; Jer. 6.16-21; Mal. 1.6-2.9; Judg. 2.1-5; 1 Sam. 2.27-36; 2 Sam. 12.7-12; 1 Kgs 14.7-11; 21.17-24; 2 Chron. 12.5-8; 15.1-15.

*rib*-pattern.<sup>60</sup> This explains why Yahweh functions as both prosecutor and judge. Yahweh commissions a prophet as the messenger agent who invokes a lawsuit to indict Israel for a breach of the covenant stipulations and subsequently warns them of severe consequences unless they repent. Harvey's thesis was advanced by Limburg who used the account of Jephthah's contention with the Ammonite king as a model for international relationships (Judg. 10.17–12.6).<sup>61</sup> The parallels adduced by Huffmon, Harvey, and Limburg make this one of the most plausible candidates for the nearest conceptual background, which would also correspond with secular and cultic jurisprudence.<sup>62</sup>

The form critical enterprise exerted an inordinate amount of effort in identifying the most probable *Sitz im Leben*, giving shape to specific *Gattungen*. Early form critics exhibited a tendency toward atomizing a literary composition into various and sundry units each with a unique historical development. The end result is that they often missed the forest for the trees. Ringgren is perhaps correct when he suggested that the solution to the *Sitz im Leben* question may be found in a combination of the various theories.<sup>63</sup> The forensic language most likely derives from secular legal proceedings and so it follows that the prophet would evoke language or procedures common to life in ancient Israel. Israel did not adhere to a strict distinction between the secular and religious spheres of life. Israel's law and concepts of justice were intimately tied to and derived from their covenant with Yahweh. A violation of the covenant stipulations or transgression of the Torah could have easily resulted in formal indictments, which may have been enacted in connection with the cult. The prophetic lawsuit was a metaphor occurring within judgment oracles to demonstrate the justice of God's judgment rendered either against Israel or in Israel's behalf. The prophets would have utilized procedures evident in any justice system while still retaining their freedom to adapt those forms in order to suit their purposes.

## 2. *The Prophetic Lawsuit and Dissenting Voices*

Despite the scholarly consensus that the prophetic lawsuit is a prophetic subgenre, there have been several dissenting voices contesting its legitimacy. Michael DeRoche faulted the concept of a prophetic lawsuit based on the fact that 'lawsuit' is a modern technical term with no real Hebrew equivalent.<sup>64</sup>

60. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 23-27.

61. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 27. See also Limburg, 'Root רִיב and Lawsuit Speeches', pp. 297-301.

62. See criticisms of Harvey's thesis in Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, pp. 54-55.

63. Ringgren, *TDOT*, XIII, pp. 477-78.

64. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's Rib against Israel', p. 564.

He contended that a proper lawsuit only occurs when a case is brought before a judge who acts as a third party to arbitrate between the two parties at odds.<sup>65</sup> He surveyed a number of OT texts involving disputes and the judicial means for solving them (2 Sam. 13.1-33; Deut. 22.28-29; 1 Kgs 3.16-28; Gen. 13.7-9; 26.17-22; 31; Judg. 6.28-32; 11; Deut. 25.1-3; Prov. 25.7b-10; 2 Sam. 15.1-6).<sup>66</sup> According to DeRoche, a רִיב does not indicate a judicial process because it always occurs prior to the actual lawsuit. The term רִיב typically only denotes a contention and accusation, but does not necessarily involve the appeal to a third party. He argued that a *rib* could only be identified as a lawsuit if it is resolved by a third party. The difference between a רִיב and a lawsuit is that a רִיב is a contention, while a lawsuit is a particular way of resolving a contention.<sup>67</sup> Once he determined that רִיב cannot mean 'lawsuit' he concluded that the so-called prophetic lawsuit passages only draw on legal metaphors and do not constitute a lawsuit (Jer. 2.5-9; Hos. 2.4-25; 12.3; Mic. 6.1-8; Isa. 5.1-7; 41.21-27; 43.8-13).<sup>68</sup> Finally, DeRoche argued that when Yahweh functions as both prosecutor and judge (i.e., covenant lawsuit) it does not constitute a lawsuit because it is only bilateral instead of trilateral.<sup>69</sup> He concluded his article by calling for the complete abandonment of the terms 'prophetic lawsuit' and 'covenant lawsuit'.<sup>70</sup>

Dwight R. Daniels heartily agreed with DeRoche, but stated that he did not go far enough because he still referred to the '*rib*-oracles' as a special genre.<sup>71</sup> He contended that no such prophetic lawsuit genre exists. Daniels established a preliminary definition of 'genre' as a set of structural features evident in a group of texts with some slight variation allowable. Acknowledging the differences in terms used to describe the lawsuit genre, he identified and examined Isa. 1.2-3, 18-20; Jer. 2.4-13; Mic. 6.1-8; and Hos. 4.1-3 as the group of texts typically called prophetic lawsuits.<sup>72</sup> Daniels concluded that each of the texts fail to constitute prophetic lawsuits. He maintained that Isaiah 1.10-20 derives from a cultic setting that has nothing to do with the legal sphere.<sup>73</sup> His redactional analysis of Jer. 2.4-13 suggested that

65. For the basis of what constitutes a lawsuit he completely follows Simon Roberts, *Order and Dispute: An Introduction to Legal Anthropology* (New York: Penguin, 1979), pp. 17-29.

66. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's Rib against Israel', pp. 566-69.

67. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's Rib against Israel', p. 569.

68. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's Rib against Israel', pp. 569-72.

69. It should be pointed out, however, that DeRoche seems not to take into consideration that the covenant lawsuit is related to the ANEVT and that all of the vassal treaties were bilateral, if not unilateral in essence.

70. DeRoche, 'Yahweh's Rib against Israel', p. 574.

71. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 340.

72. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', pp. 342-43.

73. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 349.



vv. 12-13 represent a much later insertion and therefore the presence of רִיב is not original.<sup>74</sup> The רִיב in Mic. 6.1-8 pertains, according to Daniel, to a disrupted relationship, which is also better suited for a cultic context.<sup>75</sup> Hosea 4.1-3 is a prophecy of disaster where Yahweh's רִיב expresses itself as a catastrophe befalling Israel, but not a lawsuit.<sup>76</sup> The remainder of his article attempted to counter the idea that the appeal to heaven and earth has anything to do with the legal procedure in Israel.<sup>77</sup> Overall, he concluded that these texts fail to exhibit the necessary structural features and content required to distinguish them as a genre. He closed his article by stating that 'not only should the term 'prophetic lawsuit' be abandoned but also the underlying conception that these texts belong to a single genre'.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, Meindert Dijkstra protested the category of a 'prophetic lawsuit' in Second Isaiah.<sup>79</sup> He provided a brief history of research regarding the רִיב in Second Isaiah. While rejecting a covenantal lawsuit, he suggested that prophets invoked legal language for literary effect.<sup>80</sup> Prophetic and wisdom texts frequently draw from legal procedures as a means of literary abstractions and not a development of covenantal theology. It is a mistake, then, to apply the label 'lawsuit' to these speech forms.<sup>81</sup> He argued that Second Isaiah represents a wisdom soliloquy employing speech forms drawn from legal administration.<sup>82</sup> The remainder of his essay consists of a rhetorical analysis of Isa. 40.12-42.13. Dijkstra concluded that Isaiah only used legal metaphors as part of his rhetorical tools to achieve the desired effect for his composition.<sup>83</sup>

The criticisms lodged by DeRoche, Daniels, and Dijkstra provide some much needed correctives when considering the notion of a prophetic lawsuit, but do not warrant an abandonment of the lawsuit speech as a prophetic

74. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 345.

75. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 353.

76. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 347.

77. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 357.

78. Daniels, 'Is There a »Prophetic Lawsuit« Genre?', p. 360.

79. Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse', pp. 251-71.

80. Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse', p. 253. He contends, 'Let it suffice that as yet no conclusive unequivocal evidence exists linking the *rib* texts with either the form of treaties and the content of the Sinai Covenant....In general, it may be assumed that legal speech forms in treaties have their origins in ancient Near Eastern legal forms and practice too....It is hardly conceivable that international treaty law as such served as a literary intermediary for the prophetic *rib* genre. More plausibly legal speech forms and practice found their way separately into international diplomacy, into prophetic discourse and wisdom literature'.

81. Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse', p. 254.

82. Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse', pp. 254-57.

83. Dijkstra, 'Lawsuit, Debate and Wisdom Discourse', p. 271.

subgenre. The first corrective relates to the proper identification and interpretation of a metaphor. To conceive of the prophetic lawsuit as a literal legal contention may force the text to say and mean more than what is intended.<sup>84</sup> One should resist the idea that the prophetic lawsuit is a literal trial in the same sense of two parties engaging in actual litigation. This explains why the one-to-one correlations between Israel's jurisprudence and the prophetic lawsuit begin to disintegrate when placed under a microscope. Lawsuit speeches are couched within the larger context of judgment oracles with the specific purpose of exposing guilt by listing particular charges and demonstrating the justness of Yahweh's punitive judgments.

Another corrective pertains to the relationship between the lawsuit speech and ANE or Hebrew jurisprudence. The lawsuit speech functions to announce God's judgment by employing imagery associated with judicial procedures familiar to the audience. Many points of comparison exist between legal proceedings at the gate, royal court, and even ANE international law. Attempts at isolating the exact juridical background are fraught with difficulty, due to the unique prophetic adaptation of these legal processes. Absolute parallels are not necessary for one to observe the basic similarities in order to comprehend the juridical imagery. Even in modern usage, writers often use phrases like 'burden of proof', 'guilty as charged', and 'beyond reasonable doubt' to enhance the weight of their argument by invoking juridical imagery. Therefore, historical awareness elucidates the points of comparison, but one should take caution not to press the metaphor too far.<sup>85</sup>

A final corrective calls for a careful delineation between a conflict and a lawsuit. The root ריב conveys the basic sense of 'contention' and does not always imply juridical contexts or the need for arbitration. On the one hand, the case of Jacob and Laban provides an excellent example of how two individuals may have resolved conflict without the aid of an intermediary.<sup>86</sup> This example demonstrates that their contention may have had legal connotations but does not warrant the label of an official lawsuit. On the other hand, the case of Jephthah and the king of Ammon bear the marks of international jurisprudence and in this context ריב may carry the connotation of a lawsuit.

84. Caird, *Language and Imagery*, pp. 131-33, 144-59.

85. Caird, *Language and Imagery*, pp. 144-49. DeRoche is guilty of this error. He attempted to delineate between a lawsuit and a contention by mandating the trilateral nature of an actual lawsuit. His distinction fails to take account of the metaphorical nature of the lawsuit imagery because he requires it to conform to a literal model. He rejects the prophetic lawsuit on the basis that it is not identical to actual lawsuit proceedings on all points.

86. Although their contention did not involve a third party, it still exhibits a number of elements concordant with legal disputes. Cf. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 120-21.

Not every contention necessitated a juridical resolution, but the presence of additional elements like the calling of witnesses, formal accusations, and judgment verdicts typically accompanies a lawsuit speech.

### 3. *The Language and Imagery of Lawsuit Motifs in the Biblical Canon*

The OT literary motifs and imagery related to lawsuits run throughout its corpus. These forensic passages may helpfully be designated as either lawsuit narratives or lawsuit speeches. A lawsuit speech conforms to a particular pattern of direct address, mostly occurring in the prophetic literature, which attempts to evoke concepts of guilt, innocence, and justice. This literary and rhetorical technique resembles a courtroom setting equipped with a prosecutor, defendant, witnesses, and a judge. A lawsuit narrative consists of passages containing any kind of legal contention between two parties. It is descriptive in nature and does not need to conform to ANE or Israelite jurisprudence in every respect. What is more, it may not necessarily constitute a lawsuit proper in that a third party is not required to resolve the issue. Lawsuit, in this sense, is a broad term designating oracles and narrative accounts involving any conflict and resolution that employs forensic language or adherence to legal procedures.

#### a. *Lawsuit Narratives*

The following survey examines some of the more prominent examples of lawsuit narratives in the historical and wisdom literature of the OT. Poised in the background of these narratives are the texts prescribing Hebrew jurisprudence.<sup>87</sup> The Torah did not merely govern cultic practices; it also established a justice system. Two parties could settle legal disputes between themselves without entering into arbitration. Moses appointed judges to hear and resolve disputes that erupted among individuals, but they would bring the most difficult cases to him (Exod. 18.19-26). Elders also functioned in a juridical capacity when they held court at the city gate and rendered justice (Deut. 21.19; 22.15; 25.7; Josh. 20.4; Ruth. 4.11; Prov. 31.23). Later, this served as the basis and model for the Sanhedrin, which functioned as the primary Jewish legal body for adjudicating matters of the law during the Second Temple period.<sup>88</sup> Another aspect of Hebrew, as well as ANE, jurisprudence was that the monarch administered justice in cases ranging from

87. Cf. Exod. 18.19-26; 23.1-8; Lev. 19.15; Num. 35.9-34; Deut. 1.16-17; 16.18-20; 17.6-14; 19.15-18; 24.17; 25.1-2. Cf. Josh. 20.2-6; 1 Kgs 7.7; 10.9; 2 Chron. 9.8; 19.5-10; Prov. 17.23; 18.5, 17; 20.8; 29.4-9; 31.9.

88. Cf. *m. Sanh.* 1.4, 5, 6; 3.1, 3, 8; 5.1-5.

individual disputes to international diplomacy.<sup>89</sup> All of the lawsuit narratives exhibit some measure of adherence to aspects of the Hebrew justice system.<sup>90</sup>

1. *Genesis 31.20-55*. Among a number of lawsuit narratives in the Pentateuch, the dispute between Jacob and Laban (Gen. 31.20-55; cf. Gen. 21.22-34) is perhaps the most famous example. Soon after Jacob married Leah and Rachel he began to prosper, and Yahweh directed him to return to the Promised Land (Gen. 31.11-15). Without Jacob's knowledge, Rachel stole Laban's household gods when they departed (Gen. 31.19). Laban, pursuing them, caught up with Jacob and his fleeing family and he lodged a series of accusations. These accusations were 'you deceived me', 'you did not allow me to send you away properly', 'your actions were foolish', 'you stole my household gods' (Gen. 31.26-30). Embedded within this series of accusations, Laban reminded Jacob of his ability to harm him (Gen. 31.29). Jacob defended his actions and challenged Laban's accusations (Gen. 31.31-36). Laban conducted an investigation to find the gods, but could not find them due to Rachel's clever excuse (Gen. 31.32-35). At this point Jacob's anger flared up at Laban's apparent false accusations and he demands vindication (Gen. 31.36). Genesis 31.36 contains the root ריב, as well as two words that typically connote 'transgression' (פֶּשַׁע) and 'breach of law' (חֲטָאָה). Interestingly, the LXX uses ἐμαχέσατο, a term for 'fight' or 'quarrel' to translate ריב. It uses the term ἀδίκημα to translate פֶּשַׁע and ἀμαρτία for חֲטָאָה. The dispute between Jacob and Laban never entered into a human lawcourt, but it took the form of an informal lawsuit in which Laban accused Jacob of criminal behavior. Jacob proceeded to give a defense speech to justify why he took his particular course of action (Gen. 31.36-42). In the end they resolved their dispute, made a covenant, and established a pillar as a witness to their settlement (Gen. 31.44-55).

2. *Judges 11.12-33*. The dispute between Jephthah and the king of Ammon provides a narrative example of international legal disputes (Judg. 11.12-33).<sup>91</sup> The Ammonites declared war against the inhabitants of Gilead and, as a result, the elders pleaded with Jephthah to lead their army (Judg. 11.4-11). He first attempted to negotiate a settlement by sending a messenger to the king of Ammon and accuse him of an unprovoked attack (Judg. 11.12).<sup>92</sup> The Ammonite king charges Israel with stealing his land and asks them to give it back peaceably (Judg. 11.13). In response, Jephthah denies the accusation

89. Keith W. Whitlam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup, 12; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979); J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), p. 74. Cf. 2 Sam. 15.1-6; 2 Chron. 20.4-11.

90. Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 95-178.

91. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, pp. 112-13.

92. Limburg, 'Root ריב and Lawsuit Speeches', p. 297.

and ultimately calls for a trial by war so that Yahweh will render a verdict between these two parties (Judg. 11.15-27).<sup>93</sup> The root ריב occurs once in 11.25 to refer to contention in general and once in 12.2 where Jephthah calls himself אִישׁ רִיב. According to Limburg, 'legal adversary' is the sense of this expression and suggests that it refers to a lawsuit based on a breach of international law.<sup>94</sup>

3. *The Books of Samuel and Kings*. The juridical function of the king is elucidated in several lawsuit type narratives during the reigns of David and Solomon.<sup>95</sup> After David committed the crimes of adultery and murder, the prophet Nathan rehearsed a parabolic case before David, who was sitting as judge, in order to expose his guilt (2 Sam. 12.1-14).<sup>96</sup> Absalom, perceiving that David failed to exact justice in the case of Amnon and Tamar, proceeded to establish a court to render decisions and ensure that all citizens would get justice (2 Sam. 15.1-6). The case of the two prostitutes constitutes one of the most famous lawsuit narratives demonstrating Solomon's wisdom in administering justice (1 Kgs 3.11-28). In this narrative, the themes of justice and wisdom coalesce, making wisdom an essential component for a king to render just verdicts. This is perhaps why wisdom and poetic literature abound with juridical imagery.

4. *The Book of Job*. Wisdom and poetic literature frequently portray lawsuit scenarios in which Yahweh functions as the judge.<sup>97</sup> The book of Job represents a series of wisdom discourses set within the framework of a lawsuit.<sup>98</sup>

93. For trial by warfare see Frank C. Fensham, 'Ordeal by Battle in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament', in *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra* (Milan: A. Giuffrè, 1971), pp. 127-35; Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, p. 113.

94. Limburg, 'Root ריב and Lawsuit Speeches', p. 298.

95. An interesting occurrence of ריב (1 Sam. 25.39) is found on the lips of David when Yahweh strikes down Nabal. David attributes the death of Nabal to Yahweh hearing his case and rendering a just verdict in David's behalf. For an additional example see F.I. Andersen, 'The Socio-Juridical Character of the Naboth Incident', *JBL* 85 (1966), pp. 46-57.

96. Cf. U. Simon, 'The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable', *Bib* 48 (1967), pp. 207-42.

97. See also F.C. Fensham, 'The Rôle of the Lord in the Legal Sections of the Covenant Code', *VT* 6 (1976), pp. 262-74.

98. Fridolin Stier, *Das Buch Ijob, hebräisch und deutsch* (München: Kösel, 1954); Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, pp. 158-63; Heinz Richter, *Studien zu Hiob: Der Aufbau des Hiobbuches, dargestellt an den Gattungen des Rechtslebens* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959); G. Many, 'Der Rechtsstreit mit Gott (rib) im Hiobbuch' (PhD diss., Ludwig Maximilians Universität, 1970); J.J.M. Roberts, 'Job's Summons to Yahweh: The Exploitation of a Legal Metaphor', *ResQ* 16 (1973), pp. 159-65; Michael B. Dick, 'The Legal Metaphor in Job 31', *CBQ* 41 (1979), pp. 37-50; Caird, *Language and Imagery*, pp. 157-58; Shimon Bakon, 'God and Man on Trial', *JBQ* 21 (1993), pp. 226-35; Catherine Chin, 'Job and the Injustice of God: Implicit Arguments in Job 13.17-14.12', *JSOT* 64 (1994),

Aside from the juridical terminology,<sup>99</sup> some scholars even suggest that the literary genre of Job is cast as a lawsuit depicting the interplay between Job, his friends, and God.<sup>100</sup> The book of Job, according to Gemser, exhibits a *rib*-pattern ultimately between Job and God. He states:

The book not only abounds in judicial phraseology, but formally it cannot be better understood than as the record of the proceedings of a *rib* between Job and God Almighty in which Job is the plaintiff and prosecutor, the friends of Job are witnesses as well as co-defendants and judges, while God is the accused and defendant, but in the background and finally the ultimate judge of both Job and his friends.<sup>101</sup>

Although to postulate that the entire book of Job as constituting a *rib* or lawsuit may neglect additional wisdom and poetic features, it nevertheless provides a framework for reading the narrative and discourses of Job.

The book of Job opens with a scene in the heavenly courtroom where Yahweh and Satan discuss the righteous character of Job (Job 1.6-12).<sup>102</sup> Satan makes the accusation that the only reason for Job's righteousness is because Yahweh has protected and blessed him (Job 1.9-11). Satan receives permission to wreak havoc on Job's life, but rather than sinning Job responded with worship and praise (Job 1.20-22; 2.10). Chapters 3-31 comprise a three-fold cycle of disputation speeches between Job and his friends, who form two parties acting in litigation.<sup>103</sup> Luis Alonso Schökel posits that the friends amplify the position of Satan by urging Job to confess his guilt, but this would subvert justice because Job is innocent.<sup>104</sup> In chapter 31, Job maintains

pp. 91-101; Edward L. Greenstein, 'A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind', in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (ed. Michael V. Fox *et al.*; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 241-58.

99. Cf. Sylvia H. Scholnick, 'The Meaning of *mišpat* in the Book of Job', *JBL* 101 (1982), pp. 521-29; Carl Schultz, 'The Cohesive Issue of *mišpat* in Job', in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young* (ed. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 159-75.

100. Luis Alonso Schökel, 'Toward a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job', *Semeia* 7-9 (1977), pp. 45-61; Sylvia H. Scholnick, 'Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job' (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1977); Claus Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis* (trans. Charles A. Muenchow; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 4.

101. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 134-34.

102. For the juridical function of Yahweh's council see Cross, 'The Council of Yahweh', pp. 274-75 n. 3. Cf. Psalm 82; Zech. 3.1-10; 1 Kgs 22.19.

103. Köhler, *Hebrew Man*, p. 135; Westermann, *The Structure of the Book of Job*, pp. 18-19. Cycle 1 includes speeches from Eliphaz (4.2-19; 5.1-27), Bildad (8.2-22), and Zophar (11.2-20). Cycle 2 contains speeches from Eliphaz (15.2-35), Bildad (18.2-21), and Zophar (20.2-29). Cycle 3 consists of the speech from Eliphaz (22.2-30).

104. Schökel, 'Toward a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job', pp. 54-55.

his innocence and actually brings a countersuit against God (Job 31.35).<sup>105</sup> Yahweh provides his combative response to Job's case with an intense interrogation that highlights Job's ignorance (Job 38.4, 5, 18, 21, 33; 39.1, 2).<sup>106</sup> Job's countersuit against Yahweh disintegrates as the judge of the universe exposes the error of Job's complaint (Job 40.2, 8). In the end, Job acknowledges the false ground for his countersuit and affirms the justice of Yahweh (Job 42.1-6).

5. *The Book of Psalms*. A large swath of the Psalms also invoke lawsuit motifs as appeals to Yahweh, who is the righteous judge that will render justice, exact vengeance, and vindicate the innocent. The theological foundation of the entire book of Psalms is that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the universal sovereign, who rules justly over all the earth.<sup>107</sup> Psalms exhibits a vocabulary concordant with the concept of justice.<sup>108</sup> Scholarship on the Psalms, however, has not typically identified a 'lawsuit' subgenre. The most common subgenres relating to themes of justice include both enthronement psalms and imprecatory psalms. Interestingly, Psalm 50 and 82 are frequently cited as actual instances of the *Gerichtsrede*.

All notions of justice in the Psalms are rooted in a thorough conviction that Yahweh sits as both Sovereign Lord and Judge. He sits enthroned over the earth to administer justice and often is surrounded by his heavenly council (Ps. 7.6-9; 9.4; 11.7; 45.6; 50.4-6; 58.11; 82.1; 89.5-7). His right to rule and pass judgment stems from his role as the almighty creator of the universe. As a judge, he is depicted as a divine warrior who exacts justice through battle (Ps. 7.11; 18.2-18; 21.9-13; 45.3-6; 89.9-14; 97.1-6; 110.1-7). He judges and administers justice based on righteousness, truth, and equity (Ps. 9.8; 11.7; 33.5; 36.6; 89.14; 96.10-13; 98.9). He hears, arises, and avenges the pleas of his servants who suffer unjustly (Ps. 3.7; 7.6; 9.19; 10.12; 12.5; 74.22; 94.1-2). He is particularly concerned with defending the poor, oppressed, and those who tend to experience injustice due to human corruption (Ps. 14.6; 35.10; 37.14-17; 68.5; 82.3; 103.6; 140.12). Nothing escapes his notice and he will hold all people accountable, even his own servants (Ps. 44.21; 51.4;

105. See also Greenstein, 'A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind', p. 247.

106. Greenstein, 'A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind', pp. 248-49, 252-53. Cf. Sylvia H. Scholnick, 'Poetry in the Courtroom: Job 38-41', in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry* (ed. Elaine R. Follis; JSOTSup, 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), pp. 185-204; Thomas F. Dailey, 'The Wisdom of Divine Disputation? On Job 40.2-5', *JSOT* 63 (1994), pp. 105-19.

107. Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), p. 151.

108. Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* (trans. Seán Charles Martin; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), p. 123.

94.11). The Psalms also exhibit an eschatological expectation looking forward to the time when Yahweh will preside as judge over all the inhabitants of earth (Ps. 37.13; 82.8; 96.10-13; 98.9; 110.6).

Although not exhaustive by any stretch of the imagination, these lawsuit narratives display several congruous features attesting to the plausibility that they may form a subgenre within OT literature. To begin with, most of these texts seek to resolve a contention between at least two parties through some form of arbitration. Second, these texts exhibit a consistent forensic vocabulary. Third, Yahweh functions as judge and guarantor that justice will be accomplished. Fourth, the texts stem from accepted conventions of jurisprudence and frequently depend on wisdom traditions. Finally, the verdicts satisfy all the requirements of justice.

#### b. *Lawsuit Speeches*

Claus Westermann provided some clear and helpful thinking regarding the nature of judgment oracles and lawsuit speeches. After discussing various terms associated with judgment oracles, he affirmed the subgenre of the prophetic lawsuit in that the vocabulary of certain judgment oracles places them in proximity to courtroom procedures.<sup>109</sup> Westermann observed that prophets borrowed speech forms from legal procedures to enhance the dramatic depiction of God's judgment (cf. Isa. 1.18-20; 3.13-15; 5.1-7; Mic. 6.1-5; Hos. 2.4-7; 4.1-6).<sup>110</sup> The metaphorical nature of this borrowed form renders the concept of a literal lawsuit tangential.<sup>111</sup> The forensic metaphor was simply a literary device that enabled the Israelites to experience 'a systematic quest for truth governed by rules of procedure'.<sup>112</sup>

A lawsuit speech conforms to a particular pattern of direct address, mostly occurring in the prophetic literature, which attempts to evoke concepts of guilt, innocence, and justice. This literary and rhetorical technique resembles a courtroom setting equipped with a prosecutor, defendant, witnesses, and a judge. The form and content may vary from speech to speech but a basic structure emerges: (1) summons (*Vorladung*); (2) trial (*Verhandlung*)—including accusations and witnesses (it may or may not contain a defense speech); and (3) the judgment (*Gericht*).<sup>113</sup>

109. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, p. 70.

110. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, p. 199. Another closely related borrowed speech form is the 'disputation speech' (*Streitgespräch*).

111. Claus Westermann, *Forschung am Alten Testament: Gesammelte Studien* (München: C. Kaiser, 1964), p. 135. He remarks, '...weil es sich um eine stark abstrahierende Stilisierung, nicht um eine Nachahmung der Rechtsakte handelt'.

112. Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 158.

113. Westermann, *Forschung*, pp. 134-44; Westermann, *Jesaja 40-66*, pp. 16-18. He



Harvey identifies five *רִיב* texts commonly recognized by scholars (Deut. 32.1-25; Isa. 1.2-3, 10-20; Mic. 6.1-8; Jer. 2.2-37; Psalm 50). On the basis of these texts, he observes eight elements common to the *rib*-pattern.<sup>114</sup> Harvey condenses these eight elements into five essential motifs that constitute a stable form of the classic *רִיב*: (1) introduction (including a call to witnesses and/or an announcement of Yahweh's right to bring accusations); (2) interrogation speech; (3) prosecution speech (including a historical review of Yahweh's faithfulness and/or a speech about the uselessness of idols or ritualistic amends); (4) indictment speech; and (5) a negative or positive decree (divided into either a threat of condemnation in a *Rib A*, or positive warnings in a *Rib B*).<sup>115</sup> Not every lawsuit speech conforms identically to this structural outline, but they all share some formal similarities. Prophets were not restricted to follow this structure rigidly, but were free to adopt and adapt this subgenre according to their purposes.

The following survey demonstrates the use and application of lawsuit speeches in the prophetic writings.<sup>116</sup> Prophetic oracles, especially judgment oracles, evoke language and imagery reminiscent of a trial in a lawcourt. Yahweh functions in the dual roles as both a judge and prosecutor (Mic. 6.1-5) or advocate (Isa. 3.13-15).<sup>117</sup> Lawsuit speeches against Israel stem directly from violations of the covenant stipulations established at Sinai. Lawsuit speeches, however, are not limited only to Israel. Declarations of judgment against the nations equally evoke forensic language and imagery. What this survey reveals is that the prophets frequently employed some form of the lawsuit speech in their oracles.<sup>118</sup>

1. *Deuteronomy 32.1-43*. Deuteronomy comprises a series of messages that Moses delivered to Israel prior to his death. Chapters 29–32 reiterate and renew the covenant made between Yahweh and Israel (cf. Deut. 29.1). Moses warns them to obey the commands stipulated in the covenant (Deut. 30.11-16) and that if they turned to other gods they would face destruction (Deut. 30.17-18). In Deut. 30.19, Moses summons heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant so that they will testify against Israel. Moses assembles all the tribal elders and officials because he knows that Israel will become corrupt

opposes a more concrete subdivision because of the stylized freedom of the form employed by the prophets.

114. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 53. See also Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', pp. 177-78.

115. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 54.

116. For the sake of delimitation, this survey only includes pericopes most commonly identified as prophetic lawsuits. The purpose here is to demonstrate the prominence and versatility of lawsuit motifs in the prophetic literature.

117. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, pp. 76-77.

118. Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, p. 77.

after his death (Deut. 31.24-29). It is in this context that Moses recites his Song before the entire assembly of Israel (Deut. 32.1-43).

The Song of Moses in Deut. 32.1-43 exhibits forensic language and imagery that has resulted in a widespread scholarly consensus that it is a lawsuit speech.<sup>119</sup> The exact format of the lawsuit speech in Deuteronomy 32 varies according to how different scholars organize each of the elements.<sup>120</sup> The propositions of Wright and Wiebe represent the most detailed and plausible structural outlines.<sup>121</sup> Wright's initial form critical analysis identified the first half of the Song as a *rib* or covenant lawsuit against Israel (Deut. 32.1-29) and the second half as an expansion of the *rib* that focuses on the hope of salvation (Deut. 32.30-43).<sup>122</sup> Wiebe, however, attempts to augment Wright by positing Deuteronomy as a 'deliberative *rib*'.<sup>123</sup> By a deliberative *rib*, he means that once the defendant repents after being found guilty, the judge will then deliberate whether or not to execute the sentence. What is more, Wiebe argues that the second half of Deuteronomy 32 is not merely an 'expansion' of the *rib*, but demonstrates that because Israel repented (Deut. 32.27-33), Yahweh's wrath is assuaged, and he avenges Israel by turning his wrath against her enemies (Deut. 32.34-43).<sup>124</sup>

Although the Song of Moses contains a mixture of generic elements (*Mischgedicht*) including didactic, sapiential, and messianic poetry, the juridical nature of Deuteronomy 32 becomes apparent in the overt forensic imagery.

119. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 288-89; Wright, 'The Lawsuit of God', pp. 26-67; Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', pp. 177-80; Patrick W. Skehan, 'The Structure of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (Deut. 32.1-43)', *CBQ* 13 (1951), pp. 153-63; James R. Boston, 'The Song of Moses: Deuteronomy 32.1-43' (ThD. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1967); C.J. Labuschagne, 'The Song of Moses: Its Framework and Structure', in *De fructu oris sui* (ed. A. Van Selms; POS, 9; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), pp. 85-98; George E. Mendenhall, 'Samuel's 'Broken Rib': Deuteronomy 32', in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie* (ed. James W. Flanagan and Anita W. Robinson; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 63-74; John M. Wiebe, 'The Form, Setting and Meaning of the Song of Moses', *StudBT* 17 (1989), pp. 119-63; Solomon A. Nigosian, 'The Song of Moses (Dt 32), A Structural Analysis', *ETL* 72 (1996), pp. 5-22.

120. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 288-89; Wright, 'The Lawsuit of God', pp. 34-36; Harvey, 'Le RÎB-Pattern', pp. 178-79; Wiebe, 'The Form, Setting and Meaning of the Song of Moses', p. 163; Nigosian, 'The Song of Moses', pp. 13-20.

121. Huffmon only briefly surveyed Deuteronomy 32 because he did not consider it to be prophetic literature. Harvey's outline is very satisfactory, but he did not devote special attention to Deuteronomy and, therefore, it is slightly too general. Nigosian's outline deserves consideration, but he unnecessarily departs from the typical form and vocabulary of the prophetic lawsuits.

122. Wright, 'The Lawsuit of God', pp. 54-58.

123. Wiebe, 'The Form, Setting and Meaning', p. 121.

124. Wiebe, 'The Form, Setting and Meaning', pp. 126-28.

The Song begins with a summons to heaven and earth to listen to the case as witnesses (Deut. 32.1).<sup>125</sup> Elsewhere, heaven and earth function as witnesses to the covenant and are often invoked in deliberations against Israel (cf. Deut. 4.26; 30.19; 31.28; Isa. 1.2; Jer. 6.19; 22.29; Mic. 1.2). Heaven and earth testify to Yahweh as creator, as well as his superiority and authority over all creation (Gen. 14.19; Exod. 20.4; Deut. 4.26; 31.28; 1 Kgs 8.23; Neh. 9.6; 115.15; Isa. 37.16; Jer. 33.35). Incidentally, appealing to both heaven and earth fulfills the legal requirements for two witnesses (Deut. 17.6; 19.15). After this appeal, the prophet ascribes greatness, perfection, justness, righteousness, and justice to Yahweh who is their Rock (Deut. 32.3-4).<sup>126</sup> This serves to establish, in the presence of the witnesses and defendants, that the judge is upright and just without any hint of injustice.

Yahweh formally accuses Israel of acting corruptly and thereby has become a crooked, perverse, and foolish people (Deut. 32.5-6). Embedded within this accusation is the notion that Israel has violated the covenant stipulations and, therefore, they have not acted like his children by spurning his faithfulness. Thus, a prosecution speech affirming the faithful acts of Yahweh toward Israel ensues (Deut. 32.7-14). This review of history establishes the severity of Israel's guilt by highlighting the loving kindness that Yahweh has bestowed upon his covenant people. In Deut. 32.15-18, Israel is indicted for abandoning Yahweh due to growing fat on his provisions, worshiping foreign gods, offering sacrifices to demons, and forgetting that Yahweh had fathered them.<sup>127</sup> The sentence is pronounced following this indictment. Much uncertainty surrounds the exact range of verses comprising the sentencing.<sup>128</sup> Because the Song ends with Yahweh avenging Israel and judging her enemies, Harvey seems the most correct when he suggests that it functions as a genuine

125. The appeal to listen is a common feature of the *rib*-texts in which Yahweh brings charges against his covenant people due to their rebellion. Cf. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 288-89; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, p. 409.

126. M.P. Knowles, "'The Rock, his Work is Perfect': Unusual Imagery for God in Deuteronomy 32', *VT* 39 (1989), pp. 307-22.

127. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 382.

128. Huffmon, Harvey, and Wiebe identify Deut. 32.19-25 as the sentence, but Wright extends it up through v. 29. Nigolian divides the second half of the Song into two sections of judgment. Judgment part 1 (Deut. 32.19-35) speaks of Yahweh's punitive treatment of Israel, but it is limited because Yahweh does not want his enemies to take credit for Israel's destruction. This could account for why the sentence is not fully executed on Israel, but is turned toward the nations. Judgment part 2 (Deut. 32.36-42), then, pertains to Yahweh's condemnation of the nations. Although he makes some pointed observations, his outline is inconsistent with the rest of his analysis because he casts the Song of Moses in the form of the prophetic lawsuit.

warning of punishment if Israel does not repent.<sup>129</sup> In other words, it is a conditional sentence designed to provoke the defendants to change their behavior.

The latter portions of the Song shifts focus away from judging Israel to avenging Israel (Deut. 32.31-43).<sup>130</sup> The interrogative in Deut. 32.34 introduces the future expectation that the pagan nations will experience the wrath of Yahweh.<sup>131</sup> Interestingly, Yahweh's activity results from his desire to 'judge in favor of' or 'justify' Israel by showing compassion on his servants and avenging them (Deut. 32.36).<sup>132</sup> Deuteronomy 32.39-42 depicts this concept of vindication using judicial and militaristic language. Not only does Yahweh solemnly swear to exact vengeance,<sup>133</sup> he will also come as a divine warrior with his 'flashing sword', 'arrows drunk with blood', sword devouring flesh', and 'the blood of the slain and captives'. The Song concludes with an exhortation to the nations and Israel to rejoice because Yahweh will avenge the blood of his servants by taking vengeance against his enemies and also making atonement for his land and people (Deut. 32.43).<sup>134</sup> The injunction to rejoice (i.e., the hiphil imperative הריני) at the execution of Yahweh's judgment stems from the notion that the righteous rejoice when justice is administered (cf. Prov. 21.15; 29.7). One may detect a slight echo with Rev. 18.20, evidenced by the verbal parallels between the opening admonition. In the LXX, Deut. 32.43a reads εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοί and Rev. 18.20a offers a close parallel with Εὐφράλινου ἐπ' αὐτῇ, οὐρανέ. In addition, the two passages

129. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 31-36.

130. Merrill notes that the identity of the subject addressed emerges with some difficulty. It seems, however, that Deut. 32.28-30 has Israel in view; but beginning in v. 31 the subject shifts to the enemy nations and especially their gods (*Deuteronomy*, p. 421).

131. The word, הוּא or 'that', refers to the latter end of Israel's enemies as anticipated in Deut. 32.32-33 (cf. Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21.10-34.12* [WBC, 6B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002], p. 818). Also the phrase, כִּמְסַ עֲמֻדֵי הַתֵּם בְּאַיִצְרֵתִי, conveys the idea that wrath is being 'stored/gathered up' (συνῆκται) and 'sealed' (LXX ἐσφράγισται) for a future day of retribution or vengeance as indicated in Deut. 32.34 [35].

132. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21.10-34.12*, p. 36. The concept of vengeance, according to Christensen, relates to the idea of 'defensive vindication' rather than the idea of a 'blood feud'.

133. For an example of the judicial imagery see J. Lust, 'For I Lift my Hand to Heaven and Swear: Deut 32.40', in *Studies in Deuteronomy in Honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. F. García Martínez; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 155-64; Manfred R. Lehmann, 'Biblical Oaths', *ZAW* 81 (1969), pp. 74-92.

134. On the textual difficulties of Deut. 32.34 see Arie van der Kooij, 'The Ending of the Song of Moses: On the Pre-Masoretic Version of Deut 32.43', in *Studies in Deuteronomy in Honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (ed. F. García Martínez; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 93-100; Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21.10-34.12*, p. 820; Nigosian, 'The Song of Moses', pp. 20-21.

share a thematic link with the idea of rejoicing about the retribution against the nations for the way they treated God's people.<sup>135</sup>

The Song of Moses (Deut. 32.1-43) contains all the features indicative of the prophetic lawsuit. It begins with a summons along with an appeal to the witnesses. More importantly, the accusation, historical review, indictment, and sentencing comport well with the lawsuit format. The covenantal nature of the lawsuit is seen in that it is directly related to a breach of covenant stipulations. The second half of the Song takes a decidedly different tone with Yahweh's declarations of vengeance against the idolatrous enemies of Israel. In addition, the presence of the mixed metaphor linking the lawsuit and the divine warrior forms a consistent pattern throughout canonical Scripture.<sup>136</sup> The Song of Moses, therefore, represents the earliest canonical example of a lawsuit speech. What is more, the Song of Moses played a vital role in the life of Israel, especially during times of covenant renewal.<sup>137</sup> It is plausible, therefore, to suggest that it might be the generic and literary archetype for all other prophetic lawsuits.<sup>138</sup>

The evidence bolstering that the Song is a plausible archetype for the lawsuit comes from intertextual links with other prophetic lawsuits. That the prophetic literature parallels the language and themes of the Song of Moses has, for a long time, warranted much scholarly preponderance. Numerous linguistic parallels may be detected between Deuteronomy 32 and Psalms,

135. For more parallels between Deut. 32.43 and Revelation see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 393, 666, 917, 928.

136. Cf. Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

137. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 374. Cf. John N. Day, *Crying for Justice: What the Psalms Teach Us about Mercy and Vengeance in an Age of Terrorism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), p. 56.

138. On the importance of Deuteronomy in the life of Israel see S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp. 347-48; A. Kuenen, *An Historico-Critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch* (trans. P.H. Wicksteed; London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 257; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 364, 17-27; A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 381; H.G.L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (OtSt, 31; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), p. 147; Bernard Gosse, 'Deutéronome 32,1-43 et les rédactions des livres d'Ezéchiel et d'Isaïe', *ZAW* 107 (1995), pp. 110-17; Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32* (OtSt, 37; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 1-98. For some concrete examples of later prophets modeling their material from Deuteronomy see Ronald Bergey, 'The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32.1-43) and Isaianic Prophecies: A Case of Early Intertextuality?', *JSOT* 28 (2003), pp. 33-54; William L. Holladay, 'Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations', *JBL* 85 (1966), pp. 17-27. Holladay also offers a convincing case for interpreting Jer. 15.16 in light of Deuteronomy 32.

Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. It is also possible to observe shared theological affinities between Amos, Hosea, and Micah. One striking example of this phenomenon is Ronald Bergey's article tracing the intertextual links between the Song of Moses and the Isaianic prophecies.<sup>139</sup> Using computer assisted lexical searches, Bergey compiles linguistic and thematic echoes between the Song of Moses and significant blocks of Isaiah (esp. Isaiah 1, 5, 28, and 30).<sup>140</sup> His analysis lends credibility to the idea that the Song of Moses functioned as the literary archetype for other prophetic literature:

As concerns the Song and the Isaiah chapters in question, it was shown that the linguistic affinities occurring in the extremities of the smaller literary units making up the larger sections of the Isaianic prophecies play a delimiting or framing role. This means that language elements of one source were used as part of a composition strategy in another composition but not the other way around. Where such a strategy is demonstrable suggests that these language features were deliberately borrowed and consciously used in this way. If so, the Song of Deuteronomy 32 would be the source of the language elements employed in this compositional strategy detected in these Isaianic prophecies.<sup>141</sup>

This conclusion reinforces the growing trend among OT scholars who assign a much earlier date of composition for the Song than previously allowed.<sup>142</sup> The Song of Moses probably precedes the prophets, who borrowed extensively from its language and imagery; therefore, it could very well have been the origin for the genre of the prophetic lawsuit.

2. *The Book of Isaiah.* The book of Isaiah contains several oracles commonly identified as lawsuit speeches. Those passages identified as such include Isa. 1.2-20; 3.13-17; 5.1-16; 30.8-33; 40.12-31; 41.1-5, 21-29; 42.18-25; 43.8-15, 22-28; 44.6-8; 45.18-25; 48.1-19; 49.14-21; 50.1-3; 57.1-21; 58.1-14; 59.1-21.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, most scholars acknowledge that a lawsuit motif

139. Ronald Bergey, 'The Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32.1-43) and Isaianic Prophecies: A Case of Early Intertextuality?', *JSOT* 28 (2003), pp. 33-54.

140. Ronald Bergey, 'The Song of Moses', p. 37. See list of verbal parallels on pp. 39-49.

141. Ronald Bergey, 'The Song of Moses', p. 53.

142. Holladay, 'Jeremiah and Moses', pp. 18-19. Holladay also offers a convincing case for interpreting Jer. 15.16 in light of Deuteronomy 32.

143. The vineyard song does not entirely conform to a prophetic lawsuit. However, some scholars have detected juridical features that warrant a possible correspondence to some sort of lawsuit speech. See Gale A. Yee, 'A Form-Critical Study of Isaiah 5.1-7 as a Song and a Juridical Parable', *CBQ* 43 (1981), pp. 30-40; Gerald T. Sheppard, 'More on Isaiah 5.1-7 as a Juridical Parable', *CBQ* 44 (1982), pp. 45-47; Craig A. Evans, 'On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12', *BZ* 28 (1984), pp. 82-86. Cf. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, p. 33. Trites suggests that Isaiah 56-66 also exhibits lawcourt imagery. Cf. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', pp. 132-33.

encompasses the entirety of Isaiah 40–55.<sup>144</sup> The Isaianic lawsuit falls into two distinct groups. Isaiah 42.18–25; 43.22–28; and 50.1–3 represent a lawsuit between Yahweh and Israel. Isaiah 41.1–5; 41.21–29; 43.8–13; 44.6–8; and 45.18–25 consist of a lawsuit against the nations.<sup>145</sup> Within the lawsuit speeches of Isaiah 40–55, some passages are best designated as *Streitgespräch* because they suggest disputations laden with interrogatives (Isa. 40.12–31; 44.24–28; 45.5–11; 48.1–15; 49.14–26; 55.8–13).<sup>146</sup> As a genre, disputation speeches aim to convince and refute objections using questions and answers as well as statements and counterstatements.<sup>147</sup> Due to the broad scope of lawsuit speeches in Isaiah, the following summary sketches out the prominent lawsuit features evident in these passages.

A summons or appeal to listen is found throughout as a means to introduce the start of a lawsuit speech (Isa. 1.2; 18; 41.1, 21, 22; 43.8, 9; 48.1, 14, 16). Isaiah 3.13 unmistakably pictures Yahweh entering into his courtroom for the purpose of judging his people.<sup>148</sup> The terms רִיב and מִשְׁפָּט occur frequently in close proximity, shading those passages with juridical connotations (Isa. 1.17, 21, 23; 3.13, 14; 34.5, 8; 41.1; 49.4, 25; 50.8, 51, 4, 22; 58.2; 4).

Another signal indicating the presence of a lawsuit speech relates to the call for, and reference to, witnesses. In Isa 1.2, the prophet exhorts heaven and earth to listen and bear witness against the people of God (cf. Deut. 30.19; 31.28; Ps. 50.4). The Hebrew for witness, עֵד, designates key witnesses as part of the litigation process (Isa. 8.2; 30.8; 43.10, 12; 44.8; 55.4). The LXX uses μάρτυρες to translate the Hebrew word עֵד in Isa. 43.10, 12; 44.8 identifying

144. Gressman, 'Die literarische Analyse Deuterocesajas', p. 295; Köhler, *Deuterocesaja*, pp. 110–20; Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterocesaja*, p. 42; Hans Eberhard von Waldow, 'Anlass und Hintergrund der Verkündigung des Deuterocesaja' (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 1953), pp. 44–50; H.E. von Waldow, 'The Message of Deutero-Isaiah', *Int* 22 (1968), pp. 259–87; R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament: With a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 764–95; Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, pp. 189–245; Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, pp. 62–73; Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, pp. 36–47; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, pp. 38–45.

145. Köhler, *Deuterocesaja*, pp. 116–20; Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, pp. 15–18; Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, p. 239; Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55*, pp. 43–63; Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, pp. 67–71; Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', p. 129; Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, pp. 39–40; Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 38.

146. For a definitive work on the genre of the disputation speech in the prophets especially in Deutero-Isaiah see Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts his People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets* (AnBib, 104; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), pp. 6–15. Cf. Köhler, *Deuterocesaja*, pp. 110–20.

147. Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, p. 188. Cf. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, p. 37.

148. Limburg, 'The Lawsuit of God', pp. 132–60.

Israel as witnesses to and for Yahweh. Israel's role as witnesses for Yahweh (Isa. 41.9; 43.10; 12) parallels her role as his servant (Isa. 41.8). This, according to Trites, bears a correspondence to Job where he functions as Yahweh's witness (Job 1.21; 2.10; 42.8) and is expressly described as 'my servant' (Job 1.8; 2.3; 42.7, 8).<sup>149</sup> The dual designation of God's people as both witnesses and servants may provide insight into the book of Revelation. For example, the souls under the altar were killed for their testimony and continually function as witnesses demanding justice (Rev. 6.9-10). These souls, as well as those expected to be added to their number, are identified as God's servants (Rev. 6.11). Furthermore, it is precisely because of the shed blood of these servants of God that the inhabitants of the earth and the harlot Babylon are so severely judged.

More importantly, a lawsuit must involve an accusation. The book of Isaiah is replete with accusations and interrogatives against Israel, the nations, and even pagan gods. The accusation speech provides the grounds that precipitate and necessitate Yahweh's lawsuit. Israel repeatedly faces the accusation of forsaking Yahweh, which is evidenced by their wicked behavior and rebellious obstinate hearts (Isa. 1.3-4; 5.2; 30.9-11; 42.20; 57.8; 59.2-4). The elders and leaders of Israel are accused because they have consumed the vineyard, plundered and crushed the poor (Isa. 3.14-15). Israel rejected Yahweh's instruction and instead relied on deceit (Isa. 30.9, 12). In Isa. 40.27 (cf. Isa. 49.14), it seems that Israel accused Yahweh of forsaking them, to which Yahweh makes a counteraccusation based on the evidence of his everlasting faithfulness (Isa. 40.28-31). When prosecuting those who trust in idols, Yahweh challenges them to present their case (קרבן ריבכם) by seeing if their idols can accurately predict the future (Isa. 41.21-22). Yahweh complains that Israel has failed to offer the right kind of sacrifices for him, but instead has burdened him with a multitude of offenses (Isa. 43.22-24).<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, in Isa. 43.26, Yahweh actually challenges them to examine the evidence of their past and then try to state a case for their innocence.<sup>151</sup>

A final characteristic that signals the presence of a lawsuit speech is the rendering of verdicts. Once the court is called into order, the accusations are made, and the evidence is examined, Yahweh renders just and fair verdicts (Isa. 1.24; 3.14; 5.13-16; 11.3-4; 28.6; 41.11, 24, 29).<sup>152</sup> Conditional

149. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, pp. 39-40.

150. Begrich and Boecker identify this pericope as a classic *Appellationsrede* or accusation speech (Begrich, *Studien zu Deuteronesaja*, p. 27; Boecker, *Redeformen des Rechtslebens*, pp. 54-55).

151. Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, pp. 193-94.

152. On the juridical role of the divine council in Isaiah see Cross, 'The Council of Yahweh', pp. 274-77; Christopher R. Seitz, 'The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah', *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 229-47.



stipulations often accompany the verdict (Isa. 1.15-20; 48.17-18). If the defendant repents and obeys, then the impending judgment will be suspended. In other cases, the verdict is full, final, and imminent. Based on the impending judgment, in some cases, Israel may find salvation through repentance (Isa. 1.27; 45.22; 59.20). In other cases, Israel finds salvation because Yahweh has judged her enemies (Isa. 35.4; 48.8-12; 49.25; 59.16). Salvation oracles frequently occur within, or in close association with, judgment oracles.<sup>153</sup> This conveys the idea that judgment and salvation are intrinsically bound together. Yahweh brings a lawsuit against his own people in order to judge them, and then holds court to convict the pagan nations for their crimes.

Yahweh conducts a trial against Israel, demonstrating Israel's sinfulness, rebelliousness, obduracy, and idolatry. The primary purpose of this trial is to provide compelling evidence to justify why Yahweh has so judged his people. A secondary purpose is to provoke his people to change their ways and return to him. Isaiah 1.1-20; 3.13-17; 30.8-33; 42.18-25; 43.22-28; 50.1-3 offer explicit examples of the lawsuit against the people of God. In a similar vein, Yahweh also conducts a 'cosmic lawsuit' against the nations. The purpose of this lawsuit is to demonstrate that Yahweh is the one true God and that all their idols are worthless.<sup>154</sup> The lawsuit against the nations differs from the classic *rib*-pattern, as defined by Harvey, in that it is more than an accusation against the idols but a defense of Yahweh's claims of superiority or an *Anspruchsstreit*.<sup>155</sup> Isaiah 41.1-5, 21-29, 42.8-20; 43.9-15; 44.6-8; 45.18-25 comprise explicit examples of the lawsuit against the nations and their gods. The end product of these lawsuits proves beyond reasonable doubt that Yahweh alone deserves absolute adoration and obedience because he executes judgment and justifies his faithful servants.

3. *The Book of Jeremiah*. A brief survey of the book of Jeremiah reveals his use of juridical imagery within judgment oracles.<sup>156</sup> Jeremiah 2.2-37 represents the most obvious example of the lawsuit speech in Jeremiah.<sup>157</sup> The root ריב occurs in 2.9 and 29 with the sense of 'accuse' or 'bring charges against'. As such, Harvey structures Jer. 2.4-29 in terms of the classic *rib*-pattern:

153. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, pp. 119-44.

154. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 39.

155. Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, p. 239.

156. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', p. 131. He calls Jeremiah the 'iš *rib par excellence*', using the lawsuit metaphor concerning weal for Israel (Jer. 50.33-40; 51.34-40) and woe for the nations (Jer. 25.30-38).

157. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 287-88; Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 45-48; Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', p. 131; Ringgren, *TDOT*, XIII, p. 477.

- I. Messenger's formula (2.4-5a).
- II. Interrogation: Concerning Yahweh's faithfulness and Israel's faithfulness to the covenant (2.5b-6).
- III. Historical review: Asserting Yahweh's benefits and Israel's persistent infidelity (2.7b-11).
- IV. Appeal to heaven as a witness to the covenant (2.12).
- V. Specific accusation: Israel's double crime (2.13).
- VI. Final declaration of Israel's culpability (2.29).<sup>158</sup>

Yahweh summons Israel with the familiar imperative to hear the word of the Lord in 2.4 (שִׁמְעוּ דְּבַר-יְהוָה). A series of interrogatives follows this summons, inquiring as to why Israel has rebelled against Yahweh (Jer. 2.5-8). Jeremiah 2.9 introduces the accusation speech, providing the warrant for the lawsuit. The covenantal nature of the lawsuit becomes apparent with the call to the heavens to be appalled, namely because the heavens serve as a witness to the covenant (Jer. 2.12; cf. Deut. 30.19).<sup>159</sup> Israel, then, faces an indictment for forsaking Yahweh and trusting in other nations and gods (Jer. 2.13). Jeremiah 2.14-28 expand and explain the accusations against Israel. In Jer. 2.29-37, Yahweh lodges a countersuit against Israel's implied charges against him. Although this רִיב in Jeremiah 2 lacks any warnings or verdicts, it exhibits enough features to identify it as a lawsuit speech, establishing that the covenant has been breached.

The book of Jeremiah also contains an example of a personal lawsuit between Jeremiah and Yahweh.<sup>160</sup> In Jer. 11.18-19, Jeremiah discovers a plot against his life, but stresses his confidence that Yahweh will rule in his favor and exact vengeance on the conspirators (Jer. 11.20). Yahweh promises to punish Jeremiah's accusers, but in Jer. 12.1a, Jeremiah seems to bring a case against Yahweh. He begins with an affirmation that Yahweh is always righteous whenever he brings a case (אֲרִיב) for judgment. Jeremiah then questions Yahweh's justice when he sees the wicked prospering and the faithless living at ease (Jer. 12.1b). What follows is a series of interrogatives accompanied with a dialogue between Jeremiah and Yahweh. In the end, however, Yahweh answers Jeremiah's contention by maintaining that he will not allow the wicked to remain unpunished (Jer. 12.14-17).

158. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 48.

159. The omission of the earth as a covenantal witness presents a problem when compared with other prophetic lawsuits. One wonders if both witnesses are required in order to prove Israel's violation of the covenant. The heavens are not so much called as witnesses to prove guilt because the appeal is that the heavens should be appalled at Israel's behavior, thus implying their guilt is already established.

160. William Holladay, 'Jeremiah's Lawsuit with God: A Study in Suffering and Meaning', *Int* 17 (July 1963), pp. 280-87. Although he correctly stresses the juridical nature of Jer. 12.1, he overstates his case slightly by placing Jeremiah at odds with Yahweh. This contention between an individual and Yahweh finds its closest parallel in the Book of Job.

Not only does this book contain lawsuit speeches related to Israel and Jeremiah, it also contains judgment oracles against the nations [OAN].<sup>161</sup> Jeremiah 46–51 comprises a series of oracles declaring judgment upon the pagan nations surrounding Israel.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, Jeremiah 25.30–33 announces Yahweh's intended lawsuit against the nations, leading to the oracles.<sup>163</sup> The type of lawsuit represented in the oracles relates to the violation of international treaties.<sup>164</sup> Smothers argues that all the nations mentioned, except Egypt, were part of the Babylonian empire, and the suzerain-vassal relationship governed their actions. Babylon was accountable to Yahweh because Nebuchadnezzar was his servant in the oracles of Jeremiah. The similarity between the vassal treaties and the OAN does not require an actual treaty between Yahweh and these nations. These oracles are possibly framed in a treaty or covenantal context in order to validate the justness of Yahweh's judgments against the nations.

4. *The Book of Hosea*. The book of Hosea vividly portrays Yahweh's relationship to Israel as husband and wife. Israel has played the harlot and abandoned Yahweh by chasing after her various lovers. Hosea 2 depicts a setting familiar to a divorce trial as evidenced by the language in 2.2–3.<sup>165</sup> Although

161. Cf. Isaiah 13–32; Amos 1–2; Ezekiel 25–32; Zeph. 2.2–15.

162. Significantly, the LXX rearranges both the order and location of these oracles. The MT locates these oracles in chaps. 46–51, but the LXX places them in 25.14–31.44. The LXX orders the oracles as Elam, Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Edom, Ammon, Kedar, Damascus, and Moab. The MT, however, follows the order of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and Babylon. See James W. Watts, 'Text and Redaction in Jeremiah's Oracles against the Nations', *CBQ* 54 (1992), pp. 432–47; Bernard Gosse, 'Jérémie xlv et la place du recueil d'oracles les nations dans livre de Jérémie', *VT* 40 (1990), pp. 145–51; Emanuel Tov, 'L'incidence de la critique textuelle sur la critique littéraire dans le livre de Jérémie', *RB* 79 (1972), pp. 189–99; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), pp. 757–59; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52* (Hermenia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 5, 314.

163. Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (WBC, 27; Dallas: Word, 1995), pp. 275–76. The OAN, however, differ from lawsuit speeches in that they do not always provide specific charges or reasons for the pronounced judgment. Thomas G. Smothers ('The Lawsuit against the Nations: Reflections on the Oracles against the Nations in Jeremiah', *RevExp* 85 [1988], p. 547), observes, 'The nations in 46–49 are not condemned because they have abused Israel. The oracles are not clearly nationalistically motivated, and it cannot be argued that they function as salvation oracles for Israel. In fact, in six of the nine oracles in Jeremiah 46–49, there are no reasons given for the judgments pronounced against the nations'. Therefore, one cannot press the lawsuit imagery too far in the OAN.

164. Smothers, 'The Lawsuit against the Nations', p. 551. Cf. Michael L. Barré, 'The Meaning of *l' 'šybnw* in Amos 1.3–2.6', *JBL* 105 (1986), pp. 611–31.

165. James Limburg, *Hosea–Micah* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), p. 10.

it resembles a divorce trial, Yahweh does not intend to divorce Israel but to bring her back to himself (cf. 2.1-4, 14-15).<sup>166</sup> The initial accusation regarding the wife's adultery is stated in Hos. 2.4-5 (introduced with the term רִיב in 2.4). Israel has consorted with Baal and other idols, a crime which is tantamount to adultery. An additional charge of failing to acknowledge her husband's faithful provisions (Hos. 2.8) further warrants the series of ensuing punishments (Hos. 2.9-13).<sup>167</sup> The trial ends, however, with Yahweh's decision to romance Israel back to himself so that he may bestow all his goodness upon her (Hos. 2.14-23). This pericope fails to conform to the standard forms of the lawsuit speech, but it is nevertheless cast in a forensic setting.<sup>168</sup>

Hosea 4.1-3, on the other hand, clearly evokes a lawsuit speech in which Yahweh brings charges against Israel for her unfaithfulness.<sup>169</sup> Hosea introduces the lawsuit with the familiar prophetic formula, summoning Israel to hear the word of the Lord (שִׁמְעוּ דְּבַר-יְהוָה). Although the appeal to listen occurs frequently in the prophetic literature, here it specifically introduces a lawsuit as evidenced by the clause, רִיב לַיהוָה נַעֲמִיּוֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ כִּי, which provides the reason for the judgment speech.<sup>170</sup> The accusation consists of three

Limburg comments, 'The background for the language in verses 2-3 is the kind of proceeding which took place at the court in the gate in ancient Israel. The accused in this legal procedure is the wife, or Israel. The one making the charges is the husband, representing the Lord. Here the one with the complaint does not address the accused directly but speaks to the court *about* the accused, calling upon the "children", that is, the faithful portion of the people to make a complaint against their "mother", that is, Israel as a whole'.

166. Contra Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, p. 34.

167. Limburg observes that a series of 'therefores' (2.6, 9, 14) signals decisive turning points in the speech. Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 11.

168. Cf. Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, p. 199.

169. Most scholars delimit the lawsuit to vv. 1-3. Limburg argues that 'the pericope is complete in itself'. The reason he sates is because a shift occurs in v. 4 from people to priest. However, one may assert that the entire chapter exhibits a forensic tone related to this initial contention. See Limburg, 'The Lawsuit of God', p. 190. Cf. Gemser, 'Rib- or Controversy-Pattern', p. 129; Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge*, pp. 32-33; Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (trans. Gary Stansell; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 65-66; Limburg, *Hosea-Micah*, p. 15; Jackson, 'Yahweh v. Cohen', pp. 28-32.

170. Wolff (*Hosea*, p. 66) observes the force of רִיב in 4.1 in comparison with its occurrences in 2.4 and 12.3. He comments, 'The judgment speech is introduced as such in v 1b, for its sense and purpose is to present 'Yahweh's lawsuit (רִיב) with the inhabitants of the land'. The same formula occurs in 12.3, where it announces God's action as judge (cf. 12.3b). In 4.1 Hosea uses רִיב more comprehensively than in 2.4, even though the accusation comes first. But now the accusation serves as the motivation (v 1bβ-2) for the punishment and is thus inseparably connected with it (v 3). Yahweh stands as judge before Israel....But the sentence of judgment with its motivation, although introduced as a רִיב

separate but interrelated charges—namely, that Israel is unfaithful (אֵין־אֱמוּנָה), without love (וְאֵין־חֶסֶד), and has no knowledge of their God (וְאֵין־דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים). The evidence supporting this accusation is presented in Hos 4.2. The sins listed are cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and adultery, which all correspond to the laws in the Decalogue governing human relationships (cf. Exod 20.13-15).<sup>171</sup> The proof that Israel has violated the covenant with Yahweh is seen in the way the people treat one another. Therefore, the verdict rendered (Hos 4.3) against Israel for breaching the covenant is that the land will fall under the covenant curses stipulated in Deuteronomy 28.

5. *Micah 6.1-8*. The passage in Mic. 6.1-8 stands out as an undisputed and excellent example of the lawsuit speech among the eighth-century prophets.<sup>172</sup> Gemser goes as far as to assert that throughout the entire book ‘the prophet acts as the court-official of Heaven’.<sup>173</sup> Some scholars designate Mic 6.1-5 as a covenant lawsuit and 6.6-8 as a Torah liturgy, but the entire pericope may be appropriately identified as a *Gerichtsrede*.<sup>174</sup> Micah 6.1-8 exhibits a literary structure (*Gattung*) comparable to Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 50.<sup>175</sup>

and structured in analogy to casuistic legal instruction (cf. Ex 21.1ff), more probably has its setting in the announcements of judgment given by the court assembled at the city gate’.

171. Wolff, *Hosea*, p. 67.

172. Huffmon, ‘The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets’, pp. 286-87; G.W. Anderson, ‘A Study of Micah 6.1-8’, *SJT* 4 (1951), pp. 191-97; A. Diessler, ‘Micah 6.1-8: Der Rechtsstreit Jahwes mit Israel um das rechte Bundesverhältnis’, *TTZ* 68 (1959), pp. 229-34; Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, pp. 42-43; Limburg, ‘Lawsuit of God’, p. 162; Artur Weiser, *Das Buch der zwölf kleinen Propheten* (ATD, 24; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), p. 207; John M.P. Smith, William H. Ward, and Julius A. Bewer, *Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965), pp. 118-28; Theodor Lescow, *Micha 6, 6-8: Studien zu Sprache, Form und Auslegung* (AzTh, 25; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1966); Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 362-75; James Luther Mays, *Micah: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 127-43; Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi* (WBC, 32; Waco: Word, 1984), pp. 49-51; Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Minor Prophets I* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 349-54.

173. Gemser, ‘*Rīb*- or Controversy-Pattern’, p. 130. He specifically cites Mic. 1.2-9 and 4.1-13 as evidence of this.

174. Mays, *Micah*, pp. 128, 137; Allen, *Micah*, p. 363; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, p. 50.

175. Allen, *Micah*, p. 364. Allen identifies five constituent parts: (1) a summons to heaven and earth as witnesses (Deut. 32.1-2; Ps. 50.1-6); (2) a statement of case including interrogation (Deut. 32.4-6; Ps. 50.16); (3) an accusation of ingratitude and review of Yahweh’s benefits (Deut. 32.7-15; Ps. 50.7-13, 18-31); (4) a rejection of sacrifices (Deut. 32.16-18; Ps. 50.8-13); (5) either a verdict of punishment (Deut. 32.19-25) or a warning to promote repentance (Ps. 50.14-22). For the lexical similarities between Mic. 6.1-2 and Isa. 6.8-9 see Limburg, ‘Lawsuit of God’, p. 166.

- I. Summons for the trial to begin and appeal to the cosmic witnesses (i.e. mountains and foundations of the earth) (6.1-2).
- II. Interrogation (6.3).
- III. Review of Yahweh's kind deeds (6.4-5).
- IV. Offer of compensatory sacrifices and confession of guilt (6.6-7).
- V. Positive decree (the decisive true requirements of Yahweh) (6.8).<sup>176</sup>

Instead of making a direct charge against Israel, however, Yahweh implies his innocence and insinuates their guilt by asking if he has done anything wrong or burdened them excessively (Mic. 6.3). The purpose of this lawsuit against Israel is not for judgment but to prompt Israel to act in accordance with the covenantal mandates to do justice, love mercy, and walk with their God (Mic. 6.8).

#### 4. Conclusions Regarding the Prophetic Lawsuit in the OT and its Relationship to the Book of Revelation

The lawsuit speech has most commonly been called the *Gerichtsrede* (cf. *Rechtsverhandlung* and *Streitgespräch*) and the *rib*-pattern or ריב. Identifying the lawsuit speech as a ריב fails to satisfy for two reasons. First, not all lawsuit speeches use the root ריב. Second, the root ריב implies a contention but not necessarily a lawsuit. Begrich, on the other hand, argued that the term *Gerichtsrede* constitutes a collective name for several types of speeches with relation to a lawsuit.<sup>177</sup> Since the lawsuit functions as a literary metaphor, in poetic and prophetic literature, it may be adapted and used in a variety of contexts. The terms *Gerichtsrede* or lawsuit speech broadly encompasses a multiplicity of uses.

Lawsuit speeches might occur on a variety of occasions and in a number of settings. Scholars have correctly identified and associated the lawsuit between Yahweh and Israel as directly related to the covenant. The covenant, of course, is a legally binding contract between two parties. Whenever Israel transgressed by violating the covenant stipulations, Yahweh, as lord and judge, would bring suit and convict Israel of her guilt. Where exactly this lawsuit speech would have been delivered could vary between civic (at the city gate) and cultic (temple) settings. However, the form critics in seeking to find a one-size-fits-all *Sitz im Leben* for the *Gerichtsrede* never could rally behind a single proposition. Perhaps the reason, at least partly, stems from the fact that both the form and content of the lawsuit speech was freely appropriated and adapted for various situations.

176. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 44. Cf. Huffmon, 'The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets', pp. 286-87.

177. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuterijosaja*, pp. 26-48. Cf. Schoors, *I Am God your Saviour*, p. 182.

The lawsuit narratives provide the backdrop for seeing how the Jewish people resolved conflict and maintained justice. The concept of justice mandates that the guilty are sentenced and the innocent vindicated. The lawsuit speeches comprise an identifiable literary form in the OT based on the use of juridical terminology and procedure. They stem from the same concept of justice as the narratives, but instead of simply telling a story they incorporate the audience into the trial. The prophet, speaking on behalf of Yahweh, evokes a courtroom setting in order to either convict or comfort his audience. The audience hears the charges and reviews the evidence. Yahweh as both prosecutor and judge consequently renders verdicts based on his righteous judgment. At times, Yahweh acts as the advocate who defends his people against the injustices of the idolatrous nations. The lawsuit speech is constructed in such a way as to remove doubt that Yahweh is just in everything he decrees.

Lawsuit motifs abound in the OT narrative, poetry, and prophetic forms of literature. This may plausibly indicate that the lawsuit motif was a common literary device utilized frequently when considering matters of justice, especially Yahweh's justice. Lawsuit speeches sometimes span across a large block of literature (Isa. 40–55) and in other places may only appear in individual verses (Hos. 4.1–3). This relative flexible use of the lawsuit speech demonstrates the versatile nature of the lawsuit motif. It provided a conceptual framework whereby anyone could grasp the logic behind the imagery. The form and content, however, varies in each context depending upon the message the prophet intended to convey.

Lawsuit speeches target both Israel and the nations, declaring Yahweh as the universal sovereign judge. Yahweh summons, investigates, and indicts his chosen people for their covenant violations. The bulk of lawsuit speeches are directed at Israel for the purpose of provoking the people of God to repentance by establishing the justness of the ensuing judgment. In addition, Yahweh stands as the judge of the whole earth so that all nations fall under his jurisdiction (Gen. 18.25; Pss. 50.4; 82.8; 110.6). He judges all the inhabitants of the earth with righteousness and equity (Pss. 96.13; 98.9), resulting in all people getting what they deserve (Pss. 94.2). By judging the nations, Yahweh proves the impotence of their gods and idols (Isa. 45.20). Although the lawsuits have immediate consequences, they also anticipate a final day of judgment when Yahweh will fully establish justice throughout the entire earth (Isa. 11.4; 42.4).

Prophetic oracles normally exhibit a threefold pattern: (1) oracles of judgment against Judah/Jerusalem (Isaiah 1–12; Jeremiah 1–25; Ezekiel 1–24); (2) oracles of judgment against the nations (Isaiah 13–27; Jeremiah 25; 13–38; 46–51; Ezekiel 25–32); and (3) promises of salvation (Isaiah 28–35; 65.17–66.24; Jeremiah 26–30; Ezekiel 33–48).

The prophetic lawsuit, as a subset of the prophetic oracles, follows the same basic pattern. The first type of prophetic lawsuit accuses, indicts, and threatens the people of God for violations of covenantal stipulations. The second type of prophetic lawsuit specifically addresses the pagan nations. In addition to idolatry, the nations stand trial for their harsh treatment of God's people. These lawsuit speeches are succeeded by oracles promising salvation/vindication to the faithful covenant people (Deut. 32.31-43). This analysis suggests that there are two distinct types of prophetic lawsuits followed by oracles of salvation for God's people. Prophetic lawsuits, therefore, follow a threefold pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit; (2) lawsuit against the nations; and (3) the vindication/salvation of the saints.

The book of Revelation shares a similar pattern, as will be argued in the following Chapters, in that (1) Rev. 1.9–3.22 represents the covenant lawsuit addressed to new covenant congregations; (2) Rev. 4.1–16.21 constitutes God's lawsuit against the nations; (3) Rev. 17.1–21.8 and 21.9–22.5 depict the final judgment of the world and the complete vindication and salvation of the people of God. The complex visionary nature of prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation incorporates both aspects related to lawsuit speeches and narratives to present a grand vision of God's justice.



## Chapter 2

### THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL SITUATION AND THE LAWSUIT MOTIF IN REVELATION

The Apocalypse of John made its debut in the churches of Asia Minor within the first century. John's vision addressed Christians living in cities dotted along a postal route in the Roman province of Asia Minor. As with any ancient document it reflects many aspects relevant to the time and culture of its point of origin. For generations, tradition has maintained that the churches suffered from monstrous persecution at the hands of the tyrant Domitian who mandated obeisance throughout the Roman Empire. Recent scholarship has altered this traditional view of Domitian by arguing that the paucity of evidence does not support the notion of an official imperial persecution against Christians during his reign.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of this re-evaluation scholars have sought to reconstruct the historical situation in terms of possible social crises, real or perceived, that left the churches in the dilemma of capitulating to socio-cultural pressures or clinging to their faith in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

While an official state sponsored persecution is unlikely, believers in Asia Minor may have indeed lived with the genuine threat of unjust treatment due to their faith in Christ. John, banished to Patmos, identifies with the congregations as their brother who shares with them in hardship (τῇ θλίψει) and patient endurance (ὑπομονῇ) in Jesus (Rev. 1.9). The letters to the seven churches reveal various situations ranging from spiritual lethargy to external opposition. In at least one case, this opposition escalated to the point of the execution of one faithful Christian (Rev. 2.13). The remaining visions either reflect or expect a time of intense persecution as believers engage in a spiritual

1. See the significant contribution by Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 95-115.

2. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 187-99; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 84-110; Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983), pp. 729-49. She counters the common generic characterization that apocalypses had to be produced during real times of crisis. She contends that the crisis merely needs to be perceived to justify the feelings of a crisis.

battle with the forces of Satan (Revelation 12–13). The scenes depicted in Rev. 13.1–18 evoke images of forced participation in the imperial cult. That the hostility envisioned relates to a Roman threat is seen in the positive identification of Babylon as Rome (Rev. 17.9). Throughout the vision Christians are encouraged to remain faithful and endure patiently because one day God will vindicate them through judgment at the end of the age (Rev. 20.4).

This Chapter attempts to develop a more nuanced comprehension of the crisis facing the churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century during the reign of Domitian. It will be argued that Christians constituted a marginalized and maligned group within the Roman Empire. Their uncompromising monotheism repeatedly placed them at odds with the social, religious, and political conventions of the day. Because Christians were disliked by both pagans and Jews they were subject to being dragged into court by antagonistic *delators*. Upon the judge's verdict, the castigated believers may have suffered property confiscation, imprisonment, and even death. John, therefore, wrote to Christian communities who lived with the genuine threat of standing trial for their faith that may result in unjust condemnation at the hands of pagan authorities.

### 1. *The Socio-Historical Situation: Internal Data*

Scholarly opinions regarding the date of the Apocalypse are assuredly split between an early date (64–69 CE)<sup>3</sup> and a late date (95–96 CE).<sup>4</sup> Due to the

3. For early church testimony dating the Apocalypse to the time of Nero see Epiphanius, *Pan.* 51.12; some Syriac versions of Revelation (John Gwynn, *The Apocalypse of St John, in a Syriac Version Hitherto Unknown* [Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, & Co., 1897]), p. 1); Theophylact, *Praef. in Ioann.* For notable proponents of the early date see F.J.A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St John* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xviii; also John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 224; Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation* (rev. edn; Powder Springs: American Vision, 1998); Barclay Newman, 'The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis', *NTS* 10 (1963), pp. 133–39; Albert A. Bell, 'The Date of John's Apocalypse: The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered', *NTS* 25 (1978), pp. 93–102; J. Christian Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', *NTS* 39 (1993), pp. 587–605; Thomas B. Slater, 'Dating the Apocalypse to John', *Bib* 84 (2003), pp. 252–58.

4. For early church testimony dating the Apocalypse to the time of Domitian see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3; Clement of Alexandria, *Quis div. salv.* 42; Origen, *Comm. in Matt.*, 16.6; Victorinus, *Apoc.*, 10.11; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 3.18, 20; Jerome, *Vir. ill.*, 9. Melito of Sardis (c. 160–190) also supports a Domitianic dating as recorded by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 4.26.9). The traditional date of toward the end of Domitian's reign (c. 95–96) is affirmed by the majority of scholars.

compelling arguments for each respective date, Aune suggests that it was started in the 60s and completed in the late 90s.<sup>5</sup> Although not without difficulties, the traditional Domitianic date will be affirmed, placing the time of composition toward the end of the first century. The following survey represents some of the references in the book of Revelation that may reflect the socio-historical situation at the time of composition.

a. *John in Exile on Patmos (Rev. 1.9)*

John discloses the location of where he received his vision as the little Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (Rev. 1.9b).<sup>6</sup> He states that he is there because of (διὰ) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.<sup>7</sup> It is possible to take the phrase, τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, in a positive sense, possibly indicating that John voluntarily sojourned to Patmos in order to receive a vision.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to this view, it seems more plausible to view his exile as some form of persecution. The phrase ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’ occurs regularly throughout the book of Revelation in connection with persecution.<sup>9</sup> John associates his suffering with what the believers in Asia Minor will experience with the use of the term θλίψις (Rev. 1.9; 6.9; 12.17; 20.4). Every instance of the term θλίψις in the Apocalypse connotes trouble, distress, affliction, and tribulation (Rev. 1.9; 2.9, 10, 22; 7.14).<sup>10</sup> It is also used throughout the NT in conjunction with suffering because of one’s

5. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. lxix–lxx.

6. About thirty miles in circumference according to Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 4.12.23, 69. Cf. Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War* 3.33.3; Strabo, *Geogr.* 10.5.13.

7. Every occurrence of διὰ in the accusative case in the Book of Revelation clearly expresses ‘cause’ or ‘reason’ (Rev. 1.9; 2.3; 4.11; 6.9; 7.15; 12.11, 12; 13.14; 17.7; 18.8, 10, 15; 20.4). See R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1920), p. 22; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St John* (trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 84–92; p. 127; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005) p. 51; Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight* (London: SPCK, 2002), p. 85.

8. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London: Macmillan, 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 434 (page references are to the reprint edition); Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, p. 22; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 81–82.

9. The souls under the heavenly altar were beheaded because of the word of God and their testimony (Rev. 6.9). The dragon waged war against those who keep God’s commandments and have the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12.17). All those who were beheaded because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus were raised to life to reign for one thousand years (Rev. 20.4). In the case of Rev. 20.4, their faithfulness is highlighted in terms of not worshipping the beast (Rev. 13.7–10).

10. BDAG, p. 457.

faith.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, John's presence on Patmos was most likely the result of official opposition to his message.<sup>12</sup>

Exile or banishment to an isolated island constituted a relatively common form of punishment in the Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> Those condemned to banishment faced either a perpetual sentence (*deportatio*), which might have resulted in loss of citizenship and property, or a less severe temporary sentence (*relegatio*).<sup>14</sup> These penalties were often used instead of the death penalty.<sup>15</sup> The emperor, city prefect, or provincial governor in cases of *extra ordinem* (i.e., not based on any statutes) could determine the punishment as he deemed necessary.<sup>16</sup> The *coercitio* or punishment of Christians fell under the jurisdiction of *crimina extra ordinem* probably because no official laws were yet enacted against them.<sup>17</sup> Provincial governors held the *imperium*, which gave them the authority to try cases without direct intervention from the emperor and sentence the accused to *relegatio ad insulam*.<sup>18</sup> Cases that warranted *deportatio*, however, required a verdict from the emperor.<sup>19</sup> John, according to Tertullian, was exiled to Patmos as an *insulam relegatur*.<sup>20</sup>

It seems likely that John may have been banished by a provincial governor from Ephesus.<sup>21</sup> The external testimonies, however, attribute John's

11. Cf. Mt. 13.21; 24.9; Mk 4.17; Jn 16.33; Acts 11.19; 14.22; 20.33; Rom. 8.35; 2 Cor. 1.8; 4.17; 6.4; 8.2; Phil. 1.17; 1 Thess. 1.6; 3.3, 7; 2 Thess. 1.4, 6; Heb. 10.33.

