

CONQUERING THROUGH NON-CONFORMITY:  
ANSWERING CHRIST'S CALL TO COUNTERCULTURALISM

BY

DANIEL L. MORRISON,  
B.S., M.Div.







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Daniel I. Morrison, B.S., M.Div.

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AUTHOR: Daniel I. Morrison

SUPERVISORS: Dr. Cynthia Long Westfall  
Dr. Stanley E. Porter

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Upon the recommendation of an oral examining committee,

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**Daniel I Morrison**

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Primary Supervisor: Cynthia A. Westfall  
Cynthia Long Westfall, PhD

Secondary Supervisor: Stanley E Porter  
Stanley E Porter, PhD

External Examiner: David L Mathewson  
David L Mathewson, PhD

Academic Dean: Phil C Zylla  
Phil C Zylla, DTh

Date: June 5, 2018

## ABSTRACT

### “Conquering through Non-Conformity: Answering Christ’s Call to Counterculturalism”

Daniel I. Morrison  
McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, Ontario  
Doctor of Philosophy (Christian Theology), 2018

The book of Revelation reflects a story of the past that speaks to the present. The Apocalypse presents a discourse that highlights a variety of Christians in Asia Minor who must decide whether they will remain faithful in their allegiance to Jesus Christ or demonstrate unfaithfulness to Christ and his kingdom by conforming to the majority culture by engaging in practices of the broader society that stand in contradiction to their faith. When faced with such a dilemma, various people, including Christians, respond in a variety of ways. For some, their responses bring glory to God while others bring disgrace to the name of the God they say they serve. Writers often discuss Christ’s confrontation and judgment of the Roman Empire. Few, if any, address Jesus’s confrontations with the seven churches of Asia Minor.

This study combines Norman Fairclough’s theory of Critical Discourse Analysis and Jay Lemke’s theory of intertextuality to demonstrate that Rev 1–3, the incorporation of concepts and ideas appearing in other resources, the further development of the Apocalypse, and the historical context in which John composed the work present the kingdom of God as an alternative empire to which he belongs and commits himself as a



citizen in resisting the power, practices, and allure of Rome. Though the assemblies to which he writes experience a variety of social, political, and religious circumstances, the messages to the churches come together to reveal that Christians, no matter their power or position in society, have a mandate to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom who maintain a countercultural stance for the sake of the gospel. John depicts Christ as king of this alternative empire, who confronts each of his communities regarding their allegiance to him, demonstrated by their non-conformity to the practices of the broader culture regarding how they function in the various power structures in which they live. He then uses the later visions of the Apocalypse to depict Christ's vindication of those who maintain a countercultural posture in relation to the Roman Empire and highlights the advantages and blessings of non-conformity, while noting the disadvantages and curses of conformity.

Throughout the history of the Christian faith, various segments of the church have faced opposition from the surrounding culture. Christians today maintain the same mandate as the early church to resist the allure of the worldly powers that surround them and remain loyal to Jesus. In addition to providing an analysis of John's writing for early Christians, this dissertation also presents a model for Christians—no matter their time or place in history—to follow regarding how they interact with the world around them.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BDAG	Bauer, Walter, et al. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
Historia	<i>Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte</i>
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBS</i>	<i>Irish Biblical Studies</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JPTSS	Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTL	The New Testament Library
NTM	New Testmament Message

<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
SymS	Symposium Series
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

understood the book to address Rome's persecution of faithful Christians in the empire.<sup>5</sup> Circa 310 CE,<sup>6</sup> Constantine—emperor of the Roman Empire—converted to Christianity and his termination of persecution among most Christians forced those in the church to reinterpret the text of Revelation since they “were less inclined than before to regard Rome as a force of evil.”<sup>7</sup> With the end of persecution came the expectation of Christ's return to earth,<sup>8</sup> but the delay of the Parousia resulted in Christians, like Eusebius, finding their Christ in Constantine, “who consummated a marriage of Church and Empire.”<sup>9</sup> This line of thinking led to the reinterpretation of the millennium as the time of a Christian Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup> The empire that persecuted the church had now become one with her, and the church could no longer regard as evil that which she had become a part.

Cultural shifts in the empire resulted in transformations regarding how people lived as citizens of God's kingdom. The New Testament often provides an image of Christians resisting the surrounding culture, not embracing it. The biblical standard requires that Christians explore how the Bible depicts Christian defiance to the ungodly people and cultures they face. For example, Jesus rebukes his disciples for acts of violence toward people of power during his arrest and reveals a model by which Christians should not resist others (Luke 18:49–51). The disciples later exhibited forms of resistance that followed the model set forth by Jesus (Acts 4:18–20), presenting it as a

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<sup>5</sup> Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Irvin and Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, 162. Irvin and Sunquist disagree with Eusebius that Constantine came to the faith at this time, but they acknowledge that the writings of Eusebius portray Constantine's October 312 CE vision as a conversion experience.

<sup>7</sup> Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Cole, *When God Says War is Right*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 33.

more viable and acceptable form of Christian resistance. These examples provide a guide for Christians regarding the appropriate exercise of power in their opposition to others.

The Gospels and Acts,<sup>11</sup> the New Testament Epistles,<sup>12</sup> and Revelation<sup>13</sup> exhibit resistance to the Roman Empire. The book of Revelation provides the most detailed depiction of the conflict between the church and the worldly empire. This dissertation reveals that in the Apocalypse, judgment begins with God's household and warns of the outcomes for those who fail to hear God's word. The work analyzes the behavior of the churches of Asia Minor in the various power structures in which they find themselves and evaluates Christ's responses to communities regarding how they behave as people of power or those who lack power. The study, therefore, discusses appropriate forms of resistance and the exercise of power within the context of the church and the broader culture by highlighting the successes and failures of those who are to live as citizens of the kingdom of God.

### **Revelation as Reflection of Power and Resistance**

As early as 1920, students of Revelation encountered the work of R. H. Charles, in which he explained that the Apocalypse aims to provoke resistance to the institution of the Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> Since the time of Charles, others have provided support for the Apocalypse's presence among resistance literature.<sup>15</sup> According to Gregory Linton, the genre of a given work guides audiences in how they should understand the text they are

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<sup>11</sup> Diehl, "Empire and Epistles," 9–52.

<sup>12</sup> Diehl, "Empire and Epistles," 217–63.

<sup>13</sup> Diehl, "'Babylon': Then, Now, and 'Not Yet,'" 168–95.

<sup>14</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, xxii.

<sup>15</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 89–90; Barr, "John's Ironic Empire," 20; Johnson, *The New Testament*, 112; Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 86–93; Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 25; Westfall, "Running the Gamut," 251.



reading.<sup>16</sup> Writers have identified the book of Revelation as consisting of at least two genres—apocalyptic and prophecy.<sup>17</sup> Both of these genres serve the purpose of presenting material in a way that critiques the present system and calls for some form of change. Michael Gorman appeals to the prophetic nature of the book to highlight its position about worldly empire.<sup>18</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins notes that the apocalyptic features of the book provide a firm foundation for understanding the writing as resistance literature.<sup>19</sup>

Though various scholarly writings explicitly refer to Revelation as “resistance literature” or note that the work urges resistance, Rev 1–3, the portion of the text that initiates the call for resistance, receives little attention in the discussion. The first of the seven macarisms contained in the book (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14) appears in this portion of the text. This macarism pronounces a blessing on those who read, as well as those who hear and keep, the words of the book. Though reading and hearing the book may seem to be the easiest of the three tasks, audiences of the Apocalypse raise the question of what words they are to obey. The concept of obedience eluded Martin Luther to the point that he proclaimed, “They are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book; and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to keep.”<sup>20</sup> His statement highlights the necessity

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<sup>16</sup> Linton, “Reading the Apocalypse as Apocalypse,” 12.

<sup>17</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 1–9; Westfall, “Running the Gamut,” 230–58.

<sup>18</sup> Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 24. Though John composes the Apocalypse within the context of the Roman Empire, Gorman appropriately notes that “one of the primary prophetic purposes of Revelation is to remind the church, both then and now, not to give in to the demands or practices of a system that is already judged by God . . .” (25).

<sup>19</sup> Collins, “Political Perspective on the Revelation,” 252. In her work, Collins highlights how features that appear in Revelation that are considered apocalyptic maintain a common theme of imperial resistance.

<sup>20</sup> Luther, *Luther's Works*, 398–99. Despite his lack of regard for the book of Revelation, Luther later edits his 1530 preface to utilize the Apocalypse to demonize the Roman Catholic Church.

of exploring the significance of Revelation 1–3 and determining how it provides an interpretive framework for the remainder of the book.

Approximately two-thirds of all commands in the Apocalypse directed toward the audience appear in Revelation 2–3. This concentration of commands should come as no surprise within what David Aune identifies as a series of seven imperial edicts contained in the book.<sup>21</sup> John bases his presentation of the prophetic apocalypse on a theopolitical consciousness of Jesus as King.<sup>22</sup> This activity reveals that John models his writing after those of various Old Testament prophets,<sup>23</sup> whose writings served as resistance literature rooted in the kingship of Yahweh. John functions in the context of his Jewish tradition and urges his audiences to look at their present circumstances in light of their hope in the coming of the future kingdom and God's judgment of their enemies.<sup>24</sup> While authors address Christ's confrontation of the empire, the discussion of Christ confronting the churches regarding their demonstrations of resistance requires attention.

### **Authorship and Date of the Apocalypse**

The authorship and date of the Apocalypse rest at the center of debates regarding the book. One of the earliest references to the authorship of the book comes from Justin Martyr, who identified the author as the Apostle John.<sup>25</sup> Irenaeus identified the author of the Apocalypse as the same person who authored the Gospel of John, and Hippolytus,

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<sup>21</sup> Aune, "Form and Function," 182–204.

<sup>22</sup> Use of the name John refers to the implied author of the Apocalypse. For a detailed discussion regarding theories of authorship see Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 25–53. For an abbreviated discussion refer to deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way*, 31–34.

<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure," 355.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 25.

Tertullian, and Origen perpetuated this view.<sup>26</sup> While Collins asserts that acceptance of a traditional date of composition (c. 95 CE) leads one away from recognizing John, the son of Zebedee, as the author, her primary reason revolves around the idea that he would have written the book at an advanced age. While this John may have been of advanced age, his age does not preclude him from writing the book. Though Aune argues that a lack of evidence limits support for recognizing this John as the author,<sup>27</sup> there would be no reason to question the testimony of those in the early church regarding authorship.

While discussions regarding authorship of the Apocalypse has maintained connections with arguments about the authorship of the Gospel, Martin Hengel goes a step further and connects the authorship of the Apocalypse and the Gospel with that of the Johannine epistles.<sup>28</sup> He proposes an early date for the composition of the book, placing the composition around 70 CE.<sup>29</sup> Instead of attributing the authorship to the apostle, he identifies the author as John the Elder.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Hengel proposes the idea that the work resulted from a pseudepigraphical composition by one who followed John the Elder.<sup>31</sup> While the identity of the author may be difficult to determine, the lack of the author's description within the text fails to support pseudepigraphy.

J. Massyngberde Ford proposes the idea that John the Baptist composed at least portions of the book.<sup>32</sup> While she rightly recognizes that the writer identifies himself as John in four different verses within the book (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), she does not attribute any of the passages that mention the name to John the Baptist. Massyngberde Ford

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<sup>26</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, liii.

<sup>28</sup> Hengel, *Johannine Question*, 127.

<sup>29</sup> Hengel, *Johannine Question*, 126-27.

<sup>30</sup> Hengel, *Johannine Question*, 124.

<sup>31</sup> Hengel, *Johannine Question*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 28.

attributes only Rev 4–11 to John the Baptist and notes that Rev 12–22 came from another individual.<sup>33</sup> Since she asserts that Rev 1–3 functions as a Christian addition to the book,<sup>34</sup> this means that none of the self-attestations to the authorship of the Apocalypse appear in the portion of the book she attributes to him as the author.

While some theories exist regarding the identity of the author of Revelation, the variety of ideas reveals that an absolute determination of the author's identity "is a hopeless endeavour."<sup>35</sup> While the testimony of the early church leads to the identity of the author as the Apostle John, the debate regarding authorship continues. Rather than attempt to narrow the identity of the author, the use of the name John will reflect the author, as noted in the text of the Apocalypse.

Closely connected to the discussion of authorship, the date of the Apocalypse impacts the discussion. While the most popular and traditional position places the composition of Revelation during the reign of Domitian,<sup>36</sup> other positions place the writing earlier and later.<sup>37</sup> The reference to Babylon directs readers to a post-70 CE date. This reference highlights the destruction of the temple.<sup>38</sup> While Friesen explains that the Trajanic period reflects some of the concepts John's work envisions and seems like a reasonable time for the composition of the work,<sup>39</sup> such a late date only seems to detract from the future time of John's vision. No matter how one dates the work, Beale adequately explains that no matter how early or late one dates the writing, "the book

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<sup>33</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 15–16.

<sup>37</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 150.

could be understood as a polemic against Rome and especially against compromise with ungodly Roman culture."<sup>40</sup>

### Literary Context, Genre, and Interpretation

As stated earlier, the genre of apocalypse contributes to the book's composition. In addition to the historical background of Revelation, the identification of Revelation as apocalypse lends support to the idea of the text as an instance of resistance literature. Anthea Portier-Young explains that the earliest of these writings resisted the imperial contexts in which the apocalyptists composed them.<sup>41</sup> She argues that writings contained in 1 Enoch, namely, the *Book of Watchers*, the *Apocalypse of Weeks*, and the *Book of Dreams* provide evidence for this.<sup>42</sup> Though writers often associate the apocalypse genre with discursive resistance, not all apocalyptic writings exhibit this characteristic. According to John J. Collins, 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra are not resistance writings.<sup>43</sup>

If, based on Collins' assertion, not all apocalyptic literature functions as resistance literature, there must be some criteria that determine whether an apocalypse genre functions as resistance writing. Samuel Eddy asserts that the presentation of kingship within apocalypse, as exemplified in the writings of those in the ancient Near East who wrote in "opposition to Hellenistic imperialism," serves as such a feature.<sup>44</sup> He explains that these writings, composed by the Jews,<sup>45</sup> as well as the Persians,<sup>46</sup> demonstrate resistance to domination by the Greeks.

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<sup>40</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Portier-Young, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 145.

<sup>42</sup> Portier-Young, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 146.

<sup>43</sup> Collins, "Apocalypse and Empire," 18.

<sup>44</sup> Eddy, *The King is Dead*, vii.

<sup>45</sup> Eddy, *The King is Dead*, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Eddy, *The King is Dead*, 9.

Since not all apocalypses function as resistance literature and not all resistance literature is confined to the genre of apocalypse, it remains within the realm of possibility that other forms of literature, besides those belonging to the genre of apocalypse, can function as resistance literature.<sup>47</sup> Though certain genres, such as apocalypse, function as resistance literature more than others, the primary feature of a work that discursively identifies it as resistance literature is a presentation of an alternative to the dominant discourse of the society in which the author produced it. Walter Brueggemann presents this idea within the context of the writings of the Hebrew Bible when he explains, "The resistance Israel practices vis-à-vis Egypt is rooted in the most elemental convictions that Yahweh wills otherwise."<sup>48</sup>

The genre of prophecy also contributes to the composition of the Apocalypse. As resistance literature, prophecy aims to produce hope in the midst of doubt. It also provides the understanding that God speaks from his desire for change. Therefore, it serves as another form of literature within the Christian Jewish tradition that was used to promote resistance. Jan Fekkes asserts that John understands himself to function as a prophet.<sup>49</sup> Sorin Martjan goes on to explain that John recognizes himself as having the same mission as the prophets of old.<sup>50</sup> The understanding that the book of Revelation contains more connections to the Old Testament than any other New Testament work leads to the conclusion that John had access to some form of the Old Testament text. Study of the Old Testament prophetic writings reveals that the prophets invoked the use

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<sup>47</sup> Portier-Young, "Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," 154-56.

<sup>48</sup> Brueggemann, *Texts That Linger*, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 38.

<sup>50</sup> Martjan, "Prophétisme et Symbolisme," 248.

of previously presented biblical texts for their writings.<sup>51</sup> Fekkes explains that John presents himself, as well as the other Christian prophets, as a present-day continuation of the Jewish-Christian tradition.<sup>52</sup> In addition to this, he places his work on the same level as the writings of the Old Testament prophets.<sup>53</sup> As one within the same prophetic tradition, it seems possible that John would have used the same methods of composition as found in the writings of his prophetic predecessors.

### Previous Approaches

When examining Revelation's messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor, preceding studies require attention. Multiple studies have influenced Revelation studies. Studies that do not focus on the messages to the assemblies give the text of Rev 2–3 some attention.

When considering the various studies that relate to Rev 2–3, four specific categories seem prominent. The studies regarding the historical setting and background of the congregations provide some theories for what may have been taking place before, during, and after the time of the book's composition. The study of the form of the contents of Rev 2–3 become essential for interpreting the text, as well as the material that comes after it. Examination of the language of the messages highlights John's strategies for communicating with his audience and the emphases he places on the messages to each congregation. The final group of studies regarding the messages creates a direct link between the text of the messages and the later portions of the Apocalypse. While each area of study uniquely contributes to readers' understanding of the Apocalypse, the

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<sup>51</sup> Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 5; Boda and Floyd, *Tradition in Transition*, xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and the Prophetic Traditions*, 53; cf. Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 126. John's explains that the author or Revelation "writes as a prophet in the Hebrew tradition of prophecy."

<sup>53</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse*, 3.

studies presented reveal that continued study remains a necessity in gaining a greater understanding of the messages to the seven congregations and how they impact the interpretation of the entire Apocalypse.

### Historical Setting

In their *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek*, Westcott and Hort explain that the “historical landmarks are obscure” in the Apocalypse.<sup>54</sup> The lack of historical context in which to place the text of Revelation created difficulty in interpretation, leaving people’s understanding of the text open to conjecture and speculation. Sir William Ramsay’s *Letters to the Seven Churches* and Colin J. Hemer’s *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* provide information regarding both the historical setting of the Apocalypse and how the original recipients may have read these messages within their local context. Both of their works contribute to the present-day understanding of the historical background of the messages and the local cities in which the recipients lived. While Ramsay’s work continues to significantly impact the current understanding of the Apocalypse, Hemer builds upon the work of Ramsay to further enlighten readers regarding the historical context of the Apocalypse. Hemer’s work interacts with that of Ramsay but includes additional information, which contributes clarity concerning how original recipients likely read and interpreted the messages in light of their local contexts.

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<sup>54</sup> Westcott and Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 260.



### **Ramsay**

As early as 1904, Ramsay's *Letters to the Seven Churches* discussed the broader Greco-Asiatic culture in which the seven assemblies of the Apocalypse resided.<sup>55</sup> His combination of archaeology and history with the text of the messages revealed the significance of the local situations on interpreting the messages to the churches. Ultimately, he aims to provide an understanding of how the history and setting of the cities would have influenced the understanding of the readers in their respective congregations. This leads him to explore the impact of local temples, coins, city structure, and the various monuments in each city.<sup>56</sup>

While looking at the historical background of each city, Ramsay notes the power of Rome and the desire that the empire maintained for those within its realm to adhere to maintain religious and political conformity.<sup>57</sup> His work, which examines the relationship between East and West, as reflected in the messages to the seven church, provides a historical foundation for examining the seven messages.<sup>58</sup> This work presents a collection of materials regarding the sociocultural situation regarding each message. This approach enables readers of the Apocalypse to read and interpret the messages independently of one another in light of the settings of the local congregations while creating the opportunity to see the unique aspects of each assembly's local environment and message throughout the remainder of the book. Though later discoveries have required shifts in thought from Ramsay's original work, his writing laid the foundation for the work of Colin J. Hemer.

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<sup>55</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, xii.

<sup>56</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 41–52.

<sup>57</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 70.

<sup>58</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, x.

### *Hemer*

Hemer's *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* explores the background of the cities containing the communities to which John wrote in Rev 2–3. The purpose of this study furthers the work of Ramsay in attempting to utilize the text of the message to ascertain to which historical and social situations the text may refer.<sup>59</sup> The understanding of these various aspects of society enlighten readers regarding the backgrounds of the congregations' locations to shed light on various messages they received. Ultimately, Hemer's research provides some basis for interpreting the messages to the congregations. While he acknowledges that the information available to him does not provide sufficient evidence to come to firm conclusions regarding all aspects of the writing,<sup>60</sup> he explains that the material at his disposal lends some reasonable assistance regarding how to interpret the book.

Hemer's focus on the broader society of the cities mentioned in Rev 2–3 lead him to elevate one aspect of the culture over another.<sup>61</sup> His focus on the broader societies of the region takes priority over the biblical background John shares with the Christian communities to which he writes. For example, Hemer asserts that the text of Genesis would not have been the initial thought provoked by the tree of life, but the "paradise" of the Artemision.<sup>62</sup> In such cases, his approach eliminates the potential of the reference evoking thoughts regarding both Genesis and the Artemision.

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<sup>59</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, x.

<sup>60</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 44–45.

While Hemer notes the importance of the Old Testament for the interpretation of the letters, he gives little attention to those works outside of the canon,<sup>63</sup> which reflect the culture of the writing and the development of thought which may have influenced the author of the Apocalypse. As a result, readers must recognize that the Apocalypse alludes to the Old Testament, the New Testament, and extra-canonical writings, all of which aid in interpreting the writing. This aspect of Hemer's work seems to constrain readers in the discussion of intertextuality and the Apocalypse—and area that impacts how the original recipients would have read the messages and how present-day readers would also understand them. Despite this point, Hemer's work continues to make a significant contribution to studies regarding the messages to the seven congregations of Asia Minor.

### *Friesen's Critique of Ramsay and Hemer*

Steven J. Friesen uses his "Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse" to criticize both Ramsay and Hemer regarding their work on discussing the social setting and historical background of the Apocalypse.<sup>64</sup> One of the chief critiques Friesen provides for Ramsay's work is the political position Ramsay maintained in relation to the revolution of his day regarding the area that was once Asia Minor. He argues that Ramsay establishes "historical reconstructions founded upon little or no evidence."<sup>65</sup> Friesen questions Ramsay's archeological arguments and asserts that his historical arguments based on archeology would be unreliable. Despite these

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<sup>63</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 307.

<sup>65</sup> Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 300.

criticisms, Friesen acknowledges that Ramsay's goals led to new investigations in the realm of research regarding the messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

When discussing the work of Hemer, Friesen declares that it possesses the flaws of Ramsay's writing but deserves none of the praise. He goes so far as to say that "very few parts of Hemer's case are convincing."<sup>66</sup> The use of material from one city to support the local situation in another provides Friesen with the foundation he needs to criticize Hemer.

Friesen's critique of both Ramsay and Hemer leads him to explain that those engaged in the field of biblical studies should familiarize themselves with the methods of archeological research.<sup>67</sup> He explains that the limited number of biblical scholars familiar with the field can lead to a lack of balance in the field with a few who claim to have knowledge possessing power and going unchallenged. In order to avoid such problems, Friesen suggests that scholars engage in a systematic treatment of texts as "social productions related to their historical, political, and religious contexts."<sup>68</sup>

### Form of the Writings

While various discussions revolve around the form and structure of the Apocalypse, significant discussions regarding this topic revolve around Rev 2-3. The discussion has resulted in a variety of proposed ideas regarding how to classify this portion of the Apocalypse. Classifications of the text include letters, presentations of the covenant formula of the ancient Near East, prophetic lawsuits closely related to the covenant

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<sup>66</sup> Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 302.

<sup>67</sup> Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 306.

<sup>68</sup> Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion," 307.

formula, suzerain-vassal treaties, and royal proclamations. Each of these classifications provides some insight regarding potential readings of the Apocalypse and highlights the power and authority of the Christ over the recipients of the messages.

### ***Rev 2–3 and the Letter***

In his *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, R. H. Charles asserts that the entire book of Revelation constitutes a letter that maintains similarity with the writing of the Apostle Paul.<sup>69</sup> As he continues his discussion regarding the structure of the Apocalypse, he also identifies the contents of Rev 2–3 as letters.<sup>70</sup> In the body of his work, he says that the “letters” were independent writings sent to the churches and later edited by the original author to conform them to the Apocalypse and the purpose for which this later, expanded writing was composed.

Other scholars maintain the position that these writings function as “letters.” Mounce describes them as “seven pastoral letters” that the author addressed to congregations in Asia Minor.<sup>71</sup> He argues that John directed the letters “to real churches of the first century.”<sup>72</sup> Grant Osborne also adopts the idea that these writings are letters. He goes so far as to describe them as “form letters,”<sup>73</sup> noting the common structure among them. Ramsay<sup>74</sup> and Hemer<sup>75</sup> reveal their understanding of these seven writings as letters at the outset of their works. In supporting the idea that this material functions as letters, John Kirby argues that the structure of each subdivision of Rev 2–3 maintains a

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<sup>69</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, xxiv.

<sup>70</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, xxiv.

<sup>71</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*.

<sup>75</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*.

similar structure to the Hellenistic letter.<sup>76</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza takes a position much like that of Charles and argues that the entire book maintains an epistolary structure but raises questions regarding the historicity of Rev 2–3. While she recognizes the content of Rev 2–3 as letters, she sees them as a rhetorical device that reflects the overall state of Christianity in Asia Minor.<sup>77</sup> If she is accurate regarding the messages simply functioning as a literary device, this maintains the potential to raise questions regarding the validity of the works of Ramsay and Hemer regarding the historical situation related to the congregations.

### *Shea and the Covenant Formula*

When discussing the form of the messages to the seven churches in Asia Minor, William Shea asserts that they maintain a structure similar to that of the suzerain-vassal treaty used among the Hittites.<sup>78</sup> Shea continues his discussion of “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches” by arguing that the entire book of Revelation presents the concept of covenant.<sup>79</sup> He develops his case for this by noting that various components of the Apocalypse correspond to segments of the covenant form. He pays particular attention to the preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, witnesses, and the blessings and curses associated with the covenant.<sup>80</sup> Though Shea makes a reasonable argument regarding the parallels between the Apocalypse and the covenant form, his discussion of

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<sup>76</sup> Kirby, “Rhetorical Situations,” 200.

<sup>77</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 53.

<sup>78</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 71.

<sup>79</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 72–74.

<sup>80</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 74–76.

witness in Revelation falls short,<sup>81</sup> as the text calls people to witness in their culture, not to function as witnesses of a covenant.

As Shea continues his discussion, he focuses on the presentation of covenant features within Rev 2–3 and notes that each “letter” reflects the covenantal form.<sup>82</sup> He identifies the presentation of Christ with the preamble, the recount of Christ’s knowledge with the historical prologue, and the imperatives with the covenant stipulations. When discussing the idea of witnesses, he identifies the Spirit as the witness in each message and highlights blessings and curses, though he acknowledges the inconsistency with which curses appear.<sup>83</sup> Shea’s work has been influential in the discussions of the message to the churches and the discussion of covenant, highlighting the relationship between Christ and the churches.

### *The Royal Edict*

In his article, “The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1–3,” John Kirby acknowledges the possible resemblance between the messages appearing in Rev 2–3 and royal decrees within the broader culture.<sup>84</sup> This similarity is important in classifying the writings because “the seven proclamations in Rev 2–3 betray no single feature of the Pauline or early Christian epistolary tradition.”<sup>85</sup> Aune discusses “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches” and explains that the messages belong to the genre of “royal or imperial edict,” while the mode is a specific form of prophetic speech that he

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<sup>81</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 72–74.

<sup>82</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 83.

<sup>83</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 75.

<sup>84</sup> Kirby, “Rhetorical Situations,” 200.

<sup>85</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 195.

refers to as “the parenetic salvation-judgment oracle.”<sup>86</sup> His analysis of the messages compares the contents of Rev 2–3 with a variety of Persian decrees and Roman edicts,<sup>87</sup> highlighting the similarities between the different writings.

Aune goes on to note the presence of “prophetic letters” within the context of Jewish writings.<sup>88</sup> While he notes that various Old Testament writings present such “letters” (e.g. 2 Chr 21:12–15; Jer 29), Aune explains that the variety between these writings shows no single form of a “prophetic letter” within the Jewish traditions.<sup>89</sup> When discussing the parenetic salvation-judgment oracles, Aune explains that while this form of speech has its foundation in early Judaism, it developed characteristics among those within the Christian community that distinguished it from its Jewish form.<sup>90</sup> He asserts that the form that appears in the Apocalypse reflects the features of those oracles used among prophets within early Christianity. This understanding of the messages reflects the understanding that Christ functions as king and the recipients of the messages function as his subjects.

### ***Bandy and the Prophetic Lawsuit***

While Shea discusses the covenantal form in relation to the seven messages, Bandy builds on this idea by connecting the covenantal form with the concept of prophetic lawsuits. In his “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits in the Oracles to the Seven Churches,” Bandy bases his work on that of David Chilton and Gordon Campbell. Both of these preceding writers connect the language of the messages with that of covenant lawsuit and

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<sup>86</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 183.

<sup>87</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 189.

<sup>88</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 196.

<sup>89</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 197.

<sup>90</sup> Aune, “Form and Function,” 198.



compare the language and images contained with the messages with the prophetic books within the Old Testament.<sup>91</sup> They also note that the messages to the seven churches function as a particular form of prophetic writing that Bandy refers to as “lawsuit speech.”<sup>92</sup>

Bandy establishes that the lawsuit language functions as a particular form of prophetic speech by appealing to the work of George Mendenhall, who explains that the “messages of the prophets were essentially indictments of Israel for breach of covenant.”<sup>93</sup> As a result, Bandy highlights the relationship between the covenant form of the messages and the prophetic nature they reflect. When analyzing the messages to the churches, Bandy addresses the idea that these writings, like many of the prophetic indictments in the Old Testament, declare the expectations regarding how the people of God should live.<sup>94</sup>

With regard to the book as a whole, Bandy’s notes, “John wrote in the tradition of the OT prophets,”<sup>95</sup> highlighting the prophetic dimension of the of the Apocalypse. When recognizing the prophetic call to covenant faithfulness, Bandy provides some support for recognizing the messages to the churches as reflecting the language of royal or imperial edicts. Since he explains that the message to the congregation in Ephesus reveals their violation of the royal law, this covenant community stands in violation of the covenant they have with God.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, 15; Campbell, “Covenant Rupture and Restoration,” 75.

<sup>92</sup> Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits,” 179.

<sup>93</sup> Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, 19.

<sup>94</sup> Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits,” 198.

<sup>95</sup> Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits,” 201.

<sup>96</sup> Bandy, “Patterns of Prophetic Lawsuits,” 201.

### *Graves and the Vassal Treaty*

When discussing the genre of the material appearing in Rev 2–3, David E. Graves contributes to the discussion with his *Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*. In this work, he challenges David Aune's position that the contents of Rev 2–3 do not "rigidly replicate the generic features of *any* known ancient literary form."<sup>97</sup> Graves proposes the idea that the material does follow a known, yet overlooked, form. He asserts that the material follows (admittedly not with slavish rigidity) the form of "the ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties (ANEVT) via the Torah and OT lawsuit material."<sup>98</sup> His writing ultimately builds on the work of Shea and Bandy to reinforce the prophetic role of the material, highlight the continued function of covenant in the New Testament, and contrast the kingship of Christ with that of the Roman emperor.

In his analysis of the text, Graves follows the lead of Shea in noting the presence of blessings and curses within the material. Unlike Shea, who identifies no curse for the assembly at Smyrna,<sup>99</sup> Graves argues that the congregation's experience of persecution functions as its curse.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, he notes no curse for the congregation at Philadelphia, the only other community that receives no criticism.<sup>101</sup> The problem with his assessment of the congregation in Smyrna is that the church receives no reprimand for their behavior; this would contradict his understanding that the curses resulted from a violation of covenants or treaties.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Aune, "Form and Function," 183.

<sup>98</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 3.

<sup>99</sup> Shea, "Covenantal Form," 77–78.

<sup>100</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 162.

<sup>101</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 163.

<sup>102</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 102.

This work provides a detailed study regarding both the prophetic and covenantal aspects of the messages to the seven churches. Though he challenges Aune, he does so only on the basis of a comment that does not directly impact Aune's thesis. Ultimately, Graves reinforces the role of Christ as a king who confronts the congregations, which supports the kinship of Christ, as presented by Aune. Graves notes that the literary form of the congregation takes on a form different from that which Aune asserts. Instead of Christ issuing an imperial edict, Graves notes, similarly to Shea,<sup>103</sup> that the material reflects the covenantal form.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Wilson and the Case of Personal Preference***

While various discussions have taken place within Revelation studies regarding how to classify the content of Rev 2–3, there seems to be no consensus on how readers should recognize these writings. Wilson explains that the term “message” appears to function as an acceptable description among commentators, but he identifies the contents of Rev 2–3 as “letters,” based on tradition in studies related to the text.<sup>105</sup> Though he asserts that the classification of the writings serves as a matter of “personal preference,”<sup>106</sup> the literary designation of these writings maintains significance for interpreting them and the remainder of the Apocalypse.

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<sup>103</sup> Shea, “Covenantal Form,” 71.

<sup>104</sup> Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties*, 336.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, xi.

<sup>106</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, xi.

## Rhetoric of the Messages

Another area of interest within studies of the messages to the seven churches includes the analysis of what the author does with language in the composition of the text. While all of these studies discuss the use of language to persuade the audience to conform to the desires of the author, they each focus on a different area. Adela Yarbro Collins discusses the vilification of various individuals and groups. John J. Pilch examines the language of lying and deception that appears in each of the messages. Peder Borgen addresses the use of polemic in the text, while Paul Duff challenges the idea of persecution of the congregations. Steven J. Friesen studies John's use of sarcasm in his interaction with the congregations. David A. deSilva provides a discussion of the use of logical argumentation within the messages. Each of these studies provides some understanding regarding how the language Rev 2–3 aims to guide the congregation in social alignment and behavior.

### *Collins and Vilification*

In her "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," Adela Yarbro Collins discusses John's use of language in portraying his opponents.<sup>107</sup> She identifies the primary recipients of John's verbal attacks as the Jews, other leaders in Christian communities, and Rome.<sup>108</sup> One way by which she describes the language of vilification is as a reflection of the interaction.<sup>109</sup> She dedicates a portion of her work to discussing the vilification of each group mentioned above.

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<sup>107</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 308.

<sup>108</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 308.

<sup>109</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 309.

When discussing the interaction with the Jews, Yarbro Collins acknowledges that the identity of this group has been the topic of much debate in Revelation.<sup>110</sup> No matter the identity of the group, John's language presents some form of conflict, based on the depiction of these individuals as blasphemers who function as a synagogue of Satan.<sup>111</sup>

When speaking of Rome, Yarbro Collins argues that John vilifies not only Rome but those who function as Rome's allies. Admittedly, this portion of her discussion does not refer to Rev 2–3<sup>112</sup> but further demonstrates John's use of language in portraying those he opposes. She argues that the vilification of Rome and its allies aid in setting boundaries for the Christians, noting their separation from the Empire, as well as the refusal of recognizing the emperor as a real ruler.<sup>113</sup>

When discussing John's portrayal of those in and among the congregations, Yarbro Collins argues that John vilifies Christian rivals.<sup>114</sup> Though she acknowledges that the labels of Balaam and Jezebel present these opponents as "antitypes of characters in the ancient story of Israel who attempted to lead the people astray,"<sup>115</sup> she does not mention that these historic individuals were outsiders who came in among the people. This recognition of Balaam and Jezebel as antitypes would potentially lead to the understanding that those to whom John refers by these names are not Christians; they are outsiders who have infiltrated the congregations.

When examining the work, Yarbro Collins aptly highlights the boundaries that John establishes through his use of language. The identification of people as insiders and

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<sup>110</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 310.

<sup>111</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 313.

<sup>112</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 314–16.

<sup>113</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 315.

<sup>114</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 316–18.

<sup>115</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 316.

outsiders, based on behavior, provides for the readers the understanding that John and the communities to which he writes stand in conflict with those around them. Ultimately, this work reveals the power that John wields through his use of language.

### *Pilch on Lying and Deceit*

When exploring the language of the messages to the seven churches, John J. Pilch uses his “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches” to focus on the various ways in which the language of the letters reflects lying and deceit in the interactions of the congregations. Pilch argues that the author of the Apocalypse writes to congregations located in a culture that honorably views lying and deceit.<sup>116</sup> He goes on to say that such activity among these assemblies “overreached its boundaries and turned into a denial or misrepresentation of God and Jesus . . . which is the acme of shameful behavior for a believer.”<sup>117</sup>

Pilch notes that each message reveals some form of lying and/or deceit.<sup>118</sup> He asserts that some people lie in order to defend themselves, while others lie to avoid trouble or to obtain gain.<sup>119</sup> He explains that within some of the messages, those outside of the congregations exhibit lying and deceit, while many within the congregations, except for Laodicea,<sup>120</sup> avoid such activity. Pilch notes that for members of the congregations in Asia Minor even “defensive lies and deception are exposed and their practitioners shamed.”<sup>121</sup> He explains this in relation to these individual’s relationship

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<sup>116</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 127.

<sup>117</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 127.

<sup>118</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 130.

<sup>119</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 131.

<sup>120</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 133.

<sup>121</sup> Pilch, “Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches,” 133.

with Christ. For their actions, as members of his kingdom, have the potential to impact Christ's honor within the broader society.<sup>122</sup>

### ***Borgen and Polemic***

When examining John's so-called language against the Jews in Revelation, Peder Borgen argues in his "Polemic in the Book of Revelation" that the Apocalypse speaks positively regarding the Jews. He explains that the term Jew does not appear negatively, but that the text negatively depicts those who falsely claim to be Jews.<sup>123</sup> He goes on to explain that an additional reason to reject the anti-Jewish position of Revelation is that "Christians understood themselves to be a distinct group within a Jewish context, and even thought themselves to be true Jews."<sup>124</sup> As a result, to speak negatively regarding "the Jews" would have constituted speaking negatively regarding themselves.

Borgen explains that the book of Revelation expresses a Jewish character and builds on traditions of the Jewish people.<sup>125</sup> The text reflects this through drawing on various writings of the Jewish (and Christian Jewish) people.<sup>126</sup> In his discussion of the synagogue of Satan, Borgen demonstrates that the language of Revelation and other Jewish writings divides Judaism into subgroups consisting of the faithful and the apostate.<sup>127</sup> Such an understanding transforms the readings of the passages that have been used to assert that Revelation reflects anti-Jewish sentiments. Borgen asserts that the

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<sup>122</sup> Pilch, "Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches," 133.

<sup>123</sup> Borgen, "Polemic in the Book of Revelation," 276.

<sup>124</sup> Borgen, "Polemic in the Book of Revelation," 277.

<sup>125</sup> Borgen, "Polemic in the Book of Revelation," 277.

<sup>126</sup> Borgen, "Polemic in the Book of Revelation," 277-84.

<sup>127</sup> Borgen, "Polemic in the Book of Revelation," 282-83.

congregations, which John recognized as the true Jews, suffered “the threat of persecution from the synagogal communities.”<sup>128</sup>

Borgen acknowledges that the language of the messages to the congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia reflect some anti-Jewish sentiments. His view of anti-Jewish patterns of language does not reflect the popular or traditional position. He argues that the text reflects anti-Jewish attitudes exhibited by the synagogues against the churches—the true Jews.<sup>129</sup> This work provides an alternative depiction of the discussion of anti-Judaism within the Apocalypse.

### ***Duff and the “Persecution” of the Churches***

When discussing the Book of Revelation, Duff argues that the severe lack of external evidence regarding John, the churches of Asia Minor, and the policies and practices of the Roman Empire during the time of the book’s composition, which he narrows to the last quarter of the first century CE, requires that readers examine the internal evidence of the book to gain some understanding of the historical setting of the congregations.<sup>130</sup> He explains that the best source for such evidence appears in the contents of Rev 2–3,<sup>131</sup> which he refers to as “the so-called letters.”<sup>132</sup> This understanding leads him to focus his attention on the messages to the communities to argue that the language of the messages does not reflect any form of persecution for the congregations.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 291.

<sup>129</sup> Borgen, “Polemic in the Book of Revelation,” 284.

<sup>130</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 31.

<sup>131</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 31.

<sup>132</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 31.

<sup>133</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 31.



When discussing the messages to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, he notes that these “letters” provide no evidence of persecution among these communities.<sup>134</sup> While Duff asserts “that the seer *wants* the reader to believe that Antipas was martyred, and he also *wants* the reader to see Antipas’s death as symbolic of the relations between those in the church and those outside,” he argues that the lack of explicit statements regarding the circumstances opens the discussion to other possibilities.<sup>135</sup> His observations of the message to the congregation in Thyatira note the presence of Jezebel, but he identifies her as a leader among a segment of the congregation.<sup>136</sup>

Duff goes on to explain that the messages to Sardis and Laodicea do not provide any evidence of persecution.<sup>137</sup> He notes that the message to the congregation in Sardis provides the least information regarding the situation the community faces but reflects the understanding that the community had internal issues.<sup>138</sup> When addressing the message to the congregation in Laodicea, he also highlights this assembly’s unity in their actions.<sup>139</sup>

Duff concludes that the congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia experience no “current harassment or persecution . . . by imperial or local authorities.”<sup>140</sup> Though he acknowledges the threat of imprisonment as that which comes from the empire, he asserts that the threat is based on a future event and does not necessitate any present danger for the congregation at the time of the message’s composition.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 40.

<sup>135</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 38.

<sup>136</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 40.

<sup>137</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 46.

<sup>138</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 41.

<sup>139</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 41.

<sup>140</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 46.

<sup>141</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 43.

Though Duff concludes this discussion of the messages to the seven congregations by identifying the situations the churches face as internal,<sup>142</sup> he acknowledges that these writings reflect some conflict between the congregations and various groups and individuals like the synagogue of Satan and those who killed Antipas.<sup>143</sup> While he attempts to relieve the Roman Empire of any responsibility related to the opposition these communities face, he makes room for discussion when one considers the relationships that might exist between the empire and those the text depicts negatively.

### *Friesen on Sarcasm*

In his "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," Steve Friesen builds the work of Adela Yarbro Collins regarding vilification and Peder Borgen's work discussing polemic in order to argue that John presents a "sarcastic Christ" who expresses his sarcasm toward the congregations to whom John writes, those he identifies as church leaders, and synagogues.<sup>144</sup> Friesen asserts that the sarcasm that Christ expresses toward the congregation appears "as criticism of the angel of the church."<sup>145</sup> He uses the message to the church in Sardis to support his idea by noting that the congregation has a reputation for living but really being dead.<sup>146</sup>

When examining the sarcasm expressed regarding those Friesen recognizes as church leaders, three particular entities come to mind. He explains that, in the message to the congregation in Ephesus, those who call themselves apostles indirectly receive

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<sup>142</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 46.

<sup>143</sup> Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 46.

<sup>144</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 133.

<sup>145</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 133.

<sup>146</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 133.

sarcastic denunciation.<sup>147</sup> While Friesen notes the questionable existence of the second victim, the sarcasm minimally denounces the teachings of Balaam, which some within the congregation at Pergamum embrace.<sup>148</sup> The final leader to suffer as the victim of Friesen's sarcastic Christ is Jezebel. For Friesen, there is no doubt regarding Jezebel or the use of Scripture to satirize her in light of the figure in the scriptural tradition of Israel who bears the name.<sup>149</sup> The message reveals the rejection of her status as a prophetess and the identification of her teaching with Satan. In each case, the language of the text reflects the rejection of these people and their teachings.

Friesen notes that the most severe forms of sarcasm target the synagogue of Satan. While this group claims to be Jews, the messages to the congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia denounce them as liars. When discussing this denunciation, Friesen notes that John is not referring to the churches as the true Israel.<sup>150</sup> While he notes, "Revelation is a long text with ample space for John to describe the churches by calling them Jews or the true Israel,"<sup>151</sup> he fails to recognize that John does this through the fulfillment of the promise to the congregation in Philadelphia when those who receive the seal appear as the twelve tribes of Israel. While Friesen focuses a significant amount of his writing on the group John refers to as the synagogue of Satan, his work reveals that the sarcasm expressed in the messages does not function as rhetoric against the Jews, as the text "describes Israel and the churches as participating in a larger transcendent reality."<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 133.

<sup>148</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 133-34.

<sup>149</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 134.

<sup>150</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 137.

<sup>151</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 137.

<sup>152</sup> Friesen, "Sarcasm in Revelation 2-3," 144.

*deSilva and Reason*

In his “Out of Our Minds,” David A. deSilva challenges the position of Greg Carey whose states that John’s approach “depends not so much on his arguments against his opponents.”<sup>153</sup> While Carey argues that John does not make a logical case against his opponents, deSilva asserts that the text of the Apocalypse provides markers of “rational argumentation.”<sup>154</sup> Though he begins by discussing the primary strategies of argumentation used in the Apocalypse, he ultimately focuses his attention on the messages to the seven churches.

deSilva notes that not all of the Apocalypse reflects an appeal to logical argumentation. Instead, some of the author’s encouragement has its basis on John’s authority in relation to his audiences.<sup>155</sup> Though deSilva acknowledges the lack of logical argumentation in portions of the book, his admission does equate to a denial of the use of argumentation within the book. deSilva notes the presence of “obvious markers of argumentative texture,” such as *γάρ* (for) and *οὖν* (therefore),<sup>156</sup> but also explains that deductive arguments may be present without the presence of these terms.<sup>157</sup>

Based on his analysis of the language contained in the messages to the congregations, deSilva explains that the argumentation in the messages requires the recipients accept the standards and practices of the Christian culture of the first century.<sup>158</sup> Two of the initial ideas that require acceptance are Christ’s ability to intervene in the situations the congregations face and the idea John’s writings reflect the

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<sup>153</sup> Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse*, 163.

<sup>154</sup> deSilva, “Out of Our Minds,” 128.

<sup>155</sup> deSilva, “Out of Our Minds,” 126.

<sup>156</sup> deSilva, “Out of Our Minds,” 128.

<sup>157</sup> deSilva, “Out of Our Minds,” 128.

<sup>158</sup> deSilva, “Out of Our Minds,” 153.

perspective of Christ.<sup>159</sup> No matter the presuppositions that the readers must accept, deSilva reasonably demonstrates that John appeals to logic in his addresses to the seven congregations.

### Promises to the Overcomer

While the messages to the congregations receive a significant amount of attention, other areas of focus regarding this portion of the Apocalypse have also risen. One such area is the study of the promises to the overcomer, which appears in the conclusion of each message. When discussing this section of the messages, Grant Osborne argues that the theme of perseverance appears in each of these promises contained in Rev 2–3.<sup>160</sup> The works of Homcy, den Dulk, and Wilson analyze these portions of the messages and focus attention on the relationships between these promises among the messages to the congregations. Their works provide support for both intertextual and intratextual dimensions of analysis.

### *Homcy and the Blessing of Overcoming*

Stephen L. Homcy's "To Him Who Overcomes" discusses Christ's call to the seven churches of Asia Minor, which provides "a prophetic exhortation for his followers to triumph in him."<sup>161</sup> Homcy dedicates a portion of his work to a discussion of the seven churches.<sup>162</sup> He argues that the seven churches represent the universal church, noting that the situations faced by those in the Apocalypse still occur among present-day Christian

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<sup>159</sup> deSilva, "Out of Our Minds," 154.

<sup>160</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Homcy, "To Him Who Overcomes," 193.

<sup>162</sup> Homcy, "To Him Who Overcomes," 194–96.

communities.<sup>163</sup> He explains that, just like today, overcoming requires different things from each community, based on their situation.<sup>164</sup> His work notes that while the congregations each face different situations and overcome in different ways, the promises to the overcomer in each assembly “share in different blessings of the coming age.”<sup>165</sup>

While seven of the eight promises to the overcomer occur within the context of the messages to the churches, Homcy dedicates majority of his discussion to other portions of the book where he identifies the throne room scene of Rev 4–5 as the basis of the overcomer’s triumph and a catalyst to heed the call to overcome that appears in the messages to the congregations.<sup>166</sup> Though he mentions the “different blessings of the coming age,”<sup>167</sup> Homcy focuses his attention on the reward of rising to life, like Christ, who overcame through suffering death.<sup>168</sup> While this reflects a victory for some mentioned in the messages, his analysis does not thoroughly discuss the idea of overcoming. Though he mentions the different requirements for overcoming, Homcy reduces conquering to martyrdom and identifies resurrection as the reward.

### *den Dulk and the Promises*

In his article “The Promises to the Conquerors in the Book of Revelation,” Matthijs den Dulk discusses the topic of conquering in relation not only to the text of Rev 2–3. He also notes the presence of the term *νικᾶω* in other passages of Revelation. Based on the similar presentation of the verb *νικᾶω* in the message to the churches and in Rev 21:7, den Dulk

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<sup>163</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 194.

<sup>164</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 193.

<sup>165</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 195.

<sup>166</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 196–97.

<sup>167</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 193.

<sup>168</sup> Homcy, “To Him Who Overcomes,” 200.

proposes the idea that the promises to the overcomer in the individual messages maintain some level of cohesion.<sup>169</sup> He argues that the promises to the conqueror highlight a progression of salvation history.<sup>170</sup> Within this framework, he focuses his attention on the relationship between God and humanity, which ends with participation in Christ's eschatological reign.<sup>171</sup>

While den Dulk looks back at salvation history, Alexander Stewart aptly notes, "John does not seem to be looking back . . . but forward to life and participation in God's new creation."<sup>172</sup> While the promise to the conqueror in Ephesus maintains a compelling connection with the Genesis narrative, the analysis fails to provide references for all the promises in the messages, namely the congregations in Philadelphia and Laodicea.<sup>173</sup> Because the work refers readers to the final promise to the conqueror where the promise relates to the inheritance and sonship, den Dulk emphasizes the theme of relationship and uses it as the common theme among each of the promises to the conqueror.<sup>174</sup> While den Dulk rightly connects the promises to the conquerors in Rev 2-3 with the additional promise in Rev 21:7, he does not discuss what the conqueror inherits (Rev 21:1-6). Acknowledgment of this aspect of the final promise reveals that access to the holy city and the benefits associated with it connect each of the promises with access to the holy city.

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<sup>169</sup> den Dulk, "Promises to the Conquerors," 516.

<sup>170</sup> den Dulk, "Promises to the Conquerors," 516.

<sup>171</sup> den Dulk, "Promises to the Conquerors," 521.

<sup>172</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 97.

<sup>173</sup> den Dulk, "Promises to the Conquerors," 521.

<sup>174</sup> den Dulk, "Promises to the Conquerors," 522.

### *Wilson and the Victor Sayings*

In his monograph, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation*, Mark Wilson examines the conclusion of the message to each congregation. He identifies the units as letters, which he divides into seven parts.<sup>175</sup> Because of his attention to the victor sayings, he dedicates a portion of his work to the discussion of victory within a biblical context. Here, he concludes that readers of the Apocalypse should recognize the victors as all believers, not just those who suffer as martyrs.<sup>176</sup> Over the course of his study, he expounds upon each of the victor sayings and the promises associated with each declaration. Ultimately, Wilson discusses the final victor saying and reveals the fulfillment of each promise in the later portions of the book.<sup>177</sup>

Wilson examines Rev 2–3 in light of the entire Apocalypse, which aids in understanding this portion of the work in conjunction with the remainder of the book and provides a way by which to understand the latter portion of the book in light of that which precedes it. Wilson's discussion of Rev 2–3 becomes extremely important for readers as they explore Rev 19–22 and see the fulfillment of the promises to the victors that appear in each "letter."<sup>178</sup> His work highlights the function of the Rev 2–3, mainly the victor sayings that appear at the end of each unit.

In light of the promises made to the victors in each congregation and the fulfillment of the promises at the end of the book of Revelation, Wilson concludes that the victor sayings in the messages function in a variety of ways.<sup>179</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>175</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 64.

<sup>176</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 101.

<sup>177</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 173–229.

<sup>178</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 30.

<sup>179</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 254.



proposed multifaceted functions of the promises provide an understanding of how the congregations might have read and received the messages to the communities in light of their varied situations within the Roman Empire.

#### The Relationship of Rev 2–3 with Rev 4–22

When addressing the relationship of Rev 2–3 with the materials appearing in Rev 4–22, readers discover that scholars have given very little attention to the unity of these two segments of the Apocalypse. When examining the structure of the book, J. Massyngberde Ford attributes the present form of the text to the work of an editor who brought varied components together.<sup>180</sup> She asserts that the messages to the congregations “display a higher Christology than chs. 4–22,”<sup>181</sup> resulting in her argument for a later date for the composition of Rev 2–3. Leonard Thompson speaks of the unity of the Apocalypse, but he gives little attention to the messages in his discussion. He does note that the promises to the conqueror appear in Rev 21–22, which he connects via the promise to the conqueror that appears in Rev 21:7.<sup>182</sup> In addition to this, he explains that some images recur in other portions of the book.<sup>183</sup> The discussions of both Massyngberde Ford and Thompson regarding the relationship between the messages and the remainder of the book significantly ignore the majority of language, images, and concepts that recall for each congregation its unique experiences and promises within the context of the Apocalypse.

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<sup>180</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 46.

<sup>181</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 56.

<sup>182</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 45.

<sup>183</sup> Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 44.

### The Foundation for Further Study

Though multiple works have given attention to Revelation's messages to the seven congregations in Asia Minor, more work needs to be done. Studies like those of Ramsay and Hemer, which focus on the historical backgrounds of the messages, aid readers in interpreting the messages. Further analysis, which appears in this dissertation, provides insight regarding how the historical background and social settings of the messages also aid in the interpretation of the remainder of the book. The historical background of each of the seven congregations connects the situation of the assembly to later portions of the text that speak to the group's future. The discussion of the form of the messages to the churches continues to function as a subject of debate, but the reader's interpretation of Rev 1 should constrain how she or he will understand the form and function of the material contained in Rev 2-3.