12. The inference is that John was there as a result of judicial condemnation. See Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 50; Sweet, *Commentary on Revelation* (TPINTC; London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 50.

13. Plutarch, *Exil.* 12; Juvenal, *Sat.* 1.73; 4.563; 10.170; Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.53; 3.68-59; 4.13, 30; 13.43; Suetonius, *Aug.* 19; *Cal.* 14-15; *Galb.* 10.

14. *Dig.* 48.13.3; 48.14.1; 48.22.6; 48.22.14.3; 48.22.15; 48.22.7.2; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.50; 15.71; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.56. Cf. John Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 272-73; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 79.

15. A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and the Roman Law in the New Testament: The Sarum Lectures 1960-61* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), p. 21 n. 1.

16. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome*, p. 272.

17. For crimes listed as *ex ordinem* see *Dig.* 47.11-22. See also A.N. Sherwin-White, 'The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again', *JTS* 3 (1952), pp. 199-213 (205).

18. *Dig.* 48.22.7.17. Occasionally, a proconsul might write an emperor for advice. That advice, in the early years, was not regarded as a command. The earliest evidence of the advice from the *princeps* being treated as a direct order is found during the reign of Domitian (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and the Roman Law*, p. 2).

19. *Dig.* 48.19.2.1. Although the governor could not deport a criminal, the city prefect retained that legal right.

20. Tertullian, *Praescr.* 36; cf. Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 9. Contra Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), p. 85.

21. Caird, *Revelation of St John*, pp. 22-23. Caird's view is affirmed by Colin J. Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 28; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 50-51.

banishment to Domitian instead of a provincial governor.<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus names Domitian as the emperor at the time of John's exile. Some ambiguity exists in Irenaeus's statement, however, because he only asserts that the banishment occurred 'toward the end of Domitian's reign'. By naming Domitian, Irenaeus might have only intended to say that John's exile happened during Domitian's reign and not as the direct result of Domitian. As such, the possibility of a provincial governor as the one responsible for the verdict gains feasibility.<sup>23</sup>

John's exile to Patmos possibly stemmed from a direct conflict with a local provincial governor or proconsul in Ephesus regarding the worship of Domitian.<sup>24</sup> Domitian ordered the construction of a new imperial cult temple in Ephesus, which was also the provincial capital.<sup>25</sup> The provinces benefited economically due to Domitian's policies and thus they competed for his favor. This naturally could have created a situation of intolerance toward anyone one who did not conform by participating in the local imperial cult. Someone, say from the Nicolaitans or the local Jewish synagogue, could have capitalized on this situation by denouncing John before the provincial governor.<sup>26</sup> John's refusal to conform would have been viewed as stubbornness (*pertinaciam*) and firm obstinacy (*inflexibilem obstinationem*), which would warrant punishment.<sup>27</sup> Since John was not a Roman citizen it was not necessary to dispatch him to Rome for additional trials.<sup>28</sup>

22. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 78. This assumption stems directly from the early church testimony positing clearly that John was banished by an emperor. Cf. Clement, *Quis div. salv.* 42; Origen, *Comm. in Matt.* 16.6; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.23.5-19; Victorinus, *Comm. in Apoc.* 10.3.

23. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), pp. 85-86; Wilson, 'Revelation', p. 255.

24. J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse* (JSNTSup, 132; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 26-30. For an additional example of Christians tried and convicted by a proconsul in Asia see *Mart. Pol.* 2.3.1.

25. Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 44-47. Friesen translates the dedication inscription as, 'To Emperor [[Domitian]] Caesar Sebastos [[Germanicus]]. When Marcus Fulvius Gillo was proconsul'. This temple, according to Friesen, was dedicated during the reign of Domitian about 89/90 CE. What made this temple somewhat progressive was that the cult specifically venerated the Flavian imperial family. See also Dieter Knibbe and Wilhelm Alzinger, 'Ephesos vom Beginn der römischen Herrschaft in Kleinasien bis zum Ende der Principatszeit' (*ANRW*, II, 7.2.759).

26. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97.1.

27. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.3. Contra F. Gerald Downing, 'Pliny's Prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter', *JSNT* 34 (1988), pp. 105-23; deSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', p. 94. Both of these authors argue that Pliny was the first to use the imperial cult when trying Christians. Although no earlier examples of this procedure exist, it does not mean that it originated with Pliny.

28. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.4.

This scenario accords well with the procedures outlined by Pliny for the way one holding the *imperium* may have conducted trials for those accused of Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Sherwin-White states, 'Normally, then, the prosecution of Christians followed the forms of the *cognitio* system of penal jurisdiction in which proconsular *coercitio* finds its usual expression'.<sup>30</sup> Pliny writes to Trajan for advice regarding the trial of Christians, because apparently no official jurisprudence for such a trial has been established (i.e., *ex ordinem*).<sup>31</sup> He was especially concerned if the charge of Christianity related to a shameful act (*flagitia*) or if the crime based on the name itself (*nomen ipsum*) was sufficient grounds.<sup>32</sup> Pliny narrates how he typically handled such cases. He first inquired to see if the accused admits to being a Christian, which is followed by warnings of punishment. Pliny used obeisance to the emperor and other gods as a simple test to see if the accused would renounce the name of Christ.<sup>33</sup> If they persisted he ordered their execution on the grounds of stubborn obstinacy.<sup>34</sup> This format had apparently been in operation in the provinces for

29. That this constituted a formal trial is indicated by the term *cognitio*. See Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.1 n. 3 (Radice, LCL).

30. Sherwin-White, 'The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again', p. 205. O'Rourke aptly summarizes how a provincial governor would have conducted court. He writes, 'In ruling a province a governor generally followed the emperor's example in choosing a council of advisers to assist him. In conducting trials also he commonly followed the procedure of Roman trials that were conducted *extra ordinem*. A charge was made. The defendant presented his case against the accusers after they had adduced their evidence before the governor and his council. Then, the governor consulted with these advisers and rendered whatever verdict he thought proper (John J. O'Rourke, 'Roman Law and the Early Church', in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity* [ed. Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1971], pp. 165-86 (175).

31. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.2.

32. Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 24. Benko investigates the charge of the *nomen ipsum* as grounds for persecution of Christians in the writings of Pliny, Tacitus, and Suetonius. He concludes, 'In fact, the Romans associated the name with so many real or imagined, questionable, illegal, and perhaps even criminal activities that not even the most neutral Roman observer could see clearly the true intentions and convictions of the Christians—whatever their name may have meant. . . . The above analysis of three Roman historians shows their confusion about the Christians and the associations that came into the minds of these refined aristocrats when they heard their name: radical Jews conspiring against the state, perhaps planning another revolt; secretive magicians casting spells at nightly meetings; members of superstition originating in Syria involved in typical, shameful practices'. Cf. E.G. Hardy, *Christianity and the Roman Government: A Study in Imperial Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 95-106. See the views of G.E.M. de Ste Croix, 'Why Were the Christians Persecuted?', *Past and Present* 26 (1963), pp. 6-38.

33. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.6-7.

34. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.3-4. Roman citizens are remitted to stand trial in Rome.

at least twenty years prior to Pliny's appointment (i.e., during Domitian's reign).<sup>35</sup> Trajan approved of Pliny's procedure and affirmed the policy of only placing Christians on trial if charges are brought against them by a *delator*.<sup>36</sup>

b. *Persecution of the Christians*

Until the late twentieth century many scholars accepted Domitian as the second great persecutor of the church.<sup>37</sup> Recent decades have thrown that assumption into question because of the paucity of evidence supporting an empire wide persecution instigated by Domitian. Early date proponents, therefore, contend that the persecution of Christians reflected in the Apocalypse best corresponds to the Neronian persecution. Other scholars, like Collins, speak of the persecution only as a 'perceived crisis'.<sup>38</sup> In other words, John through visionary rhetoric created a narrative world that instilled a sense of crisis in his audience to shock them out of complacency and into action. The book of Revelation, however, indicates an awareness of genuine persecution in various shades of severity as well as expecting more persecution on a much greater scale in the near future.

John addresses the reality of persecution experienced by Christians either currently or in the recent past. As mentioned above, John's banishment to Patmos appears to have come about due to local hostility toward the exclusive claims of the Christian message (Rev. 1.9). The letters to the churches in Asia Minor likewise demonstrate local persecutions. The diverse situations indicated by the letters suggest that each Christian congregation faced challenges unique to their particular locale.

The Christians in Ephesus were commended for enduring hardships because of the name of Christ (Rev. 2.3). John links their hardships with persecution by stating the cause (διὰ) as stemming from fidelity to Jesus' name (τὸ ὄνομά μου). The exact nature of their suffering, however, remains elusive because it only states that they patiently endured (ὑπομονήν) and continued to hold up under a burden (ἐβόσταςας). These hardships may have originated from internal conflicts with the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2.6), but this does not exclude external opposition from the pagan community.

Conflict in Smyrna apparently arose from the Jewish community (Rev. 2.9).<sup>39</sup> Their suffering relates to unspecified tribulations (τὴν θλίψιν), poverty

35. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.6-7.

36. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.97.1-2.

37. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.9.

38. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 32, 84-110. Cf. Walter Schmithals, *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 141-50.

39. Mark R.J. Bredin, 'The Synagogue of Satan Accusation in Revelation 2.9', *BTB* 28 (1999), pp. 160-64; Thomas B. Slater, 'On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John',

(τὴν πτωχείαν),<sup>40</sup> and slander from Jews (τὴν βλασφημίαν). Jan Lambrecht sees this slander from Jews as stemming from legal proceedings in Smyrna.<sup>41</sup> Lambrecht argues that τὴν βλασφημίαν should not be translated as ‘blasphemy’ with the theological/christological connotations as it occurs elsewhere in Revelation (Rev. 13.1, 5, 6; 16.11; 17.3).<sup>42</sup> He proposes, ‘So almost necessarily one is brought to the assumption that Jews not only revile Christians but also denounce them to the pagan magistrates. These Jews must have been *delatores*; they formulate an *accusatio*’.<sup>43</sup> The forensic nature of this slander is confirmed with the reference to future imprisonment (Rev. 2.10). Jewish hostilities against Christians expressed in the form of legal denunciation commonly occurred in the early church.<sup>44</sup> The Jewish communities benefited from legal sanctions (*religio licita*), and pagans may have grouped Christians together with the Jews.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, Jewish leaders made a concerted

NTS 44 (1998), pp. 232-56 (240); A.Y. Collins, ‘Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation’, HTR 79 (1986), pp. 308-20; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 85-87.

40. On suffering in poverty stemming from their faith see Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 68; Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), pp. 242-43; Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, p. 56; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 35; Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary* (trans. John E. Alsup; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 48. Cf. 4QpPs<sup>a</sup> 1.1-10; 2.10-11.

41. Jan Lambrecht, ‘Jewish Slander: A Note on Revelation 2,9-10’, *ETL* 75.4 (1999), pp. 421-29.

42. Lambrecht, ‘Jewish Slander’, p. 421.

43. Lambrecht, ‘Jewish Slander’, p. 423. According to Adolf Berger, Roman jurisprudence required that prosecution began when an accuser brought a charge against someone. The *delator* (denouncer) normally brought a charge in writing (*libellus accusatorius*) in order to bring the accused to trial. Incidentally, the *accusatio* could also be supported by additional signatures (*subscriptio*) from other accusers. See ‘Accusatio’, in Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law [EDRL]* (Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 43; Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), p. 340.

44. NT examples of Jews instigating legal action against Christians include Mk 15.12-14; Mt. 27.22-23; Lk. 23.20-23; Jn 19.6-7, 14-15; Acts 13.5-12, 50; 18.13-17; 22.30; 23.25-30; 24.1-22; 25.1, 7-27; 26.1-7. For examples of general Jewish hostility against Christians see Acts 7.1-8.3; 9.1-9; 1 Thess. 2.14-16; Gal. 1.13-14. Jewish hostility against Christians is evidenced in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (12.2-3; 13.1), Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 110.5; 131.2; 133.6; 137.2), Tertullian (*Scorp.* 10.10), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 26.6), and Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.16.12).

45. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 8, 240; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 393; S. Applebaum, ‘The Legal Status of the Jewish Communities in the Diaspora’, in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; CRINT, 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), pp. 420-63; Tessa Rajak, *Jewish Rights in the Greek Cities under Roman Rule: A New Approach* (AAJ, 5; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 19-35; Paul Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS, 69; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),



effort, especially after 70 CE, to denounce Christians before the magistrates.<sup>46</sup> The situation for Christians in Smyrna also paralleled what was happening in Philadelphia (Rev. 3.8-9). In both cities the Christians were few in number and poor, but faced intentional, religious, and legal opposition from Jews who sought to eliminate their existence.

The persecution experienced by Christians in Asia Minor did not result in death, except for the case of Antipas in the city of Pergamum (Rev. 2.13). At some point in the recent past Antipas was killed because of his faithfulness to Christ. The lack of details about the situation implies that it must have been common knowledge among the believers in that city. The only possible clue to reconstruct what may have happened to Antipas is the reference to Pergamum as the place where Satan rules (ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ σατανᾶ) and lives (ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ). A recent article by Steven J. Friesen attempts to identify the referent for 'Satan's throne'.<sup>47</sup> He examines the most popular theories regarding the identification of Satan's throne: (1) the Altar/Temple of Zeus and Athena;<sup>48</sup> (2) the Pergamene Asklepieion (an ancient hospital devoted to Asclepius the god of healing);<sup>49</sup> (3) Pergamum was the seat of Roman power in the province of Asia;<sup>50</sup> and (4) Pergamum was the center of the imperial

pp. 167-85; S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 220-21. Cf. Josephus, *Apion* 2.6; Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 349-67.

46. According to J.J. O'Rourke, 'After the first Jewish revolt (A.D. 66-73) a change began to take place in the legal status of Christians. Due to the harsh measures taken against the Jews, particularly under Domitian, Christians and Jews disassociated themselves to a greater degree than before so that Christianity no longer appeared in Roman eyes as part of Judaism. Since it was illegal to form new religions, Christianity as a new religion separate from Judaism gradually ceased to be tolerated' ('Roman Law and the Early Church', p. 179). For more on the relationship between the church and synagogues see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 168-72; Peder Borgen, 'Polemical in the Book of Revelation', in *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity* (ed. C.A. Evans and D.A. Hagner; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 199-211; Wilhelm Horn, 'Zwischen der Synagoge des Satans und dem neuen Jerusalem: die christlich-jüdische Standortbestimmung in der Apokalypse des Johannes', *ZRGG* 46 (1994), pp. 143-62; Steven J. Friesen, 'Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3: Churches, Christians, True Jews, and Satanic Synagogues', in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (SBLSS, 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), pp. 127-46; Paul Duff, 'The "Synagogue of Satan": Crisis Mongering and the Apocalypse of John', in *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (SBLSS, 39; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), pp. 127-416 (147-68). Cf. Justin, *Dial.* 16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 133.6; 137.2.

47. Steven J. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne, Imperial Cults and the Social Settings of Revelation', *JSNT* 27 (2005), pp. 351-73.

48. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', p. 359.

49. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', pp. 359-61.

50. Friesen ('Satan's Throne', p. 361) states that, 'The problem with this interpretation

cult in the province of Asia.<sup>51</sup> Of these the third and fourth are the most viable options, but Friesen rejects them both contending that Satan's throne is merely a reference to the 'local hostility toward the Pergamene assembly'.<sup>52</sup> Friesen, however, may slightly overstate his case because Pergamum was equally a politically important city in the province of Asia represented by the prominence of the imperial cult.<sup>53</sup>

Antipas's death most likely was the result of an unjust verdict from Pergamum's proconsul who condemned him because he refused to deny Christ when on trial.<sup>54</sup> The references to the 'double-edged sword' (Rev. 2.12) and 'the throne' (Rev. 2.13) possibly alludes to the judicial authority and official seat of the city's magistrate. The term *ῥομφαίαν* ('sword') may refer to the judicial right of *ius gladii*, symbolized as a sword, giving the proconsul the right to inflict capital punishment (Rom. 13.4).<sup>55</sup> The Christians of Pergamum are reminded that Christ, not the proconsul, wields ultimate judicial authority. The term *θρόνος* ('throne'), as used elsewhere in the NT, denotes an official seat where a king or judge<sup>56</sup> conducts court (Mt. 19.28; Lk. 1.23, 52).<sup>57</sup> Since

is that Pergamum was not the capital of Asia. Pergamum was the governmental center of the region in the Hellenistic period, and the city maintained its position as the capital of Asia when the Romans formed the province c. 130 BCE. But Augustus reorganized the province a century later, around 30 BCE, and from this time on, Ephesus functioned as the governmental center of the senatorial province'. Cf. Victor Chapot, *La province romaine proconsulaire d'Asie depuis ses origines jusqu'à la fin du haut-empire* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1904), pp. 138-50.

51. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', pp. 362-64.

52. Friesen, 'Satan's Throne', p. 365.

53. Ramsay argues, 'Consideration of the fact that Pergamum was honoured with the first, the second, and the third Neokorate before any other city of Asia shows beyond question its official primacy in the Province' (*The Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 289). See also Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 81-84; H.-J. Klauck, 'Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon und der Kaiserkult in der Johannesoffenbarung', *Bib* 73 (1992), pp. 153-82; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 5.30; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 51.20.6-7; Suetonius, *Aug.* 52; Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.15, 37.

54. According to Aune, the Roman proconsul resided in Pergamon. The Province of Asia was divided into regions and in the main city of each area the *conventus iudicus* ('judicial assembly') was convened by the proconsul for the purpose of conducting trials (*Revelation 1-5*, p. 183). See also Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 38.

55. *Dig.* 2.1.3; Berger, 'Ius gladii', *EDRL*, p. 529; Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 292-93; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 38; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 96; Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, p. 85; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 247; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 122.

56. Occasionally, 'throne' is used for a judge's bench (cf. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 183). Cf. Plutarch, *Praec. ger. rei publ.* 807b.

57. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 68; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), p. 34;

Satan is the chief adversary of the people of God it makes sense to see how a judicial verdict against a faithful Christian warrants the identification of Pergamum as the location for his throne. Satan wields so much authority in Pergamum that Christians are denied justice and face punishment at the hands of the proconsul acting on behalf of Satan.

At the time of composition the churches in Asia Minor were experiencing some persecution but nowhere near the extent of the Neronian persecution. Although they were not presently facing severe persecution, John fully anticipated and envisioned such a scenario for the churches in the near future. This is explicitly stated in the answer to the question regarding ‘how long?’ until the beheaded souls are avenged (Rev. 6.10).<sup>58</sup> In Rev. 6.11, they are told to wait until the full number of their fellow servants and brothers are also killed. The expectation of a future persecution is expressed by the phrase, οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτείνεσθαι (‘those about to be killed’). Revelation 12–13, then, graphically portrays the completion of this number in terms of a holy war between God and Satan played out on earth in a battle between state and church. Once expelled from heaven, Satan—the accuser—proceeds to make war against those who obey God’s commands and hold the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12.17).

c. ‘Lord and God’ (Rev. 4.11; cf. Rev. 19.6)

The phrase ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (‘our Lord and God’), in Rev. 4.11, directly parallels the Latin, *dominus et deus noster*.<sup>59</sup> The corollary is that this title was applied specifically to Domitian during the time of his reign. One of the key themes in the book of Revelation relates to monotheistic faithfulness to the one true God in the midst of an idolatrous society. Thus, Rev. 4.11 may contrast the imperial claim of divinity with the one seated on the heavenly throne.

Evidence abounds from Domitian’s critics and supporters that he necessitated titles of divine status beyond what was culturally acceptable. In 42 BCE sometime after the death of Julius Caesar, the senate officially declared him *divus Iulius* (‘divine Julius’). Soon after Octavian, Caesar’s nephew and successor, was called *divi filius* (‘son of a god’).<sup>60</sup> At most, an emperor could attain the status of *divus* (usually after death), but not a *deus*.<sup>61</sup> Aside from Gaius Caligula’s excessive claims to divinity,<sup>62</sup> Domitian represents the first

58. Cf. 4 Ezra 4.33–37.

59. Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.2.

60. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 310.

61. The deification of the emperor after his death was called the rite of apotheosis. Cf. Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 75.

62. Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 353; Peder Borgen, ‘Emperor Worship and Persecution in Philo’s

Roman emperor to adopt and even mandate the title *deus*.<sup>63</sup> His critics find his claims to divinity repulsive.

Suetonius recounts Domitian's arrogance by issuing a circular letter from Domitian as *Dominus et deus noster* and requiring this address in both writing and conversation.<sup>64</sup> Dio Cassius echoes Suetonius when he writes, 'For he even insisted upon being regarded as a god and took vast pride in being called 'master' and 'god'.'<sup>65</sup> He even narrates how Juventius Celsus escaped punishment by falling before Domitian in obeisance (προσκυνήσας), repeatedly calling him 'master' (δεσπότην) and 'god' (θεόν).<sup>66</sup> Dio Chrysostom remarks how the Greeks and barbarians referred to Domitian as 'master' (δεσπότην) and 'god' (θεόν), but that he was really an 'evil demon' (δαίμονα ποιηρόν).<sup>67</sup> Later writers also affirm Domitian's inappropriate claim to divinity.<sup>68</sup>

Domitian's supporters also make reference to his divinity. Martial, the poet and epigrammatist, embarrassingly compounds divine honors upon Domitian. Martial calls Domitian 'our lord and god' (*domini deque nostri*).<sup>69</sup> He often compares Domitian to Jupiter and infers their shared power.<sup>70</sup> An indirect assertion of Domitian's divine status may be derived from Martial's attempt to comfort Silius on the loss of his son. He reminds him how Apollo lost Linus, Calliope Orpheus, Zeus Sarpedon and Domitian his son.<sup>71</sup> Although not overtly asserting Domitian's divinity, Quintilian attributes divine honors to Domitian.<sup>72</sup> Ernest P. Janzen convincingly demonstrates how the numismatic

*In Flaccum and Legatione ad Gaium and the Revelation of John*, in *Geschichte—Tradition—Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*. III. *Frühes Christentum* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), pp. 498-503; James S. McLaren, 'Jews and the Imperial Cult: From Augustus to Domitian', *JSNT* 27 (2005), pp. 257-78 (266-69).

63. See, however, Floyd O. Parker, "'Our Lord and God" in Rev 4,11: Evidence for the Late Date of Revelation?', *Bib* 82 (2001), pp. 207-31 (213-17). He compiles an impressive list of primary sources demonstrating how all the emperors accepted divine titles and status prior to Domitian.

64. Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.2.

65. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.4.7 (Cary, LCL).

66. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.13.4.

67. Dio Chrysostom, *Def.* 45.1. See also Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.69-71.

68. Aurelius Victor, *De caes.* 11.2, 11.6; Eutropius 7.23; Orosius 7.10. See also Parker, "'Our Lord and God" in Rev 4,11', p. 209.

69. Martial, *Epig.* 5.8.1.; 7.34.8; and *dominoque deoque* in 9.66.3.

70. Martial, *Epig.* 6.10; 7.99; 8.39; 9.3, 11, 39, 96, 91.

71. Martial, *Epig.* 9.96. See Ernest P. Janzen, 'The Jesus of the Apocalypse Wears the Emperor's Clothes', *SBLSP* 33 (1994), pp. 637-61 (653).

72. Quintilian, *Inst.* 4.2, 5. See also Slater, 'On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John', p. 237. Slater remarks, 'Thompson's insistence that Domitian was not worshipped as 'our lord and god' may be strictly true, but it is equally true that Quintilian clearly sees him

data supports the notions of Domitian's megalomania.<sup>73</sup> He provides evidence that Domitian minted coinage that deified his family as well as the DIVVS CAESAR issues.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, a preponderance of the evidence indicates the validity of Domitian's claim to divinity was a well known facet of his reign, especially in the latter years.

The question remains whether or not the expression 'our Lord and God' in Rev. 4.11 represents anti-imperial rhetoric. Floyd O. Parker forcefully argues for interpreting the phrase in light of an OT background instead of an imperial one.<sup>75</sup> He demonstrates how the LXX, while not containing an exact duplicate of the phrase, attests to Yahweh as Lord and God.<sup>76</sup> He concludes that Rev. 4.11 has nothing to do with imperial claims. Therefore, attempts at reading anti-imperial rhetoric as a means of determining the book's date should be abandoned.<sup>77</sup> Parker successfully and helpfully demonstrates that the exclusive worthiness of God's worship is certainly rooted in the OT. The context of Rev. 4.11 is saturated with OT allusions and themes. However, the Apocalypse cannot be divorced from the culture and society where it was produced. Christians in Asia Minor existed within a polytheistic and idolatrous society where paying homage to the emperor's statue was common place. Therefore, any claim of exclusivity in worship due to God's superiority constitutes anti-imperial claims of divine honors.

#### d. *Nero redivivus*

Shortly after Nero committed suicide (June 9, 68), Roman historians recount how a belief emerged throughout the empire that Nero had not actually died and would return with the Parthian army.<sup>78</sup> Even after his death, many people decorated Nero's statue 'as if he were still alive and would shortly return and deal destruction to his enemies'.<sup>79</sup> The fact that very few witnesses actually saw Nero's corpse coupled with uncertainty regarding the location of his tomb gave credence to this belief.<sup>80</sup> A belief, no doubt, nourished and reinforced by

as worthy of divine honours, a detail which undermines, to some degree, Thompson's point'.

73. Janzen, 'The Jesus of the Apocalypse', p. 643.

74. Janzen, 'The Jesus of the Apocalypse', pp. 644-47. Contra Peter L. Viscusi, 'Studies on Domitian' (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 1973), p. 94. Viscusi correctly concludes that no coins bore the inscription *dominus et deus*, but this does not mean that his divinity was not propagated through numismatics.

75. Parker, "'Our Lord and God in Rev 4,11'", pp. 217-31.

76. Parker, "'Our Lord and God in Rev 4,11'", pp. 217-22.

77. Parker, "'Our Lord and God in Rev 4,11'", pp. 229-31.

78. See Suetonius, *Nero* 49.3.

79. Suetonius, *Nero* 57.1.

80. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 412-13; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC, 52b; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 738.

at least three pretenders.<sup>81</sup> The first (69 CE), possibly a slave from Pontus or a freedman from Italy, gathered a small army and sailed from Greece only to experience shipwreck on an island where he was soon executed.<sup>82</sup> The second pretender (80 CE), Terentius Maximus, appeared in the province of Asia where he gathered a few followers and marched to the Euphrates River where he eventually sought refuge with the Parthians.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Suetonius mentions another pretender who appeared twenty years after Nero's death (88 CE).<sup>84</sup> The notion of Nero's return persisted well into the time of Dio Chrysostom who reported that most people believe Nero was still alive (c. 88 CE).<sup>85</sup>

The Nero *redux* myth surfaced in a several apocalyptic Jewish and Christian writings toward the end of the first century.<sup>86</sup> The fourth Sibylline oracle is the earliest known source containing a prophetic expectation of Nero's return from Parthia.<sup>87</sup> Although this oracle gives evidence of several redactions, the sections regarding Nero's return are dated after 70 CE with a fair amount of certainty because of the reference to the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in 79 CE (*Sib. Or.* 130–35).<sup>88</sup> The fifth Sibylline oracle contains five passages regarding Nero's return based on his supposed flight to Parthia and the expectation that he will destroy Rome.<sup>89</sup> The third Sibylline oracle, probably redacted sometime after 70 CE, identifies Nero as Beliar—the eschatological enemy of God's people.<sup>90</sup> The Christian apocalypses also associate Nero with

81. P.A. Gallivan, 'The False Neros: A Reexamination', *Historia* 22 (1973), pp. 364–65; A.E. Pappano, 'The False Neros', *CJ* 32 (1937), pp. 385–92; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 738–39; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 412–13.

82. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 63.9.3.

83. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 66.19.3.

84. Suetonius, *Nero* 57.2. Cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8.1. For a detailed summary of the pretenders see Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 413–14.

85. Dio Chrysostom, *Pulchr.* 21.10. See H.-J. Klauck, 'Do They Never Come Back? Nero Redivivus and the Apocalypse of John', *CBQ* 63 (2001), pp. 683–98 (684); C.P. Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 135; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 690.

86. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 415; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 739.

87. *Sib. Or.* 4.119–24, 138–39.

88. John J. Collins, 'The Sibylline Oracles, Book 4' (ed. James Charlesworth; *OTP*, I; New York: Doubleday, 1983), pp. 381–92 (382). Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 416.

89. *Sib. Or.* 5.28–34, 93–110, 137–154, 214–227, 361–80. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 416–17; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 739; Waltraud Jakob-Sonnabend, *Untersuchungen zum Nero-Bild der Spätantike* (ATS, 18; New York: Olms-Weidmann, 1990), pp. 138–44.

90. *Sib. Or.* 3.63–74. For the dating see John J. Collins, 'The Sibylline Oracles, Book 3' (ed. James Charlesworth; *OTP*, I; New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 360. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 420.

Beliar as the final persecutor of the church.<sup>91</sup> The *Asc. Isa.* 4.2-4, typically dated around the end of the first century, expects the coming of a demonically inspired king who persecutes the church. This king remarkably resembles Nero in many respects:

And after it has been brought to completion, Beliar will descend, the great angel, the king of this world, which he has ruled ever since it existed. He will descend in the form of a man, a king of iniquity, a murderer of his mother... and will persecute the plant which the twelve apostles of the Beloved will have planted; some of the twelve will be given into his hand. This angel, Beliar, will come in the form of that king, and with him will come all the powers of the world, and they will obey him in every wish.<sup>92</sup>

These writings indicate that toward the end of the first century two distinct traditions pertaining to the return of Nero developed.<sup>93</sup> One stems from the idea that Nero never died and he will return with the Parthian army to conquer Rome. The other envisions a demonically empowered Nero figure that will attack God's people.<sup>94</sup>

The book of Revelation, according to most commentators, reflects an awareness of the return of Nero legend.<sup>95</sup> Revelation 13 describes how the dragon gives rise to the beast (θηρίον) and endows him with authority.<sup>96</sup> In Rev. 13.3, one of the beast's heads receives a fatal head wound (ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον) but it miraculously heals resuscitating him from death (ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἔθεραπεύθη) to the astonishment of the whole world. As a result, the entire world worships him as he proceeds to slaughter faithful

91. *Asc. Isa.* 4.2-4; *Apoc. Pet.* 14.11. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 411-12.

92. *Asc. Isa.* 4.2-4. On the Jewish and Christian composite nature of the book and the date see M.A. Knibb, 'The Ascension of Isaiah' (ed. James Charlesworth; *OTP*, II; New York: Doubleday, 1985), pp. 143-76 (147-50).

93. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 423.

94. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 424-28. Bauckham demonstrates that this apocalyptic tradition is rooted in a reading of Daniel 7.

95. W.H.C. Frend, *Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 331 n. 8; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 635-36; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 59; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 407-50; Roloff, *Revelation*, pp. 156-57; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 17-18; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 737-40; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 405-406; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 496; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 338; Klauck, 'Do They Never Come Back?', pp. 683-98.

96. Interestingly, Philostratus referred to Nero as a beast (θηρίον) due to his tyranny (*Vit. Apoll.* 4.38 [Conybeare, LCL]). He writes, 'Moreover, in traversing more of the earth than any man yet has visited, I have seen hosts of Arabian and Indian wild beasts; but as to this wild beast, which the many call a tyrant, I know not either how many heads he has, nor whether he has crooked talons and jagged teeth. In any case, though this monster is said to be a social beast and to inhabit the heart of cities, yet he is so much wilder and fiercer in his disposition than animals of the mountain and forest... And say that it ever devours its own mother, but Nero is gorged with such quarry'.

Christians (Rev. 13.4-10). Although nothing in Revelation actually names Nero, the language in Rev. 13.1-7, suggests John may have adapted the form of the Nero myth that alludes to the enemy of God's people in Dan. 7.2-25.<sup>97</sup> In addition, Rev. 17.10-12 also suggests parallels with the other forms of the Nero *redux* myth depicting Nero's attack on Rome.<sup>98</sup> John's portrayal radically differs from the other expectations of Nero's return because in the Apocalypse the beast actually rises from the dead (*redivivus*), whereas all the others examples assume Nero never died (*redux*).<sup>99</sup> The reason John departs from the usual tradition is most likely because in his vision the beast represents a parody of Christ who died and rose again and who will come again to conquer the world kingdoms.<sup>100</sup>

If Revelation does indeed allude to the return of Nero myth, then it could not have been written until at least 69 CE. Although the expectation developed within a year of Nero's death, it was during Domitian's reign that the increased expectation in Asia Minor gave rise to a least one significant pretender. The historical sources all attest that the return of Nero legend continued and increased in popularity toward the end of the first century. The legend did not appear in apocalyptic writings until after 70 CE. The accounts of Domitian's savagery warranted a reputation similar to that of Nero beyond any of his predecessors. As such, Domitian gained a reputation as a second Nero.<sup>101</sup> This suggests that the name of Nero was used topically as suitable for any tyrant and especially one who threatened the security of Christians living in Asia Minor.<sup>102</sup>

#### e. *The Mark of the Beast: 666*

The mysterious number of the beast in Rev. 13.18 may also offer a glimpse into the socio-historical situation facing believers in Asia Minor. The beast that rises to power and persecutes the Christians imposes an economic form

97. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 424-29. See also the very important contributions of Beale, *The Use of Daniel*, pp. 229-39; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 82-85.

98. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 430.

99. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 421.

100. The language used to describe the beast's resurrection in Rev. 13.3 (ὡς ἐσφαγμένην) mimics same words used to describe Christ in Rev. 5.6 (ὡς ἐσφαγμένον). The return of the beast in Rev. 17.11 (ὁ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεός ἐστιν) also parallels the language used for God in Rev. 1.4, 8; 4.8 (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 875-77; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 432, 435; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 620-21; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 184; Collins, *Combat Myth*, p. 185; Sweet, *Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 255-58.

101. Martial, *Epig.* 11.33.1-3; Juvenal, *Sat.* 4.37-38; Pliny, *Pan.* 48.3; 53.4.

102. Klauck, 'Do They Never Come Back?', p. 686.



of allegiance by requiring all people to receive a mark on their heads or right hands (Rev. 13.16-17). According to Rev. 13.17, this mark (χάραγμα) corresponds to the name of the beast (τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου) as it is represented by a numerical value (τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ). John proceeds to provide the specific number for the beast's name as six hundred sixty six (ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἕξ).<sup>103</sup> That one can arrive at some definite identification of this number is evidenced when John declares 'here is wisdom' (Ἦδε ἡ σοφία ἐστίν) and calls for an intelligent mind to calculate the number (ὁ ἔχων νοῦν ψηφισάτω).<sup>104</sup> The term ψηφισάτω, presumably, suggests that one could use some sort of mathematical solution to solve this riddle. Consequently, most interpreters have turned to the practice of gematria for answers.

Gematria refers to the practice of ascribing numerical values to Greek or Hebrew letters.<sup>105</sup> This practice was widely adopted by ordinary citizens, rabbinic exegetes, and apocalypticists. One famous example, cited by Deissmann, of a graffito in Pompeii reads, 'I love the girl whose number is 545' (φιλω ἧς ἀριθμός φμε).<sup>106</sup> Jewish rabbis also accepted and employed gematria as a hermeneutical principle.<sup>107</sup> The *Epistle of Barnabas* follows this principle when reading Gen. 14.14:

For it says, 'And Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen men and three hundred'. What then was the knowledge that was given to him? Notice that he first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I (= ten) and H (= 8)—you have Jesus [IH = the first two initials of Ἰησοῦ]—and because the cross was destined to have grace in the T [Greek symbol for 300] he says 'and three hundred'.<sup>108</sup>

103. Some ambiguity, however, surrounds the exact meaning of the phrase, ἀριθμὸς γὰρ ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν, because of the anarthrous genitive (ἀνθρώπου). Some translated it as 'for it is the number of a man' (Prigent). Yet, it also could be translated as a qualitative genitive, which would be rendered as 'for it is a human number' (Beale). Because of the similar genitival phrase in Rev. 21.17 (μέτρον ἀνθρώπου), it seems the latter option seems more probable. However, most commentators favor the former.

104. This appeal is paralleled in Rev. 17.9 with a slight variation (ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν) and most likely links the beast of Revelation 13 with the beast of Rev. 17.9-14. This appeal most likely alludes to Dan. 12.10.

105. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 771; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 385-88. So F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystic und Magie* (Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1924), pp. 91-118.

106. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R.M. Strachan; New York: Harper, 1922), p. 276-78.

107. H.L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 29. So Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 771.

108. *Barn.* 9.8 (Lake, LCL).

The Sibylline oracles frequently exhibit the propensity for using gematria in prophetic utterances.<sup>109</sup> One notable example of a Christian gematria in the Sibylline oracles gives the numerical value of Jesus' name (Ἰησοῦ) as 888:

Then indeed the son of the great God will come, incarnate, likened to mortal men on earth, bearing four vowels, and the consonants in him are two. I will state explicitly the entire number for you. For eight units, and equal number of tens in addition to these, and eight hundred will reveal the name.<sup>110</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that scholars believe John may have employed this tactic when he gives the number of the beast's name.

If the number of the beast (666) corresponds to the practice of gematria, then the arduous task of assigning the proper name remains. In the earliest extant exegesis of Rev. 13.18, Irenaeus assumes John's use of gematria.<sup>111</sup> Irenaeus cautions his readers regarding attempts at naming the beast by his number because if too many names are found adding up to the number, then how will they know which one pertains to the antichrist?<sup>112</sup> He then proceeds to discuss the names *Evanthas* (ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ), *Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ), and *Teitan* (ΤΕΙΤΑΝ) as three possibilities having been suggested in his day.<sup>113</sup> He admits that they all add up to 666, but he carefully avoids positing any of those names as candidates for the beast.<sup>114</sup> Remarkably, Irenaeus completely fails to entertain the notion that the number identifies any past Roman emperors. In his view the beast is someone who has yet to come to power. Most modern commentators, however, maintain that the beast must have referred to someone identifiable to John's audience and therefore they look to well known historical figures.

109. *Sib. Or.* 1.137-46; 3.24-26; 5.12-51. The later oracles exhibit an increased tendency for gematria (e.g., *Sib. Or.* 11.29-30, 92, 114, 189-90, 208, 256, 266). Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 772; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 355 n. 26.

110. *Sib. Or.* 1.324-25. See also *3 Baruch* 4.3-7, 10; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 389; G. Bohak, 'Greek-Hebrew Gematrias in *3 Baruch* and in Revelation', *JPS* 7 (1990), pp. 119-121.

111. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.1. He also addresses the variant reading of 616, but concluded that it must be a scribal error.

112. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3.

113. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.3. See also the text critical analysis of J. Neville Birdsall, 'Irenaeus and the Number of the Beast: Revelation 13.18', in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel* (BETL, 161; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), pp. 349-59.

114. Of the possibilities he seems to completely dismiss *Evanthas*, but seems more inclined to accept *Lateinos* (Romans) and *Teitan* (Titan). He sees a probable correlation between the Roman empire and the last kingdom represented in Daniel's vision. Irenaeus, however, favors the term *titian* because it has six letters, the titans were figures from pagan mythology and that there has never been a ruler with the name Titan.

Among the multitude of names that have been suggested for the mark of the beast, Nero Caesar seems the most viable of all the candidates. Although this suggestion was virtually unknown prior to 1831, it is widely accepted on reasonable grounds.<sup>115</sup> Transliterating the name Nero Caesar from Greek into Hebrew renders נרון קסר, which when added up equals 666.<sup>116</sup> Incidentally, transliterating the name from Latin into Hebrew would omit the final *nun* (ן) and arrive at the variant reading of 616.<sup>117</sup> The name Nero Caesar could feasibly account for both the accepted and variant readings. What is more, John may have intended to identify the beast as Nero by means of isopsephism.<sup>118</sup> Isopsephism is a technique whereby the two different names or phases refer to the same thing because the numerical value is identical.<sup>119</sup> John intimates the number of the beast (θηρ) is the number of his name. Interestingly, the numerical value of θηρ when transliterated into Hebrew (תרין) summates to 666.<sup>120</sup> Bauckham suggests, 'Thus John is saying that the number of the word beast (תרין) is also the number of a man (נרון קסר)'.

Another reason why Nero might be the name relates to Rev. 17.9 and the Nero *redivivus* myth. Rev. 13.18 and 17.9 are verbally and thematically linked by the appeal for a mind with wisdom.<sup>121</sup> The purpose of this, then, is to link the beast of chap. 13 with the eighth king of Rev. 17.11 who is also 'the beast which once was, but now is not' (τὸ θηρ ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔσται). This association dovetails nicely with the expectation of a coming king who is either Nero or like Nero in his savagery.<sup>122</sup> Despite the apparent plausibility of this

115. Bauckham notes that 'it was apparently suggested independently by four German scholars in 1831 (O. F. Fritsche), 1836 (F. Benary) and 1837 (F. Hitzig, E. Reuss)' (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 387 n. 10). See also Arthur S. Peake, *Commentary on Revelation* (London: Holborn, 1920), p. 323; D. Brady, *The Contributions of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18 (The Number of the Beast)* (BGBE, 27; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), p. 292.

116.  $\text{ר} = 200 + \text{ס} = 60 + \text{ק} = 100 + \text{ן} = 50 + \text{ו} = 6 + \text{ר} = 200 + \text{נ} = 50 = 666$ . The usual Hebrew form of Caesar Nero (קיסר נרון) adds up to 676. Evidence supporting the shorter form without the *yod* has been confirmed by a document found at Wadi Murabba'at. See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 770; D.R. Hillers, 'Revelation 13.18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at', *BASOR* 170 (1963), p. 65.

117. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 387; Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date', p. 598.

118. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet*, pp. 96-97; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 386.

119. For examples of this method see Suetonius, *Nero*, 39.

120. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 389.

121. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 394.

122. Bauckham confirms this identification of Nero as the eight king who was one of the seven by the use of triangular numbers. In short, he demonstrates that 666 is doubly triangular number. It is a triangle of 36, which is a triangle of 8. The relationship of 666 with the number 8 is significant for Bauckham because the antichrist will be the eight king, who was also one of the seven. Thus, Nero who was one of the seven will also be the

identification it cannot be afforded absolute certainty because the overall symbolic nature of numbers in the Apocalypse.<sup>123</sup>

To assert the name of the beast as Nero strongly suggests that the torment inflicted upon Christians by the beast in Rev. 13.7 corresponds with the Neronian persecution. Yet this logic is flawed because the beast in chap. 13 will persecute Christians via the imperial cult and no historical evidence links Nero's persecution with the imperial cult. Consequently, John writes in terms of a future expectation instead of a current reality. The point is that the Nero imagery in John's vision suggests an intended comparison between Nero and Domitian in terms of savagery and tyranny.

## *2. The Socio-Historical Situation: External Data*

John was probably banished to Patmos by a provincial governor during the reign of Domitian. Although Nero was a malicious despot who mercilessly persecuted the church, nothing in the book of Revelation suggests that this was occurring at the time of composition. Instead, John evokes the memory of the past persecution in order to brace believers for a future onslaught from a Nero-like megalomaniac. By dating the book around the end of the first century it becomes possible to reconstruct some aspects of the historical situation that the seven churches might have experienced.

### *a. The Emperor Domitian*

Domitian's critics have immortalized their distaste for him through their less than complimentary remarks. They described him as an insane tyrant who acted maliciously with cunning deception.<sup>124</sup> Early in his career he may have been jealous of his father and brother.<sup>125</sup> Throughout his reign he became increasingly paranoid to the point of committing murder.<sup>126</sup> Domitian's critics denigrated him as a sex fiend,<sup>127</sup> a censor of free speech,<sup>128</sup> and with an

eight. Since his number is a triangle of 36 and a triangle of 8 the beast must be Nero. Although complex and convoluted, Bauckham presents a fascinating argument (*Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 390-404).

123. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 725-26.

124. Suetonius, *Dom.* 1.3; 3.1; 12.3; Pliny, *Pan.* 48.3-5; 90.5-7; *Ep.* 1.12.6-8; 4.11.5; Tacitus, *Agri.* 39; 34; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 65.9.4-5.

125. Pliny, *Ep.* 4.9.2; Suetonius, *Titus* 9.3; Suetonius, *Dom.* 2.3; Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.5, 52, 86; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 66.26.2.

126. Tacitus, *Germ.* 37; Pliny, *Pan.* 11.4; 48.3-5; 76.5; 83.4; Suetonius, *Dom.* 4.1, 4; 5; 12.1; 14.1.

127. Suetonius, *Dom.* 22.1; Tacitus, *Agri.* 7; *Hist.* 4.2; 4.68; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.6.3.

128. Pliny, *Ep.* 3.11.3-4; 4.24.4-5; 7.27.14; *Pan.* 95.3-4; Tacitus, *Agri.* 2-3, 44-45.

insatiable appetite for power.<sup>129</sup> Overall his reign has been characterized as one of *saveitia*, that is to say ‘savageness’, ‘violence’, and ‘ferocity’.<sup>130</sup>

This caricature has been forcibly challenged by the more sympathetic treatments of Domitian by Jones and Thompson.<sup>131</sup> They contend that the traditional portrait misrepresents the real Domitian because of polemical aims based on political biases and agendas.<sup>132</sup> Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius (Dio Cassius wrote about a century later) comprised a circle of aristocracy with an ax to grind against Domitian and, more importantly, they sought to curry the favor of Trajan.<sup>133</sup> The writings of Domitian’s supporters (Quintilian, Frontinus, Statius, Martial, and Silius Italicus) suggest a much more positive perspective of Domitian as a successful emperor.<sup>134</sup> Domitian accomplished a variety of military and architectural projects.<sup>135</sup> His reputation as a tyrant is suspect, according to Thompson, because of the apparent uncensored negative remarks in the writings of Quintilian and Martial.<sup>136</sup> This, however, does not satisfactorily contradict the historic consensus that Domitian became increasingly more unstable and paranoid until he was finally assassinated by his own courtiers.<sup>137</sup> In an attempt to counter the traditional portrait of Domitian, Jones and Thompson have possibly over compensated.<sup>138</sup>

129. Suetonius, *Dom.* 1.3; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 65.2.3.

130. Pliny, *Ep.* 1.12.6-8; 3.11.3; 7.27.14; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.1.1; 67.4.2. For an excellent sketch of this traditional portrait of Domitian see Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 97-101.

131. Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992); Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 101-15. See also Pat Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

132. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 101.

133. However, these writers did not completely vilify Domitian in that at times they even spoke very positively about certain aspects of his reign. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 11-12.

134. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 103.

135. On his military success see Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.91; Silius Italicus, *Pun.* 3.607; Martial, *Epig.* 2.2; 4.3; Frontinus, *Str.* 1.1.8; 1.3.10; 2.3.23; 2.11.7; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 103. For his accomplishment as a builder see the detailed accounts of Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 79-98; Southern, *Domitian*, pp. 126-32.

136. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 108. He notes that Quintilian wrote openly about the evils of tyranny without rebuke or threats (*Inst.* 12.1.40; contra Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.12.5). Martial spoke favorably of Domitian’s enemies like Paetus Thrasea, jests about Domitian’s revival of the Lex Julia, and even ridicules other men for their baldness. Thompson suggests that a true tyrant would not tolerate such insolence.

137. Suetonius, *Dom.* 14.1-4; 17.1-3. Regarding how Domitian was esteemed by the Romans, Suetonius remarks that the news of his death was received with indifference, except the soldiers who grieved deeply. More importantly, the senators could not contain their pleasure at the news, ‘The senators on the contrary were overjoyed, that they raced to fill the House, where they did not refrain from assailing the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries’ (Suetonius, *Dom.* 23.1; Rolfe, LCL). Dio Cassius

Domitian was not without his share of enemies. Lucius Antonius Saturninus, governor of upper Germany, instigated a revolt against Domitian in 89 CE but he was quickly defeated.<sup>139</sup> The impact of this rebellion on Domitian's psyche was that he increasingly dispensed a crueller brand of justice:

Before 89 Domitian may have considered all aspects of the cases brought before him, and tried to pronounce fair judgment. It is impossible to know how many times he withheld punishments, or how many times he dismissed *delatores* without acting upon the information he had been given—Suetonius says that he did not listen to them at first. After 89 he was perhaps more willing to listen, and meted out death sentences without examining the evidence too closely. The senators who fell victim to him are meticulously recorded, and the pretexts for their removal are flimsy to say the least.<sup>140</sup>

The most endangered class under Domitian consisted of Roman aristocracy.<sup>141</sup> The closer one was to the circles of imperial power the more he or she fell prey to his paranoia. Even Pliny believed that he was on Domitian's list of accused and had the emperor lived longer he would have stood trial.<sup>142</sup>

News of Domitian's actions against governors, senators, and other notable individuals would have been common knowledge throughout the provinces. Earlier in his reign, Domitian insisted that the provincial magistrates act justly. According to Suetonius, 'He took such care to exercise restraint over the city officials and the governors of the provinces, that at no time were they more honest or just, whereas after his time we have seen many of them charged with all manner of offences'.<sup>143</sup> Any charges of impropriety by a provincial governor or other city officials could easily incur the emperor's wrath.<sup>144</sup> One might surmise that the provincial officials took extreme caution not to

states that Domitian became 'suspicious of all mankind' (*Hist.* 67.14.4; Cary, LCL). On the conspiracy and those involved with the assignation plot see Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.15.

138. For a more balanced assessment of Domitian see Southern, *Domitian*, pp. 110-25.

139. Suetonius, *Dom.* 6.2. See also Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 144-50.

140. Southern, *Domitian*, p. 103.

141. Tacitus suggests that Domitian has a system of *delatores* (informers) who supplied him with names and charges against individuals (*Agr.* 2-3; cf. Pliny, *Pan.* 33.3-4).

142. Pliny, *Ep.* 7.14 (Radice, LCL). He writes concerning a slave who woke up with a hair cut, 'Nothing remarkable followed except the fact that I was not brought to trial, as I should have been if Domitian (under whom all this happened) had lived longer. For among the papers in his desk was found information laid against me by Carus; from which, in view of the custom for accused persons to let their hair grow long, one may interpret the cutting of my slave's hair a sign that the danger threatening me was averted'. Elsewhere, Pliny implies that Domitian hated him (Pliny, *Pan.* 95.4). See also Southern, *Domitian*, p. 114.

143. Suetonius, *Dom.* 8.2. Cf. Statius, *Silv.* 5.2.91-92; Frontinus, *Strat.* 2.11.7.

144. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.14. Dio Cassius recounts how Domitian usually brought prefects to trial just because they held the office of prefect.

provoke imperial suspicion. The repercussions of this heightened state of anxiety would have dramatic implications on any person or group who might disrupt relations with Rome or invite unwanted attention. Any accusation, then, brought against a Christian could not easily be dismissed. That people were accused of Christianity and subsequently faced trials (*cognitio*) during the reign of Domitian is strongly supported by Pliny.<sup>145</sup>

The only ones Domitian typically treated harshly were those he considered to be political threats.<sup>146</sup> Christians generally would not provoke this type of threat in the imperial court unless they were members of the social elite. That no pagan writers ever allege Domitian's supposed attack on Christians warrants attention because they did so with Nero.<sup>147</sup> Domitian's reputation for persecuting Christians stems from Dio Cassius's account regarding Domitian's treatment of Flavius Clemens and his wife Flavia Domitilla, who might have been Christians. Dio Cassius actually lists the charges against them as atheism related to following Jewish ways.<sup>148</sup> Dio Cassius's account may accurately reflect the official charges, but whether or not Clemens and Domitilla were Christians remains somewhat ambiguous. Both Jews and Christians were maligned as atheists due to their rejection of all other gods.<sup>149</sup> The charge of adopting Jewish customs may relate to the tax that Domitian levied against the Jews. This tax was strictly enforced even on those who lived like Jews (*Judaicam viverent*) without publicly identifying themselves as such.<sup>150</sup> Nothing in this text positively associates these individuals with a persecution against Christians.<sup>151</sup>

145. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.6.

146. Suetonius, *Dom.* 10.2-5; Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.2.4.

147. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 114-15. Significantly, Irenaeus fails to mention anything about a persecution under Domitian as well.

148. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 67.14.1-4 (Cary, LCL). He writes, 'And the same year [95 CE] Domitian slew, along with many others, Flavius Clemens the consul, although he was his cousin and had to wife Flavia Domitilla, who was also a relative of the emperor's. The charge brought against them both was that of atheism [ἄθεότητος], a charge on which many others who drifted into Jewish ways were condemned. Some of these were put to death, and the rest were at least deprived of their property. Domitilla was merely banished to Pandateria'. Cf. Suetonius, *Dom.* 10.2.

149. Josephus contends that Apollonius accused Jews of atheism (ἄθεοις) among other things (*Ag. Ap.* 2.148). More importantly, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* the crowd cries out, Αἶρε τοὺς ἄθεοις ('Away with the atheists') with reference to all Christians in general but specifically to Polycarp (*Mart. Pol.* 3.2; 9.2).

150. Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2. Suetonius claims to have witnessed the public trial and examination of a ninety-year-old man to see if he was circumcised.

151. See Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 69; Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 233-34; Bell, 'Date of John's Apocalypse', pp. 94-95; Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', p. 590.

The notion that Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla were Christians stems from Christian historiography. Suetonius mentions no hint of Flavius Clemens religious convictions, but distastefully describes him as ‘a man of most contemptible laziness’.<sup>152</sup> It is argued that Dio Cassius would have been keenly aware of the differences between Jews and Christians because he was writing in the third century.<sup>153</sup> While by that time a wider chasm spread between Judaism and Christianity, pagans may not have been as careful to adjudicate between these differences.<sup>154</sup> Christians represented a particularly pugnacious sect of Judaism and Roman historians may not have thought it necessary to distinguish them as carefully as a Christian or Jewish writer would.<sup>155</sup> Eusebius is the earliest writer to identify Clemens and Domitilla as Christians, even calling them martyrs.<sup>156</sup> As a result of testimony to Christ (τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν μαρτυρίας), according to Eusebius, Domitilla was banished to Pontia. This developed into a tradition that Domitilla, along with two of her slaves, were commemorated with a feast day in the Catholic Church.<sup>157</sup>

Aside from these written traditions, a cemetery in Rome belonging to Flavia Domitilla (*coemeterium Domitillae*) was discovered by de Rossi in the 1860s.<sup>158</sup> Some Christian symbols were discovered, which establishes circumstantial evidence that a few Christians might have lived in her household. This evidence, however, remains inconclusive because the Christian symbols can only be dated confidently to the middle of the second century.<sup>159</sup> A strong

152. Suetonius, *Dom.* 15.1 (Rolfe, LCL).

153. Bell, ‘The Date of John’s Apocalypse’, p. 94; Wilson, ‘The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation’, p. 590. In addition, Bell questions the veracity of the text because it came from an eleventh-century epitome by the Byzantine monk Xiphilinus and a twelfth-century summary by Zonaras.

154. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 7-8.

155. Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 8.

156. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.4. He mistakenly identifies Domitilla as Clemens’s niece. In addition, he relocates her banishment to Pontia instead of Pandateria, thus throwing the reliability of Eusebius’s statements into question.

157. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 115. Jones writes, ‘In the Christian tradition (i.e., the *Acta* of Saints Nereus and Achilleus), were exiled to Terracina, where the servants were beheaded and she was burned to death. All three became official martyrs, with a feast day on 12 May (until 1969, where hers was abolished)’.

158. J.B. de Rossi, ‘Roma sotterranea’, *Bulletino di archeologia cristiana* (1865), pp. 34-40; E.M. Smallwood, ‘Domitian’s Attitude to the Jews and Judaism’, *CPh* 51 (1956), pp. 1-13; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 221 n. 101; Wilson, ‘The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation’, p. 590.

159. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 161. Frend contends that it did indeed belong to her because of the inscription that read *neptis Vespasiani*. However, he faults de Rossi because archaeology at that time was in its infancy. He did not accurately date the catacombs containing the Christian symbols. As



possibility exists that Clemens and Domitilla were Christians,<sup>160</sup> but establishing the belief in a widespread Domitianic persecution based on this evidence is tendentious at best.

The tradition regarding a widespread persecution of Christians stems primarily from Eusebius. Eusebius indicates that Domitian not only unleashed his cruelty against Rome's aristocracy, but 'He was the second to promote persecution against us'.<sup>161</sup> Thus, Domitian represented a second Nero in his actions against Christians.<sup>162</sup> Elsewhere, Eusebius quotes Melito of Sardis who compared Nero and Domitian as two emperors who were persuaded by corrupt advisors to accuse Christians falsely.<sup>163</sup> Tertullian made a similar comparison but then states that Domitian relented from his persecution.<sup>164</sup> Hegesippus, via Eusebius, suggests that Domitian relented from his persecution when he realized that most Christians did not constitute a threat due to their impoverished social status.<sup>165</sup> Although the historicity of this account remains uncertain, the earliest Christian accounts suggests that a persecution did occur under Domitian, but its severity became exaggerated over time.

One may only affirm that Domitian's persecution primarily affected socially privileged believers and that it never reached the intensity or duration of

time went on the catacombs were expanded deeper into the ground so that the 'deepest and most complicated catacombs were thus the latest'. Frend concludes, 'It is now evident that Christian burials in the *Coemeterium Domitillae* do not start until the mid-second century at the earliest'. So Wilson, 'The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation', p. 591.

160. See Paul Keresztes, 'The Jews, the Christians, and Emperor Domitian', *VC* 27 (1973), pp. 10-20; Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (trans. Annabel Bedini; Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), pp. 43-53.

161. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.17 (Lake, LCL).

162. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.17. He calls him 'the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God'.

163. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.9.

164. Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.4.

165. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.20.3-4 (Lake, LCL). He recounts, 'They [the grandsons of Judas] then showed him [Domitian] their hands, adducing as testimony of their labour the hardness of their bodies, and the tough skin which had been embossed on their hands from their incessant work. They were asked concerning the Christ and his kingdom...and explained that it was neither of the world nor earthly, but heavenly and angelic, and it would be at the end of the world, when he would come in glory to judge the living and the dead and to reward every man according to his deeds. At this Domitian did not condemn them at all, but despised them as simple folk, released them, and decreed an end to the persecution against the church'. Interestingly, these were brought before Domitian because they were ethnic Jews (i.e., grandsons of Judas and relatives of Jesus) and some 'heretics' leveled accusations against them (κατηγορήσαι). These *delators*, the so-called 'heretics', may very well have been Jewish, which suggests that antagonism toward Christianity came from Jewish sources.

Nero's persecution.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, the shadow of persecution fell across all believers who knew that they were not exempt from this injustice. Therefore some believers may have experienced 'sudden and repeated calamities' or at least lived under that threat.<sup>167</sup> If this was the situation in Rome, then similar tensions and conflicts also existed in the province of Asia Minor.

#### b. *The Economic Situation of Asia Minor*

Tensions between provincials and Christians in Asia Minor partially stemmed from economic concerns.<sup>168</sup> Under Domitian the provinces, especially Asia Minor, flourished.<sup>169</sup> Thompson summarizes this prosperity in terms of financial and governmental development:

Domitian, like his brother and father before him, built and maintained roads in Asia Minor, established cities in the interior plateau, and created new offices to oversee municipal administration. More specifically, Domitian's reign brought new privileges, a heightened status, and economic prosperity to the cities of the province of Asia. In Asia the cities' prosperity was reflected in the amount of building going on, in the minting of coinage, and in the private gifts and foundations available to support civic endeavors. Domitian's fifteen-year reign from 81 to 96 also continued a trend of imperial control of provincial affairs, as Domitian continued Vespasian's systematization and organization of the provinces, especially with regard to finances. On the whole, this imperial attention under Domitian resulted in better administration of the provinces.<sup>170</sup>

Despite the excessive taxation and incident of the vine edict,<sup>171</sup> Domitian's dealings with the provinces are generally characterized as benevolent.<sup>172</sup>

Money is a magnificent motivator. People in all levels of society have fallen under the allure of the persuasive power for personal gain. Local officials eagerly desired the conferral of senatorial status for themselves or their children 'so long as the emperor was satisfied with their loyalty'.<sup>173</sup> This

166. Bell, 'The Date of John's Apocalypse', p. 96.

167. *1 Clem.* 1.1.

168. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, pp. 24-26; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 94-99; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 351-52; Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), pp. 125-49.

169. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 168. For a detailed review of the Flavian economic policies see M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (ed. P.M. Fraser; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 353-92.

170. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 168. See, however, the uncertainties expressed by Southern, *Domitian*, pp. 57-59.

171. Suetonius, *Dom.* 7.2; 12.2; Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 77-79; Southern, *Domitian*, pp. 58-67.

172. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 110.

173. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 110.

alone could have been a significant source of conflict for Christians in their respective cities. Provincial officials would have sought to demonstrate their unflinching support and devotion to Domitian. Christians would have represented a troubling group of people who resisted the love of money.<sup>174</sup> The noncompliance on the part of Christians to cultural conventions, especially ones involving the worship of the emperor or other pagan gods, might have provoked official actions.<sup>175</sup> Those hostile toward the Christians could have exploited these political, economic, and religious tensions as opportunities to denounce Christians before the magistrates.

On a local level, exclusive faith and dedication to Jesus Christ would have placed believers in a precarious situation in which they might have experienced economic deprivation. Trade guilds, a common feature of Asian civic life, represented a combination of economic, religious, and political allegiance.<sup>176</sup> Most scholars attribute the tensions between the dominant culture and Christians in the local cities in Revelation to the believer's abstention from participation in these guilds.<sup>177</sup> It was a matter of conscience and spiritual purity that caused the Christian's refusal in anything invoking the pagan gods. Economics, then, played a vital role in the ostracism and denunciation of Christians throughout the province of Asia Minor.

174. Pliny recounts how he witnessed a Christian worship meeting where they pledged themselves to Jesus and 'to bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it' (*Ep.* 10.96.7 [Radice, LCL]).

175. Kraybill argues that the imperial cult was integrated into every aspect of Asia's financial dealings. He suggests, 'The cult pervaded many levels of society and presented Christians with practical dilemmas as they engaged in business or social relations. The cult, for example, gradually penetrated shipping lines and merchant guilds of Roman and the East during the first century CE. Since the seven cities of Revelation were in an important industrial and commercial region, Christians there had regular contact with international institutions of finance and trade' (*Imperial Cult and Commerce*, p. 29).

176. Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, pp. 110-17; Philip A. Harland, 'Honours and Worship: Emperors, Imperial Cults and Associations at Ephesus (First to Third Centuries CE)', *SR* 25 (1996), pp. 319-34 (324-27). For a list of trade guilds in Asia Minor see T.R.S. Broughton, 'Asia Minor under the Empire, 27 BC-337 AD', in *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome. IV. Rome and Italy of the Empire* (ed. Tenney Frank; Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1933-40), pp. 503-902 (841-44). See, however, the criticisms of interpreting the *collegia* as a guild in Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven*, pp. 26-27.

177. Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 53-59, 346-49; Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 68, 93; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT, 16; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1970), pp. 27, 37; M.E. Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), pp. 91-97; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 89-90; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 201; Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 111-26; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 132-38.

The book of Revelation exhibits a contrast between faithful believers and the opulence of the prevailing culture.<sup>178</sup> The letters to the seven churches describes this contrast and reverses what constitutes true riches and poverty. Smyrna suffered poverty, but were rich in faith (Rev. 2.9). In contrast, the church in Laodicea enjoyed financial wealth, but in the eyes of Christ they were pitiful, poor, and naked (Rev. 3.17-18). The beast, demanding worship, imposes financial restrictions proscribing the ability to buy or sell without this mark of allegiance (Rev. 13.17-18). Babylon, the mother of all prostitutes, leads the nations astray with her wickedness but the kings of earth exploit her for economic gain (Rev. 17.2; 18.3, 9). In other words, absolute devotion to Christ may result in poverty as the wicked and corrupt bask in the affluence granted them. The Apocalypse, however, depicts Babylon's destruction in which all her wealth and luxuries come to naught to the lament of those who gained from her exploits (Rev. 18.3-19). Subsequently, God vindicates his servants and rewards them with eternal wealth and, in turn, the saints become kings over all the earth.

### *c. The Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*

The imperial cult existed as part of Asia Minor's religious climate ever since the time of Augustus.<sup>179</sup> Pergamum hosted the very first temple dedicated to Augustus and Roma for the entire province of Asia beginning in 29 BCE and remained active well past the reign of Hadrian.<sup>180</sup> The cult functioned politically to express just how grateful and loyal the provinces were to the emperor. Nicolas of Damascus captured this sentiment regarding Augustus and the rise of the imperial cult:

Men gave him this name in view of his claim to honor; and, scattered over islands and continents, through city and tribe, they revere him by building

178. Kraybill suggests, 'John warned Christians to sever or to avoid economic and political ties with Rome because insitutions and structures of the Roman Empire were saturated with unholy allegiance to an emperor who claimed to be divine (or was treated as such)' (*Imperial Cult and Commerce*, p. 17).

179. For more on the rise and history of the imperial cult see John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), pp. 88-98; L. Cerfaux and J. Tondrian, *Le culte des souverains dans la civilisation gréco-romaine* (BTheo, 4; Tournai: Desclée, 1957), pp. 13-96; Donald L. Jones, 'Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult', *ANRW*, II.23.2 (1980), pp. 1034-54; Duncan Fishwick, 'The Development of Provincial Ruler Worship in the Western Roman Empire', *ANRW*, II.16.2 (1978), pp. 1201-53; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West. II. Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire* (EROER, 108; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991); Ralph Martin Novak, *Christianity and the Roman Empire: Background Texts* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), pp. 267-72; Philip A. Harland, 'Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life: Associations in Roman Asia', *ZAG* 17 (2003), pp. 85-107.

180. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, pp. 25, 27.

temples and by sacrificing to him [ναοὺς τε καὶ θυσίας], thus requiring him for his great virtue and acts of kindness toward themselves.<sup>181</sup>

The cult used religious conventions for political purposes.<sup>182</sup> From its inception, the emperor along with the goddess Roma was worshipped and honored for their benevolence toward the provinces. During the reign of Tiberius the cities of Sardis and Smyrna competed for the right to host a second provincial imperial temple in Asia, which was won by Smyrna in 26 CE.<sup>183</sup> Then, during the reign of Domitian, the city of Ephesus erected a third imperial temple in Asia Minor (89/90 CE).<sup>184</sup> Some estimates attest to more than eighty smaller localized imperial temples in over sixty cities in Asia Minor.<sup>185</sup> The cities and their citizens ensured the success of the imperial cult due to their enthusiastic participation in worshipping the divine Caesar.<sup>186</sup> The imperial cult became a foil by which imperial and local officials could gage loyalty to the empire.<sup>187</sup>

The imperial cult, however, was much more than a mere political tool; participants actually worshipped the divine emperor.<sup>188</sup> Inscriptional evidence demonstrates that the emperors Augustus (θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ Καίσαρος)<sup>189</sup> and Gaius (θεὸν Σεβαστόν)<sup>190</sup> were considered gods. The use of the term θεός, although rare, attests to the fact that worshipers esteemed emperors by elevating them to a status high above regular mortals. Often emperors were so closely associated with other patron deities that the worshippers made no

181. Nicolaus of Damascus, *Life of Augustus* (trans. Clayton Morris Hall; Menasha, WI: The Collegiate Press, 1923), p. 3.

182. Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 16, 29-31.

183. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, pp. 36-38. So Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.15, 55-66.

184. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, pp. 44-46.

185. Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 135.

186. Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte, 'To Worship the Beast: The Revelation of John and the Imperial Cult in Asia Minor', in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und römische Herrschaft* (TANZ, 36; Tübingen: A. Francke, 2002), pp. 239-59 (245-48).

187. Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 133. Friesen sees a more nuanced but similar purpose for the imperial cult. He contends that 'imperial cults in Asia were concerned especially with the construction of a cosmology that reinforced Roman imperialism'. See also Fergus Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', in *Le culte des souverains dans l'empire romain* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1973), pp. 157-65.

188. On the religious nature of the imperial cult, see H.W. Pleket, 'An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries', *HTR* 58 (1965), pp. 331-47; Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', pp. 145-75; Harland, 'Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life', pp. 87-90, 93-103. For scholars who marginalize the religious nature of the imperial cult, see Harland, 'Honours and Worship', p. 334 n. 4.

189. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, p. 31, citing *IGR* 4.454.

190. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, p. 39, citing Louis Robert, 'Le culte de Caligula à Milet et la province d'Asie', *Hellenica* 7 (1949), p. 206.

distinction between them.<sup>191</sup> The cult employed all the trappings and paraphernalia of rituals common to any religious practice. Images of the emperor or his family members greeted worshippers in the form of massive statues.<sup>192</sup> Some of these images even included mechanisms to mimic lightening and thunder reinforcing the emperor's identification with Jupiter.<sup>193</sup> Adherents offered prayers to these statues and even carried smaller pocket sized statues of imperial figures.<sup>194</sup> Scholars who downgrade the imperial cult as something purely political have imposed a modern conception of the separation between the secular and sacred. Those existing within a polytheistic culture easily adopted the imperial cult into their pantheon of gods and divine beings.

Domitian's religious devotion is beyond dispute and evidenced by the numerous temples that he constructed or renovated. Domitian, in keeping with the Flavian tradition, ardently worshipped Jupiter and throughout his reign he was portrayed as Jupiter's 'warrior vice-regent'.<sup>195</sup> Domitian worshipped Minerva 'with superstitious veneration' and he even claimed to be her son.<sup>196</sup> Among his architectural accomplishments, Domitian constructed or restored temples to Janus, Minerva, Isis, Jupiter, and Augustus.<sup>197</sup> More importantly, Domitian ensured the veneration of his father and brother with several temples dedicated to the Flavian family.<sup>198</sup> The temple to Domitian in Ephesus represented the pinnacle of the imperial cult's popularity in Asia

191. Harland, 'Honours and Worship', pp. 328-29; Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), p. 146. Contra Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 233. Price argues for a 'clear distinction between human and divine honours', and that the emperor might have been slotted into the intermediate category of hero.

192. Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 170-206. See also Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, p. 50. He notes that archaeologists have discovered the remains of a colossal statue of either Domitian or Titus. Based on the size of the head, left forearm, and left big toe this statue must have towered above worshippers.

193. Steven J. Scherrer, 'Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15', *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 599-610 (605). So Suetonius, *Cal.*, 52.

194. Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions', pp. 147-48. Millar notes that some statues had a legal function.

195. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 99. So J.R. Fears, 'Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology: The Role of Domitian', *ANRW*, 2.17.1 (1981), pp. 78-80 and J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *Continuity and Change in Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 173-74.

196. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, p. 100. So Suetonius, *Dom.* 15.3; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 7.24.

197. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 84-93.

198. These include the Templum Divi Vespasiani, Templum Divorum, and the Templum Gentis Flaviae (Martial, *Epig.* 9.3.12; 9.34.2; Suetonius, *Dom.* 15.2; 17.3). See Jones, *The Emperor Domitian*, pp. 87-88, 91.

Minor during Domitian's reign. Here worshippers would perform obeisance to Domitian and other members of the Flavian family.<sup>199</sup> The colossal statue of Domitian, between 22 and 26 feet tall, was not only awe inspiring but would have been an object of worship.<sup>200</sup> Thus, the second beast (Rev. 13.11-15) that erects an image of the first beast and mandates everyone to worship it may correspond to the high priest of Domitian's imperial cult in Ephesus.<sup>201</sup>

Conflict with the imperial cult in the Apocalypse can hardly be ignored.<sup>202</sup> Allusions to the imperial cult occur often in the latter half of the second vision (Rev. 13.4, 15-16; 14.9-11; 15.2; 16.2; cf. 20.4). John envisions a time when the imperial cult escalates to a point of mandatory participation by all inhabitants of earth.<sup>203</sup> Significantly, the term προσκυνέω ('worship') is used in direct connection with the beast (Rev. 13.4, 8, 12, 15). It was also a term commonly employed in the imperial cult.<sup>204</sup> Thus, Christians abhorred the imperial cult as idolatry, which was doubly evil due to the political ramifications associated with it.<sup>205</sup>

Christians refusing to bow down in worship to the beast incur his wrath and are summarily executed (Rev. 13.15).<sup>206</sup> Believers, however, are exhorted

199. In addition to Domitian, the dedicatory inscription states that the temple is Asia's common temple of the Sebastoi (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ[ωι] τῶν Σεβαστῶν κοινῶι τῆς Ἀσί[ας]). Friesen notes that the use of the plural indicates that this temple did not focus exclusively on a single individual but included prominent members of the Flavian family (*Imperial Cults*, pp. 44-46). See also Kenneth Scott, *The Imperial Cult under the Flavians* (New York: Arno, 1975).

200. Price, *Rituals and Power*, p. 187. For a description of the Flavian temple in Ephesus see Giancarlo Biguzzi, 'Ephesus, its Artemision, its Temple to the Flavian Emperors, and Idolatry in Revelation', *NovT* 40 (1998), pp. 276-90 (283-86).

201. Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 196-98.

202. Klauck, 'Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon', pp. 157-71; David A. deSilva, 'The "Image of the Beast" and the Christians in Asia Minor: Escalation of Sectarian Tension in Revelation 13', *TrinJ* 12 (1991), pp. 185-208; Jan Willem van Henten, 'Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Revelation 12-13', *SBLSP* 33 (1994), pp. 496-515; Borgen, 'Emperor Worship and Persecution', pp. 493-509; Heinz Giesen, *Studien zur Johannesapokalypse* (SBANT, 29; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), pp. 100-213; Henk Jan de Jonge, 'The Apocalypse of John and the Imperial Cult', in *KYKEON: Studies in Honour of H.S. Versnel* (ed. H.F.J. Horstmannshoff; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), pp. 127-41; Peerbolte, 'To Worship the Beast', pp. 239-59; Biguzzi, 'Ephesus', pp. 276-90; Steven J. Friesen, 'Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13', *JBL* 123 (2004), pp. 281-313 (287-311).

203. Cf. DeSilva, 'The "Image of the Beast" and the Christians in Asia Minor', pp. 197-201.

204. Dio Cassius, *Hist.* 59.24.4; Philo, *Legat.* 116; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 741.

205. Jones, 'Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult', p. 1024. Jones states, 'From the perspective of early Christianity, the worst abuse in the Roman Empire was the imperial cult. Honors which should be reserved for God alone could not be bestowed upon men' (so Biguzzi, 'Ephesus', pp. 277-79).

206. Cf. Rev. 6.9, 18.24; 20.4. Contra Millar, 'The Imperial Cult and the Persecutions',

to remain faithful and true to Christ even if it means death (Rev. 2.10, 13; 13.10; 14.12; 17.14). God will vindicate them by judging all those who worshipped the beast (Rev. 14.9, 11; 16.2). The book of Revelation strongly promotes abstinence from all forms of idolatry because God is the only one worthy of worship (Rev. 4.11; 5.2, 4, 9, 12). God receives προσκυνέω ('worship') from all the heavenly hosts (Rev. 4.10; 5.14; 7.11; 11.16; 19.4). Exclusive worship of God constitutes the major theological imperatives for Christians as well as all humanity (Rev. 9.20; 14.7; 15.4; 19.10; 22.9). Believers who resisted and abstained from participation in the imperial cult may have been viewed suspiciously as unfaithful to the benevolent dictator. If a believer was accused by a *delator* and tried for his or her faith, it was more than likely that obeisance to the emperor became a standard foil by which to determine guilt.

#### d. *Persecution and the Lawcourt*

Most opposition to the Christian faith has transpired through the means of the lawcourt.<sup>207</sup> Occasionally believers faced the riotous eruption of mob angst, but usually they faced their accusers while standing trial in a court of law. Jesus stood trial before the Sanhedrin where accusations were made followed by a guilty verdict. The problem they encountered was that they did not retain the jurisdiction for cases of capital punishment, so they needed Roman authorization from Pilate. As procurator, Pilate held the *ius gladii* (lit., 'the right of the sword' or 'supreme jurisdiction') giving him the right to execute criminal offenders. After some debate over jurisdiction, Pilate succumbed to the demands of the Sanhedrin fearing their threats.<sup>208</sup> Thus, Jesus' execution resulted from a legal verdict despite the irony of its injustice.

The book of Acts chronicles the emergence of the Christian church and how it advanced throughout the Roman Empire despite opposition. Once manifest, this opposition overwhelmingly occurred through the means of

pp. 164-65. He concluded that the imperial cult played only a minor role in the persecution of Christians. For reactions to Millar see H.S. Versnel, 'Geef de keizer wat des keizers is en Gode wat Gods is: Een essay over een utopisch conflict', *Lampas* 21 (1988), pp. 233-56; de Jonge, 'The Apocalypse of John and the Imperial Cult', pp. 127-41.

207. For a helpful summary of the Roman legal system see O'Rourke, 'Roman Law and the Early Church', pp. 165-86; Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, *Roman Civilization*. II. *The Empire* (ed. Jacques Barzun; New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 533-51. For an investigation of Jewish jurisdiction in the province of Judea see Hannah M. Cotton, 'Jewish Jurisdiction under Roman Rule: Prolegomena', in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und römische Herrschaft* (TANZ, 36; Tübingen: A. Francke, 2002), pp. 13-28.

208. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, pp. 28, 44-46. For a detailed account of Jesus' trial and Roman law, see pp. 24-47.



jurisprudence.<sup>209</sup> Peter and John were placed on trial when the evidence of the healed beggar validated their message (Acts 4.5-21). Later the Sanhedrin imprisoned all the apostles and placed them on trial in hopes of putting an end to their preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 5.17-42). Yet it was the trial and death sentence rendered against Stephen that precipitated the first systematic persecution of Christians (Acts 6.12-8.1). Christians were sought out and brought to trial before the Sanhedrin. As the official judicial Jewish authority, 'The purpose of bringing Christians to Jerusalem (Acts 22.5) was to have them tried by the Sanhedrin, with a view to passing the condemnatory verdict'.<sup>210</sup> Until his conversion, Saul was one determined to oppose the followers of the Way (Acts 8.1-3; 9.1-2).

Paul's transformation from persecutor to persecuted brings the forensic nature of persecution into sharper clarity. The Jewish leaders that once authorized his accusations against Christians found it necessary to level accusations against him. Throughout his ministry Paul regularly encountered fierce opposition from Jewish leaders (Acts 13.43-50; 14.1-5, 19; 17.5-13; 18.6-16; 21.27; 22.30; 23.12-20; 24.27; 25.7-12; 28.17-19). When Paul was in Corinth the Jewish opposition advanced a unified attack against him making their case before Gallio (Acts 18.12). Gallio, the proconsul, dismissed the case and ejected them from the courtroom because the charges were matters of religious dispute (Acts 18.14-16). In Jerusalem, however, tensions reached a fever pitch culminating in Paul's arrest (Acts 21.27-36). What follows is a detailed chronicle of Paul's trials before the Sanhedrin, Felix, and Festus (Acts 22.30-26.32).<sup>211</sup> Paul knew how the Roman justice system operated and invoked his right as a citizen to have his case heard by the emperor in Rome.<sup>212</sup> Luke's account of Paul's trials elucidates the interconnectedness of persecution and the legal system.

These examples of persecution demonstrate that the earliest opposition to the Christian church came from Jewish leaders who sometimes brought their complaints before Roman magistrates. Since the Roman government had not yet enacted any laws specifically against Christianity, the accusations could be dismissed as a matter of religious dispute.<sup>213</sup> Yet, in some cases, social and political pressure motivated magistrates to award a verdict in favor of the *delators* (Acts 25.9).

209. In Mk 13.9-13, Jesus even predicted the trial of Christians in a court of law as the form of future persecution.

210. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, p. 156.

211. On the historicity and legal veracity of this account see Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, pp. 48-70.

212. On the imperial tribunal in Rome see Hans Julius Wolff, *Roman Law: An Historical Introduction* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), pp. 85-86.