While various authors discuss the language of the text in creating community boundaries for the author and his audience, the study of the text's language furthers the discussion by examining that which the language discusses in light of the relational distance the text creates. Though some of the studies above regarding John's use of language seem to focus on a specific theme that appears in all seven messages, this work will examine each message individually and note the unique aspects of the message in conjunction with the social dynamic reflected in the language of each message. Closely related to the language of each message is the connection of the language with other writings and later portions of the Apocalypse. For this reason, the intertextual analysis will further aid in the interpretation of each message while and intratextual analysis will

focus attention on how the later portions of the Apocalypse allow for each congregation to specifically see themselves in the world of the Apocalypse.

### **Conclusion**

The text of Revelation resists more than the empire. It resists those in Christian communities who respond to the empire in an unbiblical way, bringing judgment not only upon "Babylon" but those in the churches as well. John composes the Apocalypse in a manner that he presents Jesus Christ as a divine king who confronts the churches of Asia Minor regarding their allegiance to him. The text also provides audiences with an understanding of Christ's later demonstrations of power against the unfaithful and reward of the faithful to encourage the churches to maintain solidarity in their identity as Christ-followers and exercise resistance to worldly empire in a fashion that honors Christ.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

No text exists in a vacuum. Instead, each is conceived in the mind of and birthed through the mouth and pen of someone who presents an image of the world as he or she sees it.<sup>1</sup> These images consist of series of choices—both conscious and unconscious—made by those who compose the texts.<sup>2</sup> Their choices result from both the situations prompting the text's production and the history of the composer, including experience of and exposure to various ideas that occur in other texts. Therefore, texts serve as spoken, written, and visual reflections of various aspects of society. Just as authors do not produce texts independent of other texts, audiences cannot read or interpret texts in isolation from other texts.<sup>3</sup> In the way a writer or speaker constructs a text from his or her knowledge, experiences, and point of view, audiences of that text receive, read, hear, and interpret it in light of their frames of reference.<sup>4</sup> All texts communicate both implicit and explicit ideas. While readers and hearers may detect the explicit ideas contained in a text, questions abound regarding how one might discover the implicit ideas expressed via a text. Critical Discourse Analysis aims to answer these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 24–25.

<sup>2</sup> Fontaine, "Choice in Contemporary Systemic Functional Theory," 2.

<sup>3</sup> Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*, 100.

<sup>4</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 25.

### What is CDA?

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) materialized in the discussion of linguistics during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the late 1970s, Roger Fowler, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew authored *Language and Control*, presenting Critical Linguistics as a theory utilized to highlight the use of language as an ideological tool to control others.<sup>5</sup> Their approach aimed to contribute “to the unveiling of linguistic practices which are instruments in social inequality and the concealment of truth.”<sup>6</sup> They concluded that a functional theory of language that understands the development of language structures related to “the communicative needs that language is called upon to serve”—as opposed to a model that understands language structures as unaffected by social function—would operate as the best approach.<sup>7</sup> Their need for a functional theory of language led them to utilize Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics. Later proponents of Critical Discourse Analysis also noted a strong correlation between Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and CDA, highlighting the foundations of an objective approach in uncovering data to be used for interpreting a text.<sup>8</sup> This correlation prompted critical discourse analysts to develop approaches to CDA that could present the relationship between language, power, and ideology by studying “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fowler et al., *Language and Control*, 2; Wodak and Meyer, “History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology,” 2. Wodak and Meyer explain that the terms Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis are interchangeable, while noting the increased popularity of the term Critical Discourse Analysis over that of Critical Linguistics.

<sup>6</sup> Fowler et al., *Language and Control*, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Fowler et al., *Language and Control*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Young and Harrison, *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> van Dijk, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 352.

After the publication of *Language and Control*, few pieces of research related to Critical Discourse Analysis reflected collaborative research efforts, until over a decade later. Consistent collaboration began during the winter of 1991, when multiple scholars involved in diverse forms of Critical Discourse Analysis met in the Netherlands to discuss various approaches to Discourse Analysis (DA), giving particular attention to CDA.<sup>10</sup> Key participants included Teun van Dijk,<sup>11</sup> Norman Fairclough,<sup>12</sup> Gunther Kress,<sup>13</sup> Theo van Leeuwen,<sup>14</sup> and Ruth Wodak.<sup>15</sup> This meeting led to those involved finding common ground in their aims while acknowledging the diversity of their approaches. Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak note at least seven standard dimensions exhibited in the studies of various discourse analysts, despite the diversity of their fields or focus of study:<sup>16</sup>

1. An interest in language as it naturally occurs
2. Analysis of the text beyond the level of the sentence
3. Analysis beyond the grammar exploring how the language functions as societal action
4. The incorporation of non-verbal components of communication (e.g., images, body language, text appearance)
5. Analysis of interaction
6. Study of the functions of contexts of language use
7. Analysis of the phenomena of text grammar and language use.

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<sup>10</sup> Wodak and Meyer, "History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology," 3.

<sup>11</sup> van Dijk, *Prejudice in Discourse*; van Dijk, "When Majorities Talk," 57–82; van Dijk, "Ethnic Minorities in the Press," 221–61; van Dijk, "Mediating Racism," 199–225; van Dijk, "Discourse and Prejudice," 115–38.

<sup>12</sup> Fairclough, "Politics of Meaning," 45–55; Fairclough, "Critical and Descriptive Goals," 739–63; Fairclough, "Discourse Representation," 125–39; Fairclough, *Language and Power*.

<sup>13</sup> Kress and Hodge, *Language as Ideology*; Kress, "Linguistic and Ideological Transformations," 120–39; Kress, "Ideological Structures," 22–42; Kress, *Linguistic Processes*.

<sup>14</sup> van Leeuwen, "Impartial Speech," 84–99; van Leeuwen, "Persuasive Speech," 25–35; van Leeuwen, "Generic Strategies," 199–220.

<sup>15</sup> Wodak, "Courtroom Interaction," 369–80; Wodak, "Women Relate, Men Report," 261–85; Wodak and Schulz, *Language of Love and Guilt*; Wodak, "Comprehension and Intelligibility of News," 377–410; Wodak, *Language, Power, and Ideology*; Wodak, "Turning the Tables," 65–83.

<sup>16</sup> Wodak and Meyer, "History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology," 2.

While recognizing these universal assumptions of CDA, an adequate analysis of Rev 1–3, or any text, requires a narrower approach.

### **The Dialectical-Relational Approach**

The proposed methodology for this study maintains a foundation from Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a technique that began to emerge in discourse studies during the late 1980s. Though at its core discourse analysis relates to the idea of the text, critical discourse analysis takes the concept a step further and presents a study that "combines critique of discourse and explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality, as a basis for action to change that existing reality."<sup>17</sup> This approach reveals the underlying theory of language Fairclough espouses when analyzing a text.

Fairclough explains that discourse serves as a form of social practice, leading to the understanding that it functions as an action that is both socially and historically situated in relation to other aspects of the social context in which a particular discursive event or text occurs.<sup>18</sup> He considers this relationship between the text and the social context a dialectical one, meaning that texts—whether linguistic, visual, or some combination of the two—simultaneously reflect and have the power to establish social identities and relations, as well as systems of knowledge and beliefs.<sup>19</sup> In applying critical discourse studies to Revelation, it is essential to recognize that this study will focus on how the Apocalypse *resists* the power of the Roman Empire.

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<sup>17</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Fairclough, "Marketization of Public Discourse," 134.

<sup>19</sup> Fairclough, "Marketization of Public Discourse," 134.

### Discursive Resistance

Multiple scholars have asserted that the Apocalypse functions as resistance literature.<sup>20</sup> Despite this, readers often wonder or attempt to decipher what features of the text identify it as resistance literature as well as the object of resistance. A feature of apocalypses that accents their function as resistance literature is its presentation of an alternative perspective to the society's present state or likely trajectory.<sup>21</sup> Revelation provides an alternative reality to the social order in which John composed it.<sup>22</sup>

### Dimensions of Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis studies the use of language in texts but moves "beyond the level of description to a deeper understanding of texts and provides, as far as might be possible, some explanation of why a text is as it is and what it is aiming to do."<sup>23</sup> As CDA aims to move beyond a description of the text to an interpretation of the features manifested in the text, analysis of the text's features cannot provide an evidence-based approach for explaining the discourse. The descriptions provided by traditional SFL analysis serve as an objective foundation for the conclusions at which one arrives in their interpretations of texts.<sup>24</sup>

Though texts reflect the world as construed by the author, analysts must, when possible, compare the text to the historical context that prompted its production. This study, therefore, requires a historical orientation to determine some aspects of social and

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<sup>20</sup> Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 89-90; Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 86-93; Kiel, *Apocalyptic Ecology*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, "Origins of the Designation," 158.

<sup>22</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 187-88.

<sup>23</sup> Paltridge, *Discourse Analysis*, 194.

<sup>24</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 16.



discursive practices that aid in the production of the text.<sup>25</sup> This practice finds its basis in Fairclough expanding the understanding of texts beyond the basic idea of oral, written, or visual symbols to “a product of the process of text production.”<sup>26</sup> This expansion in the definition of a text broadens the understanding of the term discourse to “the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, discursive events—instances of language use or discourse—possess three dimensions or “complementary ways of reading a complex social event.”<sup>28</sup> They are the text, the instance of discourse practice presented (including the production and interpretation of the text), and the sociocultural practice presented in the text.<sup>29</sup>

### Text

Analysis at the level of text is what Fairclough calls “form-and-meaning analysis.”<sup>30</sup> He explains that both the form/structure of a text—also known as its texture—and meaning are interdependent aspects of a text that help determine how to understand the other.<sup>31</sup> Fairclough embraces an idea, much like that of M. A. K. Halliday, which states that texts simultaneously function in multiple ways. As a result, CDA utilizes a theory that examines the various functions of language use. Because of this, he notes the need for a theory, such as Halliday’s, that recognizes the multiple functions of a text, as reflected in

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<sup>25</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 134; Fairclough et al., “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 372; Reed, “Discourse Analysis as New Testament Hermeneutic,” 234. Reed explains, “Critical Discourse Analysis . . . must of necessity be historically oriented if it is to be able to identify those in power who create manipulative discourse and the social contexts in which it is carried out.”

<sup>26</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 136.

<sup>29</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 136.

<sup>30</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 136.

<sup>31</sup> Fairclough, “Discourse and Text,” 194.

the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions.<sup>32</sup> Though both Halliday and Fairclough recognize language as multifunctional, the dialectical-relational approach uses different categorizations, thus giving more attention to what Halliday describes as the ideational and interpersonal functions of language. Fairclough explains that he does not “distinguish a separate ‘textual’ function” but incorporates it into Halliday’s presentation of the interpersonal metafunction.<sup>33</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen provide support for this idea, noting the textual metafunction as an “enabling” function, since the interpersonal and ideational metafunctions “depend on being able to build up sequences of discourse, organizing the discursive flow and creating cohesion and continuity as it moves along.”<sup>34</sup> They go so far as to identify only two principal functions of language: finding meaning in experiences and interpreting social interaction.<sup>35</sup> Fairclough asserts that the interpersonal metafunction reflects both social identities and social relations, while the ideational metafunction reflects systems of knowledge and belief.<sup>36</sup> Despite what some may perceive as Fairclough’s diminished view of the textual metafunction, he notes that he incorporates this concept into his idea of Action, which he closely relates to Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 134; Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 29–30.

<sup>33</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 58. The language Fairclough uses to refer to these functions/meanings of texts varies from work to work. In *Analysing Discourse*, he refers to “Action, Representation, and Identification.” In *Media Discourse*, he discusses, “relations, representations, and identities.” This work, unless quoting a text, will aim for consistently using “social relations, systems of knowledge and belief, and social identities.”

<sup>37</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 27. Though Fairclough attempts to present Action as corresponding to Halliday’s interpersonal metafunction, he explains that Action “puts more emphasis on text as a way of (inter)acting in social events, and it can be seen as incorporating Relation (enacting social relations).”

Though Fairclough's terminology differs from that of Halliday, this study will use Halliday's nomenclature to describe the language of Revelation's text. Lynne Young and Brigid Fitzgerald recognize SFL as foundational to CDA and continue to use Halliday's language.<sup>38</sup> Analysis at the level of text will examine Halliday's ideational metafunction to provide information that guides the interpretation of the text, highlighting how text producers identify those within the world of the text and the activities associated with them.

### ***Representation of Social Actors***

Analysis of representational strategies examines the choices a text producer makes in presenting individuals and groups to the audience. David Machin and Andrea Mayr explain, "there exists no neutral way to represent a person."<sup>39</sup> As a result, any possible way a communicator chooses to present an individual or entity will highlight "certain aspects of identity we wish to draw attention to or omit."<sup>40</sup> Machin and Mayr, in agreement with Fairclough, explain that text producers have a choice in how they represent social actors.<sup>41</sup> These choices "draw attention to certain aspects of identity" and guide audiences in developing specific thoughts and attitudes toward social actors.<sup>42</sup>

When identifying people or personified entities within a text, Fairclough makes a distinction between social actors and participants. According to Fairclough, not all social actors are participants, and not all participants are social actors. Theo van Leeuwen provides support for this understanding when he explains that linguistic agency, as

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<sup>38</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 325.

<sup>39</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 77.

<sup>41</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 145.

<sup>42</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 77.

expressed through the grammatical role of “Agent,” does not serve as the only means for realizing sociological agency.<sup>43</sup> Authors express such agency with possessive pronouns and prepositional phrases.<sup>44</sup>

For example, in the clause “James kicked the ball,” both James and ball are participants, but only James is a social actor, but in the clause “James kicked John,” John and James are both participants and social actors. Unlike participants, social actors may appear in circumstances of clauses.<sup>45</sup> In the clause, “Hannah kicked the ball toward James,” Hannah and ball are participants, but Hannah and James are social actors.

### *Pronoun Use*

Pronoun use can emphasize distinctions between various groups of people. In John 4:22, Jesus speaks to a woman he encounters at a well and says *ὕμεῖς προσκυνεῖτε δὲ οὐκ οἴδατε· ἡμεῖς προσκυνοῦμεν δὲ οἴδαμεν* (You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know). When Jesus makes this statement, he creates a distinction between the Samaritans (*ὕμεῖς*, ‘you’) and the Jews (*ἡμεῖς*, ‘we’), highlighting the difference in knowledge between the two groups regarding the worship of God. In many languages, like Greek, the use of pronouns is not always necessary. The use of pronouns often adds emphasis, because verbs often reflect the person and number referenced in the text. If the author omitted the pronouns, the translation would remain the same. The term *προσκυνεῖτε* is a second-person plural verb that one may render as ‘you worship,’ while the term *προσκυνοῦμεν* is a first-person plural verb that one could render as ‘we worship.’ First

<sup>43</sup> van Leeuwen, “Representation of Social Actors,” 32–33.

<sup>44</sup> van Leeuwen, *Discourse and Practice*, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*, 145.

John 2:19 provides an example where the subject of the action is not emphasized but is expressed through the verb, while a pronoun is used to identify the author and the audience as social actors in the writing. John explains to those in the church ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐξῆλθαν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν (They went out from us, but they were not of us.), pointing out the separation between “them” (those who departed) and “us” (those who remained). Not only does the use of such language make distinctions between groups, but it can serve to align the speaker or writer with an intended audience.<sup>46</sup>

Text producers also use pronouns to present themselves, their audiences, and social actors in the world of the text in alignment with or against a particular idea or group.<sup>47</sup> Such use of pronouns can generate the expectation that, even when text recipients deviate from the expectation of the text producer, the audience should hold the same view as, or identify in some way with, the author. The use of inclusive pronouns has the power to background the distinctions between individuals and highlight their commonality.<sup>48</sup> In 1 Thess 4:13–14a, the author explains Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπῆσθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη (Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, in order that you may not grieve as also the rest, those who do not have hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead). In this situation, the writer notes “we”—Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy—who do not desire the ignorance of the Thessalonians. As Paul begins to make his case for the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, he groups himself, along with Silvanus

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<sup>46</sup> Davies, *Oppositions and Ideology*, 189–95.

<sup>47</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 84.

<sup>48</sup> Liu, “Construction of Patriotic Discourse,” 60.

and Timothy, with his audience based on the common belief of Jesus's death and resurrection. The commonality between Paul and his audience possesses the potential to align the reader with the aim of his writing and accept the presented material as that with which they should agree.<sup>49</sup>

### ***Representation Strategies***

How a text represents social actors has the potential not only to reveal how a writer/speaker views them but also denote social relations between them.<sup>50</sup> In the opening of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul introduces himself as δούλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (a slave of Jesus Christ). The representation of Paul as Christ's slave reveals the social relation that he is "subservient to [and] controlled by" Christ, whom Paul recognizes as his master.<sup>51</sup> This presentation of Paul as Christ's slave presents him as one who is functioning under the directives of Jesus. In some respect, Paul presents his very writing as that which is prompted by Christ.

### **Classification of Social Actors**

When discussing the representation of social actors and the choices text producers make when representing various entities, Theo van Leeuwen also discusses the various ways by which an author may classify social actors and the effects these classifications may have on the audience.<sup>52</sup> Though he provides an extensive list, this discussion will focus on

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<sup>49</sup> Liu, "Construction of Patriotic Discourse," 60.

<sup>50</sup> van Leeuwen, "Representation of Social Actors," 43.

<sup>51</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 471.

<sup>52</sup> van Leeuwen, "Representation of Social Actors," 32–72.

three forms of classification: individualization, collectivization, and suppression of social actors.

### Individualization vs. Collectivization

Authors may represent social actors as individuals (individualization) or as groups or collectives (collectivization). David Machin and Theo van Leeuwen assert that individualization brings social actors closer to the audience, while generic representations through collectivization may have the opposite effect.<sup>53</sup> The Gospel of John presents cases of collectivization in the various presentations of the Pharisees. At the beginning of John's gospel, John introduces a group known as the Pharisees. John 1:24 states *Καὶ ἀπεσταλμένοι ἦσαν ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων* (and they had been sent from the Pharisees). This initial presentation of the Pharisees does not provide much information. In the later presentations of the Pharisees throughout the Gospel, John consistently construes them as standing in opposition to Jesus.

Though John represents these social actors through collectivization, the audience can identify with members of this collective by way of individualization. John 3:1 opens by introducing *ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τῶν Φαρισαίων, Νικόδημος ὄνομα αὐτῷ* (a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus). This man, though a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, has his name revealed. This individualization of Nicodemus causes him to stand out from the other Pharisees. He does not oppose Jesus. The individualization of Nicodemus also becomes vital for later portions of John's narrative. As the only Pharisee individualized in John's Gospel, John presents him making arguments among the Sanhedrin that would

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<sup>53</sup> Machin and van Leeuwen, *Global Media Discourse*, 81–84.

benefit Jesus (7:50–51). John also notes that Nicodemus aids in the burial of Jesus (19:39). The distancing between the audience and the Pharisees, by way of their representation, may serve as one of the reasons why they are consistently seen in a negative light by many Christian writers.

### Representation of Action

When discussing the ideational metafunction, Halliday explains that “language provides a theory of human experience, and certain of these resources of the lexicogrammar of every language are dedicated to that function.”<sup>54</sup> The interpretation of experience, as presented in the text, finds realization through the various processes experienced by those whom the writer presents in certain circumstances in the world of the text.<sup>55</sup> One primary method by which one objectively describes these experiences is transitivity analysis, which can unveil “our most powerful impression of experience, [which] consists of ‘goings-on’—happening, doing, sensing, meaning and being and becoming.”<sup>56</sup>

Transitivity analyses study text producers’ portrayals of the activities performed by those in the world of the text.<sup>57</sup> Such studies seek to describe “who is doing what to whom when where why and how.”<sup>58</sup> This understanding reveals that transitivity studies analyze three types of components: participants (who and whom), processes, and circumstances.<sup>59</sup> Participants are those entities—people, organizations, objects, or even abstract concepts—involved in the process and are often realized, nominal groups.

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<sup>54</sup> Halliday and Matthiessen, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 29.

<sup>55</sup> Webster, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>56</sup> Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 106.

<sup>57</sup> Halliday, “Types of Process,” 159.

<sup>58</sup> Eggins, *Introduction to SFL*, 110.

<sup>59</sup> Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 107.



Participants commonly function as the performers or recipients of processes but may also serve in other roles. Processes reflect the actions performed by certain participants and appear as verbal groups that realize actions or states of being. Circumstances provide analysts with answers to the questions of when, where, why, and how. Texts often reveal this information through adverbial groups or prepositional phrases.<sup>60</sup>

Fairclough explains that those patterns of activity “may be ideologically significant.”<sup>61</sup> Analysis of transitivity patterns has the potential to reveal which activities or process types a writer or speaker associates with certain participants, highlighting “who plays an important role in a particular clause and who receives the consequences of that action.”<sup>62</sup> Such revelations have the potential to show which participants possess power and which ones find themselves at the mercy of those powerful individuals.<sup>63</sup> When studying texts, analysts must attempt to remain as objective as possible. Therefore, they must concern themselves with how the text producer construes the events within the text, not how they might be in the world in which they live, as the text producer’s portrayal of events may provide information revealing their understanding of the world, which may or may not be an accurate reflection in the mind of the analyst.<sup>64</sup> It is for this reason that Halliday refers to the way by which the clause expresses meaning as that of representation.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change*, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 105.

<sup>63</sup> Janks, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 335.

<sup>64</sup> Bartlett, *Analysing Power*, 70.

<sup>65</sup> Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 106.

### *Suppression*

When examining a text, that which receives no mention may be just as important, if not more important, than that which the text states. Text producers may suppress social actors for any number of reasons. Sometimes, they assume that the audience already knows the information, or it is irrelevant for the audience. At other times, exclusion of social actors may serve to de-emphasize their role in an event. Even still, such suppression may function as a way to highlight the role or activities of other social actors.

Text producers use other ways to suppress social actors. When engaging in the critical analysis of a text, analysts must assess specific features of clauses. Questions regarding the voice—active or passive—that predominates may be helpful in understanding to whom the author desires to direct audience's attention. If passive clauses appear in the text, the presentation or suppression of those performing these actions should draw the analyst's attention. While a passive clause may be chosen to draw attention to that which receives the action,<sup>66</sup> the suppression of a social actor may require individuals attempt to determine the actor's identity and raise questions as to why the author would exclude such information from the text. Such questions have the potential to reveal significant information about language and power. Sometimes, the author may use the passive voice, but prevent suppression of the social actor by noting the instrumentality of the activity through the use of a prepositional phrase.

Comparison of the synoptic accounts of Jesus's baptism demonstrates how a writer may suppress a social actor. Those in the Christian tradition recognize that John the Baptizer baptized Jesus, but when asked who, according to Luke's gospel, baptized

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<sup>66</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 44.

Jesus, many of the same individuals respond with a puzzled look. Both Mark and Matthew mention John (Mark 1:9; Matt 3:13) and highlight his role in the baptism account. In Luke's account of this event, John receives no attention. The action of Jesus's baptism is mentioned in all three passages by use of the passive voice (Mark 1:9; Matt 3:16; Luke 3:21), which can be used to suppress the person acting, but Matthew and Mark note that John baptizes Jesus (Mark 1:9; Matt 3:13). Luke provides no agency for the baptism in Luke 3:21 but suppresses the role and activity of John. This suppression of John in no way contradicts the presentations of the other gospels, but it does highlight different aspects of the event, such as the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, which Luke notes via using the active voice. The presentation or suppression of social actors within the text may provide information regarding whom the author sees as important or which activities he or she desires to highlight, depending on the targeted audience.

#### Discourse Practice

The second dimension of analysis—discourse practice—focuses attention on the production and interpretation of texts. Fairclough explains that to engage thoroughly in discourse analysis, the analyst must also consider the processes of production and interpretation. The theory notes that analysis of the text should provide some “*traces of the productive process . . . [and] cues in the process of interpretation.*”<sup>67</sup> As a result, the text simultaneously serves as an artifact of production and a resource for its interpretation.<sup>68</sup> When analyzing the book of Revelation, or any canonical writing, it is important to recognize that the book functions as media discourse. Unlike speech events

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<sup>67</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 24.

where individuals can modify their communication/vocabulary, based on the feedback of their communication partners, the individual preparing media discourse must write to an “ideal” audience—an audience to which the real audience may situate itself.<sup>69</sup>

When approaching a new text or discourse, everyone reads and understands it through the lens of his or her preexisting “knowledge, experiences, and point of view.”<sup>70</sup> When text producers construct a text for a broad audience, they draw on “members’ resources”—the wealth of knowledge, experience, and perspectives—they believe are available to their ideal audience so that recipients/readers might easily interpret the text. These processes of production and interpretation result from the “members’ resources” available to the text producer and interpreter.<sup>71</sup> These traces and cues aid in presenting plausible conclusions regarding why the author constructs the text as she or he does, providing a foundation for interpreting the material. For this reason, a study of the text’s interdiscursivity, “the constitution of a text from diverse discourses and genres,” possesses the potential to provide significant data regarding how one interprets the text.<sup>72</sup>

Early in the development of the dialectical–relational approach to CDA, Fairclough noted that rather than focusing solely on linguistic analysis, a textual analysis consisting of both linguistic and intertextual study would enhance the results of one’s discourse analysis.<sup>73</sup> Fairclough, Mulderigg, and Wodak later assert the importance of analyzing texts in relation to preceding, concurrent, and later texts.<sup>74</sup> Fairclough explains that intertextual analysis aids in connecting the text to the sociocultural dimension of

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<sup>69</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 41.

<sup>70</sup> Young and Harrison, *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 10–11.

<sup>72</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 138.

<sup>73</sup> Fairclough, “Discourse and Text,” 194.

<sup>74</sup> Fairclough et al., “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 372.

discourse.<sup>75</sup> This connection exists because “properties of sociocultural practice shape texts, but by way of shaping the nature of the discourse practice.”<sup>76</sup> This study recognizes the importance of taking seriously the significance of intertextual relations in understanding the meaning and function of a text, particularly since biblical scholarship has noted the saturation of Revelation with Old Testament texts.<sup>77</sup> As a result, this dissertation will include an intertextual analysis of the selected text. This intertextual analysis has the potential to aid in the interpretation of the linguistic features assessed in the textual analysis.<sup>78</sup>

### *Intertextuality*

An intertextual analysis of John’s language, highlighting the relationship between his writing and others with which he and his audience were possibly familiar, will demonstrate his aim to communicate and encourage subjection among the churches of Asia Minor to Christ as ultimate ruler.<sup>79</sup> Analysts must remember that “intertextuality is not a method.”<sup>80</sup> This theory provides a lens—not a method—through which one may analyze a text. Admittedly, people use the term “intertextuality” in many different ways.<sup>81</sup> In New Testament studies the term often refers to little more than discussions of the use of the Old Testament in the New. This misappropriation of the term has caused

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<sup>75</sup> Fairclough, “Discourse and Text,” 195.

<sup>76</sup> Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 60.

<sup>77</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 61; Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 15–23; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 16; Trudinger, “Some Observations,” 82.

<sup>78</sup> Fairclough, *Media Discourse*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> This dissertation provides a brief introduction to the concept of intertextuality.

<sup>80</sup> Moyise, “Intertextuality and Historical Approaches,” 447.

<sup>81</sup> Irwin, “Against Intertextuality,” 227–28; Moyise, “Intertextuality and Biblical Studies,” 447–58. While Irwin asserts the term has “almost as many meanings as users” (227), Moyise explains that different forms of intertextuality exist, requiring individuals using the term to explain to their readers what they mean by their use of the term or abandon the use of the term.

Julia Kristeva, the person credited with coining the term, to employ the use of an alternative word—transposition.<sup>82</sup> This study examines both the source texts and the host text to determine what meaning John brings to the Apocalypse by incorporating this material into his writing and how this incorporation can create a new meaning for the source text, based on the new context in which he composes the Apocalypse.<sup>83</sup>

According to Kristeva, every text, whether spoken, thought, or written, serves as a mosaic of absorbed and transformed preceding texts and influences.<sup>84</sup> This understanding leads to the idea that John's use of source texts within the writing of Revelation does not mandate that those texts bear only the historical meaning possessed within their ancient contexts.<sup>85</sup> Instead, his use of a text can function actively and possess meaning, as expressed by John, given the new context in which both John and his audience find themselves.

#### Methodological Issues in New Testament Studies

Writings in biblical scholarship demonstrate an interest in the New Testament's use of the Old Testament. The wealth of publications on the use of the Old Testament in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles highlight the relationship between the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament writers.<sup>86</sup> The number of Old Testament references

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<sup>82</sup> Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 59–60.

<sup>83</sup> Van Wolde, "Trendy Intertextuality," 47. Van Wolde explains that writers have the capacity to create meaning, based on the new context in which the author places the text.

<sup>84</sup> Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 37.

<sup>85</sup> Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 19. *Contra* Kaiser, "Single Intent of Scripture," 69. *Contra* Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent," 151–80.

<sup>86</sup> The one exception to this statement is the book of Philippians. According to the fourth edition of the UBSGNT, no Old Testament quotations exist in this book. Though the same could be said for other New Testament writings, strong arguments have been presented for other uses of the Old Testament in these works (e.g., allusions and echoes). The only significant comments concerning the use of the Old Testament in Philippians relates to the possibility of a reference to Isaiah 45. For more information concerning this, see Silva, "Old Testament in Paul," 634–35.

appearing in the New Testament itself also demonstrates this. Despite the steady stream of publications in this area of biblical studies, one portion of the New Testament corpus receives surprisingly little attention—the Apocalypse of John.

A comparison of scholarly writings reveals that the discipline of biblical studies gave comparatively little attention to the use of the Old Testament in Revelation.<sup>87</sup> The amount of research in this area now continues to increase, as New Testament scholars agree that John's Apocalypse uses the Old Testament more than any other canonical New Testament writing.<sup>88</sup> A quick reading of Revelation reveals that it does not merely contain Old Testament references; since the majority of the text contains references to the Old Testament, the author of the Apocalypse owes a debt to the text of the Old Testament.<sup>89</sup>

#### Lemke and Intertextuality

Even as no text exists in a vacuum, the meaning of every text “depends directly on the kinds of connections made in a particular community between it and other texts.”<sup>90</sup> As a result, the foundation of arguments regarding the presence of intertextual connections rests in possessing knowledge of members' resources—texts at the disposal of both the text producer and the audience. In her *Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews*, Cynthia Long Westfall asserts that “the interpretation of the text at any point is

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<sup>87</sup> Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 61; Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 15–23; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 16; Trudinger, “Some Observations,” 82. When comparing the texts of Revelation with various Old Testament texts, one discovers that few, if any, Old Testament references serve as quotations of preceding material. Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cxxxv. This issue complicates substantiating Henry Barclay Swete's claim that over half of the Apocalypse contains Old Testament material.

<sup>89</sup> Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Lemke, “Intertextuality and Text Semantics,” 85.

constrained by the preceding co-text, and the preceding co-text operates powerfully in the readers' selection from a word's range of meanings."<sup>91</sup> In the same way, texts have the potential to constrain the meaning of other texts.<sup>92</sup> For example, Jude speaks of evildoers who walk in the way of Cain (Jude 11). Without access to the traditions within the culture regarding Cain (e.g., Gen 4:1–25; 1 En. 22:5–7; Jub. 4:1–6), Jude's audience would not know of what the way of Cain consisted. Therefore, the preceding materials in the Jewish–Christian scriptural tradition constrains the meaning of Jude's text.

When looking at the New Testament's use of other texts, readers discover, as Lemke asserts, "intertextual relations transcend the context of situation and depend on the context of culture,"<sup>93</sup> as the situation in which the same material appears may vary, though it occurs in the same cultural context. When exploring the meaning of a text, as identified by the culture, analysts must account for the community's recurrent forms of argument, rhetorical patterns, and ways of talking about specific topics.<sup>94</sup> Lemke explains that "construing intertextual relationships is itself a regularized set of social practices in any community."<sup>95</sup> This idea finds support in the Scriptures of Israel when Jeremiah's language drew upon the Torah as a foundation for arguments against the people of Israel regarding their lack of faithfulness to the covenant.<sup>96</sup> With the understanding that the Apocalypse is the latest of all canonical works,<sup>97</sup> R. H. Charles argues that various Old and New Testament canonical writings, as well as other non-canonical Scriptural

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<sup>91</sup> Westfall, *Discourse Analysis of the Letter to the Hebrews*, 29.

<sup>92</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 45.

<sup>93</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Text Semantics," 86.

<sup>94</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Text Semantics," 86.

<sup>95</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Text Semantics," 86.

<sup>96</sup> Sweeney, *Form and Intertextuality*, 84.

<sup>97</sup> The date of the Apocalypse receives significant attention in scholarship. This study presupposes a composition during the mid-90s CE. For discussion see Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 54–83.



writings, likely function as members' resources for the production and interpretation of Revelation.<sup>98</sup>

Though various intertextual approaches find a home in the field of biblical studies, the most suitable approach for this study of intertextuality in the Apocalypse finds its basis in the work of Jay Lemke. The two primary reasons for this include the use of Systemic Functional Linguistics theory as the foundation for Lemke's work in intertextuality and Lemke's aim to present an objective method of intertextuality beyond the restatement of material in another work.<sup>99</sup> The second reason becomes especially important, due to John's lack of use of introductory or quotation formulae.

Lemke identifies intertextuality as the principle of texts creating "social meanings against the backgrounds of other texts, and the discourse of other occasions."<sup>100</sup>

Launching from this idea, he explains that "intertexts of a text are all the other texts that we use to make sense of it."<sup>101</sup> Such an understanding of the concept presupposes a group's knowledge of other texts to establish a shared understanding of a text's meaning. In other words, the resources to which text producers and recipients have access constrain the potential meaning of other texts.

When exploring the potential relationships between texts, analysts must identify potentially relevant texts for both the text producer and the text interpreter. This relevance for both text producer and text interpreter may also determine which potential materials maintain no relevance to the text at hand. Analysts must also explore the kinds of meanings created based on the relationships established between two or more texts;

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<sup>98</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, lxxv-lxxxvi.

<sup>99</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 5.

<sup>100</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 1.

<sup>101</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 6.

such includes the exclusion of some possible meanings, due to the improbability of that meaning within a particular community.

When addressing the topic of intertextuality, Lemke asserts that in the same way Halliday's metafunctions provide three simultaneous ways of meaning, the intertextual connections within a text may also be reflected in three distinct, yet potentially simultaneous ways. The first would be thematic intertextuality, as reflected by the ideational metafunction. He explains, "We can immediately recognize that *thematic* intertextual relations, construed between texts on the ground of being 'on the same topic' correspond to semantic similarities in the use of the ideational-experiential resources."<sup>102</sup> The second form of intertextual connection he describes is orientational. Orientational intertextuality occurs when texts maintain "the same point of view" toward the audience or the content discussed.<sup>103</sup> The final form of intertextuality he identifies is organizational intertextuality, which he closely connects with the textual metafunction. This form of intertextuality "seeks to account for both structure and texture in the organization of information in [the text]."<sup>104</sup> While Lemke's method utilizes all three types of intertextual connections, this study will focus on thematic intertextual relations.

John's use of Exod 19:6 in Rev 1:56 functions as such an example of an intertextual connection. John opens the first doxology of the Apocalypse by focusing attention on the one to receive glory τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ (to the one who loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom,

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<sup>102</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 5.

<sup>103</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 6.

<sup>104</sup> Lemke, "Intertextuality and Educational Research," 5.

priests to his God and Father). Commentators note that Exod 19:6 is an intertext of this passage,<sup>105</sup> but few explain how they arrive at this conclusion. All three dimensions of Lemke's intertextual approach come into play here.

When comparing the text of Revelation with that of Exodus, readers quickly find that the terms used in the Apocalypse differ from those in Exodus, but lexemes that serve as significant features of both texts in establishing an intertextual relation show semantic relation. Revelation 1:6 refers to a group of people being "a kingdom, priests" to God. Though using different terms, the idea also appears in 1 Pet 2:9 and Exod 19:6 (LXX), presenting a recognizable discourse regarding the royal-priestly function of the audience. Though the language of 1 Peter and Exodus declares the people as βασιλειον ιεράτευμα (a royal priesthood), the terms βασιλειον and βασιλείαν relate to the idea of ruling or governing, while ιεράτευμα and ιερείς address religious roles and function. From a thematic perspective, these texts regard a group of people who function for God in both a governmental and religious role.

With regard to the orientation of the texts, the writer of Exodus presents the Lord as noting that this declaration of being his treasured possession and a royal priesthood is based on their hearing and obeying his words. Such a statement would be reminiscent of Rev 1:3, where blessings are declared on those reading, hearing and obeying the words in the book. In addition to this, John provides a foundation for recognizing that their status as a kingdom and priests is contingent upon their obedience to the commands of God; the messages that follow reveal these commands. John expands this idea even more by

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<sup>105</sup>Keener, *Revelation*, 71; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 119; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 36.

highlighting the promise of ruling extended to those who are faithful to Christ and overcome (2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 6).

In both the Revelation and Exodus texts, those who are to function as a kingdom and priests have been freed from bondage. In Exodus, the people have been loosed from the rule of the Egyptians, while in Revelation, the people have been loosed from their sins. The idea that they have experienced freedom from the bondage of one master highlights the understanding that they function as slaves to the one who has loosed them from their former bondage. This is reflected in the covenant that is made following the model of that between a suzerain and his vassal, as well as John representing himself and his audience as slaves of Jesus Christ.

### *Intratextuality*

When discussing intertextual thematic relations, Lemke asserts that they “occur between portions of what may reasonably be taken to be a single text.”<sup>106</sup> This study will use the term intratextuality to refer to relations that occur within a single text to distinguish it from intertextuality. Just as dialogical analysis between preceding materials and the text of Rev 1–3 will provide some explanation for how the materials impact the message of the text, intratextual analysis of the first three chapters with the remainder of the book will also demonstrate how John presents and expounds upon his message to the churches of Asia Minor.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Lemke, “Intertextuality and Text Semantics,” 87.

<sup>107</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 22. Bauckham examines the Apocalypse and explains “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 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

John measuring the temple (Rev 11:1–2) parallels the angel who measures the holy city (Rev 21:15). Both texts present the individuals having a measuring rod (Rev 11:1; cf. Rev 21:15). John receives instructions to measure the temple, the altar, and the people but not to measure the court outside the temple (Rev 11:1b–2a). The text does not mention John performing this act. The angel measures the holy city (Rev 21:16), and John provides details regarding the measurement of the city (Rev 21:16–17). John’s details regarding the heavenly city highlight the significance of the location and its ultimate replacement of the temple, as the presence of God transforms the city into a temple (Rev 21:22).

#### Sociocultural Practice

The third dimension of analysis—sociocultural practice—focuses attention on the context in which the writer produces the text.<sup>108</sup> Analysis of sociocultural practice often requires examination of the context of situation (the environment in which authors produce the text) and the context of culture (the background and history of participants that helps determine the significance of action within the culture).<sup>109</sup> There are many facets of sociocultural practice to examine. Based on previous studies of Revelation, as well as a preliminary study of the text, it seems appropriate that this dissertation focus on the political, economic, and religious aspects of culture. While John Christopher Thomas asserts that the historical background of the text provides “relatively little interpretive

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skillfully deployed compositional device.” This suggests that the intratextual analysis of the book serves reveals that Rev 4–22 provides various apocalyptic expansions of Rev 1–3 and allows for each congregation to see itself in later portions of the book.

<sup>108</sup> Fairclough, “Marketization of Public Discourse,” 137.

<sup>109</sup> Halliday and Hasan, *Language, Context, and Text*, 6–7.

value,”<sup>110</sup> this work analyzes sociocultural practice to expand upon that which the text communicates to its original audiences and the audiences of today.

The analysis of social practices will address various levels of social organization within the book of Revelation—Rome,<sup>111</sup> the Christian movement in the context of Asia Minor, John’s relation to the churches in the area, and the situation of each church. In addition to this, the prophetic tradition of ancient Israelite prophecy will be examined. This analysis moves beyond textual studies and integrates it with history to situate the discourse event within a sociocultural setting. This also enhances the analyses related to the first two dimensions of the study. In recognizing the way each dimension of analysis provides support for the other, readers must recognize that the analytical processes, as well as the dimensions of discourse, are interrelated.<sup>112</sup> This understanding reveals that each dimension of analysis can support the findings of another.<sup>113</sup>

### Limitations and Scope

For this study, it is essential to recognize that some may believe that Critical Discourse Analysis views all power negatively. Teun van Dijk explains that this “is a common misunderstanding” that reflects “a rather limited conception of power” and CDA.<sup>114</sup> For this reason, when analyzing the text of the Apocalypse, this study will not attempt to critique all power. Instead, it will focus on the critique of Rome, as reflected in the text.

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<sup>110</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 110.

<sup>111</sup> Porter, “Is Critical Discourse Analysis Critical,” 63. Porter notes the “need to have quantifiable historical knowledge” when utilizing CDA in one’s research. Because of this, commentaries and other writings that address the historical context of Revelation, as well as the history of the Roman Empire, will be used.

<sup>112</sup> Janks, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” 329.

<sup>113</sup> Ghachem, “Critical Discourse Analysis of Self-Presentation,” 550–58.

<sup>114</sup> van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*, 17.

## Procedure

Based on the understanding that discursive events and discourses are multifaceted, critical discourse analysis requires more than an analysis of the text. It requires a consistent examination of all three facets of discourse—text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The procedure for this dissertation will consist of four dimensions of analysis for each unit and subunit of Rev 1–3.<sup>115</sup> Though analysis can begin with any dimension of discourse, this project will begin at the sociocultural practice, transition to the analysis of the text, and conclude with discourse practice and intratextual connections.<sup>116</sup> The procedure for this study is as follows:

### Analysis of Sociocultural Practice

1. Synthesis of text and discursive practice to highlight reflection of sociocultural constructs of the author and how the text functions as a resistance to the broader culture.

### Analysis of Text

1. Identify social actors in the text unit.
2. Discuss social identities and relationships as reflected in the text, based on representational analysis of social actors.
3. Highlight social groupings based on transitivity analysis, identifying how John construes social actors and their actions.
4. Identify additional terms in the text that aid in the production of a resistance script and discuss how these terms contribute to the social relations already revealed via the analysis of representational strategies.

### Analysis of Discourse Practice (Intertextuality)

1. Identify potential discourses/discursive events that John incorporates into the host text.
2. Compare text themes, orientations, and structures to develop arguments for the most/least likely intertext.

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<sup>115</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 3. When discussing the structure of the Apocalypse, Richard Bauckham identifies the Rev 1:1–8 as the epilogue and marks verse 9 as the beginning of the visionary experience, with the transition occurring at the beginning of Rev 4.

<sup>116</sup> Janks, "Critical Discourse Analysis," 329.

3. Examine the context (of situation) of the text with the strongest intertextual relation and compare it with the host text.
4. Explain how the intertextual connections contribute to the interpretation of the texts.<sup>117</sup>

#### Analysis of Discourse Practice (Intratextuality)

1. Identify intratextual relations contained in the units of Rev 1–3 and the remainder of the book.
2. Explain how the intratextual connections contribute to interpretations of latter portions of texts.

This study will demonstrate that John's use of language, members' resources, and repetition all come together to demonstrate that he construes Christ as a divine king who confronts the churches of Asia Minor regarding their allegiance to him and provide the audience with an understanding of Christ's later demonstrations of power against the unfaithful and reward of the faithful to encourage the churches to maintain solidarity in their identity as Christ followers and resist collaboration with worldly empire.

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<sup>117</sup> Porter, "Is Critical Discourse Analysis Critical," 68. Porter asserts, "If one is able to restrict CDA to its exegetical rather than its hermeneutical potential, a more promising way forward, at least for the time being, seems to be open to it." Based on Porter's statement, it would appear that he discourages the interpretive potential of this approach. Because of this, it must be recognized that interpretation of that which is quantifiable is necessary to move the discussion forward.



### CHAPTER 3: REVELATION 1—POLITICAL POWER IN THE APOCALYPSE

When Pilate questions Jesus regarding his kingship, he explains that his “kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). This short dialogue supports the idea that the language of empire pervades the New Testament. The Gospels speak of Jesus warning his disciples regarding various kinds of opposition that they would face as citizens of his kingdom. He directly mentions political and religious opposition (Mark 13:9).

In Revelation, the conflicts between the church and the empire, as well as between the church and the synagogue, become extremely pronounced. Analysis of Rev 1 reveals that the kingdom of God stands in direct conflict with the Roman Empire, which the text argues received its power from Satan. Even though the church lives under the shadow of Rome, the most powerful empire on the planet during the time, John declares to his audiences that the congregations operate as a separate kingdom with God and Christ as rulers and that the congregations will see victory if they stand against the empire and remain faithful to God and Christ.

#### **Sociocultural Situation**

The history of the Roman Empire reveals historical foundations for early Christians resisting the Roman Empire. Before the coming of Christ, the Roman senate established sanctions that served as a foundation for eventually combatting Christian practice within

the empire. In 42 BCE, the Senate recognized Julius Caesar as divine.<sup>1</sup> This action, though predating Christianity, had the potential to negatively impact the lives of Jews, who practiced the worship of one God. Eventually, the imperial cult was established, which encouraged citizens throughout the empire to worship the emperor as a divine being.<sup>2</sup> Though debate abounds regarding the strength of the imperial cult, “the repression of persons who would not support this cult” was a reality.<sup>3</sup> The Empire extended the Jews an exemption regarding participation in the practices of the imperial cult.<sup>4</sup>

The rise of Christianity leads to a continuation of the monotheism of Judaism within the context of the Roman Empire. The recognition of Jesus Christ as divine serves as a significant distinction between the preceding Jewish religion and Christianity. It is important to recognize that Christian Jews did not see Jesus as distinct from the God of Judaism, but the incarnation of the God they already served (John 1). This recognition of Christ’s divinity eventually stands in conflict with broader Jewish ideas and, ultimately, the Roman Empire.

This distinction between Christianity and other forms of Judaism results in hostility toward the Christian sect and their no longer being identified as Jews, making them susceptible to the same mandate of imperial worship as other citizens of the empire.<sup>5</sup> Whether the persecution about which John writes is real, perceived, local, or universal, the situation within the empire served as a threat to Christians maintaining their

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<sup>1</sup> Ramage, “Augustus’ Treatment,” 236.

<sup>2</sup> Diehl, “‘Babylon’: Then, Now, and ‘Not Yet,’” 169–70.

<sup>3</sup> deSilva, “Conflicts Within, Fears Without,” 289.

<sup>4</sup> deSilva, “Conflicts Within, Fears Without,” 289.

<sup>5</sup> deSilva, “Conflicts Within, Fears Without,” 290.

loyalty to their faith. Such a situation lends weight to Teun van Dijk's explanation that specific conditions can cause groups to embrace specific ideologies "in order to defend its interests and to guarantee the loyalty, cohesion, interaction, and cooperation of its members, especially in relation to other social groups."<sup>6</sup> Based on this idea, readers of the Apocalypse must recognize the writing as resistance literature urging recipients to function as a cohesive group of Christ followers that maintains loyalty to Christ and experiences the promised rewards of such loyalty, as opposed to the threats of punishment to the disloyal.

### Textual Analysis

As a whole, the text of Revelation severely attacks the Roman Empire and the Roman emperor.<sup>7</sup> Revelation 1 opens the Apocalypse and provides an understanding for reading the visions throughout the book in light of the kingship of God.<sup>8</sup> In light of what takes place in the area of kingship, John presents himself in relation to the empire, God, and those to whom he writes his message. In the presentation of an alternative script, John asserts that his writing maintains both divine and royal origins coming from God. Based on his relationship with God, he recognizes God—not the emperor—as the ruler to whom he submits. In the midst of identifying with those to whom he writes, John highlights for his audience that they all function as citizens of a kingdom beyond that of the Roman Empire.<sup>9</sup> He depicts them as a kingdom that stands in opposition to the empire. They have Christ as their king and pledge allegiance to his kingdom. John lays the foundation

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<sup>6</sup> van Dijk, "Discourse and Ideology," 380.

<sup>7</sup> Franz, "King and I," 45.

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, "Vision in the Night," 7.

<sup>9</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 43.

in the first chapter of his writing for the churches to resist the pressures and the allure of Rome's power, wealth and intimidation.

### Social Identities in Revelation 1: John, the Church, and the Kingdom

John uses the opening of the Apocalypse to highlight his relationship with the church and the Kingdom. As a victim of the empire's exercise of power, John highlights himself and his recipients as slaves of Christ and citizens of his kingdom. This common description he shares with his audiences identifies him with them and provides a foundation for them to trust his message, which issues a call to follow his model of resisting the Roman Empire by exhibiting loyalty to the kingdom of God through obedience to Christ.

#### *Slaves as Citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom*

John does not stop the presentation of himself and the churches with the use of master-slave and therefore patron-client language. He also describes these slaves of Christ as citizens of a kingdom other than that of Rome. He identifies these slaves in this way via the use of the term *ἐκκλησίαις*, as he addresses the Apocalypse *ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις* (to the seven assemblies, 1:4). In the context of the New Testament and other early Christian writings, the term *ἐκκλησία* often refers to a "church." Though this is one way to translate the term, the context in which the word appears determines how one understands its meaning. Even within the context of biblical writings, the term *ἐκκλησία* does not always refer to a "church" or worshiping community.<sup>10</sup> Acts 19:32, 39, and 40 present such examples.<sup>11</sup> In this passage, the use of the term refers to a group of people. Craig Koester

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, *Victory Through the Lamb*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Tiegen, "Church in the New Testament," 378. While Tiegen acknowledges these usages of the

asserts that “in ordinary public discourse the ἐκκλησία at Ephesus and other cities was the assembly of citizens, who gathered for deliberation.”<sup>12</sup> The writings of Mogens Hansen<sup>13</sup> and J. W. Roberts<sup>14</sup> also provide support for understanding the use of the term ἐκκλησία in a broader sense than that of the worshipping community.

For John, use of the term ἐκκλησία within the context of language related to the presentation of these people as a kingdom, which also appears in this portion of the text, reflects such a use of the term. The alternate meaning does not demand a shift from recognizing that John writes to seven specific worshipping communities in Asia Minor. Use of the term requires recognition that the political meaning potential of the term may play a significant role in understanding how the text functions as a document of political resistance within the context of the Roman Empire since the worshipping communities (churches) can also function as an assembly of citizens in God’s kingdoms.

### ***John: Brother and Partner***

When John describes himself to his audience, he expounds upon his and his recipients’ participation in the kingdom of which God and Christ function as king.<sup>15</sup> He identifies himself with his recipients.<sup>16</sup> He describes himself as ὁ ἀδελφὸς ὑμῶν καὶ συγκαινωνός (your brother and partner, 1:9), which immediately identifies him with his recipients by noting his relationship to them.<sup>17</sup> Though John functions as the recipient of the message

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term ἐκκλησία, he maintains Jesus “took this word and used it with a specifically new meaning as *His* church.”

<sup>12</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 256.

<sup>13</sup> Hansen, “Concepts of *Demos*, *Ekklesia*, and *Dikasterion*,” 507.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, “Meaning of *Ekklesia*,” 36.

<sup>15</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 129.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *Victory Through the Lamb*, 28.

who has the responsibility of sharing it with those in the churches, he does not use his text to place himself in a different status. He eliminates such distinctions by noting “he is not their father but their brother.”<sup>18</sup> Such language further reflects his view that they all function as servants of God.<sup>19</sup>

He also notes in 1:9 the three-fold circumstance by which he highlights this relationship—the tribulation, the kingdom, and the patient endurance. These terms “form a conceptual unity,” highlighting that the suffering they endure in tribulation and patient endurance takes place within the context of their citizenship in the kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Citizenship in the kingdom of God leads to the people experiencing tribulation;<sup>21</sup> these citizens are to respond to their tribulation with patient endurance.<sup>22</sup> John carefully notes that the tribulation, kingdom, and patient endurance in which they all serve as partners are ἐν Ἰησοῦ (in Jesus, Rev 1:9), the one who made them into a kingdom (Rev 1:6).

John shifts his discussion, detailing to his audience his experience of the kingdom when he receives the prophetic message from God. He explains that he was ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ (on the island called Patmos, 1:9). While Dwight Sheets asserts that John may have gone there “simply to write the Apocalypse,”<sup>23</sup> John explains that he is there διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, 1:9). The intratextual analysis will reveal that John associates this language with the suffering of the church. Additionally, Patmos belonged to a group of

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<sup>18</sup> Bovon, “Christ in the Book of Revelation,” 96.

<sup>19</sup> Bovon, “Christ in the Book of Revelation,” 96.

<sup>20</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 91.

<sup>22</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 146.

<sup>23</sup> Sheets, “Something Old, Something New,” 205.

islands to which Rome would relegate political prisoners.<sup>24</sup> John's statement regarding his reason for being there suggests that he was not there because of his volition.<sup>25</sup> His writing suggests that his presence on Patmos results from his participation in the kingdom, exhibited through his bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

### ***The Call to Obedience***

As slaves of God and citizens of his kingdom, John calls the people to obedience to Christ. He does this by declaring a blessing on those who embrace the message of the Apocalypse. This blessing provides the Apocalypse's initial presentation of requital for faithfulness to that which follows. The macarism introduces two additional social actors: the reader and the obedient hearer of the book's contents.<sup>26</sup> The text identifies these social actors by their activity. This pronouncement of blessing on those who read aloud and obey the words of the book reveals the expectation of a reader who will read the text publicly and hearers who will serve as the reader's audience (1:3). More important than merely hearing, John expects that God's slaves will fulfill their role as such and obey that which he communicates. Therefore, the blessing does not come from merely hearing, but from obeying that which they hear.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 52. The statements regarding tribulation and endurance lead to the understanding that John endures suffering in some way. Koester argues for the likelihood "that John was on Patmos under duress."