213. T.D. Barnes, 'Legislation against the Christians', *JRS* 58 (1968), pp. 32-50 (33).

This evidence suggests a typical pattern concerning the persecution of Christians. First, conflict develops as a result of Christian faith and practice.<sup>214</sup> Since litigation is the normal means for conflict resolution, the case would be brought before a judge.<sup>215</sup> Second, a *delator* would make an official accusation against the Christian (Acts 24.7). Along with the charge, the accuser would marshal witnesses and any other evidence to impugn his adversary. The defendant, of course, would receive equal opportunity to plead his case and, in some cases, file a countersuit (Acts 24.10).<sup>216</sup> Once the judge has finally heard all the proceedings and evaluated the evidence he would pronounce a guilty or innocent verdict followed by the sentencing. The verdict largely depended on the disposition of the judge along with the nature of the charges. Not all trials resulted in a guilty verdict, but if the magistrate risked social, economic, and political loss a guilty verdict was more likely.<sup>217</sup>

Romans generally despised Christians and applauded the so-called *institutum neronianum*, which legally sanctioned persecution against them.<sup>218</sup> Nero's legislation against Christians was short lived and failed to constitute an ordinary criminal procedure (*ordo iudiciorum*).<sup>219</sup> Cases involving the charge of Christianity fell under the jurisdiction of a *cognitio extraordinaria*.<sup>220</sup> Pliny's correspondence with Trajan that indicates up until that time no official procedures existed for trying Christians.<sup>221</sup> Barnes perceptively summarizes the dilemma and nature of the accusations discussed by Pliny:

Pliny, when trying the Christians before him, had no need to rely on any law which made Christianity a capital crime: indeed he appears not even to have

214. Conflict could arise over religious disputes or even financial loss (Acts 19.26).

215. This would most likely be a proconsul. A proconsul held magisterial and imperial authority in the provinces. The *imperium* of a proconsul comprised jurisdiction of all civil and criminal administration in the provinces. See Berger, *EDRL*, p. 653.

216. It is up to the defendant whether or not to have advocates. See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, p. 49, and cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 4.22.2; 6.31.9-11.

217. The sentences would have also varied ranging from fines to scourging, imprisonment, and death (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, pp. 26-27).

218. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.3; Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.7.8; Keresztes, 'Law and Arbitrariness in the Persecution of the Christians', p. 204; Barnes, 'Legislation against the Christians', pp. 34-35.

219. Wolff, *Roman Law*, pp. 84-85.

220. Berger explains, 'The *cognitio extra ordinem* was based on the idea that the administration of justice is a function of the state, while in the previous forms of proceedings the trial was dominated by the parties under the moderation and supervision of the magistrate. The characteristic feature of the *cognitio extra ordinem* which appeared at the beginning of the Empire, is that the private juror disappears and his place is taken by a public official acting as a delegate of the emperor or of a high functionary' (*EDRL*, p. 394). See also Wolff, *Roman Law*, p. 85.

221. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96.

known there was one. There were three categories of accused: those who confessed to being Christians; those who denied ever being Christians; and those who admitted having been Christians in the past, but said that they were no longer. Pliny was certain how he ought to treat the first two classes. The second he released, while the first he either executed on the spot (the non-citizens) or sent to Rome for punishment (the citizens). The third class, however, a very large one, presented a problem and caused Pliny to write to the emperor. When he executed or despatched to Rome those who confessed, he had no doubts that punishment was merited. But his investigation of the third class revealed that the Christians had committed no illegal acts like robbery or adultery: their only crime was a depraved superstition.<sup>222</sup>

What is significant about this is that although there were no laws against Christianity it was generally assumed that they nevertheless deserved punishment. That Christians were the victims of extreme injustice in the courts is well substantiated.<sup>223</sup>

### 3. *Conclusion*

John wrote to the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia Minor toward the end of the first century during the reign of Emperor Domitian. The dominant culture was awash in Greco-Roman paganism with its plethora of gods, goddesses, and temples. Christians, however, represented a religious group that penetrated every level of society. They were tenacious monotheists who refused to participate in local trade guilds or any other common pagan ritual, including participation in the imperial cult. Christians were generally despised, distrusted, and treated with contempt.<sup>224</sup> Although, they were not systematically hunted down and executed, they still experienced various degrees of ostracism, oppression, and persecution. Because Christians lacked the protection afforded by legal sanctions, denunciation through the law courts became the most effective means to suppress this group.

While the local religious and political climate of each city varied, John, as one who experienced unjust exile, wrote to believers facing similar injustice. Believers might succumb to despair over the triumph of a corrupt justice system that condemns the innocent simply because of their faith. John's vision, however, assuages these fears by depicting the eventual reversal of this miscarriage of justice. This concern for justice and vindication is voiced by the cry of the martyred souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9-11; 16.7). The Apocalypse reveals Jesus wielding ultimate judicial authority and as the one who is worthy to unleash God's wrath upon impenitent humanity (Rev. 1.12-20;

222. Barnes, 'Legislation against the Christians', p. 36.

223. Tertullian, *Apol.* 4.

224. Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

5.4-12).<sup>225</sup> To be sure, Christ will first investigate his churches holding them accountable for their sins but also promising to reward their faithfulness (Rev 2–3). Revelation 6–16 presents a series of judgments verifying humanity’s guilt and the justice of God’s verdicts (Rev. 9.20-21; 16.9-11). In Revelation 17–18, the prostitute Babylon, because of her crimes against the saints, is declared guilty and summarily executed. Christ will return as conquering King of kings and Lord of lords brandishing the sword of God’s justice (Rev. 19.11-15). No matter what fate Christians might have endured under unjust judges, they will one day rule and reign with Christ as judges of the nations (Rev. 20.4).<sup>226</sup>

225. Cf. Jn 5.17-29.

226. DeSilva, ‘Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy’, p. 98.

## Chapter 3

### STRUCTURAL AND LEXICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE LAWSUIT MOTIF IN THE APOCALYPSE

An examination of the lawsuit motif in the book of Revelation begins with the text. Both the structure and language of the text function as the starting point for identifying and locating features associated with a lawsuit motif. The book's structure reflects authorial intent in the organization and presentation of the vision. An investigation of Revelation's macrostructure, then, may illuminate aspects related to the prophetic lawsuit in the Apocalypse. The book's vocabulary, likewise, highlights concepts and themes that play a vital role in the theology of John's vision. This Chapter consists of a structural analysis followed by a semantic analysis of particular juridical terminology.

#### 1. *The Structure of the Book of Revelation*

Attempts at delineating Revelation's macrostructure are as diverse as the imagery found within the book.<sup>1</sup> David Barr correctly observes the tendency of many scholars for discovering the exact structural patterns that they

1. Günther Bornkamm, 'Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannis', *ZNW* 36 (1937), pp. 132-49; Ugo Vanni, *La struttura letteraria dell' Apocalisse* (Aloisiana, 8; Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1971); Charles H. Giblin, 'Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22', *Bib* 55 (1974), pp. 487-504; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation', *CBQ* 39 (1977), pp. 344-66; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR, 9; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 5-55; F. Hann, 'Zum Aufbau der Johannesoffenbarung', in *Kirche und Bibel: Festgabe für Bischof Eduard Schick* (ed. Eduard Schick; München: Paderborn, 1979), pp. 145-54; Jan Lambrecht, 'A Structuration of Revelation 4,1-22, 5', in *L'apocalypse johannique et l'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. Jan Lambrecht; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 77-104; Michelle V. Lee, 'A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation', *NovT* 40 (1998), pp. 164-94; José Adriano Filho, 'The Apocalypse of John as an Account of a Visionary Experience: Notes on the Book's Structure', *JSNT* 25 (2002), pp. 213-34; Felise Tavo, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse: Re-examining a Perennial Problem', *NovT* 47 (2005), pp. 47-68.

expected to find.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, interpreters repeatedly express frustration over the multitude of diverse structural outlines.<sup>3</sup> Pierre Prigent's lament summarizes well their consternation, 'can one reasonably expect today to discover a structure that has remained elusive for so long, after so many attempts that critical review has always ended up rejecting?'<sup>4</sup>

Those looking for a single overarching structuring principle (i.e., a seven-fold series of sevens) stumble over odd passages in the text that simply cannot fit neatly into that pattern no matter how one enumerates the visions. While some scholars highlight one textual pattern clearly evident from a surface reading, those who explore Revelation's intertextuality discover remarkable structural similarities with many OT texts (i.e., Daniel 7 // Revelation 1; 13; 17 or Ezekiel 38–48 // Revelation 20–22). Still others meticulously comb through the text turning up a vast web of interconnections within the vision (i.e., intercalations, chiasmus, and repetitions of words and phrases). This enigmatic nature of Revelation's structure may arise directly from a multi-layered aspect produced by its complex composition. Aside from the fact that the Apocalypse represents a written account of visionary experiences,<sup>5</sup> its structure is further complicated by the presence of at least three structural layers. Perhaps a better grasp of Revelation's macrostructure may be gained by integrating its structural layers into a cohesive structural hierarchy.<sup>6</sup>

2. David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1998), p. 10. See also Barr, 'The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis', *Int* 38 (1984), pp. 39–50; Barr, 'The Apocalypse of John as Oral Enactment', *Int* 40 (1986), pp. 243–56; Barr, 'Using Plot to Discern Structure in John's Apocalypse', in *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 15 (ed. Benjamin Fiore; Buffalo: Canisius College, 1995), pp. 23–33.

3. Collins, *The Combat Myth*, p. 8; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 108; Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 35; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 46; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 21.

4. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 93.

5. For an example of the complexity involved with interpreting visionary communication see Vern S. Poythress, 'Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1–6', *JETS* 36 (1993), pp. 41–54 (41–42). He posits at least four relevant levels of communication: (1) The linguistic level, consisting of the textual record itself. (2) The visionary level, consisting of the visual experience that John had in seeing the beast. (3) The referential level, consisting of the historical reference of the beast and of various particulars in the description. (4) A symbolical level, consisting of the interpretation of what the symbolic imagery actually connotes about its historical referent.

6. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 2. He takes a similar approach dividing his analysis of Revelation's structure by examining (1) the obvious surface structure; (2) features not evident from an oral performance; and (3) the 'hidden meaning' only apparent when studied intently.

Anatomy books often contain illustrations with transparent overlays of the skeletal, circulatory, and muscular systems that demonstrate how each component plays a role in the structure of the human body. Each individual acetate layer reveals features unique to the systems illustrated, but do not represent the complete form of the human body. Likewise, by examining Revelation from a multilayered viewpoint, one may be able to comprehend more clearly the overall structure.

The first layer is the surface or discourse structure designed to guide the reader/auditor through the overall vision. The second is the intertextual layer whereby various OT texts function like a *Vorlage* for portions of John's vision. The third is the intratextual layer that links recurring words and phrases together in a complex cross-reference system. The following investigation will primarily consist of a 'dissection' of the layers by examining the contours and features unique to each of the tripartite layers.

Several reasons exist for affirming the probability of some common ground regarding the macrostructure of John's Apocalypse. First, the book of Revelation represents an intricately woven literary masterpiece exhibiting a cohesive unity. Schüssler Fiorenza rightly posits that 'structural analysis has driven home that the total configuration (*Gestalt*) and composition of a work cannot be derived from its sources or traditions but only from the formal expression and theological intention of the author'.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Barr maintains that most critical studies have sought to divide the book, but 'John's concern was to bind it together'.<sup>8</sup> Bauckham's seminal essay on the structure of Revelation convincingly demonstrates the assiduous and intricate nature of its composition and literary unity.<sup>9</sup> Narrative critical approaches not only presuppose this unity, but they also help demonstrate how Revelation presents a unified literary composition.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of how one construes the sources and stages of the book's composition, few could deny that Revelation represents a literary unity in its present form.<sup>11</sup>

7. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 164.

8. Barr, 'The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation', p. 43.

9. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 3-22.

10. Leonard L. Thompson, 'The Literary Unity of the Book of Revelation', in *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier; Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990), pp. 347-63; James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (BIS, 32; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998); Dal Lee, *The Narrative Asides in the Book of Revelation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002); J. Ramsey Michaels, 'Revelation 1:19 and the Narrative Voices of the Apocalypse', *NTS* 37 (1991), pp. 604-20.

11. Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 7. For an excellent summary of arguments concerning Revelation's literary unity see Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Milton Keynes: Word, 1994), pp. 97-101.

Second, the question surrounding the meaning of a written text is intimately related to genre and structure. Comparative studies between the structures of Revelation with contemporary Jewish and Christian apocalypses have yielded a number of fruitful insights demonstrating the shared use of particular generic literary conventions.<sup>12</sup> What is more, comparisons between the structures of OT prophetic books and Revelation help establish common generic structural features.<sup>13</sup> An awareness of Revelation's structure assists in the exegetical endeavor and is essential for interpreting the book's message as it pertains to the lawsuit motif.<sup>14</sup> The structural shape and contours of Revelation becomes necessary avenues for adjudicating textual meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Third, although no formal consensus has emerged, scholars have successfully identified numerous structural features. Most scholars acknowledge that Revelation has a prologue (Rev. 1.1-8) and an epilogue (Rev. 22.6-21).<sup>16</sup> A clearly pronounced series of sevens feature prominently in the vision (Rev. 2.1-3.22; 6.1-8.1; 8.2-11.19; 15.1-16.21), but debate exists over the extent of the entire structure based on a sevenfold series of seven. John includes materials that appear to interrupt or interlink aspects of the narrative, which have been labeled 'interludes', 'intercalations' (Loenertz, Schüssler Fiorenza), 'interlocking' (Collins, Hall), and 'interweaving' (Bauckham).<sup>17</sup> Another

12. David Hellholm, 'The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John', *Semeia* 36 (1986), pp. 33-54; Aune, 'The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre', pp. 65-96 (70-74).

13. Ralph J. Komer, "'And I Saw..." An Apocalyptic Literary Convention for Structural Identification in the Apocalypse', *NovT* 42 (2000), pp. 160-83; Christopher R. Smith, 'The Structure of the Book of Revelation in Light of Apocalyptic Literary Conventions', *NovT* 36 (1994), pp. 373-93; Domingo Muñoz León, 'La estructura del Apocalipsis de Juan: una aproximación a la luz de la composición del 4 de Esdras y del 2 de Baruc', *EstBib* 43 (1985), pp. 125-72.

14. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 3; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 108; Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis* (SNTSMS, 128; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 61.

15. Mathias Rissi, *Time and History: A Study of the Revelation* (trans. Gordon C. Winsor; Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 1. He 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. The organization of the total work itself discloses a distinctive theological interpretation of history'. So Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 32.

16. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 131; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 21-22; Collins, *Combat Myth*, p. 19; Kempson, *Theology in the Revelation of John*, pp. 95-142; León, 'La estructura', p. 134; Hann, 'Zum Aufbau der Johannesoffenbarung', p. 147; contra Lambrecht, 'A Structuration of Revelation', p. 18, who ends the prologue with Rev. 1.3 and Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 175, who starts the epilogue with Rev. 22.10.

17. R.J. Loenertz, *The Apocalypse of Saint John* (trans. Hilary Carpenter; New York:



commonly acknowledged structural feature is the intended contrast between the harlot city of Babylon (Revelation 17–18) and the bride city of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22). These broad areas of agreement suggest that a plausible case exists for positing a macrostructure that incorporates the various structural features of Revelation without doing damage to its complexity.

The term ‘macrostructure’ refers to the overarching topics of discourse, including themes, plots, and other constituents, which dominate the composition and structure of texts.<sup>18</sup> Macrostructures are the highest levels of semantic and conceptual structures that organize the microstructures of discourse and govern their interpretation.<sup>19</sup> To focus on the macrostructure should not neglect attention to semantic, syntactical and constituent analysis, but attempts to gain a panoramic perspective of the entire discourse. This presupposes the textual unity of a composition in that the smaller sequence of microstructures and sentence clusters form a cohesive whole.<sup>20</sup> In addition to unity and cohesiveness, a macrostructure discloses the discourse features of prominence and peak, which indicate importance and progression within the communicative text.<sup>21</sup> A well-ordered text, evidenced by its macrostructure, is not merely a sequence of sentences, clauses, and paragraphs, but is governed by a triumvirate of unity, prominence, and cohesion.<sup>22</sup>

The approach to the macrostructure of the book of Revelation, advocated here, is an analysis of several structural layers. The use of the term ‘layers’ is not entirely unique when applied to the structure of a text. Linguists speak of the layers of syntactical structure to describe the way that various parts of speech (i.e., verb, noun, clause, sentence, and paragraph) comprise an entire

Sheed & Ward, 1948), pp. xiv-xix; Fiorenza, ‘Composition and Structure’, pp. 360-61; Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 16-19; Mark Seaborn Hall, ‘The Hook Interlocking Structure of Revelation: The Most Important Verses in the Book and How They May Unify its Structure’, *NovT* 44 (2002), pp. 278-96; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 9.

18. Jeffrey T. Reed, ‘“To Timothy or Not?” A Discourse Analysis of 1 Timothy’, in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (JSNTSup, 80; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 93 n. 2.

19. Teun A. van Dijk, *Macrostructures: An Interdisciplinary Study of Global Structures in Discourse, Interaction, and Cognition* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980), p. v; Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2nd edn, 1999), p. 300.

20. Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), pp. 230-34.

21. Robert E. Longacre, *The Grammar of Discourse* (New York: Plenum Press, 2nd edn, 1996), p. 33.

22. Scott L. Kellum, *The Unity of the Farewell Discourse: The Literary Integrity of John 13.31–16.33* (JSNTSup, 256; London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), p. 138.

discourse.<sup>23</sup> Layers, in this sense, refer to the smallest units of linguistic communication working in relation to the discourse unit following a ‘bottom up’ approach. The layers of Revelation’s macrostructure, however, follows a ‘top down’ approach in that it refers to particular structural patterns, intended and unintended, existing at various levels throughout the contexture of the entire book. These structural patterns are detected by smaller sequences of micro-structures, but are interwoven cohesively within the macrostructure. When speaking of the structural layers of the book of Revelation, therefore, it refers broadly to the structural patterns in the text as consistent characteristics evident in the macrostructure.

## 2. *The Surface Layer*<sup>24</sup>

John intends to unveil the message of his vision so that the churches will understand and act accordingly.<sup>25</sup> This is evident with the repeated command ‘to hear’ (Rev. 2.7; 2.11; 2.17; 2.29; 3.6; 3.13; 3.22; 13.9) followed by promised blessings (Rev. 1.3; 14.13; 16.15; 19.9; 20.6; 22.7, 14) for obedience. The infinitive δέξαι occurs in the prologue and epilogue (Rev. 1.1; 22.6) in order to indicate the revelatory purpose of the vision.<sup>26</sup> David Hellholm correctly asserts that the recipients of the Apocalypse were able to detect the surface structure signaled by the presence of delimitation and discourse markers.<sup>27</sup> These markers include, but are not limited to, the repetition of lexemes, certain conjunctions, prepositional phrases, deictic indicators, and shifts in tense or person.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the surface structure of Revelation is something discernable when read or heard. This layer is the

23. Stanley E. Porter, ‘Discourse Analysis and New Testament Studies: An Introductory Survey’, in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (JSNTSup, 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 25.

24. Another possible designation would be ‘discourse layer’.

25. Allen Dwight Callahan, ‘The Language of Apocalypse’, *HTR* 88 (1995), pp. 453-70 (460).

26. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p. 591. So Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 53-54.

27. Hellholm, ‘The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John’, pp. 31-32. He cites E. Güliche and W. Raible, *Linguistische Textmodelle: Grundlagen und Möglichkeiten* (Uni-Taschenbücher, 130; Munich: Fink, 1977); and E. Güliche and W. Raible, ‘Überlegungen zu einer makrostrukturellen Textanalyse’, in *Grammars and Descriptions: Studies in Text Theory and Text Analysis* (ed. Teun Adrianus van Dijk and Janos S. Petöfi; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1977), p. 163.

28. John Beekman *et al.*, *The Semantic Structure of Written Communication* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1981), p. 115; Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, p. 301; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 236-39.

hierarchical chief of all other layers in that it governs the overall macro-structure.<sup>29</sup> The following discussion seeks to highlight some of the main features of the surface structure.

a. *'In the Spirit'*

The most plausible phrase for marking major structural divisions of the Apocalypse is the phrase ἐν πνεύματι.<sup>30</sup> Merrill Tenney noted how every occurrence of this phrase locates the seer in a different location.<sup>31</sup> The phrase indicates a shift of setting from Patmos (Rev. 1.9); to the heavenly throne room (Rev. 4.1-2); into a desert (Rev. 17.3); and finally to a great high mountain (Rev. 21.10). Kempson suggests that this phrase fits all the criteria for employing a phrase as a literary structural device.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the phrase δείξω σοι occurs three times (Rev. 4.1; 17.1; 21.9) in close proximity to ἐν πνεύματι (Rev. 4.2; 17.3; 21.10), suggesting that these two phrases are used in conjunction with each other to signal major structural transitions.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Rev. 4.1-2 also contains one of the three occurrences of the phrase ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι (Rev. 1.1; 4.1; 22.6), which stresses the apocalyptic nature of Rev. 4.1-22.6.<sup>34</sup>

Revelation consists of four separate interrelated visions introduced by the phrase 'in the Spirit'. The four major visions of Revelation are proposed as the major literary divisions. (1) Rev. 1.9-3.22 envisions the glorified Christ who investigates his churches; (2) Rev. 4.1-16.21 portrays the divine court proceedings and the trial of the nations; (3) Rev. 17.1-21.8 describes the sentencing and destruction of Babylon; and (4) Rev. 21.9-22.5 presents the vindication and reward of the saints comprised of the new heaven and new earth (see Table 2).

29. Robert E. Longacre, *An Anatomy of Speech Notions* (Lisse: Peter de Ridder Press, 1976), p. 256.

30. Rev. 1.10; 4.2; 17.3; 21.10. Contra Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 96.

31. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 33, followed by George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 14; Kempson, 'Theology in the Revelation', pp. 103-12; Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 338-39; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 3; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 111; Smith, 'The Structure of the Book of Revelation', pp. 384-92; Filho, 'The Apocalypse of John', p. 215.

32. Kempson, 'Theology in the Revelation', p. 86.

33. Kempson, 'Theology in the Revelation', p. 110.

34. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 152-70; W.C. van Unnik, 'A Formula Describing Prophecy', *NTS* 9 (1962), pp. 86-94 (92-94).

Table 2. *The Four Visions of Revelation as the Structural Outline.*

<i>Vision—'In the Spirit'</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Content</i>
Vision One (Rev. 1.9–3.22)	On Patmos	The glorified Christ who investigates his churches
Vision Two (Rev. 4.1–16.21)	In heaven	The divine court proceedings and the trial of the nations
Vision Three (Rev. 17.1–21.8)	In the desert	The destruction of Babylon and the return of Christ
Vision Four (Rev. 21.9–22.5)	On a mountain	The saints' reward and the renewal of creation

### b. *Series of Sevens*

Perhaps one of the most appealing and popular structural schemes organizes the book into a series of sevens triggered by the three or four septets (Rev. 2.1–3.22; 6.1–8.1; 8.2–11.19; 15.1–16.21).<sup>35</sup> Schemes vary from six,<sup>36</sup> seven,<sup>37</sup> and even eight septets.<sup>38</sup> John demonstrates a proclivity for explicitly arranging his material into groups of sevens. These three or four septets suggest that John might have intended additional septets, although not specifically numbered. Because the number seven carries significant symbolic weight indicating perfection or completion, it logically follows that he would have presented his Apocalypse in a sevenfold structure to convey its completeness (see Table 3).

One problem with using seven as an organizing principle manifests with the distribution of the word *ἐπτά* in the book of Revelation.<sup>39</sup> Bauckham, for example, has observed several additional series of sevens.<sup>40</sup> This evidence does indeed substantiate that the number seven plays a significant role in the Apocalypse, but aside from the explicitly numbered septets, efforts at identifying additional unnumbered series seem contrived.<sup>41</sup> A particularly damaging

35. Andrew E. Steinmann, 'The Tripartite Structure of the Sixth Seal, the Sixth Trumpet, and the Sixth Bowl of John's Apocalypse (Rev. 6.12–7.17; 9.13–11.14; 16.12–16)', *JETS* 35 (1992), pp. 69–79.

36. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, p. 38; Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 46–50.

37. Korner, 'And I Saw', p. 175. He concludes, 'The Apocalypse divides itself up into seven literary sections, six of which are the *vision blocks* which comprise the solitary *vision episode*'.

38. Kenneth Strand, 'The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation', *AUSS* 25 (1987), pp. 401–408; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 115. Beale takes an equivocal stance in which he argues for the viability for either seven or eight visions.

39. Occurring thirty times (Rev. 1.4, 11, 12, 16, 20; 2.1; 3.1; 4.5; 5.1, 5, 6; 6.1; 8.2, 6; 10.3, 4; 11.13; 12.3; 13.1; 15.1, 6, 7, 8; 16.1; 17.1, 3, 7, 9, 11; 21.9).

40. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 7–15, 27, 29–37.

41. Kempson, *Theology in the Revelation*, p. 76; Mazzaferri, *Genre of Revelation*, pp. 348–56.

criticism relates to how the ‘unnumbered visions’ are introduced. Collins, improving upon Farrer, introduced the method of interlocking and the use of καὶ εἶδον as the structural marker (Rev. 13.1, 11; 14.1, 6, 14; 15.1, 2).<sup>42</sup> She does not seem to account for additional occurrences of καὶ εἶδον making eight visions not seven.<sup>43</sup> It seems, therefore, preferable to view the phrase ‘and I saw’ as introducing transitions within a vision sequence.

Table 3. *Major Structural Proposals: A Series of Sevens.*

<i>Collins (Farrer)</i>		<i>Tavo</i>	
1.1-8	Prologue	1.1-3	Prologue
1.9-3.22	Seven Messages	1.4-3.22	Seven Messages
4.1-8.5	Seven Seals	4.1-5.14	= <i>transition</i>
8.2-11.19	Seven Trumpets	6.1-7.17	Seven Seals
12.1-15.4	Seven Unnumbered Vision	8.1-5	= <i>transition</i>
15.1-16.20	Seven Bowls	8.6-11.14	Seven Trumpets
17.1-19.10	Babylon Appendix	11.15-19	= <i>transition</i>
19.11-21.8	Seven Unnumbered Visions	12.1-14.20	Series of Visions I
21.9-22.5	Jerusalem Appendix	15.1-8	= <i>transition</i>
22.6-21	Epilogue	16.1-16	Seven Bowls
		16.17-19.10	= <i>transition</i>
		19.11-20.15	Series of Visions II
		21.1-8	= <i>transitions</i>
		21.9-22.5	New Jerusalem
		22.6-21	Epilogue

### c. ‘And I Saw’

Minor visionary transitions within these four visions are often signed by verbal phrases pertaining to seeing.<sup>44</sup> The phrase καὶ εἶδον,<sup>45</sup> according to Aune, functions in three ways: (1) it introduces a new vision narrative (Rev. 8.2; 10.1; 13.1; 14.1, 6, 14; 15.1; 19.11, 17; 20.1); (2) it introduces a major scene within a continuing vision narrative (Rev. 5.1; 6.1; 8.13; 13.11; 15.2; 19.19; 21.2, 22); and (3) it is used to focus on a new or significant figure or action that occurs within a continuing vision narrative (Rev. 5.2, 6, 11; 6.2, 5,

42. Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 15-16. Farrer (*Rebirth of Images*, p. 45) posited that the words εἶδον or ὤφθη introduced the next vision or series of visions.

43. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 6.

44. The aorist verb ἤκουσα (‘I heard’) occurs frequently (Rev. 1.10; 4.1; 5.11, 13; 6.1, 3, 5, 6, 7; 7.4; 8.13; 9.13, 16; 10.4, 8; 12.10; 14.2, 13; 16.1, 5, 7; 18.4; 19.1, 6; 21.3; 22.8) but does not seem to function like a structural marker.

45. A total of 32 occurrences of just καὶ εἶδον not separated by additional words. Some instances of καὶ followed by εἶδον occur with intervening words in subordinated clauses (Rev. 1.17; 6.9; 10.5; 13.2). Three instances occur of καὶ εἶδον separated by word/words but not directly subordinated (Rev. 1.12; 9.17; 21.22).

8, 12; 7.2; 9.1; 16.13; 17.3, 6).<sup>46</sup> This phrase, then, acts as a marker within a vision signaling a transition and demonstrating a progression within the narrative, but it does not necessarily introduce a new vision episode since the location of the seer does not change.<sup>47</sup> Dal Lee suggests that εἶδον introduces the narrative asides of Revelation.<sup>48</sup> The effect of this narration would be like listening to someone excitedly share what he or she saw while sitting in a theater watching a play or movie. Thus it creates a flow similar to ‘I saw this and then I saw that, oh and then I saw and heard such and such’.

The phrase μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον occurs four times (Rev. 4.1; 7.9; 15.5; 18.1) and seems to function as an indicator of significant transitions within a vision unit.<sup>49</sup> Each occurrence appears in close proximity to doxological sections:

*Rev. 4.1*

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἡνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἡ πρώτη ἦν ἡκούσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλούσης μετ’ ἐμοῦ λέγων· ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δεῖξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα.

*Rev. 7.9*

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν ἑστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου περιβεβλημένους στολὰς λευκάς καὶ φοίνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν,

*Rev. 4.8, 11*

καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα, ἐν καθ’ ἐν αὐτῶν ἔχων ἀνὰ πτέρυγας ἕξ, κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν γέμουσιν ὀφθαλμῶν, καὶ ἀνάπασιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς λέγοντες· ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (see also v. 11).

*Rev. 7.10-11*

καὶ κράζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ. Καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι εἰστήκεισαν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ θεῷ

46. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 338. Cf. Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, p. 106; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 66; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, p. 494; Allo, *Saint Jean*, p. cli; Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images*, pp. 47-49; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 70; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 111; Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 14-16; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), pp. 333-34; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 117 n. 1; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 316-17; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 223.

47. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 223.

48. Lee, *Narrative Asides*, pp. 142-47. See especially his chart of εἶδον and asides on pp. 144-45.

49. Contra Korner, ‘And I Saw’, pp. 171-75. His stimulating article examines the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον as a means for the major division blocks. By comparing Revelation with 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 1 Enoch, and Daniel, he demonstrates that they all share the use of equivalent phrases to ‘and I saw’ as a means for dividing vision episodes. Although, he makes an excellent case he fails to explain why the phrase, ‘in the Spirit’, does not function as the means for dividing the major vision blocks.

## Rev. 15.5

Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ,

## Rev. 15.3-4

καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες· μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοί σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῇ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσῃ τὸ ὄνομά σου. ὅτι μόνος ὁσῖος, ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

## Rev. 18.1

Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα ἑξουσίαν μεγάλην, καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐφωτίσθη ἐκ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.

## Rev. 18.20

Εὐφραίνου ἐπ' αὐτῇ, οὐρανὲ καὶ οἱ ἄγιοι καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ προφῆται, ὅτι ἔκρινεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ κρίμα ὑμῶν ἐξ αὐτῆς.

This suggests that the transitions within the vision and the worship of God correspond to each other.<sup>50</sup> The doxologies provide explication.<sup>51</sup> On one hand, the doxologies affirm the worthiness and justice of God. On the other hand, the content of the worship expresses God's activity in the redemption and vindication of his people. This second aspect is reinforced by the references to the people of God intimately connected to these transitions and doxologies. Therefore, John not only signals the transition with visual indicators, but he also includes his audience in these transitions by inserting material relevant to their worship setting.<sup>52</sup>

## d. Interludes

A pattern of interludes emerges between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals (Rev. 7.1-17) and also between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpet (Rev. 10.1-11.13). Both interludes are introduced by εἶδον signaling a transition of scenes within the vision.<sup>53</sup> These interludes appear in the

50. Rev. 18.20 only calls for worship and is not a doxological section *per se*.

51. For a helpful discussion on the use of the liturgies in the structure of the Apocalypse see Tavo, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse', pp. 63-64. See also G. Delling, 'Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannes-Apokalypse', *NovT* 3 (1959), pp. 103-37 (136); K.P. Jöns, *Das hymnische Evangelium: Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (SNT, 5; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), p. 170.

52. Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 13-50. Pattemore employs Relevance Theory to his study of the Apocalypse as an attempt to demonstrate where and how the audience would have seen themselves in the text.

53. Revelation 7.1 reads, Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον, indicating a more pronounced vision transition. However, Rev. 10.1 only reads, Καὶ εἶδον, but still signals a more pronounced transition by introducing a new character and a change in perspective from a heavenly to an

narrative for theological reasons. They are bound to the preceding sections and provide answers for questions that the audience might be asking. In Rev. 6.9-11, the fifth seal reveals souls in heaven beheaded for their faithful testimony who ask, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' The answer to this question occupies a central focus throughout the entire book.<sup>54</sup> God will vindicate his faithful witnesses. The sixth seal unleashes devastating catastrophes causing the earth's inhabitants to scurry and flee into caves. In their terror they cry out concerning the wrath of God and the Lamb asking, 'Who can stand?' The succeeding narrative (Rev. 7.1-17) answers this question by depicting the protective sealing and salvation of God's people who are standing before the throne.<sup>55</sup>

A similar pattern occurs when the fifth and sixth trumpets unleash horrible and devastating plagues upon the earth's inhabitants. Their response is a failure to repent from their sins.<sup>56</sup> The succeeding narrative (Rev. 10.1-11.13)<sup>57</sup> not only provides justification for the plagues, but also depicts the people of God in their role as prophetic witnesses before the nations.<sup>58</sup> These interludes enable the auditors to identify their role within the narrative as protected and prophetic witnesses.<sup>59</sup> The purpose of the interludes, then, would challenge

earthly vantage point (ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ...καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸν πόδα αὐτοῦ τὸν δεξιὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης, τὸν δὲ εὐώνυμον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). It is also important to note the other occurrences of εἶδον (Rev. 7.2, 9; 10.5) that introduces minor transitions.

54. J.P. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal (Rev 6, 9-11) as Key to the Book of Revelation', *Bib* 74 (1993), pp. 220-43. See also Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 68-116.

55. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 405) offers the best treatment of the relationship between the question in Rev. 6.17 and chap. 7. He first lists the positive arguments favoring a direct relationship: (1) 6.17 and 7.9 are close to each other and both use ἵστημι ('stand'); (2) both refer to people standing before the throne and the Lamb; (3) the picture of the Lamb 'standing' before the throne in 5.6 is closely associated with his resurrection existence, suggesting that those 'standing' before the throne in 7.9 are resurrected saints; and (4) the saints are said to stand 'on the sea of glass' close to the later mention of the 'Lamb' (15.2-3).

56. This is reminiscent of Amos 4 where God sends a series of plagues upon Israel, but they did not repent.

57. C.H. Giblin, 'Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration', *NTS* 30 (1984), pp. 433-59 (434).

58. Aune (*Revelation 6-16*, p. 555), agreeing with Giblin, notes the prophetic emphasis evident within this interlude. He states, 'This connection is part of the *prophecy* motif that occurs in both sections: the verb προφητεύειν occurs in 10.11; 11.3; the noun προφήτης occurs only sporadically elsewhere in Revelation (1.3; 11.18; 16.6; 18.20, 24; 19.10; 22.6, 9)'.

59. Cf. Robert Dalrymple, 'These Are the Ones', *Bib* 86 (2005), pp. 396-406; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 31.



the churches to remain faithful and endure through opposition because God was protecting and using them.

e. *Three Woes*

The last three trumpets are prefaced in Rev. 8.13 with a bird of prey<sup>60</sup> flying in mid-air pronouncing three woes. John introduces this aside with the transition markers Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα.<sup>61</sup> The sounding of the fifth trumpet heralds the first woe (Rev. 9.12). The sixth trumpet results in the completion of the second woe (Rev. 11.14), which also encompasses the second interlude of prophetic witnessing. However, the pattern breaks down with the blowing of the seventh trumpet. Instead of a pronouncement declaring the completion of the third woe, what occurs is an announcement of its soon coming followed by adulation in the heavenly court (Rev. 11.14-18). Because the word οὐαί occurs in Rev. 12.12 after Satan is cast down to earth, some interpret chap. 12 as the third woe.<sup>62</sup> Others suggest that the destruction of Babylon constitutes the third woe because the double οὐαί occur in a threefold refrain (Rev. 18.10, 16, 19).<sup>63</sup> Still other scholars view the third woe as open-ended in that it encompasses all that follows.<sup>64</sup>

The most plausible explanation is to equate the third woe with the eight bowl judgments (Rev. 16.1-17). The pattern is that the breaking of the seventh seal results in the trumpets. The blowing of the seventh trumpet does not appear to unleash a judgment because it is immediately followed by worship, but upon closer inspection it does usher in the bowl judgments.<sup>65</sup> Two observations add credibility to this view. First, rather than including an interlude prior to the seventh bowl, it occurs prior to the introduction of the bowls

60. The word ἀετός could mean either 'eagle' or 'vulture'. Commentators favoring the 'eagle' translation contend that it conveys the sense of strength and swiftness. The image of a 'vulture' conveys the idea of impending doom (cf. Lk. 17.37). Either way the imagery stems from OT metaphors of judgment (Deut. 28.26, 49; Jer. 4.13; 7.33-34; 16.3-4; 19.7; 34.18-20; 48.40; 49.22; Lam. 4.19; Ezek. 17.3; 39.17-20; Hos. 8.1; Hab. 1.8). Cf. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 490. For helpful discussions see Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 359-60; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 189; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 159.

61. Cf. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 489) who suggests that the purpose of this literary division is to 'highlight the greater harshness of the remaining trumpets'. Cf. Lee, *Narrative Asides*, p. 143 n. 345.

62. Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 190. The major appeal to this view, aside from the lexical relationship, is that it corresponds well with the demonic nature of the other two woes.

63. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 524.

64. Lambrecht, 'A Structuration', p. 93. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 12) takes a slightly different view by stating that the 'formula signalling [sic] the sequence of the woes in 11.14 then indicates that the period in which there is opportunity for repentance is rapidly coming to an end as the third and last woe, the final judgment, approaches "soon"'.<sup>65</sup>

65. Filho, 'The Apocalypse of John', pp. 224-25.

(Rev. 12.1–15.1). Second, Rev. 11.19 and Rev. 15.5 form an *inclusio* that connects the blowing of the seventh trumpet to the issuing of the bowl judgments.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, John presents a consistent pattern that the last three trumpets constitutes the last three woes.<sup>67</sup>

#### f. The 'Signs' Narrative

Revelation 12 represents a dramatic shift in the flow of John's vision narrative introduced by the phrase Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὥφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (Rev. 12.1) followed by καὶ ὥφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (Rev. 12.3) and again with Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν (Rev. 15.1).<sup>68</sup> These are only three nominative singular occurrences of σημεῖον that appear in heaven. The other four occurrences are all accusative plural and refer to the miraculous signs performed on earth (Rev. 13.13, 14; 16.14; 19.20).<sup>69</sup> The regular use of σημεῖον in the NT carries the sense of a supernatural sign or miracle that is either true or false.<sup>70</sup> The plural occurrences, in Revelation, all refer to false miracles performed on behalf of the beast. The use of σημεῖον in the Apocalypse most likely parallels the Fourth Gospel in terms of it as a means of pointing to something more significant than just the sign/miracle itself.<sup>71</sup>

That Revelation 12 initiates a 'fresh start' in the vision finds almost universal agreement,<sup>72</sup> but the exact beginning of this new section requires fresh examination. Bauckham maintains that it 'seems an uncharacteristically abrupt fresh start, devoid of literary links with anything that precedes'.<sup>73</sup> Bauckham, however, appears not to notice how Rev. 11.19 constitutes the introduction to the new section of narrative materials instead of Rev. 12.1.<sup>74</sup> One indication that Rev. 11.19 is more than just a conclusion to the trumpets is that all three occurrences of the aorist ὥφθη (Rev. 11.19; 12.1, 3) share a formal and logical

66. See section on the 'signs' narrative for additional explanation.

67. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 187.

68. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 310; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 621; Collins, *Combat Myth*, p. 28.

69. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 679.

70. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 313.

71. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 313. See also Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St John*, pp. 376–77; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 456. For an analysis of the use of σημεῖον in John's Gospel see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Studies on John and Gender* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 38; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 99–116.

72. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 147; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 621; Collins, *Combat Myth*, p. 28; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 310; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St John*, p. 366; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 452; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 234.

73. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 15.

74. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 661–62; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 621; Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, p. 112; E.B. Allo, *Saint Jean, l'Apocalypse* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1921), pp. 152–53.

relationship.<sup>75</sup> As such, Rev. 11.19 interlocks the succeeding material (Rev. 12.1–15.4) with the preceding material related to the prophetic interlude and the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11.1–18).<sup>76</sup>

Another interesting delimiting feature of the ‘signs’ narrative is that it is framed within a literary *inclusio*. The verbal and thematic correlations between Rev. 11.19 and 15.5 constitute this literary *inclusio* as a means to signal the beginning and end of the narrative segment.

*Rev. 11.19*

Καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ  
οὐρανῷ καὶ ὥφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης  
αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐγένοντο  
ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ  
σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη.

*Rev. 15.5*

Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς  
τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

These are the only two passages containing the exact phrase, ἡνοίγη ὁ ναός. Both passages locate this opened temple ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.<sup>77</sup> The temple in heaven appears in Rev. 14.15 and 17, but these references do not present the interior view of the ‘opened temple’ as in Rev. 11.19 and 15.5. Revelation 11.19 includes phenomena associated with the three series of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, and bowls) and with God’s throne in heaven (καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη).<sup>78</sup> These rumblings occur in Rev. 11.19 because it is a structural device linking the judgment of the seven trumpets back to the heavenly courtroom proceedings (Revelation 4–5). A final indication that Rev. 11.19–15.5 forms an *inclusio* is that Rev. 15.6 resumes the series of seven bowl judgments that one would expect at the conclusion of the trumpets; thereby indicating that the signs narrative functions like an interlude intervening between the series of God’s punitive judgments.

As with other interludes, the signs narrative focuses on the role of the people of God concomitant with the sevenfold series of judgments.<sup>79</sup> The first

75. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 679. He also notes that that in early Jewish and Christian literature, ὥφθη is often used to introduce theophanies (Gen. 12.7; 26.2; Exod. 6.3; 16.10; Judg. 6.12; 13.3; Jer. 38.3), angelophanies (Exod. 3.2; Judg. 13.3; Tob. 12.22; Acts 7.2), and prophetic visions (Ezek. 1.4; 2.1; 10.1; Dan. 8.1).

76. Contra Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 313. Cf. Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, pp. 112–15.

77. Interestingly, the phrase ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ is used to denote the inhabitants in heaven (Rev. 5.3, 13; 11.15; 13.6; 19.1, 14), but more frequently it is used as the stage for the action of the vision (Rev. 4.1, 2; 8.1; 11.19; 12.1, 3, 7, 8, 10; 14.17; 15.1, 5) and it occurs prominently in the narrative sections between Rev. 11.19–15.5.

78. Cf. Rev. 4.5; 8.5; 11.19; 16.18. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 8. Bauckham observed how this phrase recurs at these intervals in order to link the series of seven numbered judgments together.

79. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 452.

interlude illustrates the protection and ultimate salvation of the saints (Rev. 7.1-17). The second interlude pictures the role of the saints as God's final prophetic witnesses (Rev. 10.1-11.13). This third interlude (Rev. 12.1-15.4) portrays the saints engaged in a holy war against Satan.<sup>80</sup> Although the precise microstructure of this interlude proves elusive,<sup>81</sup> the narrative falls into three natural divisions of holy war in heaven (Revelation 12), holy war on earth (Revelation 13), and the vindication of the saints followed by the judgment of the wicked (Revelation 14). Amid the scenes of this cosmic spiritual warfare, John makes the purpose of this interlude explicit by interjecting calls for encouragement (Rev. 12.10-12), patient endurance (Rev. 13.9-10), and declaring the ultimate vindication of the saints (Rev. 14.6-13). Finally, Rev. 12.1-15.4 offers the basis and justification for the severity and finality of the judgments rendered upon the inhabitants of the earth.

g. *Two Cities Contrasted: Babylon Destroyed and New Jerusalem Descended*  
The last two visions (Rev. 17.1-21.8 and 21.9-22.5) starkly contrast the prostitute city of Babylon the Great with the holy bride city of the New Jerusalem.<sup>82</sup> In the third vision (Rev. 17.1-21.8) John sees a prostitute named Babylon (Rev. 17.15) who represents Rome (Rev. 17.9) and rules over the nations as well as the kings of the earth (Rev. 17.15, 18). The rest of the vision depicts all the events associated with her judgment including her trial, sentencing, lament (Rev. 18.1-24), the return of Christ (Rev. 19.1-21), his millennial reign (Rev. 20.1-10); and the resurrection followed by the final judgment (Rev. 20.11-15).<sup>83</sup>

80. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 191; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 622-24; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 234. Collins, *The Combat Myth*, famously identifies this section as a Christian redaction of the combat myths drawn from various pagan mythologies. Barr (*Tales of the End*, pp. 101-31) goes as far as to say that Rev. 11.19-22.21 comprises a third narrative unity that he calls 'The War Scroll'.

81. Some see Revelation 12-15 consisting of an unnumbered series of sevens (Farrer, Collins, Beale); others see a chiastic structure (Strand, Shea).

82. Contra Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 18) who divides these passages as Rev. 17.1-19.10 and 21.9-22.9. Cf. David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC, 52c; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 915. Commentators seem to struggle about where to fit 19.1-20.15 into Revelation's structure. At first glance it appears unrelated to the Babylon material. However, since, Rev. 19.1-20.15 deals with the events surrounding the final judgment, it makes sense to view it as a continuation of the destruction of Babylon (Rev. 17.1), but only described in more detail.

83. Revelation 21.1-8 interlocks (dovetails) these two visions together by means of prolepsis. John summarizes the content of the next vision with a series of announcements concerning the arrival of the new age. One striking structural feature within this transition is a parallel between Rev. 21.6 and 16.17 signaled by the repetition of the proclamation, 'it is done'. When the seventh angel pours out the contents of his bowl, a voice from the temple declares γέγονεν. Then at the end of the third vision (Rev. 17.1-21.8) John saw that the old heaven and earth were replaced by the new and accompanied by celebratory

The fourth vision (Rev. 21.9–22.5)<sup>84</sup> portrays the beauty and brilliance of the bride city of the New Jerusalem coming down to earth from heaven. This vision falls into two divisions that first describes the Holy City as an eternal Holy of Holies (Rev. 21.9–27) and then as a new Eden (Rev. 22.1–5).<sup>85</sup> These two final visions, then, serve to contrast the fate of those who worship the beast with the glory awaiting the followers of the Lamb.<sup>86</sup> When viewed together, these two visions form the climax of the prophecy in that it provides the culmination of everything anticipated in John's vision.<sup>87</sup>

John accomplished this contrast through lexical and thematic parallels. Giblin was the first to suggest that the parallels between these two visions should figure prominently in Revelation's structure.<sup>88</sup> A synoptic comparison of these two texts demonstrates the lexical and thematic parallels between them.<sup>89</sup>

announcements. In Rev. 21.6, Jesus declares *γέγοναν*. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 7) insightfully remarks, 'In the first case it refers to the accomplishment of the judgment of evil, completed in the fall of Babylon; in the second place, it refers to the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven. This creates a parallelism between the end of the sequence of judgments (chaps. 6–16), which briefly describes the fall of Babylon, and the end of the section on the transition from Babylon to the New Jerusalem (19.11–21.8), which briefly describes the descent of the New Jerusalem'.

84. Revelation 22.6 marks the beginning of the prologue by alluding to Rev. 1.1. Both Rev. 22.6 and 1.1 refer to the angel sent to John to show him what must soon take place (*δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει*). Additional parallels adduced between Rev. 1.1–3 and 22.6–8 confirm that Rev. 22.6 is not a continuation of the fourth vision.

85. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 604.

86. Rossing, *Choice between Two Cities*, pp. 14–15. She argues that this is part of John's rhetorical strategy to compel his audience to make a choice between which city to belong. See also Eva Maria Räßple, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 67; New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

87. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 5; Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 64; Jan Lanbrecht, 'Final Judgments and Ultimate Blessings: The Climactic Visions of Revelation 20,11–21,8', *Bib* 81 (2000), pp. 262–85; Marko Jauhiainen, '“Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (Rev. 1.1), the Climax of John's Prophecy?', *TynBul* 54 (2003), pp. 99–117.

88. Charles H. Giblin, 'Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16–22', *Bib* 55 (1974), pp. 487–89 (488–89). For earlier scholars who have acknowledged the literary parallels see Swete, Lohmeyer, Allo, Wikenhauser, Lohse, and Rissi. Scholars since Giblin who have incorporated his work into their structural outlines include, Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 4; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 109–10; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1020–21; Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation*, pp. 112–15; Collins, *Combat Myth*, p. 19. Collins, however, could not fit these sections into her series of sevens so she relegated them as appendices.

89. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1020–21. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 4.

## Rev. 17.1-3

Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· δεῦρο, δείξω σοι τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης τῆς καθημένης ἐπὶ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, μεθ' ἧς ἐπόρευσαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς.  
καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με εἰς ἔρμηον ἐν πνεύματι.  
 Καὶ εἶδον γυναῖκα καθήμενην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, γέμον[τα] ὀνόματα βλασφημίας, ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα.

## Rev. 17.4-6

καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἦν περιβεβλημένη πορφυροῦν καὶ κόκκινον καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ καὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ καὶ μαργαρίταις, ἔχουσα ποτήριον χρυσοῦν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτῆς γέμον βδελυγμάτων καὶ τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῆς ὄνομα γεγραμμένον, μυστήριον, Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη, ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν καὶ τῶν βδελυγμάτων τῆς γῆς. καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ. Καὶ ἐθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα.

## Rev. 19.9-10

Καὶ λέγει μοι· γράψον· μακάριοι οἱ εἰς τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου κεκλημένοι.  
καὶ λέγει μοι· οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν. καὶ ἔπεσα ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ προσκυνῆσαι αὐτῷ. καὶ λέγει μοι· ὅρα μὴ· σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ· τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον· ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας.

## Rev. 21.9-11

Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων τῶν ἔχόντων τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τῶν γεμόντων τῶν ἑπτὰ πληγῶν τῶν ἐσχατῶν καὶ ἐλάλησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων· δεῦρο, δείξω σοι τὴν νύμφην τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀρνίου. καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι ἐπὶ ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχουσαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς ὅμοιος λίθῳ τιμιωτάτῳ ὡς λίθῳ ἱάσπιδι κρυσταλλίζοντι.

## Rev. 21.11-27

ἔχουσαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ φωστὴρ αὐτῆς ὅμοιος λίθῳ τιμιωτάτῳ ὡς λίθῳ ἱάσπιδι κρυσταλλίζοντι. ἔχουσα τεῖχος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, ἔχουσα πυλῶνας δώδεκα καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν ἀγγέλους δώδεκα καὶ ὀνόματα ἐπιγεγραμμένα, ἃ ἐστὶν [τὰ ὀνόματα] τῶν δώδεκα φυλῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ· ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς πυλῶνες τρεῖς καὶ ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πυλῶνες τρεῖς καὶ ἀπὸ νότου πυλῶνες τρεῖς καὶ ἀπὸ δυσμῶν πυλῶνες τρεῖς. καὶ τὸ τεῖχος τῆς πόλεως ἔχων θεμελίους δώδεκα καὶ ἐπ' αὐτῶν δώδεκα ὀνόματα τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῦ ἀρνίου.

## Rev. 22.6-7

Καὶ εἶπέν μοι· οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί, καὶ ὁ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν προφητῶν ἀπέστειλεν τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει. καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ. μακάριος ὁ τηρῶν τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου. Κἀγὼ Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀκούων καὶ βλέπων ταῦτα. καὶ ὅτε ἤκουσα καὶ ἔβλεψα, ἔπεσα προσκυνῆσαι ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ποδῶν τοῦ ἀγγέλου τοῦ δεικνύντός μοι ταῦτα. καὶ λέγει μοι· ὅρα μὴ· σύνδουλός σου εἰμι καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου· τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον.

This comparison of Rev. 17.1-3 and 21.9-11 reveals the parallel nature of these two passages through the use of repetitive wording. Each vision is introduced by one of the angels who held the bowls, followed by a transportation

‘in the spirit’ to a new location.<sup>90</sup> John then witnesses two women, one a prostitute and the other a bride, who respectively represent Babylon and the New Jerusalem: John describes their attire, rich in symbolic imagery, in Rev. 17.4-6 (Babylon) and 21.11-27. Finally, the similarities between Rev. 19.9-10 and 22.6-7 suggest an intentional parallel. Both assert the veracity of the vision as the word of God (Rev. 19.9; 22.6). Both contain accounts of John falling down to worship the angel with a strong rebuke to worship God (Rev. 19.10; 22.8-9). At the conclusion of these parallel visions the guiding angel firmly enforces the proper response to the content of these visions as worship of God and God only.

### 3. The Intertextual Layer

A second layer influencing the structure of Revelation is best described as the intertextual layer.<sup>91</sup> The designation of intertextuality denotes, in the broadest sense, all interactions between texts.<sup>92</sup> Among literary critics, intertextuality typically ‘encompasses manifold connections between a text being studied and other texts, or between a text being studied and commonplace phrases or figures from the linguistic or cultural systems in which the text exists’.<sup>93</sup>

#### a. Intertextuality, Allusion, and Revelation’s Structure

Intertextuality was brought to the forefront in biblical studies with the seminar work of Richard Hays in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. Hays maintained that the phenomenon of intertextuality, that is, the imbedding of

90. The fact that these two final visions are guided by one of the angels (Rev. 15.6-8) intimately links them to the preceding visions, especially the bowl septets. It is as if the final two visions offer a close-up and expanded view of the events associated with the blowing of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11.15-19) and the pouring out of the bowl judgments (Rev. 16.1-21). Additional links to the first vision (Rev. 1.9-3.22) may be adduced in the fourth vision as fulfillments of the promises given to those who overcome from among the seven churches. Therefore, these four smaller vision units are interwoven into a grand narrative that forms the entire apocalyptic revelation given to John while on Patmos.

91. Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1-7. Genette prefers the term transtextuality and defines it as, ‘all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts’. This broad definition includes the notion of modeling one text from another.

92. Steven Moyise, ‘Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New’, in *The Old Testament in the New: Essays in Honour of J.L. North* (JSNTSup, 189, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 15-17, 40-41; Robby Waddell, *The Spirit in the Book of Revelation* (JPTSUP, 30; Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2006), pp. 63-66.

93. Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 7.

fragments of an earlier text within a later one, played a significant role in Israel's scriptural tradition.<sup>94</sup>

Intertextuality, broadly conceived, includes more narrowly focused concepts like echo and allusion. Sommer draws a distinction between intertextuality and allusion. He writes:

Intertextuality is concerned with the reader or with the text as a thing independent of its author, while influence and allusion are concerned with the author as well as the text and reader. Intertextuality is synchronic in its approach, influence or allusion diachronic or even historicist. Intertextuality is interested in a very wide range of correspondences among text, influence and allusion with a more narrow set. Intertextuality examines the relations among many texts, while influence and allusion look for specific connections between a limited number of texts.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, intertextuality represents the rubric of all interaction between texts in general, whereas allusion focuses on the specific occurrences of an intentional appropriation of an earlier text for a particular purpose.

Allusion, occurs when an author incorporates the language, imagery, and themes of another text without direct citation. Allusions are distinct from formal citations in that there is no introductory formula. Rather, the phrases are woven into the text and are often less precise in wording.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, allusions still represent an intertextual reference.<sup>97</sup> David Mathewson recommends thinking of allusion 'in terms of what appears to be taking place in the text: the author may allude to the wording of an OT text, or he may allude to a recognizable theme found in one or more texts, or even a form or genre'.<sup>98</sup> Allusions include both verbal and thematic parallels to words and themes.<sup>99</sup> The almost continuous allusion to the OT is not a haphazard use of OT language, but it is a 'pattern of disciplined and deliberate *allusion* to specific Old Testament texts'.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, these intertextual allusions are an imbedded feature throughout the framework of Revelation's structure.

The intertextual structural layer examines the relationship between the structure of OT books and similar patterns evident in the Apocalypse. It

94. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 14.

95. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, p. 8.

96. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', pp. 18-19.

97. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 29.

98. David Mathewson, 'Assessing Old Testament Allusions in the Book of Revelation', *EvQ* 75 (2003), pp. 311-35 (322).

99. Ian Paul, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12', in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J.L. North* (JSNTSup, 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 261.

100. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. x-xi.



corresponds to Beale's category of 'literary prototypes' or 'modeling'.<sup>101</sup> Sometimes, according to Beale, John takes over OT contexts as models to pattern his creative compositions. Such modeling becomes apparent from a thematic structure that is traceable to only one OT context or from a cluster of clear allusions to the same OT context. In this sense, then, patterns of similarity converge between various OT writings and the Apocalypse that may have implications on the book's structure.

The writings of the prophets were not only the *traditionsgeschichtliche Hintergrund* for the composition of John's vision, but he wrote in the same tradition as the prophets.<sup>102</sup> He wrote as a prophet in continuity with the OT prophets.<sup>103</sup> The book of Revelation draws more from the prophetic writings than other NT writings.<sup>104</sup> John would have associated some of his visions with similar OT passages and employed the language of those passages to record what he saw.<sup>105</sup> These similarities represent John's thoughtful reflection and re-reading (*relecture*) of the OT text as he penned his vision.<sup>106</sup> Intertextuality, as it pertains to the structure, only seeks to trace, in broad strokes, the patterns of correspondence shared between OT texts and the Apocalypse.

#### b. *The Influence of the Prophetic Oracles on the Structure of Revelation*

One example of this type of structural modeling surfaces when compared with prophetic oracles commonly classified as lawsuit speeches. Prophetic lawsuit oracles normally follow a threefold pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit; (2) lawsuit against the nations; and (3) the vindication/salvation of the saints. John writing as a prophet presents a vision of final judgment in a manner that conforms to the broad pattern of a prophetic lawsuit. The following brief sketch outlines the similarities between the prophetic lawsuit oracles and the book of Revelation as it will be argued throughout the remainder of this monograph.

Revelation 1.9–3.22 represents the covenant lawsuit addressed to new covenant congregations. Revelation 4.1–16.21 represents God's lawsuit against the nations. God judges the nations based on the charges of idolatry, obduracy, and the shedding of innocent blood. John's entrance into the heavenly courtroom enables him to witness an extended session of the divine

101. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 86. See also Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, pp. 70–71.

102. Beate Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (SBB, 52; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), p. 285.

103. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 19.

104. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 14–16.

105. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 66.

106. André Feuillet, *L'apocalypse: état de la question* (StudNeot, 3; Paris: Desclée, 1963), p. 65; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 85.

council. This session convened for the purpose of installing Christ as the Davidic king and the only one worthy to execute God's judgment on humanity. The series of septets represents a sequence of judgments designed to provoke repentance and also to satisfy the just requirements of God's wrath. These septets function as investigative judgments to determine the guilt of human beings and to enter their response as evidence in the lawsuit against them. The interludes pertain primarily to the saints. The signs narrative (Revelation 12–14) provides the final evidence necessary to convict the nations and render judgment: (1) failure to worship God; (2) idolatry; and (3) the slaughter of the saints.

Finally, Rev. 17.1–21.8 and Rev. 21.9–22.5 depict the final judgment of the world and the complete vindication and salvation of the people of God. The final two visions represent literary parallels that contrast the judgment of the nations with the vindication of the saints. This forms the climatic rendering of justice as the lawsuit against the nation results in a guilty verdict. Babylon is indicted for intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication and rendering unjust verdicts against the saints (Rev. 18.6). Christ returns to earth as the divine warrior king and judge to execute the sentence decreed against Babylon. After the final resurrection of all individual humans, the saints dwell with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem as their eternal reward.

#### 4. *The Intratextual Layer*

In addition to the surface and intertextual layers, one may also detect a number of recurring words, phrases, and themes embedded in the text that binds this vision into a cohesive discourse. George Guthrie remarks, '[a]ny discourse unit has a network of relationships, some grammatical and others lexical, which make that unit of text cohesive'.<sup>107</sup> While a text's cohesiveness is more apparent in smaller discourse units, the cohesion of a composition is evident through several 'cohesion fields' like the repetition of topics, subjects, verb tenses, lexemes, phrases, as well as temporal and local frames of reference.<sup>108</sup> That the book of Revelation contains numerous of examples of these consistent repetitions was noted well by Bauckham when he observed:

A remarkable feature of the composition of Revelation is the way in which very many phrases occur two or three times in the book, often in widely separated passages, and usually in slightly varying form. These repetitions create a

107. George H. Guthrie, 'Cohesion Shifts and Stitches in Philippians', in *Discourse Analysis and Other Topics in Biblical Greek* (JSNTSup, 113; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 36–59 (38–39).

108. See also Robert A. Dooley and Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2001), p. 33.

complex network of textual cross-reference, which helps to create and expand the meaning of any one passage by giving it specific relationships to many other passages. We are dealing here not with the writing habit of an author who saved effort by using phrases more than once, but with a skilfully [*sic*] deployed compositional device.<sup>109</sup>

This introduces the structural feature, concordant with cohesion, which may be identified as the *intratextual layer*. The intratextual layer does not so much determine the structure, but rather derives from the structure as an internal interpretive framework.

Scholars have long observed this phenomenon, but referred to it in terms of recapitulation,<sup>110</sup> chiasms,<sup>111</sup> intercalations,<sup>112</sup> and interweaving.<sup>113</sup> Müller, in his *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation of 4–11*, finds that the repetitions of words in Revelation serve to link passages together as a means for interpretation.<sup>114</sup> Bauckham discovers numerous examples of repeating phrases and suggests that John composed his Apocalypse expecting his readers to use the Jewish exegetical technique of *gezērâ šāwâ* when interpreting it.<sup>115</sup> Thus, woven into the structure of the Apocalypse is an intricate network of cross-references that function as intratextual links. The phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ

109. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 22.

110. Victorinus of Pettau, *Victorini episcopi petavionensis opera* (CSEL, 49; Leipzig: F. Tempsky, 1916), p. 86; Bornkamm, 'Die Komposition', pp. 132–49; Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 32–44; Lambrecht, 'Structuration of Revelation', pp. 80–92; Robert L. Thomas, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse: Recapitulation or Progression?', *MSJ* 4 (1993), pp. 45–66; Charles H. Giblin, 'Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John's Apocalypse', *CBQ* 56 (1994), pp. 81–95; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. xci–xciii; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 116–44.

111. Nils Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), pp. 325–46; Kenneth A. Strand, 'Chiastic Structure and Some Motifs in the Book of Revelation', *AUSS* 16 (1978), pp. 401–408; Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 159–80; William H. Shea, 'Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals', *AUSS* 22 (1984), pp. 249–57; Shea, 'The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20', *AUSS* 23 (1985), pp. 37–54. Michelle V. Lee, 'A Call to Martyrdom: Function as Method and Message in Revelation', *NovT* 40 (1998), pp. 164–94; William H. Shea and Ed Christian, 'The Chiastic Structure of Revelation 12.1–15.4: The Great Controversy Vision', *AUSS* 38 (2000), pp. 269–92; Antoninus King Wai Siew, *The War between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1–14.5* (LNTS, 283; London: T. & T. Clark, 2005).

112. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 175–76.

113. Charles H. Giblin, 'From and before the Throne: Revelation 4:5–6a Integrating the Imagery of Revelation 4–16', *CBQ* 60 (1998), pp. 500–13; Farrer, *Revelation*, pp. 83–86; Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 44–47; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 96.

114. Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11* (AUSDDS, 21; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), pp. 728–50.

115. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 22–29.

καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ demonstrates how this structural feature aides in exegesis and helps establish the presence of a lawsuit motif in the Apocalypse.

The phrase, τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, recurs with some minor variation four times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4) and once with a major variation (Rev. 12.17),<sup>116</sup>

*Rev. 1.2*

ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν.

*Rev. 1.9*

Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης, ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει καὶ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ὑπομονῇ ἐν Ἰησοῦ, ἐγενόμην ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

*Rev. 6.9*

Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον.

*Rev. 12.17*

καὶ ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

*Rev. 20.4*

Καὶ εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἵτινες οὐ προσεκύνησαν τὸ θηρίον οὐδὲ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔλαβον τὸ χάραγμα ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτῶν.

It is used to express the contents of the book (Rev. 1.2), the reason for John's exile (Rev. 1.9), why the souls under the altar were beheaded (Rev. 6.9; 20.4), and the basis for those who incur Satan's wrath (Rev. 12.17).

The fact that this phrase recurs at a number of significant places throughout Revelation indicates that it may be synonymous with the contents of the book.<sup>117</sup> Osborne argues that the phrase 'word of God' has the same force it has in Acts (cf. 4.31; 6.2; 8.14; 11.1), referring to Christian witness and proclamation of the gospel message and, therefore, argues that it constitutes 'a

116. The phrase τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ is used in Rev. 12.17, instead of the phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ as in Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4. See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 709–10. Cf. Rev. 12.17 and 14.12.

117. Comblin, *Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse*, pp. 132–42. See also B. Dehandschutter, 'The Meaning of Witness in the Apocalypse', in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalypticisme dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; BETL, 53; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 283–88 (284); Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 184; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 19; Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, p. 7; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 11; Ladd, *Revelation of John*, p. 23.

semitechnical formula for gospel truth and faithful Christian witness to it'.<sup>118</sup> However, a more plausible understanding for the phrase 'word of God' is to connect it with the OT prophets and prophecy. Aune correctly observes that 'John's use of this phrase suggests that he considers himself a prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets who received the word of God (Hos. 1.1; Joel 1.1; Jer. 1.2, 4, 11)', and '[i]n the LXX the phrase 'word of the Lord' is a stereotypical formula used to categorize a sequence of revelatory experiences (Zech. 1.1; Jon. 1.1; Mic. 1.1; Zeph. 1.1)'.<sup>119</sup> This link to prophecy is further supported in Rev. 19.10 where the 'testimony of Jesus' (ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ) is identified as 'the spirit of prophecy'.

Revelation 19 may provide a key to identifying this much-repeated phrase.<sup>120</sup> The enigmatic expression μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ comes into sharp focus in Rev. 19.10.<sup>121</sup> The precise meaning depends on how one interprets the genitive Ἰησοῦ.<sup>122</sup> Most commentators have typically suggested three options. First, some commentators favor the objective genitive, 'testimony about Jesus', asserting that the testimony in question has Jesus for its object.<sup>123</sup> The strength of the objective genitive is that it seems to best account for the general content of the testimony.<sup>124</sup> The problem with the objective genitive

118. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 56. Both Ladd and Osborne limit the usage in 1.2 to the contents of the book, but in 1.9; 6.9; and 20.4 it refers to the gospel message.

119. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 19.

120. Thomas B. Slater, *Christ and Community: A Socio-Historical Study of the Christology of Revelation* (JSNTSup, 178; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 207–35.

121. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1038. He observes several other parallel or otherwise related phrases: '(1) ἡ μαρτυρία αὐτῶν, 'their testimony' (Rev. 11.7 and 12.11), (2) τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, 'the testimony which they bore' (6.9), (3) τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ, 'the blood of the witnesses to Jesus' (17.6), and (4) τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, 'faith in (or, faithfulness to) Jesus' (Rev. 14.12)'.

122. For a survey of various treatments see Thomas Michael, 'Evangelistic Motifs in the Book of Revelation: A Critical Analysis of the Book of Revelation with Regard to its Various Evangelistic Motifs' (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), pp. 10–18.

123. F.F. Bruce, 'The Spirit in the Apocalypse', in *Christ and the Spirit in the New Testament* (ed. Barnabas Lindars and S.S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 334–44 (338); J.M. Ford, 'For the Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy', *ITQ* 42 (1975), pp. 284–91 (285); Ford, *Revelation*, p. 312; Petros Vassiliadis, 'The Translation of Martyria Iēsou in Revelation', *BT* 36 (1985), pp. 129–34 (131). The NET Bible consistently translates this phrase as an objective genitive, yet never provides reasons why the objective genitive is preferable. A slightly different suggestion is offered by R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, II (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 130, in which he takes the γάρ as explanatory, thus, rendering it 'the testimony to Jesus'.

124. Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1038–39) also favors an objective genitive for this particular instance. He argues that a subjective genitive would presumably refer to Jesus' earthly trial that was characterized by evasive answers or silence. Also, if it is a subjective

is that while it may seem like a viable interpretation, a consistent application of it proves to be too problematic. A strict objective genitive interpretation of this phrase on contextual grounds may limit the fuller nuances in the reading of its other occurrences.

Next, the subjective genitive conveys the meaning 'the testimony borne by Jesus'.<sup>125</sup> As a subjective genitive the testimony is one that Jesus maintained. The testimony that Jesus maintained could either be the contents of the prophecy or it may also include his testimony before Pilate. John 19.1-16 records Jesus' trial before Pilate. Jesus was being tried for blasphemy and treason. Pilate, frustrated by Jesus' silence, said, 'Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?' (Jn 19.10). Jesus responded by informing Pilate that he does not have any more authority than what God has allowed him. When Pilate tried to release Jesus, the Jews reminded him that anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. 'Shall I crucify your king', asked Pilate, to which the Jews replied, 'we have no king but Caesar' (Jn 19.15). In this account, Jesus' testimony of loyalty to God is starkly contrasted with the unfaithfulness of his accusers. This passage provides an appealing background for understanding the 'testimony borne by Jesus' in Revelation, but a strict subjective genitive in all instances also proves contextually difficult.

The final and most probable solution is to regard it as a general genitive, which would read 'the witness by and to Jesus',<sup>126</sup> or 'testimony about Jesus in response to his testimony about God'.<sup>127</sup> Essentially this is a combination of both the objective and subjective sense in which the witness was first borne by Jesus and then transmitted to believers, and the witness they bear is about Jesus.<sup>128</sup> Beale argues that it is best to view the genitive as intentionally ambiguous, making it apply both to Christ and the Christians.<sup>129</sup> To interpret the genitive construction in this manner is preferable for several reasons. One

genitive it would be the only reference to the historical Jesus in Revelation. Finally, the references in 6.9; 11.7; 12.11, and 17.6 depict Christians bearing witness about Christ.

125. Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 194-95; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1974), p. 276; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, p. 729; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 342; Trites, 'Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study', *NovT* 15 (1973), pp. 72-80 (75); Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 311.

126. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 947.

127. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 677.

128. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 947; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 677; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, p. 279; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 249; Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (NCB; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 234; Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 251; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 238; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 194; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St John* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 228.

129. Beale, *Revelation*, pp. 183-84.

reason is because such a specific identification of the genitive can run the risk of missing subtle nuances.<sup>130</sup> Another reason is it offers the best solution to the use of this particular genitival phrase in its various contexts.<sup>131</sup> Finally, this reading takes Jesus' own testimony (Jn 19.6-13) into account and at the same time implies a relevant application for Christians who remain faithful to Christ in the midst of an idolatrous society.

An equally vexing problem is the identification of the testimony of Jesus as τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας ( 'the spirit of prophecy'). Mark W. Wilson instructively argues that the article τῆς, although omitted in the English translations, should be retained so that προφητείας specifically refers to the contents of the Apocalypse rather than prophecy in general. This corresponds to the use of the phrase 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' as a short-hand reference to contents of this vision.<sup>132</sup> Although this phrase specifically denotes the book of Revelation, it also may generally include all Christian prophetic activity.

Among the various possibilities<sup>133</sup> for interpreting this phrase, the best is to view it as something akin to 'the spirit that inspires prophecy', or 'the prophetic Spirit'.<sup>134</sup> Aune notes that this 'phrase occurs with some frequency in the second-and third-century Christian authors as a way of referring to a mode of prophetic inspiration'.<sup>135</sup> Second Temple Judaism placed a heavy

130. Moisés Silva, 'The Truth of the Gospel: Paul's Mission According to Galatians', in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission* (ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), pp. 51-62 (51-52). Silva perceptively argues that 'it is one thing to categorize grammatical uses for pedagogical purposes, and quite another to make such categorizations the basis of exegesis. Again, when there is a difference of opinion about the force of a genitival construction, scholars may find it convenient to identify the various options by using the standard textbook labels, but this practice can easily degenerate into a debate that is not true to the nature of language. What needs to be remembered is that the only *grammatical* consideration in these cases is a rather vague one: the genitive links two nouns as having some sort of relationship'.

131. For other possible examples of general genitives in the NT see Jn 5.42; Rom. 5.5; 2 Cor. 5.14; 2 Thess. 3.5; Rev. 1.1.

132. Mark W. Wilson, 'Revelation 19.10 and Contemporary Interpretation', in *Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams* (ed. Mark W. Wilson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 191-202 (198-201).

133. For a concise survey of suggestions offered by most commentators see Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 677-78.

134. Wilson, 'Revelation 19.10', pp. 198-201; Waddell, *The Spirit in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 35-36.

135. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1039. Cf. Justin, *1 Apol.* 6.2; 13.3; 31.1; *Dial.* 55.1; Athenagoras, *Leg.* 10.4; 18.2; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.13.4; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.* 9.

emphasis on Spirit inspired prophecy and a promised messianic era.<sup>136</sup> As such, it makes this a reference to the Holy Spirit who descended on believers at Pentecost.<sup>137</sup> If this background is operative in Rev. 19.10, then the phrase indicates fulfillment of the promised 'Spirit of prophecy', which was to be a witness to the presence of the messianic era and therefore a witness here to Jesus as the only true object of worship (in contrast to angelic mediators of revelation [19.10a], idols, and the like). This Spirit was to be a possession of all those living in the latter-day community of faith (cf., Joel 2.28-32; Ezek. 39.29).

Revelation 19.10 is paralleled in 22.8-9 in which the angel refusing worship identifies himself as a 'fellow servant' with John and with 'your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God! (22.9)' Bauckham points out that in Revelation the church as a whole fulfills a prophetic role.<sup>138</sup> The command to worship God suggests that '[i]t is connected with the idea of the church's newly revealed role of confronting the idolatry of Rome in a prophetic conflict, like that of Moses with Pharaoh and his magicians or of Elijah with Jezebel and her prophets of Baal, and in the power of the Spirit of prophecy winning the nations to the worship of the true God'.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, the faithful believers function as prophetic witnesses rendering testimony against all idolatry (i.e., the Imperial cult).

The examination of this phrase demonstrates how the intratextual layer of Revelation's structure also enables its interpretation. Interwoven words and phrases function as interpretive keys for the vision. This intratextual layer acts like threads binding the vision together. It also presents themes that play a significant role for the purpose of the vision. In the case of the phrase, 'word of God and testimony of Jesus', the readers are encouraged to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of possible state sanctioned opposition. The believers bear witness both to and against the nations before God. Thus, when God executes his judgments, he is justified in doing so because of the testimony of the saints (Rev. 18.20).

136. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 678; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1039; Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 948) notes: 'the Spirit of prophecy' in *Targ. Isa.* 61.1 (the phrase also occurs in *Targ. Ong.* and *Pal.* to Gen. 41.38; Exod. 35.31; and Num. 27.28 and in *Targ. Pal.* Exod. 33.16; *Num. R.* 15.19).

137. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 276, in which he states that the favorite name for the Holy Spirit in Judaism was 'precisely "the Spirit of Prophecy"'. Cf. Lampe, 'The Testimony of Jesus', p. 255-56.

138. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 120.

139. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 120.



## 5. Lawsuit Motif and the Structure of Revelation

This tripartite aspect of Revelation's structure also yields some observations related to the prophetic lawsuit. Because Revelation was intended for an oral performance one must first look to the surface structure for key elements designed to convey meaning. John's composition also exhibits characteristics commonly associated with forensic rhetoric. Although Revelation differs radically from classical rhetorical compositions, John composed a document that solicits certain behaviors and decisions from the audience through means of persuasion.<sup>140</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza correctly observed and underscored how Revelation displays evidence of the three classic genres (deliberative, epideictic, and forensic) of rhetoric.<sup>141</sup> She contends that all three modes maintain a balance that resists preference of one form over another. Of particular interest, however, are those characteristics corresponding to the forensic arena.

Intrinsic to the purpose of forensic rhetoric is to accuse or defend someone in a legal case, in order to establish the justice or injustice of a certain action.<sup>142</sup> On one hand, John presents his case against sinful humanity with a variety of proofs through his vision of witnesses (Jesus, John, angels, saints, OT Scriptures), polemical caricatures (Dragon, beasts, harlot), and indictments (Rev. 2.4, 14, 20; 9.20-21; 16.6, 10-11; 17.6; 18.6, 20, 23-24; 20.12, 13).<sup>143</sup> On the other, John emphasizes the justness of God's judgments (Rev. 15.3; 16.5, 7; 19.2) and other instances of justice (Rev. 6.10; 19.11; 22.11) that attest to its essential forensic character.<sup>144</sup> Aristotle and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* indicate that fidelity to a deity is inherently a matter of justice.<sup>145</sup> This

140. deSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', pp. 79-80.

141. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 26. For one who argue for a primarily deliberative form see David A. deSilva, 'The Persuasive Strategy of the Apocalypse: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14.6-13', *SBLSP* 37 (1998), pp. 785-806 (787). For epideictic see Loren L. Johns, 'The Lamb in the Rhetorical Program of the Apocalypse of John', *SBLSP* 37 (1998), pp. 762-84 (764). In the end, Schüssler Fiorenza was right when she cautioned, 'To decide for one over and against the other would not enhance but diminish our readings'.

142. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.3.5 (Freese, LCL).

143. Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), p. 132. Robert M. Royalty, 'The Rhetoric of Revelation', *SBLSP* 36 (1997), pp. 596-617 (601 n. 19). Cf. Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 16.

144. deSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', p. 88.

145. Aristotle, *Virt. vit.* 5.2 (Rackham, LCL). Aristotle writes, 'First among the claims of righteousness [δικαίων] are our duties to the gods, then our duties to the spirits, then those to country and parents...' Also following in a similar vein, *Rhet. Her.* 3.3.4 includes within the list of issues regarding justice, 'if we urge that faith ought zealously to be kept; if we say that the laws and customs of the state ought especially to be preserved; if we

aspect appears prominently throughout the Apocalypse for both the saints who are encouraged to remain faithful and for the inhabitants of the earth who are condemned for worshipping the beast instead of God (Rev. 9.20-21; 13.4-15; 14.7-13; 15.4; 16.2; 19.10; 20.4; 22.8-9). In this sense, then, one major purpose of the Apocalypse, gleaned from the surface structure, is to persuade the audience to worship God because he will justly judge the world for its idolatry.

Second, John has apparently modeled his composition, to some extent, from various OT prophetic writings. This stems from his prophetic role in which he faithfully and obediently sought to communicate the vision he received. In doing so, he feasibly drew from the familiar language and imagery of the OT. It stands to reason that John intentionally used various prophetic texts as *Vorlagen* due to the high degree of similarity of symbols, themes, and theology. If John patterned portions of his Apocalypse from the prophetic literature, then a plausible case can be made for identifying how he also utilized the prophetic lawsuit. Revelation is a book ultimately concerned with the question of justice. It follows, therefore, that John would have used a typical prophetic convention when proclaiming God's final judgment.

Finally, the intratextual aspect indicates that various words, phrases, and themes recur throughout the book forming interwoven motifs essential for interpretation. The phrase, 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus', provided a case study illuminating how these intratextual links aid in exegesis. The cumulative evidence suggests that the prophetic lawsuit is one such motif in the Apocalypse. Jesus serves as both a warrior and a judge who will exact the full and final judgment on all those who fail to worship the true creator God (Rev. 19.11). The churches function as representatives of Jesus who is the exemplar faithful witness. The Holy Spirit indwelling believers enables them to serve as prophetic witnesses (Rev. 11.1-6). Believers are called to remain faithful to Jesus with patient endurance as they witness to the nations in the midst of forced idolatry (Rev. 13.1-18).<sup>146</sup> Revelation 14.6-11 declares the fate of all those who worship false gods as one of eternal suffering and

contend alliances and friendships should scrupulously be honoured; if we make it clear that the duty imposed by nature towards parents, gods, and fatherland must be religiously observed...'. According to *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, possibly attributed to Cicero, 'We shall be using the topics of Justice if we say that we ought to pity innocent persons and suppliant...if we explain that we ought to punish the guilty... With these and like topics of Justice we shall demonstrate that an action of which we are sponsors in Assembly or council is just, and by their contraries we shall demonstrate that an action is unjust' ([Cicero,] *Rhet. Her.* 3.3.4 [trans. Harry Caplan; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954]).

146. J.P.M. Sweet, 'Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John', in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G.M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar* (ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 101-17 (104-105).

torment.<sup>147</sup> God, in turn, will vindicate the plea of his star witnesses (Rev. 6.9, 16.7) by ultimately allowing them to sit on thrones as judges over the nations (Rev. 20.4). Therefore, the lawsuit motif in Revelation encompasses the entire scope of the book, beginning and ending with a solemn oath attesting to its veracity (Rev. 1.2; 22.8, 16).<sup>148</sup>

### 6. *Lexical Analysis and the Lawsuit Motif*

The Apocalypse exhibits a vocabulary replete with juridical connotations.<sup>149</sup> Clusters of various word groups related to judgment, righteousness and testimony frame the prophecy within the settings of justice. This forensic vocabulary helps to establish a plausible case for the lawsuit motif. The following lexical analysis will attempt to identify significant words and word groups in order to assess the validity of the forensic connotation within the context of the book of Revelation.

#### a. *Κριν- Word Group*

Words drawn from the κριν- word group convey a distinctively forensic connotation.<sup>150</sup> The masculine noun κρίμα occurs twenty-seven times in the NT and always conveys some nuance of judgment.<sup>151</sup> The feminine form κρίσις, likewise conveying the sense of judgment,<sup>152</sup> occurs forty-seven times in the NT.<sup>153</sup> The noun forms derive from the verb κρίνω typically meaning to

147. DeSilva, 'Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', pp. 90-103.

148. Essentially, Revelation contains three separate trials: (1) believers who face judgment from the world's courts where they must overcome as faithful witnesses; (2) Christ judges his churches (chaps. 2-4); and (3) the nations are placed on trial for failing to worship the Creator God and persecuting his witnesses (4-20).

149. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, pp. 161-62.

150. W. Schneider, 'Κρίμα', *NIDNTT*, II, p. 363. He notes, 'in its numerous compounds (both nouns and vbs.) had come to occupy a major place in legal terminology'. He also examines its usage in the LXX, where it is used to translated three Hebrew words (שפט, דין, and ריב). Cf. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 229.

151. BDAG, p. 567, offers five basic senses of κρίμα all of which are juridical: (1) legal action taken against someone, dispute, lawsuit; (2) content of a deliberative process, decision, decree; (3) action or function of a judge, judging, judgment, authority to judge; (4) legal decision rendered by a judge, judicial verdict; (5) proper recognition of someone's rights, justice; and (6) the judicial decision which consists in the separation of those who are willing to believe from those who are not willing (Jn 9.39).

152. BDAG, p. 569, provides three basic senses: (1) legal process of judgment, judging, judgment; (2) a board of judges, court, specifically a local court; and (3) the administration of what is fair and right in the sense of justice/righteousness.

153. Matthew contains twelve occurrences followed closely by John with eleven. Luke, 2 Peter and Revelation all share four occurrences. Cf. Acts 8.33; 2 Thess. 1.5; 1 Tim. 5.24; Heb. 9.27; 10.27; Jas. 2.13; 5.12; 1 Jn 4.17; Jude 6, 9, 15.

‘judge’, ‘pass judgment’, or ‘decide’.<sup>154</sup> Louw and Nida locate this word group under the semantic domain of ‘courts and legal procedures’.<sup>155</sup> They define it as, ‘to decide a question of legal right or wrong, and thus determine the innocence or guilt of the accused and assign appropriate punishment or retribution—‘to decide a legal question, to act as a judge, making a legal decision, to arrive at a verdict, to try a case’ (in the passive ‘to stand trial’).<sup>156</sup> All three terms occur in the book of Revelation.

The noun forms occur seven times exclusively with a forensic sense. Forms of κρίμα are located in Rev. 17.1; 18.20; 20.4. In Rev. 17.1, one of the angels holding the bowls invites John to witness the judgment of the harlot Babylon, which also serves to introduce the third major vision of the Apocalypse (Rev. 17.3). The phrase, τὸ κρίμα τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης, refers to judgment in the sense of a verdict rendered because the third vision represents an expansion of the final judgment rendered with the sequence of bowls (Rev. 16.1-21).<sup>157</sup> In Rev. 18.20, this sense of finality in judgment is more fully expressed with the command for the saints, apostles and prophets to rejoice at the verdict rendered because justice has been served with the destruction of Babylon. The awkward phrase, ὅτι ἔκρινεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ κρίμα ὑμῶν ἐξ αὐτῆς, constitutes a use of a paronomasia and strongly reflects the biblical principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., ‘the law of retribution’, Deut. 19.16-19).<sup>158</sup> The apparent

154. BDAG, pp. 567-68, offers six senses and most of which are juridical: (1) to make a selection, select, prefer; (2) to pass judgment upon the lives and actions of other people; (3) to make a judgment based on taking various factors into account, judge, think, consider; (4) to come to a conclusion after a cognitive process, reach a decision, decide, propose, intend; (5) to engage in a judicial process, judge, decide, hale before a court, condemn, also hand over or judicial punishment; and (6) to ensure justice for someone, see that justice is done. Acts, 1 Corinthians, Romans, John and Revelation represent the highest occurrences of usage indicating a focus on issues related to justice.

155. LN, p. 56.20.

156. LN, p. 56.20

157. Almost all major English versions including the KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, RSV, NRSV, NLT translate κρίμα as ‘judgment’. The NIV and TNIV are the only versions that offer the more specific nuance of ‘punishment’. Although, contextually κρίμα does carry the connotation of ‘punishment’, it would be better to use either the word ‘judgment’ or even ‘verdict’. Although κρίμα could be translated as ‘lawsuit’ (1 Cor. 6.7) it would be going to far to suggest that sense in Rev. 17.1.

158. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1008. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 917, calls this phrase one of the most difficult phrases in the entire book to translate. He lists six possible interpretive paraphrases: (1) ‘God had judged her and vindicated you’ (Lohmeyer); (2) ‘God has given judgment for [or ‘in favor of’] you against her’ (RSV, GNB, BAGD, Zerwick); (3) ‘in judgment against her he has vindicated your cause’ (NEB); (4) ‘God pronounced on her the judgment she passed on you’ (BAGD, Caird); (5) ‘God executed severe judgment on you against her’; and (6) ‘God judged the judgment on you (which came) from her’. He also suggests that it is an allusion to the LXX of Jer. 27.34 that uses different words to

idea is that God passed judgment on Babylon in a manner equal to the judgment she passed on the saints, apostles, and prophets.<sup>159</sup> Specifically, she is charged with the murder of God's saints which is evidenced by the cup of their blood in her hand (Rev. 17.6; 18.6). The final occurrence of κρίμα refers to those who have been given authority to judge (Rev. 20.4).<sup>160</sup> While the phrase κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς could mean that the recipients were endowed with authority to sit as judges, it seems more likely that they (αὐτοῖς) were the recipients of a favorable verdict.<sup>161</sup> These observations support Strand's contention that in the book of Revelation the word κρίμα is the 'verdict-rendering type of judgment'.<sup>162</sup>

The noun κρίσις occurs in Rev. 14.7; 16.7; 18.10; 19.2. Remarkably, every use of κρίσις in Revelation is uttered in an announcement declaring the appropriateness of God's judgment. In Rev. 14.7, an angel flying in midair proclaiming the eternal gospel warns the inhabitants of the earth to fear God. The causal clause, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ, gives the reason for the imperative φοβήθητε τὸν θεόν ('to fear God').<sup>163</sup> Implicit in the injunctions,

express the same idea (καὶ ὁ λυτρούμενος αὐτοὺς ἰσχυρὸς κύριος παντοκράτωρ ὄνομα αὐτῷ κρίσιν κρινεῖ πρὸς τοὺς ἀντιδίκους αὐτοῦ ὅπως ἐξάρη τὴν γῆν καὶ παροξυνεῖ τοῖς κατοικοῦσι Βαβυλῶνα). The allusion merits consideration because of the allusions to Jeremiah 50 and 51 running throughout Revelation 18.

159. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 229.

160. Interestingly, Rev. 17.6; 18.20; 19.2; 20.4 all connect God's judgment to the cry of vindication from the souls under the heavenly altar in Rev. 6.9-10. Cf. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal', pp. 237-38; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 848.

161. Indicated by the anarthrous use of κρίμα with the passive ἐδόθη. The article is used in Rev. 17.1 and 18.20 as a means denote the actual judgment rendered. It seems that without the article it refers to the quality of the judgment rendered. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 243-45.

162. Strand, 'Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment', pp. 58-59.

163. Interestingly, the concept of an appointed time—an hour of judgment—recurs in a number of places, but especially in the third vision depicting Babylon's final judgment (Rev. 3.10; 9.15; 11.13; 14.7, 15; 18.10, 17, 19). In Rev. 3.10, the church at Philadelphia is promised that if they obey his commands he will keep them from the 'hour of trial' coming upon the inhabitants of the earth (καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης πειράσαι τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). The global lament over the judgment of Babylon declares that the judgment and destruction was complete in an hour as in Rev. 18.10 (ὅτι μὴ ὥρα ἦλθεν ἡ κρίσις σου), 18.17 (ὅτι μὴ ὥρα ἦρημάθη), and 18.19 (ὅτι μὴ ὥρα ἦρημάθη). Is this 'hour of judgment' equivalent to the 'hour of trial/testing' in Rev. 3.10? One plausible connection is that prior to the hour of Babylon's judgment the faithful believers are called to come out and be separate from her so as not to share in her punishment (Rev. 18.4). Caird (*The Revelation of St John*, p. 226) avers that the 'one hour of persecution [Rev 17.12-14] is balanced by the one hour of retribution'. The reference to μὴ ὥρα may echo Dan. 4.17 (ἐν ὥρᾳ μὴ). Cf. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 907.

φοβήθητε and προσκυνήσατε, is the idea that God's judgment is justified because of their failure to fear God and worship him. Furthermore, when the contents of the third bowl destroy the earth's supply of drinking water, an angel declares the justice of God's judgments because the inhabitants of the earth have unjustly slaughtered the saints (Rev. 16.5-6). It is in this context that the souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9-10) utter their approval of God's judgment in Rev. 16.7. The third occurrence of κρίσις is vocalized by the kings of the earth who cry out in terror at the sight of Babylon's destruction (Rev. 18.10). They recognize this as the result of God's juridical decree, indicated by the use of the word κρίσις (Rev. 18.8) when announcing the swiftness and severity of Babylon's punishment.<sup>164</sup> The final occurrence of κρίσις is uttered by the heavenly multitude of redeemed saints who declare that God's judgments are true and just (Rev. 19.2). The legal basis for his judgment (ὅτι ἔκρινεν) of Babylon is that she corrupted the earth with her immorality (ἐφθείρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς) and she unjustly executed his saints (ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς).<sup>165</sup> This evidence contradicts Strand's suggestion that κρίσις describes 'the execution of judgment taking place'.<sup>166</sup> Instead, it seems to denote God's judicial verdict and is typically accompanied with explanations for his verdict—idolatry and persecution of the saints.

The verb κρίνω occurs in various forms in Rev. 6.10; 11.18; 16.5; 18.8, 20; 19.2, 11; 20.12, 13. Musvosvi concludes that Rev. 6.9-11 constitutes a plea to God for legal justice:

It is clear from the foregoing evidence that the martyrs had faced legal charges. The charges were unjust, but the martyrs had been condemned and executed. On earth Satanic power have apparently always won the legal case. But the hope for the trust in a reversal of verdict by the heavenly supreme court still remains...precisely this hope and trust element furnishes the proper setting for the cry of the martyrs in Rev 6.9-10.<sup>167</sup>

Although others may see their plea as merely a cry for vengeance<sup>168</sup> or

164. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 907; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 452; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 646; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 332; Morris, *Revelation*, p. 219. Contra Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 505.

165. Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 664-65. So Paul B. Decock, 'The Symbol of Blood in the Apocalypse of John', *Neot* 38 (2004), p. 157. Decock argues that the symbol of blood is used in three different contexts: the blood of Christ as saving power (Rev. 1.5; 5.9; 7.14; 12.11), the blood of the martyrs as a cry for justice (Rev. 6.10; 16.6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2) and the blood of divine justice (Rev. 6.12; 8.7, 8; 11.6; 14.20; 16.3, 4, 6; 19.13).

166. Strand, 'Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment', pp. 58-59.

167. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, pp. 206-7.

168. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 175; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St John* (MNTC; New York: Harper, 1940), p. 119; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 4; William Klassen,

theodicy,<sup>169</sup> contextually it best to take it as an appeal to God, who is holy and true, for justice through judgment.<sup>170</sup> Specifically, the souls demand justice because their blood was unjustly shed.<sup>171</sup> The first occurrence, in Rev. 6.10, plays a crucial role in the subsequent uses.<sup>172</sup> Osborne avers, ‘This verb functions as a prelude to the rest of the book as God pours out his judgment on “those who dwell on the earth”’.<sup>173</sup> The additional occurrences of κρίνω in Rev. 16.5-7; 18.20; and 19.2 all directly link back to the plea of the souls in Rev. 6.9-10 to indicate God’s answer to their prayers for justice and vindication.<sup>174</sup>

The occurrences of κρίνω not directly linked to Rev. 6.9-10 refers to God’s final judgment of humanity (Rev. 11.18; 18.8; 19.11; 20.12, 13). At the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11.15) the hosts of heaven immediately render praise to God indicating the consummation of his judgment. The twenty-four elders announce that the time has come to judge the dead (κριθῆναι), but conversely it is also time to reward (δοῦναι τὸν μισθόν) the saints. The aorist passive indicative forms of κρίνω in Rev. 20.12 and 13 simply state that at the final judgment everyone who has ever lived will be resurrected to stand trial before God’s throne. The dead are judged according to their deeds and if their names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life they are condemned to the lake of fire, which is the second death. The scenes of Rev. 20.11-15 depict the final judgment announced in Rev. 11.15-19.<sup>175</sup>

‘Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John’, *CBQ* 28 (1966), pp. 300-11; A.Y. Collins, ‘Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation’, in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), pp. 729-49.

169. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 158; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, p. 64; Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 90.

170. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 407-10; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 392; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 275; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 287; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 84-85; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 218; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 48-56; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 84.

171. Cf. LXX Ps. 78.2; Zech. 1.12. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 392-93; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 84.

172. Heil, ‘The Fifth Seal’, pp. 220-22. Cf. André Feuillet, ‘Les martyrs de l’humanité et l’Agneau égorgé: Une interprétation nouvelle de la prière des égorgés en Ap 6,9-11’, *NRT* 99 (1977), pp. 189-207; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 68-116.

173. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 287. See also Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 85. He argues that κρίνω is frequently used of action of God or Christ (Cf. Rev. 11.18; 16.15; 18.8, 20; 19.2; 20.12, 13; 19.11).

174. Cf. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 228-30; Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 431-34; Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 230-31.

175. Revelation 11.15-19 proleptically anticipates the final judgment depicted in Rev. 20.12-13. Although a plausible case can be made for recapitulation because of this announcement, it is not necessarily so. The sounding of the seventh trumpet introduces the

The other two occurrences pertain to the act of judging. In Rev. 18.8, Babylon's judgment will be swift (ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ) and complete (ἐν πυρὶ κατακαυθήσεται), because (ὅτι) God who judges her (ὁ θεὸς ὁ κρίνων) is so mighty. In Rev. 19.11, Jesus is depicted as the faithful and true divine warrior<sup>176</sup> who judges (κρίνει) and wages war (πολεμεῖ) with justice (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ).<sup>177</sup> The idea of Jesus judging with righteousness or justness reflects a theme common in the Psalms that God judges on the basis of his own righteous standards and always does what is right (Pss. 7.11; 9.4, 8; 50.6; 67.4; 72.2; 96.13; 98.9).<sup>178</sup> All of these occurrences of κρίνω refer to either God or Jesus rendering and executing verdicts associated with the final judgment.

#### b. Δικ- Word Group

Words based on the δικ- stem occur with measurable frequency conveying both moral and juridical connotations. These include common words like δίκαιος and δικαιοσύνη, but also less common words like δικαίωμα<sup>179</sup> and ἐδικέω.<sup>180</sup> In addition, the negative terms ἀδικέω<sup>181</sup> and ἀδίκημα<sup>182</sup> are also drawn from the δικ- word group. Interestingly, other significant words related to this word group fail to appear in the Apocalypse.<sup>183</sup> All of these terms

third woe—the bowl septet in Rev. 16.1-21. Chapters 17-18 correspond to the final judgments of Revelation 16 by depicting a more detailed account of Babylon's judgment. Revelation 16.1-19.21 respectively encompasses the third woe (Cf. Rev. 15.1). Thus, the announcement of the consummation in Rev. 11.15-19 is not that chronologically distant from Rev. 20.11-15.

176. Cf. Exod. 15.3-4; Isa. 63.1-3; Zech. 9.9-10; 2 Apoc. Bar. 72.1-6; Pss. Sol. 17.21-29; See also Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, pp. 730-31; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 351; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1048-52; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 488; Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 180-92; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 950. Beale comments that the epithet πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός is only found in 3 Macc 2.11 where it refers to a hope in God's faithfulness, 'namely that in answering Israel's prayer God will defend the honor of his name by judging Israel's persecutors'.

177. The two verbs joined by καί are governed by ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ the adverbial dative of manner that denotes the manner in which the action of the verb is accomplished. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 161.

178. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 680.

179. Cf. Lk. 1.6; Rom. 1.32; 2.26; 5.16, 18; 8.4; Heb. 9.1, 10; Rev. 15.4; 19.8.

180. Cf. Lk. 18.3, 5; Rom. 12.19; 2 Cor. 10.6; Rev. 6.10; 19.2.

181. Cf. Mt. 20.13; Lk. 10.19; Acts 7.24, 26, 27; 25.10, 11; 1 Cor. 6.7, 8; 2 Cor. 7.2, 12; Gal. 4.12; Col. 3.25; Phlm. 1.18; 2 Pet. 2.13; Rev. 2.11; 6.6; 7.2, 3; 9.4, 10, 19; 11.5; 22.11.

182. Cf. Acts 18.14; 24.20; Rev. 18.5.

183. Most important is the absence of the verb δικαίω frequently used by Paul when discussing the concept of justification (Cf. Mt. 11.19; 12.37; Lk. 7.29, 35; 10.29; 16.15; 18.14; Acts 13.38, 39; Rom. 2.13; 3.4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4.2, 5; 5.1, 9; 6.7; 8.30, 33;



occur in the LXX used to translate various Hebrew words related to the concepts of justice and righteousness or the lack thereof.<sup>184</sup> One should not make too strong of a distinction between the moral and juridical connotations because typically what is morally right is also legally right and vice versa.

The word δίκαιος occurs a total of four times as an adjective describing the justness of God's judgments (Rev. 15.3; 16.5, 7; 19.2) and once with δικαιοσύνη to describe moral human actions (Rev. 22.11). BDAG offers two basic senses of δίκαιος: (1) pertaining to being in accordance with high standards of rectitude ('upright', 'just', 'fair'); and (2) that which is obligatory in view of certain requirements of justice ('right', 'fair', 'equitable').<sup>185</sup> In Rev. 15.2-4, John sees a great multitude standing by the sea of glass singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15.3). Their song of praise is offered to God and the Lamb because they have been victorious over the beast with his image and number.<sup>186</sup> They acknowledge God's ways as just and true (δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναί). God's people ascribe both truth and justice to God by pairing these two adjectives as dual attributes affirming God's ways and judgments (Rev. 15.3; 16.7; 19.2). The coupling of these two nouns in Rev. 15.3; 16.7; and 19.2 constitutes and allusion to Deut. 32.4 indicated by the lexical and thematic parallels. These two nouns are also used in the LXX to describe God's ways and judgments in Deut 32.4 (θεός ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις θεός πιστός καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀδικία δίκαιος καὶ ὁσῖος κύριος).<sup>187</sup>

Two occurrences of δίκαιος in Revelation 16.5 and 7 are also a part of a 'judgment doxology' (*Gerichtsdoxologie*) in response to the outpouring of the first three bowls.<sup>188</sup> The purpose of the doxology is to affirm the judgment

1 Cor. 4.4; 6.11; Gal. 2.16, 17; 3.8, 11, 24; 5.4; 1 Tim. 3.16; Tit. 3.7; Jas. 2.21, 24, 25). See also to a lesser extent, δικαίως (Lk. 23.41; 1 Cor. 15.34; 1 Thess. 2.10; Tit. 2.12; 1 Pet. 2.23), ἐκδίκησις (Lk. 18.7, 8; 21.22; Acts 7.24; Rom. 12.19; 2 Cor. 7.11; 2 Thess. 1.8; Heb. 10.30; 1 Pet. 2.14), ἄδικος (Mt. 5.45; Lk. 16.10, 11; 18.11; Acts 24.15; Rom. 3.5; 1 Cor. 6.1, 9; Heb. 6.10; 1 Pet. 3.18; 2 Pet. 2.9), ἀδικία (Lk. 13.27; 16.8, 9; 18.6; Jn 7.18; Acts 1.18; 8.23; Rom. 1.18, 29; 2.8; 3.5; 6.13; 9.14; 1 Cor. 13.6; 2 Cor. 12.13; 2 Thess. 2.10, 12; 2 Tim. 2.19; Heb. 8.12; Jas. 3.6; 2 Pet. 2.13, 15; 1 Jn 1.9; 5.17) and ἀντίδικος (Mt. 5.25; Lk. 12.58; 18.3; 1 Pet. 5.8).

184. H. Seebass, 'δικαιοσύνη', *NIDNTT*, III, p. 354-56. So David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms* (SNTSMS, 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 82-127.

185. BDAG, p. 246-47; LN, p. 88.12.

186. Their victory, however, was accomplished through their refusing to worship the beast and their subsequent martyrdom (cf. Rev. 12.11; 13.1-18). For the Song of Moses see Exod. 15.1-18 and also Deut. 32.4.

187. Cf. LXX Ps. 144.17; Jer. 38.23.

188. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 864. So Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchung zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 56; Hans Dieter Betz, 'The Concept of Apocalyptic in the Theology of the Pannenberg Group', *JTC* 6

rendered by God as both just and appropriate as corresponding to his divine character.<sup>189</sup> The altar (most likely the beheaded souls of Rev. 6.9-10) declares that God's judgments are ἀληθιναί and δίκαιαι because the nations are forced to drink blood (Rev. 16.6-7) invoking the concept of *lex talionis*. This idea is paralleled in Rev. 19.2, when the heavenly multitude praises God for his judgment against Babylon resulting in its destruction. The combined occurrences of δίκαιος in Rev. 15.3; 16.5, 7; and 19.2, therefore, function as an affirmation of God's judgments on the inhabitants of the earth as fully warranted because of their unjust treatment of the saints.

The word δικαιοσύνη only occurs twice in the Apocalypse (Rev. 19.11; 22.11). The term δικαιοσύνη, like δίκαιος, pertains to the concept of justice and righteousness but carries a qualitative nuance in the sense of 'having the quality of righteousness or justice'.<sup>190</sup> This is borne out in Rev. 19.11 depicting Christ coming with righteousness or justice to judge and wage war. The idea of judging with righteousness (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει) stems from Isa. 11.4 where the messianic king (Isa. 11.1) will righteously judge the poor and then destroy the wicked.<sup>191</sup> Specifically, Christ shares God's attributes of being just and fair in all his ways.<sup>192</sup> Beale correctly identifies the balance between the twin ideas of judgment and warfare in a forensic context:

This judicial action by God in the OT is now carried out by the divine Christ on behalf of his people (though Psalm 72 applies it to the 'king's son' and Isa. 11.4 applies it to the messianic 'shoot...from the stem of Jesse')... The allusion to 'making war' refers not to literal battlefield conflict but to a legal battle and judgment, as does the heavenly combat (cf. πολέμω) between the angelic armies in ch. 12 (see on 12.7-9).<sup>193</sup>

Christ will execute his judgment in a manner consistent with his quality of being just and right.

(1969), pp. 192-207. For the OT background and reaction to Betz's thesis for a Hellenistic background see Peter Staples, 'Rev 16.4-6 and its Vindication Formula', *NovT* 14 (Oct 1972), pp. 280-93 (284-93). Cf. A.Y. Collins, 'The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the 'Angel of the Waters' (Rev. 16.4-7)', *CBQ* 39 (1977), pp. 367-81 (369); Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 581.

189. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 402. Cf. Josh. 7.19-21; 2 Chron. 12.6; Ezra 9.15; Neh. 9.33; Pss. 7.11; 9.4; 119.137; Jer. 12.1; 46.28; Dan. 3.27; 9.14; Tob. 3.2; 3 Macc. 2.3.

190. BDAG, pp. 247-48.

191. For messianic interpretation of Isa. 11.4 see *Tg. Isa.* 11.1-6; *Pss. Sol.* 17.24-29; 4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> 8-10; 4 Ezra 3.9-11, 37-38. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1053; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 951; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, pp. 117-22; Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (TU, 85; Berlin: Akademie, 1962), pp. 168-70.

192. Ps. 7.11; Jer. 11.20; Rom. 2.5; 2 Tim. 4.8; 1 Pet. 2.23. Cf. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 1053.

193. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 951.

The occurrence of both δικαιοσύνη and δίκαιος in Rev. 22.11 serves as an exhortation for Christians to continue doing what is right in light of the second coming. In the epilogue, the angel who exhorted John to worship God also tells him not to seal up the book because the end is near (Rev. 22.8-10). He then gives a brief list of imperatives clearly delineating the conduct expected for the wicked and righteous (i.e., ἀδικησάτω, ῥυπανθήτω, ποιησάτω, ἁγιασθήτω). The phrase ὁ δίκαιος δικαιοσύνην ποιησάτω ἐτι is best translated as, 'let the righteous one continue to do what is right'. Osborne comments that δίκαιος typically refers to the 'righteous acts' of God (Rev. 15.3, 4; 16.5, 7; 19.2, 11), but used here it forms the basis and model for the 'righteous deeds' of the saints (Rev. 19.8; 22.11).<sup>194</sup> This prophecy warns of impending judgment on wickedness and at the same time exhorts the saints to hear (Rev. 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6; 13, 22) and remain faithful to Christ despite potential suffering and death (Rev. 13.9-10). Implicit to this imperative is the notion that the righteous will be justified when Christ comes again (Rev. 19.11).

On a related note, the term δικαίωμα refers once to the 'righteous acts' of God (Rev. 15.4) and once to the 'righteous acts' of the saints (Rev. 19.8). This rare term occurs only ten times in the NT and fifteen times in the LXX denoting either a regulation or righteous/just act.<sup>195</sup> Logically it follows that the two senses of this word overlap in that a righteous act is performed in conformity to a righteous regulation. In Rev. 15.4, the multitude of redeemed saints singing the song of Moses and the Lamb declare that all nations will come and worship (ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν) God because his 'righteous acts' have been revealed (ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν). The arrival of the Lamb also occasions the marriage celebration in Rev. 19.7-9. His bride prepares herself by donning the fine bright and clean linen that was given to her to wear.<sup>196</sup> John provides an explanatory key (γάρ) for interpreting the symbolism here when he identifies the fine linen as the 'righteous deeds' of the saints. This is followed up with the fifth of seven macarisms in the book of Revelation blessing those who have an invitation to the wedding.<sup>197</sup> In

194. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 787.

195. For occurrences denoting a regulation see 1 Esd. 8.7; 1 Macc. 1.13, 49; 2.21, 40; 4 Macc. 18.6; *Odes Sol.* 14.36, 37, 38; Sir. 4.17; 32.16; Bar. 2.12; 4.13; Lk. 1.6; Rom. 1.32; 2.26; 8.4; Heb. 9.1, 10; For occurrences ascribing righteous deeds see Bar. 2.17, 19; Rom. 5.16, 18; Rev. 15.4; 19.8. Cf. BDAG, p. 249; LN, p. 33.334.

196. The passive aorist, ἐδόθη, constitutes a divine passive as indicated by its frequent occurrence in Revelation (Rev. 6.2, 4, 8, 11; 7.2; 8.3; 9.1, 3, 5; 11.1, 2; 13.5, 7, 14, 15; 16.8; 19.8; 20.4). With the exception of Rev 11.1, each occurrence of ἐδόθη seems to indicate that God is the one who has given authority, power, etc. This highlights the prominent aspect of God's sovereignty throughout the Book of Revelation.

197. Cf. Rev. 1.3; 14.13; 16.15; 19.9; 20.6; 22.7, 14. So. Oliver Nwachukwu, *Beyond Vengeance and Protest: A Reflection on the Macarisms in Revelation* (Studies in Biblical Literature 71; New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 29-30.

doing so, he communicates the notion that God will vindicate and reward those who follow his model of righteousness.

Another significant term from the  $\delta\iota\kappa$ - word group,  $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ , occurs in Rev. 6.10 and 19.2. The first occurrence (Rev. 6.10) is the second half of the beheaded souls plea for God to judge and avenge them. The second occurs after Babylon is destroyed, when a great heavenly multitude celebrates because God has avenged the blood of his servants (Rev. 19.2). The imagery of Christians demanding vengeance and rejoicing at judgment have caused some scholars to reject these passages as contrary to the ethic of love and forgiveness taught by Jesus.<sup>198</sup> However, as Musvosvi has so convincingly demonstrated, John's use of  $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  is deeply rooted in an ANE concept of justice also evident in the OT.<sup>199</sup> Several OT passages provide background examples of God avenging the blood his people (Ps. 79.10; Hos. 1.4; 4.1, Isa. 26.21; Deut. 32.43). In addition, Beale suggests that Rev. 6.10b reflects Deut. 32.43 (cf. Ps. 79.10). This is highly plausible given the divine warrior imagery in Deut. 32.35-43 and also in Rev. 19.11-19 coupled with the idea of God avenging the innocent blood of his servants.<sup>200</sup> It is also important to note that every other occurrence of  $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  in the NT exhibits a forensic connotation (Lk. 18.3, 5; Rom. 12.19; 2 Cor. 10.6). Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that the outcry for divine justice stems from the experience that no Christian could receive justice from a Roman court.<sup>201</sup> Therefore, in the Apocalypse, the use of  $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  reflects the positive concept of ultimate judgment on those who unjustly shed innocent blood.

The terms  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  and  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\kappa\eta\mu\alpha$  convey the antithetical concepts contrary to righteousness and justice. Almost every occurrence of the verb  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  in Revelation (Rev. 2.11; 6.6; 7.2, 8; 9.4, 10, 19; 11.5; 22.11) has the sense of 'to cause harm' rather than the forensic sense of 'to commit injustice'.<sup>202</sup> One possible exception is its use in Rev. 22.11 where it contrasts doing what is right or just in the sense of doing what is wrong or unjust. The noun  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\kappa\eta\mu\alpha$ , on the other hand, conveys a forensic sense when it is used to denote the

198. Eberhard Vischer, *Die Offenbarung Johannis: eine jüdische Apokalypse in christlicher Bearbeitung* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1886); Walter Bauer, 'Das Gebot der Fienesliebe und die alten Christen', *ZTK* 27 (1917), pp. 37-54 (27); Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, p. 271; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 175; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 119; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 4; Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', pp. 300-11; Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', pp. 729-49.

199. Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, pp. 37-148. Used to translate the Hebrew terms נָקַם, פָּקַד and שָׁפַט.

200. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 393.

201. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 8.

202. For the two basic senses of  $\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  see BDAG, p. 20; LN, p. 20.25.

‘crimes’ Babylon has committed to justify the punishment rendered (Rev. 18.5).<sup>203</sup> Osborne comments that ‘While there is definitely a religious aspect here, in Acts 18.14 and 24.20...it has a legal connotation of criminal activity, and that is probably the primarily thrust here as well’.<sup>204</sup> The forensic connotation for ἀδίκημα is warranted because occurs in the context of a judgment scene (Rev. 18.6-8).

### c. *Μαρτ- Word Group*

The book of Revelation frequently employs words drawn from the *τ μαρτ-* word group with both the verb and noun forms present (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 11.7; 12.11, 17; 19.10; 20.4; 22.16, 18, 20). The noun *μάρτυς* almost always occurs in the NT in the context of (1) a legal or public declaration about something that has happened, and (2) those who are witnesses claim personal knowledge and experience of the facts that they assert. Another important noun, *μαρτυρία*, typically refers to the content of what the witnesses testify and often occurs in a trial setting. Significantly, the greatest distributional weight of *μαρτυρία* is found in the Johannine writings.<sup>205</sup>

The masculine noun, *μάρτυς*, occurs five times in Revelation (Rev. 1.5; 2.13; 3.14; 11.3; 17.6). Twice Jesus is the obvious referent of the substantive noun and both times it is followed by the attributive adjective *ὁ πιστός* (Rev. 1.5; 3.14). Twice the word is used to refer to Christians who are witnesses belonging to Jesus in that both Rev. 2.13 and 11.3 are followed by the possessive genitive *μου*. The final occurrence depicts the harlot who is intoxicated with the blood of the saints who are ‘witnesses belonging to Jesus’ (Rev. 17.6).<sup>206</sup> When used to designate Christians (Rev. 2.13; 11.3; 17.6), they

203. The NIV; NET; and TNIV correctly translate ἀδίκημα as ‘crimes’, which effectively captures the sense of ‘unjust’ or ‘unrighteous’ actions. The NLT translates it as ‘evil deeds’. The KJV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, and ESV all use the ambiguous ‘iniquities’. Cf. BDAG, p. 20; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 447.

204. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 640.

205. It occurs fourteen times in the Gospel, seven times in the Epistles, and nine times in Revelation. For the forensic connotations in the Fourth Gospel see Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, p. 38; Martin Asiedu-Pepurah, *Johannine Sabbath Conflicts as Juridical Controversy* (WUNT, 132; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

206. Translations differ drastically over the interpretation of τῶν μαρτύρων. Both the KJV and the NKJ translated it as ‘with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus’ thereby implying the martyrological sense. The NASB differs only in that it exchanges ‘martyrs’ with ‘witnesses’. All three translate the genitive Ἰησοῦ with a simple ‘of’. The NIV differs significantly by translating the whole phrase as a subjective genitive: ‘the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus’. The NLT takes the phrase τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ and translated it as an appositional or exegetical genitive: ‘God’s holy people who were witnesses for Jesus’. Based on the other uses of *μάρτυς* as referring to Christians it seems best to translate Ἰησοῦ as a possessive genitive (replacing *μου*), thus rendering it ‘the witnesses belonging to Jesus’.

not only belong to Jesus, but each reference involves the witnesses having been executed. In Rev. 2.13, Antipas is called a witness whose faithfulness to Christ resulted in his execution. In Rev. 11.3, the two witnesses are given prophetic power, however, once they finished their testimony (τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν) they are slain and their corpses left in the streets (Rev. 11.7-8).

Another word, μαρτυρία, features prominently among terms drawn from the μαρτ- word group with a total of nine occurrences. Four times it occurs in conjunction with τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ. Μαρτυρία also occurs in two variations of the same phrase in chap. 12. In Rev. 12.11, τὸν λόγον is followed by the genitive phrase τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν ('the word of their testimony'). In Rev. 12.17, the phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ is replaced with τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ ('the commandments of God'). Both references occur in a context of Christians facing death as the objects of Satan's wrath.<sup>207</sup> Chapter twelve contains two intertwined metaphors. A metaphor of war (the Dragon waged war against the saints) and by referring to Satan as 'the accuser' (ὁ κατήγωρ—a legal term used for a prosecutor in a court of law) John also employs a courtroom metaphor.<sup>208</sup> The main point is that, in 12.7-10, victory in war also becomes victory in God's legal courtroom.<sup>209</sup> This mixed metaphor of a holy war and a courtroom accounts for the frequent references to execution accompanying witnessing. Many of the instances, then, of μαρτυρία are followed by persecution (Rev. 1.9; 6.9;<sup>210</sup> 11.7; 12.11; 20.4).

By the late second century the μαρτ- word group almost exclusively denoted martyrdom in the sense of dying for the cause of Christ. The most famous example is *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* that tells the story of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who was burned to death after refusing to revile Christ and worship Caesar when placed on trial before the proconsul.<sup>211</sup> In 19.1, three words from the μαρτ- word group occur with the martyrological sense:

Such was the lot of the blessed Polycarp, who though he was, together with those from Philadelphia, the twelfth martyr [μαρτυρήσας] in Smyrna, is alone especially remembered by all, so that he is spoken of in every place, by the heathen. He was not only a famous teacher, but also a notable martyr [μάρτυς],

207. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 663) views both the two witnesses and the women (with her offspring) as representative of the church both in a corporate and individual sense. In addition he connects these references to the group of martyred souls underneath the altar in 6.9.

208. Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 474-75.

209. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 475-76.

210. Much debate revolves around the significance of the sacrificial implications. Therefore, in this instance one may find a similarity with the use of the μαρτ- word group in 2 Macc. 2.37; 6.22. See also Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 405-407.

211. 'The Martyrdom of Polycarp', in *The Apostolic Fathers*, II (trans. Kirsopp Lake; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1913), pp. 313-34.

whose martyrdom [τὸ μαρτύριον] all desire to imitate, for it followed the Gospel of Christ.

In addition, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* reveals a martyrological usage common by the mid-second century in the writings of Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), Irenaeus (c. 140–202), and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215).<sup>212</sup> Based on early church usage coupled with the close association between witness and execution in Revelation, some have subsequently argued that a martyrological connotation is intended in Revelation.<sup>213</sup> One translator concluded that every occurrence of μαρτυρία ‘has a clear martyrological nuance’ and that it ‘is thus in the final stage of becoming a technical term’, with the sense of martyrdom.<sup>214</sup>

To read the martyrological sense into the use of the word in Revelation is semantically anachronistic and therefore inappropriate. Many major commentators reject the use of μάρτυς in the technical sense of a martyr.<sup>215</sup> Several scholarly treatments also argue against the martyrological concept in Revelation.<sup>216</sup> Trites presents the most convincing and cogent argument based on his semantic study of every occurrence of the μαρτ- word group. He identifies five distinct diachronic stages in the semantic development of μάρτυς with the fifth stage referring absolutely to martyrdom.<sup>217</sup> Most significant is the

212. G.W.H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 828–33.

213. Vassiliadis, ‘The Translation of Martyria Iēsou in Revelation’, pp. 132–33; T.W. Manson, ‘Martyrs and Martyrdom’, *BJRL* 39 (1956–57), pp. 463–84 (464); Ernst Lohmeyer, ‘Die Idee des Martyriums im Judentum und Urchristentum’, *ZST* 5 (1928), 232–49; Norbert Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer: Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie* (SANT, 5; Munich: Kösel, 1961); Akira Satake, *Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannesapokalypse* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), pp. 97–119. Tentatively Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 47; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 37–38; Peters, *The Mandate of the Church*, pp. 77–118.

214. Vassiliadis, ‘The Translation of Martyria Iēsou in Revelation’, p. 133. See also Ellingworth, ‘The Marturia Debate’, pp. 138–39; Ernst Günther, ‘Zeuge und Märtyrer’, *ZNW* 47 (1956), pp. 145–61.

215. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 190; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 62; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 35; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 374; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 70.

216. Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse’, pp. 72–80; A.A. Trites, ‘Μάρτυς, μαρτυρέω’, *NIDNTT*, III, p. 1038–50; H. Strathmann, ‘Μάρτυς, μαρτυρέω’, *TDNT*, IV, p. 474–514; Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 306–310; Dehandschutter, ‘The Meaning of Witness in the Apocalypse’, pp. 283–88; Mazzaferri, ‘Martyria Iēsou Revisited’, pp. 114–22; Paul Ellingworth, ‘The Marturia Debate’, *BT* 41 (1990), pp. 138–39.

217. Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse’, pp. 72–73. (1) Originally, it meant a witness in a court of law with no expectation of death. (2) Then it came to mean a man who testified to his faith in a law court and suffered death as the penalty for his witness. (3) Next, death is regarded as part of the witness. (4) It becomes equivalent to

observation that the execution is always subsequent to the witness as a penalty. One should separate death from the actual testimony of the witness (Rev. 1.9; 2.13; 6.9; 11.7; 12.11; 20.4).<sup>218</sup> Trites consistently maintains the juridical context and connotation of these terms. This indicates that metaphors ‘drawn from the lawcourt are never far from the author’s mind’.<sup>219</sup> Witherington concludes ‘the use of legal language helps set the forensic rhetorical tone from the outset. It is going to be a document about faithful witnesses under pressure and prospect of death, and so a document about justice and vindication of those mistreated’.<sup>220</sup> Not all persecution that the believers faced resulted in execution.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, a martyrological understanding should be soundly discarded.<sup>222</sup>

In addition to the noun forms, the verb μαρτυρέω only occurs at the beginning and end of the book (Rev. 1.2; 22.16, 18, 20), which functions as a solemn oath to ‘tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth’. In Rev. 1.2, the verb ἐμαρτύρησεν is coupled with the phrase ‘the word of God and the testimony of Jesus’, and clarified by the relative clause ‘everything he saw’ (ὅσα εἶδεν). The relative clause limits the identification of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus to the contents of the vision that is recorded in the rest of the book.<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, this verse places John within the chain of command by which he received this prophecy: (1) God gave the revelation to Jesus; (2) Christ is the agent of the revelation; (3) the revelation is given to his angel and to the prophets (John); and (4) the prophet gives the message of revelation to the churches.<sup>224</sup> Revelation 22.16, 18, 20 reasserts that ultimately

‘martyr’. Here the idea of death is uppermost, though the idea of witness is not entirely lacking. (5) The idea of witness, disappears, and the words μάρτυς, μαρτύριον, μαρτυρία, and μαρτυρεῖν are used absolutely to refer to martyrdom.

218. Trites, ‘Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse’, p. 76.

219. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, p. 162.

220. Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 67. Cf. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 73.

221. For example, John was merely in exile because ‘of the word of God and testimony of Jesus’ rather than martyred. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 391; deSilva, ‘Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy’, p. 82, see also n. 9; Sweet, ‘Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus’, p. 106.

222. However, one can still label those who die for Christ as martyrs, but the concept of bearing witness is not martyrological in Revelation.

223. Virtually all commentators agree that this phrase refers to the contents of the book. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 184; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 56; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 19; Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 66; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 7; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 3; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, p. 66; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 11; Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 23.

224. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 183. So Boring, *Revelation*, pp. 64–65; Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 294.



Jesus through his angel and through John is the one who is testifying. Beale aptly notes the legal nuances implicit with the threefold occurrences of μαρτυρέω. He writes, 'The forensic sense of 'testify' is brought out clearly in 22.18-19, where the penalty for disobeying the testimony is stated'.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, the impact of μαρτυρέω at both the beginning and end of the book, which may be an *inclusio*, is to attest to its truthfulness.<sup>226</sup>

#### d. Lexical Clusters Related to Juridical Themes

The vocabulary of the Apocalypse is saturated with terms and images that cumulatively convey themes associated with justice, judgment, and sovereignty. The theme of justice includes concepts related to truth, investigation, rewarding the righteous, and punishing the wicked. Other components related to judgment include, evidence for guilt as well as terms related to the punishment inflicted. Ultimately, the book of Revelation asserts the sovereignty of God over all creation as both king and judge. The combined effect of all these concepts adds plausibility to the existence of a lawsuit motif in John's Apocalypse.

Terms related to the concept of justice abound throughout the book of Revelation. The concepts of truth and truthfulness are essential to justice and, consequently, both God and the contents of the Book are repeatedly described as true.<sup>227</sup> Words related to searching (Rev. 2.23), finding (Rev. 2.2; 3.2; 5.4; 14.5; 18.24; 20.15), examining (Rev. 2.2, 9, 13, 19; 3.1, 8, 15) and testing (Rev. 2.2, 10; 3.10) hint of juridical investigation.<sup>228</sup> This is also evident with courtroom-type language such as 'confess' (Rev. 3.5), 'not deny' (Rev. 2.13; 3.8), 'convict' (Rev. 3.19), and 'swear' (Rev. 10.6). What is more, the saints are rewarded (Rev. 11.18; 22.12) because they are worthy (Rev. 3.4), faithful (Rev. 2.10, 13, 19; 13.10; 14.12; 17.14), keep the commandments (Rev. 12.17; 14.12), without fault (Rev. 14.5), clean (Rev. 19.8, 14), and they are victorious (Rev. 2.7, 11, 17, 26; 3.5, 12, 21, 12.11; 15.2; 21.7). Justice for the people of God constitutes a significant theme based on these indicators.

Conversely, the wicked are repaid (Rev. 18.6) according to what they deserve (Rev. 16.6). This judgment is spoken of in terms of wrath (Rev. 6.16, 17; 11.18; 14.10; 16.19; 19.15), war (Rev. 2.16; 12.7; 13.4; 16.14; 17.14; 19.11, 19; 20.8), torment (Rev. 9.5; 11.10; 14.10, 11; 18.7, 10, 15; 20.10), plagues (Rev. 9.18, 20; 11.6; 15.1, 6, 8; 16.9, 21; 18.4, 8; 21.9; 22.18), woes (Rev. 8.13; 9.12; 11.14; 12.12; 18.10, 16, 19), destruction (Rev. 17.8, 11),

225. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 1143.

226. Dehandschutter, 'The Meaning of Witness in the Apocalypse', p. 284.

227. For occurrences of ἀληθινός see Rev. 3.7, 14; 6.10; 15.3; 16.7; 19.2, 9, 11; 21.5; 22.6. Cf. ἀμήν (Rev. 1.6, 7; 3.14; 5.14; 7.12; 19.4; 22.20).

228. Interestingly, this investigation is limited to the churches. A primary theme of the first vision (Rev. 1.9–3.22) is that Jesus is the judge of his churches.

desolation (Rev. 17.16; 18.17, 19) and the second death (Rev. 20.6, 14; 21.8). Satan (Rev. 2.9, 13, 24; 3.9; 12.9; 20.2, 7), the beast (Rev. 11.7; 13.1-4) and the false prophet (Rev. 16.13; 19.20; 20.10) will face judgment for attacking God's saints (Rev. 12.10-17; 13.10), blasphemy (Rev. 13.1, 5, 6; 17.3) and forced idolatry (Rev. 13.14-15; 15.2; 19.20). The great harlot (Rev. 17.1, 5, 15, 16; 19.2) faces judgment for sexual immorality (Rev. 14.18; 17.2, 4; 18.3; 19.2) and the blood of the saints (Rev. 16.6; 17.6; 18.24; 19.2).<sup>229</sup> The inhabitants of the earth will face judgment for failing to repent (Rev. 9.20, 21; 16.9) and for everything they have done (Rev. 20.12-13) including idolatry (Rev. 14.9, 11; 16.2), immorality, unfaithfulness and other acts of wickedness (Rev. 21.8).

The book of Revelation is filled with images related to kings and rulers. This corresponds to theme of judgment because the right to judge ultimately pertains to the question of authority. Only one with authority has the right to render verdicts and enforce judgment. From the very outset God is identified as the ultimate sovereign of the universe. The Almighty God sits securely enthroned in heaven as evidenced by the frequent references made to God's *θρόνος* (Rev. 1.4; 3.21; 4.2-10; 5.1, 6, 7, 11, 13; 6.16; 7.9-17; 8.3; 11.16; 12.5; 14.3; 16.17; 19.4, 5; 20.11, 12; 21.3, 5; 22.1, 3).<sup>230</sup> Christ is the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1.5) and he is the King of kings (Rev. 19.16). He shares the throne with God the Father (Cf. Rev. 5.1-13; 7.9-17). The Apocalypse depicts the coming reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 11.15, 17; 19.6; 20.6) together with his saints (Rev. 5.10; 20.4, 22.5).<sup>231</sup> Consequently, it abounds with references to Christ's authority or the divine granting of authority (Rev. 2.26; 6.8; 9.3, 10, 19; 11.6; 12.10; 14.18; 16.9; 18.1; 20.6; 22.14).<sup>232</sup> This, of course, contrasts with the counter claims of authority made by Satan (Rev. 2.13; 12.3; 13.1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 12; 16.10; 17.12, 13) and all those associated with him (Rev. 18.7). What emerges is an account of the true sovereign of the universe pronouncing judgment on all who have rebelled against him and have unjustly harmed his people.

## 7. Conclusion

The preceding lexical analysis of Revelation demonstrates the existence of explicit forensic themes. God's judgment occupies a central role in Rev. 16.1–20.15, which comprises the third woe. Language related to justice and righteousness resonates throughout God's judgments. The issue of justice and

229. Cf. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 7.

230. Cf. 'ὁ παντοκράτωρ' (Rev. 1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 16.7, 14; 19.6, 15; 21.22).

231. See also the emphasis on 'kingdom' (Rev. 1.6, 9; 5.10; 11.15; 12.10; 16.10; 17.12, 17, 18).

232. Cf. additional symbols of authority (Rev. 1.16; 2.12, 16; 19.12, 15, 21).

righteousness come as a result of the saints who have been unjustly executed. They serve as witnesses who testify before the world and God. The emphasis on testimony throughout the vision further frames the Apocalypse in a forensic setting. Thus, words drawn from the κριν-, δικ-, and μαρτ- word groups cast a distinctive juridical light on other terms and images in the book of Revelation.

## Chapter 4

### AN EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF THE LAWSUIT MOTIF IN THE FIRST VISION (REV. 1.9–3.22)

John functioned in a prophetic role when he transmitted his vision to the seven churches of Asia Minor. In reporting all that he saw, he spoke as Christ's emissary to the churches. John fits the pattern and role of the OT seer-prophets like Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and others. Like the OT prophets, John's message revolved around the twin themes of salvation and judgment regarding the covenant people of God and the surrounding nations. Like the OT prophets, John summons the people of God and the inhabitants of the earth to stand trial in a cosmic courtroom. Like the OT prophets, John utilizes the subgenre of the prophetic lawsuit in his narratives and oracles. His vision exhibits the basic threefold pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit (cf. Rev. 1.9–3.22); (2) lawsuit against the nations (cf. Rev. 4.1–21.8); and (3) promise of salvation/vindication for God's obedient people (cf. Rev. 21.9–22.5).

The first vision, Rev. 1.9–3.22, corresponds to the covenant lawsuit addressing individual congregations of new covenant churches. John sees a vision of the glorified Christ and describes him in terms depicting his role as judge. The following series of seven messages to the churches evinces a framework remarkably similar to a covenantal lawsuit. Christ's investigation results in curses for the disobedient and blessings for the faithful. These blessings and curses serve as the basis for the remaining vision and its relationship to the people of God. In the second vision (Rev. 4.1–16.21), the people of God fade quietly into the background until the interludes.

#### 1. *The Inaugural Vision of Christ (Rev. 1.9-20)*

##### a. *John as a Prophetic Witness*

John identifies himself as the author of visions (Rev. 1.1c, 4a, 9a; 22.8a). The use of the first person, then, automatically entails that John is the one narrating, seeing, and hearing the contents recorded unless it is attributed to another (i.e., Christ in Rev. 1.17-18; 2-3). The function of the 'I' brings the narrative closer to the reader by giving witness to the truth.<sup>1</sup> In Rev. 1.1c, John testifies

1. Bovon, 'John's Self-Presentation in Revelation 1.9-10', p. 695.

(μαρτύρησεν) as an eyewitness to the veracity of the message directly handed down to him by God. The forensic sense of μαρτύρησεν retains its full force, as if in a lawcourt, he solemnly swears ‘to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth’. This usage corresponds with other occurrences of μαρτυρέω in the NT asserting the official and eyewitness nature of giving testimony (cf. 1 Jn 1.1-3).<sup>2</sup> In the other two self-designations, it is as if John states his name for the record (Rev. 1.4a, 9a cf. 22.8a).<sup>3</sup> What is more, Jesus (Ἐγὼ Ἰησοῦς) also states his name for the record at the end of the vision to verify John’s testimony (Rev. 22.16; cf. 22.8-9). John fulfills the role of a witness to Christ and to the churches by submitting his testimony in writing, which consists of all that he has seen (ὅσα εἶδεν).<sup>4</sup>

John fulfilled the vocation of a prophet and was a well-recognized leader in the churches of Asia Minor. This is demonstrated by the simple self-designation ‘I, John’ (Ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης), which conforms to a standard convention used in prophetic and apocalyptic writings.<sup>5</sup> In Rev. 10.8-11, he participates in the vision in a prophetic manner when he eats a bittersweet scroll, which is followed by the injunction that ‘it is necessary for you to prophesy again’ (δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι).<sup>6</sup> He exhibits a special concern for Christian prophets (Rev. 10.7; 11.10; 11.18; 16.6; 18.20; 18.24; 22.6; 22.9) and condemns all false prophets (Rev. 16.13; 19.20; 20.10), especially those influencing the congregations addressed (Rev. 2.2, 6, 15, 20). This suggests that John regarded himself as a prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets.

The prologue and epilogue of the book of Revelation unambiguously designate it as a book of prophecy (προφητεία). In Rev. 1.3, anyone who reads or hears the words of the prophecy (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας) is blessed. It is also affirmed as a prophecy in the epilogue by Jesus, an angel, and John. In

2. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 184.

3. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 1127-28. While commenting on Rev. 22.8, Beale posits, ‘he makes explicit his identification as a prophetic witness in v. 18. He is in a long line of prophets who witnessed to Israel about God’s covenantal stipulations, Israel’s disobedience to those stipulations, and the consequent impending judgment, especially for idolatry (e.g., 2 Kgs 17.7-23; 2 Chron. 24.18-19; Neh. 9.26-27a). The notion of ‘seeing and hearing’ is the basis for a legal witness, as in 1 Jn 1.1-2: ‘what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes...we testify... As with the OT prophets, so now John’s witness is also directed to the covenant community’.

4. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 56. See also Keener, *Revelation*, p. 98.

5. Cf. ‘I, Daniel’ (Dan. 7.15; 8.15, 27; 9.2; 10.2, 7; 12.5); ‘I, Baruch’ (2 Bar. 8.3; 9.1; 10.5; 11.1; 13.1; 32.8; 44.1); ‘I, Enoch’ (1 Enoch 12.3); ‘I, Ezra’ (4 Ezra 2.33); ‘I, Salathiel [= Ezra]’ (4 Ezra 3.1). It was used as a designation by some non-prophets such as ‘I, Nebuchadnezzar’ (Dan 4.4); ‘I, Artaxerxes’ (Ezra 7.21); ‘I, Tobit’ (Tob. 1.3). The apostle Paul used the simple ‘I, Paul’ (Gal. 5.2; Eph. 3.1; cf. ‘I, Simon Peter’ [Gos. Pet. 14.60]). See also Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 11; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 75.

6. Cf. Ezek. 3.1-3.

Rev. 22.7, Jesus blesses those who keep the words of prophecy of this book (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου). In Rev. 22.10, the guiding angel instructs John not to seal up the words of prophecy (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου) because the time is near. In Rev. 22.18-19, John warns anyone from altering, in any way, the prophecy of this book (οὐς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου).<sup>7</sup>

The inaugural vision (Rev. 1.9-20), therefore, represents John's prophetic commission in a manner very reminiscent of other OT prophets.<sup>8</sup> His prophetic commission exhibits a broad pattern shared by several call narratives. While the exact structure of the prophetic call narrative has been the subject of some debate, it is clear that these narratives all share some similar characteristics. Habel's analysis of the prophetic call narratives identifies six constituent components: (1) Divine confrontation; (2) introductory word; (3) commission; (4) objection; (5) reassurance; and (6) sign.<sup>9</sup> Mazzaferri uncritically adopts Habel's works and uses it as a guide for his analysis of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel.<sup>10</sup> Although Habel's work is helpful, it is too limited in that it does not allow for the full range of prophetic experiences.<sup>11</sup> John's commission parallels Isaiah (Isa. 6.1-12), Jeremiah (Jer. 1.1-10), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 1.1-2.8) in at least five aspects.

First, John records his commission as an autobiographical account.<sup>12</sup> He provides details regarding the historical circumstances at the time of the commission (Rev. 1.9-10a). This aspect mirrors the call narratives of all three canonical prophets (Isa. 6.1; Jer. 1.1-3; Ezek. 1.1-3).<sup>13</sup>

Second, John indicates the means of revelation by which he received his inspired vision (Rev. 1.10a). The phrase ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι suggests that he fell into some sort of visionary trance.<sup>14</sup> Most prophets simply state that

7. Cf. Eugene M. Boring, 'The Apocalypse as Christian Prophecy: A Discussion of the Issues Raised by the Book of Revelation for the Study of Early Christian Prophecy', *SBL Seminar Papers* 2 (1974), pp. 43-62.

8. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of Book of Revelation*, pp. 259-378.

9. Norman Habel, 'The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives', *ZAW* 77 (1965), pp. 297-323.

10. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of Book of Revelation*, pp. 88-102.

11. David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 98-99.

12. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 38.

13. Only the canonical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel provide a detailed account of their prophetic commission. Other prophets, however, provide chronological data for when the 'word of the Lord' or the 'visions' came to them (cf. Dan. 7.1; 8.1; 9.1; 10.1; Hos. 1.1; Amos 1.1b; Mic. 1.1; Zeph. 1.1; Hag. 1.1; 2.10, 20; Zech. 1.1, 7).

14. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 150-59; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 13; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 22; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*,

‘the word of the Lord’ came to them. In the OT, the phrase ‘word of the Lord’ (דברי־יהוה) commonly denotes a prophetic revelation from God. This phrase encompasses both visionary and non-visionary means of revelation (e.g., Gen. 15.1, 4; Ezek. 1.1-3; Zech. 1.7-8). In the LXX, the construct phrase דברי־יהוה is usually translated as λόγον κυρίου. The phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ occurs four times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 1.2, 9, 6.9; 20.4) and is always paired with τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (except in Rev. 6.9 where it reads, τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον). Although the exact phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ never occurs in the LXX, it is found in the NT to refer to the OT or the spirit inspired preaching of the gospel (Mt. 15.6; Mk 7.13; Lk. 5.1; 8.21; 11.28; Acts 4.31; 6.2; 8.14; 11.1; 13.5, 7, 46; 18.11; 2 Cor. 2.17; 4.2; Col. 1.25; Heb. 13.7). It is possible that the NT phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ represents a translation of דברי־יהוה independent of the LXX. Therefore, in Revelation the phrase ‘word of God’ seems to constitute an intentional parallel to the prophetic דברי־יהוה indicating divine revelation.

Third, John’s inaugural vision included a theophany. His description of the glorified Christ (Rev. 1.12-16) along with the voice like a trumpet (Rev. 1.10b) evoke OT theophanies. John’s experience parallels Ezekiel and, to a lesser extent, Isaiah.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, the sheer power of this vision provokes John’s worshipful and fearful response by falling prostrate to the ground (Rev. 1.17). Each of the prophets in the call narratives responds in some similar manner. Isaiah cries out in terror pronouncing woe upon himself (Isa. 6.5). Jeremiah openly doubts his ability to fulfill the call (Jer. 1.6). Ezekiel, just like John, falls facedown in reverent terror (Ezek. 1.28b).<sup>16</sup>

Finally, John is commanded to write down all he sees and send it to the seven churches, which may correspond with the prophets being sent to speak on Yahweh’s behalf (Rev. 1.11, 19). Regarding the injunction to ‘write and send’ (Rev. 1.19), Aune’s comments prove to be instructive. He suggests that the command to write may correspond with Isa. 30.8 (LXX) where the prophet is commanded to write. In addition, Moses (Deut. 31.19, 21, a passage similar to Isa. 30.8) is commanded by God to write down a song (Deut. 32.1-43) ‘so that it will function as a witness against Israel’. While the connections to Isa. 30.8 and Deut. 31.19, 21 is somewhat tentative, he observes that ‘The commands to ‘write and send’ constitute a commission form functionally

p. 128; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 84; Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 80; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 39-40.

15. Ezek. 1.4-28a. Cf. Isa. 6.1-4. Jeremiah’s account omits a theophany (unless one considers God speaking to him as equivalent to a theophany).

16. Cf. Exod. 20.18-19; Josh. 5.14; Dan. 8.18; 10.10, 19; Ezek. 3.23; 43.3; Tob. 12.16; 1 En. 14.13-14; 60.3; 71.2, 11; 2 En. 21.2; 22.4; 4 Ezra 4.12; 10.30; Jos. Asen. 14.10-11; T. Job 3.4; Apoc. Zeph. 6.9-10.

equivalent to the OT prophetic commission ‘go and tell’ (cf. Isa. 6.1-12; Jer. 1.1-10; Ezek. 1.1-3.27; Amos 7.14-17).<sup>17</sup> In light of all this, then, the phrase, ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα, in Rev. 1.19, represents a prophetic formula rather than merely a structuring device (cf. Isa. 48.6 [LXX]).<sup>18</sup>

The opening chapter of Revelation establishes John as a prophet in continuity with Israel’s prophetic tradition. By building on this heritage, John functions as an authoritative prophetic voice for the new covenant community. Although removed from that community, he commiserates with the churches as a fellow-sharer with them in tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance because of their mutual faith in Jesus Christ (Rev. 1.9).<sup>19</sup> Like the OT prophets, he will deliver a message of judgment and salvation, as well as warning and encouragement. In communicating his message, John readily employs the language, imagery, patterns, and conventions of his predecessors. Since he was functioning in the same manner as the OT prophets who frequently evoked juridical imagery, it follows that John would have also utilized this prophetic convention. John could have likewise seen himself in the role of heralding a lawsuit, summoning witnesses, invoking charges, rendering verdicts, and calling for repentance in order that God might be proved true and just in all his judgments (Rev. 16.5-7; 19.2).

b. *One like a Son of Man* (Rev. 1.13a)

John saw one like a son of man (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου) standing in the midst of seven lampstands (Rev. 1.12-13). The anarthrous use of υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου<sup>20</sup> echoes Dan. 7.13 (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου [LXX]) instead of Jesus’ self-appellation ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου from the gospels. Of the eighty plus instances in the Gospels, all of them use the article (except Jn 5.27).<sup>21</sup> In Rev. 1.13 and 14.14,

17. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 85-87.

18. van Unnik, ‘A Formula Describing Prophecy’, pp. 86-94; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 112-14.

19. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 49-50.

20. The accusative υἱόν is a solecism since the dative usually follows ὅμοιον. The identical phenomenon happens in Rev. 14.14 with the same allusion to Dan. 7.13. It intentionally signals the readers to an OT allusion. See Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 210. So G. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St John: A Study in Bilingualism* (NovTSup, 27; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), p. 139.

21. For important assessments of the use of ‘Son of Man’ in the gospels see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), p. 291; I.H. Marshall, ‘Son of Man’, in *DJG*, pp. 775-81; Douglas R.A. Hare, *The Son of Man Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (SNTSMS, 107; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Ragnar Leivestad, ‘Exit the Apocalyptic Son of Man’, *NTS* 18 (1972), pp. 243-67.



John uses the expression ‘one like a son of man’<sup>22</sup> directly linking Jesus with the apocalyptic Son of Man from Dan. 7.13–14, but this implicitly shares a conceptual similarity with the Gospels.<sup>23</sup>

That both occurrences of ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου (Rev. 1.13; 14.14) allude to Dan. 7.13 is confirmed by the lexical, contextual, and conceptual parallels. Revelation 1.13 employs the exact wording of the LXX except that John uses ὅμοιον instead of ὥς. Charles, however, demonstrates how in the Apocalypse ὅμοιον is the equivalent of ὥς in both meaning and construction, thereby making this merely a stylistic discrepancy.<sup>24</sup> Contextually, John alludes to Dan. 7.13 in just a few verses prior in Rev. 1.7.<sup>25</sup> He conflates Dan. 7.13 and Zech. 12.10 supplying a thesis statement for the entire book. The conflation of these two OT passages reflects the eschatological expectation that Christ will return bringing salvation on one hand and judgment on the other.<sup>26</sup> Thus, John identifies Jesus as the Son of Man in glory who receives judicial authority over all the nations as well as the pierced son whose appearance will strike terror among the enemies of God.

Interestingly, the references to the Son of Man in *1 Enoch* seem also to refer to a being that is given ultimate authority as a judge. In *1 En.* 46.1–8, Enoch sees the Ancient of Days with hair white like wool and another standing next to him that looked like a human. This one next to him is explicitly identified as ‘the Son of Man’ who is righteous in every way and chosen by the Lord (*1 En.* 46.3). He wields tremendous authority because he will dispose mighty kings from their thrones on the grounds that they fail to glorify or obey him since he is the source of their kingship (*1 En.* 46.4–5). The exalted nature and eternality (‘before all time’) of the Son of Man is expressed in *1 En.* 48.1–8. The Son of Man is ‘a staff of righteousness’, ‘the light of the gentiles’, and the hope of the trouble hearted (*1 En.* 48.4). All the inhabitants of the earth will fall prostrate in worship before him (*1 En.* 48.5–6). While a case may be made that Israel will dispose of the pagan kings of the earth, one is hard pressed to affirm the notion that Israel will be worshipped. Most significantly, the Son of Man will appear as the eschatological judge sitting on

22. Thomas B. Salter, ‘*Homoion huion anthropou* in Rev 1.13 and 14.14’, *BT* 44 (1993), pp. 349–50.

23. Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (ÖTK, 19; Würzburg: Mohn, 1984), p. 83. On Rev. 14.14 see Matthias R. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (WUNT, 2/203; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 88.

24. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 27, 35–37.

25. Cf. Kroll, *Revelation*, p. 94.

26. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 196. Cf. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 73.

his throne of glory executing judgment against all the wicked and vindicating the righteous (*1 En.* 69.26-29). These passages suggest that in the parables of Enoch the Son of Man represents an individual heavenly being, whether Enoch himself or some other being, rather than merely a literary symbol for Israel (cf. *4 Ezra* 13.1-39; *1 En.* 37-71; *2 Bar.* 36-40).

c. *The Composite Image of the Glorified Christ/Son of Man (Rev. 1.13b-16)*

John's ensuing visionary description of the Son of Man highlights certain characteristics of his appearance borrowing images from a variety of OT texts all of which emphasize his judicial role.<sup>27</sup> Revelation 1.14-16 is grammatically connected to Rev. 1.13 by a series of coordinating conjunctions so that the ensuing description further elaborates the 'one like a son of man'. The list begins with δέ in Rev. 1.14a, but the following string of similes are joined by καί. The δέ provides a further list to deepen the opening metaphor of v. 13b.<sup>28</sup> This pattern (δέ...καί...καί...) occurs again in Rev. 19.11-13 with the description of the rider on the white horse. In both cases (Rev. 1.14-16; 19.12-13), Christ is first symbolically portrayed and then symbolically described.

The insufficiency of John's own vocabulary forces him to depend on similes and familiar images of supernatural beings from the OT. His description basically conforms to a pattern introducing a physical feature of Christ followed by 'like' or 'as' (ὅμοιον or ὡς) coupled with symbolic imagery drawn from a familiar antecedent. John melds these images together to present Christ as the glorified majestic judge from a composite of texts rather than performing an exegesis or *midrash*. In agreement with Caird, one must not simply compile a list of allusions so as to 'unweave the rainbow', because John paints a composite portrait rather than a piecemeal collage.<sup>29</sup> The following analysis traces the feature, characteristic, OT antecedent and referent, as well as the most plausible meaning for the symbol as it relates to John's description of Christ (see Table 4).

27. Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), p. 87.

28. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 89.

29. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 25-26. Contra Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 220 who calls Rev. 1.12-20 a Midrash on Dan. 7 and 10. For arguments against Beale see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 74.

Table 4. *John's Composite Description of Christ.*

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Physical Feature</i>	<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>OT Antecedent</i>	<i>Referent (OT)</i>	<i>Symbolic Meaning</i>
1.13a	being	someone 'like [ὅμοιον] a son of man'	Dan. 7.13	Son of Man	eschatological king and judge
1.13b	clothes	long robe with golden sash around chest	Dan. 10.5; Ezek. 9.2; cf. Exod. 28.4; 39.29	Man dressed in linen or a heavenly being	priest or royal dignitary
1.14a	head and hair	as [ὥς] white as [ὥς] wool and snow	Dan. 7.9; cf. Lev. 19.32; Prov. 20.29	Ancient of Days	wisdom in judgment
1.14b	eyes	as [ὥς] blazing fire	Dan. 10.6	Man dressed in linen or a heavenly being	penetrating judicial insight
1.15a	feet	like [ὅμοιοι] glowing bronze	Dan. 10.6; Ezek. 1.7, 27; cf. Dan. 3.25	Man dressed in linen or a heavenly being	judicial testing or refining fires
1.15b	voice	as [ὥς] many rushing waters	Ezek. 1.24; 43.2; cf. Dan. 10.6	Yahweh	overwhelming authoritative voice
1.16a	right hand	holding seven stars	none	Roman emperor (?)	cosmic sovereignty
1.16b	mouth	protruding sharp double-edged	Isa. 11.4; 49.2	Divine warrior	judicial authority
1.16c	face	shining as [ὥς] the sun	Dan. 10.6; Mt. 17.2	Angelic being or Transfiguration	majestic and glorious splendor

The first physical feature mentioned in John's description of the Son of Man is his attire (Rev. 1.13b). The Son of Man wears a 'long robe' (ποδήρη) with a golden sash (ζώνην χρυσᾶν) around his chest. The association of ποδήρη with the priestly garments seems to denote that Christ functions in a priestly capacity (Exod. 28.4; 39.29).<sup>30</sup> This interpretation merits plausibility due to

30. Cf. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 78; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 87; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 208-10. Contextual support for the priestly connotations includes that Christ has atoned for their sins with his blood (Rev. 1.5b) and he made them a kingdom and priests (Rev. 1.6a). His location among the lampstands also suggests a sanctuary-like setting (Rev. 1.12a). In Rev. 15.6, the angels dressed in similar attire and proceed out of the heavenly temple with the seven bowls containing the final plagues. Since these angels were located in the heavenly temple it tacitly implies some sort of priestly function. The angels are described as clothed in shining clean linen and having a golden sash around their chests (ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσᾶς).

several lexical and contextual considerations. The term ποδήρη occurs in the LXX referring to the garments of the high priest (Exod. 25.7; 28.4, 31; 29.5; Zech. 3.4; Sir. 45.8; cf. Wis. 18.24). The robe is usually mentioned in close connection with the ephod (Exod. 25.7; 28.4, 31; 29.5; 35.9).<sup>31</sup> In Exod. 25.7 and 35.9, the LXX supplies ποδήρη when only the word for ephod (אֶפֶד) occurs. Yet, Exod. 28.4; 28.31; 29.5 distinguishes between the ephod (אֶפֶד) and the long robe (מַעֲטָל). Josephus not only uses the word ποδήρης when describing the priest's robe, but he also mentions the sash wrapped tightly around his chest.<sup>32</sup> While this strongly supports the conception of Christ as a high priest, the imagery of his attire may simply depict a royal dignitary.<sup>33</sup>

The term ποδήρη represents the garb of important officials. Charles observed that the long robe was 'an Oriental mark of dignity' and shows how the underlying Hebrew term, מַעֲטָל, was commonly used by men of high rank (cf. 1 Sam. 18.4; 24.5, 12; Ezek. 24.16).<sup>34</sup> Referring to the 'man clothed in linen', ποδήρη occurs in the LXX of Ezek. 9.2, 3, 11 and without any overt priestly connotations.<sup>35</sup> The connection to Ezek. 9.2 is strengthened by the comparison with Dan. 10.5 to another man dressed in linen. Because much of John's imagery comes from Dan. 10.5-6, one may safely conclude that this visionary being provides the background for Christ's clothing.<sup>36</sup> The golden sash around the chest may simply designate a person of high status.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the omission of any additional priestly vestments (i.e., the ephod, trousers, turban, crown, and the color of the material) mitigates against placing too much weight on the priestly imagery.<sup>38</sup> It may be, then, that John uses this polyvalent imagery to depict Christ in his role as a royal high priest.<sup>39</sup>

31. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 93.

32. Josephus, *Ant.* 3.7.2.

33. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 67; Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 36; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 88-89; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 89; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 136; Smalley, *Revelation to St John*, p. 54.

34. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 27-28; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 87. Cf. Sir. 27.8 where ποδήρη represents a mark of dignity if one pursues justice and attains it.

35. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 89. See however John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC, 30; Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 290.

36. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 208-210. Nevertheless, Goldingay cautions, 'There is no reason to link any of the figures here specifically with the humanlike figure of 7.13'. Goldingay, *Daniel*, p. 291.

37. A lowly laborer tied his belt around the waist in order to tuck in his tunic while working, but a noble dignitary wore the sash around the chest. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 67.

38. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 94.

39. Vanni, *La struttura*, pp. 126-27. See, however, Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 87. Giesen remarks, 'Eine solche Interpretation läßt sich jedoch nicht sichern'.

Next, John describes the pure whiteness of Jesus' head and hair (Rev. 1.14a). He states that both his head (ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ) and hair (αἱ τρίχες) were white (λευκαί). To emphasize just how white it was John adds two comparatives stating that it was as white as wool (ὡς ἔριον λευκόν) and as snow (ὡς χιών). John uses the language regarding the Ancient of Days in his description of Christ.<sup>40</sup> In Dan. 7.9, the Ancient of Days sits arrayed in garments that are as 'white as snow' (לבושה כהלג חור) and the hair of his head is 'like clean [white] wool' (ושער ראשה כעמר נקא).<sup>41</sup> John's allusion to Dan. 7.10 is confirmed by the lexical similarities with the LXX. To translate the Aramaic term נקא the LXX adds the adjective λευκόν with καθαρόν probably to express that clean wool is white. Revelation 1.14 reads ὡς ἔριον λευκόν and ὡς χιών. The major differences between these two texts are that John uses ὡς instead of ὡσεὶ and the nominative χιών instead of the accusative χιόνα.

Although both passages use the terms for snow and white wool, John's appropriation of the imagery does not represent an exact citation because he restricts both adjectives to the description of Christ's head and hair. John describes both his head and hair (ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαί) as white, but Dan. 7.9 carefully distinguishes the head from the hair. It is possible, however, that the καί is exegetical so that it should be read as, 'his head, that is the hairs [of his head] are white'.<sup>42</sup> This interpretation is plausible since λευκαί (plural) modifies τρίχες (plural) and not κεφαλὴ (singular). Since white hair generally denotes an elder and more specifically is a symbol of wisdom (cf. Lev. 19.32; Prov. 20.29), the idea is that Jesus possesses ultimate wisdom.<sup>43</sup>

John's identification of Jesus with the Ancient of Days attests to his high Christology as well as his role as the eschatological judge. Concerning this merging of Christ with the Ancient of Days, Smalley remarks:

The Son of man figure seems to merge with God. He is a celestial visitor, who appears in clothing and with personal characteristics which point to his divine status (vv. 13-16); and he speaks of his pre-existence and sovereign exaltation (vv. 17-18). Eventually, we are left in no doubt that he is the risen and glorified Lord Christ, the eschatological judge (1.16, 18) who also 'possesses the glory of heaven' and 'shares the likeness of God himself',<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 209) confirms that the ambiguity between the royal and priestly images may deliberately signify Christ as both a king and priest.

40. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 210; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 91; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 90; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 67.

41. For additional references to the Ancient of Days drawn from Dan. 7.9 see *1 En.* 46.1; 71.10; *Apoc. Abr.* 11.2.

42. See Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 95; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 54.

43. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 90.

44. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 53-54.

John stresses the judicial character of the glorified Christ through his allusion to Daniel. Daniel's vision portrays the Ancient of Days as the sovereign judge who renders a verdict against the fourth beast. After entering his court and sitting on his throne (Dan. 7.9-10), the Ancient of Days conducts a trial in which he examines evidence prior to his judgment (i.e., the 'books' were opened). The scene represents a transferral of judicial authority from the Ancient of Days to the one like the Son of man, but rabbinic traditions suggests that the two beings are merged into one.<sup>45</sup> While this tradition is subject to serious doubt,<sup>46</sup> in the book of Revelation, John clearly blends the two figures of Daniel's vision into one exalted judicial figure.<sup>47</sup>

John's gaze shifts from Christ's hair to his penetrating eyes that he describes as a flaming fire (Rev. 1.14b). The image of his eyes as flames of fire (οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρός) once again evokes the being from Dan. 10.6 who has eyes like torches of fire (ועיניו כלפידֵי אֵשׁ).<sup>48</sup> The imagery of eyes blazing with fire unambiguously conveys the idea of a judge with penetrating insight so that nothing is hidden from his sight.<sup>49</sup> In other judicial contexts, this aspect of Christ sheds light on the shameful activities occurring in the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2.18) and provides the basis for his judging the world with justice (Rev. 19.12).

This image of fire prompts John to mention the feet of Jesus because they appear as bronze glowing in a furnace (Rev. 1.15a). The use of χαλκολιβάνῳ, a *hapaxlegomenon* occurring only in Rev. 1.15 and 2.18, basically denotes a high quality bronze alloy.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis, however, should not so much focus on the type of bronze but that his feet appear 'as having been smelted in a

45. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 135. He notes a rabbinic tradition (b. Hag. 14a), tracing back to Akiba, that takes both figures as two manifestations of God (one represents his mercy and the other his justice).

46. Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, p. 91) observes 'This identification was not necessarily original with John, but may already be presupposed by the LXX version of Dan 7.13 found in MS 967... It identifies the one like a son of man with the Ancient of Days, though it is unclear whether this was intentional or the result of scribal error, or whether this was pre-Christian or reflects Christian exegesis'. So Loren T. Stuckenbruck, 'One Like a Son of Man as the Ancient of Days' in the Old Greek Recension of Dan 7,13: Scribal Error or Theological Translation?', *ZNW* 86 (1995), pp. 268-76.

47. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 209.

48. The LXX translates the phrase as καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ λαμπάδες πυρός. Cf. 2 En. 1.5.

49. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 67; Krodell, *Revelation*, p. 95; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 88; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 90; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 54.

50. For the most extensive lexical analysis see Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, pp. 111-17. Hemer argues that John deliberately chose χαλκολιβάνῳ because of its relationship to Thyatira and its illustrious trade guild of bronze smiths.

furnace’ (ὡς ἐν καμίνῳ πεπυρωμένης).<sup>51</sup> John’s description alludes to the figure in Dan. 10.6 in which his feet are described in appearance ‘as gleaming bronze’ (ὡσεὶ χαλκὸς ἐξαστράπτων [LXX]), but his language also evokes the angelic beings described in Ezek. 1.7 (ὡς ἐξαστράπτων χαλκός [LXX]).<sup>52</sup> The main idea conveyed by these two images is ‘that his body had a fiery appearance, like burning metal (cf. Ezek. 1.27)’.<sup>53</sup> Christ, then, shines from head to toe with the intensity of white hot flames.<sup>54</sup> The occurrence of πεπυρωμένον in Rev. 3.18 referring to refined gold signifies that Christ is the refiner. Throughout Scriptures the concept of refining metal frequently expresses judicial testing and purification (Jer. 9.7; Zech. 13.9; Mal. 3.3; 1 Cor. 3.12–15; 1 Pet. 1.7).