<sup>26</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 21; Osborne, *Revelation*, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 21.

### Royal Origins of Grace and Peace

The epistles of the New Testament commonly contain a greeting that presents the idea of grace and peace coming from God and Christ (e.g., Rom 1:7; Gal 1:3; 2 John 3). While greetings function as a regular part of the epistolary composition in the ancient world, John takes the time to present the origins of grace and peace as coming from God, Christ, and the Spirit. Such a presentation functions as a rare occurrence in the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the rarity of this occurrence, John utilizes his epistolary introduction and greeting to the seven churches of Asia Minor to provide an initial presentation of God, Christ, and the Spirit as royal figures. This presentation of the royal origins of grace and peace within the Apocalypse lays an initial foundation for audiences of the Apocalypse to recognize that John presents greetings from their heavenly and true earthly king, along with the one who inaugurates and presently manifests this Kingdom in the earth.<sup>29</sup>

#### *The Royal Function of God*

John identifies the first source of grace and peace as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (the one who is and who was and is coming, 1:4). This language refers to God.<sup>30</sup> This description alone does not provide any significant textual features regarding a royal presentation of this social actor, but the introduction of the second source of grace and peace relates to the first and highlights God's royal status. Here, audiences discover that God possesses a

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<sup>28</sup> The only other occurrence of a greeting occurring in relation to the Father, Christ, and Spirit occurs in 1 Pet 1:2.

<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 109.

<sup>30</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 30; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 247; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 115; Osborne, *Revelation*, 60; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 32.



throne (1:4). This possession of the throne informs readers and hearers of the Apocalypse that God has royal power and authority.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the initial presentation of the one who is and was and his to come, John presents the first of two occurrences in the book when the Lord God speaks.<sup>32</sup> God describes himself as *ὁ παντοκράτωρ*—the one possessing all power (1:8).<sup>33</sup> In this statement, the Lord God self-identifies using language that John has already used to describe him—*ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (the one who is and who was and who is coming, 1:8).<sup>34</sup> The designation of this social actor as the Lord God also provides an understanding that this is the God and Father to whom Jesus has made the people a kingdom, priests (1:6).<sup>35</sup>

### *The Royal Function of Jesus Christ*

John introduces Jesus with his most elaborate presentation as the source of the grace and peace, providing a foundation for God's slaves remaining confident in their status within the Kingdom, no matter the circumstances they face. John notes grace and peace coming from Jesus Christ, whom he describes as *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς* (the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth, 1:5). This construal of Jesus presents him in light of his death,

<sup>31</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Though the term refers to God, this statement provides the understanding that Christ's presentation as ruler of kings on earth maintains its foundation upon the kingship and authority of the Lord God, as referenced in the messages to the congregations (cf. 2:26–27).

<sup>34</sup> Oster, *Seven Congregations*, 56. Richard Oster also notes that the three-fold temporal formula presents opposition to the pagan deities worshiped in society.

<sup>35</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 104. Ramsay explains that the relationship individuals maintained with the government included religious obligations throughout one's life. As a result, serving as a member of God's kingdom brought along with it religious duties.

resurrection, and exaltation. Laying a foundation for those receiving the message of the Apocalypse to embrace that which lies before them.

The first description of Jesus as the faithful witness highlights his death. The use of the term μάρτυς maintains close connections with the concept of death, as multiple individuals who function as μάρτυς (a witness) or μαρτυρέω (bear witness) ultimately face death. This term seems to function no differently for Jesus or Antipas, Christ's faithful witness who suffered death (Rev 2:13). Ultimately, this presentation Jesus as the faithful witness establishes a foundation for that which follows in the message where John encourages the recipients of the Apocalypse to function as faithful witnesses to God and Christ.

Next, John describes Jesus as ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν (the firstborn of the dead). Though John depicts Jesus as a witness, highlighting him as one who dies, he also presents him as the one who came back to life. This language not only highlights Jesus's "sovereignty over life and death,"<sup>36</sup> but also the use of the term πρωτότοκος often refers to an individual, namely the firstborn son, who experienced "prestige and status" within the familial context and maintained responsibility for family matters and inheritance.<sup>37</sup> Though Koester explains that within a royal context the inheritance could include a throne,<sup>38</sup> the term here does not appear to reflect kingship exclusively. Instead, it highlights his role as the firstfruits of the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:20) and expresses Christ's superiority over those who die in faithfulness to God.<sup>39</sup> Even as Christ is the

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<sup>36</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Koester, "Roman Slave Trade," 217.

<sup>39</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 737.

firstborn of the dead, this presentation should give hope to those who will die because of their loyalty to him that they too will rise from the dead.

John concludes this presentation of Jesus by referring to him as *ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς* (the ruler of the kings of the earth, 1:5). In this case, John uses a term that explicitly identifies Jesus as a ruler—*ἄρχων*. In the same way that John communicates Jesus's superiority over those who have died, he now communicates that preeminence over those who have the authority to rule.<sup>40</sup> In other words, Jesus does not merely rule, but he functions as the ruler of rulers. This depiction of Jesus presents John's audience with a portrayal of who maintains ultimate authority.

#### Christ's Activity over God's Slaves

Immediately following the elaborate description of Jesus, John presents a doxology—a declaration of glory to one for what he or she has done. Within the context of the doxology, virtually everything for which John declares glory to Jesus finds its basis in activities related to royal functions. This doxology consists of two components: (1) attention on the activity of Jesus and (2) ascription to Christ of language that highlights the demonstration of this power.

The first portion of the doxology (1:5b–6a) discusses the state of God's slaves and the connection of Christ's activity to their present status. John utilizes two terms to construe Jesus's activity. Both relate to the concepts of rule and control. Christ's activities of loosing (*λύω*, 1:5b) and making (*ποιέω*, 1:6a) demonstrate his power over not

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<sup>40</sup> Stevens, "Vision in the Night," 10.

only those he has loosed and transformed. His activity highlights his power over sin—that which previously bound those he has now loosed.

The doxology provides the understanding that Jesus has loosed John and the recipients of the writing from their sins ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ (by his blood, 1:5b). The act of releasing these people from their sins reveals the nature and foundation of Christ's authority over the recipients of the Apocalypse. While the term λύω refers to release in a concretized sense, the term maintains a figurative extension that refers to being "freed from political domination."<sup>41</sup> Loosing from bondage reflects an exercise of power over that from which the bound person receives deliverance. John does not end the description of Jesus's activity with freeing individuals; he goes on to note Christ's worthiness of glory for other activities as well.

Not only does Jesus free these individuals from the bondage of sin, but he also transforms them into a new group. John explains ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ ([Christ] made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, 1:6a). Like the act of loosing, Christ's act of making (ποιέω) also presents him as one who rules and controls.<sup>42</sup> When examining his use of language, it becomes evident that John has reinscribed the language of empire and appropriated it for the kingdom of God.

#### Ascription of Glory and Dominion to Christ

Immediately following the activity of Jesus, John provides ascriptions to him. Even as both activities relate to the same concept—rule/control, the ascriptions John gives him in

<sup>41</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 486; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 483.

response to his activity relate to the concept of power. John's doxology calls for people to give Jesus δόξα (glory) and κράτος (dominion). These terms occur in the same semantic domain. The term κράτος relates to the idea of "the power to rule or control,"<sup>43</sup> while the term δόξα refers "a manifestation of power characterized by glory."<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the doxology points to Christ's demonstration of power as the foundation for people acknowledging his authority to rule eternally (1:6).

### *The Royal Function of the Spirit*

Through John's explicit use of royal language to identify Jesus and his presentation of God's throne, readers see the royal presentation of both God and Christ. When John identifies the Holy Spirit before God's throne,<sup>45</sup> his mention of the Spirit between these two royal figures identifies the Spirit in royal terms.<sup>46</sup> The Spirit manifests the kingdom of God and Christ on the earth. Recognition of this regularly occurred in early Christianity.<sup>47</sup>

The New Testament presents the giving of the Holy Spirit in direct connection to the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the new age and the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God (Acts 1:6–8; 2:25–36).<sup>48</sup> Youngmo Cho connects the giving of the

<sup>43</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 680.

<sup>44</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 682.

<sup>45</sup> *Contra* Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 40. Aune asserts that the "seven spirits who are before his throne" (Rev 1:4) refers "to the seven archangels who stand continually in the presence of God." When discussing whether readers should identify the seven spirits as the Holy Spirit or as seven angels, Craig Koester argues in favor of understanding the seven spirits as angels, "given the strong connection between angels and spirits in Revelation." Koester, *Revelation*, 216. Ian Boxall acknowledges the possibility for recognizing the seven spirits as either the sevenfold Spirit of God or seven angels. He states that they are more likely angelic beings. See Boxall, *Patmos in Reception History*, 68. For a detailed overview regarding interpretations of the seven spirits, see Waddell, *Spirit of the Book*, 7–21.

<sup>46</sup> Davis, *Heavenly Court Judgment*, 83.

<sup>47</sup> Dunn, "Spirit and Kingdom," 36–40.

<sup>48</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 58.

Spirit with the “power to proclaim the Kingdom,” as opposed to the inauguration of the kingdom of God.<sup>49</sup> While Cho presents one concept over another, Scripture reflects both. Within the context of the Apocalypse, John maintains an awareness of the kingdom, which the Spirit inaugurates, and he proceeds to exercise the power of the Spirit by proclaiming Christ and his kingdom to those he writes.

#### Presentation of the Divine King

In light of John’s presentation of the Spirit and understanding that the empowerment of the Spirit serves to help declare the kingdom of God, it comes as no surprise that John notes his being *ἐν πνεύματι* (in the Spirit, 1:10) just before his vision of Christ. This experience of the Spirit enables John to proclaim the kingdom and to declare to the churches that Christ is King. The presentation of Jesus Christ to John functions as one of the most awe-inspiring depictions of Christ in the New Testament. John’s description of this vision presents Christ, his royal power, and his authority while highlighting the interaction between Christ and John as well as Christ and the church. In this depiction, the sartorial and physical descriptions of Jesus provide an image of Christ that highlights his strength, might, and royal power.

#### *Command to Write and Send*

While on Patmos, John receives Revelation to relay to other participants in the kingdom. John’s visionary experience begins after he hears a voice like a trumpet command him to write. John recounts that he turns to see the voice and sees a vision of seven golden

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<sup>49</sup> Cho, *Spirit in Kingdom*, 197.

lampstands, noting that one “like a son of man” stands amid them.<sup>50</sup> The language of this passage leads some, like Prigent and Osborne,<sup>51</sup> to conclude that the one like a son of man functions as the source of the voice John hears. Many of the arguments that support the understanding that the one like a son of man functions as the source of the voice only do so because he functions as the only social actor that John reports seeing. Though this serves as a reasonable line of thinking, continued examination of the book provides a more likely option that deserves a hearing.

At the beginning of the second vision (4:1), John refers to the first voice that spoke to him. The notation of a “first” voice distinguishes that voice from some later voice.<sup>52</sup> Since there appears to be no disagreement that the one like a son of man, recognized as Jesus Christ, speaks in Rev 1:17—3:22, the speaker in 1:11 must be a social actor other than Jesus. Additionally, while multiple authors note that the phrase ἐν πνεύματι (in the Spirit) functions as a discourse marker signifying each of John’s visionary experiences, it is equally worthy of note that a voice speaking to him regarding that which he is going to see also appears. In the last two visions of Revelation, beginning at 17:1 and 21:9–10, John explicitly identifies the speaker as an angel. Since Rev 1:1 explains that God made the revelation known by sending his angel to his servant John, it

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<sup>50</sup> Stevens, “Vision in the Night,” 7. Stevens explains that the first vision of apocalypses function as the most important, as they provide the interpretive framework for interpreting the later visions in the writing. The vision of the son of man, who serves as a royal figure, as discussed in the following section, necessitates reading the remainder of the Apocalypse with the recognition of Christ as King.

<sup>51</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 130; Osborne, *Revelation*, 84.

<sup>52</sup> *Contra* Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, cxxiv. Aune argues for no distinction between the first and second voice in Rev 1. He assumes that Rev 1:12b—3:22 appears in a revised version of the Apocalypse, meaning there was no second voice in the original version. Even if Aune is correct in his theory of composition, the text clearly describes the first and second voices in different ways. John notes that the first voice he hears sounds like a trumpet (Rev 1:10), but the second voice was as the sound of many waters (Rev 1:15).

seems reasonable that the only other revelatory agent besides Jesus, an angel, would serve as the source of the voice that inaugurates John's experience.

### *Description of the One Like a Son of Man*

After John notes that he sees one like a son of man, he immediately describes this individual. He begins by providing a sartorial description of this social actor. He then proceeds to a physical description of this individual.

When providing the sartorial description of this individual, John only notes that he wears a long robe with a golden sash around his chest. Debate surrounds the significance of these clothes. Some argue that these clothes signify the priestly status of the wearer,<sup>53</sup> while others assert that they represent his high social rank.<sup>54</sup> To reconcile these two positions, some have asserted that the garb represents both.<sup>55</sup> Writers associate such clothing with both kings and priest, meaning that the textual analysis by itself cannot sufficiently determine whether the clothing relates exclusively to a royal or priestly function. Instead, other dimensions of analysis may provide sufficient data whereby individuals may arrive at some conclusion.

John provides seven physical descriptions of the one like a son of man. He describes his hair, eyes, feet, voice, right hand, mouth, and face. When discussing each of these physical characteristics, multiple commentators note the significance of these descriptions of the one like a son of man. For example, multiple writers assert that the

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<sup>53</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 57–58; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 51–52; Harrington, *Revelation*, 53; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 210; Witherington, *Revelation*, 81; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 28–29; Fee, *Revelation*, 17; Ross E. Winkle, "Clothes Make the (One Like a Son of) Man," 304–5.

<sup>54</sup> Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 438; Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 93; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 64–65.

<sup>55</sup> Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 32.



feet like burnished bronze represent strength,<sup>56</sup> while the eyes represent his ability to see beyond that which others can typically see.<sup>57</sup> While various writers seem to agree regarding the representations of these features, some debate seems to surround the hair of this figure. Three different positions regarding the white hair of the one like a son of man include the representation of holiness,<sup>58</sup> the eternal nature of this individual,<sup>59</sup> and wisdom (as opposed to age, eternity, or pre-existence).<sup>60</sup>

Though writers make assertions regarding what these aspects of John's vision represent, they provide little to no support for their statements. Like the sartorial descriptions, the textual analysis provides insufficient data for arriving at firm conclusions regarding the physical descriptions. Therefore, other dimensions of analysis must receive attention to provide information regarding the interpretation of this material.

### *Christ's Relation to John*

When John sees this one like a son of man, he falls at his feet as though dead (1:17). When this happens, John explains that the one like a son of man lays his right hand—the hand in which he held the seven stars—on him and commands him not to fear.<sup>61</sup> This

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<sup>56</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 383; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 59; Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 33; Witherington, *Revelation*, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 383; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 59; Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 33; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 54.

<sup>58</sup> Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 33; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 65.

<sup>59</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 137.

<sup>60</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 58; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> For some, attention may shift from that which is taking place to the question of the location of the seven stars, which were in Jesus's right hand. Within the realm of literature, this should be the least of the concerns that individuals have, as this would likely have not been a concern for the initial audiences. For John and his audience, the location of the seven stars during this interaction does not appear to function as the central focus as Jesus lays his hand on him. Instead, John later directs the audience's attention to the meaning of the stars.

imperative construes the one giving it as possessing power and authority over the one who receives the command.

Seeing that John has fallen as though he is dead, Jesus provides him with words of comfort. These words of comfort are the first time Jesus speaks in the text of Revelation. He then describes himself. The first way he describes himself is as *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* (the first and the last, Rev 1:17b). This description identifies him with the Lord God, who speaks in Rev 1:8, describing himself as the Alpha and Omega. He goes on to describe himself as one who was dead, but now alive. This self-description, like that of the Lord God, parallels John's description in the epistolary introduction (cf. 1:5). Such a description leads to the conclusion that John and his audiences should recognize this individual as Jesus—one who has identified himself with God—who possesses royal power and authority, was dead—demonstrated by his serving as the faithful witness, and now lives—demonstrating his status as the firstborn of the dead.<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, he describes himself as having the keys of Death and Hades, highlighting his having conquered death through his resurrection and exaltation. Understanding that the descriptions reveal this individual as Jesus provides a foundation for the instructions Christ gives to John. He then reiterates the instruction of the angel to *γράψον οὖν ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα* (write therefore the things you have seen, both the things that are and the things that are about to happen after these things, v. 19).

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<sup>62</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 126.

### *Christ's Relation to the Churches*

Toward the end of the Christophany, Jesus's speech shifts away from himself to the interpretation of two aspects of the vision, the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands. Here, the seven stars that were in the right hand of Jesus but seemed to move into the background during his initial interaction with John come back to the forefront of the text. The seven golden lampstands John mentions at the beginning the vision also return to the center of attention. The correlation between these two sets of items provides the foundation for understanding why Jesus explains what they are and reveals that the message that follows provides a foundation for Christ's relationship to the churches.

Significant discussion surrounds the angels of the seven churches. Some purport that they are ministry leaders,<sup>63</sup> the person reading the message to the churches,<sup>64</sup> and the heavenly counterpart to the churches.<sup>65</sup> Though all of these ideas have received support in scholarship, the most likely understanding of the angels is that they function as a heavenly representation of the assemblies.

The idea for this comes in part from the message to the churches themselves. The beginning and end of the messages associate different social actors with the activity of speaking. Each message identifies the recipient of the speech as the angel of the church in a specific city (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). While Jesus speaks to the angel, the Spirit declares the message to the churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). This presentation of both speakers brings about the question of how one message can have two speakers

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<sup>63</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 52–53.

<sup>64</sup> Michaels, *Revelation*, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration*, 237.

and multiple audiences. Ultimately, the shift reflects the perspective of the speaker. To better express this, it becomes essential to examine John's presentation of the Spirit.

Contrary to Aune's position,<sup>66</sup> John's first presentation of the Spirit occurs in Rev 1:4, where he sends greetings in the epistolary opening of his work. John identifies the greetings coming from τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων ἃ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ (the seven spirits which are before his throne). The next time he presents the Spirit, John notes that he was ἐν τῇ νήσῳ τῇ καλουμένῃ Πάτμῳ . . . ἐν πνεύματι (on the island called Patmos . . . in the Spirit, 1:9–10). The significance of the presentation of the Spirit finds its basis in location. Some have argued that the expression "seven spirits" recalls the writing of the prophet Isaiah. Others, like Aune, assert that these are seven archangels. It seems more appropriate to recognize John's distinction between the seven spirits and the Spirit as a way by which John depicts the Spirit in heaven or on earth. When John presents the Spirit from a heavenly perspective, he consistently refers to the "seven spirits" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). When he presents the Spirit from an earthly perspective, he refers to the Spirit (1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:2; 14:13; 21:10; 22:17).

Given John's varied presentation of the Spirit, based on location, it becomes apparent that the conclusions to each of the seven messages present the declaration of the message from an earthly perspective, highlighting the universal nature of all the messages. Since John presents his vision of the exalted Christ, who rules and reigns from heaven, it should come as no surprise that the angels of the churches to whom he speaks function as the heavenly representation of each of the churches on earth. John's

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<sup>66</sup> *Contra Aune, Revelation 1–5*, 40.

presentation of Jesus holding the seven stars in his right hand signifies that he possesses power and control of the churches.<sup>67</sup>

Not only does Jesus explain the mystery of the seven stars but he also explains the mystery of the seven lampstands. Jesus identifies the seven lampstands as the seven churches. While this functions as the last time the Apocalypse refers to the seven golden lampstands, Christ's presence among them demonstrates to recipients of the Apocalypse that he is in their midst. Some might even assert that this presence of Christ amid the churches is made real to those in these communities by way of the Holy Spirit. Such an idea accurately reflects the idea that the activity of the Spirit on the earth parallels or reflects the work of Christ in Heaven.<sup>68</sup>

This portion of the text provides a significant foundation for reading and understanding the messages to the seven churches, as most of the descriptions of Christ that appear in Revelation 2–3 come from this portion of the text. After having laid the foundation for himself and his recipients functioning as part of a kingdom, he recounts his supernatural, prophetic vision of one like a son of man who tells him to write his visions to those in the churches and explains portions of the vision to him. The explanation of these portions of the vision serves as a bridge to the messages that follow as Jesus introduces himself to the church in Ephesus, based on that which he discusses at the conclusion of the vision's inauguration.

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<sup>67</sup> Boxall, *Revelation*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Slater, *Christ and Community*, 110.

### Intertextual Analysis

Each dimension of a discourse's analysis should provide support for the conclusions at which one arrives regarding the analysis of that discourse. The analysis of the intertextual relations between Rev 1 and various other writings provide support for the presentation of God as king and Jesus as the human representation of that kingship. This analysis presents John's use of members resources with which his original audience(s) would likely have been familiar. John does this by using various passages from the books of Exodus, Daniel, and Matthew. Additionally, he supports this idea by intertextually connecting his writing to texts within the broader culture.

### A New and Greater Exodus

John incorporates the language of the Exodus narrative into his composition of the Apocalypse to highlight the kingship of God and God's establishment of a people for himself. Even as the Exodus narrative presents God's kingship and his establishment of the people of Israel, John's narrative presents God's kingship and identifies the recipients in the same way as the writer of Exodus identifies Israel, via royal and priestly language. John's use of this narrative prepares audiences of the Apocalypse to receive the commands that follow in Rev 2–3, even as the Israelites received the commands of Yahweh after their establishment as members of the kingdom of God at Sinai.

*ὁ ὢν (Rev 1:4 → Exod 3:14)*

One of the first and most prominent intertextual presentations of God's kingship appears in the epistolary introduction of the book. As John presents the origins of grace and peace, he identifies the first origin of grace and peace as *ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (the

one who is and who was and who is coming, 1:4). Multiple scholars have noted that the description  $\delta \omega \nu$  hearkens back to the language of Exod 3:14 (LXX) when Yahweh reveals himself to Moses by declaring 'Εγώ εἰμι  $\delta \omega \nu$  (I am the one who is).<sup>69</sup> Yahweh instructs Moses to inform the people that 'Ο  $\omega \nu$  ἀπέσταλκέν με πρὸς ὑμᾶς (I am sent me to you).

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:4	χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ $\delta \omega \nu$ καὶ $\delta \eta \nu$ καὶ $\delta \epsilon \rho \chi \acute{o} \mu \epsilon \nu \omicron \varsigma$	grace and peace to you from the one who is and who was and who is coming
Exod 3:14	'Εγώ εἰμι $\delta \omega \nu$	I am the One who is

This reference to God as  $\delta \omega \nu$  functions as a divine title.<sup>70</sup> It recalls the promise Yahweh makes in Exod 3 to deliver his people from the affliction of the Egyptians and bring them to the Promised Land. Exodus demonstrates the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Abraham to deliver his descendants from bondage. He does this by overcoming Pharaoh—a ruler who oppresses his people—and delivering them from the bondage of slavery to Egypt. Likewise, the Apocalypse presents the story of God's people enduring tribulation under the hand of an oppressive ruler and delivers them to a new promised land—the Holy City.

John's incorporation of the Exodus into his epistolary introduction provides a foundation for the original audience of the Apocalypse to remember God's activity on behalf of his people in the Old Testament. The recognition of God in this way provides an image of him as one who delivers his people from the hand of their oppressors and

<sup>69</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 187; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 32; Williamson, *Revelation*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> Aune, "God and Time," 233.

functions as their king because he serves as their deliverer. This presentation of Yahweh through the use of Exodus language provides a foundation for the Apocalypse's recipients to recognize God, who sends them greetings, in the same way.

***Kingdom, Priests (Rev 1:6 → Exod 19:6)***

The doxology appearing in Rev 1:5–6 notes that Jesus transforms the Apocalypse's recipients into a kingdom. The text also notes that Christ has made this group of people into priests. They, unlike the priests of the imperial cult, are to function as priests to God, not the emperor. The doxology does more than ascribe glory to Christ, it reinscribes Old Testament language, applying it to John and the recipients of the Apocalypse, identifying them in the same manner that the Old Testament describes Israel—as the people of God. Many commentators note that Exod 19:6 is an intertext of this passage, but few provide evidence for how they arrive at that conclusion.

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:6	καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ	and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father
Exod 19:6	ὕμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον	And you yourselves will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation

John opens the doxology by focusing attention on the one to receive glory τῷ ἀγαπῶντι ἡμᾶς καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ (to the one who loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, 1:5–6). The terms used in the Apocalypse differ from those in Exodus, but lexemes that serve as significant features of both texts in establishing an intertextual relation show semantic



relation. Revelation 1:6 refers to a group of people being βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς (a kingdom, priests) to God. Though using different terms, the idea appears in 1 Pet 2:9 and Exod 19:6, presenting a recognizable discourse regarding the royal-priestly function of God's people. Though the language of 1 Peter and Exodus declares the people as βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα (a royal priesthood), the terms βασίλειον and βασιλείαν relate to the idea of ruling or governing, while ἱεράτευμα and ἱερεῖς address religious roles and function. From a thematic perspective, these texts regard a group of people who function for God in both a governmental and religious role, in much the same way the Roman Empire functioned as a governmental and religious system.

The writer of Exodus presents the Lord as noting that this declaration of being his treasured possession and a royal priesthood is based on their hearing and obeying his words (Exod 19:5). Such a statement parallels the language of Rev 1:3, where John declares blessings on those reading, hearing, and obeying the words in the book. In addition to this, John provides a foundation for Christians to recognize that their status as a kingdom and priests is contingent upon their obedience to the commands of God, which he reveals in the following message of the book. John later expands this idea even more by highlighting the promise of ruling extended to those who are faithful to Christ and overcome (Rev 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4; 20:6).

In both the Revelation and Exodus texts, those who are to function as a kingdom and priests now have freedom from bondage. In Exodus, Yahweh loosed them from the rule of the Egyptians, while in Revelation, Christ loosed the people from their sins. The idea that they experience freedom from the bondage of one master highlights the understanding that they function as slaves to the one who has loosed them from their

former bondage. The shift in masters is reflected via the covenant at Sinai following the model of that between a suzerain and his vassal, as well as John representing himself and his audience as slaves of Jesus Christ.