In Rev. 1.15b, John compares the sound of Christ’s voice to the sound of rushing waters. The phrase, ὡς φωνὴ ὑδάτων πολλῶν, echoes ὡς φωνὴν ὕδατος πολλοῦ from Ezek. 1.24 (cf. Ezek. 43.2). Although Ezekiel uses this phrase for the sound of the angel’s wings, it specifically compares the ‘voice of the Almighty’ to the sound of many rushing waters as in Ezek. 43.2. To further emphasize the volume, Ezekiel compares it with the noise generated by a tumult from an army (Ezek. 1.24). One may also detect a tacit allusion to the figure in Dan. 10.6 with a voice like the sound of a great multitude. The comparison illustrates the magnitude and volume of the sound being described. Anyone who has ever stood next to the rushing torrents of white water rapids or the crashing roar of a waterfall can easily grasp how his voice drowned out all other sounds. The description of Christ’s voice enhances the audible, authoritative and awe-inspiring quality of his pronouncements. As the eschatological judge, Christ speaks with absolute authority and cannot be ignored.

The next feature, holding seven stars in his right hand (Rev. 1.16a), depicts Christ as the universal sovereign ruler.<sup>55</sup> That he holds (ἔχων) the seven stars in his right hand (ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ) demonstrates his authority and power over those stars.<sup>56</sup> Throughout Scriptures, the right hand represents one in an authority position and symbolizes powerful strength.<sup>57</sup> The seven stars

51. The verb πυρόμαι is used elsewhere in the NT with the idea of burning or flames of fire blazing (1 Cor. 7.9; 2 Cor. 11.29; Eph. 6.16; 2 Pet. 3.12).

52. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 95; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 54.

53. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (NAC, 18; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 281.

54. Cf. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 96; Edmondo Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. Maria Poggi Johnson and Adam Kamesar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 110.

55. In Rev. 1.16, John’s description proceeds from his appearance to his function as ruler and judge (Krodel, *Revelation*, p. 95). Giesen (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 88) also perceptively observes, ‘gestaltet die Position des Menschensohnegleichen als Herrn und Richter weiter aus...die Symbol für Kraft und Macht ist’.

56. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 91.

57. In the OT, the right hand is used of persons indicating their authority (cf. Gen. 48.13,

(ἀστέρας ἑπτά) evokes cosmic imagery suggesting that Christ maintains authority over the entire universe.<sup>58</sup> In Rev. 1.20, the stars are categorically identified as angels (cf. Judg. 5.20; Job 38.7; Isa. 14.12; Rev. 9.1), but the image may also evince a hint of anti-imperial polemic.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the preceding descriptions, John does not seem to draw from an OT antecedent.<sup>60</sup> Since John is not performing an exegesis on the OT, he is not required to borrow all of his imagery from the Scriptures. Jesus' cosmic sovereignty affords him the right to render judicial verdicts, which comes into sharp focus with the sword proceeding from his mouth.

John graphically illustrates the juridical force of Christ's word as a sharp two-edged sword (ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα) coming out of his mouth. The sword, his only weapon, denotes his power to execute judgments simply with an utterance. He promises to pronounce judgment on the unrepentant in Pergamum (Rev. 2.12, 16), and decimates all those on earth in hostility to him simply by speaking a word (Rev. 19.15, 21). In this sense, he is portrayed as a divine warrior who comes in judgment (Wis. 18.15-16; *1 En.* 62.2; Pss. Sol. 17.24, 35; 4 Ezra 13.9-11; 4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> 8-10; 1QSB 5.24-25; 4Q431 1.7). The background for this particular image comes from a conflation of Isa. 11.4 and 49.2. In Isa. 11.4, the expected Messiah will strike the earth with the 'rod' (שֵׁבֶט) of his mouth when dispensing justice.<sup>61</sup> The Lord makes the mouth of

14, 17, 18; 1 Kgs 2.19; 1 Chron. 6.39; Pss. 108.6; 109.6) or connotes power and strength (cf. Job 40.14; Ps. 16.8). Most often the 'right hand' speaks of God's authority and power to accomplish salvation (cf. Exod. 15.6, 12; Pss. 17.7; 18.35; Isa. 41.10, 13; 45.1; 48.13; 62.8; 63.12; Jer. 22.24; Lam. 2.3-4), but it is used once in reference God's judgment (Hab. 2.16). In the NT, after Jesus ascended he was seated at God's right hand demonstrating his exalted and authoritative position (Mt. 22.44; 26.64; Mk 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Lk. 20.42; 22.69; Acts 2.25-34; 5.31; 7.55-56; Rom. 8.34; Eph. 1.20; Col. 3.1; Heb. 1.3, 13; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1 Pet. 3.22).

58. Seven stars were often used in the ancient world to denote the seven planets of the solar system (i.e., Sun, Moon, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Saturn). See discussion in Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 97. So Bruce J. Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 262-63.

59. An imperial coin issued around 81 CE depicts Domitian's deceased son sitting atop a globe surrounded by seven stars. The imagery, of course, associates him with Jupiter who controls the cosmos (Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* [SHBC; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001], p. 43). For more on the anti-imperial polemic see Charles Brüttsch, *Die Offenbarung Jesu Christi* (ZBK, 1; Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970), p. 88; Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 36; Krodell, *Revelation*, p. 95; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 92.

60. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 211), however, connects the reference to the 'stars' as an allusion to Dan. 12.3, 6-7 where stars symbolize the 'wise' among Israel who have been resurrected to heavenly glory. He then links these stars with the 'seven lamps' of Zech. 4.2 making the image concordant with the people of God. Cf. *Lev. R.* 30.2; *Sifre Deut.* 10; *Pes. K.* 27.2; *Pes. R.* 51.4; *Tg. Exod.* 40.4.

61. Interestingly, instead of translating the word 'rod' the LXX reads 'he will strike the



his servant, in Isa. 49.2, like a sharp sword (בַּחֶרֶב חֲדָה, μάχαιραν ὀξεῖαν) for the purpose of rendering judgment. Fekkes insightfully remarks that, ‘John’s preference for the sword image over the rod is no doubt determined in part by his desire to represent Christ as the bearer of universal judicial authority’.<sup>62</sup> Christ, rather than the earthly rulers, wields the sword of justice.

The final aspect of Christ’s appearance describes his face shining like the sun in its full strength (Rev. 1.16c). John possibly alludes again to Dan. 10.6 describing the man dressed in linen with a face appearing like lightning (בְּמִרְאָה בָּרָק, ὥσελ ὄρασις ἀστραπῆς).<sup>63</sup> The most plausible parallel for this description comes from the transfiguration account where Jesus’ face shown as the sun, ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος (Mt. 17.2). The wording contrasts in minor areas since Matthew uses τὸ πρόσωπον and the verb ἔλαμψεν (shine), but John uses ἡ ὄψις and φαίνει as well as adding the extra clause indicating the dazzling brilliance of it’s brightness (ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ). Incidentally, the radiance of his face is reminiscent of Moses when he descended from Mt Sinai after getting a glimpse of God’s glory (cf. Exod. 34.29-35). The image intimates that the appearance of the glorified Christ requires one to avert or shield the eyes due to his majestic splendor. This final aspect of his appearance works in conjunction with all the other descriptions to present Christ as the eschatological judge endowed with all authority, power, glory, and honor.

Coupled with this composite portrait, Christ’s role as the eschatological judge finds further affirmation in the titles explicitly applied to him. In Rev. 1.5, Christ is called the faithful witness (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός), the firstborn from the dead (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν), and the ruler of the kings of earth (ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς). The title ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος (‘the first and the last’) designates Christ as the beginning and end of history (Rev. 1.17; 22.13; Rev. 1.8; 21.6). It closely parallels the title τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ (‘the Alpha and Omega’) used for God the Father in Rev. 1.8; 21.6; 22.13. The title ‘first and last’, when applied to Christ, resounds with theological significance because it is drawn from Isa. 44.6 and 48.12. In both Isaiah passages Yahweh identifies himself as the only true God who redeems Israel. In Isa. 48.12-13, he proceeds to declare his role as the creator of the universe. Its uncritical application to Christ in this passage suggests a very high Christology. As the resurrected one, he holds the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1.17-18). Therefore, Christ, rather than the emperor, determines who lives and who dies.

earth with the word of his mouth’ (πατάξει γῆν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ), but note the variant reading of ῥάβδος.

62. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in Book of Revelation*, p. 120.

63. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 99.

These titles address Jesus as savior, God, king, and judge. His titles not only declare who he is, but also how he relates to his people. This is most clearly demonstrated in the relationship between the inaugural vision of Christ and the letters to the seven churches. Each message includes one or two characteristics of Christ typically introduced in chap. 1. Christ stands in the midst of his churches, not only as savior and Lord, but also as judge. Judgment begins with the people of God as evidenced in the seven letters. The characteristics listed in the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira are all rooted in the visionary description of Rev. 1.13-16. The letters to Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea emphasize one of his titles. Sardis, like Ephesus, features Christ grasping the seven stars, but adds that Jesus also holds the 'seven spirits'. Instead of the Christ holding the 'keys of death and Hades' (Rev. 1.18) as one might expect, in the letter to Philadelphia Jesus holds the keys of David. Finally, Laodicea introduces the christological titles of 'the Amen' and 'ruler of God's creation' as well as adding the adjective 'true' to 'faithful witness'. Despite these additions and alterations, the point remains that Jesus authoritatively addresses, inspects, and judges his people.

## *2. The Church as Christ's Witnesses through Patient Endurance*

In addition to the introduction and presentation of Jesus as the eschatological judge, John acquaints his readers with themes relating to the lawsuit motif as the rest of the vision unfolds. The theme of 'witness' represents a key component of the lawsuit motif especially since all judicial hearings must involve witnesses. Witness was also a common element in the OT prophetic lawsuit. In the prophetic lawsuit of the OT, the prophet called the heavens and earth as witnesses. But as seen in Isaiah, God's people were likewise called to be his witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations and their idols (cf. Isaiah 40-55).

All three terms from the μαρτ- word group (μαρτυρέω, μάρτυς, μάρτυς) occur in this first chapter (Rev. 1.2, 5, 9). The book begins and ends with the affirmation that all that is recorded constitutes a testimony indicated by the verb μαρτυρέω (Rev. 1.2; 22.16, 18, 20). The masculine noun μάρτυς coupled with the attributive adjective ὁ πιστός refers twice to Jesus (Rev. 1.5; 3.14) and once to Antipas (Rev. 2.13). Incidentally, fidelity (πιστός) and truthfulness (ἀληθινός), crucial concepts pertaining to legal testimony, occur frequently as qualitative affirmations of one's character or the reliability of one's testimony.<sup>64</sup> The term μαρτυρία occurs most often denoting the contents of

64. The adjective 'true' applies to Christ and is coupled with 'faithful' (Rev. 1.5; 3.14; 19.11) or with 'holy' (Rev. 3.7). Christians are commanded or encouraged to remain faithful (Rev. 2.10; 13.10; 14.12) and faithfulness is regarded as an important virtue for individual believers (Rev. 2.13, 19; 17.14). The souls under the altar make their appeal for justice to God declaring that he is ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός (Rev. 6.10). Repeatedly,

the testimony maintained.<sup>65</sup> Witness terminology occurs regularly demonstrating that it is a prominent theme especially as it pertains to the churches.

Believers testify to Christ through patient endurance as kingdom citizens in the midst of tribulation (Rev. 1.9). John combines the themes of tribulation (θλίψις), kingdom (βασιλεία), and patient endurance (ὑπομονή) as especially pertinent for the Christian communities. Twice θλίψις denotes the suffering, hardship, and persecution befalling faithful believers (Rev. 1.9; 2.9-10). It also occurs twice with the adjective μέγας (Rev. 2.22; 7.14) regarding the judgment that Christ inflicts upon the false prophetess (and her followers) as well as the earth's inhabitants. This suggests a distinction between the θλίψις inflicted on believers by worldly constituents and the θλίψις that sinners endure as part of Christ's righteous judgments. Christians, then, should expect persecutions and hardships as part and parcel of living for Christ.

The believers are rejected because they are citizens of God's kingdom. In the Apocalypse, they actually comprise the kingdom (Rev. 1.6; 5.10).<sup>66</sup> Revelation envisions the eschatological consummation of Christ's kingdom (Rev. 11.15; 12.10), which is placed in juxtaposition to the satanic kingdom of this world (Rev. 16.10; 17.12, 17-18). As members of Christ's kingdom, believers are exhorted to endure (ὑπομονή) unjust suffering because their vindication will come when Christ's kingdom is visibly established on earth. Therefore, endurance constitutes the chief virtue for believers during times of hardship and oppression as a testimony (Rev. 1.9; 2.2-3, 19; 3.10; 13.10; 14.12-13).

God receives affirmation for the justness of his judgments when the saints, souls, and heavenly multitude aver that his ways (αἱ ὁδοί σου; cf. Rev. 15.3) and judgments (αἱ κρίσεις σου; cf. Rev. 16.7; 19.2) are ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια. Three times specific promises are announced regarding the rewards awaiting the saints and each one is followed by an assurance of reliability. In Rev. 19.9, the saints invited to the wedding will be blessed and they can count on it because οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι ἀληθινοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσιν. Jesus promises to make all things new, in Rev. 21.5, followed by the injunction to write it down because οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ εἰσιν. Lastly, an angel affirms the truth and faithfulness of all the delights promised in the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 22.3-5), as well as, the prophecy of the entire book when he tells John that οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί.

65. It most frequently occurs in a binary combination as the phrase τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4) and once with τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ (Rev. 12.17 cf. 14.12). Usually τὴν μαρτυρίαν includes the general genitive Ἰησοῦ (Rev. 1.2, 9; 12.17; 17.6; 19.10; 20.4), but not always (Rev. 6.9; 11.7). In Rev. 11.7; 17.6; 19.10, it clearly refers to the testimony maintained by believers. The testimony maintained by believers relates to their vocal proclamation or faithfulness to Christ, which resulted in their execution or oppression (Rev. 1.9; 6.9; 11.7; 12.11, 17; 17.6; 20.4).

66. Both Rev. 1.6 and 5.10 contain statements regarding what Jesus has accomplished with his atoning work by making the saints into a kingdom of priests who serve God who will one day rule on earth with Christ. Revelation 1.6 expresses that Christ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ. This aspect is reaffirmed in Rev. 5.10.

*3. Investigation of the Churches (Rev. 2.1–3.22)*

The letters to the seven churches play a vital role in the overall message of the book of Revelation because they contain specific instructions regarding what behavior Christ expects from his new covenant communities.<sup>67</sup> They constitute a very large block of direct address written to the intended recipients. The impact of these messages cause ripples throughout the entire vision evident by the intratextual reverberations later in the book. These messages broadly correspond to the OT genre of prophetic oracles.<sup>68</sup> They generally resemble judgment and salvation oracles, but more specifically they relate to the covenant lawsuit speech. In this sense, these letters are comparable to the proceedings of a judicial investigation whereby a judge examines the evidence and either encourages particular actions or warns of impending judgment. An analysis of both the form and content will confirm that these letters are best associated with the covenantal lawsuit speech.

*a. The Form of the Seven Letters*

The form and genre of the letters to the seven churches furnishes a gateway between the prophetic lawsuit of the OT and the book of Revelation.<sup>69</sup> Because these letters diverge from the normal models of Greco-Roman epistolary writing,<sup>70</sup> they are closer to classification as *prophetic oracles*.<sup>71</sup> While

67. de Lassus, 'Le septénaire des lettres', pp. 359-63. Some commentators, however, like R.H. Charles have contended that these letters were composed separately from the rest of the Apocalypse and were included by a later redactor. On the other side of the spectrum, others like Schüssler Fiorenza maintain that the letters function solely as part of John's rhetorical strategy meaning that they do not address real problems endemic to the churches.

68. So Ferdinand Hahn, 'Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse: Ein Beitrag zur Bestimmung prophetischer Redeformen', in *Tradition und Glaube: Das frühe Christentum in seiner Umwelt* (ed. Gert Jeremias, H. Kuhn, and Hartmut Stegemann; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 357-94; Ulrich B. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament: Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur urchristlichen Prophetie* (SNT, 10; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975), pp. 46-107.

69. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, pp. 46-107. Müller argues that John structured his prophetic lawsuit speech directly from the OT pattern. Although he includes Paul and the synoptic tradition, he stated, 'Wenn z. B. Paulus und der Prophet Johannes die Struktur der prophetischen Gerichtsrede, wie sie aus alttestamentlich-jüdischer Tradition überliefert ist, verwenden, so dürfen wir annehmen, daß sie eine übliche Redeform auch des Urchristentums war, zumal sie auch in der synoptischen Tradition zu finden ist'.

70. Contra Adolf Deissmann, *Bible Studies: Contributions, Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions, to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* (trans. Alexander Grieve; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909), p. 54; Adolf Deissmann, *New Light on the New Testament: From Records of the Greco-Roman Period* (trans. Lionel Strachan; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), pp. 51-61;

the letters contain features related to both judgment and salvation, the inclusion of commendations and accusations suggests generic features concordant with the prophetic lawsuit speech. Specifically, it resembles the covenant lawsuit whereby Christ scrutinizes the new covenant people of God in order to provoke repentance and promote desired behavior by means of promised judgment or salvation. Campbell labels the letters as ‘*mini covenant lawsuits*’.<sup>72</sup> Beale accepts a qualified version of Campbell’s thesis for three reasons: (1) the covenantal structure for the entire book seems viable especially in respect to the conclusion of the book (Rev. 22.7b, 18-19), which partly alludes to Deut. 4.2; (2) the ‘high degree’ of allusions to OT themes and phrases ‘permits the plausibility of the employment of such a major theme;’ and (3) the churches comprise the new covenant communities that have become the ‘true Israel’.<sup>73</sup>

The messages that Christ delivers, via John, to the seven churches of Asia Minor exhibit an agglomeration of structural features signaling an intentional unified pattern.<sup>74</sup> Duplicate phrases recur with some variation in all seven letters clearly delineating particular structural elements. Each letter begins with an address to the angel of one of the seven churches (Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ

cf. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, pp. 38-39; John T. Kirby, ‘The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3’, *NTS* 34 (1988), pp. 197-207 (200).

71. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, pp. 47-107; Hahn, ‘Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse’, pp. 357-94; Klaus Berger, ‘Apostelbrief und apostolische Rede: Zum Formular frühchristlicher Briefe’, *ZNW* 65 (1974), pp. 212-19; Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, pp. 72-73; David E. Aune, ‘The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)’, *NTS* 36 (1990), pp. 182-204 (195-97); Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 373-75; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 19-20; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 72-73; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 47; Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 3; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, ‘Revelation’ in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (ed. J.D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 1536-72 (1536); Robert L. Muse, ‘Revelation 2–3: A Critical Analysis of Seven Prophetic Messages’, *JETS* 29 (1986), pp. 147-61; Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, p. 55. Contra Wiard Popkes, ‘Die Funktion der Sendschreiben in der Apokalypse, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Spätgeschichte der neutestamentlichen Gleichnisse (Rev 2–3)’, *ZNW* 78 (1987), pp. 90-107 (92).

72. Campbell, ‘Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls’, pp. 75-81.

73. G.K. Beale, ‘The Hearing Formula and the Visions of John in Revelation’, in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet* (ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), pp. 167-80.

74. Hahn, ‘Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse’, pp. 357-94. He argues that the messages exhibit four main sections: (1) *die Botenformel* (the messenger formula); (2) the οἶδα speech; (3) *der Weckruf* (the hearing formula) and (4) *der Überwinderspruch* (the overcoming saying).

τῆς...ἐκκλησίας) followed by an imperative to write (γράψον).<sup>75</sup> The phrase Τάδε λέγει ('thus says') coupled with a characteristic of Christ constitutes another consistent feature.<sup>76</sup> The main body of each letter in which Christ addresses the condition of the churches begins with οἶδά.<sup>77</sup> The ensuing οἶδά speech contains either a word of commendation (οἶδά A), accusation (οἶδά B), or both.<sup>78</sup> The accusation speech typically begins with the phrase ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ.<sup>79</sup> Christ admonishes each church to respond in active obedience and often warns of dire consequences should the churches fail to make amends. The prominent use of imperative verbs signals the beginning of each admonition section.<sup>80</sup> Each letter also contains an exhortation to listen ('Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω')<sup>81</sup> and an eschatological promise of salvation for the overcomers (Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτόν).<sup>82</sup> This gives the letters a basic sevenfold structural pattern if all these elements are present:<sup>83</sup>

- (1) Address (Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ...ἐκκλησίας γράψον).
- (2) Prophetic formula (Τάδε λέγει coupled with a christological predication).
- (3) The οἶδά A speech of commendation, if applicable.
- (4) The οἶδά B speech of accusation (ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ), if applicable.
- (5) An admonition laden with imperative verb forms.
- (6) An exhortation to listen ('Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω).
- (7) An eschatological promise of salvation (Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτόν).

John, however, does not follow this pattern rigidly as evidenced by certain omissions and reversal of elements. On one hand, two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, do not receive any accusatory remarks. On the other hand, two churches, Sardis and Laodicea, fail to receive any words of commendation. The beginning of Christ's accusation is typically marked by the phrase ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ,<sup>84</sup> but this phrase is omitted in the letters to Sardis and Laodicea

75. Cf. Rev. 2.1a, 8a, 12a, 18a; 3.1a, 7a, 14a.

76. Cf. Rev. 2.1b, 8b, 12b, 18b; 3.1b, 7b, 14b.

77. Cf. Rev. 2.2, 9, 13, 19; 3.1, 8, 15.

78. Although there are no canonical parallels to the οἶδά speech in Revelation, it does appear to be a common feature in the ANEVT. See Herbert B. Huffmon, 'The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yāda*', *BASOR* 181 (1966), pp. 31-37; Graves, 'The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties', p. 58.

79. Cf. Rev. 2.4, 14, 20.

80. For the use of the admonition speech in Apocalyptic writings such as *1 En.* 91.3, 10; *Jub.* 7.20, 29; 36.11, see Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, pp. 79-81.

81. Cf. Rev. 2.7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3.6, 13, 22.

82. Cf. Rev. 2.7b, 11b, 17b, 26; 3.5, 12, 21.

83. Contra the fourfold divisions suggested by Lars Hartman, 'Form and Message: A Preliminary Discussion of 'Partial Texts' in Rev 1-3 and 22, 6 ff', in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. Jan Lambrecht; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 129-49 (142); Muse, 'Revelation 2-3', p. 149.

84. I.e., Ephesus (Rev. 2.4), Pergamum (Rev. 2.14), and Thyatira (Rev. 2.20).

since the entire οἶδα speech comprises an accusation against them. While the strong adversative ἀλλά usually contrasts the positive from the negative, in Rev. 2.6 and 3.4 it introduces a positive exception in the otherwise negative tone during the admonition.<sup>85</sup> What is more, an interesting pattern emerges differentiating the first three letters from the remaining four letters. The first three letters consistently place the appeal to listen (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω) prior to the promise to the overcomers (Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ), but this order is completely reversed in the following four letters. The most likely reason is because the letter to Thyatira functions as the theological epicenter of the letters.<sup>86</sup>

The address to the representative angels of the congregations followed by the command to write indicates its prophetic character. The presence of a supernatural messenger or *angelus interpres* is a common characteristic in apocalyptic literature.<sup>87</sup> These correspondences exceed the boundaries of typical Greco-Roman epistles suggesting an intentional departure to highlight its prophetic nature. One reason for this departure stems from the fact that the letters are primarily addressed to angelic beings whereas the individual churches are the secondary recipients.<sup>88</sup> That the letters are addressed to spiritual beings is the most likely interpretation.<sup>89</sup> These angels function as heavenly representatives of the earthly congregations.<sup>90</sup>

85. The adversative ἀλλά ('but') combined with the second personal plural ἔχεις ('you have') appears at the end of the admonition section in the letters to Ephesus (ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις) and Sardis (ἀλλὰ ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν).

86. An interesting, albeit unconvincing, suggestion takes a chiastic view for the letter's arrangement. See Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 226-27 and Kiddle, *Revelation*, pp. 19-20. Based on literary and structural considerations rather than thematic ones (i.e. Beale), the pattern looks more like a b c d e b' e' and therefore does not constitute a chiasm.

87. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 15.

88. For a detailed treatment of the identity of the seven angels as human or supernatural agents see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (WUNT, 2/70; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), pp. 232-38; Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 32-34; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 50-52; Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, pp. 87-89; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 108-12.

89. On the seven angels as supernatural beings either as personifications and heavenly counterparts see Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, pp. 445-56; Morris, *Revelation*, p. 57; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 63; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 18-20; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 88. For those who argue that they are human messengers or prophets see Richard C. Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches of Asia* (2nd edn; London: Parker, Son & Bourn, 1861), pp. 53-58; Hugh Martin, *The Seven Letters: Christ's Message to His Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 56; Howard H. Brownlee, 'The Priestly Character of the Church in the Apocalypse', *NTS* 5 (1958-1959), pp. 224-25; William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 58 n. 2; Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, p. 118.

90. Traugott Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD, 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck

Another reason to associate these letters as prophetic in nature relates to the aorist imperative γράψου commanding John to write down the ensuing message.<sup>91</sup> This exact verb form (γράφου) occurs a total of twelve times and in every instance John is commanded to write in fulfillment of his prophetic commission.<sup>92</sup> Since the entire book of Revelation is addressed to the same seven churches (cf. Rev. 1.11), these letters represent smaller prophetic oracles to individual churches within the overall framework of John's vision.

The prophetic character of these letters is made even more explicit by the use of τάδε λέγει coupled with a christological predication. Of the three hundred plus occurrences of τάδε λέγει in the LXX, the overwhelming majority denote a prophetic formula introducing a word from God.<sup>93</sup> Whenever prophets spoke a specific word from Yahweh, they introduced their oracle in Hebrew as כה אמר יהוה, which is translated in the LXX as τάδε λέγει κύριος. Variations of this phrase add predications augmenting יהוה including such descriptions as 'the God of Israel' (אלהי ישראל, ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραηλ), 'LORD of Hosts/Almighty' (צבאות, παντοκράτωρ), and 'the God of David your father' (אלהי דוד אביך, ὁ θεὸς Δαυιδ τοῦ πατρὸς σου). A pattern of τάδε λέγει plus a divine predication constitutes a standard formula introducing a prophetic oracle. This corresponds to the seven letters, which follow a pattern of τάδε λέγει plus a christological predication. Significantly, Revelation replaces יהוה with an aspect denoting Christ thereby demonstrating an extremely high Christology. As such, τάδε λέγει was a standard prophetic formula recognized in nascent Christianity because of its clear connection to the OT prophets.<sup>94</sup>

& Ruprecht, 2008), p. 32. Holtz argues that the angels represent the churches, but they are not human representatives. He remarks, 'Schon von daher ist es unmöglich, daß der "Engel der Gemeinde" für einen menschlichen Repräsentanten der Gemeinde (etwa ein monarchischer Bischof) steht. Er ist vielmehr eine Individualisierung der jeweiligen kollektiven Gemeinde, repräsentiert sie in ihrem Gehalt und ihrer Geschichte, ohne in ihr als ihr Symbol gleichsam aufzugehen'.

91. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 110. He observes, 'The indirect object Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ... and the aorist imperative γράψου... are reversed, with the imperative uncharacteristically last for emphasis'.

92. Cf. Rev. 1.11, 1.19; 2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14; 14.13; 19.9; 21.5.

93. Aune, 'The Form and Function of the Proclamations', p. 187. Aune observes that τάδε (the accusative form of ὅδε) was obsolete in Koine Greek and would convey a sense of archaism. This usage, then, suggests an intentional archaic effect equivalent to the use of 'thus saith' in English.

94. Interestingly, the only other NT occurrence of τάδε λέγει also introduces a prophetic oracle. In Acts 21.11, the prophet Agabus warns Paul of his impending arrest in Jerusalem: After taking Paul's belt and binding his own feet and hands, Agabus declares, τάδε λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. Not only does one observe the similarities between the prophetic proclamation of Agabus and the seven letters in that they begin with τάδε λέγει, but they are also attributed to the Holy Spirit. While the letters to the seven churches are dictated by Christ (as demonstrated by the Christological predications), they are regarded



The use of *τάδε λέγει*, however, is not restricted to prophetic oracles and it was commonly used to report direct speech in official correspondences. All other non-prophetic occurrences of *τάδε λέγει* in the LXX always introduce a speech from one party to another via a messenger. Joseph (*τάδε λέγει ὁ υἱὸς σου Ἰωσήφ*) tells his father to join him in Egypt in a message delivered by his brothers (Gen. 45.9). Moses asks the King of Edom, on behalf of the Israelites (*τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀδελφός σου Ἰσραὴλ σύ*), to let them pass through his territory (Num. 20.14). This phrase is also used in cases of parley where one party addresses a grievance against another party (Josh. 22.16; Judg. 11.15; Amos 7.11). The most dominant non-prophetic use of *τάδε λέγει* involves the correspondence of a king transmitted through a messenger (Exod. 5.10; 1 Kgs 2.30; 20.2, 5 [21.3, 5]; 2 Kgs 1.11; 9.18, 19; 18.19, 29, 31; 19.3; 2 Chron. 36.23; Isa. 36.4, 14, 16; 37.3; 1 Esd. 2.2; Jdt. 2.5). Evidently, this was a proclamation formula characteristic of Persian royal diplomatic communications and later edicts issued by Roman magistrates and emperors (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.26).<sup>95</sup> The preponderance of usage in the LXX clearly demonstrates that *τάδε λέγει* generally functioned as an introductory formula by which a messenger authoritatively quotes a high ranking official to a third party, either through written or oral correspondence. Hence, it naturally fits a prophetic context where the prophet transmits a specific message from a sovereign God to his covenant people.

David Graves contends that the use of *τάδε λέγει* suggests a covenant lawsuit by comparing it with ANEVT parallels.<sup>96</sup> He notes that the ANEVT often begin with ‘These are the words of...’ followed by the identification of the suzerain.<sup>97</sup> The function of this opening is to establish the identity of the Suzerain/King as the one who made a covenant with the recipients. Graves

as what the spirit says to the churches (*τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις*). Aune notes a similar variation in Ign. *Phld.* 7.3 (*τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ἐκήρυσεν λέγον τάδε*). So Aune, ‘The Proclamations to the Seven Churches’, p. 188.

95. Aune, ‘The Proclamations to the Seven Churches’, p. 187. As such, Aune argues that the form of the seven letters is *parenetic salvation–judgment oracles* conveyed through the mode of Roman imperial edicts. Imperial edicts issue the juridical decrees of the emperor through the empire. So Gunnar Rudberg, ‘Zu den Sendschreiben der Johannes-Apokalypse’, *Eranois* 11 (1911), pp. 170–79 (175–76); E. Stauffer, *Christus und die Caesaren: Historische Skizzen* (Hamburg: Wittig, 5th edn, 1960), p. 198; J. Lähnemann, ‘Die sieben Sendschreiben der Johannes-Apokalypse: Dokumente für die Konfrontation des frühen Christentums mit hellenistisch/römischer Kultur und Religion in Kleinasien’, in *Studien zur Religion und Kultur Kleinasien* (2 vols.; ed. S. Sahin, E. Schwertheim, and J. Wagner; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 516–39.

96. Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, pp. 101–103.

97. Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, p. 102. See also John A. Thompson, ‘The Near Eastern Suzerain–Vassal Concept in the Religion of Israel’, *JRH* 3 (1964), pp. 1–19 (4).

suggests that John adopts this prophetic messenger formula ‘to introduce the Suzerain/King who would judge the church in classic OT prophetic prescription understandable to a first-century reader with a Jewish background’.<sup>98</sup> He suggests that this use of *τάδε λέγει* evokes a covenant lawsuit against the disobedient people of God to return to their covenant pledge (cf. Amos 2.4; Zech. 1.3).<sup>99</sup>

The official body of the investigation begins with the use of *οἶδα* where Christ declares his intimate knowledge of the condition of his churches. The term *οἶδα*, only occurring in Rev. 2.2, 9, 13, 19; 3.1, 8, 15, refers to the definite knowledge possessed by Jesus and is semantically related to other verbs of knowing. It occurs in every letter immediately after the *τάδε λέγει*, thus signaling the content of the prophetic oracle. In all but two of the letters, Smyrna and Pergamum, Jesus declares his knowledge of their deeds (*τὰ ἔργα*). In the letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia the *οἶδα* speech proceeds to enumerate a positive assessment or commendation of believers in those churches. The letters to Sardis and Laodicea, however, immediately launch into accusations following the *οἶδα*. In the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira the accusation begins with *ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σου*, but this section is still governed by *οἶδα*. The *οἶδα* speech (*οἶδα-Abschnitt* or *οἶδα-Sätzen*), therefore, includes both a commendation (*οἶδα A*) and an accusation (*οἶδα B*).<sup>100</sup> This section also seems to reflect expressions in OT prophecy emphasizing God’s knowledge of Israel’s situation (cf. 1 Cor. 14.24).<sup>101</sup>

The transition from the *οἶδα* speech to the admonition is signaled by the presence of imperative verbs. The admonition falls into two basic divisions based on verb forms: (1) commands (imperative verbs); (2) followed by a warning about disobedience or a reward for obedience (future verb forms). The indicted churches (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea) are commanded to change their ways,<sup>102</sup> whereas Smyrna and Philadelphia are exhorted to continue in their faithfulness as they prepare to endure future

98. Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, pp. 103.

99. Graves, ‘The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties’, pp. 103.

100. Hahn, ‘Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse’, pp. 370-76; Beale, ‘The Hearing Formula in Revelation’, p. 169.

101. Hartman, ‘Form and Message’, p. 143. Cf. Jer. 48.30; Hos. 5.3; Amos 5.12; 2 Kgs 8.12; 1 En. 98.6.

102. Interestingly, the corruption of the congregation in Thyatira was so extensive that Christ only commands the few faithful in the church to hold on (*ὁ ἔχετε κρατήσατε*). The false prophetess, Jezebel, has garnered so many adherents in the church that Christ is giving her an unspecified amount of time to repent before he judges her and her followers (Rev. 2.21-23). The reason for this advanced judgment is so that all the churches will know that Christ is the one who examines and judges his people according to their deeds (Rev. 2.23).

opposition. Christ warns Ephesus and Pergamum of serious consequences should they fail to comply.<sup>103</sup> He uses the formula εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι... ('but if not, I will come to you...'). In the letters to Smyrna, Sardis, and Laodicea, the future form accompanies a promised reward for obedience to his commands.<sup>104</sup> The absence of either a warning or reward for Thyatira is explained by the fact that the threat of punishment was already pronounced in the accusation due to the seriousness of their compromise.

The stipulations, presented in the admonition, strongly evoke a covenantal tone for the seven letters conforming to a pattern of blessings for obedience but curses for disobedience.<sup>105</sup> The book of Deuteronomy represents a covenant renewal with the generation about to enter the Promised Land in which Moses repeatedly proclaims blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The covenant stipulations were legally binding on the people of God and their future blessings depended on whether or not they chose to obey (cf. Deut. 30.19). The covenantal nature of the overall message for the seven churches is further supported by the final warning not to add or subtract from the contents of the book of Revelation (Rev. 22.18-20; cf. Deut. 4.2). If the churches heed the Lord's instructions, then they will receive the blessings promised to the new covenant communities rather than incurring the curses (plagues) described in the book. The admonition represents Christ's partial verdict resulting from his initial juridical investigation regarding the churches' faithfulness to the new covenant. His verdict is conditional in that he stipulates injunctions for the churches to obey in order to avoid punishment and/or gain their reward.<sup>106</sup> Christ's verdict, therefore, remains open-ended, allowing the churches time to repent before the final judgment.

The final two formal elements of the seven letters include an appeal to listen and the promise to the victorious ones. In the first three letters (Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum) the order is first the appeal and second the promise, but it is reversed in the final four (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea).

103. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 103. He calls this a *Gerichtsdrohung*.

104. In the letter to Philadelphia, he merely states that they should hold on to what they have so that no one could take their crown away (ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου). He uses the subjunctive form, λάβῃ, rather than the future tense because he uses a ἵνα clause stating the purpose/result of the imperative. This suggests that the admonition functions to encourage the believers of their assured reward.

105. See Graves, 'The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties', pp. 108-11.

106. Muse, 'Revelation 2-3', p. 158. He observes that, 'The repentance exhortation in the imperative is found in the Deuteronomistic tradition (Deut. 30.1-10) as well as the prophets Joel (1.8-14), Zechariah (1.1-6), Isaiah (3.1-4.4) and Ezekiel (14.6; 18.30)... Repentance was considered to be the saving effect of God's punitive judgments (Deut. 4.29-31) in the day of Yahweh'.

The appeal to listen occurs identically in all seven letters.<sup>107</sup> The appeal addresses the one having an ear (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς) to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches (ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις).<sup>108</sup> This command to hear recurs throughout the book of Revelation in order to urge Christians to respond positively to the contents of the vision. John addresses the auditors of the book of Revelation at the beginning and at the end of the book. In Rev. 1.3 the first macarism promises a blessing for everyone who hears the words of this prophecy (οἱ ἀκούοντες τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας). Whereas the book begins with a blessing, it ends with a stern warning issued to those who have heard the words of this prophecy in Rev. 22.18 (Μαρτυρῶ ἐγὼ παντὶ τῷ ἀκούοντι τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας). That warning, however, is preceded by a gracious invitation in Rev. 22.17 offered by the one hearing (ὁ ἀκούων εἰπάτω· ἔρχου) to come to and drink of the water of life. An appeal to the auditors is also made in the middle of the vision in the midst of the description of the severe persecution inflicted on believers by the beast. Rev. 13.9 closely resembles the appeal in the seven letters in that it reads Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω (cf. Mk 4.23). This appeal is followed by a gnomic expression calling for patient endurance during the coming intense persecution.

Although the exact construction of the hearing formula in Revelation 2–3 is unique to the Apocalypse, it readily compares with the hearing formula employed by Christ in the Gospels. Jesus' usage stems from the OT prophetic tradition especially as it relates to obduracy in Israel. The ability to see and hear spiritual truth is granted by Yahweh and the inability is likewise the result of his sovereign choice (Deut. 29.4; Prov. 20.10; Isa. 32.3). Israel's obduracy results in their inability to see, hear, understand, and repent. This spiritual blindness and deafness comes from both the decree of Yahweh and the hardness of their own hearts (Isa. 6.9–10; 42.20; Jer. 5.21; 6.10; Ezek. 12.2; 40.4). Jesus, in keeping with his prophetic vocation, bases his use of parables on Isa. 6.9–10 indicating that some will hear and understand but others are blinded to spiritual truth.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, this expression in Revelation functions as a prophetic formula<sup>110</sup> or a *prophetischer Weckruf*<sup>111</sup> whereby

107. A.M. Enroth, 'The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation', *NTS* 36 (1990), pp. 596–608. She argues that the hearing formula, which is reminiscent of Jesus' public ministry, indicates that the letters address all congregations generally based on the hearing formula in the Synagogues.

108. See Aune, *Revelation* 1–5, p. 151.

109. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 237–38.

110. Aune, *Revelation* 1–5, p. 150. So David E. Aune, 'The Odes of Solomon and Early Christian Prophecy', *NTS* 28 (1982), pp. 435–60 (438).

111. Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 104; Hahn, 'Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse', p. 377. See also Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 58. He argues that this prophetic formula was used when the word of God did not produce its

individual believers are called to respond if they perceive the reality of the situation pronounced in this word of the Lord (τάδε λέγει).

Implicit in this appeal is that the content of the seven letters contains a universal message to all the churches because it employs the plural (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις) rather than the singular (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ). These letters constitute inspired prophetic oracles from the Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit and communicated to John (cf. Acts 22.21).<sup>112</sup> They are not limited merely to the seven churches because the messages are applicable to all new covenant communities. This becomes evident in the oracle to Thyatira, which is the longest of the letters and is centrally located in the middle as the fourth of seven.<sup>113</sup> After Christ declares the impending fate of the false prophetess and all her followers (Rev. 2.22-23a), he provides a reason for the swift and severe judgment in Rev. 2.23. Jesus will kill (ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ) the followers of the false prophetess and as a result all the churches (πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι) will realize (γινώσκονται) that he is the one who examines their minds and hearts (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας). The assured results of Christ's forensic examination is that he will give (δώσω) a just verdict according to what they have done (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν). Rev. 2.23, therefore, functions as the theological epicenter of the seven letters by positing a concise summary of the basic message integral to all churches.

The final element of these prophetic oracles is an eschatological promise of salvation for the overcomers (*Überwinderspruch*).<sup>114</sup> The letters to Ephesus and Pergamum use the dative singular participle to address the conquerors (τῷ νικῶντι), but all the rest use the nominative singular participle ὁ νικῶν. The letter to Thyatira, once again, differs from the pattern in that it is the only one to begin with the conjunction καί and adds the extra nominative singular participle phrase ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου. All the letters use a first

desired effect in the hearers. He also ties this theory into the judicial threats and themes in the letters.

112. No distinction is made between the words of Christ and the words of the Spirit. So Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, pp. 208-11; Bruce, 'The Spirit in the Apocalypse', p. 340; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 89; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 122; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 63-64. On the role of the Holy Spirit in early Christian prophecy see Hill, 'Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St John', pp. 401-18; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, pp. 115-18.

113. This placement makes Thyatira the central oracle with a balance of three oracles before it and after it. While avoiding a chiasmic model for the order of the letters, the location of this letter does seem to convey theological significance. As demonstrated by the statement in Rev. 2.23, the letter to Thyatira works like a hinge between the first three and the last three. This could account for the reversed form of the final two elements between the first three and the last four letters.

114. Hahn, 'Die Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse', p. 381; Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt*, pp. 104-107.

person singular future form of the verb indicating what they may expect Jesus to do for them,<sup>115</sup> except the letter to Smyrna that uses the third person aorist passive subjunctive with an emphatic negation (οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῇ).<sup>116</sup> Jesus offers an eschatological promise to individuals who succeed victoriously in their obedient faithfulness to Christ. On one hand, these eschatological promises are graphically portrayed in the final vision as a means to encourage believers to stay faithful until their ultimate vindication.<sup>117</sup> On the other, the salvation promised to the overcomers is juxtaposed with the judgment reserved for the wicked (cf. Rev. 21.7-9).

#### *b. The Prophetic Lawsuit and the Seven Letters*

The prophetic oracles addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor closely resemble the covenant lawsuit speech of the OT. The plausibility for this assertion is confirmed by three observations. First, the use of covenantal language and imagery is endemic to the oracles because the churches comprise communities of the new covenant. The relationship between Christ and his people is governed in terms of the new covenant that he inaugurated and mediated. He has the right to deal with their infractions as their king. Second, the seven oracles exhibit a forensic quality that evokes lawsuit imagery. Prophetic oracles in the OT that were steeped in juridical imagery typically belong to the subgenre of lawsuit speeches. It is only reasonable, then, to make a similar connection in light of the forensic nature of the seven letters. Although the letters do not share a one-to-one correspondence with any known OT prophetic lawsuit speech, some formal parallels exist. The features of the seven letters, third, correlate with several features evident in the prophetic *rib*-pattern. The cumulative effect of these observations suggests that John intentionally incorporated the covenant lawsuit speech to highlight the juridical nature of these oracles.

1. *The Covenantal Nature of the Letters.* The letters to the seven churches reflect a covenantal relationship with Christ who investigates them in terms of their faithfulness to his stipulations for appropriate belief and praxis. The word for covenant, διαθήκη, only occurs in Rev. 11.19 when the heavenly temple opens to reveal the ark of the covenant. Despite this apparent lack of

115. On the use of the future form as the grammaticalization of expectation see Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (SBG, 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 427-28.

116. The use of οὐ μὴ with an aorist subjunctive constitutes the strongest way to negate something in Greek. Therefore, the conquerors at Smyrna could never ever face any harm posed by the second death. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 468.

117. Celia Deutsch, 'Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rev. 21.1-22.5', *ZNW* 78 (1987), pp. 106-26 (124); Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 134-35, 1057-58; Barr, *Tales of the End*, pp. 53-55; de Lassus, 'Le septénaire des lettres', pp. 359-63.

overt covenantal language, the book of Revelation resounds with covenantal overtones in the prologue and epilogue. Jesus relates to his people through the legal framework of a covenant partnership.<sup>118</sup> These covenantal features manage to frame the entire book as a document intended for a people bound by a covenant relationship with their God. It also lends credence to the notion that Christ's messages to the seven churches reflect the relationship between a suzerain and his vassals.

The main question at hand is the exact relationship of the supposed ANEVT/OT fivefold covenant structure and the book of Revelation. Scholars such as Shea,<sup>119</sup> Strand,<sup>120</sup> Chilton,<sup>121</sup> and Campbell<sup>122</sup> argue that John's vision conforms to the ANEVT structure. Strand and Chilton apply it on a macro-level casting the entire book as a covenant document. Neither Strand nor Chilton make a convincing case, however, because their broad outlines subsume large swaths of complex material that does not comport well with the covenantal divisions that they postulate. Shea attempts to divide the contents of the seven letters into the basic five-fold structure of the ANEVT. Aune has correctly faulted him for imposing an 'essentially alien' structure on the seven letters and that 'his verse-by-verse analysis reveals far too many exceptions to the overall schema'.<sup>123</sup> Campbell, however, manages to offer a plausible covenantal structure for the letters because he does not rigidly force a five-fold covenantal structure on the seven letters.

The fivefold covenantal structure provides an interesting avenue for analyzing the seven letters, but several caveats militate against a wholesale

118. Campbell, 'Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls', pp. 73-74. He posits, 'Thus a legal framework is carefully made to structure the relationship between God and human-kind, with Messiah Jesus as guarantor through his saving death and resurrection (1.5). At the end, the same framework is just as meticulously recalled, for 22.16...harks back in a condensed form to the dispatch of an angel sent to the churches with the solemn declaration what the book contains; then in 22.18-20 various judicial formulae, familiar from Deuteronomy (cf. Deut. 4.2 and 12.32), form the document's final clauses, declare it to be incapable of modification, and give it a stamp of authenticity (μαρτυρῶ...; ἔαν τις ἐπιθή...; ἐπιθήσει...; ἔαν τις ἀφέλῃ...; ἀφελεῖ...; λέγει ὁ μαρτυρῶν...). Finally, a double dire warning guards against trying to add to or subtract from its message by threatening the plagues the book describes (22.18) instead of its promised blessings (22.19)—this is an abbreviated closing reference to the sanctions that apply to the new covenant'. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 227.

119. Shea, 'The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches', p. 72. Cf. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, pp. 32-34; Du Preez, 'Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties', pp. 33-34.

120. Strand, 'A Further Note on the Covenantal Form', pp. 253-54.

121. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 17. He argues that the seven letters also exhibit the exact same structure (cf. pp. 85-86).

122. Campbell, 'Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls', pp. 79-80.

123. Aune, 'The Form and Function', p. 182 n. 4.

adoption of this thesis. To begin with, a covenant represents a foundational document establishing the boundaries and terms of a relationship between two parties. The seven letters presuppose an already established covenantal relationship. At best, then, the seven letters represent an investigative audit to evaluate the churches on the basis of the new covenant stipulations.<sup>124</sup> Second, one may detect some disjunction between the ANEVT covenantal categories with those of the seven letters. For example, the purpose of the historical prologue in the ANEVT was to rehearse the prior relationship between the two parties, but in the seven letters it merely recounts the deeds of the churches. What is more, if John intentionally modeled the seven letters on this fivefold covenantal pattern then how can one account for the otherwise unexplained additions and omissions of various structural elements that are essential to the ANEVT/OT covenants?<sup>125</sup>

More recently, David E. Graves argues persuasively that John combines the covenant lawsuit message of the prophets with the covenant formulary structure of the ANEVT found in Deuteronomy to construct his own unique genre of a hybrid lawsuit oracle.<sup>126</sup> Graves proposes a sixfold structure for the seven letters that is similar to the ANEVT, but gives equal weight to the OT covenant structure:

- (1) Messenger Preamble Formula (Rev. 2.1b; 2.8b; 2.12b; 2.18b; 3.1b; 3.7b; 3.14b)
- (2) Historical Prologue (2.2-4, 6; 2.9; 2.13-15; 2.19-21; 3.1c; 3.8-9; 3.15)
- (3) Ethical Stipulations (2.5a; 2.10a-c; 2.16a; 2.24-25; 3.2-3a; 3.11; 3.18-19)
- (4) Sanctions (including curses) (2.5b, 7b; 2.16b-17b; 2.22-23, 26-28; 3.3b-5; 3.16-17, 20-21)
- (5) Proclamation Witness Formula (2.7a; 2.11a; 2.17a; 2.29; 3.6; 3.13; 3.2)
- (6) Deposit for Public Reading (2.7a; 2.11a; 2.17a; 2.29; 3.6; 3.13; 3.22)

Although some of his categories tend to overlap, he offers a judicious balance between the ANEVT structure and the seven messages of Revelation reflecting a covenantal lawsuit. Therefore, one may posit that the structure of the seven letters exhibits some covenantal features without rigidly corresponding to them.

*2. The Letters as Forensic Documents.* In addition to the covenantal quality of the seven letters, they are unambiguously judicial in nature. The seven letters clearly and undeniably represent a forensic examination of those churches.

124. Campbell, 'Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls', p. 77.

125. E.g., John includes features like the appeal to listen and the promise of eschatological salvation, but omits things like the renewal arrangements and a 'list of witnesses'. A case could possibly be sustained for the promise of salvation to correspond to the blessings and the appeal to listen as the 'witness', but it is not clearly elucidated.

126. Graves, 'The Influence of Ancient Near Eastern Vassal Treaties', pp. 85-159.



Not only do they perform a judicial function, they are also replete with themes drawn from the legal settings of their situations. The juridical character is evident in every aspect of the letters. The contours of the letters from the christological predications to the promise of salvation convey forensic aspects reminiscent of a lawcourt setting.

The predication of Christ in every letter indicates that the one speaking to them wields judicial authority.<sup>127</sup> To the Ephesians he is the one who maintains universal sovereignty over the stars and the churches (Rev. 2.1). The believers in Smyrna are reminded that he reigns over the sphere of history as the resurrected one (Rev. 2.8). The sword in Christ's mouth, reaffirmed to the believers in Pergamum (Rev. 2.12), contrasts the judicial authority of the provincial magistrate by positing Jesus as the one with true political authority to render judgments.<sup>128</sup> In Thyatira, a church indulging in sexual immorality, Jesus' judicial insight and authority is graphically illustrated by his fiery gaze and glowing feet (Rev. 2.18).<sup>129</sup> The believers in Sardis are reminded that Jesus holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars in his right hand imply his sovereign grip of authority (Rev. 3.1). Christ is presented to the church of Philadelphia as the holy and true judge and the Davidic Messiah with the keys to the kingdom (Rev. 3.7).<sup>130</sup> The Laodiceans receive the final message from the ultimate true authority,<sup>131</sup> the faithful and true witness, and

127. For a more exhaustive treatment of the Christological predications in the seven letters see B. Gerhardsson, 'Die christologischen Aussagen in den Sendschreiben der Offenbarung', in *Theologie aus dem Norden* (ed. Albert Fuchs; SNTU, 2; Freistadt: Plöchl, 1977), pp. 142-66.

128. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 247; Cf. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 37-38; Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 84-85; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 68.

129. See the interesting proposal of Paul B. Duff, "I Will Give to Each of You as your Works Deserve": Witchcraft Accusations and the Fiery-Eyed Son of God in Rev 2.18-23', *NTS* 43 (1997), pp. 116-33.

130. The first description ὁ ἄγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, by means of asyndeton, also applies to God in Rev. 6.10. It strongly emphasizes the sanctity and justness of his character and subsequently his verdicts. Beale suggests that it 'probably is a paraphrastic development of 'faithful witness' in 1.5a' (Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 283). The second epithet, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, draws from Isa. 22.22 referring to the authority granted to Eliakim who received the 'keys of David'. The Targums imply a messianic interpretation for the one who has the key will have dominion over the house of David (Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 202). Osborne (*Revelation*, p. 188) observes, 'In this context this describes Jesus as the Davidic Messiah who controls the entrance to God's kingdom, the 'New Jerusalem' (3.12)... He alone can 'open' and 'shut' the gates of heaven. Moreover, the Jews excluded the believers from the synagogue, but Christ will exclude these Jews from God's eternal kingdom. His decision will be final'.

131. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 94; Comblin, *Le Christ*, p. 137; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 104; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 418; Klaus Berger, *Die Amen-Worte Jesu: Eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Legitimation in apokalyptischer Rede*

the ruler over God's creation (Rev. 3.14). Each christological predication clearly presents the oracles as from their covenantal Lord giving him the right to examine and judge his people.

The results of these judicial investigations are not all negative in that Christ acknowledges the areas that his people have performed well in the commendation speech (οἶδα A). Churches are commended for their good works in general, the testing of false prophets, acts of love and service, and overall obedience to Christ. Congregations that fare particularly well all share the common trait of faithfulness and endurance in the midst of trying circumstances.<sup>132</sup> The churches of Smyrna and Pergamum give evidence of opposition manifested through litigation in the court system (see Chapter 5 pp. 69-70).

As part of the tribulation (τὴν θλίψιν) for believers in Smyrna (cf. Philadelphia), a group of Jewish adversaries have instigated accusations against them by dragging them before magistrates whereby they face the threat of imprisonment.<sup>133</sup> Believers in Pergamum have held tight to Christ's name and have not denied their faith while undergoing intense persecution. This persecution culminated in the death of Antipas who faithfully bore testimony to Christ when on trial before the proconsul. Since the proconsul is the only one in the city who has the authorization to enforce capital punishment (*imperium*), this case must have played out in a provincial lawcourt. When the world finds fault with believers because of their faith, Christ commends them for a life well lived.

Christ scrutinizes his churches resulting in a number of accusations exposing their guilt (οἶδα B). These accusations include such covenantal violations as abandoning love, allowing false teachers, engaging in idolatrous and immoral activities, being spiritually dead, and becoming worthless due to self-sufficient pride. If fidelity to Christ represents the highest virtue, then syncretistic adoption of pagan practices becomes the most grievous of offenses. Two churches, Pergamum and Thyatira, are charged with succumbing to false prophets and prostituting themselves in idolatry. John uses infamous OT

(BZNW, 39; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1970), p. 150. Fekkes (*Isaiah and the Prophetic Tradition*, p. 139) remarks that the use of ὁ ἀμήν to introduce the words of Jesus may draw from the gospels; here it 'solemnly and authoritatively opens some new declarations'.

132. Ephesus (Rev. 2.2) is commended for its endurance (τὴν ὑπομονήν σου) as is Thyatira (Rev. 2.19). Smyrna and Philadelphia not only appear small and impoverished but they also face strong opposition from the Jewish community (cf. Rev. 2.9; 3.8-10). Pergamum is the only explicit example of martyrdom up to that point in Asia Minor (Rev. 2.13).

133. Lambrecht, 'Jewish Slander', pp. 421-29. See also the contribution that further advances this theory: Philip L. Mayo, 'Those Who Call Themselves Jews'. *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (PTMS, 60; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), pp. 62-66.

villains, Balaam and Jezebel, as characterizations for the heretics that have infiltrated the congregations. Balaam and Jezebel are credited with leading Israel into apostasy. Significantly, the situation in Thyatira has become so squalid that the judgment of Jezebel and her followers is imminent. The reason for this judgment, as well as for all the letters, is so that all the churches will know that not only is Jesus the one who examines their hearts and minds but he will also judge each person according to their deeds (Rev. 2.23).

That Christ will give to each one according to their deeds (δώσω ὑμῖν ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν) carries both negative and positive connotations. On one hand, the eschatological judgment in store for recalcitrant churches is that Christ will remove their lampstand (Rev. 2.5), fight against them with the sword of his mouth (Rev. 2.15), and he will come to them like a thief (Rev. 3.3). On the other hand, he promises eschatological salvation for those who ‘overcome’. This salvation is graphically described in terms drawn from the OT and images familiar to the provincial citizens. The letters unambiguously assert Christ’s judicial authority to dispense justice by rendering verdicts of guilt or acquittal. Therefore, out of all the possible forms of prophetic oracles the letters to the seven churches share the most affinity with the prophetic lawsuit speeches addressed to God’s covenant people.

3. *The Letters as Covenant Lawsuit Speeches.* If the seven letters are prophetic lawsuit speeches, then they should share formal parallels with known examples drawn from the OT. The prophetic lawsuits against Israel all shared a basic framework.<sup>134</sup> The work of Harvey represents the most comprehensive structural analysis of the *rib*-pattern or covenant lawsuit.<sup>135</sup> He posited a basic fivefold structure: (1) introduction; (2) interrogation; (3) prosecution speech; (4) indictment; and (5) a judicial decree. What is more, he observed that additional elements might also occur in the introduction, prosecution speech, and judicial decree. The introduction typically included a convocation and statement advocating God’s right to lodge accusations. The prosecution speech contained an accounting of how Israel has spurned God’s covenant faithfulness and in some cases mentioned the uselessness of ritual amends. Harvey divides the decree into either treats of condemnation (*Rib* A) or positive words of promise if they repent (*Rib* B).<sup>136</sup> He uses Deut. 32.1-25; Isa. 1.2-29; Jer. 2.4-29; Mic. 6.1-8; and Ps. 50.4-23 as model examples of the prophetic lawsuit (see Table 5).

134. Cf. Westermann, *Forschung*, pp. 134-44; Westermann, *Jesaja 40–66*, pp. 16-18.

135. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 53; Harvey, ‘Le RÎB-Pattern’, pp. 177-78.

136. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique*, p. 54.

Table 5. *Harvey's Structure of the Prophetic Lawsuit in the OT.*

<i>Introduction</i>	Deut. 32.1-3 convocation	Isa. 1.2a, 10 convocation	Jer. 2.4-5a, 12 convocation	Mic. 6.2 convocation	Ps. 50.4-5 convocation
	Deut. 32.4-5 right to accuse	Isa. 1.2b-3 right to accuse			Ps 50.6-7 right to accuse
<i>Interrogation</i>	Deut. 32.6	Isa. 1.11-12	Jer. 2.5b-6	Mic. 6.3	Ps. 50.16b-17
<i>Prosecution speech</i>	Deut. 32.7-15 historical review	Isa. 1.13-15b ritualistic amends	Jer. 2.7-11 historical review	Mic. 6.4-5 historical review	Ps. 50.18-20 historical review
	Deut. 32.16-17 ritualistic amends			Mic. 6.6-8a ritualistic amends	Ps. 50.8-13 ritualistic amends
<i>Indictment</i>	Deut. 32.18	Isa. 1.15c	Jer. 2.13-29		Ps. 50.17-21
<i>Decree</i>	Deut. 32.19-25 <i>Rib</i> A	Isa. 1.16-29 <i>Rib</i> B	Jer. 2.14 <i>Rib</i> A	Mic. 6.8bc <i>Rib</i> B	Ps. 50.14-15 <i>Rib</i> B
					Ps. 50.22-23 <i>Rib</i> A

Immediately, a number of observations arise regarding the differences between this structure and the format of the seven letters in Revelation 2–3. First, the seven letters exhibit a basic structure with seven parts rather than five. The convocation in the OT prophetic lawsuit calls forth eternal witnesses to the covenant from the natural realm, something that is totally absent in the seven letters. The seven letters omit any section filled with interrogatives, unlike the OT examples. Finally, nothing in the seven letters compares with the section of the prosecution speech regarding the uselessness of making ritual amends. These differences reveal that John does not slavishly follow some archetypal pattern mandating strict adherence to qualify them as such. The OT examples, likewise, vary considerably in length and content. The seven letters may not evidence an exact one-to-one correspondence with other known OT examples of covenant lawsuit speeches, but this fails to abolish the plausibility that they are rooted in the same generic soil.

Despite some obvious discrepancies, these OT lawsuit speeches and the seven letters share some remarkable similarities. In most cases, the oracles in the OT begin with an appeal to listen, Jer. 2.5 begins the seven letters with the prophetic formula *τάδε λέγει κύριος*. Interestingly, in the LXX, all the opening appeal to listen use an imperative form of *ἀκούω* just like the similar appeal made toward the end in each of the seven letters.<sup>137</sup> The prosecution speech in

137. Cf. *ἀκούέτω* (Deut. 32.1); *ἄκουε* (Isa. 1.2); *ἀκούσατε* (Mic. 6.1); *ἄκουσον* (Ps. 50.7 [49.7]); *ἀκουσάτω* (Rev. 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13, 22).

the OT (Deut. 32.7-17; Isa. 1.13-15b; Jer. 2.7-11; Mic. 6.4-8a; Ps. 50.8-20) roughly corresponds to the οἶδα speech, especially when charges of idolatry are involved. The wording and concise nature of the indictments in the prophetic lawsuit speeches parallel the accusations made in the οἶδα B speech of the seven letters (cf. Deut. 32.18; Isa. 1.15c; Jer. 2.13; Ps. 50.17-21). A final comparison demonstrates a similarity in that both the OT oracles and the seven letters include threats and promises. These threats and promises, *Rib* A and B, in the OT oracles instruct the Israelites to obey and act accordingly or else experience God's judgment. If they obey then they can expect grace and salvation. The seven letters exhibit the same pattern in the admonition section (*Rib* A) and the promise to the overcomers (*Rib* B).

#### 4. *Conclusion*

The above analysis demonstrates that the letters to the seven churches correspond to lawsuit speeches whereby Jesus conducts a forensic examination of his covenant people. The form of the letters generally distinguishes them as prophetic oracles similar to the OT prophets, more specifically as covenant lawsuit speeches. The book of Revelation follows the pattern of the OT prophetic lawsuit that begins with the people of God before announcing judgment on the nations. The judgments and promises announced for the churches in the seven letters remains contingent upon what they do in response to these oracles. In this sense the remaining vision, especially the interludes, relates to how the churches respond (i.e., faithfully endure as witnesses) during the heightened state of persecution. Once the Lord deals with his people, he turns his attention to the surrounding nations with oracles of judgment. This pattern is established by the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, in that once the covenant people repent and obey Yahweh promises to exact vengeance on Israel's pagan enemies. The book of Revelation, likewise, sounds a note of judgment pertaining to the churches but then the remaining contents of the vision pertains to the judgment of the nations. Significantly, the judgment of the nations is closely tied to the theme of vengeance for their treatment of the saints. Therefore, the letters to the seven churches and the stipulations outlined therein play a vital role throughout the entire vision. The purpose is to provoke obedience, faithfulness, and endurance among the churches as they enter into an intense period of tribulation.

## Chapter 5

### AN EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPHETIC LAWSUIT IN THE SECOND VISION (REV. 4.1–16.21)

The end of the first vision and the transition to the second is signaled by a change of location from Patmos to heaven along with the phrase ἐν πνεύματι (Rev. 4.1-2). This second vision occupies the largest section of the book of Revelation by spanning thirteen chapters. In the first two chapters, John is ushered into the divine courtroom, which emphasizes God and the Lamb's worthiness to judge all humanity. Once Christ is installed as the heavenly judge, he proceeds to open the scroll of God's judgment against the nations.

This initiates the sequence of septets (seals, trumpets, and bowls) unleashed upon the inhabitants of the earth. These septets of judgments increase in severity with each successive set. The seventh of each set proleptically anticipates the final judgment (Rev. 6.16-17; 11.15-19; 16.17-21), which is described in the third vision (Rev. 17.1–21.8). The purpose of these septets is tacitly expressed by the repeated observation that the earth's inhabitants refused to repent of their wicked deeds (Rev. 6.15-16; 9.20-21; 16.9, 11). It will be argued that these septets represent investigative judgments to adjudicate the guilt of the earth's inhabitants.

Interludes interspersed between the septets of investigative judgments depict the role of the saints during this period. These interludes present the saints as sealed prophetic witnesses engaged in a spiritual holy war. Their actions demonstrate how faithful obedience and testimony to Christ may result in their unjust execution in a grand miscarriage of justice. Calls exhorting patient endurance confirms that even though they may suffer for their faith in Christ, their obedience does not go unnoticed in heaven's courtroom (cf. Rev. 13.10). The purpose of these interludes in the narrative flow of Revelation is to promote faithful endurance to Christ among the churches in the face of fierce opposition. Their testimony to Jesus and the word of God will guarantee their final vindication.<sup>1</sup>

1. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 311.

1. *Proceedings in the Divine Courtroom (Revelation 4–5)*

John's ascension into the heavenly throne room is a continuation of his prophetic role in that he was summoned to witness a session of the divine courtroom (cf. 1 Kgs 22.19). God's throne occupies the central location in a series of concentric circles depicting his sovereignty over the cosmos. In order to describe his vision, John draws from other familiar prophetic visions involving God's throne (e.g., Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7). The scene, however, represents more than a euphoric glimpse of the heavenlies because it depicts a very serious session of the divine council. The heavenly assembly convenes for the purpose of installing an eschatological judge worthy enough to prosecute God's judgment on earth's inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

Revelation 4–5 advances the *Gerichtsmotiv* with the divine courtroom proceedings.<sup>3</sup> Four observations support the contention that chaps. 4–5 comprise a lawcourt setting designed to create a sense that the succeeding material pertains to divine jurisprudence. First, God's throne in the heavenly temple also functions as an assize whereby he dispenses justice throughout the cosmos.<sup>4</sup> An analysis of comparative biblical and extra-biblical texts demonstrates the juridical nature of throne room visions. Second, the entourage surrounding the throne embodies the divine council commonly represented in OT prophetic material. Of particular importance is the identification and function of the twenty-four elders. Third, the scroll with seven seals represents a legal document pertaining to judgment. Finally, chap. 5 revolves around the enthronement of a judge worthy enough to open the scroll. Jesus steps forward as both the Davidic king and the Lamb who is the only one worthy to take the scroll.<sup>5</sup>

2. Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 168–70.

3. Jöns, *Das hymnische Evangelium*, p. 38 n. 94. He carefully distinguishes between the 'court hearings' and the 'court happenings'. Chapters 4–5 represent the court hearings and chaps. 6–16 represent the court happenings. He notes, 'Es ist zu unterscheiden zwischen 'Gericht' als Gerichtsverhandlung und 'Gericht' als Gerichtsgeschehen. Im folgenden geht es um die Gerichtsverhandlung, die dem Gerichtsgeschehen vorangeht'.

4. In the ANE and Greco-Roman world, monarchs also functioned as judges who decided legal cases while holding court. Therefore, John's readers would have easily related the setting of God's throne in comparison with that of the emperor. See also Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', pp. 5–22.

5. Giesen (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 145) rightfully contends that Jesus' enthronement and the handing over of the seven sealed scroll is the climax and ultimate purpose of chaps. 4–5. He remarks that 'Ziel- und Höhepunkt der beiden Kapitel ist zweifellos die Übergabe des Buches mit den sieben Siegeln an das Lamm, die die Einsetzung Christi in seine Macht über die Endereignisse symbolisiert'.

a. *The Divine Courtroom (Rev. 4.2-6)*

John's entrance through the threshold of heaven signals a major transition into a new vision that also signals a thematic transition from a juridical investigation of the churches to an investigation of the nations. The succeeding material appears to be eschatological in orientation and focuses on the investigation of the nations rather than the church. This transition is not only signaled by John's transport 'in the spirit', but also it is made even more explicit by the phrase *καὶ δέλω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα*. The scene radically transforms from the barren rocky isle of Patmos into the heavenly throne room shimmering brilliantly with dazzling colors. John describes nothing less than an infinitely majestic display of God gloriously enthroned and surrounded by his courtiers. The prophet of Patmos has arrived in the royal court of the almighty sovereign Creator God. This overwhelming scene creates a sense of the august majesty accorded to the universal judge securely enthroned.

John's vision of the heavenly throne room offers an apocalyptic perspective contrasting imperial pretensions assuming cosmic sovereignty with the true king and judge of the universe. David E. Aune has written an influential article suggesting that Revelation 4–5 deliberately draws from the imperial court to contrast the superiority of God over that of Caesar.<sup>6</sup> His thesis is that 'John's description of the heavenly ceremonial practiced in the throne room of God bears such a striking resemblance to the ceremonial of the imperial court and cult that the latter can only be a parody of the former'.<sup>7</sup> He argues that God's role in the Revelation correlates to the Hellenistic and Roman conception of gods and kings who administer justice.<sup>8</sup> He observes, 'The primary role of the Roman emperor... was that of rendering justice; this corresponds to the ancient conception that Zeus and Jupiter were guarantors of justice and that they provided sanctions supporting the maintenance of the laws and customs of men'. Aune contends that '[t]he primary role of God in the Apocalypse, in fact, appears to be that of dispensing justice in the sense of punishing past breaches of divine law and rewarding the righteous (11.18; 14.7; 16.7; 18.8; 19.2, 11; 20.12, 13)'.<sup>9</sup> Thus, God is depicted as functioning in the same judicial capacity as that of the emperor and all those who act under imperial auspices.

The open door of heaven along with the ascension into the heavenly realms is one of the stock elements of apocalyptic and mystical texts.<sup>10</sup> In the

6. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', pp. 5-26. So Andreas Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), pp. 1-118.

7. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 5.

8. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 8.

9. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 9.

10. Beate Kowalski (*Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, p. 104) convincingly



apocalyptic literature, the seer transcends through the varying layers of heaven, anywhere from three to ten, to arrive before the divine throne.<sup>11</sup> A closely related phenomenon appears in the *Hekhalot* writings containing the accounts of the *merkavah* mystics who traveled through the realm of the heavens to arrive at a vision of God's throne-chariot.<sup>12</sup> While Revelation 4–5 represents a *merkavah* vision in that John is transported before God's throne, to identify it as a 'Christianized' form of *merkavah* mysticism may border on exaggeration.<sup>13</sup> John's account represents a unique quality devoid of the excessive speculation in these Jewish writings. Since he simply appears in heaven and before the throne, the lack of multiple levels of heaven reflects a particularly Christian cosmology stressing the immediacy of God's presence.<sup>14</sup> Another feature that distinguishes John's account from other throne room visions is

argues that the θύρα ἡνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ represents a mixed allusion (*Mischanspielung*) to Ps. 78.23 [77.23] and Ezek 1.1. She compares the LXX of Ps. 78.23 (θύρας οὐρανοῦ ἀνέωξεν) and Ezek 1.1 (ἡνοίχθησαν οἱ οὐανοί). Remarkably, she observes, that Ps. 78.23 and Rev. 4.1 represent the only examples of combining the words (*Wortkombination*) 'door' and 'heaven' in the entire Greek Bible. John combines Ezekiel's vision of an open heaven with the concept of a door to heaven from Psalm 78. This *Mischanspielung* most likely accounts for all other references to the door of heaven in apocalyptic literature.

11. 1 En. 14.8-24; 2 En. 22.1-4; 2 Bar. 22.1; Mart. Isa. 7.13-15, 18-20, 24, 28-31, 32-33; 8.1-3, 16-20; 9.6; T. Lev. 2.6-8; 5.1. So F. Lentzen-Deis, 'Das Motiv der "Himmelsöffnung" in verschiedenen Gattungen der Umweltliteratur des Neuen Testaments', *Bib* 50 (1960), pp. 301-27.

12. Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955), pp. 41-79; I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (TSAJ, 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1980); D.J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (TSAJ, 16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1988); P. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992). Dating the *Hekhalot* literature has proven to be a rather sticky endeavor. Conservative estimates date it to the eighth century CE, but it is possible that it originated around the same time as other Jewish apocalyptic writings. See Michael Mach, 'From Apocalypticism to Early Jewish Mysticism?', in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism. I. The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 229-64 (232-36). For a very helpful comparative analysis of throne room visions see Christopher Rowland, 'The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature', *JSJ* 10 (1979), pp. 137-54.

13. Contra Phillip B. Munoa, 'Jesus, The *Merkavah*, and Martyrdom in Early Christian Tradition', *JBL* 121 (2002), pp. 303-25 (315). Cf. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, p. 62.

14. L.W. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies', *JSNT* 25 (1985), pp. 105-24 (110-11); Jörm, *Das hymnische Evangelium*, p. 33. Contra Rowland, 'The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature', p. 137-54. For an excellent discussion of the differences between Jewish Apocalypses and John's Apocalypse see Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 169-71.

the inclusion of the twenty-four elders because no other extant Jewish or Greek writing contains anything remotely parallel.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, these Jewish writings share at least one common characteristic with the book of Revelation when it comes to throne room visions. Throne room visions frequently emphasize the theme of justice through God's judgment. The *Testament of Levi* contains a throne room vision filled with pronouncements of judgment on the 'injustices of humankind' provoking the Lord's wrath.<sup>16</sup> In his introduction to *3 Enoch*, Alexander demonstrates how the conception of a heavenly lawcourt became central to discussions about God's judgment in rabbinic Judaism:

Building on such biblical texts as 1 Kings 22.19-22, Psalm 82; Job 1.6-12, and especially Daniel 7.9f., the rabbis taught that there is a heavenly law court... over which God presides (b. Sanh 38b; ExR 30.18; LevR 24.2). It was regarded as the heavenly counterpart of the earthly Sanhedrin (b. Sanh 99b; b. Ber 16b/17a), and there was earnest discussion as to the relative jurisdictions of the two courts (b. Makk 23b; Pesiqta deRab Hahana 5.13, ed. Buber, 48a; cr. DeutR 5.5; GenR 26.6). The heavenly law court is one of the main themes of 3 Enoch, and its sessions are covered in detail. There are three main blocks of material: (1) 28.7-10; 30.1-33.2 (2) 26.12 and (3) 18.19-21.<sup>17</sup>

Divine judgment, in other words, was conceived in Judaism as occurring within the realm of a heavenly lawcourt.

Significantly, the first thing that John sees upon his entrance through the open door is the throne centrally located in heaven. To describe the indescribable, once again, strains the limits of John's vocabulary. John remains indebted to antecedent descriptions drawn from OT theophanies of God on his throne.<sup>18</sup> He melds together a smorgasbord of allusions from Exod. 19.16; 24.10-12; 1 Kgs 22.19-20 (cf. 2 Chron. 18.18); Isa. 6.1-4; Dan. 7.9-14; Zech. 4.2, 6 and apparently modeled it on the structure of Ezek. 1.1-28 (cf. Ezek. 10.1).<sup>19</sup> Although the language and imagery is laden with OT allusions, John presents the readers with a fresh accounting of his vision. The result is a remarkably familiar yet distinctive depiction of God's throne room.

The dominant object drawing John's immediate attention is God sitting on

15. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4-5', p. 111.

16. *T. Lev.* 2.2-3; 4.1-2.

17. P. Alexander, '3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction', in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 244.

18. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 80.

19. For the most comprehensive treatments of John's use of Ezekiel in this passage see Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, pp. 104-18; Vogelgesang, 'The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation', pp. 168-82. Cf. Vanhoye, 'L'utilisation du livre d'Ezéchiel', pp. 436-72.

his throne (ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος).<sup>20</sup> He only briefly remarks how the one on the throne appears as the stones *ιάσπιδι* (i.e., jasper, a translucent stone found in shades of red, green, blue, yellow, brown, and white) and *σαρδίῳ* (i.e., carnelian, a bright red stone).<sup>21</sup> The glorious and colorful brightness of the throne and its occupant comes into sharper focus with the halo-like emerald rainbow encircling the throne (καὶ ἶρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὅμοιος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ, cf. Ezek. 1.28). These iridescent stones also adorn the New Jerusalem bedecked with all kinds of precious materials, thus indicating that the entire city radiates with God's glory (Rev. 21.11–23).<sup>22</sup>

Twenty-four other thrones surround God's throne (Rev. 4.4). These thrones and their occupants seem to evoke parallel accounts of additional thrones flanking God's (cf. 1 Kgs 22.19; Dan. 7.9). Aside from God, these elders are the only beings in the divine court permitted to sit. That they sit is unique since most portrayals of the divine court depict that God alone is sitting while all other members stand (1 Kgs 22.19–20; 2 Chron. 18.18; Isa. 6.1–4; Dan. 7.9–14; *1 En.* 14.22; *2 Bar.* 21.6; 48.10; *T. Abr.* 4.5; 8.1; 9.7; *T. Levi* 2.1). Because they sit on thrones and don golden crowns, the twenty-four elders most likely make up a special group within the divine council. In a similar vein, the four living creatures (Rev. 4.6b) stationed in the middle and around the throne basically correspond to the cherubim of Ezek. 1.5, 8. Their primary function involves worship and they most likely correspond to royal throne guardians—a standard feature of ancient throne rooms.

Their worship of God may also parallel several aspects drawn from practices in the imperial court affirming reign of the emperor. For example, according to Aune, the twenty-four elders provide a key when they offer their crowns to God because '[t]he presentation of gold crowns to a sovereign was a ceremony inherited by the Romans from the traditions of Hellenistic kingship'.<sup>23</sup> Aune states that the offering of crowns in worship becomes comprehensible in light of the ceremonial traditions of Hellenistic and Roman ruler worship because it has 'no parallel in Israelite-Jewish literature'.<sup>24</sup> In addition,

20. Cf. Rev. 4.3, 9, 10; 5.1, 7, 13; 6.16; 7.10, 15; 19.4; 20.11; 21.5. Although John avoids identifying the one seated on the throne, it obviously refers to the God of Israel as attested in the OT (1 Kgs 22.19; Pss. 9.4; 45.6; 47.8; 123.1; Isa. 6.1; 66.1; Ezek. 1.25; 10.1; Dan. 7.9) as well as apocalyptic writings (*1 En.* 9.4; 18.8; *2 En.* 1.4; 20.3; *T. Mos.* 4.2). Aune (*Revelation 1–5*, p. 284) observes that John uses the throne as a circumlocution for the name of God. Cf. Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 170–71.

21. See also Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, pp. 106–108; Vogelgesang, 'The Interpretation of Ezekiel in *Book of Revelation*', pp. 172–74; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 320; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 285; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 226–27; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, p. 72.

22. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, p. 285.

23. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 13.

24. Aune ('The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 13) adds an

the elders prostrate themselves before the throne, which was a widespread custom as part of the Hellenistic royal ceremony.<sup>25</sup> The hymns declaring God's worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power (Rev. 4.11), resemble hymns sung to the emperor that proclaim his right to govern. Aune remarks that '[t]he consent of the governed in the making of emperors was taken very serious in antiquity, both in reality and in imperial propaganda designed to justify or legitimate the assumption of power on the part of the emperors'.<sup>26</sup> Aune concludes that the importance of the *consensus omnium* for imperial legitimacy is echoed in the approval of God's decrees in the heavenly court.<sup>27</sup>

The phenomena in Rev. 4.5a, ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί, issuing forth from the throne evokes the Sinai theophany of Exod. 19.16 (cf. Ezek. 1.13). Not only do these theophanic phenomena connect the throne with Yahweh as the lawgiver, but they also occur at significant junctures linking the series of septet judgments with his judicial decrees.<sup>28</sup> The seven burning torches (ἑπτὰ λαμπάδες πυρὸς καίόμεναι) ensconced before the throne most likely represent the Holy Spirit (cf. Zech. 4.2; Ezek. 1.13). Finally, the sea resembling glass, a rather polyvalent image, evokes the firmament of creation (Genesis 2), the floor of heaven (Exod. 24.10b), and even temple imagery (the Brazen Sea). When viewed together, what emerges is, in every way, God's throne room radiates with symbols of his glorious presence rooted in OT theophanies.

Six scenes revolve around the heavenly throne room and each resounds with worship (Rev. 4.2–6.17; 7.9–17; 11.15–19; 14.1–5). Although placed in the foreground in chaps. 4–5, the throne shifts to the background during the

interesting note providing a clue for the symbolic value of twenty-four elders. He notes, 'Roman magistrates were permitted to be accompanied by the number of lictors bearing fasces which corresponded to the degree of imperium which they had been granted. The purpose of these lictors, in addition to acting as bodyguards, was to announce the approach of the magistrates they accompanied. Consuls were permitted twelve lictors. Augustus apparently had twelve lictors from Actium (31 BCE to 23 BCE), though it is possible that he had twenty-four lictors until 27 BCE. At any rate the standard number of twelve lictors, indicative of the degree of imperium, as doubled by Domitian to twenty-four. These lictors were not crowned, nor did they wear white robes. They did, however, constitute part of the official crowd of public servants which constantly surrounded the emperor'.

25. Among the evidence of this practice, Aune ('The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 13) asserts, 'There is also evidence that the Roman senators performed ritual *proskynesis* (accompanied by hymns and acclamations) before the empty throne of the living emperor Gaius'.

26. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 18.

27. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', p. 19.

28. Cf. Rev. 8.5; 11.19; 16.18. See the important insights of Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 8.

judgments in Revelation 6–16 (e.g., Rev. 6.1-8, 16; 8.3-6; 16.17).<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the judgments produced by the seals, trumpets, and bowls directly result from the proceedings in the divine courtroom.

b. *The Divine Council (Rev. 4.4, 6b-11)*

The OT contains references to a divine court composed of a council that deliberated with Yahweh resulting in his verdict or decree.<sup>30</sup> Terms describing the members of the divine council include ‘holy ones’ (Deut. 33.2; Job 5.1), ‘sons of God’ (Deut. 32.8; Job 1.6; 2.1; Pss. 29.1; 89.7), and simply ‘gods’ (Ps. 82.1).<sup>31</sup> The prophet, then, witnesses the proceedings and is responsible to relay the decisions to the people (1 Kgs 22.19-22; Isa. 6.8; 40.1-8). Yahweh invites the prophets because he does nothing without first revealing it to his servants, the prophets (Amos 3.7). The council does not exist to inform or advise Yahweh, but rather functions as a juridical assembly.<sup>32</sup> According to Mullen, the major function of the divine council is to decree the destiny of a group or individual.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the divine council has been associated with the prophetic lawsuit, whereby the prophet announces the resultant positive or negative verdicts.<sup>34</sup> In the Apocalypse, John witnesses and records the proceedings of a special called session of the divine council as a constituent part of his prophetic lawsuit.

R. Dean Davis provides a helpful analysis of Revelation 4–5 in light of the OT imagery employed to depict the divine covenant process of judgment,

29. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 320.

30. In the OT, it is referred to as *סִדֵּר יְהוָה* or ‘council of Yahweh’ (Ps. 25.14; Jer. 23.18; cf. Jer. 18.22; Job 15.8; Ps. 82.1); *קֹהֵל קְדָשִׁים* or the ‘assembly of sacred ones’ (Ps. 89.6, 8). Studies devoted to the divine council are legion, but some of the more notable examples include H.W. Robinson, ‘The Council of Yahweh’, *JTS* 45 (1944), pp. 151-57; Frank Moore Cross, ‘The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah’, *JNES* 12 (1953), pp. 274-77; E.C. Kingsbury, ‘Prophets and the Council of Yahweh’, *JBL* 83 (1964), pp. 274-77; E. Theodore Mullen, *The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (HSM, 24; Chico: Scholars Press, 1980); Max E. Polley, ‘Hebrew Prophecy within the Council of Yahweh, Examined in its Ancient Near Eastern Setting’, in *Scripture in Context: Essays on the Comparative Method* (ed. Carl D. Evans, William W. Hallo, and John B. White; Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1980), pp. 144-45; Christopher R. Seitz, ‘The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah’, *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 229-47; Martti Nissinen, ‘Prophets and the Divine Council’, in *Kein Land für sich allein* (ed. Ulrich Hübner and Ernst Axel Knauf; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), pp. 4-19.

31. Nissinen, ‘Prophets and the Divine Council’, p. 4-5; Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 100-102; Polley, ‘Hebrew Prophecy within the Council of Yahweh’, pp. 144-45.

32. Cf. Isa. 40.13; 46.10; Sir. 42.21; *1 En.* 14.23; *2 En.* 33.4.

33. Mullen, *The Divine Council*, p. 107.

34. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 107.

redemption, and the establishment of the final messianic kingdom on earth. A major corollary to his analysis of the heavenly courtroom scene is the presence of the divine council. In Chapter 4, Davis reviews 1 Kings 22, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1–11, and Daniel 7 as significant OT passages for interpreting the role of the divine council in Revelation 4–5.<sup>35</sup> He argues that in the covenant lawsuit Yahweh functions as both the prosecutor and judge. Whereas members of the divine council function in a secondary role as witnesses (Job 16.19), vindicators (Job 19.25), mediators (Job 33.23–24), intercessors (Isa. 53.11–12; Heb. 7.25), and as advocates before God (Dan. 7.13, 27).<sup>36</sup> In these OT passages the council convenes before divine actions are taken, suggesting that its primary function is executive/judicial decision-making.<sup>37</sup> The council passes judgment within the context of the covenant and on that basis a verdict is followed by subsequent actions.<sup>38</sup>

Concerning the theme of judgment, Davis argues that chaps. 4–5 envision a session of the divine council.<sup>39</sup> He notes that some commentators deny that these chapters describe a judicial session, but he offers a number of reasons for why the scene does indicate an investigative-type of judgment.<sup>40</sup> First, God is described as the head of the divine council in terms drawn directly from the OT.<sup>41</sup> Second, the twenty-four elders function in a capacity similar to the divine council in the OT (Isa. 24.23).<sup>42</sup> In Israel, elders traditionally served as community leaders or royal officials who participated in council sessions and sat as judges.<sup>43</sup> Third, Davis contends that other beings like the seven Spirits of God, the four living creatures, John, a strong angel, the Lamb, the myriad of angels, and every creature in the cosmos could all be classified as members of the divine council.<sup>44</sup> Fourth, the issue before the council is the worthiness of the Lamb to open the sealed scroll.<sup>45</sup> The final evidence that Davis cites is

35. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 91–116.

36. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 107.

37. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 109.

38. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 110.

39. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 157.

40. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 158. Contra R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 191; Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1979), pp. 23, 35; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBC; London: Oliphants, 1974), p. 113.

41. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 158–62.

42. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 162–64.

43. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, p. 162.

44. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 164–67. Space does not permit a detailed critique of his suggestion, but it appears that in this case he is potentially guilty of overstating his case. While these other beings may witness the divine council, it would be difficult to prove that they are equal participating members of the decision-making process.

45. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 168–70.

that of the judicial nature of the scroll.<sup>46</sup> While some of Davis's arguments may need some further development, he overall makes a very strong case for viewing Revelation 4–5 in terms of a session of the divine council.

The divine council, in Revelation 4–5, convenes for the purpose of finding a judge worthy enough to implement God's judgment against humanity. The divine council is comprised of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. The four living creatures serve as members of the council and leaders of worship as well as participating in the execution of divine justice.<sup>47</sup> Since they resemble a lion, ox, man, and an eagle, they function as representatives of the entire created order.<sup>48</sup> Although the four living creatures stand in closer proximity to God's throne (Rev. 4.6b), by mentioning the elders first (Rev. 4.4) John ascribes them with a more prominent position. These twenty-four elders, then, constitute the members of the divine council based on the three accusatives in Rev. 4.4 (θρόνους, πρεσβυτέρους, στεφάνους).

First, that they are seated on thrones (θρόνους) suggests their high status within God's court (cf. Dan. 7.9–10).<sup>49</sup> Of the thirty-seven occurrences of the term 'throne' in the Apocalypse most refer to either God or the Lamb (Rev. 1.4; 4.2–3, 5–6, 9, 10; 5.1, 6–7, 11, 13; 6.16; 7.9–11, 15, 17; 8.3; 12.5; 14.3; 16.17; 19.4–5; 20.11–12; 21.3, 5; 22.1, 3). Three times it refers to the throne of Satan or the beast (Rev. 2.13; 13.2; 16.10), twice to the elders (Rev. 4.4; 11.16), and once as an eschatological promise for the saints (Rev. 3.21). Thrones denote authority and the right to render judgment as explicitly stated in Rev. 20.4. Since they sit on thrones, these elders most likely represent a judicial group within God's court.

Second, that they are called 'elders' (πρεσβυτέρους) indicates their role as leaders. In its most basic sense, the term πρεσβύτερος refers to an older person. Naturally, men with the wisdom of age and experience attain this status as respected leaders (Job 12.20; Pss. 105.22; 119.100). The elders (i.e., seventy elders) were the leaders of the community in Israel (Exod. 3.16; 24.9; Lev. 4.15; Num. 11.16–26; Isa. 9.15; Ezek. 8.11). Elders were responsible for maintaining justice and hearing cases among Israel's citizens (Deut. 19.12; 21.1–20; 22.15–18; 25.7–9; Ruth 4.2–11; Ezra 10.8–14). What is more, elders formed a

46. Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, pp. 170–87.

47. Osborne (*Revelation*, p. 235) perceptively summarizes their function in the heavenly court, 'In Revelation these 'four living beings' lead worship (4.6–9; 5.8–9, 11; 19.4), stand sentinel at the throne (5.6; 7.11; 14.3) and take the lead in the outpouring of divine judgment (6.1, 3, 5–7; 15.7). Since they are nearest the throne (4.6) and take the lead in worship (4.8; 5.14), it is likely that they are the leaders of the heavenly court. In essence, all we can know for certain is that they represent the highest order of celestial beings, perhaps angels, and lead in worship and judgment. Building on the cherubim and seraphim of Ezekiel and Isaiah, they go beyond those figures in their participation in divine justice'.

48. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 235.

49. Cf. *Asc. Isa.* 7.13–37; 8.9; 10.1–31; *T. Lev.* 3.8–9.

council and assembled for important meetings pertaining to the welfare of the nation (Judg. 21.16; Ps. 107.32; Ezek. 7.26; Joel 1.14; 2.16; Lk. 22.66; Acts 5.21; cf. *m. San.* 1.6).<sup>50</sup> Not surprisingly, leaders of the church were called πρεσβύτεροι.<sup>51</sup> The twenty-four elders in the Apocalypse occupy a prominent role within the divine courtroom as leaders granted with some measure of judicial authority.

A final indication pointing to their exalted status in the heavenly court is that they are wearing golden crowns (στεφάνους χρυσοῦς). The term, στεφάνους, refers to a type of crown resembling an ornamental wreath.<sup>52</sup> The crown imagery connotes the concepts of victory and royal authority but also divine glory and honor.<sup>53</sup> The elders recognize, however, that whatever authority their crowns afford them it pales in comparison to the sovereign creator God who granted them that authority. These crowns become offerings in worship when the elders lay them at the foot of God's throne as they declare his worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power (Rev. 4.10-11). This also implies that they are far from equality with God and that their authority has definite limitations.

As members of the divine council, the elders function in several ways throughout the book of Revelation. In Rev. 4.4; 5.6; 11.16; 14.3, John describes them as seated on their thrones surrounding the Almighty while court is in session. Twice an elder assists John in understanding the vision by alerting him to two significant characters (i.e., *senior interprets*).<sup>54</sup> The first time, an elder tells John not to weep because the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David was able to open the seals because he has triumphed (Rev. 5.4). The second occurs as John marvels at the multitude of redeemed individuals from all over the world. An elder tells him that they are the ones who have come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 7.13-14). Interestingly, this elder makes a declaration about their reward of eschatological salvation as if to assure John's audience that it is an established decree (Rev. 7.15-17). By far, the most frequent function of the twenty-four elders is to proclaim God and the Lamb's worthiness to judge (Rev. 4.10; 5.8, 14; 7.11; 11.16; 19.4).

50. See also Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 117. He adds, 'In the community of Qumran, elders were given a place of dignity after the priests (1QS 6.8; CD 9.4). Those who held religious or political authority in early Judaism were generally known as 'elders' (cf. 1 Macc. 1.26; 11.23; 1 Esdras 6.5, 8; Judith 6.16; Mk 8.31; Acts 4.5, 8, 23)'.

51. Acts 11.30, 14.23; 15.2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16.4; 20.17; 21.18; 1 Tim. 4.14; 5.17, 19; Tit. 1.5-6; Jas 5.14; 1 Pet. 5.1, 2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1.

52. BDAG, p. 944.

53. Gregory M. Stevenson, 'Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4.4, 10; 14.14)', *JBL* 114 (1995), pp. 257-72.

54. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 288.



The specific identity of these elders and the reasons for the number twenty-four remains a perennial problem engendering a plethora of speculation. The lack of any biblical or extra-biblical parallels makes their exact identification a rather elusive mirage. What is more, the lack of the article implies that their identification might have been equally uncertain for John's audience.<sup>55</sup> Scholars have debated robustly whether or not the elders are a class of angelic beings or glorified human beings.<sup>56</sup>

No matter how uncertain the solutions for this ontological dilemma may prove to be, that these elders are representatives of the saints is highly probable.<sup>57</sup> That they are called 'elders' and not 'angels' hints at their representational role since the seventy elders were representatives of the entire community of Israel. The attire of the twenty-four elders (i.e., golden crowns and white clothing), as well as the fact that they sit on thrones are descriptions predicated only of the saints elsewhere in the book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2.10; 3.4–5, 21; 7.13–15; 19.7–8, 14; 20.4).<sup>58</sup> As representatives they demonstrate a special concern for the saints (Rev. 5.9–11; 11.17–18) and even appear to perform priestly functions on their behalf (Rev. 5.8). It is not uncommon in apocalypticism that heavenly beings and institutions represent their earthly counter parts. The twenty-four elders, seem to constitute the heavenly representatives of the entire earthly community of God's people.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the divine council is composed of representatives from both the created order in general (i.e., the four living creatures) and also from the saints (i.e., the twenty-four elders).

As the heavenly representatives of the earthly saints, the reason for the specific number of twenty-four has equally solicited a number of possibilities.<sup>60</sup> Since the elders are cast slightly in a priestly light some have seen them as corresponding to the twenty-four priestly courses in 1 Chron. 23.6; 24.7–18.<sup>61</sup>

55. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 118.

56. Many commentators argue that the elders are angelic beings (Beckwith, Charles, Ladd, Beasley-Murray, Mounce, Roloff, Thomas, Osborne). Others contend that they are human beings (Swete, Feuillet, Sweet, Kraft, Ford, Beale). See the detailed surveys in Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 128–33; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 288–92.

57. Hurtado, 'Revelation 4–5', p. 113. Cf. 1 En. 60.2, 24; 61.3; 7.3–4; 71.17.

58. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 324. Cf. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, pp. 185–87.

59. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, pp. 323–24) remarks that 'This is consistent with the observation that a key function of "elders" in the OT, NT, and early Fathers is to rule and represent the people of God (e.g., Exod. 12.21; 24.9; Num. 11.16–17; 1 Kgs 8.1; 2 Kgs 23.1; Ezra 5.5, 9; 6.7, 14; 10.8; Ezek. 14.1; 20.1; Acts 20.17, 28; 1 Pet. 5.1–5)'.

60. Since the elders are representatives of the saints, however, it seems likely that this number comes from a biblical background rather than from a Babylonian or Greco-Roman one.

61. See Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 131–32; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 114; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 135–36; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 288–89.

A more plausible suggestion is to interpret them as some symbolized form of the OT and NT saints, possibly the twelve patriarchs and twelve apostles (cf. Rev. 21.12-13).<sup>62</sup> The proposition of Baumgarten, however, attractively manages to do justice to the priestly and juridical functions of the elders. A thumbnail sketch of his proposal will demonstrate that the twenty-four elders may reflect a heavenly counterpart to the lesser Sanhedrin.

Baumgarten articulates the plausibility of the juridical function of the twenty-four elders in Revelation by comparing them with related Second Temple literature.<sup>63</sup> The peshar on Isa. 54.11-12 (4QpIsa<sup>d</sup>) serves as the locus for this fascinating study on the duodecimal courts. In order to adjudicate the nature of the duodecimal courts in the Qumran writings, Baumgarten summarizes the suggestions offered by Yadin<sup>64</sup> and Flusser,<sup>65</sup> and favors the last suggestion that the royal tribunal consists of twelve priests, twelve Levites, and twelve chiefs of the people to produce a quorum of thirty-six (cf., 1QM 2.1-3).<sup>66</sup> After a detailed analysis and translation of the DSS fragment, Baumgarten proceeds to discuss the composition of a juridical quorum.

The 'council of the community' composed of priests and lay members mentioned in 4QpIsa<sup>d</sup> bears striking resemblance to that of 1QS 8.1.<sup>67</sup> The Temple and War scrolls, along with 4QpIsa<sup>d</sup>, refer to delegations of twelve priests with twelve heads of the tribes, but they omit the Levites. 'We are, therefore', Baumgarten remarks, 'led to the conclusion that the two groups of twelve mentioned in the peshar were envisioned as constituting the entire quorum of the panel judging Israel in the future, which we presume to be twenty-four'.<sup>68</sup>

62. This is one of the oldest views as posited by Victorinus, *Comm. in Apoc.* 4.3. For variations of this view see Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 69; Kroll, *Revelation*, p. 155; Hurtado, *Revelation 4-5*, pp. 113, 120. Cf. Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 132-33; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, p. 289; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 325-26.

63. Joseph M. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran, Revelation, and the Sanhedrin', *JBL* 95 (1976), pp. 59-78.

64. Yigael Yadin, 'Some Notes on the Newly Published Pesharim of Isaiah', *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959), pp. 39-42.

65. David Flusser, 'The Peshar of Isaiah and the Twelve Apostles', *Eretz-Israel* 8 (1967), pp. 52-62.

66. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 59. These include: (1) The council of the community in 1QS 8.1, consisting of twelve men and three priests, (2) the court of twelve (including two priests) mentioned in 4QOrd 2-4.3-4, and (3) the twelve priests in 1QM 2.1. To these we must add the king's council described in an excerpt from the Temple Scroll disclosed by Yadin. This advisory body, whose judicial functions and tripartite compositions of priests, Levites, and heads of tribes apparently derive from the model of Jehoshaphat's central tribunal (2 Chron. 19.5-11).

67. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 63.

68. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 64.

Baumgarten suggests that the rabbinic literature regarding the composition and function of the greater and lesser Sanhedrin provides the pivotal missing link for identifying the twenty-four elders. He asserts that the lesser Sanhedrin maintained local jurisdiction and competency to conduct trials of all capital cases except those involving a false prophet, a high-priest, and an apostate city.<sup>69</sup> This corresponds to the analogy of 4QpIsa<sup>d</sup> indicating that the king's council functioned similarly to the Great Sanhedrin which 'was composed of three panels of twelve, a court of but one third this quorum was competent to rule in capital cases'.<sup>70</sup> More importantly, Baumgarten argues for the viability of the smaller Sanhedrin consisting of twenty-four instead of twenty-three members. He does so by suggesting that a court with capital jurisdiction comprised two panels representing the prosecution and defense may have consisted of twelve men representing the twelve tribes.<sup>71</sup> He counters the principle that a quorum must be odd numbered for the purposes of avoiding a tie by providing evidence of even numbered quorums.<sup>72</sup>

A fairly sturdy case may be sustained for recognizing the twenty-four elders as constituting a lesser Sanhedrin that represents the saints in heaven. Rabbinic Judaism often spoke about the existence of a heavenly counterpart of the Sanhedrin. For example, *Midr. Pss.* 4.4 identifies the beings in Dan. 7.10 as the 'heavenly Sanhedrin' representing the 'earthly Sanhedrin' (cf. 2Q24 frag. 4).<sup>73</sup> What is more, the *halakhic midrash* on Numbers contends that no 'elder' sits on the earthly assembly below (i.e., the Sanhedrin) unless he also sits in the heavenly assembly above.<sup>74</sup> Yet, if John intended to associate this group with the Sanhedrin why did he only identify them as πρεσβύτεροι rather than as a συνέδριον? John, most likely, wanted to associate this group with the OT tradition instead using the more developed version from first-century Judaism. Schürer recounts how the 'elders' from Israel's history evolved into the 'Sanhedrin' during the Hellenistic period.

For the 'elders' that are sometimes mentioned as being the representatives of the people...did not constitute a regularly organized court like the future Sanhedrin. Then again, the supreme court at Jerusalem, the existence of which is presupposed in the Deuteronomic legislation (Deut. xvii. 8ff., xix. 16ff.), and the institution of which the author of Chronicles ascribes to Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. xix. 8), was merely a court of justice with the functions of an exclusively judicial character, and not a council governing...as was the Sanhedrim of the Graeco-Roman age.<sup>75</sup>

69. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 73. Cf. *Sanh.* 1.5.

70. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 74.

71. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', p. 74.

72. Baumgarten, 'The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran', pp. 74-75.

73. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 325.

74. *Sifre Num.* §92. Cf. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies*, p. 188.

75. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. Second

Incidentally, the circular arrangement of the twenty-four elders is also reminiscent of the semi-circular seating of the Sanhedrin.<sup>76</sup> The elders of the Apocalypse, then, function like a Sanhedrin as judicial representatives of the saints in the heavenly courtroom.

*c. The Lamb and the Scroll (Rev. 5.1-14)*

The courtroom scene continues in chap. 5 with the introduction of the scroll and the Lamb.<sup>77</sup> The purpose of this scene is to depict the installment of Christ as the Davidic King and eschatological judge who is the only one worthy to unleash God's judgment upon humanity.<sup>78</sup> This scene represents the inauguration of Jesus' eternal reign at the right hand of God; also known as his enthronement.<sup>79</sup> It begins with the introduction of a sealed scroll and an angel announcing the search for one worthy to break the seals and open it (Rev. 5.2).<sup>80</sup> After an extensive search of worthy candidates throughout the created order, only one is found worthy (Rev. 5.2-4). One of the elders informs John not to worry because the Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered (ἐνίκησεν).<sup>81</sup> The Lamb is deemed worthy to take the scroll and assume his role as king and judge (Rev. 5.5-7). The remainder of the chapter focuses on the adulation in the courtroom declaring the Lamb's worthiness. This chapter, then, sets the stage for the judgment of the nations. In the same way that Revelation 5 focuses on the worthiness of the Lamb to judge as a result of his sacrificial

Division, I. *The Internal Condition of Palestine, and of the Jewish People, in the Time of Jesus* (trans. John Macpherson; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), p. 165.

76. Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People*, p.193.

77. For a helpful outline and theological analysis on Jesus as the Lamb in the Apocalypse as well as a comparison with the Fourth Gospel see Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Das Lamm Gottes – eine Skizze', in *Geschichte–Tradition–Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag*. III. *Frühes Christentum* (ed. Hermann Lichtenberger; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1996), pp. 529-42.

78. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, p. 136.

79. On the enthronement of Christ see Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, pp. 27-54; Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 121-27; Roloff, *Revelation*, pp. 72-73; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 332-35; Ranko Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5* (AUSDDS, 22; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), pp. 206-17; Margaret Barker, 'Enthronement and Apotheosis: The Vision in Revelation 4–5', *New Heaven and New Earth, Prophecy and the Millennium* (VTSup, 77; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), pp. 217-27.

80. Hans-Peter Müller, 'Die himmlische Ratsversammlung, Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5.1-5', *ZNW* 54 (1963), pp. 254-67. Significantly, Müller traces this scene within a tradition of heavenly court texts in which a herald asks a question in order to commission someone for a task.

81. Cf. Rev. 3.21.

death and resurrection, chaps. 4–16 demonstrates the justness of his judgment on humanity.<sup>82</sup>

The imagery of this chapter evokes a number of possible background contexts.<sup>83</sup> Aune has perceptively suggested an intentional contrast with an imperial court setting.<sup>84</sup> Without a doubt, this scene represents a direct assault on imperial pretensions of cosmic rule. John makes it explicit that Christ maintains the universal *imperium*. Like most of the imagery in the Apocalypse, however, the background also draws heavily upon the OT. Because this represents an enthronement passage it is possible that Deut. 17.18–20 and 1 Chron. 29.20–23 may loom in the background.<sup>85</sup> The language reflects portions of Ezekiel 1–2, Isa. 29.11, and Dan. 7.9–14 (cf. Dan. 12.4, 9).<sup>86</sup> In agreement with Beale, that the scene is replete with thrones, a scroll, and the Son of Man approaching God's throne strongly suggests that John uses Dan. 7.9–14 as a *Vorbild*.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, judgment is the common theme that binds all these texts together.<sup>88</sup>

The phrase καὶ ἶδον (Rev. 5.1) signals a minor transition within the throne room vision in which John zooms in on a scroll (βιβλίον) at the right hand of

82. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, pp. 116–99. See also Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, p. 46.

83. For an extensive survey of the background contexts see Russell S. Morton, *One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4–5* (Studies in Biblical Literature, 110; New York: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 88–120.

84. Aune, 'The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial', pp. 5–26. So J. Daryl Charles, 'Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5', *CTR* 7 (1993), pp. 85–97; Emmet Russell, 'A Roman Law Parallel to Revelation Five', *BSac* 115 (1958), pp. 258–64; Roloff, *Revelation*, pp. 72–73; Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 113; Craig Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 75.

85. Stefanović (*The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, pp. 229–34) actually argues that the scroll represents God's eternal covenant and that the earthly kings were unworthy to open it. See also Barker ('Enthronement and Apotheosis: The Vision in Revelation 4–5', p. 219) who contends that based on 1 Chron. 29.20, 23, that the coronation service in Revelation 5 depicts when Jesus become a god (i.e., his apotheosis). Her low Christology, however, fails to consider how the gospels demonstrate that the early Church understood Jesus to be equal with God during his lifetime on earth.

86. Kowalski, *Die Rezeption des Propheten Ezechiel*, pp. 118–20; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 337–38; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 247; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 160; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 103. On Isa. 29.11, however, see the concerns of Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, pp. 149–50. For a very helpful analysis of all the proposed OT allusions see Hultberg, 'Messianic Exegesis in the Apocalypse', pp. 284–301.

87. Beale, *The Use of Daniel*, pp. 181–91. Cf. Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 214–15; Krodell, *Revelation*, pp. 160; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 336–38.

88. Schlatter, *Alte Testament in der johanneischen Apokalypse*, p. 61; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 338.

God (ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου).<sup>89</sup> John describes the scroll in detail as having writing on the inside as well as the outside (ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν) and sealed with seven seals (κατεσφραγισμένον σφραγίσιν ἑπτά). The identification of this mysterious document has elicited an almost frenzied level of excitement among Revelation scholars as they have proffered enough possibilities to warrant entire monographs devoted to the subject.<sup>90</sup> One reason for the difficulty is that the basic lemma βιβλίον appears a total of nineteen times (seven in chap. 5), but not all occurrences refer to the same scroll.<sup>91</sup> Its identification as a double-sided scroll with seven seals, however, narrows the potential options.<sup>92</sup> The obvious parallels with Ezek. 2.9-10 (cf. Isa. 29.11;

89. βιβλίον, the diminutive form of βιβλος, most likely refers to a scroll rather than a codex. Cf. Ford, *Revelation*, p. 84. On the translation of 'at the right hand' instead of 'in the right hand' see Ranko Stefanović, 'The Meaning and Significance of the ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιάν for the Location of the Sealed Scroll (Revelation 5.1) and Understanding the Scene of Revelation 5', *BibRes* 46 (2001), pp. 42-54.

90. In fact several monographs have indeed been devoted to the subject including: Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation* 5, pp. 8-117; Anton Vögtle, *Das Buch mit den sieben Siegeln* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981); E. Riesner, *Das Buch mit den sieben Siegeln* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), p. 55; W. Brückner, *Die grosse und die kleine Buchrolle in der Offenbarung Johannes 5 und 10* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1923). For articles see E.J. Goodspeed, 'The Book with Seven Seals', *JBL* 22 (1903), pp. 70-74; Otto Roller, 'Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln', *ZNW* 36 (1937), pp. 98-113; R. Bergmeier, 'Die Buchrolle und das Lamm (Apk 5 und 10)', *ZNW* 76 (1985), pp. 225-42; Ford, 'The Divorce Bill of the Lamb', pp. 136-43. For a helpful summary of various interpretations see Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, pp. 31-36; Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 22-26; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 341-46; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 249-50.

91. Rev. 5.1-5, 8-9 unambiguously denotes the scroll with seven seals. In Rev. 1.11; 22.7, 9-10, 18-19, it refers to the scroll of the prophecy that John wrote. A more restrictive use with possessive genitive τῆς ζωῆς [τοῦ ἁρνίου] identifies the scroll as the Lamb's Book of Life in Rev. 13.8; 17.8; 20.12; 21.27. It is used once metaphorically (Rev. 6.14) and once referring many books (Rev. 20.12; cf. Dan. 7.10). While it possibly denotes the Lamb's Book of Life or even the Book of Revelation, this is not very likely. Its occurrence in Rev. 10.8 could refer to the scroll from chap. 5 (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 250-51). The correlation between the scroll in Rev. 5.1 with 10.8 is that they convey a message of judgment to the nations (cf. Rev. 10.11).

92. A variant of Rev. 5.1, supported by the majority text, reads ἔσωθεν καὶ ἐξωθεν instead of the preferred reading of ἔσωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν (for a list of MSS sources see the apparatus in the NA<sup>27</sup>). The problem posed by these variants is significant because it influences the possible nature of the scroll. The preferred reading suggests that the scroll is an *opistograph* meaning that it was a single roll of parchment written on the front and back (cf. Charles, *Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 136-37). The variant reading allows for the possibility that the scroll is a *Doppelurkunde* or a 'doubly written document' used in legal transactions (cf. Roller, 'Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln', pp. 98-113). Although the arguments favoring the scroll as a doubly written document is appealing, the older reading

Dan. 12.4) suggest that this scroll pertains to divine judgment (i.e., ‘[o]n both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe’). Interestingly, the message on Ezekiel’s scroll announced the coming judgment first on Israel (Ezekiel 4–24) and then on the surrounding nations (Ezekiel 25–32).<sup>93</sup>

A second clue regarding the nature of this scroll abides in the description of it as having seven seals. The practice of using a wax or clay seal on the outer edge of a scroll to guarantee the safe keeping of the contents is a practice as old as papyrus (cf. 1 Kgs 21.8; Isa. 8.16; 29.11).<sup>94</sup> The purpose of the seal was to ensure that only the officially authorized person could break the seal and subsequently read the scroll. This is especially the case when it came to legal documents. Legal documents usually had several seals listing the proper witnesses (cf. Jer. 32.10).<sup>95</sup> Roman Law mandated that a will or testament (διαθήκη) required between five to seven—usually seven—witnesses (e.g., Gaius, *Inst.* 2.147).<sup>96</sup> Sealing documents with seven seals, however, appears to have been a common practice for many types of legal documents in the ancient world.<sup>97</sup>

For example, in 1962, some Bedouin shepherds found a scroll with seven seals while pilfering through a cave north of Jericho (c. 335 BCE).<sup>98</sup> Although the papyrus gave evidence of severe decay, the recovered *bullae* (i.e., seals) bore the names of the officials that witnessed the document’s inscription.<sup>99</sup> After removing the seals the archeologists rolled the scroll open only to discover that it was blank for six turns until the seventh turn of the scroll revealed ‘bold Aramaic’ script.<sup>100</sup> What the archaeologists discovered was a legal scroll recounting various transactions. In fact, the entire cache of papyri found ‘belong to the genre of legal or administrative documents’.<sup>101</sup> One may confidently assert, then, that the scroll in Rev. 5.1 certainly represents a legal

supporting the scroll as an *opistograph* represents the *lectio originalis* (Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 341–43).

93. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 344.

94. For a survey of the practice of sealing scrolls in Mesopotamian, Assyrian, and Isaiah see Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation*, pp. 137–39.

95. Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 184–85; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 121.

96. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, pp. 342; Berger, ‘*Testamentum*’, *EDRL*, p. 735.

97. Roller, ‘Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln’, p. 106.

98. Frank Moore Cross, ‘The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri’, *BA* 26 (1963), pp. 110–13. See also Wilson, *Revelation*, pp. 284.

99. Cross, ‘The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri’, p. 111.

100. Cross, ‘The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri’, p. 112.

101. Cross, ‘The Discovery of the Samaria Papyri’, p. 115.

document only accessible to the authorized recipient. The legality of the scroll is further enhanced by its relationship with the judgments rendered in the rest of the Apocalypse.

A mighty angel, acting like a court herald, announces the search for a candidate worthy enough to open the scroll (Rev. 5.2). This announcement signals the official start of the court proceedings as the investigation ensues. The term ἄξιος basically refers to the intrinsic value of something or someone.<sup>102</sup> While it certainly includes the idea of moral virtue, in this context the main sense conveyed is that the search is for one who is 'proper' or 'fitting' to receive such authority.<sup>103</sup> The search for a worthy recipient draws the audience into the courtroom inquiry so that all may recognize Jesus as the only one worthy to assume the authority as both king and judge. John inadvertently participates when he succumbs to excessive sorrow when the investigation produces no worthy candidate in heaven, on earth, or under the earth. Little did John know that the matter of a worthy candidate was already settled as the elder informs him of the verdict already rendered. He declares that Jesus, the Davidic Messiah, is worthy because he has conquered (ἐνίκησεν).

The epithets and descriptions of Christ significantly combine the concepts of military conquest together with his sacrificial death and resurrection. The elder fuses together the titles 'Lion of the Tribe of Judah' (Gen. 49.9) and 'Root of David' (Isa. 11.1, 10) drawn from the messianic expectation of a future king who would assume David's throne to reign eternally with a rod of iron.<sup>104</sup> Bauckham labels these texts as comprising the *loci classici* of Messianic hopes for a 'warrior prince' who will conquer Israel's enemies.<sup>105</sup> He further observes how this conception changed slightly by the end of the first century because in the vision of *Fourth Ezra* 11–12, 'Conquest by judicial sentence has now replaced conquest by military might, as was envisaged at Qumran'.<sup>106</sup> John hears about the Lion of Judah and the Root of Jesse, but he sees a slain lamb standing (ἀρνίον ἐστῆκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον) before the throne (Rev. 5.6). While it is possible that his standing position may evoke the law-court imagery (cf. Dan. 12.1), it seems best to associated it with royal and

102. LN 65.17.

103. BDAG, p. 93; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 251.

104. For messianic interpretations of Gen. 49.9 see 4 *Ezra* 11.37; 12.31–32; 1QSb 5.29. Interestingly, 1QSb 5.21–27 clearly anticipates that this king will judge the poor with justice and destroy the wicked. See also examples of rabbinic exegesis in Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 349 n. 143. For messianic expectations associated with Isa. 11.1, 10 see 4QFlor. 11–12; 1QSb 5.24; 4Q252 5.1–4; *Pss. Sol.* 17.26–27. For the expectation of the Messiah to assume the throne in the court of the 'holy ones' see 1 *En.* 62.7–9.

105. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 180–81.

106. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 180–81.



military imagery.<sup>107</sup> This Messianic warrior king is now clearly associated with Jesus who died as a sacrificial Lamb but rose victoriously from the dead (i.e., ἔστηκός).<sup>108</sup> This presents a particular theology that suggests, '[w]her-ever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross'.<sup>109</sup> Christ's assumption to the throne, is not only affirmed by his Davidic lineage, but also because his death and resurrection established him as a conquering king (cf. Rev. 5.9-10).<sup>110</sup>

Christ, then, assumes the rights afforded him by his worthiness to take the scroll and break open its seals. The handing of the scroll most likely represents the transferal of judicial and royal rights over all creation from the Father to the Son. As such, it seems that the most plausible view is that the scroll represents a testament whereby Christ receives his inheritance, but judgment necessarily precedes the establishment of that inheritance on earth (i.e., his kingdom).<sup>111</sup> Once Christ takes his throne the divine council, together with the vast heavenly hosts ascribes to him praise, honor, glory, and power (Rev. 5.7-14).<sup>112</sup>

The relationship between the scroll and Christ's enthronement now qualifies him as the eternal king and judge. This most likely occurred upon his ascension into heaven at the right hand of God as affirmed throughout the NT.<sup>113</sup> The christological implications of this transition accounts for one major difference between the Apocalypse and the OT prophetic lawsuit. In the OT, Yahweh was the sole prosecutor and judge of the lawsuit. After he rendered a verdict, he also carried out the judgments. Christ, in the Apocalypse, assumes this role and responsibility. He now functions as prosecutor, judge, and divine warrior administering justice with equity, certainty, and severity (cf. Rev. 19.11-15). Christ does not supplant God, but rather serves

107. Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, pp. 144, 147.

108. Grant R. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', *Trin* 14 (1993), p. 67. Regarding Jesus as the eschatological Lamb, Osborne writes, 'This wondrous and startling juxtaposition of images (5.5-6) combines the redemptive sacrifice of the paschal lamb (cf. Isa 53.7) with the imagery of the eschatological Lamb who triumphs. John here uses the word *arnion* (not *amnos* as in John 1.29, 36), the same term used of the eschatological Lamb in *1 Enoch* 89.45-46; 90.9-16. In 5.5-6 one of the key themes in the Apocalypse is presented, that of triumph through suffering'.

109. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 75.

110. See also Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, pp. 96-97.

111. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 340-42.

112. Osborne, 'Theodicy', p. 67. The cause for their worship is the revelation of God's holiness and justice.

113. Cf. Mk 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Mt. 22.44; 26.64; Lk. 20.42; 22.69; Acts 2.25, 33-34; 5.31; 7.55-56; Rom. 8.34; Eph. 1.20; Col. 3.1; Heb. 1.3, 13; 8.1; 10.12; 12.2; 1 Pet. 3.22.

as a co-regent with him. What is more, in his promise to the Laodiceans, Jesus guarantees that the one who overcomes (ὁ νικῶν) will sit with him on the throne just as he overcame and sat with the Father (Rev. 3.21). So now enthroned with scroll in hand, Christ proceeds to prosecute his lawsuit against the nations through a series of sevenfold judgments.<sup>114</sup>

Revelation 6–16 comprises the bulk of the second vision as it alternates between the series of septets and interludes. Instead of a linear analysis of the preceding chapters, it would be more pertinent to trace important judicial themes demonstrating the lawsuit as a unifying motif. A close corollary to the lawsuit theme is the issue of theodicy in the book of Revelation. Theodicy, in this case, pertains to the justification of God concerning ‘the seeming triumph of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent’.<sup>115</sup> The unfolding vision, therefore, illustrates the apocalyptic reality that while the righteous do indeed suffer unjustly at the hands of the wicked, they will have their day in court when God’s verdict results in a grand reversal of this present world order.

Two themes related to the Lamb’s lawsuit against the nations reveal the justice of his judgment. First, judgment against humanity is justified because of their obduracy by refusing to repent of their sin. Second, judgment against humanity is justified because of their individual and collective offenses, especially the crimes against his saints. What is more, two themes emerge in this lawsuit against the nations pertaining to the vindication of the saints. First, the Lamb will vindicate all his people who endure as faithful witnesses in the world, especially during the trial of the nations (i.e., the Tribulation). Second, vindication awaits saints who triumph over Satan and the world through suffering and martyrdom (cf. Rev. 12.11). These themes will be developed and charted by dividing the survey of Revelation 6–16 into two broad categories focusing first on the series of septets and then on the interludes.

## 2. *Sequence of Septets*

The lawsuit against the nations involves a series of seven judgments with each successive septet increasing in severity. Although some repetitive overlap appears to occur, they are best viewed as a sequence of related but chronologically successive judgments.<sup>116</sup> Christ initiates the first sequence when he

114. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, pp. 311–12) suggests that this scenario further explicates ‘the past act of Christ’s exaltation on his throne as ruler over the church *and* the cosmos, which was accomplished by his death and resurrection... That chs. 4–5 perceive his kingship as an inaugurated reality is most evident from 5.9–10, where his death and resurrection are said to have resulted in the redemption of believers and their participation *presently* in a priestly kingdom (cf. Exod. 19.6)’. Cf. Rev. 3.21.

115. Osborne, ‘Theodicy’, p. 63.

116. On this view as opposed to recapitulation see the helpful article and charts by

cracks open seal number one (Rev. 6.1). The breaking of the seventh seal introduces the seven trumpets (Rev. 8.1). Subsequently, the blowing of the seventh trumpet introduces the seven bowls containing the full dose of God's wrath (Rev. 15.7). The number seven, of course, symbolically conveys the idea that each series of judgments represents a complete set, which culminates in the declaration that 'it is done' (γέγονεν) when the last angel pours out the contents of the seventh bowl (Rev. 16.17).

The seals correspond to the inauguration of the *eschaton* initiated shortly after Christ's ascension to his throne. The seals represent the continuous nature of the 'already/not yet' tensions characteristic of the intervening time between 'this age' and the consummation of the 'age to come'. Prior to the first trumpet an interlude occurs pertaining to the 'sealing' of God's people to protect them from the judgments inflicted on the earth's inhabitants during this period (cf. Rev. 7.1-3). The bowls, then, represent the outpouring of God's wrath upon the nations in full judgment. The bowl judgments, most likely, occur in rapid-fire succession as indicated by the third vision (Rev. 17.1–21.8).<sup>117</sup> The seals introduce the coming wrath of God and the Lamb. The trumpets announce his impending wrath. And the bowls comprise the execution of his wrathful judgment.

The septets accomplish God's purposes of judgment in incremental installments. The reason they occur in incremental installments is because they also function as investigative judgments. The investigative nature of these judgments suggests at least two purposes related to the lawsuit motif: (1) they

Thomas, 'The Structure of the Apocalypse: Recapitulation or Progression?', pp. 45-66; D.R. Davis, 'The Relationship between the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls in the Book of Revelation', *JETS* 16 (1973), pp. 149-58; Vanni, *La struttura*, pp. 163-66. On the artistic and literary quality of the septets see Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 106. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 8) observes, 'The judgment of the seventh seal-opening, the climax of the first series, described by this formula in 8.5, encompasses the whole course of the judgments of the seven trumpets, and similarly the judgment of the seventh trumpet, described by this formula in 11.19b, encompasses the whole series of bowl judgments, climaxing in the final, fullest elaboration of the formula in 16.18-21. Thus the formula indicates that it is the same final judgment which is reached in the seventh of each of the three series'. Contra Steinmann, 'The Tripartite Structure', pp. 69-79.

117. Prior to the outpouring of the bowls, the second of three angels announces the verdict 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great' (Rev. 14.8; repeated in 18.2). Then after the bowls have been poured out, an angel comes to John and says 'Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute [i.e., Babylon the Great]' (Rev. 17.1). This is then followed by a transition to the third vision when John is caught up 'in the spirit' and changes location from the heavenly courtroom to the desert (Rev. 17.3). The third vision is a 'zoomed in' or 'close up' view of the final judgment (Rev. 16.1-21) in terms of the trial and destruction of Babylon—a metaphor for Rome and ultimately for human civilization. The swiftness of this judgment (i.e., the bowls) is seen in the sentence that 'in one day' her plagues will overtake her (Rev. 18.8; cf. 18.10, 17).

gather evidence for mounting a case against the nations; and (2) they are designed to provoke people to repentance, but sadly people only add to their guilt by refusing to repent.<sup>118</sup> The notion of incremental installments of God's judgment against the heathen nations as a means to provoke repentance is confirmed by Wis. 12.10. The NRSV reads, 'But judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to repent, though you were not unaware that their origin was evil and their wickedness inborn, and that their way of thinking would never change'.<sup>119</sup> These judgments provide two key categories of evidence warranting the complete judgment against the inhabitants of the earth. The first, and most damning, evidence collected against the nations comes in the form of humanity's sinful deeds, both individual and collective. The second comes in the form of obduracy by refusing to repent of their wicked deed and worshiping God only.

a. *The Preliminary Investigative Judgments (Rev. 6.1–8.1)*

The scroll with seven seals introduced in Rev. 5.1 now rests securely in the hands of the Lamb who proceeds to break open the seals. Since the contents of the scroll cannot be read until all the seals are broken, it is best to understand the seals as preliminary judgments.<sup>120</sup> They are preliminary in that they occur prior to the time of the Great Tribulation. The primary reason for viewing them as prior to the Tribulation stems from the fact that before the plagues of the trumpets are allowed to harm the earth, God's servants must first be protected with his seal (Rev. 7.1-3). The increased intensity of those judgments along with the need to protect God's servants indicates that trumpets introduce a new and more serious phase of God's judgment. What is more, the trumpets and bowls exhibit several parallels echoing the Exodus plagues distinguishing them from the seals.<sup>121</sup> The seals seem to present an earlier stage in the sequence of judgment.<sup>122</sup>

The trials introduced by the seals represent the 'birth pains' (Mk 13.8) occurring prior to coming days of tribulation that will precede the return of Christ (Mk 13.19).<sup>123</sup> The seals, like the trumpets and bowls, fall into a pattern whereby the first four constitutes one group of judgments and the last

118. For an example of the remedial nature of the judgments as a means of provoking repentance see Amos 4.6-11. Although this passage specifically pertains to Israel, the principle remains true for the judgment of the nations in the three series of septets.

119. Cf. *1 En.* 10.16–11.2. See also Decock, 'The Symbol of Blood in the Apocalypse of John', p. 172.

120. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 151. Contra Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 124-25.

121. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 104.

122. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 104.

123. Kenner, *Revelation*, p. 200. So Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 105.

three forms a second group.<sup>124</sup> The four horsemen form a repetitious pattern of conquest, war, famine, and death discernable throughout this age.<sup>125</sup> The martyred saints and their appeal for justice (Rev. 6.9-11) indicates that during this time the church will continue to endure persecution. The seals, however, also represent a progressive intensification leading up to a time of cosmic upheaval as indicated by the breaking of the sixth seal. These judgments primarily target the inhabitants of the earth, but the people of God are also affected. Beale argues that Christ brings about these events for redemptive and judicial purposes, portraying how Christ is in control of trials and persecutions endured by the church.<sup>126</sup>

The first four seals evoke judgments against the nations and implicitly include warnings directed to covenant violators in the respective church communities. The four colored horses and their riders allude to Zech. 1.8-17 and 6.1-8.<sup>127</sup> John significantly alters the horses of Zechariah to suit his own purposes. He sees a white horse (λευκός), a fiery red horse (πυρρός), a black horse (μέλας), and a pale green horse (χλωρός) and each horse bears a rider who is granted authority by God to accomplish a task (i.e., ἐδόθη). In Zech. 1.8, he has a vision of a rider on a red horse among the myrtle trees with additional red, brown, and white horses. In Zech. 6.1-2, he sees a different set of four horses (red, black, white, and dappled grey) pulling chariots, which are identified, in Zech. 6.5, as the four winds of heaven (רִהוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם, ἄνεμοι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).

Although Beale takes Zech. 6.1-2 as the primary background,<sup>128</sup> Jauhiainen correctly suggests Zech. 1.8-17 as more prominent based on three observations:

First, the fact that John sees horsemen rather than chariots naturally forms a stronger link with Zech 1. Second, both Rev. 6 and Zech 1 reflect a situation where the nations have the upper hand over the people of God, and there is the question of when the roles will be reversed. In both contexts, the description of the horses is also followed by the cry, ‘How long?’ Third, unlike the chariots in Zech 6, the horsemen of Rev. 6 are not appeasing God’s wrath. Indeed, in contrast to various other calamities in Revelation nothing is said regarding the targets or purpose of the horsemen.<sup>129</sup>

124. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 10-15; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 389-90; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 146.

125. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 371; Krodell, *Revelation*, p. 175

126. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 370.

127. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 390; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 372; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 69-70; Marko Jauhiainen, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation* (WUNT, 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 62-65.

128. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 372. Cf. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 84; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 517.

129. Jauhiainen, *The Use of Zechariah*, p. 64.

Zech. 1.15 (LXX) gives the purpose of the horsemen, αὐτοὶ ὀργὴν μεγάλην ἐγὼ ὀργίζομαι ἐπὶ τὰ ἔθνη, explicitly stating that the horsemen exacted God's wrath against the nations persecuting Israel. While the horsemen in Rev. 6.1-8 are not explicitly linked to God's wrath, the reference to the wrath of the Lamb (τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου) in Rev. 6.16 provides a tacit link suggesting that they specifically target the nations.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse 'signify that the natural and political disasters throughout the world are caused by Christ in order to judge unbelievers who persecute Christians and in order to vindicate his people'.<sup>131</sup>

An implicit warning directed to the new covenant community may be detected in an allusion to Ezek. 14.21 in Rev. 6.8b.<sup>132</sup> John summarizes the authority of the four horsemen over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword, famine, plagues, and wild beasts (ἀποκτείνει ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων). This echoes the four covenant curses inflicted on the inhabitants of Jerusalem in Ezek. 14.21 ([LXX] καὶ τὰς τέσσαρας ἐκδικήσεις μου τὰς ποιηράς ῥομφαίαν καὶ λιμὸν καὶ θηρία ποιηρὰ καὶ θάνατον ἐξαποστείλω). This list of fourfold covenant curses traces back to Lev. 26.18-28 and also to the covenant lawsuit of the Song of Moses in Deut. 32.24-25. In Deut. 32.23-25, God promises to heap calamities on his wayward covenant people by shooting arrows at them. These arrows are specifically described in the same fourfold group as in Lev. 26.18-28; Ezek. 14.21; and Rev. 6.8b. These include famine and devouring birds, pestilence and plagues, wild beasts and serpents, and the sword (τηκόμενοι λιμῷ καὶ βρώσει ὀρίνων καὶ ὀπισθοτόνος ἀνιάτος ὁδόντας θηρίων ἀποστελῶ εἰς αὐτοὺς μετὰ θυμοῦ συρόντων ἐπὶ γῆς ἔξωθεν ἀτεκνώσει αὐτοὺς μάχαιρα [Deut. 32.24-25a LXX]). The purpose of the sword, famine, plagues, and wild beasts in those contexts is to provoke the covenant people to repentance. This implies that the unrepentant individuals within the seven churches should heed this warning and realize that they are not immune. Although the covenantal implications are apparent, the context of Ezek. 14.12-20 applies these same fourfold punishments to any 'country' (γῆ) that sins against the Lord. Therefore, the nations still remain the primary recipients of those judgments, but the unfaithful sinners within the new covenant communities should also be included.

The similarities of both content and arrangement between the seals and the events predicted in the Olivet discourse suggest an intentional thematic correspondence that provides the framework for these preliminary judgments.

130. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 70; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 372; Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, p. 219. Contra Jauhainen, *The Use of Zechariah*, p. 64.

131. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 372.

132. So Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 71; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 373.

The lack of lexical parallels greatly diminishes the probability of any literary dependence. This, however, does not obviate the plausibility of positing the Olivet discourse as looming intentionally in the background.<sup>133</sup> Charles maintains that ‘our author finds his chief and controlling authority in the eschatological scheme there set forth’.<sup>134</sup> The rider on the white horse (Rev. 6.2) represents a parody of the true Messiah who comes in order to conquer (Rev. 19.11), which corresponds with the claims of the false messiahs promising victory to their followers (Mt. 24.5; Mk 13.6; Lk. 21.8). The rider on the red horse given a large sword causing wars among people (Rev. 6.4) evokes wars, rumors of war, and international discord as nations engage in battle (Mt. 24.6-7; Mk 13.7; Lk. 21.9). With war comes famines, plagues, and death wreaking havoc upon the population (cf. Rev. 6.5-8; Mt. 24.7; Mk 13.8; Lk. 21.11).<sup>135</sup> A striking parallel exists between the souls of martyrs killed for their testimony to Christ (Rev. 6.9-11) and the persecution befalling believers that will give testimony before magistrates (Mk 13.9-13; Lk. 21.12-19; cf. Mt. 24.9).<sup>136</sup> The earthquakes and cosmic phenomena resulting from the sixth seal (Rev. 6.12-14) appears to resemble the signs preceding the *Parousia* (Mt. 24.7; Mk 13.8; Lk. 21.11). These parallels demonstrate the basic framework shared by the seals and the Olivet discourse.

The most pertinent feature of the seals regarding the lawsuit motif is the appeal for justice coming from the slain souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9-11). When Jesus breaks open the fifth seal, John sees a group of souls under the altar (εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχάς). The altar resides in heaven and reappears throughout the Apocalypse in connection with the execution of divine justice (cf. Rev. 6.9; 8.3, 5; 9.13; 14.18; 16.7).<sup>137</sup> It most likely

133. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 158-59; Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 52-54; Court, *Myth and History*, pp. 49-51; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 129-30; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 104; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 370-71; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 105-6; Mathias Rissi, ‘The Rider on the White Horse. A Study of Revelation 6.1-8’, *Int* 18 (1964), pp. 407-18. For one of the most extensive investigations on this relationship see John Andrew McLean, *The Seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27 as a Literary Key for Understanding the Structure of the Apocalypse of John* (MBPS, 38; Lewiston, ME: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), pp. 169-86.

134. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p.158.

135. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 200 n. 6. He notes the common threefold pattern of sword, pestilence, and famine in the OT (cf. Jer. 14.12; 21.7-10; 27.8; 29.17-18; 32.24, 36; 34.17; 38.2; 42.17, 22; 44.13; Ezek. 5.12; 6.11-12; 7.15; 12.16).

136. Both Mark and Luke envision a time when believers will be handed over to councils and magistrates where they will give testimony (μαρτύριον) of Christ before all the nations. The scene in Rev. 6.9-11 presents the heavenly counterpart in that it presupposes that these souls have already stood trial and were executed because of their testimony to Christ (διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον).

137. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 226-20. The only possible exception occurs in Rev. 11.1. In the context it refers to the measuring of the temple, the altar, and

represents the altar of incense due to its location before the throne and its connection with the prayers of the saints (cf. Rev. 8.3, 6).<sup>138</sup> Another indication of its heavenly location relates to the fact that these souls (τὰς ψυχὰς) have been slaughtered (ὡς ἐσφαγμένον).<sup>139</sup> Aside from the mention of the θυσιαστήριον, the imagery of the heavenly temple and a cultic setting is apparent from language closely associated with Leviticus. That the souls are under (ὑποκάτω) the altar is reminiscent of Lev. 4.7 instructing the priest to pour out the blood at the base of the altar.<sup>140</sup> Even more striking are the thematic parallels with Lev. 17.11 (LXX) based on the shared lexical occurrences of the occurrences of ψυχή, θυσιαστήριον, αἷμα.<sup>141</sup>

The term indicating their death, ἐσφαγμένων,<sup>142</sup> was used to describe Jesus as the slain Lamb (ἐσφαγμένον).<sup>143</sup> It also occurs in Revelation to indicate any form of brutal murder that humans inflict on one another (cf. Rev. 6.4; 13.3, 8; 18.24). Here it forms an associative link between the murder of these souls and the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>144</sup> This stems from the fact that these souls were executed because of (διὰ) the word of God (τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ) and because of (διὰ) the testimony they had maintained (τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον) for Jesus in the midst of opposition.<sup>145</sup> Variations of this phrase occur four times throughout the Apocalypse and every instance pertains to persecution against Christians with varying degrees of intensity (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 12.17; 20.4; cf. 14.12). The absence of the genitive Ἰησοῦ led Feuillet to argue that it must

the worshippers. Scholars are divided as to whether this refers to the literal temple in Jerusalem or the community of saints as a spiritual temple. While the former is the easiest view to maintain, given the symbolic imagery of the book the latter is preferable. Contra Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 405. Aune contends that in Rev. 6.9; 11.1; 16.7 that θυσιαστήριον denotes the altar of burnt offerings. Although the semantic range and use within the NT allows for this delineation of its use in Revelation, nothing in the context explicitly affirms this. Another possible suggestion is that the altar in question represents a blending of both the altar for burnt offerings and the altar of incense. So Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 285; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 75.

138. Rev. 6.9–11 comprises the only explicit example of a prayer in the Book of Revelation. See Heil, 'The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation', p. 224.

139. For the Christian cosmology stressing the immediacy of the soul's presence in heaven upon death see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 403–404.

140. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 273; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 84; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 218.

141. Pattemore, *The Apocalypse and the People of God*, p. 77.

142. Contra Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 390.

143. Cf. Rev. 5.6, 9, 12.

144. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 273. He maintains that when applied to the beast (Rev. 13.3, 8) it represents the beast's parody of Christ's death and resurrection.

145. So Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 285. Contra Beckwith, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 526; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 174; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 147; Morris, *Revelation*, p. 106; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 406.



refer to OT martyrs rather than Christian ones.<sup>146</sup> This interpretation overstates the significance of the missing genitive and therefore strains credulity.<sup>147</sup> Undoubtedly this group would include Antipas, victims of the Neronic persecution, as well as any other Christians killed because of their faith in Christ, but it may also include all of God's people who died as a result of their faith.<sup>148</sup> These souls, then, represent the star witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations because instead of taking matters into their own hands they present their case to the ultimate judge.

They are the plaintiffs in a wrongful death lawsuit pleading their case in the divine court demanding that justice be served on their behalf through his retributive vengeance (Rev. 6.10). These martyrs cry out in a loud voice (ἐκράξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) inquiring as to how long (ἕως πότε) until he renders a verdict in their behalf and thereby avenge them (κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς). Some ambiguity exists as to whether ὁ δεσπότης addresses God or Christ.<sup>149</sup> The attributive titles ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἄληθινός specifically apply to Christ in Rev. 3.7 (cf. 3.14; 19.11), but variations of those titles frequently refer to God in OT (LXX).<sup>150</sup> What is more, God is the one praised for the justice of his judgments (Rev. 15.3; 16.7; 19.2). Perhaps, the ambiguity is intentional in that John presents both God and the Lamb equally in the role of judge (Rev. 5.13; 6.16; 7.9-10; 19.11; 20.11; 22.1, 3).<sup>151</sup>

Although others may see their plea as a vindictive cry for vengeance<sup>152</sup> or theodicy,<sup>153</sup> contextually it best to take it as an appeal for justice through judgment.<sup>154</sup> The imagery of Christians demanding vengeance has caused

146. Feuillet, 'Les Martyrs', pp. 189-207. Cf. Kraft, *Offenbarung*, pp. 119-20; J. Webb Mealey, *After a Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup, 70; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), pp. 85, 111.

147. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation', p. 224 n. 13; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 274; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 78-79.

148. Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 183.

149. For a thorough analysis of the use of δεσπότης in the NT see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 406-407.

150. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 407.

151. Those who favor that the souls primarily address Christ see Heil, 'The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation', p. 223; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 82-83; P.R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (SNTSMS, 95; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 113.

152. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 175; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 119; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 4; Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', pp. 300-11; Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', pp. 729-49.

153. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 158; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, p. 64; Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 90.

154. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 407-10; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 392; Prigent,

some scholars to reject these passages as antithetical to the Christian ethic of love and forgiveness.<sup>155</sup> John's use of ἐκδικέω, however, stems from the concept of justice prevalent throughout the OT.<sup>156</sup> Several OT passages provide background examples of God avenging the blood of his people (Ps. 79.10; Hos. 1.4; 4.1, Isa. 26.21; Deut. 32.43).<sup>157</sup> John alludes to Ps. 79[78].10 and Deut. 32.43, but Ps. 79.10 stems from Deut. 32.43.<sup>158</sup> In Deut. 32.43, the Song of Moses promises that God will exact vengeance on those who have harmed his people. The lexical parallels between οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν (Rev. 6.10) and ὅτι τὸ αἷμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκδικᾶται καὶ ἐκδικήσεται (Deut. 32.43 [LXX]) suggest an intentional allusion. Both passages pertain to God vindicating his people who were wrongfully persecuted. Since the Song of Moses represents the archetypal prophetic lawsuit, the allusion in Rev. 6.10 affirms the presence of the lawsuit motif as it relates the judgment of the nations.<sup>159</sup> The mention of the martyrs' blood (τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν) makes their request for justice in accordance with the divine law of *lex talionis* (Deut. 19.21). Incidentally, Jewish apocalyptic writings frequently depict similar scenes of appeals to God for justice.<sup>160</sup> The outcry for divine justice stems

*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 275; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 287; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 84-85; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 218; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 48-56; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 84.

155. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 175; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 119; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 4; Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', pp. 300-11; Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', pp. 729-49; Bauer, 'Das Gebot der Fiendesliebe und die alten Christen', p. 27; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, p. 271.

156. Used to translate the Hebrew terms נָקַם, פָּקַד, and שָׁפַט. See Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, pp. 37-148.

157. Numerous OT passages exist providing conceptual backgrounds for Rev. 6.10: (1) oppressed saints often ask God how long will it be until he acts in their behalf (Pss. 6.3; 13.1-2; 35.17; 74.10; 94.3; 119.84; Hab. 1.2-3); (2) the idea of blood crying out for justice (Gen. 4.10; Job 16.18; Ps. 9.12; cf. Mt. 23.35; Lk. 11.51); (3) prayers for divine vengeance (2 Sam. 3.28-39; 2 Kgs 1.10, 12; 2 Chron. 22.22; Neh. 4.4-5; Jer. 11.20; 15.15; 17.18; 18.21-23; 20.12; Amos 7.17); and (4) the general tenor of imprecatory prayers whereby an innocent one appeals to God for retribution against their enemies (Pss. 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 109, 138, 139). So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 692-93; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 407.

158. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 393; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 84 n. 78.

159. An additional parallel exists regarding the appeal for vengeance in Rev. 6.10 and the Song of Moses as the plea of the martyrs finds its fulfillment in Revelation 19. The divine warrior imagery in Deut. 32.35-43 as the one who exacts vengeance in behalf of his people finds a counterpart in the appearance of Christ as the divine warrior in Rev. 19.11-19.

160. 1 En. 8.4-11.2; 47.4; 90.1-11; 104.3-4; 4 Ezra 4.35-37; 15.9-11. Cf. T. Mos. 9.6-7; Sib. Or. 3.307-13. See also Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 176; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 408-409; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 218.

from the experience that no Christian could receive justice from a Roman court.<sup>161</sup>

The martyrs request the vengeance to be directed at the τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ('the inhabitants of the earth').<sup>162</sup> The phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς denotes the objects of wrath in the Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 14; 17.2, 8). This group is consistently set in juxtaposition to the saints. The inhabitants of the earth are the ones responsible for the execution of the saints (Rev. 6.10) and they will subsequently be recipients of God's wrath. With the breaking of the sixth seal, they seek to hide due to their dread and terror at the coming wrath of God and the Lamb (Rev. 6.13–17). Nothing in that fear indicates repentance from their wickedness, but rather it implies they recognize that their guilt deserves punishment. This compounds their guilt and contributes to the mounting evidence against them.

The plea for justice through vindication receives an initial answer assuring them that judgment is coming, but not until the predetermined number of martyr's reaches completion (Rev. 6.11). That they were given (ἐδόθη) white robes (στολὴ λευκή) affirms their innocence and anticipates their full vindication.<sup>163</sup> The notion of a set number to reach fulfillment, especially in response to the 'how long' question, represents a fairly common theme in Apocalyptic writings (cf. *1 En.* 47.1–4; *4 Ezra* 4.35–37; *2 Bar.* 23.4–5a).<sup>164</sup> In this context, the souls must rest and wait until the remaining number of their brothers in Christ join them (ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί). Rather than seeing οἱ σύνδουλοι and οἱ ἀδελφοί as two separate groups of people it is best to take the καὶ epexegetically equating οἱ σύνδουλοι with οἱ ἀδελφοί (i.e., 'their fellow servants, that is, their brothers').<sup>165</sup> By stating that additional believers will surrender their lives in faithful testimony to Christ, John's audience should realize that they very well could be included in that

161. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 8. See also Aune's (*Revelation 6–16*, p. 407) statement that Rev. 6.10 reads like a dramatization of the rhetorical questions of Jesus in Lk. 18.7.

162. For the most detailed analysis of οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς and the synonymous constructions denoting a universal scope see the insightful work of Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation* (BZNW, 143; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 185–201.

163. The imagery of white or clean robes recurs throughout the Apocalypse to depict the purity of the saints guaranteeing their eschatological reward in glory (Rev. 3.4–5, 18; 7.9, 13–14; 19.14; 22.14). So Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 90.

164. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 48–56. So Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 185.

165. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 160; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 160; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 411; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 290. Contra Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 92.

number (Rev. 12.11; 13.7-10).<sup>166</sup> This corresponds with the theme that the way to victory for believers is the way of the Lamb via martyrdom.<sup>167</sup> This theme of justice and vindication directly related to the martyred souls resurfaces as a central component in the execution of divine judgment against the nations—especially as it relates to the trumpet and bowl judgment (Rev. 8.3-5; 16.7).<sup>168</sup>

*b. Eschatological Investigative Judgments (Rev. 8.1–9.21)*

The opening of the seals introduces a series of preliminary judgments preparing the way for the next series of seven judgments signaled by the trumpet blasts from the seven angels. Trumpets were sounded for several purposes in the OT: (a) ceremonial processions (Josh. 6; Neh. 12.41); (b) to proclaim the accession of a king (1 Kgs 1.34, 39; 2 Kgs 9.13); (c) an alarm signal summoning Israel to national repentance in the face of imminent divine judgment (Jer. 4.5; 6.1, 17, Ezek. 33.3; Isa. 58.1; Joel 2.1, 15); and (d) the trumpets were blown as part of the Jewish liturgy during all feasts, the first day of each month, and at the daily sacrifices. Concerning the series of trumpet judgments in Revelation 8–9, Caird argued that they serve to announce judgment, call for repentance, and summon the army of martyr-witnesses.<sup>169</sup> He suggests a direct relationship between the trumpets of the Jewish feasts and those in the book of Revelation, because Tishri came to be viewed as the ‘day when he [God] judges all mankind’.<sup>170</sup> According to Caird, the Rabbis taught that ‘the trumpets of Tishri 1 are blown to confuse Satan’ and ‘for to them as to John (xii. 10) Satan was the prosecuting counsel in the heavenly lawcourt’.<sup>171</sup> The Day of Atonement represented an annual anticipation for the final Day of Judgment when God passes sentence on all mankind.

An interlude interrupts the sequence between the sixth and seventh seal. The purpose of this interruption is to assure the believers that prior to the plagues of the tribulation God will provide them with a protective sealing. John, however, returns to the seals in Rev. 8.1 with the opening of the

166. Pattemore (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 89) writes, ‘For the audience to find an identity as *σύνδουλοι* and *ἄδελφοι* of the martyrs involves being prepared to be killed like them for the sake of the word of God. While they cannot be part of the company of martyrs who have already been slaughtered, they are challenged to become part of those ‘about to be killed’. In this way they too, like the martyrs under the altar, will be identified with the Lamb. As his being slain is the obverse side of the coin of his victory, so the completion of the number of martyrs will result in their vindication and eternal life’.

167. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 87.

168. For an extensive analysis of Rev. 6.9-11 throughout the Apocalypse see Heil, ‘The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation’, pp. 220-43.

169. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 108-109.

170. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 109-10.

171. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 110.

seventh seal. Revelation 8.1-5 establishes a relationship between the seven seals and the seven trumpets by means of interlocking.<sup>172</sup> John uses the device of interlocking to transition from the seals to the trumpets, but it also intimately connects the succeeding trumpet judgments with the preceding seals. The breaking of the seventh seal immediately results in silence for about half an hour (σιγῇ)<sup>173</sup> followed by the introduction of the seven angels (τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἄγγέλους)<sup>174</sup> holding the trumpets given to them (ἐδόθησαν). This scene demonstrates that the ensuing judgments are directly related to the martyrs' plea for vindication in Rev. 6.9-11.

The interconnectedness between the martyrs' plea and the trumpet judgments is made explicit with the emphasis on the altar and the offering up of

172. Collins (*Combat Myth*, p. 17) argues that the breaking of the seventh seal results in three effects: (1) the silence of about half an hour (Rev. 8.1); (2) the appearance of the seven angels with the seven trumpets (Rev. 8.2); and (3) the vision of the angel with the golden censer (Rev. 8.3-5). She argues that these three effects constitute the device of interlocking in two ways. 'First', she proposes, 'since one of the effects of the seventh unsealing is the introduction of the seven trumpet angels, the entire series of trumpets is linked to the preceding section as the result of the opening of the seventh seal. Second, the vision of the angel with the golden censer is inserted between the introduction of the trumpet angels in vs. 6. This insertion (8.3-5) is a transitional vision because it alludes back to the fifth seal and forward to the first four trumpets'.

173. The silence lasting for approximately half an hour (ἡμιώριον) creates a jarring effect because heaven is normally characterized by a cacophony of ceaseless worship around the throne. The duration of this silence equals half of the time reserved for the final judgment of the nations (Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 150; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 83; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 453). In the OT, silence often preceded God's acts of judgment especially on the Day of the Lord (Zech. 2.13; Zeph. 1.7). While judgment is implicit in this silence, Jewish tradition maintains that during times of prayer on earth heaven fell silent as the Almighty listened intently (3 Macc. 6.1; *b. Hag.* 12b; 4Q405 20-22). Given the heavy emphasis on prayer in the surrounding context, it seems that the most plausible interpretation of Rev 8.1 is to combine both traditions of silence related to prayer and judgment. For scholars who connect the silence to prayer see Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 223-34; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 150; Caird, *Revelation of St John*, pp. 106-107; Michaels, *Revelation*, pp. 116-17; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 337-38. For a detailed assessment of the various interpretations of see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 451-54; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 211-12.

174. Most commentators agree that although John does not specifically identify these seven angels but the use of the article (τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἄγγέλους) suggests that they must have been a familiar group of angels to his readers. What is more, the added detail that these angels stand in the presence of God (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστήκασιν) ascribes them with a measure of prominence. As such, these seven angels are commonly thought to be the seven archangels of Jewish tradition (Tob. 12.15; cf. *Jub.* 2.2, 18; *T. Levi.* 3.5; 8.2; *3 En.* 17.1-3; 4Q403; 4Q404). *1 En.* 20.2-8 lists their names as Uriel, Raphael, Michael, Saraq'el, Gabriel, and Remiel. Although this identification is plausible, it is interesting to note that John does not explicitly make this connection. See also Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 213-14.

the saints' prayers. The initial answer to the martyr's appeal for vindication (Rev. 6.11) was to wait a little longer (ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν). The scene depicted in Rev. 8.1-5 represents the initiation of the sequence of judgments that will ultimately accomplish the full outpouring of God's retribution for the blood of his saints. The most obvious connection to the martyrs of Rev. 6.9-11 is that the altar (θυσιαστήριον) once again takes center stage. Due to the lack of any other altar mentioned in the heavenly courtroom, this is likely to be the same one containing the souls of the slain saints.<sup>175</sup>

An angel standing at the altar (ἐστάθη ἐπὶ) holding a golden censer is given a large amount of incense for the purpose of offering up the prayers of all the saints (ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων). The large quantity of incense essentially corresponds to the large quantity of prayers. Although these prayers generally include all the prayers offered by every saint throughout history (i.e., τῶν ἁγίων πάντων), it specifically pertains to the antecedent petition of the slaughtered souls. This association is strengthened by the observation that the request of the souls constitutes the only explicit example of prayer in the Apocalypse.<sup>176</sup> These prayers, then, primarily involve the desperate cries for justice from believers suffering unjustly at the hands of ungodly oppressors. The smoke of the incense coalesced with the prayers ascending before God indicates that the petition of Rev. 6.10 'is now being formally presented before God with angelic favor and authority'.<sup>177</sup>

Once the prayers are offered and accepted the answer to the plea for vindication is symbolically portrayed in Rev. 8.5. Now that the censer has been emptied the angel uses it to scoop up some of the fiery coals from the altar to hurl it down toward the earth.<sup>178</sup> What once contained the prayers of the saints suddenly becomes a vehicle for administering divine judgment. The use of ἔβαλεν conveys the sense of a forceful action and evokes a sense of anger and wrath. This act triggers the theophanic phenomenon associated with judicial decrees issuing from the throne of God (βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός).<sup>179</sup> The verdict from the preliminary investigative judgments is in

175. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 227.

176. Cf. Heil, 'The Fifth Seal as a Key to the Book of Revelation', p. 224.

177. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 455.

178. The use of the preposition εἰς following the verb of motion (ἔβαλεν) could either be understood as indicating an intended direction (i.e., 'toward') or the area of surface (i.e., 'on' or 'upon').

179. Interestingly, these phenomena appear at the beginning and end of the trumpet judgments. They happen again after the seventh trumpet in Rev. 11.19 (ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη). Note, however, the addition of a great hailstorm (χάλαζα μεγάλη). This suggests intensification in the severity of the judicial decrees. This intensification is also evident in the final appearance of this theophanic phenomena in Rev. 16.18, which adds the occurrence of a tremendous earthquake unlike any before in human history (καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας).

and now the angels are permitted to sound their trumpets after an anticipated delay (cf. Rev. 7.1-3; 8.1). The trumpets, like the seals, occur in a grouping of  $4 + 2 + \text{interlude} + 1 = \text{next septet}$ .<sup>180</sup> Although each successive trumpet blast has dire consequences on the earth's inhabitants, they refuse to repent (Rev. 9.20-21). The last trumpet comprises the consummation of God's wrath in that it contains the seven bowl judgments that destroy life on earth (Rev. 16.1-21). By developing the theme of the prayer for vindication from 6.9-11, Rev. 8.1-5 explicitly connects the Tribulation judgments with the prayers for vindication from the star witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations.

*c. Final Punitive Judgments (Rev. 16.1-21)*

The seventh trumpet, comprising the third woe, signals the final consummation of God's judgment (Rev. 11.15-19) by introducing the angels with the seven bowls filled with his wrath (Rev. 15.5-8). That the seventh trumpet represents the consummation of God's investigative and punitive judgments is evident by the declarations accompanying it in Rev. 11.15-19.<sup>181</sup> Of particular importance, is the announcement from the twenty-four elders declaring that God's wrath has come (ἦλθεν ἡ ὀργή σου) and subsequently it is now time for judging the dead (ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι) and rewarding the saints (δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν τοῖς δοῦλοις). As such, Rev. 11.15-19 proleptically anticipates the results of the seventh trumpet rather than its content. The

180. The first four trumpets impact all life on earth, which would presumably affect believers as well as unbelievers. The last three, however, are directed specifically against the inhabitants of the earth. Consequently, the saints are exempt from the last three as explicitly stated in Rev. 9.4 where the locusts are commanded not to harm the earth's vegetation or those with God's seal on their foreheads.

181. Two sets of declarations contained in heavenly worship immediately succeed the sounding of the seventh trumpet. First, a group of loud voices (φωναὶ μεγάλαι) announce the arrival of God and Christ's kingdom on earth (ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ). This declaration, then, heralds the end of the age by positing that the kingdoms of this world have now been subsumed by Christ's kingdom on earth. The elders, second, confirm that the Tribulation judgments have reached their consummation with the return of Christ and the final judgment. That Christ has returned is affirmed by the omission of ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Rev. 11.17; cf. 16.5) from the familiar threefold refrain, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Rev. 1.4, 8; 4.8) used as a circumlocution of the divine name. This obvious omission, along with Rev. 16.5, implies that he is no longer 'the one who is coming' because he has now arrived. The following ὅτι clause explains the reason why such adulation accompanies the final trumpet. Namely, because Christ has taken (ἐλήφας) his power and he has begun to reign (ἐβασίλευσας). The combination of the prophetic perfect tense with the ingressive aorist reinforces that the seventh trumpet marks the beginning of Christ's reign on earth. On the nature of the kingdom as belonging equally to God and the Christ see Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, p. 202; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 638-40; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 611; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 288-89.

revelation of the content is further delayed by the inclusion of the signs narrative (Rev. 12.1–15.8). The signs narrative functions as an interlude between the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the introduction of the bowls for the purpose of setting the stage for the final judgment.<sup>182</sup> The actual content of the seventh trumpet judgment is finally introduced in Rev. 15.1 with the arrival of the seven angels given seven last plagues that will fully complete the outpouring of God's wrath (ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ). Because the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls they represent the continuation of judgment stemming directly as a result of the saints' prayer in Rev. 6.9–11 via Rev. 8.1–5.

The final two septets share a number of affinities with the Exodus plagues as well as with each other. The apparent overlap between the bowls, trumpets and seals would suggest that they recapitulate each other. A comparative analysis, however, reveals that too much dissimilarity between them makes a recapitulation theory too dissatisfying to be sustained (see Table 6).<sup>183</sup> While the trumpets and the bowls exhibit several parallels they rarely correspond with the seals. What is more, the intensification of the impact on the earth increasing from a fourth (seals), to a third (trumpets), and eventually to the all (bowls) cannot merely be attributed to just a closer perspective of the same judgments.<sup>184</sup> The parallels fail to match consistently in their content and arrangement. They even fail to match consistently with the order of the Exodus plagues.<sup>185</sup> Although John alludes to six of the ten Exodus plagues, he resists any formal or chronological uniformity in his arrangement of them in the corresponding trumpet or bowl judgments. What emerges, then, is that instead of recapitulation, John wants to establish thematic parallels among the two septets with the Exodus plagues for theological purposes. Namely, John draws a comparison with the Exodus as the penultimate activity of God's activity to redeem his people from oppression through the judgment of their pagan persecutors.<sup>186</sup>

182. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 398.

183. For other comparative charts see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 238–39; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 500–503; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 809–10.

184. Smalley (*Revelation to John*, p. 398) insightfully remarks, 'It is true that there are differences between the two sequences, and that the second is not a mere imitation of the first'. Cf. Beckwith, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 672–73, 690.

185. Contra Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 808–809.

186. The Exodus motif in the Apocalypse also fulfills the second Exodus theme of Isa. 40–55.



Table 6. *Comparisons of the Septets with the Exodus Plagues.*

<i>Seven Seals</i>	<i>Seven Trumpets</i>	<i>Seven Bowls</i>	<i>Exodus Plagues</i>	<i>Compare/Contrast</i>
The rider on the white horse bent on conquest over 1/4 of the earth (Rev. 6.2)	Hail and fire mixed with blood burning 1/3 of the earth's vegetation (Rev. 8.7)	Ugly festering sores on all with the mark of the beast (Rev. 16.2)	#1 Nile turned to blood (Exod. 7.17-21) #7 Plague of hail (Exod. 9.22-26) #6 Plague of sores and boils (Exod. 9.8-12)	The trumpet corresponds to the 7th Exodus plague and possibly the 1st with the use of 'blood'. The bowl corresponds to the 6th Exodus plague.
The rider on the red horse brining about war over 1/4 of the earth (Rev. 6.4)	Oceans into blood destroying 1/3 of the seas, sea creatures, and ships (Rev. 8.8-9)	100% seas turn to thick blood and 100% of sea life and industry is destroyed (Rev. 16.3)	#1 Nile turned to blood (Exod. 7.17-21)	Both the trumpet and the bowl pertain to the seas turning to blood echoing the 1st Exodus plague.
The rider on the black horse bringing famine over 1/4 of the earth (Rev. 6.5-6)	Blazing star named Wormwood turning 1/3 of the fresh waters bitter (Rev. 8.10-11)	100% of the fresh waters become blood (Rev. 16.4)	#1 Nile turned to blood (Exod. 7.17-21)	Both the trumpet and bowl pertain to the fresh waters turning to blood echoing the 1st Exodus plague.
The rider on the pale green horse bringing death over 1/4 of the earth (Rev. 6.8)	1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars turned dark (Rev. 8.12)	The sun intensifies scorching all flesh (Rev. 16.8)	#9 Plague of darkness (Exod. 10.21-19)	The septets are dissimilar. The trumpet corresponds with the 9th Exodus plague.
Souls under the altar (Rev. 6.9-11)	Plague of locust demons torment the earth's inhabitants (Rev. 9.1-11)	The beast and his kingdom is plunged into darkness (Rev. 16.10)	#8 Plague of locust (Exod. 10.12-20) #9 Plague of darkness (Exod. 10.21-19)	The septets are dissimilar. The trumpet corresponds with the 8th Exodus plague. The bowl corresponds to the 9th Exodus plague.
Cosmic shakings (Rev. 6.12-14)	Plague of demons and mounted troops (Rev. 9.12-19)	The Euphrates dries and three frog demons prepare for the	#2 Plague of frogs (Exod. 8.1-7)	Possible similarities with the battle imagery in both the

<i>Seven Seals</i>	<i>Seven Trumpets</i>	<i>Seven Bowls</i>	<i>Exodus Plagues</i>	<i>Compare/Contrast</i>
		battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16.12-16)		trumpet and bowl judgments. The bowl loosley corresponds with the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Exodus plague.
Silence for about half an hour (Rev. 8.1)	Seventh trumpet results in heavenly worship followed by theophanic rumblings (Rev. 11.15-19)	Cosmic shakings of apocalyptic proportions followed by hundred pound hailstones (Rev. 16.17-21)	#7 Plague of hail (Exod. 9.22-26)	Both the trumpet and the bowl correspond to the Sinai theophany in Exod. 19.16-19. The 6th seal parallels the phenomenon of the 7th bowl, but to a lesser extent.