### Daniel: Foretelling Babylon's Fall

John alludes to the text of Daniel in Rev 1 for multiple reasons. First, he uses Daniel's text to communicate Jesus's royal function in the book of Revelation. In addition to this, he lays the foundation for recognizing the Apocalypse as political discourse, thus preparing the people to whom he writes to recognize the oppression and opposition they will face because of their faith.

#### *Daniel I*

John uses language similar to that which appears in the texts of Dan 2 and Dan 7 to establish the royal function of Jesus in his writing. He does this by incorporating language from the narrative and apocalyptic portions of the prophetic writing to present Jesus as the ultimate ruler and the one who receives power and authority from God to exercise such rule. John's presentation of Jesus in this way not only construes him as possessing royal power and authority, but it also identifies him with God, who serves as the almighty ruler of all.

#### Ruler of Kings (Rev 1:5 → Dan 2:47)

In his three-fold presentation of Jesus to his recipients, John describes him as *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἀρχὼν τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς* (the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, 1:5). Multiple scholars

have asserted that this text forms an intertextual relationship with the text of the Septuagint. Many of them have asserted that the text recalls the language of Ps 88 (LXX). This idea finds support from the understanding that the text speaks of kingship and presents David's offspring as *πρωτότοκος* firstborn among the kings of the earth (88:28) and compares him to a faithful witness in the heavens (*ὁ μάρτυς . . . πιστός*, 88:38). However, the text does not appear to function as the strongest possible intertext for Rev 1:5, since the textual analysis reflects Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation—none of which seem to receive attention in Psalm 88. Instead of attempting to present all three descriptions of Jesus in one text, the strongest relationship between the Revelation text and the Old Testament arises from the description of Jesus as the *ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων* (the ruler of kings, 1:5) and the description of God in similar fashion in the book of Daniel.

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:5	Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς	Jesus Christ, the witness, the faithful one, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth
Dan 2:47	Ἐπ' ἀληθείας ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν βασιλέων	Your God is certainly the God of gods and Lord of kings

The book of Daniel makes three references to the “King of kings.” Two occurrences refer to Nebuchadnezzar (2:37; 3:2). Ezekiel also refers to Nebuchadnezzar in this way (26:7). When referring to Nebuchadnezzar—or any other human king—the LXX refers to him as *βασιλεὺς βασιλέων*. When the Septuagint refers to God as King of kings, he receives recognition as *βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλέων* (King of kings, Dan 4:37; 2 Macc 13:4). While the verbiage between the two passages does not match identically, the

differing terms are synonymous, recognized by their common relationship to the concepts of ruling and governing.

Within the context of Daniel, the text presents Nebuchadnezzar identifying Daniel's God as θεός τῶν θεῶν καὶ κύριος τῶν κυρίων καὶ βασιλεὺς τῶν βασιλέων (God of gods, Lord of lords, and King of kings, Dan 4:37). Following this, he goes on to note God's supremacy over rulers, as he possesses the power to remove and establish kings, even as he removed Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28). Nebuchadnezzar was a ruler of Babylon who exercised dominion over the people of Israel during the time of their exile. John's language recalls the story of Daniel and highlights the removal of rulers from their place of authority (Dan 2:39–44).<sup>71</sup> In the same way that Daniel's prophecy foretold the fall of an oppressive empire of Babylon, the Apocalypse encourages those victims of Rome who are faithful to Jesus to recognize that he will remove the oppressive hand of their ungodly rulers. Following the removal of Rome's oppressive hand, God will manifest his kingdom that will last forever.<sup>72</sup>

#### One Like a Son of Man (Rev 1:13–14 → Dan 7:9,13)

As noted in the textual analysis, John provides both sartorial and physical descriptions of the one like a son of man. Though debates surround the significance of these descriptions, few, if any, writers substantiate their claims regarding their assertions. Upon further analysis, it seems clear that the textual analysis alone does not provide sufficient data to develop any satisfactory conclusions. At the same time, the intertextual analysis of these

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<sup>71</sup> Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 37.

<sup>72</sup> Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*, 39.

descriptions provides data supporting the idea that the descriptions of the one like a son of man further reflects his royal power and authority over the kingdoms of the earth.<sup>73</sup>

The first sign that this social actor possesses royal power and authority lies in his initial description—one like a son of man. John reports seeing “one like a son of man” amid the lampstands. The use of this language—“one like a son of man”—appears nowhere in Jewish or Christian writings except in the book of Daniel. The use of such language drives audiences to remember how the one “like a son of man” functioned in Daniel’s writing.

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:13	καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἷον ἀνθρώπου	and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man
Dan 7:13	ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου ἦρχετο	behold, upon the clouds of heaven, a being like a son of humanity came

According to Dan 7:13, Daniel has a night vision where he saw one ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου (as a son of man) coming ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (on the clouds of heaven). This individual receives irrevocable, eternal authority over all the nations of the earth (v. 14).<sup>74</sup> He adds that this figure possesses an indestructible kingdom (v. 14). The receipt of this power and authority leads to him serving as the object of service and worship from the peoples of the earth. As a result, John’s audience should recognize this entity he depicts as the one who has ultimate power and authority, even over the rulers of the Roman Empire. The background of this one like a son of man constrains the descriptions that follow to be understood in relation to the concept of royalty/kingship.

<sup>73</sup> Ellens, *Eschatological Rewards*, 199.

<sup>74</sup> McComiskey, “Alteration of OT Imagery,” 312; Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 53.

Additionally, John describes the one like a son of man having αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ . . . ὡς χιῶν (hair white . . . like snow, Rev 1:14). This description also appears in Dan 7:9, but Daniel does not use it to describe the one like a son of man. He uses it to describe the Ancient of Days who sits as judge and gives authority to the one like a son of man.<sup>75</sup> Throughout the book of Revelation, John presents Jesus in terms like those used to describe God. As a result, his use of language to describe Jesus in terms used in Daniel to present a divine figure—the Ancient of Days—provides the understanding that this one like a son of man not only functions as a king but as a divine king who possesses the authority and power of God. It should come as no surprise that John’s other descriptions also recalls the language of the Old Testament and reinforces the kingship of this figure.<sup>76</sup>

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:14	ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν	now his head and his hair were white as wool, white as snow
Dan 7:9	καὶ τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, ὁ θρόνος ὡσεὶ φλόξ πυρός	and the hair of his head was like pure white wool

The first physical traits John mentions are Jesus’s head and hair. John notes that both his head and hair were ὡς ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιῶν (as white wool, as snow, 1:14). This text recalls Dan 7:9 (LXX), where after Daniel has a vision of a royal figure who aims to oppress and destroy, he sees the Ancient of Days seated on his throne about to take action.<sup>77</sup> Daniel presents his description of the Ancient of Days, noting τὸ τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ ἔριον λευκὸν καθαρὸν (the hair of his head was as pure white wool).

<sup>75</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 67.

<sup>76</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 44; Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 29.

<sup>77</sup> Goldingay, *Daniel*, 188.

Daniel's vision recalls the presentation of a judgment seat, followed by the opening of books for judgment.<sup>78</sup> These features of both texts provide the understanding that they present a discourse regarding divine judgment. From a thematic perspective, these texts refer to one who ultimately possesses the power to judge all creation. As appears later in the Apocalypse, Christ sits as both judge and king who rules over the peoples of the earth. The similarity in the description of Christ in Revelation and the Ancient of Days in Daniel provides the understanding that though he has not yet appeared before the throne in the Apocalypse, he functions as a divine king and judge who will execute justice on the rulers of the earth.

### *Daniel II*

When examining John's vision of one like a son of man, audiences find that John provides elaborate descriptions of this social actor. Despite the details he provides, "none of these details on their own, nor simply an accounting of them from their OT texts, does justice to the vision."<sup>79</sup> While individuals may find similar language throughout the Old Testament, many descriptions from Rev 1 come together in the text of Dan 10. John incorporates the language of Dan 10 into his writing not only to present Jesus to his audience. He also uses the sartorial and physical descriptions of the one like a son of man, the actions of the prophet, and the response of the heavenly being with whom the

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<sup>78</sup> Mosca, "Ugarit and Daniel 7," 501. Mosca connects the whiteness of this figure's hair with the fact that his judgments are just. He connects this with Isa 1:18 where people's sins are made white and like wool after a call is made to seek justice and correct oppression. These issues of justice and oppression speak to the text and the historical situation in which John and his audiences find themselves. Willis, *Dissonance and the Drama of Divine Sovereignty*, 73. Amy C. Merrill Willis explains that this vision depicts the supremacy of the power of the Ancient of Days over the kingdoms of the earth. Readers of the Apocalypse should recognize that if Christ has received such power that he too has the capacity to exercise his authority without the necessity of a battle.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 82.

prophet interacts to present portions of the inaugural vision in terms that lead to the understanding that that which follows concerns the politics of the empire in which God's people live and the coming persecution upon those who remain faithful to God and Christ.

<u>Revelation Passage</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Danielic Passage</u>
1:13	Golden Sash	10:5
1:14	Eyes Like Flames	10:6
1:15	Feet Like Bronze	10:6
1:15	Multitudinous Voice	10:6
1:17	Falling Prophet	10:9
1:17–19	Heavenly Being Placing Hand on Individual and Giving Commands	10:10–14

#### Preparation for Political Discourse

When providing his description of the one like a son of man, John begins by describing his clothing. He describes him as *ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη και περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν* (clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest, 1:13). As noted in the textual analysis, debate exists regarding the significance of these garments. The primary discussion revolves around whether Jesus's clothing reflects a priestly function or a royal one.

The term *ποδήρης* appears in the LXX and refers to a priestly garment (e.g., Exod 28:4, 31; 29:3). The term also appears to maintain this meaning in Wis 18:24; Sir 45:8; 50:11; Zech 3:4. While the term maintains an association with priestly garments, it does not refer to one specific garment, as demonstrated by its use in translating *מעיל* (Exod 28:4), *אפוד* (Exod 28:31), and *מחלצות* (Zech 3:4). This variation in terminology reveals



that when referring to priestly garments, ποδήρης does not necessarily refer to one specific priestly vestment.

Additionally, Ezek 9:2 reveals that this term does not merely refer to the clothing of the priest. Ezekiel's writing presents individuals who serve as executioners and avenge the city. An individual in the midst of them wears a ποδήρης. This text does not present this individual as a high priest but as one who executes judgment. Because of this, the use of the term does not present Jesus in exclusively priestly terms. The multiple uses of the term provide no conclusive evidence regarding the clothing presenting the one like a son of man in priestly terms. At the same time, a discussion focused solely on the clothing of the one like a son of man fails to provide support for the presentation of the one like a son of man in royal terms. When taken in conjunction with the remaining physical descriptions given, John's use of language presents the one like a son of man as a royal figure.

In conjunction with the description of the figure's robe, John's use of language recalls the language of Dan 10.

Reference	Greek	English
Rev 1:13	ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη και περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν	clothed with a long robe and a golden sash around his chest
Dan 10:5	και ἤρα τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς μου και εἶδον και ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπος εἷς ἐνδεδυμένος βύσσινα και τὴν ὀσφύν περιεζωσμένος βυσσίνῳ, και ἐκ μέσου αὐτοῦ φῶς,	And I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a man clothed in fine linen and girded with fine linen on his loins and light gleamed from the midst of him

As appears above, the parallels between John's language and that of Daniel provides support for John's use of Danielic language to present the one like a son of man. Both

texts possess components that provide a discourse regarding interaction with a heavenly messenger. It becomes evident that the figure in Revelation serves as more than an angel, while the Danielic figure appears merely to serve as a messenger of some kind. Despite the distinctions, if readers recognize the social actor identified as the one like a son of man as Jesus Christ, this demonstrates how Jesus, at least at the outset of the Apocalypse shows his servants the things that must soon take place.

In Dan 10, “this vision of the angelic figure is essentially a bridge to the lengthy description of the political happenings surrounding the people in God and more pertinently, pertaining to the persecution for their devotion to Yhwh.”<sup>80</sup> In the same way, the vision of the one like a son of man leads John and his audiences along a journey that relates to the political issues within John’s context as well as that of the near future.

The text of Dan 10 maintains multiple parallels with John’s vision of the one like a son of man. Both texts present the beginning of a visionary experience. Both prophets begin by discussing the clothing of the figure they see. While John notes his sight of an individual who wears a long robe and has a golden sash around his chest, Daniel mentions his vision of a figure clothed in fine linen with a golden belt around his waist. As both visions proceed, audiences discover that both figures possess eyes related to fire, feet like bronze and a voice or mouth related to water. Some argue against such strong parallels because the figure in Daniel’s vision does not possess the same kind of power as Christ, based on his need for help after being withstood for twenty-one days by the prince of the kingdom of Persia (10:13). The appropriation of this Danielic imagery for this royal figure does not exalt the figure in Daniel nor does it diminish the majesty of the

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<sup>80</sup> Hebbard, *Reading Daniel*, 194.

social actor John sees. Instead, the parallels prepare the audience for the message that the figure is about to give.

Additionally, both texts provide strong parallels between the activities of the prophets and those they encounter. After seeing this vision of the one like a son of man, John explains that he falls at his feet as though dead (1:17). Daniel also mentions his having fallen after his encounter with the figure he sees. The responses of these figures play a significant role in understanding John's use of the Danielic text here. After the prophets have fallen, the figures touch the prophet with their hands and command them not to fear (Rev 1:17; Dan 10:10, 12).

The parallels between these texts lead to further analysis of this portion of Daniel and how it maintains an intertextual connection with the Apocalypse. When reading Daniel, audiences discover that this individual tells the prophet that which will happen to his people in the last days (Dan 10:14). What follows through the end of Dan 11 is the unveiling of the political upheaval and tribulation that Daniel's people will face. Though John does not receive such explicit detail at this point in his vision, the one like the son of man informs him that that which he has seen consists of both that which is and that which must take place. As the audiences progress through the rest of the Apocalypse, they discover that, like Daniel's writing, John explains what is in store for his people—both those who remain faithful and those who exhibit unfaithfulness.

### Matthew: Looking Back at the Second Coming

John alludes to material that also appears in Matthew's Gospel, which conflates the language of Daniel and Zechariah.<sup>81</sup> Matthew's language presents the coming of the Son of Man after the tribulation. John's use of the Matthean language prepares his audience for the coming of Jesus, which occurs after the tribulation—a term John uses to describe the state of himself and his audience.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Coming with the Clouds (Rev 1:7 → Matt 24:30)*

Following the doxology, John makes a prophetic declaration regarding the Lord's coming. Rev 1:7 opens by saying ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν (he is coming with the clouds). Collocations of the terms ἔρχομαι and νεφέλη appear eight times in the New Testament. Two occurrences appear in each of the Synoptic Gospels and in Revelation. This common feature among multiple writings in the New Testament suggests some shared tradition. The Old Testament presents only one such collocation, which appears in Dan 7. This suggests that John appeals to the Danielic tradition for his composition.

The remainder of the passage notes καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ οἳτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν, καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς (and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him). The ultimate source for the passage comes from Zech 12:10, where the LXX uses the terms ἐπιβλέπω (look intently) and κόπτω (mourn). Though Rev 1:7 functions as a conflation of Dan 7:13 and Zech 12:10, the combination of these texts also appears

<sup>81</sup> Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 9–10.

<sup>82</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 238–9; Bovon, "John's Self-Presentation," 699.

within the Matthean tradition (Matt 24:30), which most likely serves as John's source.<sup>83</sup>

The combination of the terms ἔρχομαι, νεφέλη, and κόπτω only occur twice in the Greek versions of the Old or New Testament—the Apocalypse of John and the Gospel of Matthew. Though the Danielic and Zecharianic traditions serve as the ultimate sources for this tradition, it seems highly likely that either Matthew and John share the same tradition or John draws upon the Matthean tradition as a source.

#### Coming on the Clouds

Rev 1:7	Ἴδού ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν Behold, he is coming with the clouds
Matt 24:30	τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν the Son of Man coming on the clouds

#### All Will See Him

Rev 1:7	καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς and every eye shall see him
Matt 24:30	καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory

#### All the Tribes Will Mourn

Rev 1:7	καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς and all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him
Matt 24:30	καὶ τότε κόψονται πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn

To understand John's use of tradition, it seems best to observe this text in light of the Matthean tradition, given the close relationship observed between the two texts. The Matthean text attributes these words to Jesus. Jesus's discussion is related to the tribulation and the coming of the Son of Man. He explains that after the tribulation there

<sup>83</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 52.

will appear the sign of the Son of Man (Matt 24:29–30). A possible reason for reframing the message for his audience results from the fact that John views himself, and his audience, as partners in tribulation (Rev 1:9). Such a perspective provides an understanding of why John likely uses the same tradition as Matthew and repeatedly refers to the Lord's coming in this portion of his text (1:4, 7, 8).

### Numismatic Intertextuality

John appeals not only to the scriptural writings of Judaism and Christianity. To communicate the kingship of Christ, John engages in the incorporation of texts that are not limited to words. John additionally utilizes another text with which his recipients would have been familiar—coins. Coins within the context of the empire provide additional insight for understanding royal presentation of Jesus. Key texts explain the sartorial imagery with which John portrays Christ and his possession of the seven stars.

#### ***Ruler in a Priestly Robe***

When discussing the description of Jesus that John presents in Rev 1, a significant amount of debate surrounds Christ's robe. While some assert that the robe reflects Christ's priestly function,<sup>84</sup> others note it characterizes his royal function. While various authors have presented arguments that support both ideas, the debate does not find resolution in the textual analysis of the passage or the intertextual analysis of the passage when compared to Old Testament writings. Instead, an intertextual analysis of the

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<sup>84</sup> Winkle, "Clothes Make the (One Like a Son of) Man," 304–5.

passage when presented against the backdrop of Roman literature brings clarity to the issue.

Within the context of the Roman Empire, evidence exists that presents a blend of royal and sacral imagery. While the text presents Jesus as a king, it appears that he wears a priestly robe. The presentation of Jesus as a royal figure wearing a robe parallels the image on a coin minted in the empire. A coin from Smyrna depicts Emperor Tiberius in the temple.<sup>85</sup> This coin depicts him wearing a long robe. Though a ruler, his location in the temple seems to reflect a priestly function that Tiberius maintains in this image. In the same way, John presents Jesus as a royal figure who exercises a priestly function in the Apocalypse. While the clothing reflects a priestly function, this intertextual comparison reveals a royal function, as Tiberius served as a royal figure.

### *Holding the Seven Stars*

History explains that the Roman Emperor Domitian had a child who died at an early age. Domitian had coins minted in honor of his son. His coins consecrate the child as divine, reading DIVUS CAESAR IMP DOMITIANI F[ILUS] (the divine Caesar, son of the Emperor Domitian).<sup>86</sup> The coin depicts a nude child sitting on a globe with his hands outstretched, surrounded by seven stars.<sup>87</sup> Janzen asserts that the coin depicts the child as “the son of (a) god and that the infant was conqueror of the world.”<sup>88</sup> This understanding of the child as conqueror comes from the understanding that on ancient Roman coins,

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<sup>85</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 273.

<sup>86</sup> Franz, “King and I,” 47.

<sup>87</sup> Franz, “King and I,” 47.

<sup>88</sup> Janzen, “Jesus of the Apocalypse,” 645–47.

globes represented “world domination and power,” while stars communicated the divinity of those they surrounded.<sup>89</sup>

When describing Jesus’s relationship to the seven stars, it should come as no surprise that John construes Jesus’s self-presentation of holding seven stars in a manner that stands in contradiction to and reinscribes that which was produced on coins and propagated throughout the empire. Within its social context, this presentation of Jesus as the one holding the seven stars presents him as the divine son of God who has already been recognized as the ruler of the kings on earth (cf. 1:5). Instead of recognizing Domitian’s deceased son as the son of a god and Domitian as divine, the text presents the exalted and risen Jesus, who was dead, but now alive, as the true son of God, with his Father—not Domitian—functioning as the true God. Such language urges the recipients of this message, to note that Jesus is Lord—not Caesar. Though Domitian seems to have referred to himself as a god,<sup>90</sup> others did not refer to him in this way when minting coins or making inscriptions.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, this in no way diminishes the strength of the imperial cult during the time of Revelation’s composition.

#### Intertextual Summary

While various authors attempt to explain features of the Apocalypse by analyzing only the textual features of the discourse, John’s incorporation of other works into his composition of Revelation contribute significantly to interpreting the text. His recall of the Exodus narrative reappropriates the audiences’ understanding of God as King. Just as

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<sup>89</sup> Janzen, “Jesus of the Apocalypse,” 645.

<sup>90</sup> Diehl, “Empire and Epistles,” 28–29.

<sup>91</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 77.



Daniel prophesies the fall of Babylon, John utilizes Danielic language and imagery to present a message of Christ's kingdom triumphing over that of their oppressors. John's incorporation of the New Testament material not only recalls the language of Jesus but the passages Jesus quotes from the Scriptures of Israel, all of which highlight Christ's royal function. Finally, John utilizes the texts of the empire, which appear on coins, to present Jesus as the royal figure who also performs priestly duties. Each of these features comes together to present the establishment of this people as a kingdom that stands in opposition to the Roman Empire.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

The intratextual analysis of Rev 1 reveals that later portions of the text provide support for the ideas presented in the preceding textual analysis. Recurring thematic parallels occur throughout the book supporting the idea that God functions as a divine king with Jesus as the human representation of that kingship. The intratextual analysis also reveals that the text presents multiple calls to the recipients to maintain their solidarity and function as followers of Jesus. The intratextual analysis presents four primary concepts: (1) the call to faithfulness, (2) the reinforcement of God as king, (3) the reinforcement of Christ as king, and (4) the unity of God and Christ in kingship.

### **Reinforcing the Kingship of God**

As noted in the textual analysis, Rev 1 presents God as king. Throughout the remainder of the book, John repeatedly presents intratextual thematic parallels throughout the Apocalypse. Three distinct intratextual parallels present the reinforcement of God as royalty: (1) the temporal formula and (2) the presentation of God's throne. The

recurrence of these themes appearing in the first chapter of the Apocalypse reminds the audience of God's kingship when they appear in later portions of the text.

### *The Temporal Formula*

When reading the epistolary opening, John presents the first source of grace and peace as *ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος* (the one who is and who was and is coming, 1:4). As noted in the textual analysis, this social actor possesses a throne, signifying his royal power and authority. In addition to this presentation of the one who is and was and is coming, John presents this social actor multiple times throughout the Apocalypse, alternating the order between the present tense-form and the imperfect tense-form. Each recurrence of the temporal formula, all appearing within the second vision (4:1—16:21), presents this social actor as one who has the power to rule.

The second vision (4:1—16:21) of the Apocalypse presents the Lord God not merely possessing a throne but as *ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος* (one seated on the throne, 4:2). Revelation 4–5 centers on the throne or at least the room in which the throne appears,<sup>92</sup> highlighting the centrality of God's rule. Once again, John connects the temporal formula with the Lord God's status as *παντοκράτωρ* (Almighty, 4:8). Here, John presents the *Sanctus*. He notes that the four living creatures on each side of the throne cry out "Ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and who is, and who is coming, 4:8). In

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<sup>92</sup> Aune, "Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial," 7–8. Aune asserts that in the era of John's writing "the conceptions of the gods in the heavenly world was based largely on the projections of native kingship ideology and conventions into the heavenly world" (8).

this instance, John once again connects the temporal formula of the Lord God to his throne.

As John moves later into the vision, he abbreviates the formula by removing the final title—ὁ ἐρχόμενος (the coming one).<sup>93</sup> Despite the abbreviation of the title, John continues to connect the formula with the idea of God as παντοκράτωρ (11:17). Like the throne room scene of Rev 4, social actors initially described in association with God's throne speak of him using the temporal formula; they also speak referring to his kingship and authority. The twenty-four elders ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ καθήμενοι ἐπὶ τοὺς θρόνους αὐτῶν (sitting before God on their thrones, 11:16, cf. 4:4) worship God, identifying him as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν (the one who is and who was, 11:17a) because he has taken his power and ἐβασίλευσας (begun to reign, 11:17b). This taking of power and beginning to reign presents the exercise of God's kingly authority over the nations.

The final presentation of the temporal formula appears in the midst of God's judgments (16:5). After the third angel pours out his bowl, he declares Δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος, ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας (just are you, who was and who is, the Holy One, because these you judged). Immediately following the end of the statement of the angel who was speaking, John notes that the altar concurs with these statements referring to the one who is and who was as κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (Lord God the Almighty, 16:7). Though this presentation of the one who is and who was does not mention him as a king or use

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<sup>93</sup> Aune, "God and Time," 234. Aune explains that the abbreviation of the formula occurs in the context of hymns that immediately follow God coming in judgment and salvation. As a result, John uses the abbreviated formula because God has come.

regal language, it does mention him executing judgment. Such activity directly ties back to his status as ruler, since this served as “the primary role of the Roman emperor.”<sup>94</sup>

Throughout the second vision (4:1—16:21) of the Apocalypse, John utilizes the temporal formula, which he initially uses to refer to the Lord God to reinforce this social actor’s kingship. In each of John’s presentations of the temporal formula, he consistently connects the verbiage with the presentation of God as Almighty and highlights some presentation of God’s ruling authority, whether it be his throne, his ruling over others, or his judging the nations. This activity consistently calls the audiences of the Apocalypse to dedicate their allegiance to God and identify as his slaves, as opposed to collaborating with the worldly empire.

### *God’s Throne*

As has been noted in the textual analysis of Rev 1, John’s presentation of a throne functions as “a ruling power, with the implication of royal status.”<sup>95</sup> The constant use of this term throughout the book of Revelation only reinforces the idea that the work functions as one of political discourse. The presentation of the throne of God only reinforces his kingship throughout the book. Though the throne of Satan and the beast highlight their kingship, John presents God as the Almighty. God’s throne appears at both the beginning and end of the book and functions as the only throne that appears at the end of the Apocalypse, demonstrating his power over all other kings and kingdoms, including the kingdom of Satan.

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<sup>94</sup> Aune, “Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 8.

<sup>95</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 479.

### Reinforcing the Kingship of Christ

The textual analysis of Rev 1 provides sufficient data to support the idea of Jesus as a royal figure in the Apocalypse. At the same time, John does not stop his kingly presentation of Jesus here; he continues it throughout the book of Revelation. Similar to the way by which John carried specific descriptors of God throughout the book to enforce his kingship, he does the same thing regarding Jesus by reiterating three descriptions of Jesus that appear throughout the book. John reinforces Jesus's kingship by presenting him as (1) the ruler of kings, (2) the first and the last, and (3) one having eyes like flames of fire. John's later presentations of Jesus in this way in the latter portion of his writing consistently communicate his authority and power to rule.