The seven bowl judgments significantly develop the lawsuit motif in two ways: (1) they continue the theme of divine retribution administering justice on behalf of his slaughtered saints; and (2) it proves the absolute obduracy of the earth's inhabitants. In Rev. 16.1 the angels are commanded to go (ὑπάγετε) and pour out (ἐκχέετε) the seven bowls containing the wrath of God (τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>187</sup> The term θυμός occurs eight times in the Apocalypse (Rev. 12.12; 14.8, 10, 19; 15.7; 16.1, 19, 18.3; 19.15) and for the most part it is synonymous with ὀργή (Rev. 6.16, 17; 11.18; 14.10; 16.19; 19.15).<sup>188</sup> In Rev. 16.19 and 19.15, John uses the phrase τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ to express the full extent of God's wrath. This wrath is symbolically portrayed as a deadly wine comprised of blood (Rev. 14.10, 19-20; 19.15). The imagery of a cup of wine containing God's wrath comes directly from Jeremiah's prophecy against the nations (Jer. 25.15).<sup>189</sup> The cup of God's wrath contrasts the cup of Babylon the prostitute, which is filled with the blood of the saints and representative of the fury of her violence (Rev. 14.8; 18.3).

The seven bowls contain the wine of God's wrath poured out on the inhabitants of the earth. The objects of this wrath are specifically identified as

187. The genitive phrase, τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, is most likely a genitive of content modifying the noun φιάλας. Wallace contends that when used nominally, 'the genitive term bears the brunt of the semantic weight' (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 113). As such, John emphasizes the content of the bowls (i.e., wrath) rather than focusing on the bowls themselves. So Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 579.

188. θυμός conveys, however, a stronger sense of the intense inner feelings of anger or fury (BDAG, p. 461; LN 88.178).

189. Cf. Isa. 51.17, 22; Lam. 4.21; Zech. 12.2; Obad. 17; *Pss. Sol.* 8.15; 2 *Bar.* 13.9.

everyone with the mark of the beast and all who worshipped his image (Rev. 16.2). According to Rev. 13.8, this would include all the inhabitants of the earth in juxtaposition to the people of God. Therefore, the bowls represent the answer to the prayer of Rev. 6.9–11.<sup>190</sup> When the last bowl empties, God's retribution is complete (Rev. 16.19) as explicitly affirmed in the judgment doxology of Rev. 16.5–7.

The pouring out of the third bowl, in Rev. 16.4, transforms all fresh water into putrid blood (ἐγένετο αἷμα). Although it echoes the first Exodus plague (Exod. 7.17–21), it represents a far more serious plague due to its global impact. This plague deprives all life on earth from water and forces them to drink blood out of thirsty desperation. At this point, the pattern of pouring out the bowls is interrupted with brief, but profound, doxological statements affirming the justice of God inherent in this harsh judgment. Aune subsumes Rev. 16.5–7 under the broad generic heading of 'judgment doxology', which is a 'brief hymnic passage that provides general or specific justification for the judgment of God'.<sup>191</sup> Based on the content, the designation as an 'eschatological vindication formula' might more narrowly identify what kind of judgment doxology this passage fits.<sup>192</sup> Regardless of the preferred form-critical label, the purpose of Rev. 16.5–7 is to extol God for the justness of his righteous judgments.

This judgment doxology contains two witnesses affirming the justness of God's judgment. John uses the phrase καὶ ἤκουσα to introduce the first witness in Rev. 16.5a and the second in Rev. 16.7a. The angel of the waters (τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων) declares God as just/righteous (δίκαιος εἶ).<sup>193</sup> Two ὅτι clauses provide the basis or cause for this declaration.<sup>194</sup> God is just *because* ταῦτα ἔκρινας ('he judged them'). The use of the plural neuter appears

190. Pattemore (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 99) creatively calls this a 'progress report' on God's activity regarding his answer to this prayer.

191. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 885. So R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zur Form, Sprache, und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen* (SUNT, 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), p. 56; Hans D. Betz, 'On the Problem of the Religio-Historical Understanding of Apocalypticism', *JTC* 6 (1969), pp. 134–56 (139). See, however, Osborne (*Revelation*, p. 581) who faults Aune's designation because he first cites OT examples affirming God's righteousness (cf. Ps. 119.137; Jer. 12.1; Dan. 3.27; Tob. 3.2; *Apoc. Mos.* 27.5) and then passages focusing on the justice of divine judgment (Josh. 7.19–21; 2 Chron. 12.6; Ezra 9.15; Neh. 9.33; Pss. 7.11; 9.4; Jer. 46.28; 3 *Macc.* 2.3). The problem is that 'there are no examples that combine the two elements apart from this one, so a form-critical designation is problematic'.

192. Collins, 'The History-of-Religions Approach to Apocalypticism' (Rev. 16.4–7)', p. 369.

193. The justness and righteousness of a holy God is an important theme in the Song of Moses (cf. Deut. 32.2, 4).

194. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, p. 674. See also Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 856; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 818; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 403.

awkward because uncertainty surrounds exactly what ταῦτα might refer to.<sup>195</sup> Most likely, however, ταῦτα takes τῶν ὑδάτων as its antecedent since it is the only other plural neuter in the context.<sup>196</sup> This would mean that the angel in charge of the waters acknowledges the righteousness of God's judgment on the waters by turning them to blood. The second ὅτι clause further explains the reason why this judgment is appropriate by evoking the law of retribution (*lex talionis*). This judgment is just because they (i.e., the earth's inhabitants collectively) have poured out (ἐξέχεαν) the blood (αἷμα) of the saints and prophets. The expression of pouring out blood, an example of paronomasia, clearly bespeaks the charge of murder. In other words, God has avenged the αἷμα of his witnesses (Rev. 6.10) by forcing the inhabitants of the earth to drink blood (cf. Deut. 32.43; 2 Kgs 19.10; Ps. 79.10).<sup>197</sup> The ironic use of ἄξιόι (cf. Rev. 3.4) indicates that the punishment fits the crime and they got what they deserved.

The second witness to testify to the justness of this judgment is a voice that comes from the altar (τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) containing the souls of the martyrs (Rev. 16.7).<sup>198</sup> The connection of this judgment with the martyrs' plea for vindication is now made explicit when they<sup>199</sup> can no longer contain their exuberance and gladly affirm the angel's declaration by stating ναὶ κύριε...-ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου. The phrase ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια constitutes an intratextual allusion to the Song of Moses and the Lamb sung by the victorious saints in Rev. 15.3. In that context it specifically describes the ways of God (αἱ ὁδοί σου). It occurs again in Rev. 19.2 (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ) affirming God's judgments as in Rev. 16.7, but the latter directly addresses God in the second person (σου). Significantly, these declarations come from the mouths of the redeemed saints who now praise God for the acts of retribution accomplished on their behalf. The witnesses, who have brought their suit to the most Supreme Court, rejoice that the judge has reached a verdict in their favor by causing the ones who murdered them to drink blood.

195. Most translations take ταῦτα to refer to the judgments that God has rendered.

196. Since ταῦτα is the object (accusative) of the verb ἔκρινας, it is grammatically implausible to translate this phrase as 'because you have so judged'. What is more, it is rather unlikely that ταῦτα modifies the feminine plural αἱ κρίσεις (Rev. 16.7). This leaves τῶν ὑδάτων as the most likely antecedent. As such, the phrase would translate as 'because you judged these [waters]'.

197. See also Decock, 'The Symbol of Blood in the Apocalypse of John', pp. 171-78.

198. The genitive τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου is most likely a partative genitive meaning that someone from the altar spoke instead of the altar itself speaking. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 404.

199. By stating that he heard a voice from the altar (ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου), John may be using τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου in the singular to refer to the entire group of souls under the altar collectively.

A final proof of the justness regarding the severity of these plagues of wrath is vividly depicted in the stubborn recalcitrance demonstrating the incorrigibility of the earth's inhabitants. While praise from heaven accompanies the third bowl, blasphemy from humanity accompanies the four remaining bowls. After the outpouring of the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh bowls the response of humanity is recorded. This obduracy, then, is submitted as evidence in the lawsuit against the nations (see Table 7). They curse God because they recognize that he is the one with the authority to judge them. This blatant hatred for the divine sovereign creator warrants the severity of the wrath inflicted on these wicked people.

Table 7. *The Impenitence of Humanity and the Justice of God's Wrath.*

<i>Bowl and Plague</i>	<i>Response from Humanity</i>
Bowl four. Sun intensified to burn people (16.8-9)	Curse God (16.9a) and refusal to repent and glorify God (16.9c) ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ...καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν
Bowl five. Darkness on the beast's kingdom (16.10-11)	Gnawed tongues in agony (16.10b), cursed God (16.11a), and refused to repent of deeds (16.11b) ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν...καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ...καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν.
Bowl six. Preparation for the battle of Armageddon (16.12-16)	Kings gather for the final battle against the Lord—Armageddon (16.16) συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀρμαγεδών
Bowl seven. God's wrath completed (16.17-21)	Cursed God (16.21b) ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεόν

### 3. *The Interludes*

These interludes appear in the narrative for theological reasons. They are bound to the preceding sections and provide answers for questions that the audience might be asking. The purpose of the interludes in the narrative flow of the Apocalypse is to focus on the role of the people of God on earth during the sequence of the seals and trumpets. These interludes depict the saints as sealed prophetic witnesses engaged in a holy war against the idolatrous demands of Satan. They also provide important details essential to God's lawsuit against the nations. First, the saints are assured of their ultimate vindication if they remain faithful and endure persecution although it might result in their unjust execution. Second, the interludes, especially the signs

narrative of Revelation 12–15, tell a story effectively incriminating humanity of their idolatry and bloodshed. These accusations are accompanied by the necessary evidence to convict them of their guilt and render an appropriate verdict.

a. *God's Servants Sealed (Rev. 7.1-17)*

This is the first of several interludes interwoven between the series of septets. John places this interlude between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals (cf. Rev. 6.12; 8.1). The sixth seal unleashes devastating catastrophes causing the earth's inhabitants to scurry about as they flee into caves praying for death. In their terror they cry out concerning the wrath of God and the Lamb asking, 'Who can stand?' The succeeding narrative (Rev. 7.1-17) answers this question by depicting the protective sealing and salvation of God's people. The phrase Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, in Rev. 7.9, divides the interlude into two separate but interrelated segments (i.e., Rev. 7.1-8 and 9-17).

The first, Rev. 7.1-8, pertains to the sealing of the 144,000 for protection prior to the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 7.1, 14).<sup>200</sup> The idea of their protection from God's punitive judgment (i.e., the trumpets) is supported by three observations. First, four angels hold back the winds as another angel prevents them from harming the earth until (ἄχρι) the servants of God have been sealed (σφραγίσωμεν). Winds, in the OT, often functioned as agents of divine judgment (Pss. 18.10; 104.3-4; Isa. 40.7, 24; Jer. 23.19; Ezek. 5.12; cf. *1 En.* 76.1-14).<sup>201</sup> The punitive nature of this divine judgment is bolstered by the fact that these four angels had been given authority to harm the earth and sea (ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν). Second, the concept of sealing the foreheads of the servants of God also connotes divine protection. As with the scroll, the primary purpose of sealing something is to protect the contents by demonstrating proper ownership.<sup>202</sup> The parallels between this passage and Ezek. 9.4-6 further support the idea of marking the heads of the faithful to protect them from divine punitive judgments. Finally, in Rev. 9.4, the fifth trumpet unleashes a plague of locusts that utterly torments the nations, but they are specifically instructed not to harm those with the seal of God on their foreheads.<sup>203</sup> Interestingly, God protects his people from the plagues of

200. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 443. See also his survey of the various interpretations pp. 441-47.

201. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 180. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 305; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 166; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 204.

202. See also Krodell, *Revelation*, p. 180; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 143-43.

203. Incidentally, Ezekiel 10 also lurks in the background of Revelation 8–9 during the trumpet judgments. This confirms the notion of God's protective sealing of his righteous servants prior to unleashing judgments against the wicked.

the Tribulation in a similar manner to the way he protected his people in Goshen during the Exodus plagues.<sup>204</sup>

While John hears the number, what he sees comprises an international multitude of redeemed Christians who have come out of the Great Tribulation. The second segment of Rev. 7.9-17, then, focuses on the salvation of God's people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν).<sup>205</sup> This group is standing before God's throne (ἑστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου) and answers the question regarding who can stand during the day of wrath.<sup>206</sup> It also draws a firm distinction between the people of God and the rest of humanity. One of the elders informs John concerning the identification of the multitude and declares the certainty of their vindication in salvation (Rev. 7.14-17).

This interlude offers two perspectives regarding the same group of people (i.e., the 144,000 and the multitude).<sup>207</sup> The 144,000 represent the entire new covenant community of God's people about to enter the Tribulation, whereas the international multitude standing before the throne represents the entire congregation of the redeemed coming out of the Tribulation. John essentially provides a before and after snapshot of the church as an assurance that God capably protects and saves his people during those days of distress.

204. Cf. Exod. 8.22-23; 9.6, 26; 11.7. The purpose was not merely to protect his people, but also to make a distinction between them and the Egyptians. So Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 409-16.

205. Cf. Rev. 5.9; 7.9, 10.11; 11.9; 13.7; 14.6; 17.15. On how John uses this phrase and its variations to denote the universals composition of the redeemed from all nations and its relationship to OT texts, see Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 326-37.

206. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 405) offers the best treatment of the relationship between the question in Rev. 6.17 and Revelation 7. He first lists the positive arguments favoring a direct relationship: (1) 6.17 and 7.9 are close to each other and both use ἵστημι ('stand'); (2) both refer to people standing before the throne and the Lamb; (3) the picture of the Lamb 'standing' before the throne in 5.6 is closely associated with his resurrection existence, suggesting that those 'standing' before the throne in 7.9 are resurrected saints; and (4) the saints are said to stand 'on the sea of glass' close to the later mention of the 'Lamb' (15.2-3). Beale also raises and responds to the possible objection that ἵστημι is used five times to refer to angels and four times to ungodly figures. In light of context, however, it seems best to view the multitude as the answer to the question in 6.17.

207. Beckwith, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 534-36, 540; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 201; Ladd, *Revelation*, pp. 117-18; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 145; Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 151; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 131; Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 98; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 197-98; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 412-13; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 443; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 302-303; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 185-87; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 216, 225-26; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 140-43; Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction through Revelation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), pp. 529-30.

The identification of the redeemed multitude with the 144,000 sealed servants of God as representing the church entering the Great Tribulation rests on several exegetical and theological arguments.<sup>208</sup> Although the 144,000 are composed of 12,000 from 12 tribes of Israel, this group most likely represents the church rather than ethnic Israelites. First, they are explicitly called servants of God (τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ), which everywhere else in the Apocalypse refers to Christians (both Jewish and Gentile).<sup>209</sup> Second, the list of tribes provided (Rev. 7.5-8) is unlike any other known list of tribes in the OT.<sup>210</sup> This suggests that John intentionally altered the list because he wanted to present the church as the continuation of the true Israel.<sup>211</sup> Thirdly, in Rev. 5.5-6, John hears about the Lion of Judah, but he sees the Lamb slain. This indicates a pattern whereby the audition and vision refer to the same thing by using different images. A parallel exists in that John heard (ἤκουσα) the number of 144,000, but he saw (εἶδον) an innumerable international multitude.<sup>212</sup> Finally,

208. This passage, however, constitutes a notoriously knotty maze of interpretative possibilities. For a summary of interpretative views on the 144,000 see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 416-23. For those who contend that the 144,000 strictly refers to ethnic Israelites or a group of Jewish Christians see Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, pp. 475-83; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 143; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung*, pp. 126-28; A. Geyser, 'The Twelve Tribes in Revelation: Judean and Judeo-Christian Apocalypticism', *NTS* 28 (1982), pp. 388-99.

209. The term δούλος occurs a total of fourteen times (Rev. 1.1; 2.20; 6.15; 7.3; 10.7; 11.18; 13.16; 15.3; 19.2, 5, 18; 22.3, 6). The majority of uses specifically refer to prophets, but it does also denote Christians in general.

210. The primary differences include: (1) Judah heads the list, rather than Reuben; (2) the combination of Joseph with Manasseh, rather than Ephraim; (3) the omission of Dan; and (4) the inclusion of Levi has also been discussed as unusual. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 220-23; Bauckham, 'The List of the Tribes in Revelation 7 Again', *JSNT* 42 (1991), pp. 99-115; Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 169-68; Christopher R. Smith, 'The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7.5-8', *JSNT* 39 (1990), pp. 111-18; Christopher R. Smith, 'The Tribes of Revelation 7 and the Literary Competence of John the Seer', *JETS* 38 (1995), pp. 213-18.

211. Beckwith, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 535; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 140; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 129; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 420; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 315; Smith, 'The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel', pp. 111-18.

212. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 96; Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 150-51; Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 216) observes an even further parallel between the Lion and the Twelve tribes and the Lamb with the innumerable multitude. He contends, 'To the Lion of the tribe of Judah... corresponds a list of the sealed of the tribes of Israel, headed by those of the tribe of Judah... To the Lamb standing (5.6), who has ransomed people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (5.9), corresponds the multitude from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the Lamb (7.9). The correspondences imply that the 144,000 are the Israelite army of the military Messiah of David, while the international multitude are the followers of the slaughtered Lamb'.



the symbolic nature of 144,000 as indicative of completeness strongly favors not taking it too literally (cf. Rev. 14.1-5; 21.16-17).<sup>213</sup>

*b. God's People as Prophetic Witnesses (Rev. 10.1–11.13)*

The second interlude appears between the sixth and seventh trumpet blasts (Rev. 10.1–11.13). It depicts the role of the people of God on earth contemporaneously during the time of the corresponding trumpet judgments. This interlude exhibits an implicit parenetic function concordant with the overall message to the churches. John's message to the churches basically exhorts believers, both individually and corporately, to remain faithful to Christ and endure unjust suffering because he will vindicate them. As God conducts his trial of the nations, believers actively participate in the unfolding proceedings by functioning as witnesses to the nations. This is consistent with the function of Israel during the lawsuit speech of Isaiah 40–55. In his lawsuit against the nations, Israel represents Yahweh's witnesses against the nations as they testify about his ways and works (Isa. 43.9-12).

The second interlude presents the testimony of the two witnesses as they boldly and powerfully testify before all the inhabitants of earth. Although the saints have been protectively sealed from the divine judgments, their testimony will incur hostility and even death. The nations reject their testimony and slaughter the witnesses, but God publicly vindicates them through their resurrection (Rev. 11.11-12).

The interlude divides into two separate but interrelated sections framing it within a prophetic context. The first section, Rev. 10.1-11, contains John's second prophetic commission in which he receives a message pertaining to the nations (δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσας καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς). Instead of reciting the scroll's message, the second section (Rev. 11.1-13) describes the ministry of the two prophetic witnesses before the nations (βλέπουσιν ἐκ τῶν λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν καὶ ἔθνων). One section involves John and a scroll while the other section involves two witnesses. These are inextricably bound together because they pertain to the fulfillment of a prophetic ministry before the nations.<sup>214</sup> In other words, John's prophetic commission is ultimately completed in the ministry of the faithful churches.<sup>215</sup> Based on the command to worship only God (Rev. 19.10; 22.8-9), Bauckham points out that in Revelation the church as a whole fulfills a

213. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 206; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 416; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 218. Caird (*The Revelation of St John*, p. 96), however, argues that the enumeration of 12,000 represents a part rather than the whole. He suggests that it only denotes the martyrs, but this view is too restrictive.

214. So Charles H. Giblin, 'Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration', *NTS* 30 (1984), pp. 433-59 (435-36). Contra Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 555.

215. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 338; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 572.

prophetic role: '[i]t is connected with the idea of the church's newly revealed role of confronting the idolatry of Rome in a prophetic conflict, like that of Moses with Pharaoh and his magicians or of Elijah with Jezebel and her prophets of Baal, and in the power of the Spirit of prophecy winning the nations to the worship of the true God'.<sup>216</sup> The faithful believers function as prophetic witnesses who render testimony against all idolatry, call for repentance, and warn the nations of God's impending judgment.

c. *John's Message for the Nations (Rev. 10.1-11)*

John uses καὶ εἶδον in Rev. 10.1 to signal a transition into the interlude that interrupts the sequence of the trumpets. The first six trumpets wreaked havoc on humanity resulting in the torment and death of many people. Sadly, however, Rev. 9.20-21 indicates that those who survived these plagues refused to repent of their idolatry and evil deeds. The investigative judgments have determined that humanity will not repent as a result of punishment. Will they repent, however, if they hear his message that he has entrusted to his prophets? Therefore, the scene introduces a massive angel holding a scroll intended for John's consumption so that as a prophet he could convey the ingested message regarding the fate of the nations.

The colossal angel descends from heaven for the purpose of commissioning John with a prophetic message against the obstinate nations. His appearance closely resembles descriptions of Christ in the Apocalypse. That he descends from heaven, is robed in a cloud (περιβεβλημένον νεφέλῃν), has a rainbow encircling his head (ἡ ἶρις ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ), his face shines as the sun (τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος), and his legs/feet look like fiery pillars (οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὡς στῦλοι πυρός) explicitly corresponds with other divine and christological imagery in the Apocalypse. This angel is sometimes identified as Christ. Despite the apparent merits of this interpretation, nowhere else in the Apocalypse is Jesus ever called an angel (ἄγγελον).<sup>217</sup> A more satisfying interpretation, is that this angel is possibly Christ's angel (διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ) who mediated the ἀποκάλυψις to John (Rev. 1.1).<sup>218</sup> Everything about this angel's appearance, posture, and action conveys a sense of heavenly authority.<sup>219</sup> This angel performs a juridical function central to the court proceedings as the lawsuit against the nations begins final deliberations.

216. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, p. 120.

217. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 253-54.

218. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 255. See also Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 152.

219. Several adjectives convey the notion of authority. He is called a strong angel (ισχυρὸν). Standing on both sea and land symbolizes universal authority over creation (Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 529; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 398; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 260). His voice is compared to the roar of a mighty lion (ὥσπερ λέων μυκᾷται) and it resounds with such authority that it provokes the sounding of the seven thunders.

This colossal angel straddles the land and sea with a very small scroll (βιβλαρίδιον) laying open in his hand.<sup>220</sup> Despite some contrasts between this opened scroll and the sealed scroll of Rev. 5.1, a majority of scholars tend to equate them.<sup>221</sup> The scroll in the angel's hand is the same sealed scroll now opened by the Lamb and contains a message of judgment against the nations. The scroll directly relates to God's plan for ending this evil age and ushering in the new heaven and earth as well as depicting the place of the church in these unfolding events.<sup>222</sup>

This scene advances the lawsuit motif when the angel raises his right hand as he solemnly testifies that the final answer to the martyr's plea for vindication is imminent (Rev. 10.5-7). The act of raising the right hand (ῆρεν τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιάν) coupled with him swearing (ὥμοσεν) indicates that this angel now submits a sworn deposition in this lawsuit.<sup>223</sup> To swear an oath confirms the veracity and reliability of testimony.<sup>224</sup> The language and imagery of this action clearly evokes Dan. 12.7 and Deut. 32.40. In Dan. 12.7, the man clothed in linen standing above the waters lifts his hand and testifies about the completion of the saints suffering for a times, time, and half a time. He swears that the people of God must endure an intense period of suffering corresponding to the days of the abomination that causes desolation. Beale correctly argues, however, that Dan. 12.7 is a development of Deut. 32.40.<sup>225</sup> That John intentionally alludes to both passages is

220. The contrasting image of very large and very small is emphasized by the use of βιβλαρίδιον. Smalley (*Revelation to John*, p. 258) observes that βιβλαρίδιον is a diminutive of βιβλάριον, which is the diminutive form of βιβλίον (Cf. Rev. 5.1). Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 244), however, contends that the diminutive form does not retain a diminutive sense in the Book of Revelation. MSS evidence demonstrates the existence of several variants supporting the possibilities for reading either βιβλάριον or of βιβλίον (Cf. NA<sup>27</sup> critical apparatus for Rev. 10.2, 8, 9, 10).

221. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 243-57) presents the most persuasive case for equating the scroll of Rev. 10.1 with the one in Rev. 5.1. His arguments may be summarized as: (1) βιβλαρίδιον, βιβλάριον, and βιβλίον are used synonymously in the *Shepherd of Hermas*; (2) clear literary parallels between 10.2 and 5.1; (3) both passages depend on Ezek. 2.9-10 for a conceptual background; (4) for a book focused on revealing content it follows that the scroll in chap. 10 provides the content of the scroll in chap. 5; and (5) the content of the scroll relates to the fulfillment of God establishing his kingdom on earth. See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 527-32; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 259; Mazzaferri, *Genre of Revelation*, pp. 265-79; Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 34; Wilson, *Revelation*, p. 309. For commentators that argue a genuine distinction between the two scrolls see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 171; Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 202-203; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 260, 269.

222. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 395.

223. Cf. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 280. Contra Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 564.

224. BDAG. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 398-99.

225. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 537.

confirmed by the lexical parallels between the LXX of Deut. 32.40 and Dan. 12.7 with that of Rev. 10.5. Revelation 10.5 states that ἤρην τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ τὴν δεξιάν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ὤμοσεν ἐν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. This closely reflects the reading of Deut. 32.40 in that it shares some of the same vocabulary: ἄρῶ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν τὴν χεῖρά μου καὶ ὁμῶμαι τῇ δεξιᾷ μου καὶ ἐρῶ ζῶ ἐγὼ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Dan. 12.7 uses the same imagery but omits the verb ἄρῶ and the noun χεῖρα: ψῶσε τὴν δεξιάν καὶ τὴν ἀριστεράν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ὤμοσε τὸν ζῶντα εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα θεόν. Daniel 12.7 remains more dominant in the overall context of Rev. 10.5-7, but John intentionally draws attention to Deut. 32.40. In Deut. 32.40, Yahweh raises his right hand and swears that, as a warrior, he will destroy his adversaries to avenge the blood of his people (cf. Deut. 32.43). The conflation of these two passages in Rev. 10.5 conveys the dual notion that on the one hand, saints must still endure through the three and a half year period, but on the other, God will avenge them soon.

The angel specifically swears that the wait for God's retributive judgment as promised by Moses, Daniel, and John has reached its determined end. He states, in Rev. 10.6, ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται ('there will be no more time'). This refers back to the initial response to the martyr's plea that ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν (Rev. 6.11). According to this oath, then, the blowing of the seventh trumpet and the subsequent bowl judgments constitutes the final judicial decree condemning the nations and avenging his saints with the full outpouring of God's wrath (cf. Rev. 16.4-7). There is a delay, however, between this testimony (Rev. 10.6-7), the blowing of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11.15), and the outpouring of wrath (Rev. 16.1-21)—the signs narrative (Revelation 12-15). The purpose for the delay is to depict the fulfillment of the number of martyrs required before God exacts vengeance (Rev. 6.11). Believers are assured that God will rule in their favor before he portrays the blood bath of his faithful witnesses that must happen prior to the final judgment.

The injunction to eat the scroll represents a clear allusion to Ezek. 3.1-3.<sup>226</sup> The broader context of Ezek. 3.1-11 confirms the fact that the contents of the scroll relate to a message of judgment intended for an obstinate audience. In Ezekiel, however, he is sent with a message directed at Israel, but John's message is directed at λαοὶς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς.

226. The parallels between this account and Ezek. 3.1-3 suggests intentional modeling at least in some degree. These two accounts share the same concept of eating a heavenly scroll containing a prophetic message that is at first as sweet as honey. Among these similarities, they share the identical use of the aorist imperative κατὰφαγε (Ezek. 3.1 [LXX]; Rev. 10.9). Ezekiel discovers that the scroll tastes as sweet as honey (ὥς μέλι γλυκάζον) and John describes its flavor in very similar terms (ὥς μέλι γλυκὺ). This is not to say that John depended on the LXX because it uses the word κεφαλίδᾶ ('scroll') and John uses βιβλαρίδιον ('little scroll').

John uses this phrase as a circumlocution for the inhabitants of the earth (κατοικοῦντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς). Variations of this phrase occur at significant junctures to emphasize the global and international focus of the Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 5.9; 7.9; 10.11; 11.9; 13.7; 14.6; 17.15). Interestingly, in Rev. 5.9 and 7.9 it is used in a positive sense to express the global success of the gospel in that Christ has redeemed people from all over the earth.<sup>227</sup> All the occurrences, however, from Rev. 10.11 onward convey a negative sense in that the nations remain hostile to God and deserve his wrath. The second part of this interlude, then, portrays the role of the church as faithful witnesses before the nations and endowed with prophetic authority.

d. *The Two Witnesses and their Prophetic Ministry before the Nations*

Revelation 11.1-13 forms the heart of this interlude by depicting the ministry of the two witnesses as God continues to conduct his trial against the nations. John is given a rod to measure the temple. He is told to exclude the outer court (καὶ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξωθεν τοῦ ναοῦ ἔκβαλε ἔξωθεν), because it has been given to the Gentiles (ἐδόθη τοῖς ἔθνεσιν) to trample underfoot for forty-two months (μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο). Concordant to this three and a half year period God will give<sup>228</sup> his two witnesses to prophesy for 1,260 days.<sup>229</sup> The time frame corresponds to the times, time, and half a time of Dan. 7.25 and 12.7 denoting the intense, but limited, period of suffering. Bauckham suggests that the reason John alternates between these two temporal designations to refer to the same period of time is to contrast forty-two months of the beast's reign with the 1,260 days of saints' prophetic ministry.<sup>230</sup> Aune argues that μάρτυσιν, in this context, has the same meaning as 'prophet' (cf. Rev. 11.10).<sup>231</sup> John, however, chose to call them witnesses rather than prophets for theological reasons related to the lawsuit motif. That God gives his (μου) two witnesses (δυσὶν μάρτυσιν) corresponds to the judicial requirement of two witnesses in any legal case, but especially in cases of capital punishment (Num. 35.30; Deut. 17.6; 19.15).

227. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 326-37.

228. The use of the first person future form of δώσω constitutes an emphatic use compared to the more common use of the passive. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 419 n. 2.

229. On the two time designations referring to the same period of time see, Court, *Myth and History*, p. 85; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 417.

230. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 402. In his complex essay about the numerological significance of triangular and square numbers in the Apocalypse, he suggests, 'This may be because 42 is the sixth rectangular number and corresponds to 36, the triangular root of 666, and so is more closely associated with the beast, whereas both 1260 and its corresponding square 1225 relate to the number of the people of God, 12 (though this is not so obvious in John's Greek)'.

231. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 610.

The prophetic ministry of the two witnesses is expressed not only in their commission but also in their description. They will be commissioned to prophesy powerfully for a specific period of time (ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα). The use of προφητεῦσουσιν not only represents their prophetic commission but also connects it with John's commission in Rev. 10.11, which contains the only other occurrence in the Apocalypse of προφητεῦω. The message of the two witnesses most likely corresponds with the message given to John. The witnesses, then, are commissioned to proclaim a message of impending judgment against many peoples, nations, languages, and kings. Failure to repent of their idolatry, wickedness, and bloodshed will certainly incur God's wrath. This prophetic activity ensures that all the people of earth will know exactly why these judgments are befalling them. Therefore, all people are without excuse and called to account by these witnesses who proclaim the word of God and testimony of Jesus.

Sackcloth evokes familiar OT images related to times of individual and national mourning and repentance. Donning sackcloth in times of excessive grief and mourning was a very common practice throughout the OT, especially as a result of divine judgment (cf. Gen. 37.34; 2 Sam. 3.31; 21.10; 2 Kgs 6.30; Est. 4.1-4; Job 16.15; Pss. 30.11; 35.13; Isa. 3.24; 15.3; Jer. 49.3; Lam. 2.10; Ezek. 7.18; 27.31; Joel 1.8, 13; Amos 8.10). People also wore sackcloth as a means to demonstrate their repentance in order to prevent the outpouring of divine judgment (cf. 1 Kgs 20.31-32; 21.27; 1 Chron. 21.16; Neh. 9.1; Isa. 22.12; 32.11; 58.5; Jer. 4.8; 6.26; 48.37; Jon. 3.5-8; Mt. 11.21; Lk. 10.13). Sometimes the use of sackcloth involved both ideas of mourning and repentance (cf. 2 Kgs 19.1-2; Isa. 37.1-2; Dan. 9.3). Prophets often wore sackcloth when calling people to repentance or mourning over the destruction warranted by the people's sin. Although protected from divine judgment, these two witnesses visibly mourn over the fate of the earth's inhabitants as they continue to call them to repentance. This mourning starkly contrasts the glee and delight that the earth's inhabitants express over the death of these two witnesses (Rev. 11.10).

Their prophetic message is accompanied with supernatural displays of power reminiscent of Moses and Elijah. During the days appointed for them to prophesy, they are divinely protected from any physical harm. If someone attempts to harm them, fire issues forth from the mouth of the witnesses and consumes their enemies. While Elijah demonstrated the ability to call down fire upon his opponents in 2 Kgs 1.9-16, it more likely refers to Jer. 5.14 in that the word of God is like a fire that consumes people.<sup>232</sup> The fire figuratively represents 'the legal pronouncement of the ensuing judgment of the enemies'.<sup>233</sup> Their commission to prophesy grants them the authority to

232. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 290; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 278.

233. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 580.

exercise power like Elijah to prevent rain and like Moses by turning the water to blood along with inflicting any kind of additional plagues on the earth. Both witnesses apparently share these abilities equally since no distinction is made regarding which witness can perform which miracle. Interestingly, turning the water into blood along with any other kind of plagues (πάση πληγῇ ὁσάκις) suggests that their ministry occurs contemporaneously with the other judgment plagues in the Apocalypse.<sup>234</sup> These supernatural displays of power validate their testimony and verify them as true prophets speaking in Christ's behalf.

Any attempt at identifying these two witnesses largely depends on whether or not they are representative of two individuals or a group of people.<sup>235</sup> The most natural explanation is to identify them as the eschatological return of Moses and Elijah or at least two future individuals like them.<sup>236</sup> The clear allusion to the ministries of Elijah and Moses coupled with the Jewish expectation of their return lends credibility to this view (Deut. 18.18; Mal. 4.5-6; cf. Sir. 48.10). Jewish tradition affirms the expectation of the eschatological return of figures like Moses, Elijah, and Enoch.<sup>237</sup> Since the witnesses are presented as two eschatological prophets, it is possible that John envisioned two future Christian prophets coming in the spirit and power of Israel's two greatest prophets.<sup>238</sup> However, John offers a clue to identification in Rev. 11.4.

In Rev. 11.4, John states that these two witnesses are the two olive trees (αἱ δύο ἐλαῖαι) and two lampstands (αἱ δύο λυχνίδαι) that stand before the Lord of the Earth (αἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἐστῶτες). The positive asseveration that 'these are' (οὗτοί εἰσιν) followed by the two plural nouns with the article suggests that John expected his readers to figure out their identity.<sup>239</sup>

234. John uses the term πληγῇ throughout the trumpet and bowl judgments (Rev. 9.18, 20; 15.1, 6, 8; 16.9; cf. Rev. 18.4, 8).

235. S. Turner, 'Revelation 11.1-13: History of Interpretation' (DPhil, University of Oxford, 2004). See also Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 177-78; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 598-603; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 349-51; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 372-76; Patristic interpreters overwhelmingly identified them as Enoch and Elijah.

236. Daniel K.K. Wong, 'The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11', *BSac* 154 (July 1997), pp. 344-54.

237. On the return of Moses see *Sifre Deut.* 357.10.5; *T.Moses* 11.8. On the return of Elijah see *Sifre Deut.* 41.4.3; 342.5.2. On the return of both Enoch and Elijah see *Apoc. Elijah* 4.7; *Apoc. Dan.* 14.1-3; *Apoc. Paul* 20; *Apoc. Peter* (Ethiopic) 2; *Acts of Pilate* 25. On the return of Moses and Elijah see *Deut. R.* 3.17. For a more extensive discussion of these sources see Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 600; Keener, *Revelation*, pp. 290-291.

238. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 418. See also Wong, 'The Two Witnesses', pp. 347-50.

239. Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah*, p. 91.

This verse constitutes a direct allusion to Zech. 4.1-14 regarding Joshua (the post-exilic high priest) and Zerubbabel (the postexilic Davidic descendant).<sup>240</sup> Zechariah sees one lampstand (λυχνίου) with seven lamps sitting upon it (ἐπὶ τὰ λύχνοι) and seven oil channels keeping the lamps supplied with olive oil. An olive tree stood flanked on the left and right side of the lampstand. The trees provide the olives to keep the bowl of the lampstand supplied with oil. The interpreting angel explicated the meaning of the image that it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the task of rebuilding the temple. Zechariah inquires as to the exact identity of the two olive trees and discovers that they are the two anointed ones (Zerubbabel and Joshua) who serve the Lord of all the earth (τῷ κυρίῳ πάσης τῆς γῆς). Despite the obvious lexical parallels between Zech. 4.1-14 and Rev. 11.4, John diverges from Zechariah's vision in that he sees two lampstands instead of one. John also equates the trees with the lampstands, but in Zechariah they are kept distinct.<sup>241</sup> This suggests John modified the imagery so as not to equate his vision as simply a rehashing of Zechariah's.

The alteration from one lampstand into two comprises the most striking differences between Rev. 11.4 and Zech. 4.2. The reason for this shift probably rests with the fact that the symbol of lampstands in the Apocalypse is clearly used to denote the churches (Rev. 1.20). If John intended to use λυχνία to denote any other entity or individual he fails to make this usage explicit. Instead, he assumes his readers would readily recognize that αἱ δύο λυχνίαι refers to the churches in some way or another. John probably does not intend to equate the witnesses with all the churches since he restricts their number to only two out of seven.<sup>242</sup> The use of two also reinforces the notion of the church as a witness giving legal testimony.<sup>243</sup> One plausible solution is to equate these two lampstands with the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia. Both churches were commended for their faithfulness and endurance despite persecution and hardships. These are the only two churches free from any accusations from Christ. They may represent the churches who faithfully maintain their witness of Christ in the midst of persecution.<sup>244</sup> What is more, Beale makes the interesting connection between Zerubbabel and Joshua with

240. Farrer, *The Revelation of St John the Divine*, p. 65; Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 283; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 576-79; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, pp. 612-13; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 277; Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah*, pp. 89-92.

241. Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah*, p. 91.

242. Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 163; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 274; Bauckham, *Theology of Revelation*, p. 85.

243. Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 163. See also Trites, *Concept of Witness*, pp. 165-68.

244. Giblin, 'Revelation 11.1-13', p. 443.



the church in its kingly and priestly function commonly posited in the book of Revelation.<sup>245</sup>

Their spirit inspired prophetic testimony before the nations reaches completion in Rev. 11.7-10. They finish (τελέσωσιν) their testimony before the nations and are subsequently murdered. In Rev. 11.7, John observes that the beast from the abyss will wage a war against the two witnesses. This proleptically anticipates the war against the saints instigated by the beast in Rev. 13.1-18. It is possible that the two witnesses of Rev. 11.3-12 refers to the same group of saints in Rev. 13.7.<sup>246</sup> The inhabitants of the earth revile these two witnesses so much that a global celebration ensues once they have been violently murdered in the streets. That their corpses remain exposed where they lay indicates the level of umbrage and hatred expressed by humanity toward Christ's faithful representatives.<sup>247</sup> After three and one half days, at a time corresponding with the seventh trumpet, God vindicates his witnesses through an awesome public display of resurrection and ascension (Rev. 11.11-12).<sup>248</sup> The voice inviting them to 'come up here' while their enemies watched conveys the idea of divine acceptance and vindication.<sup>249</sup> At the same hour (ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ) a tremendous earthquake took the lives of seven thousand citizens in that city. The survivors quaked with terror and gave glory to God (ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), which may possibly indicate that some repented.<sup>250</sup> The time for testimony is completed and now the time for judgment has arrived.

245. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 578. See also Trites, *Concept of Witness*, pp. 165-68; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 598-603; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 272-74; Pattemore, *People of God in the Apocalypse*, p. 162.

246. Note the parallels between Rev. 11.7 and 13.7. The beast, in Rev. 11.7, will respond to the two witnesses when he ποιήσῃ μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσῃ αὐτούς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς. This same beast, in Rev. 13.7, will seek to eliminate the saints in that ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς.

247. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 283.

248. The resurrection of the two witnesses constitutes an act of supreme vindication by God overturning the verdict rendered against them by the beast. deSilva ('Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy', p. 97) writes, 'As judge of the world, God is indeed able to preserve God's honor and the honor of God's loyal clients. God's vindication of the witnesses is an important episode in this regard...Notably, God's vindication of his servants' honor is intimately linked with God's establishment of God's own honor, for the sequel shows the onlookers struck with fear and giving 'honor to the God of heaven' at last (11.13)'.

249. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 599-602.

250. Cf. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 278-79; Trites, *Concept of Witness*, pp. 169-70; Sweet, *Revelation*, pp. 106-109.

e. *God's People Engaged in Holy War (Rev. 12.1–15.8)*

A third interlude appears between the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11.15–19) and the introduction of the seven bowls containing the final judgments (Rev. 15.5–8). This interlude is best identified as the ‘signs narrative’ due to the occurrence of the lexeme σημεῖον (Rev. 12.1, 3; 13.13, 14; 15.1) as well as the narrative quality of the material presented. It tells the story of the war between Satan and God via his war against the saints. As the story told in the heavenly signs unfolds, the ahistorical and cosmic nature of this struggle becomes apparent.<sup>251</sup> The dragon, who is Satan the arch-nemesis (Rev. 12.9), attempts to destroy a beautiful sky woman and her unborn child (Rev. 12.3–4). This pregnant woman represents Israel through whom the Messiah would come.<sup>252</sup> The language used to describe the rule of her son indicates that he is Jesus—the Davidic Messiah (cf. Rev. 19.15; Ps 2.9). After the child ascends to heaven and the woman flees to the desert for 1,260 days, a war in heaven ensues between Michael and Satan. Michael expels Satan and his rebellious angels out of heaven by casting him down to the earth (Rev. 12.7–9). Caird perceptively captured the legal nature of this struggle when he remarked, ‘The real victory of Michael may be a forensic one, the victory of an advocate whose case is wholly dependent on the record of his client; but it takes open war to clinch it’.<sup>253</sup>

The conflict between Satan and God’s people in Rev. 12.10–17 is a continuation of this legal battle. Immediately upon Satan’s defeat and prior to his

251. Due to the mythological character of this narrative, many scholars have compared it with popular pagan combat myths like Leto and Apollo or Tiamat and Marduk. See Collins, *Combat Myth*, pp. 57–100; Barr, *Tales of the End*, pp. 108–109; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 666–74; Malina, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation*, pp. 153–73. But see Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, pp. 310–14; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, pp. 614–15; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, pp. 171–72; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 624–32.

252. On the interpretation of the woman as Israel and/or the messianic community see Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 314–15; Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 189; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 457–58; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 314; Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 148; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 236; A.Y. Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR, 9; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 106–107. Prigent (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 378) argues that she represents the Church that has ‘taken root in the history of Israel’. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 625), however, more correctly identifies her as representative of the faithful community of God’s people both before and after the coming of Christ. For a survey of additional interpretations of the identity of the woman see Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, pp. 679–82. On the relationship between this woman and the New Jerusalem in contrast to the harlot see Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, pp. 83–96.

253. Caird (*The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 157) identifies Rev. 12.7–17 as the first lawcourt scene depicting the heavenly legal battle between Satan, Michael, and God’s people in Rev. 12.7–17. He identifies the second lawcourt scene as depicted in the judgment of Babylon and the coming of the divine warrior (Rev 18.20–19.21). See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 661.

war against the people of God, a loud voice in heaven announces the forensic victory of God and his people in litigation with Satan the accuser (Rev. 12.10–12). The point is that victory in war results from victory in God’s courtroom.<sup>254</sup> The dragon is identified as Satan (ὁ Σατανᾶς) in Rev. 12.9, but in 12.10 his role is described as the accuser (ὁ κατήγορ) bringing charges against God’s people. The term ὁ Σατανᾶς comes from the Hebrew form of שָׂטָן,<sup>255</sup> which basically carries of the sense of a legal ‘adversary’. The term κατήγορ reflects a literal translation of שָׂטָן (‘Satan’).<sup>256</sup> As such, ‘Satan’ refers to his identity, but ‘accuser’ refers to his role and how it pertains to his war against God’s people in the heavenly court. The conception of Satan as the prosecuting attorney in a lawsuit against God’s people is grounded in the OT.

In the OT, Satan opposes and accuses God’s faithful servants by denouncing them in the heavenly courtroom. In the book of Job, Satan lodges an accusation against Job in God’s court (cf. Job 1.6–11; 2.1–6). God commends Job before Satan as a blameless and upright man (Job 1.8). Satan directly accuses Job, and indirectly God, of an insincere love based solely on the fact that God has blessed and protected him (Job 1.9–10). In Job 1.11, Satan charges that if God were to remove Job’s blessings then Job would curse him. The trial begins and God permits Satan to bring destruction and ruin on Job. Job, however, maintains his integrity by not cursing God (Job 1.20–22; 2.3). This cycle continues and in the end God vindicates Job. Another notable example of Satan accusing God’s servants occurs in Zechariah’s vision of Joshua’s trial (Zech. 3.1–7). Zechariah sees a vision of Joshua, the high priest, standing on trial before the Lord with the angel of the Lord on the left side of him and Satan standing on the right (Zech. 3.1). Satan made accusations condemning Joshua before the Lord. God, however, vindicated Joshua by rebuking Satan and giving him clean priestly garments to wear. What is more, Jewish writings support the lawcourt imagery of Satan as the accuser of God’s people (cf. *Jub.* 1.20; 17.15–16; 48.15–18; *I En.* 40.7) and Michael as their advocate/intercessor (cf. *T. Levi* 5.6; *T. Dan* 6.2).<sup>257</sup>

Although Satan constantly brings accusations against the saints, in Rev. 12.11 they are assured of certain victory because they overcame him (ἐνίκησαν αὐτόν). The means of their victory is not in military might but through faithful testimony to Christ. John states that they overcame Satan on three grounds (διὰ). First, because the blood of the Lamb (τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου) has redeemed

254. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 475.

255. Cf. Num. 22.22, 32; 1 Sam. 29.4; 2 Sam. 19.23; 1 Kgs 5.18; 11.14, 23, 25; 1 Chron. 21.1; Job 1.6–9, 12; 2.1–4, 6–7; Pss. 38.21; 71.13; 109.4, 6, 20, 29; Zech 3.1, 2. The devil is only called Satan in 1 Chronicles, Job, and Zechariah. See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 697.

256. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 700.

257. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 661. See also Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, I, p. 327; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 475.

them from their sin (cf. Rev. 1.5-6). Second, because they maintained faithful testimony to Jesus (τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν) even while suffering (cf. Rev. 6.9; 11.7).<sup>258</sup> The third phrase, οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἕνεκα θανάτου, indicates that their faithfulness to Christ surpassed even their desire for self-preservation. That their testimony and death are conceptually linked is evident by the fact that the διὰ preceding ‘the word of their testimony’ also governs ‘they did not love their lives to the point of death’.<sup>259</sup> By connecting their testimony with their death, John associates them with the slain souls under the altar making an appeal for true justice (Rev. 6.9-10).<sup>260</sup> The point of the proclamation in Rev. 12.10-12, then, reminds John’s audience that the way of victory is the way of the slain Lamb.<sup>261</sup>

Once the dragon plummets to the earth he continues with his vehement assault on the people of God (Rev. 12.13-17). In his rage, the dragon declares war (ἀπηλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον) against the rest of the woman’s offspring (τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς). He identifies these offspring with two phrases that clearly designates them as Christians. Her offspring are those who observe God’s commands (τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ)<sup>262</sup> and have the testimony of Jesus (ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ). The dragon enlists the aid of two beasts in order to execute his war against the saints (Rev. 13.1-18).<sup>263</sup> The beast from the sea (Rev. 13.1-8) represents the brute force of the political and military power of Rome.<sup>264</sup> Aune plausibly suggests that while this beast commonly represents the emperor, it could also denote the provincial proconsul acting as the emperor’s legal representative in Asia Minor.<sup>265</sup> The beast from the land (Rev. 13.11-17) represents the religious institution that enforces the worship of the first beast (i.e., the imperial cult).<sup>266</sup> Together these three

258. Although it is possible to take μαρτυρίας as an objective genitive, the presence of αὐτῶν suggests that it is subjective (i.e., ‘the word of the testimony by them’). Cf. Satake, *Gemeineordnung*, pp. 110-11.

259. A διὰ occurs prior to the first two phrases, but the third phrase is conjoined to the second with a καί.

260. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 665-66.

261. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 476.

262. This phrase is equivalent to the oft cited τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (cf. Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4). It also emphasizes that they obey God’s righteous requirements. See David E. Aune, ‘Following the Lamb: The Apocalypse’, in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 279-83.

263. Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 270.

264. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 343. See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 682-85; Roloff, *Revelation*, pp. 155-57.

265. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, p. 733. Cf. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, pp. 431-32.

266. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 343-44. See also Court, *Myth and History*, pp. 148-52; Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 40-43, 252, 254; Klauck, ‘Das Senschreiben nach Pergamon’, pp. 157-71; David A. DeSilva, ‘The ‘Image of the Beast’ and the Christians in Asia Minor’, pp. 185-208; Henten, ‘Dragon Myth and Imperial Ideology in Revelation

form an unholy trinity whereby the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast function in a similar capacity to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The war that began in heaven (Rev. 12.2-9) shifts to the earth in chap. 13 as the beast from the sea—the Antichrist—takes center stage.

The Antichrist arrogantly establishes himself as a false messiah arrogating divine status as a sovereign tyrant and mandating idolatrous worship.<sup>267</sup> The pretentious reign of the beast over the nations of the earth intentionally mocks the rightful reign of the Lamb. Just as the Father granted his power, authority and throne to Jesus (Rev. 5.6-7), the dragon endues the beast with power, a throne, and great authority (Rev. 13.2).<sup>268</sup> In Rev. 13.3, his reign over the nations is secured by his pseudo-resurrection when he miraculously recovered from a fatal head wound (cf. Rev. 1.18). While the heavenly council with all the hosts of heaven worshiped God and his Lamb as the rightful sovereign over all creation (Rev. 5.8-14), the inhabitants of the earth worshiped the dragon and his beast as their unassailable despot (Rev. 13.4). They ask ‘who is like the beast and who can make war against him?’ (τίς ὅμοιος τῷ θηρίῳ καὶ τίς δύναται πολεμῆσαι μετ’ αὐτοῦ;). Although the implied answer is ‘no one’, John provides a definitive answer to this question in the Song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15.3-4) sung by the saints who inquire ‘who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name?’ (τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῇ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;).<sup>269</sup> The question, then, addressed in the lawsuit of the Apocalypse revolves around who is the rightful sovereign over creation and as such the only one worthy of worship.

The Antichrist tyrannically exercises his authority in a blasphemous assault against the true God and his people. John borrows extensively from Daniel’s

12–13’, pp. 496–515; Borgen, ‘Emperor Worship and Persecution’, pp. 493–509; Giesen, *Studien zur Johannesapokalypse*, pp. 100–213; De Jonge, ‘The Apocalypse of John and the Imperial Cult’, pp. 127–41; Peerbolte, ‘To Worship the Beast’, pp. 239–59; Biguzzi, ‘Ephesus’, pp. 276–90; Friesen, ‘Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13’, pp. 287–311.

267. Revelation 13.1–4 exhibits a pattern reflecting Dan. 7.13–14: (1) an agent steps forward; (2) the agent is granted authority; and (3) the agent receives recognition and worship. Beale suggests this is an ‘ironic use’ of Dan. 7.13–14 in order to mimic the authorization of Christ as the son of man. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 728–29. See also H.-P. Müller, ‘Formgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Apc Joh. 4–5’ (PhD diss., Heidelberg University, 1962), pp. 108–11.

268. See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 687. Concerning the bestowal of satanic authority, Beale remarks, ‘Though Satan has lost his legal rights of accusation (12.7–12), he still has authority to empower his evil earthly agents to act, which shows he is still actively executing his schemes...’ See also Roloff, *Revelation*, p. 156.

269. Cf. Exod. 15.11; Pss. 18.31; 89.8; Isa. 44.7; Mic. 7.8.

vision of the little horn (Dan. 7.6-8).<sup>270</sup> This little horn, representing the leader of a powerful earthly kingdom, speaks boastfully against God and wages a war against the saints for a period of three and a half years (Dan. 7.21, 25). This antagonist is granted a limited period of time to persecute the saints, but at the end of that allotted time God will hold court and render a verdict to vindicate his saints by establishing his kingdom on earth (Dan. 7.22, 26-27).

The Antichrist was granted to speak blasphemously and to reign for forty-two months (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἐξουσία ποιῆσαι). The use of ἐδόθη emphasizes God's sovereignty over the Antichrist and his actions.<sup>271</sup> In Rev. 13.7, the Antichrist is given authority to wage a war against the saints and conquer them (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικῆσαι αὐτούς).<sup>272</sup> Although Rev. 12.11 explicitly states that the saints ultimately conquered Satan (ἐνίκησαν αὐτόν), during this time of war they will face physical death (νικῆσαι αὐτούς). This miscarriage of justice continues as all the inhabitants of the earth worship the beast (Rev. 13.8) and the false prophet (i.e., the land beast) mandates forced idolatry with the legal authority to execute offenders as well as instituting economic restrictions designed to oppress the saints (Rev. 13.11-17). As Satan proceeds to execute his war against the saints on earth, the subsequent slaughter of the righteous would make things seem to appear that Satan has indeed triumphed through this injustice. Their death, however, is part and parcel of their faithful testimony entered as evidence in the lawsuit.<sup>273</sup>

John inserts a brief prophetic warning for the saints, in Rev. 13.9-10, between the introduction of the sea beast (Antichrist) and the land beast (false prophet).<sup>274</sup> The unjust and merciless onslaught against believers may tempt them either to retaliate or conform, but John encourages them to remain faithful as they patiently endure captivity and execution (cf. Jer. 15.2).<sup>275</sup> By responding to this oppression with patient endurance, they place the judgment of their enemies in the hands of God and the Lamb (cf. Rev. 6.10).<sup>276</sup> Although many may die during this time of exile, Rev. 14.1-5 returns to the 144,000 as a means to assure the believers that God will faithfully save all his sealed servants.<sup>277</sup> In Rev. 14.4, the designation of the 144,000 as παρθένοι,

270. For the most thoroughgoing analysis of John's use of Daniel see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 681-703.

271. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 498.

272. Cf. Dan. 7.25; Rev. 11.7.

273. Herms (*An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World*, p. 215) comments, 'The concept of witness—while associated with belief and proclamation—specifically refers to the willingness of one to die for those beliefs (cf. 2.13; 6.9; 11.3-13; 12.11; 20.4)'.

274. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 504.

275. Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 160. See also Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 183; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 343.

276. Michaels, *Revelation*, p. 161.

277. Aune, 'Following the Lamb', pp. 278-79.

coupled with the phrase that ‘they have not defiled (ἐμολύνθησαν) themselves with women’, suggests a metaphorical interpretation viewing them as both male and female followers of the lamb who have abstained from participation in the Emperor cult.<sup>278</sup> This group of redeemed saints appears again in Rev. 15.3–4 as those who overcame (τοὺς νικῶντας) the beast, his image, and his number. The third great sign (σημεῖον), then, not only reveals the final plagues of God’s wrath, but includes the final exodus and redemption of the people of God from all satanic wrath, oppression, and death.<sup>279</sup> As such, the redeemed saints worship the rightful Lord and king of the nations because ‘just and true’ are all his ways (Rev. 15.3–4).

The signs narrative contributes to the development of the lawsuit motif in the Apocalypse in that it provides the evidence necessary for the final verdict (cf. Revelation 18). The three angelic proclamations of Rev. 14.6–13 link the evidence gathered during the juridical investigation with the judgment and sentencing of Babylon (Rev. 18.1–8).<sup>280</sup> These angels precede the harvesting of the grapes of wrath (Rev. 14.17–20) and the introduction of the seven bowls containing the wine of the full fury of God’s wrath (Rev. 15.1).<sup>281</sup> Their announcements effectively list three charges against the inhabitants of the earth: (1) failure to worship the true God (Rev. 14.6–7); (2) idolatry and spiritual adultery (Rev. 14.8); and (3) the worship of the beast coupled with the persecution of the saints (Rev. 14.9–11). These angels, then, herald the certainty of God’s justice by condemning the wicked and vindicating the righteous (Rev. 14.12–13).

#### 4. Conclusion

The second vision constitutes the largest block of material pertaining to the trial of the nations. John’s entrance into the heavenly courtroom enables him to witness an extended session of the divine council. The council is comprised of God, representatives from the created order (i.e., the four living creatures), and representatives of the saints (i.e., the twenty-four elders). The twenty-four elders represent a judicial body that functions like a heavenly Sanhedrin involved in discussing legal issues concerning the judgment of God’s people and the nations. As members of the divine council, their

278. Satake, *Gemeindeordnung*, pp. 39–47; Jörns, *Das hymnische evangelium*, pp. 124–25; Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, p. 93.

279. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 306.

280. See Hoffman, *The Lamb and the Destroyer*, pp. 88–104. Cf. Müller, *Offenbarung*, p. 268.

281. Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes*, p. 134, Bornkamm, ‘Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen’, p. 212 n. 13. See also Bauckham *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 290.

primary role is to worship and exalt God for the splendor of his holy majesty and worth. A secondary role is to announce the verdicts rendered by the judge. This session convened for the purpose of installing Christ as the Davidic king and the only one worthy to execute God's judgment on humanity.

The series of septets represent a sequence of judgments designed to provoke repentance and also to satisfy the just requirements of God's wrath. These septets function as investigative judgments to determine the guilt of human beings and to enter their response as evidence in the lawsuit against them. The fifth seal introduces the star witnesses in the lawsuit against the nations because they were the recipients of unjust treatment and verdicts that resulted in their execution. While on earth, their adversaries became *delators* accusing them of wrongdoing before a Roman magistrate; these beheaded souls now file a countersuit by appealing their case before the Supreme Court in heaven. Their request for vindication through God's vengeance represents the fact that justice must be served if the universe is to operate correctly. As the just judge of heaven, God cannot allow this miscarriage of justice to stand unpunished. Therefore, this theme of retributive justice becomes a significant theme related to the lawsuit as the vision unfolds.

The septets pertain primarily to the nations, but the interludes pertain primarily to the saints. The sealing of the 144,000 demonstrates that God will spare his people from the ensuing trumpet judgments as well as demonstrating his purposes in election. His elect from all nations, tribes, and peoples will stand victoriously with the Lamb at the conclusion of the trial of the nations (cf. Rev. 7.9-14). The second interlude defines their role during this trial in terms of prophetic witnesses warning the nations to repent in light of the impending judgment of God. While God will spare these witnesses from human wrath during their time of testimony, at the completion of their deposition the beast will declare a war against them. After three days, however, God will publicly vindicate them through their resurrection and ascension just before the bowls of wrath are emptied. The signs narrative depicts a war between the beast and the saints. This war results in the unjust slaughter of God's people who refuse to compromise through faithful endurance as they maintain the testimony of Jesus and the word of God. The signs narrative provides the final evidence necessary to convict the nations and render judgment: (1) failure to worship God; (2) idolatry; and (3) the slaughter of the saints. The third vision, then, presents that verdict and sentencing of the nations through the judgment of Babylon.



## Chapter 6

### AN EXEGETICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPHETIC LAWSUIT IN THE THIRD AND FOURTH VISIONS (REV. 17.3–22.21)

#### 1. *Vision Three: The Trial, Sentencing, and Judgment of Babylon* (Rev. 17.1–21.8)

The last bowl completed the total outpouring of God's wrath so that the third vision comprises an expanded and more detailed look at the final trial and sentencing (τὸ κρίμα) of the prostitute city of Babylon.<sup>1</sup> The third vision, then, represents a different perspective on the final events briefly described during the trumpets and bowls. John metaphorically presents Rome as a prostitute seducing kings and nations into committing fornication with her. John places the destiny of the harlot city Babylon with the bride city of the New Jerusalem in juxtaposition.<sup>2</sup> The third vision exhibits five distinct movements: (1) Babylon introduced (Rev. 17.3-18); (2) Babylon judged in the eschatological judgment of the nations (Rev. 18.1-19.10); (3) the return of Christ as a divine warrior (Rev. 19.11-21); and (4) the first and second resurrections as the eschatological judgment of individuals (Rev. 20.1-15). After the final assize, the saints are introduced to their eternal reward (Rev. 21.1-8).

##### a. *Babylon Introduced: One Deserving Judgment* (Rev. 17.3-6)

After the last bowl, one of the angels with a bowl came to John and invited him to get a closer look at the judgment (τὸ κρίμα) of the great prostitute

1. Caird (*The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 156) identifies Rev. 18.20–19.21 as the second lawcourt scene concerning the judgment of Babylon and the coming of the divine warrior. The first lawcourt scene depicts the heavenly legal battle between Satan, Michael, and God's people in Rev. 12.7-17.

2. On the use of contrasting feminine imagery see Gordon Campbell, 'Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation', *TynBul* 55 (2004), pp. 81-108; Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, pp. 61-165; Daria Pezzoli-Olgia, 'Zwischen Gericht und Heil: Frauengestalten in der Johannesoffenbarung', *BZ* 43.1 (1999), pp. 72-91; Eva Maria Räßle, 'The City in Revelation', *Bible Today* 34 (1996), pp. 359-65; Marla J. Selvidge, 'Powerful and Powerless Women in the Apocalypse', *Neot* 26.1 (1992), pp. 157-67; J. Edgar Bruns, 'The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17', *CBQ* 26 (1964), pp. 459-63.

(Rev. 17.1-2).<sup>3</sup> John, once again, was carried away in the spirit (ἐν πνεύματι) to a desert where he beheld a great prostitute sitting astride the sevenheaded beast and who was drunk on the blood of the saints (Rev. 17.3-6). She personifies the city Rome with her military might, opulence, and allurements.<sup>4</sup> She may be more broadly conceived of as the world system evident in all great earthly civilizations like Babylon and Rome.<sup>5</sup> By depicting her on the back of the beast, John demonstrates her dependence on and relationship with Satan's kingdom. John paints a verbal portrait of her that sparkles with facets highlighting her political power, economic extravagance, and religious devotion.<sup>6</sup> John evokes a sense of disgust regarding the lewd and immoral character of Babylon by describing her as a prostitute.<sup>7</sup> She entices the earth's inhabitants to forsake truth, righteousness, and justice in order to indulge in her flagrant adulteries consisting of idolatry, greed, and murder. The legal context for the

3. Fekkes (*Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 88-89, 213) avers, 'Since the fall of Babylon takes place already in 16.19, it appears that Rev. 17.1-18.24 serves as a parenthetical expansion to describe and explain the Babylon theme in more detail'. Cf. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 670; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, pp. 104, 211; Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 66, 72; Giblin, 'Structural and Thematic Correlation', pp. 487-504.

4. The personified figure of Rome seated as a queen may correspond to common conceptions of the goddess Roma. See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 343-50; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 920-22, 929-30; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 854; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 608; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 428-31; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 492; Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 271; Court, *Myth and History*, p. 125; Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 216; Roloff, *Revelation*, pp. 196-201; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 310; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 256-57; Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 210-15; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. 698; Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?', in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. Jan Lambrecht; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980), pp. 186-203 (200); K. Kuhn, 'Βαβυλών', *TDNT*, I, pp. 514-17. Contra Ford, *Revelation*, pp. 282-88; Corsini, *Revelation*, p. 200; D. Holwerda, 'Ein Neuer Schlüssel zum 17. Kapitel der johanneischen Offenbarung', *EstBib* 53.3 (1995), pp. 387-96 (389-91); Iain Provan, 'Foul Spirits, Fornication and Finance: Revelation 18 from an Old Testament Perspective', *JSNT* 64 (1996), pp. 81-100.

5. Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland, *Revelation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 178-89. Ian Boxall, 'The Many Faces of Babylon the Great: Wirkungsgeschichte and the Interpretation of Revelation 17', in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), pp. 51-68 (54-55); Boring, *Revelation*, p. 184; Kiddle, *Revelation*, p. 187.

6. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 242.

7. Keener (*Revelation*, p. 404) posits, 'The image is calculated to put the evil empire's true hideousness in perspective; the ancient horror of cannibalism was great, and imaginary creatures like Cyclops, thought to eat humans, were revolting even to pagans'.

third vision has been anticipated in the judicial verdict that Babylon has fallen as proleptically announced in Rev. 14.8 and 16.19.<sup>8</sup>

The golden cup in her hand represents the most incriminating evidence against her.<sup>9</sup> As with all her other lavish accretions she brandishes a golden cup (ποτήριον χρυσοῦν) wielding it as the only weapon needed to bring her victims into subjugation. Her cup symbolically represents her ability to maintain control and corrupt the world with the wine of her immorality through religious idolatry (Rev. 14.8; cf. 16.19). With the wine in this cup, according to Rev. 17.2, she has made all the nations drunk (ἐμεθύσθησαν οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς). The cup is filled with ‘abominations’ (βδελυγμάτων) that is the ‘filth of her fornication’ (τὰ ἀκάθαρτα τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς).<sup>10</sup> Although the term βδελυγμάτων generally denotes anything abhorrent, it is most commonly associated with pagan practices and worship.<sup>11</sup> This idea is made even more explicit with the use of ἀκάθαρτα as it relates to sexual immorality (πορνείας).<sup>12</sup> The religious connotation of the cup’s contents conveys an even more sinister and gruesome quality to the wine.

Her wine is apparently mixed with the shed blood of the saints. John indicates that she was drunk on the blood of the saints (ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων) and the witnesses of Jesus (ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ).<sup>13</sup> This evokes the memory of all the witnesses who were slain for their faith (Rev. 2.13; 11.7; 13.7), but more specifically the souls crying out for justice (Rev. 6.9–10). Since she is intoxicated (μεθύουσιν) on the blood of the saints, her wine must be infused with their blood. Aune remarks that ‘becoming drunk on

8. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, p. 62.

9. John draws his imagery of Babylon and the cup from Jer. 51.7. Babylon is the cup making the nations drunk. The *Tg. Jer.* 51.7 compares the cup with Babylon’s sin. See Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 935; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 855; Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, pp. 64–65. For more on possible OT backgrounds see Keener, *Revelation*, p. 405.

10. John uses the plural genitive βδελυγμάτων and connects it with a καί to the articular plural accusative τὰ ἀκάθαρτα. While the two nouns agree in number, they fail to agree in case. The καί is probably exegetical rather than coordinate. Cf. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 430.

11. Werner Foerster, ‘βδελυγμα’, *TDNT*, I, p. 600. Cf. Exod. 1.12; Lev. 18.30; 1 Kgs 11.5; Prov. 15.8–9; Isa. 2.8, 20; Dan. 11.31; Mal. 2.11; 1 Macc. 1.48.

12. It specifically denotes demonic spirits leading people astray in Rev. 16.3; 18.2. See also Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 310–11; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 855–56; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 612; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 430–31.

13. The use of καί most likely suggest that μαρτύρων represents a more specific designation of ἁγίων. Commentators typically argue that the καί is exegetical (Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 937; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 613; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 432) or that is explanatory (Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 860; Satake, *Gemeindeordnung*, pp. 116–17).

blood' was a metaphor in the OT and ancient world for the blood lust of soldiers in battle.<sup>14</sup> The idea, then, is that Babylon's power, wealth, and idolatry precipitated and resulted in the senseless slaughter of the faithful saints who refused to commit adultery with her. As such, she will certainly receive the punishment that her crimes deserve (Rev. 18.6).

b. *Babylon Judged: Tried and Sentenced* (Rev. 18.1–19.10)

The tour of Babylon's judgment (τὸ κρίμα) promised by the angel of Rev. 17.1 now comes sharply into focus in Revelation 18. While this passage possibly exhibits a chiasmic structure, a chiasm would make the lament of the merchants the locus of Rev. 18.1–19.8 and that seems unlikely.<sup>15</sup> Due to the preponderance of prophetic precedents, other studies of Revelation 18 have focused on the use of a prophetic dirge or taunt-song as a means to pronounce judgment through laments.<sup>16</sup> The use of a dirge is evident, but to limit this passage strictly to this literary form fails to do justice to how this scene contributes to the theological themes consistently presented throughout John's vision. A more viable suggestion is to view the entire passage as exhibiting a juridical framework:<sup>17</sup> (1) a pronouncement of the verdict (Rev. 18.1-3); (2) the sentencing (Rev. 18.4-8); (3) lamenting from the kings, merchants, and mariners (Rev. 18.9-19); (4) the sentence and indictment reaffirmed (Rev. 18.21-24); and (5) the multitude of redeemed saints celebrate the justness of God's judgments against Babylon in the heavenly courtroom (Rev. 19.1-10).<sup>18</sup> Instead of merely being a dirge, therefore, Rev. 18.1–19.10 incorporates several images, allusions, and literary forms within a forensic context for the purpose of depicting God's final verdict rendered against Babylon.

One salient feature of this entire scene is that John has saturated this section with material drawn from OT prophetic oracles pertaining to the judgment of

14. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 937. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 613; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 432.

15. For those who posit a chiasm see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 891; Farrer, *Revelation*, p. 189; Fiorenza, *Revelation*, pp. 98-99; Giblin, *Revelation*, pp. 166-71; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 338-43.

16. Collins, 'Revelation 18', pp. 192-97; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 975-83; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 442. Cf. 1 Sam. 17.43-44; Isa. 23.15-18; 27.22-29; Jer. 22.14-15; Amos 5.1-3.

17. Fiorenza (*Revelation*, p.99) suggests, 'The whole scene could be likened to a universal courtroom, in which a class-action suit takes place. Plaintiffs in this suit are Christians together with all those killed on earth (18.24); the defendant is Babylon/Rome, who is charged with murder in the interest of power and idolatry; and the presiding judge is God. As announced previously in 14.8, Babylon/Rome has lost the lawsuit and therefore its associates break out in lamentation and mourning, while the heavenly court and Christians rejoice over the justice they have received'.

18. See also Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, p. 211.

the historical Babylon.<sup>19</sup> John has already alluded to the imagery of Babylon and the cup of judgment from Jer. 51.7 in Rev. 17.4. Jeremiah 50–51 essentially provides the *Vorbild* for describing the destruction of the new Babylon (see Table 8). John reworks the oracle of judgment against the historical Babylon in Jeremiah 50–51. He also draws from the taunt songs of Isaiah 23–24 and oracles against Tyre in Ezekiel 26–27.<sup>20</sup> John freely rearranges the material and includes oracles of judgment against several Gentile cities as well as Jerusalem: This interweaving of allusions creates the effect that Babylon's judgment represents the culmination of God's judgment against all pagan nations in terms of military, political and economic devastation. The ultimate reason God destroyed ancient Babylon and predicts the doom of the new Babylon is because the blood of his people has been found within her walls (cf. Jer. 51.49; Rev. 18.24).

Table 8. *The Judgments of Babylon Compared in the OT and Revelation 18.*

<i>Condition of City</i>	<i>OT Prophets</i>	<i>Revelation 18</i>
Babylon fallen	Jer. 51.8; Isa. 29.1; cf. Jer. 50.15	18.2a
A haunt for beasts/demons/birds	Jer. 50.39; 51.37; Isa. 13.21; 34.11-14	18.2b
Babylon intoxicated all nations	Jer. 51.7-8; Isa. 23.17; Ezek. 27.33	18.3
God's people compelled to come out	Jer. 51.6, 45; cf. Isa. 49.7; 52.11	18.4
Crimes reaching the skies	Jer. 51.9	18.5
Retributive judgment	Jer. 50.15, 29; 51.24; cf. Lev. 24.21; Deut. 19.21; Isa. 40.2	18.6
Babylon boasts, 'I will never mourn'	Isa. 47.8	18.7
God will judge her with fire	Jer. 50.32, 34; 51.30, 32, 58; cf. Isa. 47.9	18.8
Mourning over destruction of the city	Ezek. 26.16-21; 27.6-22 (Tyre)	18.9-14
Nations marvel	Jer. 50.46	18.10
Commerce ceases	Jer. 51.44	18.11
Mariners mourn	Ezek. 27.29-32 (Tyre)	18.17-18
Rejoicing over vindication	Jer. 51.10, 48	18.20

19. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 983; Musvosvi, *Vengeance in the Apocalypse*, p. 252; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 87-88.

20. Boxall, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 254; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 423.

<i>Condition of City</i>	<i>OT Prophets</i>	<i>Revelation 18</i>
Babylon uninhabited and sinks like a millstone	Jer. 50.13; 51.26, 63-64	18.21
No more music or workers	Jer. 25.10 (Jerusalem); Ezek. 26.13 (Tyre)	18.22c-23b
No bride or bridegroom	Jer. 7.34; 16.9; 25.10 (Jerusalem)	18.23b
Babylon judged because of slain saints	Jer. 51.49	18.24

The verdict against Babylon is pronounced by an angel with great authority (ἔχοντα ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην) illuminating the earth with his splendor (Rev. 18.1-3).<sup>21</sup> The lawsuit against the nations has come to its conclusion and this angel now delivers the verdict from heaven's courtroom. Babylon is guilty as charged (cf. Rev. 14.6-11). The angel expresses the verdict in terms conveying the certainty of Babylon's destruction, although still a future event from John's perspective.<sup>22</sup> The angelic declaration of Rev. 18.1-3 announces Babylon's fall coupled with a statement about the desolation decreed for her. The announcement of Babylon's fall (ἔπεσεν ἔπεσεν Βαβυλὼν ἡ μεγάλη) reiterates Rev. 14.8 and echoes Isa. 29.1 alluding to the destruction of ancient Babylon and its idols.<sup>23</sup> The use of the aorist tense form in Rev. 14.8 and 18.2 could rightly be translated as, 'the destruction of Babylon has now been decided.'<sup>24</sup> Although a city with a once thriving population living in luxury, it will become a barren wasteland.<sup>25</sup> John arrogates the imagery of a desolate city inhabited by demons and carrion birds from prophetic oracles of judgment against Babylon (Isa. 13.21-22; Jer. 50.39; 51.37), Edom (Isa. 34.11-14), and Nineveh (Zeph. 2.14). All of these cities have violated the righteous requirements of God's

21. The angel's glory, an allusion to Ezek. 43.2 (LXX), foreshadows the glory of the New Jerusalem. Cf. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 893; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 635; Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 266.

22. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 985.

23. Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 204-205, 213-14. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 635; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 323.

24. Mussies, *The Morphology of Koine Greek*, p. 338. Cf. Thompson, *The Apocalypse in Semitic Syntax*, p. 122 n. 117; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, p. 205; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 985; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 893.

25. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 894) elegantly remarks, 'The final stripping away of Babylon's luxurious facade (17.4; 18.16) reveals her skeleton, within which sit only demonic birdlike creatures'.

law and consequently received their due penalty.<sup>26</sup> The new Babylon will not escape the certainty of God's justice.

Having decreed certain judgment, in Rev. 18.3, the angel proceeds to state the grounds for this verdict. The reason (ὅτι) Babylon is condemned to destruction is because she seduced the nations into idolatry. The first and overarching reason is because all the nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) have consumed (πέπωκαν) her wine and have become intoxicated. This indictment resembles the announcement of Rev. 14.8, but reflects a greater degree of guilt than the former charge. A subtle lexical variation exists between Rev. 14.8 in that Babylon has given all nations to drink from her cup (πεπότικεν), but in Rev. 18.3 the use of πέπωκαν suggests that all nations have fully indulged and now have become drunk from consuming her wine. A second reason is because the kings of the earth have fornicated (ἐπόρευσαν) with her by engaging in idolatry and subsequently leading their subjects to follow suit.<sup>27</sup> The final reason relates to the economic opportunities afforded to the earth's merchants who shamelessly grew rich (ἐπλούτησαν) from plying their trade with her.<sup>28</sup> God holds her responsible for promoting the lust of the flesh (wine), the lust of the eyes (wealth), and the pride of life (political power) thereby leading the nations astray from the true God and obedience to his righteous decrees.

Once the verdict is announced, another voice from heaven commences with Babylon's sentencing.<sup>29</sup> The sentencing is characterized by a series of imperatives. The first imperative represents a preliminary order for the withdrawal of the people of God from Babylon before the execution of the final judgment. The injunction for God's people to come out of her (ἐξέλθατε ὁ λαός μου ἐξ αὐτῆς) constitutes an allusion to Jer. 51.6. Jeremiah urges the Israelites to flee from Babylon because the time has come for God to exact his vengeance (ὅτι καιρὸς ἐκδικήσεως αὐτῆς ἐστίν [LXX]) for its crimes. In the same way that God judged the ancient Babylon, he will destroy the new Babylon. Therefore, his people must separate themselves from that condemned city. The purpose (ἵνα) of this command is so they do not share in her sins (μὴ συγκοινωνήσητε ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις αὐτῆς) and receive her plagues (ἐκ τῶν πληγῶν αὐτῆς ἵνα μὴ λάβητε). This prophetic appeal not only implies the removal of God's people prior to Babylon's destruction, but it also compels John's

26. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 636.

27. Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, p. 265.

28. The idea is that for the merchants to prosper economically in the Roman Empire they had to willingly participate in idolatrous trade guilds as well as the imperial cult. On the relationship between the imperial cult and commerce in the Roman Empire see Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, pp. 142-65. See also Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 376-77; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, p. 127; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 424.

29. John only states that this voice originated from heaven and does not elaborate on a possible identity. It could be Christ or simply an angelic messenger.

audience to abstain from participating in Rome's idolatry, especially for social ease and economic prosperity.<sup>30</sup> An additional ὅτι clause indicates the reason for God's judgment against Babylon (Rev. 18.5). The idea is that Babylon has reached maximum capacity in its sinful corruption and therefore God must judge her for her crimes (τὰ ἀδικήματα αὐτῆς).<sup>31</sup>

The second string of imperatives comprises the actual sentence that God has decreed for Babylon based on her sins and crimes (Rev. 18.6-7a).<sup>32</sup> The imperatives are not voiced to earthly saints, but rather to some undesignated agents of God's vengeance (possibly the glorified saints).<sup>33</sup> Four imperatives (ἀπόδοτε, διπλώσατε, κεράσατε, δότε) expressly convey the principle of *lex talionis* and divine retribution.<sup>34</sup> The justice of the sentence is demonstrated in that each command stems as a direct result of Babylon's action (see Table 9).

God administers justice through rendering judgment warranted by the crimes committed (Jer. 50.29; Ps. 137.8; cf. Isa. 40.2). The language of paying back double is a metaphor for rendering a full recompense or requital.<sup>35</sup> In this sentencing, the martyrs' prayer for vindication concerning their shed blood (Rev. 6.10) has been fully satisfied. Babylon unjustly condemned the saints

30. Cf. Keener (*Revelation*, p. 425) remarks, 'This warning to flee comes in the same context as the mention that Babylon was an intoxicating cup for the nations and would be mourned ([Jer.] 51.7-9). That people are still invited to escape just before the judgment reveals the greatness of God's mercy. God invites his people to leave Babylon because they have a better city'.

31. This comports well with the biblical notion that God waits until a city or nation reaches the full measure of sin before he judges them. In other words, since the city is beyond redemption it must be destroyed. Cf. Gen. 15.16; Jer. 51.9. See also Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, p. 992. Regarding the idea of sins reaching heaven and God remembering as language typically reserved for prayer, Aune observes, 'Here that motif is used in an ironic sense, for it is the sins that have reached heaven, analogous to the smoke of sacrifices or incense or the prayers of the worshipers, and have provoked a response'.

32. Osborne (*Revelation*, p. 640) captures the nature of this scene well when he comments, 'God pronounces a legal sentence on Babylon/Rome/the empire of the beast in 18.6-8, perhaps given to the heavenly bailiff...who is to carry out the sentence. It contains both the sentence and the legal basis for the verdict, all expressed in terms of the Roman (and biblical) "law of retribution"'.

33. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 325; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 504.

34. Aune (*Revelation 17-22*, p. 993) explains, 'The principle of *lex talionis* (i.e., "proportional retribution") from the Latin legal term *talio*, "payment in kind"...and exemplified by the OT phrase "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"...is a frequent motif in the prophetic judgment speeches of OT prophets (Isa. 34.8; 59.18; 65.6-7; Ezek. 9.10; 11.21; 16.43; 17.19; 23.31; 23.49; Hos. 4.9; 12.2; Joel 3.4, 7 [MT 4.4, 7]; Obad. 15-16; see Prov. 24.12) and early Jewish literature (Sib. Or. 3.312-14; *Apoc. Abr.* 29.19)'.

35. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 641; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, p. 715; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 325; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 504. Contra Morris, *Revelation*, p. 217.



to death and now God condemns her accordingly.<sup>36</sup> God will, therefore, bring about her destruction in one day (διὰ τοῦτο ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ ἥξουσιν αἱ πληγαὶ αὐτῆς) because as the mighty judge he is able to accomplish it (Rev. 18.6).

Table 9. *The Justice of Divine Retribution in the Sentencing of Babylon.*

<i>Judgment</i>	<i>Reason</i>
ἀπόδοτε αὐτῇ (‘render to her’)	ὥς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπέδωκεν (‘as she has rendered’)
διπλώσατε τὰ διπλα (‘Double her punishment’)	κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς (‘according to her deeds’)
κεράσατε αὐτῇ διπλοῦν (‘mix her a double portion [of wine]’)	ἐν τῷ ποτηρίῳ ᾧ ἐκέρασεν (‘in the cup in which she mixed [her wine]’)
τοσοῦτον δότε αὐτῇ βασανισμὸν <sup>37</sup> καὶ πένθος (‘give her as much torture and grief’)	ὅσα ἐδόξασεν αὐτὴν καὶ ἐστρηνίασεν (‘[in accordance with] as much glory and luxury [as she gave herself]’) <sup>38</sup>

John viewed the proceedings of this cosmic courtroom while in the desert (presumably on earth) with heavenly beings announcing the verdict and sentence, but he now includes a response to this judgment from the earth’s inhabitants in Rev. 18.9-19. Collins has insightfully observed the parallel function between the heavenly declarations and the earthly responses, ‘[t]he three announcements of judgment against the kings of the earth (vv. 9-10), the merchants (vv. 15-17a), and the mariners (vv. 17b-19) are parallel in form and content. These three units, in effect, present three earthly scenes which complement the two angelic appearances. As the angels announce heavenly judgment and its causes, the kings, merchants and mariners express an earthly response.’<sup>39</sup> This response directly results from the sentence that Babylon will be destroyed in ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ as evidenced by the repeated refrain that she met her end in μιᾷ ὥρᾳ (Rev. 18.10, 17, 19). Although Babylon seemed so

36. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 227-48.

37. The term ‘torture’ (βασανισμός) is consonant with the text’s legal emphasis. In ancient lawcourts, torture was a means by which confessions and testimony were exacted from courtroom witnesses. Cf. Paige DuBois, *Torture and Truth* (London: Routledge, 1991), on the role of torture in Roman legal trials. See also Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), on the legality of torture.

38. The ὅτι clause provides an additional reason for this particular punishment as resulting from her arrogant boast that she sits as a queen and will never mourn (cf. Isa. 47.8). On the theological significance of this claim see Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities*, pp. 66-67.

39. Collins, ‘Revelation 18’, p. 199.

strong, wealthy, and powerful, God easily brought about her collapse with his judicial verdict.

The laments end abruptly in Rev. 18.20 with a return to an imperative call exhorting God's people (οὐρανὲ καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ προφῆται) to rejoice over his justice (cf. Rev. 12.12).<sup>40</sup> The occurrence of the imperative verb, Εὐφραίνου,<sup>41</sup> indicates that this resumes the speech of the heavenly voice instead of a continuation of the mariners threnody.<sup>42</sup> Although the sudden return of this heavenly voice may seem like an aporia,<sup>43</sup> it appropriately precedes Rev. 19.1-8, which contains a scene of jubilation with the saints celebrating God's just judgments.<sup>44</sup> The idea of saints rejoicing over the destruction of Babylon may seem vindictive, but in reality it flows out of the concern for God's justice by vindicating his righteous servants.<sup>45</sup> The command to rejoice corresponds to Jer. 51.48, but it is theologically rooted in Deut. 32.43—the climax of the prophetic lawsuit in the Song of Moses.<sup>46</sup> This is evidenced by the verbal parallels between Deut. 32.43a (LXX) εὐφράνθητε οὐρανοί and Rev. 18.20a Εὐφραίνου ἐπ' αὐτῇ, οὐρανέ. The two passages share a thematic link in that rejoicing is the proper response to the expressed retribution against the nations for the way they treated God's people.<sup>47</sup> The reason they are commanded to rejoice is because (ὅτι) God has judged her in a manner corresponding to the way she had judged them (cf. Rev. 18.6).<sup>48</sup>

Babylon's sentencing concludes with a symbolic act depicting her complete destruction along with a final reassertion of her indictment (Rev. 18.21-24).

40. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 460.

41. The reason why the imperative is singular is because it addresses several subjects headed by the singular οὐρανέ.

42. Some English translations include v. 20 within the quotation marks of the mariners (NIV, NRSV, ESV, NJB), but others correctly mark it as a new speech (NKJ, NASB, NLT).

43. Cf. Charles, *The Revelation of St John*, II, pp. 111-12, 353; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1006-1007.

44. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 653.

45. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 916) states that, 'The focus is not on delight in Babylon's suffering but on the successful outcome of God's execution of justice, which demonstrates the integrity of Christians' faith and of God's just character'. Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 654; Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse', p. 304.

46. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 511. See also a similar call for rejoice in the Isa. 44.23 and 49.13, which also appears in a lawsuit context (cf. Ps. 96.10-13).

47. For more parallels between Deut. 32.43 and Revelation see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 393, 666, 917, 928.

48. Caird (*The Revelation of St John*, pp. 227-30) argues that v. 20b is best translated as God judging Babylon because of 'the sentence she passed on you'. In this way, God vindicates the martyrs who were condemned by the Roman courts and it directly relates to the law of the malicious witness (Gen. 9.5-6; Deut. 19.16-19). Caird describes it as God reversing Babylon's sentence in the final court of appeals. Justice is accomplished when the saints are acquitted and Babylon is condemned.

A mighty angel cast (ῥβαλεν) a large boulder, the size of a millstone, into the sea to demonstrate the expectation that Babylon will be cast (βληθήσεται) from the face of the earth.<sup>49</sup> The future verb form indicates that while there is an imminent expectation of the sentence's execution, the actual judgment will occur with the return of Christ in Rev. 19.11-21.<sup>50</sup> The finality of Babylon's destruction is also poetically recounted by the eternal absence of any music, commerce, work, lights, and wedding celebrations (Rev. 18.22-23a). The reason that these things will never be *found* in Babylon again (οὐ μὴ εὑρεθῇ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι) is because the blood of the prophets, saints, and all those who have been slain was *found* within her (εὑρέθη).<sup>51</sup> Not only, then, does God judge Babylon because she has led all the nations astray (Rev. 18.23b) as well as the fact that she has slaughtered his people (Rev. 18.24a), but also because of all violence and bloodshed perpetrated on earth (Rev. 18.24b).<sup>52</sup>

The transition in Rev. 19.1, signaled by the phrase μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα, marks the end of the trial of Babylon and records the heavenly response to God's justice. Revelation 19.1-10 functions like a bridge interlocking the preceding courtroom scene regarding the verdict culminating from the lawsuit against Babylon (Rev. 18.1-24) with the return of Christ who carries out the sentence rendered against her (Rev. 19.11-21).<sup>53</sup> John hears the sound of a massive multitude (μεγάλην ὄχλου πολλοῦ) praising God. The multitude certainly includes all the angelic inhabitants of heaven (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ), but it specifically denotes the entirety of redeemed saints (cf. Rev. 7.9).<sup>54</sup> The elated mood expressed by the heavenly multitude represents the antithesis of the grievous laments of the kings, merchants, and mariners. This contrast further conveys the sense that the lawsuit, trial, and judgment are acts of divine justice as a recompense for the injustice committed in Babylon.<sup>55</sup> The ones who benefited by fornicating with her (i.e., kings, merchants, and mariners) did so

49. On the rhetorical use of paronomasia in Rev. 18.21 see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1008.

50. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 656. The judgment will take place in two eschatological phases: (1) a civil war between the beast and the harlot (Rev. 17.16); and (2) the *Parousia* (Rev. 19.11-21).

51. Collins, 'Revelation 18', p. 199.

52. Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, p. 7.

53. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 517.

54. Cf. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 242; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, pp. 720-21; Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 232; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, pp. 242-43; Boring, *Revelation*, p. 192; Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 336-37; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 331; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1024; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 926; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 476; Boxall, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 266.

55. Musvosvi ('Vengeance in the Apocalypse', pp. 261-62) expresses this well when he remarks, 'The once mourning saints are now rejoicing, while the once rejoicing Babylon is now in the midst of lamenting'.

at the expense of truth and justice. The saints, in particular, suffered at their hands. So now that God had declared his verdict, the saints duly acknowledge him with the appropriate praise for his avenging justice (cf. Rev. 6.10; Deut. 32.43).

The saints expressly praise God for vindicating them through the just judgment rendered against Babylon. Although this is evident throughout the entire hallelujah section, the first hallelujah of the heavenly multitude provides the clearest example of this truth.<sup>56</sup> The reason (ὅτι) the heavenly multitude shouts 'Hallelujah!'<sup>57</sup> is because God has judged Babylon and avenged the blood of his servants (Rev. 19.2).

The heavenly multitude affirms God's judgments as both true and just (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ),<sup>58</sup> which echoes Rev. 16.7 concerning all the earth's fresh water being turned to blood. In both cases, God's judgment is affirmed as true and just by those who have been the recipients of false and unjust judgments at the hands of the harlot queen. What is more, their gratitude is warranted because (ὅτι) God has completely answered the martyrs' plea for vindication (Rev. 6.10). This is confirmed by the lexical parallels (κρίνεις/ἐκρίνεν and ἐδικεῖς/ἐξεδίκησεν) between the request of Rev. 6.10 and the response of Rev. 19.2b.

*Rev. 6.10*

καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἕως  
πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ  
κρίνεις καὶ ἐδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν  
κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

*Rev. 19.2b*

ὅτι ἐκρίνεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην ἣτις  
ἔφθειρεν τὴν γῆν ἐν τῇ πορνείᾳ αὐτῆς, καὶ  
ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ  
χειρὸς αὐτῆς

God has avenged the blood of his servants because they were unjustly sentenced to death at Babylon's hand.<sup>59</sup>

56. Revelation 19.1-8 contains four hallelujahs and one command to rejoice. The first comes from the great heavenly multitude of redeemed saints (19.1-2). This same group continues with a second hallelujah because the eternal judgment against Babylon (19.3). The twenty-four elders and four living creatures voice the third hallelujah with their affirmation of what the multitude had said (19.4). In 19.5, a voice from the throne commands all of God's servants to praise him (αἰνεῖτε). Subsequently, all of God's servants, that is, all those who fear him (i.e., expegetic καὶ [Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 470, 480]), obediently praise him with the fourth hallelujah (19.6-8). Cf. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 515-16.

57. On the meaning and significance of the hallelujahs in this passage see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1024-25; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 926-27; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 665; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 476-77.

58. Osborne (*Revelation*, p. 664) comments, 'God's justice is 'true' because it is based on his own covenant faithfulness and 'just' because it is based on his holy character. In other words, his judgments are both morally true and legally just (see on 15.3; 16.7)'.<sup>59</sup>

59. The phrase ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς represents a Hebraism and could be translated as 'from her hand', 'by her hand', or 'at her hand'. The point is that Babylon and its corrupt system

The phrase ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς suggests an intentional allusion to 2 Kgs 9.7 [LXX], which reads ἐκδικήσεις τὰ αἵματα τῶν δούλων μου τῶν προφητῶν καὶ τὰ αἵματα πάντων τῶν δούλων κυρίου ἐκ χειρὸς Ιεζαβέλ. In the OT context, a prophet commissions Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab in order to exact God's vengeance (ἐκδικήσεις) because Jezebel had ordered the execution of God's prophets. This allusion effectively combines John polemic against the false prophet of Thyatira (Rev. 2.20) and the politically oppressive Babylon (Rev. 17.1-6). God's retributive justice, then, would extend to all those who tarnish or torment God's servants.

Interestingly, the notion of God's vengeance on behalf of his people in both Rev. 19.2 and 2 Kgs 9.7 is grounded in Deut. 32.43. Therefore, Rev. 19.1-2 not only represents the culmination of the martyrs' prayer (Rev. 6.10), but more importantly signals the conclusion of the lawsuit against the nations. The purpose of Rev. 19.1-10 is to express how the judgment of the nations accomplished the vindication of the saints (i.e., their salvation).

In Rev. 19.6-10, John continues the theme of legal vindication but intertwines it with nuptial imagery. The saints continue in their exaltation because now that Babylon has been judged the time has arrived for the Lamb's wedding since his bride is fully prepared (ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἡτοίμασεν ἑαυτήν). The next phrase describes her preparation by having been given (ἐδόθη) dazzlingly clean fine linen (περιβάλλεται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθρόν). On one hand, clean white clothing was a symbol of salvation promised to the overcomers (Rev. 3.5, 18; 7.9). On another, the use of βύσσινον also intentionally contrasts the fine linen of the earthly prostitute city (Rev. 18.12, 16) with the fine linen of the heavenly bride city (Rev. 19.8; cf. 19.14). A parenthetical explanation (γάρ) delimits the fine linen as τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ('the righteous acts of the saints'). The rare term δικαιώματα appears in Rev. 15.4 in the Song of Moses and the Lamb referencing the revelation of God's righteous acts. In this sense, then, God justly rewards the righteous deeds performed by the saints while on earth. The forensic nature of δικαιώματα, however, also includes the connotation of God's righteous deeds performed on behalf of the saints. Although the precise nuances inherent in this phrase deserve more attention, it clearly expresses the future vindication awaiting the saints.<sup>60</sup>

### c. *The Returning Warrior King and Judge (Rev. 19.11-21)*

Now that the lawsuit against the nations has resulted in a judicial verdict, Jesus returns to earth to prosecute the sentence against Babylon. He returns as the rightful king and divine warrior in this christological culmination of the

was directly responsible for the judicial verdicts that sentenced God's faithful servants to death.

60. See also Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 941-42.

Apocalypse (cf. Rev. 1.14-16; 2.12, 16, 18; 5.6b; 11.15; 12.11; 14.14; 17.14).<sup>61</sup> That he returns as a conquering king determined to bring all the kingdoms of the earth under his subjugation is made explicit by several images. The imagery of riding a white horse was the common Roman symbol of the emperor who triumphed over his enemies.<sup>62</sup> The multiple diadems (διαδήματα πολλά) upon his head demonstrates that his cosmic sovereignty surpasses all other pretentious earthly claims to a throne (cf. Rev. 12.3; 13.1).<sup>63</sup> He comes accompanied by his army of redeemed saints that he has made to be his kingdom (cf. Rev. 1.6). Although the saints come as a messianic army, Christ alone is the one who executes the battle. The fact that he will rule over his domain with a scepter of iron indicates that he is the true messianic king (cf. Ps. 2.9; Isa. 11.4). Finally, the name engraved on his thigh attests that he is the βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων (cf. Rev. 1.5; 17.14).<sup>64</sup>

That he comes as the divine warrior to dispense justice through judgment and salvation is also made explicit through several images.<sup>65</sup> The appellative πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός represents the quality of his character denoting authentic justice (cf. Rev. 1.5; 3.14; 6.10).<sup>66</sup> He comes to wage a just war (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ) against the beast's kingdom, to exact vengeance for the unjust war he waged against the saints (Rev. 13.7). The two images from the inaugural vision of Christ reappear to denote judicial insight (blazing eyes) and pronouncements (sword out of mouth).<sup>67</sup> One of the most graphic and violent images depicting Jesus as the divine warrior is his blood soaked robe (Rev. 19.13) from treading the winepress of the fury of God's wrath (Rev. 19.15). The winepress (ληνός) used to crush the grapes of wrath was introduced in Rev. 14.19-20. According to this, the wine of God's fury was a metaphor for the massive bloodshed associated with the final battle.<sup>68</sup> The blood on Jesus' robe is that of his victims as confirmed by the allusion to Isa. 63.2-6.

61. Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 678-79. See also Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, pp. 124-131.

62. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, pp. 1050-51.

63. Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 241; Kroll, *Revelation*, p. 321; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 954.

64. This title is used for God in the OT and Jewish writings (cf. Deut. 10.17; Ezek. 26.7; Dan. 2.37; Ezra 7.12; Ps. 136.2; 2 Macc. 13.4; 1 En. 9.4; 63.2; 84.2; 1QM4.16; 4Q4910). For the Christological significance of this designation for Christ see Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, p. 185.

65. On the dual aspect of his judgment as punishment for the wicked but salvation for the righteous see Smalley, *Revelation to John*, pp. 487-88.

66. See also Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 303.

67. Cf. 4 Ezra 13.9-13. See also Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb*, p. 179.

68. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, p. 847. Cf. Joel 3.12-13; 1 En. 100.3; 4 Ezra 15.35-36; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 40-48.

In the lawsuit against the nations in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32.41-42), God promises to exact vengeance on behalf of his people with very violent and bloody language (cf. Isa. 42.13; Hab. 3.11-14; Zech. 3.17).<sup>69</sup> Jesus, therefore, is the full revelation of the divine warrior from the OT who executes judgment against all the enemies of God and his people.

The great and final battle constitutes a slaughter that ends just as soon as it begins (Rev. 19.17-21). Prior to the battle, an angel standing in or on the sun issues a dinner invitation to all the carrion birds to feast on the corpses of all those in rebellion to Christ (Rev. 19. 17-18; cf. 18.2). The beast along with all the earth's kings amass their forces together in a deluded attempt to attack the coming King of kings (cf. Rev. 16.13-16).<sup>70</sup> Despite the boasts of the beast and the false prophet, they are quickly captured and tossed immediately into the lake of fire (Rev. 19.20). The rest (οἱ λοιποὶ) died instantly at the spoken word of Christ (Rev. 19.21). The collective use of οἱ λοιποὶ signals the fate of the kings, their armies, and all other inhabitants of the earth aligned against God (cf. Rev. 9.20-21; 11.13).<sup>71</sup> Christ effectively conquered all other kingdoms of the earth and subsumed them under his kingdom now established on earth.

d. *Judgment of Individuals: The First and Second Resurrections (Rev. 20.1-15)*

The destruction of Babylon pertained to the judgment of the nations corporately as a political entity, but God will also judge all people individually. Having established his kingdom through a military victory (Rev. 19.20-21), he orders the dragon bound and imprisoned for the duration of a thousand years (Rev. 20.1-3; cf. Isa. 24.21-22). The exact meaning of the χίλια ἔτη and its theological significance in the scheme of the *eschaton* constitutes, by far, the most problematic and perennial issue flummoxing interpreters of the Apocalypse. In terms of the lawsuit motif, however, the millennium pertains to the first resurrection as a judicial verdict awarded to individual saints as a special reward.

The entire scene in Rev. 20.4-6 corresponds to Dan. 7.9-10, where the Ancient of Days holds court and books are opened for judgment and Dan. 7.22-27, where he renders a favorable verdict for the saints by giving them the kingdom.<sup>72</sup> The phrase κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς, in Rev. 20.4, reflects the LXX

69. Keener, *Revelation*, p. 453.

70. For the basis of this conception see Ezek. 38.14-16; 39.1-6; Joel 3.2; Zech. 12.1-9; 14.2; Ps. 2.1-3; cf. *1 En.* 56.5-6; 90.13-19; 99.4; *2 Bar.* 48.37; 70.7; *4 Ezra* 13.33-38; *Jub.* 23.23; *Sib. Or.* 3.663-68; *Pss. Sol.* 2.1-2; 17.22-23; *1QM* 1.10-11.

71. Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World*, p. 136; contra Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, p. 1067.

72. Krodell, *Revelation*, p. 333; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 354; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, p. 256;

of Dan. 7.22 (τὴν κρίσιν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις). Mounce explains the reason for the dative case of αὐτοῖς by noting that the Hebrew preposition לְ affixed to saints (i.e., לְקַדְשֵׁי) conveys the sense ‘in behalf of.’<sup>73</sup> The meaning, then, of κρίμα ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς relates to a judicial verdict rendered on behalf of the saints. This effectively equates κρίμα, as used here, with ‘judicial vindication’ rather than ‘bestowing judicial authority’.<sup>74</sup>

This interpretation affects the identification of the ones sitting on the thrones (εἶδον θρόνους καὶ ἐκάθισαν ἐπ’ αὐτούς).<sup>75</sup> The allusion to Dan. 7.22 suggests that the dative plural pronoun αὐτοῖς is synonymous with τοῖς ἁγίοις. This would indicate that the thrones belong to saints instead of the twenty-four elders. John usually specified the elders as a special group and so the omission of any designation of πρεσβύτερος in Rev. 20.4 hardly seems accidental. That resurrected saints occupy the thrones makes even more sense if the occurrences of καί connecting the ones seated on the thrones, with the judicial verdict, and the beheaded souls are taken epexegetically.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the souls from underneath the altar received a favorable verdict that placed them on thrones. Therefore, the judicial verdict awarded to individual saints includes the right to reign with Christ, which would include judicial authority (cf. Rev. 2.26-27; 3.21; 5.10; 20.6).<sup>77</sup>

The use of τὰς ψυχὰς coupled with ἔζησαν indicates that this resurrection is literal and physical rather than spiritual and heavenly.<sup>78</sup> The question remains, however, as to which saints participate in the first resurrection. Is the first resurrection intended for all the saints of all time or is it restricted to the martyrs and the Tribulation martyrs in particular? The qualifying phrase τὰς

Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 997; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 506; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 283.

73. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 354 n. 8.

74. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 997. See also Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 506; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 283.

75. Aune (*Revelation 17–22*, p. 1084) remarks, ‘The third-person plural aorist verb ἐκάθισαν, ‘they sat’, is used here without a subject, so exactly *who* sat upon the thrones remains unspecified’. The fact that the identity of those sitting upon the thrones is ambiguous has produced several possible candidates including the twenty-four elders or the martyred saints, or both. For a survey of possibilities see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1084-85; Osborne, *Revelation*, pp. 703-4; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 996.

76. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 507.

77. Reddish, *Revelation*, pp. 394-95. The saints vindication represents a great reversal of roles from judged to judges. Reddish argues, ‘This is a scene of role reversals. The martyrs have had to stand before the imperial throne (at least figuratively) and receive the sentence of death. Now they are the ones who are seated on thrones and deliver judgment... The millennium is John’s way of offering encouragement to the martyrs. Those who have paid the greatest price receive the greatest reward’.

78. Witherington, *Revelation*, p. 249; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 998; contra Charles H. Giblin, ‘The Millennium (Rev.20.4-6) as Heaven’, *NTS* 45 (1999), pp. 553-70.



ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων appears to limit the first resurrection primarily to the martyrs.<sup>79</sup> The beheaded souls were condemned in a Roman court because of the testimony of Jesus and word of God.<sup>80</sup> The language clearly connects these souls with the other slaughtered faithful witnesses (Rev. 6.9). A second qualifying phrase seems to restrict the first resurrection to persecuted believers during the Tribulation period. Since the masculine plural pronoun οἱ τινες has no antecedent, it denotes a second group of faithful saints refusing to worship the beast or receive his mark.<sup>81</sup> These two qualifiers coupled with the slightly ambiguous οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν (Rev. 20.5) seem to suggest that the first resurrection is a reward specifically for the faithful testimony maintained by persecuted believers. All saints throughout history, however, are not necessarily exempt because the promise of reigning with Christ generally applies to all faithful believers (Rev. 2.26-27; 3.21; 5.10).<sup>82</sup>

The second resurrection, in Rev. 20.11-15, pertains to the individual judgment of all humanity (i.e., οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν).<sup>83</sup> The second resurrection is the final judicial act of God before the complete renewal of the created order (i.e., the eschatological ‘age to come’). The descent of the Great White Throne from heaven is more than the earth can handle as it dissolves in the presence of the awesome purity of its creator (Rev. 11; cf. Rev. 6.14; 20.11). When the judge enters the courtroom, all the dead must rise to face the accounting of their deeds. As with the judgment of the saints, John incorporates imagery from Dan. 7.9-10 where the Ancient of Days holds court and books are opened for judgment (cf. Dan. 12.2-3). This is confirmed by the obvious lexical parallels between βιβλοὶ ἠνεώχθησαν (Dan. 7.10 [LXX]) and βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν (Rev. 20.12). John, however, contrasts the plural ‘books’ (βιβλία) with the singular ‘book of life’ (βιβλίον...τῆς ζωῆς).

These books are opened as the primary evidence consulted during the investigative trial of every individual human being all the way back to Adam. The multiple books (βιβλία) are the written records of each person’s conduct (τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν). Judgment according to the written record of a person’s life was a common theme in Jewish writings (4 Ezra 6.20; Asc. Isa. 9.22-23; Test. Abr. 12.4-18). All those resurrected, then, are judged according to their works. These works certainly include attitudes of the heart like cowardice, unbelief, and moral corruption (ἐβδελυγμένοις), but also external actions like murder, sexual immorality, sorcery/witchcraft, idolatry, and

79. See also Caird, *The Revelation of St John*, p. 252.

80. On decapitation and Roman capital punishment see Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, pp. 1086-87.

81. Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 507.

82. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 704.

83. Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (NovTSup; 93; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998), p. 270.

lying (Rev. 21.8). No one will escape the consequences of their guilt and will subsequently share the same fate as the dragon, beast, and false prophet in the lake of fire (Rev. 20.14). The only hope for salvation depends solely on whether or not their name is written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 20.14). Therefore, all those suffering eternally in the lake of fire are there because of what they have done, while all those enjoying the eternal bliss of the New Jerusalem are there because of what the Lamb has done (Rev. 1.5-6).

## *2. Vision Four: The Vindication and Reward of the Saints* (Rev. 21.9–22.5)

The final vision commences in Rev. 21.9-10 when another angel holding one of the seven bowls invites John to see the bride of the Lamb and he is carried away in the spirit (ἐν πνεύματι) to a high mountain. It constitutes an expanded presentation of the New Jerusalem introduced in Rev. 21.1-8. This vision functions as the antithesis of the harlot city of Babylon and presents the glorified church as the bride city of the New Jerusalem: The purpose is to contrast the fate of Babylon with the glory of the New Jerusalem in which the saints receive their ultimate vindication and eternal reward. Although they may have endured unjust persecution temporarily as pariahs in a corrupt society, they will reign with the Lamb in the bliss of God's incorruptible paradise (Rev. 22.1-5).

The final vision contributes to the lawsuit motif by demonstrating God's justice through the ultimate salvation of his people. John encourages believers throughout the Apocalypse to remain faithful in their testimony as they patiently endure unjust treatment. The motive for this patient endurance is the knowledge that God will vindicate them. That vindication begins with the judgment of Babylon, the dragon, Antichrist, False prophet, and all the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 17.1–20.15), but is not complete until the saints receive their full reward (Rev. 21.11–22.5). Obedience to the Lamb and living according to God's righteous requirements may result in suffering during this present age, but it will result in glory in the age to come. The present world order is under satanic dominion, promotes idolatry, rewards greed, and slaughters the saints. Believers find themselves conflicted between the desires to remain faithful to Christ or compromise with the harlot. This final vision, however, promises the overcomers a reward that far outweighs their earthly suffering. Therefore, the final vision comprises the third element common to the prophetic lawsuit speech—an oracle of salvation.

The epilogue begins in Rev. 22.6 when the interpreting angel affirms the truthfulness of words of the prophecy because it has been authorized by God. John continues with a series of testimonies submitted as forensic verification for the churches. First, John testified that he has presented an eyewitness

account of what he has seen and heard (Rev. 22.8-11). Second, Jesus testified that he is coming soon to reward the righteous and punish the wicked (Rev. 22.12-16). The third testimony comes from the Spirit and the bride (Rev. 22.17), which probably refers to the Holy Spirit through the church as a prophetic witness (cf. Rev. 19.10).<sup>84</sup> The first imperative, ἐρχου, possibly represents a response to Jesus' testimony by asking him to return.<sup>85</sup> In context with the other two imperatives addressed to the audience, however, it seems more likely that this represents an evangelistic appeal to humanity offering eschatological salvation (cf. Rev. 21.6) rather than judgment.<sup>86</sup> In Rev. 22.18-19, John solemnly warns against any tampering of his vision by invoking the legal consequences of altering a covenant document (cf. Deut. 4.2). John concludes with a final testimony by Jesus affirming that he is coming soon (Rev. 22.20). These four testimonies constitute the strongest way possible to validate the truth of his vision by using legal categories.

### 3. Conclusion

The final two visions represent literary parallels that contrast the judgment of the nations with the vindication of the saints. This forms the climax of justice as the lawsuit against the nation results in a guilty verdict. Once the verdict is read, the sentence follows announcing the destruction of Babylon because of the crimes she has propagated. She is indicted for intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication and she has unjustly rendered verdicts against the saints. Christ returns to earth as the divine warrior king and judge to execute the sentence decreed against Babylon. Her destruction indicates that the martyrs' prayer for vindication has been answered. Although the beast along with the kings of the earth stage a coup d'état to prevent the rightful establishment of Christ's kingdom, he slays all his adversaries with the judicial authority of his spoken word. Not only does he answer their prayer for retribution, but he also reverses the verdict of the earthly courts and exalts them by giving them thrones to sit as kings and judges over the earth (Rev. 20.4). After the final resurrection of all individual humans, the saints dwell with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem as their eternal reward.

84. Bruce, 'The Spirit in the Apocalypse', pp. 342-44; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 167-73; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, p. 491; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 646; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 1148; Keener, *Revelation*, p. 516.

85. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 160; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, p. 578; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, p. 318.

86. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 395; Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 294; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 1148; Osborne, *Revelation*, 793; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, p. 647. Cf. Isa. 55.1; Jn 7.37-38.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPHETIC LAWSUIT IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

#### 1. *Summary*

The preceding Chapters have focused on isolated elements contributing to the presence and development of the prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation. The introduction sought to make a case for the lawsuit motif. It demonstrated how scholarship has increasingly remarked on the lawsuit themes and juridical aspects evident throughout selected pericopes and sections. Various studies have revealed that certain clusters of Revelation exhibit more lawsuit imagery than others. Revelation 1–3 present Christ as judge of his churches, and the warnings and encouragements proffered remain relevant throughout the book. Revelation 4–5 portrays the divine courtroom from where investigation occurs and verdicts are subsequently rendered. Revelation 6.1–16; 8.1–9.21; 15.1–16.21 describes a series of seven judgments designed to indict the guilty and promote repentance. Revelation 11 presents the church delivering prophetic testimony in a trial-like setting before the nations. Revelation 12 reveals the heavenly legal battle between God, Satan, and the saints. Revelation 18 constitutes the trial, sentencing, and execution of God’s judgment on Babylon. Revelation 20 evokes juridical imagery when describing the final assize of God. These clusters bespeak a thematic and literary phenomenon signaling a motif intentionally woven into the fabric of John’s vision.

Chapter 1 argues that the lawsuit imagery frequently appears throughout the OT demonstrating both the basis for, and justice of, Yahweh’s judgments. Both lawsuit narratives and speeches appear throughout the OT and especially in the prophetic writings. From this analysis two distinct types of prophetic lawsuits are posited. The first type of prophetic lawsuit accuses, indicts, and threatens the people of God for violations of covenantal stipulations. The illocutionary effect of this covenant lawsuit aims at provoking God’s people to repentance. The second type of prophetic lawsuit specifically addresses the pagan nations. In addition to idolatry, the nations stand trial for their harsh treatment of God’s people. The narrative substructure of the Apocalypse consistently returns to juridical themes, binding them into a leitmotif. What is

more, John employs both forms of the prophetic lawsuit. The first vision (Rev. 1.9–3.22) represents a forensic investigation of the new covenant people of God (including indictments, calls for repentance, and promises of reward for obedience). The second vision (Rev. 4.1–16.21) primarily relates to the forensic investigation of the pagan nations. Therefore John, writing in the same vein as the OT prophets, utilized this prophetic convention as a framework when he penned his vision for the churches. John's use of the lawsuit motif conforms to the same pattern evident in the prophetic lawsuits exemplified particularly by Deuteronomy 32: (1) covenant lawsuit; (2) lawsuit against the nations; and (3) the vindication/salvation of the saints.

Chapter 2 elucidates how the historical background for the book of Revelation may have prompted the inclusion of the prophetic lawsuit. Believers in Asia Minor may have endured the reality of injustice as they stood before provincial magistrates simply because of their exclusive fidelity to Christ. Hostility toward Christianity frequently manifested itself as legal opposition that conforms to patterns of jurisprudence. For any persecution to retain its force it must have legal backing. Both Greco-Roman and Jewish opponents to the Christian communities brought their grievances and accusations before provincial officials who may have rendered unjust verdicts against the believers. This situation naturally provoked feelings of defeat and discouragement in the lives of Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. John's Apocalypse, therefore, provides encouragement and motivation to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of suffering. John's audience was also assured of God's vindication by promising to render ultimate justice in the near future.

Chapter 3 explores how the structure and semantics of the book of Revelation give evidence for the juridical concerns permeating throughout John's vision. The tripartite aspect of Revelation's structure also yields some observations related to the prophetic lawsuit. Because Revelation was intended for an oral performance one must first look to the surface structure for key elements designed to convey meaning. John has apparently modeled his composition, to some extent, from various OT prophetic writings. The intratextual aspect indicates that various words, phrases, and themes recur throughout the book forming interwoven motifs essential for interpretation. Notably, it was argued that Revelation consists of four separate interrelated visions introduced by the phrase 'in the Spirit'. The four major visions of Revelation are posited as the major literary divisions: (1) Rev. 1.9–3.22 envisions the glorified Christ who investigates his churches; (2) Rev. 4.1–16.21 portrays the divine court proceedings and the trial of the nations; (3) Rev. 17.1–21.8 describes the trial, sentencing, and judgment of Babylon; and (4) Rev. 21.9–22.5 presents the vindication and reward of the saints comprised of the new heaven and new earth. Aside from Revelation's macro-structure, the book conforms to a forensic species of rhetoric designed to maximize its affect on

the audience. The forensic tone of the Apocalypse is evidenced by the use of a vocabulary steeped with juridical connotations.

Chapter 4 comprises an exegetical survey of the prophetic lawsuit in the first vision (Rev. 1.9–3.22). This chapter focused first on the inaugural vision of Christ and its relationship to John and the churches. The inaugural vision of Christ establishes John as a prophetic witness heralding the lawsuit from the eschatological judge. Although Christ is the judge of the universe, the first vision emphasizes his role as the judge of the churches. This becomes clear in the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, which occupies the central focus of the second half of this chapter. The seven letters exhibit a form and content that closely resembles the covenant lawsuit. Christ investigates his churches and audits them on their faithfulness to covenantal stipulations. For example, Ephesus faced accusations because the call to love one another constitutes the royal law (Jas 2.8) for the new covenant communities. Churches facing charges are admonished to repent or he will judge them. The purpose of the covenantal lawsuit is so that ‘all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds’ (Rev. 2.23). Therefore, the first vision corresponds to the covenant lawsuit speech designed to promote repentance and faithfulness.

Chapter 5 provides an exegetical survey of the second, and longest, vision (Rev. 4.1–16.21). John’s entrance into the heavenly courtroom enables him to witness an extended session of the divine council. The council is comprised of God, representatives from the created order (i.e., the four living creatures), and representatives of the saints (i.e., the twenty-four elders). This session convened for the purpose of installing Christ as the Davidic king and the only one worthy to execute God’s judgment on humanity. The series of septets represents a sequence of judgments designed to provoke repentance and also to satisfy the just requirements of God’s wrath. These septets function as investigative judgments to determine the guilt of human beings and to enter their response as evidence in the lawsuit against them. The interludes pertain primarily to the saints. The sealing of the 144,000 demonstrates that God will spare his people from the ensuing trumpet judgments as well as demonstrating his purposes in election. The second interlude defines their role during this trial in terms of prophetic witnesses warning the nations to repent in light of the impending judgment of God. The signs narrative depicts that war between the beast and the saints. What is more, the signs narrative provides the final evidence necessary to convict the nations and render judgment: (1) failure to worship God; (2) idolatry; and (3) the slaughter of the saints.

Chapter 6 completes the exegetical survey by highlighting the prophetic lawsuit in the third (Rev. 17.1–21.8) and fourth visions (Rev. 21.9–22.5). The final two visions represent literary parallels that contrast the judgment of the nations with the vindication of the saints. This forms the climax of justice as

the lawsuit against the nation results in a guilty verdict. Babylon is indicted for intoxicating the inhabitants of the earth with the wine of her fornication and she has unjustly rendered verdicts against the saints. Christ returns to earth as the divine warrior king and judge to execute the sentence decreed against Babylon. Her destruction indicates that the martyrs' prayer for vindication has been answered. Not only does he answer their prayer for retribution, but he also reverses the verdict of the earthly courts. He exalts these vindicated saints by giving them thrones to sit as kings and judges over the earth (Rev. 20.4). After the final resurrection of all individual humans, the saints dwell with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem as their eternal reward.

## 2. *Contribution*

This study fills a gap in current scholarship on the book of Revelation by connecting the dots regarding the juridical language and imagery as a lawsuit motif interwoven throughout the entire book. While many articles and commentaries frequently discuss lawsuit imagery, no prior study traces it out as an intentional motif in the Apocalypse. Since the lawsuit motif has evaded centuries of investigations, this would suggest that it is not necessarily dominant or essential for interpreting John's vision. Judgment constitutes a more prominent theme of which the lawsuit is a subsidiary. Nevertheless, a lawsuit functions as a natural way to communicate ideas like justice and judgment, acquittal and requital, vengeance and vindication. Therefore, the prophetic lawsuit motif of book of Revelation offers a new avenue for research regarding the metaphors, narratives, and theology inherent to the Apocalypse.

Another contribution is that this study gives proper attention to John's role as a prophet and his use of the OT. Most of the discussion on this topic has focused on analyzing specific allusions in the book of Revelation, the use of specific OT books (i.e., Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Psalms), or how the author reinterprets the OT passages for his own purposes. This study, however, focused on how the author utilized a specific genre from the OT. It offers some insights into why John often combines allusions found scattered throughout the OT into one composite image by demonstrating how he followed a particular pattern evident in the prophetic lawsuit texts. John, then, utilized a familiar prophetic convention when describing his vision as it pertained to God's judgment on sinners and the vindication of the saints.

A final contribution of this study on the prophetic lawsuit is that it brings the purpose and theology of the book of Revelation into sharper clarity. This allows for a reading that gives proper attention to the theology of justice presented in the Apocalypse. It tells the story of the creator God and sovereign judge who will ultimately render justice over all his creation. He will

vindicate his saints for the unjust suffering they have endured at the hands of the pagan nations (Rev. 1.2, 9; 6.9; 20.4). The Dragon and all his followers will face God's righteous wrath because of their sin, their mistreatment of God's people, and their failure to worship God (Rev. 18.19-24; 19.1-3, 22.9). The purpose of the lawcourt imagery would be to demonstrate God's sovereignty, to encourage the suffering saints, and to reveal the justice of God's activity in the final eschatological judgment. Although it appears as if Christians will always face injustice, John received a vision of the glorified Christ sitting on his throne with the authority to unleash the wrath of God against this injustice. This message would have served as an encouragement to remain faithful to Christ and patiently endure all kinds of trials because the judge of the universe will vindicate his people.

### *3. Implications*

The prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation has broad implications for several hermeneutical issues, questions about the historical background, theology, and the praxis of the church. The following discussion will attempt to tease out some of these implications.

#### *a. Hermeneutical Implications*

The Apocalypse continues to warrant the claim as the most difficult book of the whole NT to interpret. Its complex structure, symbolism, metaphors, bizarre images, and eschatological focus makes for an immense challenge. Although, the presence of the prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation may not solve all the hermeneutic enigmas, it helpfully nuances the discussion on the use of the OT. John's use of the prophetic lawsuit stems from his role as a prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets. Mazzaferri's groundbreaking book on the genre of the book of Revelation argues quite persuasively that John wrote in the pattern of the classical prophets:

...John frequently employs his OT prophetic sources with major generic objectives. This is so above all in his CN [call narrative] and the sketch of his prophetic ministry, as well as in his Exodus typology. He earnestly wishes to be recognised as the inheritor of the great classical prophetic tradition. This is all the more impressive since he employs none of his many other sources generically. Accordingly, this aspect of source criticism confirms the patent testimony of its initial results. John dips his hands freely into classical apocalyptic, the synoptic tradition, pagan mythology, and even astral symbols. But he bathes himself in one corpus alone, classical OT prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

1. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 378.



Although he possibly overstates his case, he correctly places John in continuity with the OT prophets. Mazzaferri even argues that John follows a pattern of oracles of woe directed against Israel and the nations, and oracles of benevolence toward the covenant faithful. Interestingly, he argues that the lawsuit, the woe oracle, fable, and allegory constitute a secondary type of oracle against a foreign nation.<sup>2</sup> The similarities between John's Apocalypse and the OT prophets intimates that interpreters need to give greater attention to the generic features of the OT prophets when approaching the book of Revelation.

John's use of the OT is a subject that deserves much attention. While many significant articles and monographs have recently focused on the identification and a nature of OT allusions, it has also been the source of some lively hermeneutical debates. The debate surrounding Revelation centers on the question whether or not John used the OT as a servant (a source freely to appropriate at will), or master (an authoritative guide in formation),<sup>3</sup> or both.<sup>4</sup> Steve Moyise criticizes Greg Beale's view of the use of Daniel 2 and its fidelity to the original context stating that 'his view needs to do justice to the other side of the interaction, namely, that Revelation is a fresh composition which has used Daniel as *one* of its significant sources'.<sup>5</sup> Beale, in turn, faults Moyise on three points: (1) it is wrong to speak of OT texts receiving new meanings; (2) NT authors do not take the OT out of context; and (3) meaning derives from authorial intention, not the creative process of readers.<sup>6</sup> However, Moyise defended his use of intertextuality as not wanting 'to apply a radical literary theory', but because 'the complexity of the book of Revelation, with OT allusions in nearly every verse, required it'.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, both of their positions may be illuminated by an analogy to fruit.

2. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation*, p. 380.

3. Barnabas Lindars, 'The Place of the OT in the Formulation of NT Theology', *NTS* 23 (1976), pp. 59-66 (66).

4. Jon Paulien, 'Dreading the Whirlwind Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation', *AUSS* 39.1 (Spring 2001), pp. 5-22; Greg K. Beale, 'A Response to Jon Paulien on the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation', *AUSS* 39 (2001), pp. 23-34; Steve Moyise, 'Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation', *AUSS* 39 (2001), pp. 35-40; Moyise, 'The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale', *IBS* 21 (1999), pp. 54-58; Beale, 'Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise', *IBS* 21 (1999), pp. 152-80; Moyise, 'Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures?' *AUSS* 40 (2002), pp. 3-21.

5. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 63.

6. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, pp. 50-59.

7. Moyise, 'Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation', p. 36.

Beale, following closely Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, argued that John's use of the OT is comparable to a fruit basket. He illustrates:

We can compare an author's original, unchanging meaning to an apple in its original context of an apple tree. When someone removes the apple and puts it into another setting (say, in a basket of various fruits in a dining room for decorative purposes), the apple does not lose its original identity as an apple, the fruit of a particular kind of tree, but the apple must now be understood not in and of itself but in relation to the new context in which it has been placed. This new contextual relationship is called 'significance'. The new context does not annihilate the original identity of the apple, but now the apple must be understood in its relation to its new setting.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the originally intended meaning is preserved in the new context, but may take on a new significance (application). Moyise, on the other hand, agrees that the OT texts are not annihilated but suggests that a better analogy would be that of a fruit salad:

We no longer have nice shiny apples but pieces of apple, mixed up with pieces of pear and pieces of banana and covered in syrup. There is a connection with the shiny apple that once hung on a tree but on this analogy, one is much more struck by the differences. It is no longer round, the skin has been removed and it has been severed from its core. And the experience of eating it will be considerably different from biting into the original apple.<sup>9</sup>

Moyise criticizes Beale for wanting his apple and also eating it when he asserts that John offered new understandings of the OT texts that would have surprised the original audience.<sup>10</sup>

A possible way forward is to propose a distinction between levels of authorial intended meaning. When interpreting a text and its appropriation of another text, the issue of meaning is complicated by the presence of two or more authors. The distinction proposed is between the authorial intended meaning of the surface/primary text and the source/subtext. In other words, the interpreter of Revelation is ultimately concerned with what John intended the allusion to mean, rather than what the original intent of the OT writer might have been.<sup>11</sup> This is not a distinction in kind (as to put the texts at odds

8. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, pp. 51-52.

9. Moyise, 'The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale', pp. 54-55.

10. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', p. 32; Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, pp. 45, 128.

11. Pattemore (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 36-43) argues that relevance theory adds to the discussion on intertextuality by examining how an audience would have perceived the communication. When an author alludes, cites, or echoes another text it must evoke a shared cognitive environment for an audience to understand the intended meaning. Rather than adopting the conventional classification of 'informal quotation',

with each other) but in degree (giving precedence to the new context). It is also important to bear in mind the exegetical practices underlying much of the Jewish and Christian writings.<sup>12</sup> What may appear as a disregard for the OT context, upon closer inspection may reveal careful exegetical concern. The primary goal is to interpret the intended meaning of the text of Revelation. A necessary, but secondary, goal is to understand the meaning of the OT text John intentionally flags as significant by means of allusion. Perhaps instances where John alludes to only one or two OT passages, the intended meaning corresponds to Beale's fruit basket. On the other hand, where John amalgamates several allusions into an apparently new image, the authorial intended meaning follows closer to Moyise's fruit salad.<sup>13</sup>

Too often the discussion surrounding the relationship between the OT and the book of Revelation has focused on assessing and interpreting allusions. While this is indeed a very important issue it sometimes overlooks the forest for the trees. This study has taken a different approach by analyzing how John utilized a specific genre pattern from the OT. John followed the basic tripartite scheme of judgment against the people of God to provoke repentance, followed by judgment against the pagan nations, and concluded with an oracle promising salvation through vindication. The prophetic lawsuit provided a model drawn from a common prophetic convention for presenting the message of John's vision in accordance with the message of divine justice through judgment.

#### b. *Historical Implications*

John was exiled to Patmos as a result of a court ruling that penalized him because of the testimony of Jesus and the word of God (Rev. 1.9). His plight demonstrates how Christians in the Roman Empire lived with the reality that they would not necessarily receive a fair trial in that justice system. This is evident in the fact that persecution frequently played out in the lawcourt. The book of Acts illustrates the way in which opposition to the gospel resulted in

'allusion', or an 'echo', with all the varying degrees of probability, Pattemore opts for distinguishing between what is 'contextually evoked' and what is 'used conventionally'. He writes, 'An OT (or other source) text is contextually evoked [bold in original] if the audience need to access the original context of the text, and add it to their cognitive environment, in order to optimize the relevance of the author's statement in their contemporary context. An OT (or other source) text is used conventionally [bold in original] if the audience can optimize relevance within the mutual cognitive environment of author and audience, without access to the original context of the embedded text'.

12. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1999).

13. Jon Paulien, 'Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation', in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001), pp. 113-29 (129 n. 74).

Paul's arrest and subsequent trials.<sup>14</sup> The ancient world operated according to established modes of jurisprudence to regulate laws and conduct. People simply did not possess the legal right to imprison or execute their adversaries at will; they had to work through the legal system if they wanted to silence or stop their opponents. The legal status of believers in the provinces failed to protect them against their abstention from cultural or political intuitions, like the imperial cult, that violated Christian sensibilities. This would have given their opponents an opportunity to bring charges against believers before imperial magistrates.

The nature of the persecution of Christians in Asia Minor when the Apocalypse was composed often plays a vital role in scholarly discussions. Robinson captures the prominence of imagery related to persecution when he famously quipped, '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'.<sup>15</sup> The paucity of evidence, however, supporting the notion of a widespread imperially sanctioned persecution of Christians during the reign of Domitian obviates against using it as a probable backdrop for John's vision. Scholars, instead, view that believers in Asia Minor were merely ostracized and marginalized by the dominate culture, which was usually with economic implications. Other scholars have even postulated that the persecution reflected in John's vision functioned rhetorically to create a sense of perceived crisis in order to promote a desired behavior.<sup>16</sup> These theories warrant merit because they seek to explain the strong sense of persecution evident in the book of Revelation in light of a more probable socio-historical context. The problem is that they fail to take into account the reality that believers were not afforded legal protection. If they were denounced before the local magistrates, the odds were against them.<sup>17</sup>

Legal injustice against Christians in the Roman Empire is rather well attested. Tertullian, for example, recounted numerous examples of ways in

14. NT examples of legal action against Christians include Mk 15.12-14; Mt. 27.22-23; Lk. 23.20-23; Jn 19.6-7, 14-15; Acts 13.5-12, 50; 18.13-17; 22.30; 23.25-30; 24.1-22; 25.1, 7-27; 26.1-7. Cf. *Mart. Pol.*, 12.2-3; 13.1; Justin, *Dial.* 16.4; 47.4; 93.4; 95.4; 96.2; 108.3; 110.5; 131.2; 133.6; 137.2; Tertullian, *Scorp.* 10.10; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 26.6; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.12.

15. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, pp. 230-31.

16. Cf. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 187-99; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, pp. 84-110; Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', pp. 729-49.

17. On the legal status of Jews as opposed to Christians see Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 8, 240; Ford, *Revelation*, p. 393; Appelbaum, 'The Legal Status of the Jewish Communities in the Diaspora', pp. 420-63; Rajak, *Jewish Rights in the Greek Cities under Roman Rule*, pp. 19-35; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, pp. 167-85; Price, *Rituals and Power*, pp. 220-21. Cf. Josephus, *Apion* 2.6; Philo, *Legat.* 349-67.

which believers faced a variety of charges brought against them in the law-court.<sup>18</sup> Although not all of these involved cases of capital punishment, the judges typically rendered verdicts against the Christians. Tertullian's vocation as a lawyer afforded him with a keen perspective on persecution from a legal perspective. This study attempts to give more attention to the nature of the persecution reflected in the book of Revelation in light jurisprudence. This evidence suggests a possible pattern concerning the persecution of Christians through litigation. First, conflict develops as a result of Christian faith and practice. Second, a *delator* would make an official accusation against the Christian (Acts 24.7). Along with the charge, the accuser would marshal witnesses and any other evidence to impugn his adversary. The defendant, of course, would receive equal opportunity to plead his case and, in some cases, file a countersuit (Acts 24.10).<sup>19</sup> Once the judge heard all the proceedings and evaluated the evidence, he would pronounce a guilty or innocent verdict followed by the sentencing. The verdict largely depended on the disposition of the judge along with the nature of the charges. Not all trials resulted in a guilty verdict, but if the magistrate risked social, economic, and political loss a guilty verdict was more likely.<sup>20</sup>

### c. *Theological Implications*

The prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation helps to address the issue of theodicy by presenting a theology of justice. Theodicy represents a major thrust in the Apocalypse, which encapsulates the justice and mercy of God.<sup>21</sup> The martyred souls make a request that directly addresses the question of justice when they inquire, in Rev. 6.10, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' This request echoes the sentiments of countless generations of servants of God who suffered unjustly as the wicked appear to remain unpunished. The OT abounds with the same inquiry pondering when God will take judicial action on behalf of his mistreated people (e.g., Pss. 79.5-10; 94.1-3).<sup>22</sup> The concern, in Rev. 6.10, is not why does evil exist in the world or why Christians suffer in general, but specifically why are they suffering as a consequence of faithfulness to Christ and obedience to the righteous requirements of God's law.

18. Tertullian, *Apol.* 4.

19. It is up to the defendant whether or not to have advocates. See Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, p. 49. Cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 4.22.2; 6.31.9-11.

20. The sentences would have also varied ranging from fines to scourging, imprisonment, and death. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, pp. 26-27.

21. Osborne, 'Theodicy in the Apocalypse', p. 77.

22. See also D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2nd ed, 2006); Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, p. 123.

In a sense, the remainder of John's vision seeks to answer this query by demonstrating that God will render true justice.

The Song of Moses promises that, in due time, God will vindicate his saints and exact wrathful vengeance against the wicked. John N. Day contends that Deuteronomy 32 constitutes the theological foundation for the theme of divine justice through vengeance, which had direct implications for the book of Revelation:

Moreover, the Song of Moses has an ongoing prophetic function. It is a witness to the ongoing covenant of God with his people—the application of which carries through the end of the canon. Through the canon, the cry for divine vengeance for the blood of saints is raised until [*sic*] Revelation 6.9-10, and in 19.1-2, those gathered around the throne rejoice in its accomplishment. This prophetic nature illustrates both the primary and secondary purpose of the Song. It is primarily a witness against Israel for their rebellions. . . . Secondly it is a testimony to the faithfulness of God in the face of his people's faithlessness, including his faithfulness in taking vengeance against oppressors (cf. Deut. 32.4, 31-43).<sup>23</sup>

The language of vengeance in Deut. 32.43 is the backbone of the imprecatory prayers.<sup>24</sup> These prayers represent the way in which suffering saints expressed their trust in the justice of God who will avenge them. Paul, likewise, urges believers not to take justice into their own hands, but rather respond with kindness to their adversaries because God himself will avenge them at the right time (Rom. 12.17-21). The book of Revelation continues this theme of divine justice through retributive vengeance in accordance to the *lex talionis* because he will render judgments based on what people deserve (cf. Rev. 18.6; 20.12). The martyrs' plea for justice is fully satisfied in the vindication of the saints exalting to the throne with Christ.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. *Suggestions for Further Research*

This study attempted to trace out the presence of a prophetic lawsuit in the book of Revelation with analysis of the literary, historical, and theological aspects of the text as it pertains to juridical imagery. While a case may be sustained for the lawsuit motif, this study represents only the tip of the iceberg. A more specific and detailed analysis of complied allusions may reveal even more connections between the prophetic lawsuits speeches in the OT and the book of Revelation. In particular, more work needs to be done on the use of Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah in the Apocalypse. In addition to

23. Day, *Crying for Justice*, p. 56.

24. Day, *Crying for Justice*, p. 107.

25. N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), pp. 138-39.

these prophetic oracles, tracing the relationship between the lawsuit themes in the Psalms and Job would also contribute to the lawsuit motif in the Apocalypse.

An investigation of the lawsuit motif in Jewish apocalypses, rabbinic, and Second Temple writings might shed even more light on John's appropriation of the prophetic lawsuit. For example, 1 *En.* 9.9 loosely parallels Rev. 6.9-11. Because of the violence, oppression, and bloodshed that has filled the earth, the saints who were killed bring their suit to the most holy one. This suggests the possibility of similar lawsuit themes shared in other apocalyptic texts. The presence of the lawsuit motif has also been observed in a variety of Jewish writings indicating that it constituted a rather widespread subgenre. This could feasibly open the door for a virtually untapped field of research in apocalyptic literature.

Due to the limits of the exegetical survey, additional research is necessary to explore the lawsuit motif in particular sections of the Apocalypse. The divine council is one of those sections. The identification of the twenty-four elders as comprising the heavenly Sanhedrin requires much more research to flesh out the full implications as it relates to their function. The brief survey of the series of septets only examined a few examples of themes related to the lawsuit motif. In particular, the relationship between the trumpets, the prophetic lawsuit, the messianic army, and the War Scroll could prove to be very fascinating. What is more, the relationship between the lawsuit and the final vision deserves a more detailed investigation. This study only attempts to establish the lawsuit as a consistent feature throughout the book of Revelation, but future studies will develop it more fully.

More work is also necessary on the historical background and the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. Hard data recounting specific court cases involving Christians may not exist, but nevertheless it would be very helpful to explore the legal status of Christians according to Roman jurisprudence. A continued investigation into the historical background for the book of Revelation will always cast more light on the message of John's vision.

Finally, further research may reveal additional uses of the lawsuit motif in other NT books. Luke-Acts, in particular, exhibits an intimate knowledge of the legal system and a rather sophisticated juridical vocabulary. The lawsuit motif may also provide a nexus between the book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel. Could this provide an avenue for correlations between the Gospel and the Apocalypse?

## 5. *Conclusion*

Because John wrote in the tradition of the OT prophets, he incorporated a lawsuit motif into the framework of his vision. The prophetic lawsuit speech

was a common generic convention that prophets employed in their oracles of judgment against Israel and the nations. These lawsuit speeches, as typified by the Song of Moses, evinced a tripartate pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit speech regarding toward Israel; (2) lawsuit speech directed regarding the nations; and (3) the promise of vindication/salvation for the faithful people of God.

The purpose of the lawsuit speech was to promote repentance through accusations and warnings of judgment and also to demonstrate the justness of God's judgments. The book of Revelation incorporates the lawsuit motif throughout the entire vision. It conforms to the same pattern: (1) covenant lawsuit speeches regarding the seven churches (Rev. 1.9–3.22); (2) the lawsuit against the nations (Rev. 4.1–16.21; 17.1–21.8); and (3) the promise of vindication/salvation for the faithful overcomers (Rev. 21.9–22.5). Not only does the prophetic lawsuit in Revelation seek to promote repentance, it also demonstrates the justice of God's judgments by vindicating his suffering saints.



## Appendix

### ASSESSING OT ALLUSIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Stanley E. Porter has isolated three problematic issues related to scholarship and the use of the OT in the New.<sup>1</sup> ‘The first’, writes Porter, ‘is that there is persistent confusion over terminology, including what appears to be confusion over echo, allusion and quotation or citation’.<sup>2</sup> The second difficulty he observes is with the ‘audience-oriented’ or reader-response approach to the use of the OT.<sup>3</sup> ‘The reasonable solution would appear to be to adopt the author-centered approach’, he argues, ‘in which each set of words is assessed on its own merits’.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the third issue revolves around the question of what is intended by such analyses of the use of the OT.<sup>5</sup> These critiques provide the framework for the present discussion concerning the particular methodology employed for assessing OT allusions in Revelation.

To begin with, an explanation of the basic terminology centers on the terms intertextuality, allusion, and echo.<sup>6</sup> Intertextuality has recently risen from a literary fad into an indispensable addition to the exegetical toolkit. Building on the work of Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva is credited as the first to introduce the term *intertextualité* to suggest a dialogical relationship between texts broadly conceived of as a system of codes or signs.<sup>7</sup> Among literary critics intertextuality typically ‘encompasses manifold connections between a text being

1. Stanley E. Porter, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology’, in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (JSNTSup, 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 92-94.

2. Porter, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament’, p. 92.

3. Porter, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament’, p. 93.

4. Porter, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament’, p. 93.

5. Porter, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament’, p. 93.

6. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture*, p. 23) helpfully observes that ‘Quotation, allusion, and echo may be seen as points along a spectrum of intertextuality reference, moving from the explicit to the subliminal’.

7. Julia Kristeva, *Desire and Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (trans. L.S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). I am indebted to Steve Moyise’s survey of the development of the concept of intertextuality in ‘Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament’, pp. 14-15.

studied and other texts, or between a text being studied and commonplace phrases or figures from the linguistic or cultural systems in which the text exists'.<sup>8</sup> Intertextuality was introduced into the field of biblical studies in 1989 with the publication of two books. The first was *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings*,<sup>9</sup> but it was Richard Hays's monumental *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* that really brought intertextuality to the forefront in biblical studies.<sup>10</sup> Hays maintains that the phenomenon of intertextuality, that is, the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one, has always played a significant role in Israel's scriptural tradition.<sup>11</sup> However, the problem is that the term has rapidly wandered into equivocity and looms on the brink of abandonment due to its multivalent application by scholars of various persuasions.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, in the broadest sense possible, intertextuality still serves as a helpful umbrella term 'for the complex interactions that exist between "texts"'.<sup>13</sup> Sommer draws a distinction between intertextuality and allusion. He writes:

Intertextuality is concerned with the reader or with the text as a thing independent of its author, while influence and allusion are concerned with the author as well as the text and reader. Intertextuality is synchronic in its approach, influence or allusion diachronic or even historicist. Intertextuality is interested in a very wide range of correspondences among text, influence and allusion with a more narrow set. Intertextuality examines the relations among many texts, while influence and allusion look for specific connections between a limited number of texts.<sup>14</sup>

8. Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 7.

9. Sipke Draisma (ed.), *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel* (Kampen: Kok, 1989).

10. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, pp. 14–24.

11. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 14. So Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

12. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', pp. 15–17, 40–41.

13. Moyise ('Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', p. 41) helpfully classifies intertextuality into subcategories that indicate the individual scholar's particular interests: (1) *Intertextual Echo* aims to show that a particular allusion or echo can sometimes be more important than its volume might suggest. (2) *Dialogical Intertextuality* occurs where the interaction between text and subtext is seen to operate in both directions. (3) *Postmodern Intertextuality* pertains to the fact that a text always points to other texts and a reader always brings texts they know to every reading, meaning that there is never *only* one way of interpreting a text.

14. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scriptures*, p. 8.

Therefore, intertextuality represents the rubric of all interaction between texts in general, whereas allusion focuses on the specific occurrences of an intentional appropriation of an earlier text for a particular purpose.

Allusion, consequently, occurs when an author intentionally incorporates the language, imagery, and themes of another text without a direct citation. Allusions are distinct from quotations or formal citations in that some form of introductory formula is completely absent. Instead of an explicit marker to alert the reader to an allusion, they are usually woven into the text and they often contain less precise wording.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, allusions still represent an obvious intertextual reference.<sup>16</sup> Mathewson recommends thinking of allusion 'in terms of what appears to be taking place in the text: the author may allude to the wording of an OT text, or he may allude to a recognizable theme found in one or more texts, or even a form or genre'.<sup>17</sup> Allusion includes both verbal parallels to words and themes and thematic parallels to words and themes.<sup>18</sup> Authorial intention serves as the crucial locus for distinguishing between an allusion and an echo.<sup>19</sup>

Hays's original explication of an echo still remains the standard defining conception. The work of literary critic John Hollander forms the foundation for Hays.<sup>20</sup> In explaining Hollander's work, Hays specifies the force of an echo:

Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that texts B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed. This sort of metaleptic figuration is the antithesis of the metaphysical conceit, in which the poet's imagination seizes a metaphor and explicitly wrings out of it all manner of unforeseeable significations. Metalepsis, by contrast, places the reader within a field of whispered or unstated correspondences.<sup>21</sup>

In order for echoes to exist, one must accept intertextuality as 'the notion that every text embodies the interplay of other texts and so exists as a node within a larger literary and interpretive network'.<sup>22</sup> Texts behave like echo chambers, so that even a word or phrase 'may easily carry rumors of its resounding

15. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New', p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 29.

17. David Mathewson, 'Assessing Old Testament Allusions in the Book of Revelation', *EvQ* 75 (2003), pp. 311-35 (322).

18. Paul, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12', p. 261.

19. Beale, *The Use of Daniel*, pp. 306-309.

20. John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

21. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 20.

22. Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, 'The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers', in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 222-38 (228).

cave'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, echoes are 'faint traces of texts that are probably quite unconscious but emerge from minds soaked in the scriptural heritage of Israel'.<sup>24</sup>

Second, this methodology adheres to a hermeneutic that locates textual meaning in authorial intention.<sup>25</sup> The almost continuous allusion to the OT is not a haphazard use of OT language, but it is a 'pattern of disciplined and deliberate *allusion* to specific Old Testament texts'.<sup>26</sup> The debate surrounding Revelation centers on the question whether or not John used the OT as a servant (a source freely to appropriate at will), or master (an authoritative guide in formation), or both.<sup>27</sup>

A possible way forward is to propose a distinction between levels of authorial intended meaning.<sup>28</sup> When interpreting a text and its appropriation of another text, the issue of meaning is complicated by the presence of two or more authors. The distinction proposed is between the authorial intended meaning of the surface/primary text and the source/subtext. In other words, the interpreter of Revelation is ultimately concerned with what John intended the allusion to mean, rather than what the original intent of the OT writer might have been.<sup>29</sup> This is not a distinction in kind (as to put the texts at odds with each other) but in degree (giving precedence to the new context). It is also important to bear in mind the exegetical practices underlying much of the Jewish and Christian writings.<sup>30</sup> As such, what may appear as a disregard for the OT context upon closer inspection may reveal careful exegetical concern. The primary goal is to interpret the intended meaning of the text of Revelation.

23. Hollander, *The Figure of Echo*, p. 95.

24. Moyise, 'Intertextuality and the Study of the Old Testament in the New Testament', pp. 18-19.

25. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, pp. 1-23; Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text*, pp. 201-65. Cf. For a helpful critique of postmodern hermeneutics see D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 93-137; Raymond W. Gibbs, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 234-72; Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 24-31. Pattemore uses Relevance Theory, a linguistic hypothesis concerning the nature of communication, to argue for authorial intention without falling into the trap of the 'intentional fallacy'. Contra W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (ed. W.K. Wimsatt; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1954), pp. 748-56 (3).

26. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. x-xi.

27. Barnabas Lindars, 'The Place of the OT in the Formulation of NT Theology', *NTS* 23 (1976), p. 66. Lindars concludes that it never serves as master.

28. See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion concerning the debate between Moyise and Beale regarding authorial intention and intertextuality.

29. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, pp. 36-43.

30. Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 1999).

Thirdly, before one can answer the question of what is intended by the author's use of the OT, it is first necessary to provide a method for identifying an allusion. The most problematic methodological concern surrounding the use of the OT in Revelation relates to the criteria for identifying and classifying allusions.<sup>31</sup> All potential references will be placed along a sliding scale of three heuristic categories: embedded allusion, implied allusion, and incidental allusions. These categories are weighted according to the probability of an actual and intentional allusion to an OT text. The analogy of a sliding scale<sup>32</sup> is appropriate because some cases may cover a range of possibilities rather than a concrete designation. The key to determining allusions rests in the intentions of the author. The more likely that an author intentionally evokes an OT subtext, the more it is accorded probability weight. The more weight an allusion has, the more likely that it will impact the interpretation and theology of the text.

Embedded allusions consist of what are typically identified as clear,<sup>33</sup> probable,<sup>34</sup> and direct allusions.<sup>35</sup> Embedded allusions represent the cases where allusions are assessed with a high degree of probability. Implied allusion represent the cases where the potential allusion is identified as indirect or demonstrated through logical necessity and therefore is relegated to a moderate degree of probability. This classification corresponds to the categories of possible allusion<sup>36</sup> and influence.<sup>37</sup> Incidental allusions pertain to minor or

31. Jon Paulien, 'Elusive Allusions: The Problematic Use of the Old Testament in Revelation', *BibRes* 33 (1988), pp. 37-53; Paulien, 'Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions', pp. 113-29; Paul, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12', pp. 257-62; Mathewson, 'Assessing Old Testament Allusions', p. 319; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 77-86; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, pp. 14-19, 63-69; Moyses, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, pp. 11-23; Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: Kok, 1965), pp. 18-19, 112.

32. Mathewson, 'Assessing Old Testament Allusions', p. 322. Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 29.

33. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 78) defines this as, 'the wording is almost identical to the OT source, shares some common core meaning, and could not likely have come from anywhere else'. This is comparable to Fekkes and Paulien's designation of 'certain' or 'virtually certain'.

34. Beale (*Book of Revelation*, p. 78) explains, 'Though the wording is not as close, it still contains an idea or wording that is uniquely traceable to the OT passage'.

35. Paulien ('Elusive Allusions', pp. 40-41) maintains that a direct allusion occurs when the author was consciously referring to previous literature.

36. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, p. 78. Although it is uncertain whether this includes echoes, he defines it as 'the language is only generally similar to the purported source, echoing either its wording or concepts'.

37. Sommer (*A Prophet Reads Scripture*, pp. 14-15) takes this concept from literary criticism and explains that the 'study of influence often accompanies the study of literary tradition: as writers continue adopting themes, topics, genres, and styles from their

subordinate cases of low probability for an intended allusion. Thus, echoes are typically relegated to this category.

This study will follow a proposal of five criteria for identifying and classifying allusions. Allusions are placed along the sliding scale of probability in one of the heuristic categories based on how many of the criteria they match (see Table 10). Allusions deemed as fitting five or four of the criteria are identified on the scale as embedded allusions. If the potential allusion only exhibits three or four out of the five criteria, then it would most likely be ranked as an implied allusion. In cases of fewer than three criteria matches, it would be classified as an incidental allusion.

Table 10. *Sliding Scale of Allusion Probability.*

<i>Embedded</i>		<i>Implied</i>				<i>Incidental</i>	
Clear Allusion	Probable Allusion	Structural Allusion	Thematic Allusion	Typological Allusion	Conceptual Allusion	Loud Echo	Soft Echo

Each category is also divided into additional degrees of probability. Embedded allusions may be divided into clear and probable allusions. Implied allusions may be ranked according to the degree of correspondence with an OT text. These rankings include structural, thematic, typological, and conceptual similarities. Incidental allusions are subdivided into loud and soft echoes. Hays remarks that the ‘volume of intertextual echo varies in accordance with the semantic distance between the source and the reflecting surface’.<sup>38</sup> Loud echoes may correspond with two of the criteria and thereby may indicate conscious choice on the part the author. A soft echo corresponds with only one of the criteria and most likely is the result of an unconscious use of apparent OT wording.<sup>39</sup>

The first of the five criteria is that of *linguistic parallels*. Linguistic parallels represent the most crucial and visible of the criteria. Without linguistic parallels, allusions remain under a cloud of suspicion and reasonable doubt. They may be detected through lexical, syntactical, and structural indicators or

precursors, patterns of theme and topic develop which constitute a tradition investigated by literary historians. Sommer differentiates between allusion (that posits a relationship between particular sets of lines in texts) and influence that incorporates a much broader phenomenon of relations between authors, whole works, and traditions.

38. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, p. 23.

39. Hays (*Echoes of Scripture*, p. 23) further explicates, ‘As we move farther away from overt citation, the source recedes into the discursive distance, the intertextual relations become less determinate, and the demand placed on the reader’s listening powers grows greater. As we near the vanishing point of the echo, it inevitably becomes difficult to decide whether we are really hearing an echo at all, or whether we are only conjuring things out of murmurings of our own imaginations’.

markers.<sup>40</sup> Lexical indicators are verbal links between words in the primary text and a subtext. Comparing the Greek wording of Revelation with various versions of the OT elucidates the validity of the supposed connections.<sup>41</sup> Syntactical indicators refer to grammatical phenomenon that may signal shifts in the text to alert the reader to an OT allusion. Beale has persuasively argued that solecisms in Revelation may be intentional grammatical irregularities as a means of indicating dependence on the OT.<sup>42</sup> Finally, structural indicators relate to when the patterns, ordering, and chronology of the primary text may be appropriating the structure of a subtext.<sup>43</sup> For example several significant studies have demonstrated Revelation's structural dependence on Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Daniel.<sup>44</sup>

*Theological significance* constitutes the second criterion. The criterion of theological significance refers to how the potential allusion impacts the reading of the text. This assumes, however, that by alluding to an OT text the author wants to convey something theologically significant contained within the allusion. In other words, evoking OT language and imagery serves a theological rather than merely a literary purpose. If the potential OT reference fails to contain any theological relevance for its presence in the new context, its designation as an allusion remains doubtful. Theological significance is determined by a number of indicators/markers. If the OT passage is heavily theological, in that it expresses something about God or other theological concepts (redemption, covenant, faith, sin, judgment), then it may indicate continuity, revision, replacement, or a polemic in the new context.<sup>45</sup> In addition, other theological indicators include themes, typology, analogical use, universalization, fulfillment, inversion, stylistic uses and salvation-historical trajectories.<sup>46</sup>

The third criterion may be called *contextual consistency*. Contextual consistency pertains to the correspondence between the potential allusion and its consistency with the original OT context.<sup>47</sup> Does John demonstrate sensitivity

40. Paulien, 'Elusive Allusions', pp. 41-43.

41. See charts in the appendix that provide a helpful visual of this phenomenon in Ian Paul, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12', pp. 275-76.

42. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 100-103. Cf. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. 286) observes, 'Unusual and difficult phrases in Revelation frequently turn out to be Old Testament allusions'.

43. Paulien, 'Elusive Allusions', p. 43.

44. Ruiz, 'Ezekiel in the Apocalypse'; Vogelgesang, 'The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation'; Mathewson, *A New Heaven and A New Earth*; Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*; Beale, *The Use of Daniel*.

45. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, pp. 25-29.

46. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, pp. 86-96.

47. Fekkes (*Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, pp. 286-90) argues that John does use OT passages consistently in regard to their contexts.

to the original context of the OT passage to which he is alluding? This is a question that is distinct from how he actually used the OT allusion.<sup>48</sup> An intended allusion summons a specific OT passage to the mind of the reader/hearer. This establishes a link between author and audience by appealing to shared knowledge.<sup>49</sup> The knowledge of the OT passage would then play a significant part in understanding how it is used in Revelation. Beale, citing Vos, offers an excellent example as to how the OT allusions in Rev. 4.2-9 are often consistent with the original context.<sup>50</sup> The more Revelation coheres with the context of an OT passage(s), the greater the probability for the allusion.<sup>51</sup>

The fourth criterion relates to the *transitivity* of the allusion from the author to the audience. Transitivity pertains to the ability of the audience to grasp and comprehend the allusion and its source text. Is the alluded text something that the original readers/hearers had access to or a measure of familiarity? If not, then a measure of doubt is cast upon whether or not the author would have alluded to something that would have been completely foreign to his audience. Although this criterion is fairly subjective and requires a modicum of conjecture, two aspects aid in adjudicating the transitivity of an allusion.

First is the aspect of availability. Was the source text even available to the recipients? The question of dating, then, helps to minimize the danger of anachronism. It would be impossible to make an allusion to a document not yet in existence at the time of writing. Another question related to availability is the geographic distribution of the source text (something like the OT would have had a greater geographic distribution, rather than, say, Egyptian magical texts). The second aspect is shared knowledge. Did the recipients

48. Bauckham (*Climax of Prophecy*, p. xi) writes, 'Allusions are meant to recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusion to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of Old Testament prophecy'.

49. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, p. 19.

50. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 79-80, quotes from Vos, *Synoptic Traditions*, pp. 37-40. Beale writes, 'But when the OT context of each allusion is studied one finds that, without exception, they are all from descriptions of theophanies that function as introductory sections to announcements of judgment on Israel or the nations... This common denominator of theophany-judgment theme is enhanced when one also notes the dominant influence of Dan. 7.9-14 throughout Revelation 4-5... This clearly common motif points toward a more intentional thematic formation of texts to describe a similar theophany in Revelation'.

51. Mathewson ('Assessing Old Testament Allusions', pp. 316-17) suggests that a 'better approach is to test potential OT allusions and echoes as to whether they cohere with the *text itself*, in addition to what we can know about the author's intention, rather than on the basis of what can be proven to lie within the author's conscious intention or belong to the category, 'Certain/virtually certain'. Cf. Paul, 'The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12', p. 260.



drink from the same presupposition pools?<sup>52</sup> Did they have the same Scriptures as the author? To be sure, John most likely intended his vision to be passed to the seven churches in Asia, but read and interpreted through prophets who would have been trained in interpreting the images and explaining the meaning of the OT allusions.<sup>53</sup>

The fifth criterion pertains to the *exegetical tradition* of an OT text. This criterion examines the tradition of how the text of a potential OT allusion has been interpreted in both inner-biblical and extra-biblical exegesis. Tracing the interpretive history of a particular OT passage enables one to identify certain traits of similarity and dissimilarity that may illuminate the potentiality of the allusion in Revelation. If other writings quote, cite, or allude to an OT passage in a manner that is comparable to Revelation, then it bolsters the probability of the allusion. Inner-biblical exegesis tracks the development of how earlier OT writings (esp. the Pentateuch) are interpreted/reinterpreted in later OT writings. Fishbane discusses the range of inner-biblical exegesis, as concerned with the legal, homiletic and prophetic matrices through which later prophets and writers amended, replaced, revised, and rearticulated the Sinaitic revelation given by God.<sup>54</sup> Sommer contends Fishbane uses the phrase inner-biblical exegesis to refer to any case which one biblical passage borrows from or is based on another, and prefers the label 'inner-biblical allusion and exegesis'.<sup>55</sup> The phenomenon of inner-biblical exegesis represents a valid, substantial, and significant contribution to the study of intertextuality.

Extra-biblical exegesis, on the other hand, examines how OT passages were interpreted in non-canonical Jewish writings. Evans, describing his own method, expresses this analysis succinctly:

To determine how a NT writer has understood the OT passage being quoted or alluded to, it is necessary to reconstruct as closely as possible the first-century exegetical-theological discussion surrounding the OT passage in question. How was the OT passage understood by early Christians and Jews? To answer this question, every occurrence of the passage should be examined. This involves study of the ancient versions themselves (MT, LXX, Targum) and citations of the passage elsewhere in the NT, OT, apocrypha, pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Josephus, Philo, and early rabbinic sources. Some of these sources will prove to be utterly irrelevant; others may significantly clarify the NT writer's exegesis.<sup>56</sup>

52. Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 90-97.

53. Aune, 'The Prophetic Circle', pp. 103-16; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, pp. 85-91.

54. Michael Fishbane, 'Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis', *JBL* 99.3 (1980), pp. 343-61 (359).

55. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, p. 23.

56. Craig A. Evans, 'The Old Testament in the New', in *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research* (ed. Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne; Grand

As a criterion, however, the purpose of this practice at this point is not to determine how a NT writer understood the OT, but to adjudicate the plausibility of the presence of an allusion in the NT text. The possibility exists for John to allude to an OT text that has previously escaped the attention of canonical and non-canonical writers so this criterion cannot stand on its own when attempting to establish the probability of an allusion.

These five criteria serve as heuristic tools for adjudicating the probability of a potential allusion. A careful distinction is made between identifying allusions and interpreting them.<sup>57</sup> Once allusions are successfully identified and classified, the rest of this study will seek to interpret how John uses them and why. As Mathewson correctly observed, 'The discussion surrounding the use of the OT in Revelation needs to move beyond classifying and substantiating allusions based on perceived authorial intention and interpretive confidence in identifying them, to focusing on the interpretive and theological significance of a given allusion or echo in Revelation'.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to extend past the heuristic value of the criteria to assist also with the subsequent interpretation of the allusions.

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 130-45 (134). Cf. Craig A. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), pp. 1-8; Richard Bauckham, 'The Relevance of Extra-Canonical Jewish Texts to New Testament Study', in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. Joel B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 90-108 (94-95).

57. This is done in order to heed the corrective critiques of Stanley E. Porter who complains that others who have set forth criteria often confuse the difference between identification and interpretation. See Porter, 'The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament', pp. 81-83.

58. Mathewson, 'Assessing Old Testament Allusions', p. 319.

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