#### *Christ as Ruler (Rev 1:5 → Rev 17:14; 19:16)*

In his epistolary introduction, John presents Jesus as *ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς* (the ruler of the kings of the earth, 1:5). When reading or hearing the text of Revelation, audiences of the Apocalypse will receive exposure to an intratextual connection that reinforces the idea of Jesus Christ as king. Though detectable, some individuals may miss this intratextual connection, because John does not utilize the same language that he presents in Rev 1:5. Instead of identifying Jesus again as the ruler of kings, John, in his third vision (17:1—21:8), which tells of the judgment of the great prostitute, presents Jesus as *Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων* (King of kings, 17:14; 19:16). This presentation not only reveals Jesus as a king, but it highlights his status as a ruler or king above all others who have the authority to rule.

Some may raise questions regarding whether this functions as an intratextual connection since there is variation in John's verbiage. It seems appropriate to recognize that just as intertextual connections do not have to have utterly identical language, intratextual relations may maintain some lexical variation, as long as the terms that vary maintain some reasonable semantic relation. When exploring the various terms, namely, ἀρχων versus Βασιλεὺς, readers must recognize that both of these terms occur not only within the semantic domain of Control and Rule but the subdomain of Rule or Govern.<sup>96</sup> As a result, these terms could be classified as synonymous and therefore exchangeable within the realm of inter- and intratextual relations.

Each of the occurrences where John presents Jesus as the King of kings presents his interaction with those who maintain some form of royal status and power. The first occurrence of this intertextual connection appears in Rev 17:14. John explains that ten kings will receive ἐξουσίαν ὡς βασιλεῖς . . . μετὰ τοῦ θηρίου (authority as kings . . . with the beast, 17:12) for a limited time. After receiving their authority, they will give their power and authority to the beast and μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν (will make war against the Lamb, 17:14). Though they make war with the Lamb, the Lamb conquers these kings, demonstrating his position and authority as the King of kings.

The second occurrence of John presenting Jesus as the King of kings appears in Rev 19:16. This time, John presents this as Jesus's name. Unlike the presentation in Rev 17, the presentation of Jesus as King of kings precedes his encounter with the kings of the earth. Having already seen the events of Rev 17, audiences of the Apocalypse should expect that, once again, Jesus will overcome. Again, John notes that those possessing

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<sup>96</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 477–83.

royal power and authority, kings and the beast, *συνηγμένα ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον μετὰ τοῦ καθήμενου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ* (gathered together to make war against the one sitting on the horse and against his army, 19:19). Once again, audiences find that the King of kings defeats those who stood in opposition against him and lives up to the title he possesses.

The presentation of Jesus as the ruler of kings maintains strong intratextual ties to the following presentation of Jesus as King of kings. In this situation, John uses this later designation to reinforce Jesus's status not only as royalty but also has his state as supreme human ruler over all others who may exercise such authority. Even as God holds the status of Pantocrator, Jesus holds the status of King of kings, given his function as the human representation of God's rule to all people.

### *Eyes like Flames of Fire (Rev 1:14 → Rev 19:12)*

Closely related to the intratextual presentation of Jesus as the Ruler/King of kings, John also presents Jesus as one with eyes like a flame of fire to reinforce his royal presentation. Though the presentation of Jesus with eyes like a flame of fire maintains intertextual connections with the book of Daniel, signaling, along with multiple other features, the disclosure of political discourse, the later intratextual connection, that presents him as one with eyes like a flame of fire reinforces the kingship of Jesus.

Rev 19:12 presents Jesus coming as the rider on the white horse whose eyes are like a flame of fire. Immediately following this description, John notes *καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά* (and on his head were many diadems). The diadem

functioned as a symbol of royalty.<sup>97</sup> Like the presentation of the one having eyes like a flame of fire serving a king, this figure continues to function as a king when he later appears in the text. As audiences progress through the text, they discover that this figure also performs the act of shepherding or ruling, an activity associated with the duties of royalty.

Additionally, John notes that he acts as the agent of the Almighty. As a result, Jesus functions as the human representative of God's rule on the earth. As noted in the preceding discussion, John describes this individual as the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Not only does his crown serve as a presentation of his royal status, but his title also identifies him as such.

#### The Seven Spirits and the Throne (Rev 1:4 → Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)

The epistolary introduction and the message to the church in Sardis refer to τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων (the seven spirits, 1:4; 3:1). Like the temporal formula, further references to the seven spirits that reinforce the kingship of God appear in the second vision of the Apocalypse. As noted in the textual analysis, the references to the seven spirits occur when the writing takes place from a heavenly perspective, leading to the conclusion that these intratextual connections also reflect the heavenly perspective of the writer. Like the initial mention of the seven spirits in Rev 1:4, John presents the seven spirits in connection with God's throne in the second vision.

John's second vision begins with his noting a throne and the one sitting on the throne. In Rev 4:5, he again mentions the seven spirits of God. This time, he notes that

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<sup>97</sup> Stevenson, "Conceptual Background," 257.



kingdom of God, as opposed to committed citizens of the Roman Empire. These images of opposition provide the understanding that, like John, they will suffer for their faithfulness to Christ. Despite the situations they face as the Church, John explains that God functions as the heavenly king who sits on the throne and functions as the righteous judge of all. He also presents Jesus's execution of God's judgment throughout the earth. In light of the present situation the Church faces, John depicts the Holy Spirit, who was before the throne, as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the earth.

### **Conclusion**

Analysis of Rev 1 reveals that John presents the kingdom of God as an alternative empire to which he belongs and functions as a model citizen in resisting the power and allure of Rome. The text shows that he recognizes himself, along with his recipients, as citizens of an alternative kingdom manifested on earth by the Holy Spirit and ruled by the kingship of God and Christ. John's use of biblical and Roman texts reinforces the royal function of both Jesus and God as well as the establishment of this group of Christ followers as citizens of this kingdom. It also lays a foundation for understanding the suffering the church will face at the hands of the ungodly. As he continues with his writing, the intratextual analysis reveals that John functions as a model for the suffering the church will endure for bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus but reinforces the royal functions of God, Christ, and the Spirit. This intratextual presentation reveals that while God's people may suffer at the hands of ungodly rulers, God maintains ultimate authority over all creation and will bring deliverance and relief to those who trust in him.

## CHAPTER 4: READING MESSAGES FROM THE LEGITIMATE KING

### Introduction

Now that the kingship of God and Christ have been established, based on the analysis of Rev 1, this chapter aims to build a bridge to understanding the messages to the churches in light of that kingship. The various components of the messages come together and reflect the authority of Christ as he engages the churches. When discussing the promises to the conquerors at the end of the conclusion of each message, Robert L. Thomas and Gordon D. Fee attempt to transform Christ's commitment to each assembly into universal promises. For example, when discussing the promise to the conqueror in the message to the church in Ephesus, Thomas acknowledges that the promise uniquely speaks to the church in Ephesus.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, he equates the promise of access to the tree of life to eternal life and explains that eternal life serves as an eschatological blessing for all the faithful.<sup>2</sup> Fee appeals to the message to the church in Sardis and highlights the connection between the promise to the conqueror and the promise of requital to the faithful.<sup>3</sup> He proposes that "the promise made to the Sardian believers will also be true of the 'victorious' believers in all the churches," including others who read the messages.<sup>4</sup> Though each of these promises functions as an eschatological commitment to the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 152.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 152.

<sup>3</sup> Fee, *Revelation*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Fee, *Revelation*, 23.

conquerors in each congregation,<sup>5</sup> those who attempt to universalize the promises face the problem of explaining how this promise to a specific church receives a universal application. Instead of attempting to universalize each promise to the conqueror contained in the messages, audiences of the Apocalypse must recognize that the final promise to the conqueror (Rev 21:7), which John directs to all the audiences of the Apocalypse, reveals that the holy city is the ultimate reward for those who overcome.<sup>6</sup> All those who conquer gain citizenship in the holy city.

The common reward of access to the eschatological city is not the only feature of the texts that connects them all. The demonstrations of power appearing in each of the messages highlights for readers the congregation's allegiance to Christ and his kingdom. Each congregation operates within the power structure of its local context. The text of each message reflects the church's possession of or lack of power. How each congregation functions in its local power structure will reveal to what degree it aligns with Christ and his kingdom or the beast and his kingdom.

The Apocalypse not only highlights Christ's opposition to the Roman Empire through judgment for its abuse of power but starts within the churches and resists inappropriate activities related to the use, abuse, or pretenses of power. The messages exemplify this resistance through the presentations, evaluations, actions, and promises of Christ, as well as the interactions of the churches with those they encounter. The messages to the seven churches function as royal or imperial edicts that create an opportunity for audiences of the Apocalypse to read the text from seven distinct

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<sup>5</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 14.

dimensions as Jesus confronts each congregation regarding its relationship with him and its allegiance to his Kingdom.

While John composes a unique message for each church, the correspondence contains common features that aid in understanding how each message expounds upon the kingship of Christ, his opposition to the Roman Empire, and how each church is to function as part of his Kingdom. Each message contains unique details that apply to the congregation to which John writes it. It also maintains intertextual connections with other writings that reinforce the message to the church. Each message also connects with later portions of the Apocalypse as John provides a unique stream that results in the conqueror entering the new Jerusalem.

### **Classifying the Content of Rev 2–3**

People refer to the material contained in Rev 2–3 as “the letters.” This designation appears in both popular and academic writings. One major point of discussion when examining Rev 2–3 is how to classify the text. Various classifications include letter, prophetic speech, suzerain-vassal treaty, and Greek oratory. Though arguments support each of the aforementioned classifications, no single designation identifies the entire message. David Aune notes that each message appears to function as a mixture of genre. The presentation of Jesus as King in Rev 1 constrains the writings to have a classification of royal or imperial edicts.<sup>7</sup> They function prophetically, providing audiences with a salvation-judgment oracle that builds on the presentation of Jesus revealed in Rev 1.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rudberg, “Zu Den Sendschreiben,” 175–9; Aune, “Form and Function,” 183.

<sup>8</sup> Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity*, 326.

Like other prophetic oracles, each message addresses the specific circumstances of those presents opposition to the powers at work in the local environment.

The messages to the churches serve as the most popular section of the book commonly preached in Christian churches, making it appear to function as a separate composition. Contrary to J. Massyngberde Ford<sup>9</sup> and David Aune,<sup>10</sup> the writings contained in Rev 2–3 did not function as a later literary construction independent of the rest of the Apocalypse. The unity of the book finds support from John Sweet who describes the book as “disordered and coherent,”<sup>11</sup> reflecting a characteristic of other apocalypses and reasonably reflecting “the work of one mind.”<sup>12</sup>

### Common Features of the Text

Studying the text of each message highlights the relationship between Christ, the Spirit, and the churches to which John writes. Christ’s confrontation of each church reinforces his kingship and the servitude of both John and the churches. The text of each message presents the activity of the churches, as well as those with whom the churches interact, Christ’s response to the churches regarding their activity, and the encouragement to

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<sup>9</sup> Massyngberde Ford asserts that the first three chapters of the text significantly differ from the remainder of the book “in literary form, style, and . . . ‘Linguistic Features’.” While she points to the explicit mentions of Christ in the opening of the work, she notes that the explicit mentions of him cease until the latter portion of Rev 22. Though she acknowledges the lamb imagery appearing in Rev 4–22, she fails to recognize that John the Baptist pointed to Christ as “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Ford ignores that what she refers to as the non-Christian portion of the text (Rev 4–22) refer to Christ. Given her thoughts regarding the authorship of Rev 4–11 by John the Baptist, Rev 12–22 by one of his disciples, and Rev 1–3 serving as a later Christian redaction, one would think that the disciple of John the Baptist would have some recognition of Christ as the Lamb of God.

Massyngberde Ford’s analysis of “Linguistic Features” serves as little more than a list comparing the vocabularies of what she sees as the Christian and non-Christian portions of the text (43–46). Her analysis excludes terms such as *ρομφαία* (sword, 1:16). This term not only appears in Rev 4:22, but also collocates with the term *στόμα* (mouth, 1:16) in both sections of the book (cf. Rev 19:15, 21).

<sup>10</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, cxx–cxxi.

<sup>11</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 35.

exhibit faithfulness to Jesus. The conclusion of each message reveals additional encouragement to maintain loyalty to Christ by obeying the words of the Spirit.

### Structure and Common Features of the Messages

The messages to the seven churches maintain common features that guide the reader through Christ's royal communication to each congregation. Various components of the message also highlight Christ's kingship and royal authority as he communicates with the congregations. These communications present Christian opposition to the Roman Empire by calling those in the churches to participate faithfully as citizens in the kingdom of God and pledge their allegiance to Christ as their King.

#### *Identification of Common Social Actors*

While each message contains unique social actors, some remain common to all the messages. While not receiving a direct mention, John continues to present himself to his audiences as a model of obedience to Christ. He functions as the recipient of Christ's command to write, which he obeys, as revealed through the receipt of the message.

Maintaining the understanding that Christ functions as King (as revealed in Rev 1), John reiterates some description of Christ in each Christophanic presentation of the messages. While the presentation to each church maintains some uniqueness, each description maintains at least one component that refers the audiences back to Rev 1 (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). These descriptions allow audiences to recognize this individual as the one like a son of man whom John sees at the beginning of his vision. In each message, Christ communicates with the angel of the church.

Toward the end of each message, the one who has ears receives the call to hear the words of the Spirit, who speaks to the churches. While the conqueror hears, the churches serve as the recipients of the Spirit's speech. Each of the messages reveals that just as Christ exercises royal authority speaks to the angels of the churches, the Spirit who manifests the kingdom of God the earth speaks to the churches. The end of the message also provides a promise to another social actor, the one who conquers. This person serves as the recipient of the eschatological reward Christ gives to the faithful. In each message, the power and authority of Christ and the Spirit over those in the churches become more apparent as the Spirit and Christ speak, but the recipients of their speech have no voice. The overcomer receives from Christ, highlighting Christ's authority to act in ways that benefit the individual. John's presentation of the typical social actors in the messages reflect the differences in power between Christ and those who function as his slaves.

### *Introduction to the Message*

The introduction to each message consists of three distinct parts: the recipient of the message, the command to write, and the introduction of Christ to the congregation. All of these components of the introduction reveal the kingship of Christ, his authority over his servants, and a realm of his domain. The introduction of each message provides a foundation for those in the churches to obey the words read and heard. It also maintains a direct connection with the content of each message.

The introduction begins by identifying the recipient of the message. Each message opens with τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν . . . ἐκκλησίας (to the angel of the assembly in . . . , 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). The repetition of this language, along with the spatial shift from city to

city, marks the beginning of each message. Since the term *ἐκκλησία* not only refers to a worshiping community but a gathering of citizens, readers can identify the church in this locality as part of Christ's present kingdom located within the context of the Roman Empire.

Though John receives no explicit mention in the message, he receives the command to write to the church, noted by the imperative *γράψον*. The backgrounding of John as a social actor presents Jesus as the authoritative figure who speaks and not John as a commanding individual who writes. John's compliance with the command, noted by the composition of the message, reveals Christ's authority over John and his obedience to the command. John's submission to Christ's command models for those to whom he writes that they too should obey the commands they will receive from Christ.

John's language reflects the angel as the heavenly representation of the local congregations by the use of the second person singular pronoun and the use of second person singular verbs. Additional support for this view that the angel represents the collective also appears via the shift that occurs to the second person plural. The presentation of "some" or a "few" when referring to subgroups of the congregation also helps to highlight this.

The content of each message begins with *τάδε λέγει* (thus says, 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). This language appears in prophetic writings of the Septuagint and Greek oracles.<sup>13</sup> The use of this language reflects the divine origin of the message. In addition to the association of the text with divine speech, the text also maintains parallels with royal

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<sup>13</sup> Aune, "Form and Function," 187.



decrees. Such language appears in royal communications of Persia and Rome.<sup>14</sup> As a result, the language of the message reveals both the divine and royal presentation of Christ, who declares the messages to the churches.

In addition to the language that introduces the message, the description of the one like a son of man further highlights his royal status. Each of the messages contains a description of this individual that parallels the divine figure John sees in Rev 1. Though Jesus's name never occurs in the description of the one who speaks, as do the names of rulers in some edicts, some of the descriptions parallel depictions of Christ in Rev 1. These descriptions from Rev 1 combine with the royal features of the text to reveal that the speaker in each message functions as a divine, royal figure who confronts the churches.

### *Ecclesial Interaction*

The next portion of the text reveals Christ's knowledge of each congregation. Each message follows the introduction with the declaration of Christ's knowledge, signified by the term οἶδα (I know, 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1b, 8, 15). David Aune explains that this portion of the text "is not identical with the central message of each proclamation"; it serves as the foundation for the focus of the message. This portion of the message reveals the interactions of the church.

While Christ possesses unique details regarding each church, he expresses that he knows the ἔργα (works) of five congregations: Ephesus (2:2), Thyatira (2:19), Sardis (3:1), Philadelphia (3:8), and Laodicea (3:15). While the term "works" refers to a variety

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<sup>14</sup> Aune, "Form and Function," 187.

of activities, Jesus elaborates on the details of each church's works. These details become vitally crucial since Jesus notes that he will judge each one according to their works (Rev 2:23).

When addressing the other two congregations—Smyrna and Pergamum—Jesus makes no mention of their works, but still expresses intimate knowledge. He tells the congregation in Smyrna that he knows their *θλίψιν* (tribulation, 2:9). The church in Pergamum hears that Christ knows *ποῦ κατοικεῖς* (where [they] dwell, 2:13). Unlike the other churches, these two congregations receive messages that mention violent opposition and death. For the church in Pergamum, they receive a reminder of what took place in the days of Antipas's death (2:13). The church in Smyrna receives encouragement to be faithful unto death (2:10).

Another common feature of this portion of the message occurs when Christ judges the congregation. While the majority of the message begins with a commendation, the phrase *ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ* marks the shift from commendation to critique. This shift occurs in three of the messages: Ephesus (2:4), Pergamum (2:14), and Thyatira (2:20). The messages to the churches in Ephesus and Sardis contain a shift when Christ notes *ἀλλὰ . . . ἔχεις* (but you have, Rev 2:6; 3:4), identifying a transition from critique to commendation. Christ's knowledge of each congregation prepares the audiences for his interaction with them.

### Divisions in the Church

Aune argues that the “a close reading of the seven proclamations in Rev 2–3 *clearly* suggests that this is a literary fiction” in which John fails to exhibit consistency.<sup>15</sup> While he accurately identifies shifts in person and number among the messages, those inconsistencies better reflect the non-fictive nature of the writings. John’s composition reveals that either not all of the churches maintain unity in their behavior, or, in the case of Smyrna, the statement does not affect or apply to everyone, but only a portion of the congregation. The message reveals such divisions. The message to the church begins with a critique and moves to a commendation. Jesus directs the critique to the entire church, utilizing verbs and pronouns in the singular form. The term ἀλλὰ marks the shift from critique to commendation (3:4). Jesus directs the commendation to a subset of the church which John starkly identifies by shifting the language from singular to plural, noting the church has ὀλίγα ὀνόματα a few names that had remained faithful. As a result, the shifts within the message based on number reveal whether or not a congregation experiences internal conflict in their approach to those outside of the church and those associated with the empire.

### Activities of Opponents

Jesus’s knowledge provides information regarding more than the activities of the church or the evidence of any internal divisions or subgroups within the church. It reveals information regarding the interaction of those in the church with those outside the church. When addressing these interactions, the texts reveal any external oppositions the church

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<sup>15</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 109. Emphasis mine.

may face. John evidences the opposition in which the church engages through the use of transitive verbs in which another social actor functions as the recipient of the action.

### *Divine Confrontation*

The next portion of the message to receive attention varies from church to church. Instead of using consistent language to signify a shift to this portion of the text, this section of the message contains a combination of imperatives and verbs that Christ performs based on the congregation's response to his instructions. The imperatives and Christ's actions divide this portion of the text into two sections: admonition and requital. These components of the message reveal Christ's power and authority over the churches. He does not simply give commands; he provides promises and threats based on compliance. The fulfillment of Christ's promises and threats appear in the later portions of the text.

Christ most often issues the command *μετανόησον* (repent, 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19) to the churches. The churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, and Laodicea—all churches that receive critiques—receive this command. This call to repent reveals a deficiency in the church and calls them to rectify their situation by exhibiting loyalty to Christ and his kingdom. Though Christ critiques the church in Thyatira, the message does not provide a command to repent. Instead, Jesus explains that he had already extended the opportunity of repentance to Jezebel (2:21–22).

The response of the church to Christ's instructions determines the requital they experience. How Jesus responds to the congregation initially maintains a clear connection with how he initially presents himself to the congregation. The one who walks among the seven golden lampstands threatens to remove the lampstand of the church in Ephesus if they fail to repent (2:1, 5). The one who died and came to life offers the crown of life to

those who exhibit faithfulness unto death (2:8, 10). The one who has the sharp two-edged sword threatens to use the sword against those who hold to aberrant teachings (2:12, 16). The messages to Ephesus (2:5), Pergamum (2:16), Thyatira (2:22–23), Sardis (3:3), and Laodicea (3:16) contain promises of requital for disobedience to Christ. The messages to Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea declare promises of requital for obedience to Christ. Ultimately, Christ's promises to the churches take on both positive or negative tones, depending on one's relationship with him.

### *Conclusion*

The conclusion to each message consists of two components: the call to the hearer and the promise to the conqueror (2:7, 11, 17, 26–29; 3:5–6, 12–13, 21–22). While Jesus directs the majority of the message to the angel of the church, as signified by the use of the second-person, this portion of the message shifts to the third person. Though these two components appear in every message, they do not maintain the same order throughout the messages. The first three messages—those to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum—have the call to the hearer before the promise to the conqueror. In the remaining messages, the promise to the conqueror precedes the call to the hearer.

### Call to the Hearer

The call to the hearer exhibits the same language in each message. John writes ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις (the one having ears let that person hear what the Spirit says to the churches, 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). These passages not only issue a call to hear the message, but the text also introduces another speaker—the Spirit. While John writes in the Spirit, the churches hear the Spirit. While the presentation of

two speakers delivering the same message might cause problems for some readers, recipients of the Apocalypse must recognize the dual nature of the message John presents in Rev 2–3. While the exalted and glorified Christ speaks to the angel—the heavenly representation—of the church, the Spirit on earth speaks to the churches.<sup>16</sup>

### Promise to the Overcomer

The conclusion of each message makes a promise to the individual who conquers (2:7, 11, 17, 26–27; 3:5, 12, 21). Unlike the promises of requital that could have either a positive or negative effect, all of the promises to the conqueror maintain a positive eschatological outcome. While the call to hear maintains the same language throughout the messages, the language of the promise to the overcomer varies from message to message, while maintaining connections with the preceding portions of the messages. Though some have been tempted to universalize these promises, Christ makes the promise to the specific group to which he addresses in the message. The unique connection of the promise with the preceding portions of the message should discourage such universalization.

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<sup>16</sup> Within the first three chapters of the Apocalypse, spatial shifts happen not only from city to city in which the assemblies are but between heaven and earth. As the intratextual analysis of Rev 1 reveals, the seven spirits of God do not appear after the seven spirits of God are sent out into all the earth, but the Spirit does. The text reveals that John equates the seven spirits with the Holy Spirit.

Some have argued that the expression “the seven spirits” recalls the writing of the prophet Isaiah. Others, like Aune, assert that these are seven archangels. It seems more appropriate to recognize John’s distinction between the seven spirits and the Spirit as a way by which John depicts the Spirit in heaven or on earth. When John presents the Spirit from a heavenly perspective, he consistently refers to the “seven spirits” (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). When he presents the Spirit from an earthly perspective, he refers to the Spirit (1:10; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:2; 14:13; 21:10; 22:17).

Regarding the joint activity between Christ and the Spirit, the presentation of both social actors speaking the same message highlights the parallel between the activity of the exalted and glorified Christ with that of the Spirit on earth. Even as the Son does nothing by himself but that which the Father does (John 5:19), the Spirit does not speak of himself but declares that which is of the Son (John 16:13–14). As a result, the messages to the congregations parallel the foretold activities of the Spirit on the earth and the exalted Christ. Such understanding provides some understanding of the recipients of the speech of Jesus and the Spirit.

### **Conclusion**

The composition of each message presents the audiences of the Apocalypse with a distinct image of Christ—the ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5)—exercising his royal authority. He does so by speaking to the churches, judging the congregations, disciplining those who require discipline, acting against those who persecute his churches, and aiding those in need. While John distributes these features among the messages, he presents the standard features and activities of Christ among the churches in a unique manner, based on the situation of each congregation.

## CHAPTER 5: EPHESUS—POWER STRUGGLES IN THE CONGREGATION

### Introduction

John obeys the command he receives in Rev 1:11, 19 and writes to the congregation in Ephesus (Rev 2:1).<sup>1</sup> The message to the assembly in this city presents a community that expresses a willingness to oppose who hold to aberrant ideas. The group experiences the challenge of maintaining faithfulness to Christ in the midst of a polytheistic culture. At the same time, some among the community embrace heterodox teachings and practices.

To maintain their fidelity to Christ, the congregation goes to an extreme and finds itself in another predicament. The Ephesian congregation exhibits an ungodly attitude toward those who embrace these unorthodox teachings. Though the text identifies this community aligned with Christ, it behaves as if it lives under the curse of sin and unlovingly exercise power over others. In response to this, John writes to the assembly in Ephesus and urges the congregation to behave like those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ. He then uses his message to explain that those who have a relationship with Christ should maintain loving relationships with one another, as a reflection of their relationship with him.

This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction with the sociocultural situation of the congregation in order to address the community's

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 109.



conformity to the Roman Empire and how John critiques the group's abuse of power. The textual analysis will utilize social actor analysis, particularly the examination of which social actors are activated and passivated, providing evidence that the Ephesian community engages in power abuse. Following this, the intertextual analysis will appeal to the earliest biblical account of power abuse, recalling how humanity initially lost access to the tree of life. Finally, the intratextual analysis will present the tree of life and discuss the characteristics of the tree that bring restoration to the destructive effects of Rome's abuse.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

The sociocultural situation in Ephesus reveals that the city exercised some of the most, if not the most, power among the cities within Asia Minor.<sup>2</sup> The city maintained a position of power and prominence as the largest city in the region. It also served as a center of Roman administration,<sup>3</sup> highlighting the political power of the city. The imperial cult found a prosperous place for its propagation in Ephesus, as the city maintained a temple dedicated to Augustus.<sup>4</sup> This temple, likely located at the city's administrative center, symbolized the connection between daily life and the worship of the emperor.<sup>5</sup> The city's status as a political, religious, and cultural center made it one of the most influential cities in Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Witherington, *Revelation*, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 136.

<sup>4</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 259.

<sup>5</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 259.

<sup>6</sup> Lähnemann, *Die Sieben Sendschreiben*, 525.

In addition to the city's leadership in the area of politics and culture, Ephesus possessed significant wealth. It was the most extensive commercial center in Asia.<sup>7</sup> The worship of Artemis significantly contributed to the city's culture and economy.<sup>8</sup> The Artemision's operation as a financial institution within Ephesus directly connects the cult of Artemis with the economic power of the city.<sup>9</sup> The biblical account reflects the dedication of the citizens of Ephesus to the city's patron deity by noting a public disturbance in response in apostolic teaching regarding Christ (cf. Acts 19:21–41). While the people of the city worshiped other local deities, such as Apollo, Athena, and Zeus, the Ephesians understood themselves to have a special relationship with Artemis.<sup>10</sup> In addition to their relationship with Artemis, they recognized the negative economic impact of the gospel on the city, due to people defecting from the worship of Artemis in order to worship Jesus (Acts 19:24–27).

These combined factors consistently made the congregation in Ephesus susceptible to interaction with some form of alternative teaching. As with the Christians in Ephesus as noted in the writings of the Apostle Paul (1 Tim 1:3–11; 4:1–8; 2 Tim 3:1–17), those receiving John's writing must face the toil of addressing those who rise up among the group bringing a false teaching to the congregation (Acts 20:28–32). The book of Revelation encourages the assembly to exhibit faithful resistance to the empire and the cults that contribute to its sociocultural contexts.<sup>11</sup> The congregation's firm stance should

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<sup>7</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis*, 283.

<sup>9</sup> Braund, *Greek Religion and Cults*, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 106; Trafton, *Reading Revelation*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse*, 24–25; Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 1; Bovon, "John's Self-Presentation," 96.

come as no surprise, as the assembly in Ephesus has a history of combatting false teaching (cf. 1 Tim 1:3).<sup>12</sup>

When considering how the Roman Empire functioned, history reveals that “the Roman Empire promulgated a sort of ‘Roman imperial theology’ based on violence, power, domination, and material prosperity.”<sup>13</sup> These kinds of approaches were central to the expansion and maintenance of the empire. This kind of approach to interacting with others stands in direct contradiction with the teaching of Christ to his followers.<sup>14</sup> Abandonment of Christ’s teachings and the implementation of such power abuse results in the confrontation between Christ and the congregation.

### Textual Analysis

Though Robert H. Mounce notes that under Domitian’s reign “failure to honor the emperor as a god became a political offense and punishable,”<sup>15</sup> the text of the message does not address a community experiencing persecution. Instead, the correspondence reflects that the congregation in Ephesus exercises power in the midst of internal conflict.<sup>16</sup> They perform multiple works for which Christ commends them.<sup>17</sup> While the congregation displays behavior that highlights their dedication to Christ, some of their internal attitudes reflect disloyalty to Christ and his kingdom. As a result, they experience the challenge of functioning as a group that maintains faithfulness to Christ in the midst of a culture in which some Christians may assimilate to the broader culture.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 105–9.

<sup>13</sup> Hill, *Prophetic Rage*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, “Matthew and Empire,” 111.

<sup>15</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 116.

<sup>18</sup> Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 235–36.

The congregation goes to an extreme to maintain their fidelity to Christ and finds itself failing to exhibit love toward those they should lovingly confront as brothers and sisters in their faith.<sup>19</sup> The message presents an assembly that abandons the love of Christ and adopts the exercise of power as a means of demonstrating their dedication to Jesus. Instead, the congregation attempts to adopt the ways of Rome and exert power over those who exhibit dissidence. The message responds to the community's attempt to follow Christ by exerting power over those they resist. In the message, Jesus Christ exercises his royal power as judge and confronts the congregation for the ungodly attitude it exhibits while attempting to demonstrate faithfulness to him. He urges the assembly to maintain their allegiance to his Kingdom while showing love as they resist those with whom they disagree. If the congregation can demonstrate their ability to love others, Christ offers them the restoration of the fullness of relationship with him by way of the tree of life.

#### Identification of Social Actors

John, whose name receives no mention, receives the instruction to write the message. The passage portrays him as a scribe who merely writes that which Christ speaks. John writes the message to the angel of the congregation in Ephesus. This angel personifies the entire congregation. The angel opposes an unnamed group of evil people and a group known as the Nicolaitans. The one having ears receives a call to hear what the Spirit says to the

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<sup>19</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Apocalyptic and Gnosis," 568; Boring, *Revelation*, 92; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 33; Oster, *Seven Congregations*, 98. Boring, Oster, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Skaggs and Benham recognize the evil people in Rev 2:2 as Christians. Though Boring identifies them as those from outside the local community, Skaggs and Benham explain that Paul warned of such individuals coming from both outside of and within the community (Acts 20:28–31).

churches. The conqueror receives a promise that introduces God, who possesses the paradise promised.<sup>20</sup>

#### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 2:1)

The opening of the message informs the congregation of Christ's power and authority over it and all the other assemblies he addresses.<sup>21</sup> It identifies Christ as ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσῶν (the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, 2:1). This language parallels John's portrayal of Jesus in Rev 1:13, 16 where he describes Christ as a divine, royal figure.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Jesus's proximity to and activity among the stars and lampstands highlight his relationship with the congregations. According to David Machin and Andrea Mayr, "distance signifies social relations,"<sup>23</sup> reflecting an indirect correlation between relationships and spatial proximity unless other factors of the text speak to the contrary.<sup>24</sup> Based on his relationship with the community, Jesus confronts the Ephesian congregation.

#### Holding the Seven Stars

Though reminiscent of John's initial description of Jesus (Rev 1:16), the language of Rev 2:1 uses slightly different verbiage. When depicting Jesus's possession of the seven stars

<sup>20</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Witherington, *Revelation*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Machin and Mayr, *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis*, 97. Though Machin and Mayr explain correlation when discussing images, they explain that this parallels real life, which written texts portray.

<sup>24</sup> Waugh et al., "Critical Discourse Analysis," 85.

in the inauguration of the vision, John uses the term ἔχω (to have, 1:16). In the introduction of the message, he uses the term κρατέω (to hold, 2:1). Though these terms can function synonymously,<sup>25</sup> the use of different terms in the text maintains some significance.<sup>26</sup>

Rev 2:1	ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ (the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand)
Rev 1:16	καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτὰ (and having seven stars in his right hand)

Jesus holding the stars in his right hand (Rev 2:1) demonstrates more than mere possession of the angels of the churches (Rev 1:16). The use of the term κρατέω (hold) connects Christ with the concepts of power, strength, authority, and the exercise thereof.<sup>27</sup> The association of Christ with this term reinforces the understanding that he, their King, has authority over the angels of the churches and the churches themselves.<sup>28</sup> This construal of authority reminds the congregation that even though they may live within the geographic realm of the Roman Empire, Christ still maintains his authority over them.

<sup>25</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 220.

<sup>26</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 297. Robertson argues that the term κρατέω is a “stronger word” than ἔχω but notes that the use of κρατέω in Rev 2:1 refers back to the use of ἔχω in Rev 1:16.

<sup>27</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 473; Patterson, *Revelation*, 83. In this entry in Louw and Nida, the term κρατέω relates to the concept of someone or something possessing control of another. Another example of this appears in Acts 2:24, when Peter explains that it was impossible for Christ to be held by death.

<sup>28</sup> Leithart, *Revelation*, 145.

### Walking Among the Lampstands

Christ walking among the seven golden lampstands reinforces his authority.<sup>29</sup> Just as there exists a distinction in language between the initial description of Jesus with the seven stars (Rev 1:16) and how he now appears in relation to them (Rev 2:1), the same disparity holds true for Jesus's activity among the lampstands. The latter portrayal depicts him as more than merely present. He is present and active among the churches.

Rev 2:1	ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσεῶν (the one who walks amid the seven golden lampstands)
Rev 1:13	καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν ὅμοιον υἷὸν ἀνθρώπου (and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man)

In Rev 1, the initial presentation of Christ notes his presence ἐν μέσῳ τῶν λυχνιῶν (in the midst of the lampstands, 1:13). He does not act. In the message, Christ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ λυχνιῶν (walks among the lampstands, Rev 2:1). His activity among the lampstands reveals more than his presence among the churches; it reveals his power. The association of Jesus with this activity demonstrates his authority over the assemblies he prepares to confront.

### Ecclesial Interactions (Rev 2:2–4, 6)

This portion of the study utilizes social actor analysis, giving particular attention to the activation and passivation of social actors, to expose that the congregation engages in the abuse of power over those they encounter. The engagement of the church with those John refers to as κακοὺς (evil, 2:2) reveals that the congregation functions as the aggressors

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<sup>29</sup> Leithart, *Revelation*, 145.

against those they resist. The group's works fall into two categories: κόπον (toil) and ὑπομονήν (patient endurance, 2:2).<sup>30</sup> The assembly's toil reflects the activity between the congregation and those they encounter,<sup>31</sup> while its patient endurance highlights its attitude in relation to its interactions.<sup>32</sup>

The group's labor reflects its exercise of power through actions and discernment while interacting with those they encounter. Analysis of the language of the message reveals that in each clause, the assembly functions as the social agent, while those with whom it interacts serves as the social patient. They οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακούς (cannot bear evil people, 2:2), ἐπίρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους (test those who call themselves apostles, 2:2), and εὔρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς (find them false, 2:2).<sup>33</sup> The portrayal of the congregation in each of the clauses above presents it as able to perform actions that impact those with whom they interact. Such construal reflects the church's exertion of power against these people.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to the congregation, John depicts the evil people as liars, where he reveals that they are not apostles, as they present themselves to be (Rev 2:2). This depiction delegitimizes and discredits the group's reputation.<sup>35</sup> Such a construction demonstrates that these evil people possess no power. Its actions reinforce the power dynamic between them and the angel of the church. While the assembly performs three activities in opposition to the group, those the congregation opposes perform only one

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<sup>30</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 112.

<sup>31</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 220. Aune asserts that the use of this term functions as juridical language, communicating that the assembly has evaluated these individuals.

<sup>34</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 24–25.

<sup>35</sup> Hart, *Discourse, Grammar, and Ideology: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives*, 8.



activity—speaking. When this group speaks, they do so only with regard to themselves, and John mentions no parties as the recipients of their speech. In addition to only speaking, the evil people’s lack of activity in relation to the church reveals their lack of power compared to the congregation in Ephesus. Such delegitimation decreases any potential for seeing these social actors as exhibiting any power over the church.

Works (ἔργα, Rev 2:2–3)	
Toil (κόπον, Rev 2:2)	Patient Endurance (ὑπομονήν, Rev 2:3)
οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι κακούς (cannot bear <b>evil people</b> )	ὑπομονήν ἔχεις (you have <i>patient endurance</i> )
ἐπίρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους (you tested <b>those who call themselves apostles</b> )	ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου (you <i>bear up</i> for the sake of my name)
εὔρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς (you found <b>them</b> to be false)	οὐ κεκοπίλαες (you <i>have not grown weary</i> )

The text contains three clauses that expound upon the congregation’s patient endurance. They reflect the attitude of the assembly. In each, the church performs actions that have no social actor who functions as the social patient of the process. The group hears ὑπομονήν ἔχεις (you have patient endurance, 2:3), ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου (you bear up for the sake of Christ’s name, 2:3), and οὐ κεκοπίλαες (you have not grown weary, 2:3). All of these clauses reveal that the Ephesian congregation has remained faithful in their dedication to Jesus.

Further elaboration on the attitude of the church reflects a deficiency in their interaction with others. Jesus tells the church τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες (you abandoned your first love, 2:4).<sup>36</sup> This departure from their first love holds great

<sup>36</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 292–93. This term, like the expressions of the congregation’s patient endurance, occurs in the semantic domain of Attitudes and Emotions.

significance, as a reference to the love they had at first begins the clause.<sup>37</sup> While extensive discussion surrounds the object of this love,<sup>38</sup> the treatment of these other Christians by the congregation readily identifies them as the object of the love the assembly abandons.<sup>39</sup> The actions of the church impact their relationship with others. Their lack of love reflects their failure to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom and fully identify as his disciples. Instead, their adoption of Rome's practices makes them appear as faithful citizens of the empire. The deficiency in love makes those in the congregation at Ephesus unrecognizable as faithful disciples of Jesus, for others recognize Jesus's followers by the love they have for one another (cf. John 13:35). Their lack of love also calls into question to their love for God, as one cannot fail to love another person and love God (cf. 1 John 4:20).

In addition to lacking love, the church manifests another attitude—hatred.<sup>40</sup> Since the church lacks love, their manifestation of hatred should not surprise readers. The congregation hates the works of another group known as the Nicolaitans. While the text notes the hatred of their works and not those who perform the works, which reflects a biblical model of hating lawlessness and unrighteous actions (cf. Rom 7:15; Heb 1:9), one connection between the congregation's hatred and lack of love leaves one open to the question of whether or not the hatred of people's actions leads to standing firm against them, but when unfettered, leads to an abuse of power.

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 116.

<sup>38</sup> Though some assert that Christ functions as the object of their love, the congregation stands firm in its commitment to Christ, as noted by their actions and tenacity to stand against evil. Additional support for this idea comes from the fact that within the messages, Christ never functions as the recipient of any human actions, as he exhibits ultimate authority.

<sup>39</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 269.

<sup>40</sup> Vorster, "In What Sense," 30. Vorster rightly critiques Louw and Nida for not listing the term *μισέω* in the semantic domain of Attitudes and Emotions. Given the relationship between the terms, they should appear in the same semantic domain.

### Divine Confrontation (Rev 2:4–5)

This section focuses on the commands Christ issues and his promised actions toward the community. These components of the text expose the relative nature of this congregation's power. While it abuses power when interacting with others, its power is minimal compared to Christ's authority. Within the context of this confrontation, Christ exercises his power over the assembly through judging and instructing the assembly. In addition to his evaluations and instructions, he issues threats to the community, based on its compliance with his commands. Such presentations of power urge the assembly to submit to Christ's commands instead of conforming to the abusive culture of Rome.

#### *Christ's Actions Toward the Church*

Christ's instructions and promises to the church in Ephesus conform to the same instructions he gave to his disciples regarding loving others (e.g., Matt 5:44; 19:19; John 13:34; 15:12). The Ephesian church received exhortation regarding love on other occasions as well. The text explains that *ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ* (bearing with one another in love, Eph 4:2) functions as part of their calling.<sup>41</sup> When speaking of how they should not fall prey to false teaching, the message also notes they should be *ἀληθεύοντες . . . ἐν ἀγάπῃ* (speaking the truth in love, Eph 4:15). The words of Jesus, as well as the Pauline instruction to the church in Ephesus, reveal the failure of this congregation and provide an explanation for the commands Christ issues and the promises of requital he makes for any potential disobedience.

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians*, 334.

### Admonition

Even as the church exerts power over those outside the community of faith, Critical Discourse Analysis reveals that Christ exercises his authority over the assembly by issuing a series of commands.<sup>42</sup> In light of their failure to exhibit love, Christ calls them to love those they oppose. Jesus gives the congregation three commands: *μνημόνευε οὐν πόθεν πέπτωκας* (remember from where you have fallen, Rev 2:5), *μετανόησον* (repent, Rev 2:5), and *τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον* (do the first works, Rev 2:5). The call to remember from where they have fallen suggests that the church had a former state where their current state of activity devoid of love did not exist.<sup>43</sup> The command to repent urges them to change their attitude, which should result in them changing their way of life. As a result, the final command urges the church to follow through with their repentance by interacting with others as they did before. The call to do the works they did at first relates to the quality, not quantity, of the works they were previously performing. Since the failure of the church relates to their lack of love, the works Christ mandates that love accompany their activities.<sup>44</sup> The commendation reveals that the church continued to work the quality of love lacking from their works, their activities lacked the potency that they should have had within the church and the broader culture.<sup>45</sup>

### Requital

Jesus's commands do not function as impotent suggestions for the church. If the church fails to maintain proper relationships with others, he threatens to end his relationship with

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<sup>42</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 75–76.

<sup>43</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 34.

the congregation. He declares ἔρχομαί σοι καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς (I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent, 2:5b). Christ is activated in relation to two material processes. In each of these clauses, the congregation is passivated. Immediately following this threat, the text reveals that which the assembly possesses the power to do if they wish to avoid such judgment—repent. First, John notes that Christ will come to the church. Depending on where one stands with Christ, his coming can have either a positive or negative effect. For the church in Ephesus, a lack of repentance leads to a negative result of Christ coming—eternal punishment.<sup>46</sup> Their disobedience will result in the removal of their lampstand from its place.

Various writers propose ideas regarding the meaning of the removal of the lampstand. Some assert that the removal of the lampstand relates to the loss of the church's witness, while Grant Osborne argues that the removal of the lampstand reflects a loss of the community's standing as a church.<sup>47</sup> While these are plausible assumptions, the question of "From what will Christ remove the lampstand?" aids in explaining the promise of requital.

While the idea of "place" may refer to status,<sup>48</sup> the text refers to the place as the location of the lampstand.<sup>49</sup> Both Rev 1:16 and Rev 2:1 connect the location of the lampstands with Christ's location. These passages identify Jesus ἐν μέσῳ (in the midst of) the lampstands. As a result, while discussions of the removal of the lampstands revolve around status and function, the text makes clear, based on the lampstands' current

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<sup>46</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1011–12.

<sup>49</sup> Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1011.

location, that impenitence results in Christ exercising his royal authority and removing the lampstand from his presence.<sup>50</sup> Even as Jesus's proximity to the lampstands signifies relationship, the removal of the lampstand signifies rejection. If the church fails to exhibit appropriate relationships with others, Christ will end his relationship with them.

### Identification with the Church

Though Jesus critiques the church for their abandonment of the love they previously had, he also identifies with the church in their hatred by noting *καγὼ μισῶ* (I also hate, Rev 2:6) the works of the Nicolaitans. Though it might appear ironic that Christ would rebuke and threaten the church for their lack of love and identify with the congregation in their hatred, they direct their hatred toward the works of the Nicolaitans, not the Nicolaitans themselves. This approach of hating sinful behavior functions as how the church should interact with all individuals. They should love people, even when they hate those people's actions.

### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 2:7)

This component of analysis utilizes social actor analysis to reveal that the promise to the overcomer functions as a demonstration of Christ's power that ultimately leads to a reversal of the effects of the power structures reflected in the body of the message. The message concludes with Jesus's promise of eternal relationship to those who overcome.<sup>51</sup> This portion of the text once again reveals Christ's power over those in the church. He declares *δώσω αὐτοῖς φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ* (I

<sup>50</sup> Decock, "Works of God," 41; Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 128.

<sup>51</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 52.

will give to [the conqueror] to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God, 2:7b). Analysis of the social actors reveals that the John activates Christ, presenting him as the social agent who performs the activity of giving, and beneficializes the overcomer, who receives to eat from the tree of life. This promise also activates God, who provides the paradise in which the tree is located. This promise displays the power of God and Christ and reminds those in the congregation that there are those who have greater power than they possess and can impact their eternal fate.

### Textual Summary

Analysis of the text reveals that while the congregation in Ephesus takes a stand for Christ and exercises power over self-proclaimed apostles who are not who they claim to be, it embraces the ways of the empire and attempts to enforce a Christian position through means that Christ critiques. While this exercise of power demonstrates the community's support of Christ and his kingdom, the attitude it exhibits when interacting with others demonstrates disloyalty to Christ and his kingdom. Jesus confronts this congregation as a king who does not stand far from the church and exercises power over the community. He issues corrective measures regarding how it should function as a segment of his kingdom. Jesus mandates that the church reflect his values by loving others.

### Intertextual Analysis

An intertextual analysis of the message to the congregation in Ephesus reinforces the understanding that the text encourages the congregation to abandon the abusive practices of Rome. This portion of the study argues that John alludes to the language of the

Genesis narrative regarding the tree of life. The allusion to Genesis recalls the sin of humanity, marked by the first biblical account of power abuse.<sup>52</sup> Further examination reveals that 2 Enoch also speaks of God moving about in Paradise where the tree of life is located.

The intertextual features of the text recall the language of the Genesis narrative and bookend the message. Christ walking among the seven golden lampstands (Rev 2:1) connects John's audience with the Genesis narrative when God walks in the Paradise (Gen 3:8). The mention of the tree of life (Rev 2:7; cf. Gen 2:22) serves as another common feature of the texts. Finally, the location of the tree in paradise (Rev 2:7; cf. Gen 3:8) offers sufficient support to assert that the message alludes to the narrative. These texts also maintain a parallel structure in which the divine being walks, evaluates and judges the people, and discusses access to the tree of life.

When looking at the text of Gen, the text reveals that the confrontation between the Lord and humanity takes place because the humans have illegitimately exercised their power. Genesis 1:28 (LXX) notes God's commands to the man and woman. He tells them *κατακυριεύσατε* (lord over) the earth.<sup>53</sup> Though God had given them authority over the earth, he also limited human authority by instructing Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). In Gen 3:6, both the man and the woman eat of the forbidden fruit. This abuse of power leads to their confrontation with God when he reveals that their power abuse will lead to an inequality between them,<sup>54</sup> where the man

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<sup>52</sup> Boxall, *Revelation*, 48. While Boxall asserts the connection between Rev 2:1 and Gen 3:8, his argument that it may serve as reassurance for Christians facing a dominant culture finds no support from the text.

<sup>53</sup> Brayford, *Genesis*, 224.

<sup>54</sup> Vogels, "The Power Struggle Between Man and Woman (Gen 3, 16b)," 197.



will rule over the woman, perpetuating the abuse of power among people. Because of their actions, God expels the man and the woman from the paradise.

When comparing the Genesis narrative with the message to the congregation in Ephesus, it becomes apparent that while both texts have common features, the text of Revelation speaks regarding gaining access to the tree of life, not losing access to it. Beyond the scope of Revelation, other writings speak of future access to the tree of life. The text of Ezek 47:7–12 refers to the tree of life.<sup>55</sup> The text of 1 Enoch discusses the restoration of humanity's access to the tree of life after eschatological judgments have occurred, noting the preservation of the fruit of the tree for "the righteous and holy" (1 En. 25:4–5). 2 Enoch also mentions the restoration of humanity's access in paradise. In this situation, the text also mentions God moving about goes into paradise (2 En. 8:1–3).<sup>56</sup> In 2 En. 9:1, readers discover that this location is reserved for the righteous who endure offense.

The intertextual dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis of this message reveals that John communicates to the community that those who illegitimately use and abuse power will not have access to the tree of life. For this reason, he discourages the group from following the Roman Empire's model of life. Instead, he encourages the community to exercise the power it has with love.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

The intratextual analysis of the message to the church in Ephesus discourages the congregation's practice of conforming to the broader culture of power abuse. Since this

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<sup>55</sup> Moyise, "Genesis in Revelation," 170.

<sup>56</sup> Swarup, *Self-Understanding of the Dead Sea Scrolls Community*, 30.

community has adopted the empire's abusive practices of power, John's final vision (Rev 21:9—22:5) portrays access to the tree of life for those who resist the empire's abusive behavior. It also models how the congregation should behave as it encounters others, demonstrating that the assembly should utilize its power to bring healing to those who have been abused by the empire. Critical Discourse Analysis reveals that both the overcomer and the nations who dwell in the holy city do not exercise any direct power in their access.

#### Eat from the Tree of Life (Rev 2:7b → Rev 22:2)

The vision of the tree of life in Rev 22 presents the fulfillment of the promise to the conqueror in Rev 2:7. While both Rev 2:7 and Rev 22:2 mention the tree of life, the message and John's description of the city's geography maintain multiple common features. In addition to the mention of the tree of life, Christ appears in the midst of the congregations (Rev 2:1; Rev 22:2), while the throne of God has its home in the midst of the holy city. The message promises that he will give the conqueror to eat from the tree of life (Rev 2:7), while the tree produces fruit (Rev 22:2). These common features lead to the understanding that these two texts both speak about access to the tree of life.

The message to the church in Ephesus uses the language of paradise, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. This vision transforms the garden into a city. This city stands in contrast with Babylon (Rome), which experiences judgment in Rev 17:1—21:8.<sup>57</sup> Additional support for this contrast comes from the personification of these cities as

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<sup>57</sup> Rossing, "Healing, Kairos, and Land," 72.

women. John refers to Babylon as the prostitute, while he identifies the new Jerusalem as the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:9).

In addition to the tree's production of fruit, which provides food, John notes an additional feature about the tree that stands in contrast with the practices of Rome and the congregation in Ephesus. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. The necessity of this healing of the nations stems from the abuse of the nations by Rome. John's previous visions depict Rome's abuse and oppressive dominance of the nations. In John's third vision, the prostitute sits on many waters (Rev 17:1). These waters represent peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages (Rev 17:15). Her position on these groups reflects her dominance. In addition to sitting on the nations, the second vision depicts her power by making all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality (Rev 14:8). She also deceived the nations with her sorcery (Rev 18:23). These different demonstrations of her power necessitate the healing that the nations will receive through the leaves from the tree of life.

Though the empire has obtained "peace" through power abuse and the exertion of military power,<sup>58</sup> Jesus demonstrates that the individuals who dwell in the holy city will never have to worry about functioning as victims of abuse or military might. The open gates of the city function as a sign that they will have peace and never have to concern themselves about invasions or the abuse of another invading empire (Rev 21:25).<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately, the tree of life and the paradise bring life and peace to those who dwell in the holy city, whether they have ever demonstrated an abuse of power or suffered as victims of such abuse. This depiction of the holy city presents a model for the

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<sup>58</sup> Ehrensperger, *Paul at the Crossroads*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> Gilchrest, *Revelation 21–22*, 267.

congregation's behavior. This depiction of life in the eschatological kingdom guides the congregation in Ephesus regarding how it should live as a group of citizens of the kingdom of God and refuse to conform to the practices of the Roman Empire.

The activity of Christ later in the Apocalypse stands in contrast to the activity of the Roman Empire with regard to the present situation of John. Those who utilize their power to abuse others, like Rome, will have no place in the holy city. Christ granting access to the tree of life in the holy city enables them to receive the healing they need in God's kingdom, as opposed to them functioning as victims of the Roman Empire. This intratextual analysis reveals Christ exercising his power to bring restoration where Rome brought destruction.

### **Conclusion**

Each dimension of CDA reinforces the idea that readers of the message to the congregation in Ephesus receive a call to resist the Roman Empire's abusive model of exercising power. The textual analysis reveals the congregation's abuse of power through the lack of love the community demonstrates amid its consistent activity in relation to those it opposes. The intertextual analysis highlights the relationship between the message and the first biblical account of power abuse, which recounts that the activity resulted in humanity losing access to the tree of life. The intratextual analysis highlights the reward of the tree of life for those who overcome by refusing to engage in such abusive activities and highlights the healing that comes to the nations, which have suffered the abusive activity of Rome.

## CHAPTER 6: SMYRNA—POVERTY, PRISON, AND PERSECUTION

### Introduction

After writing to the assembly in Ephesus, John composes a message to the congregation in Smyrna, approximately thirty-five miles north of Ephesus.<sup>1</sup> While Smyrna and Ephesus functioned as rival cities to one another for power and status in the empire,<sup>2</sup> the experiences of the Christian communities in their respective cities reflect different forms of interaction with the surrounding culture. While the congregation in Ephesus exercises illegitimate power over those they oppose, the assembly in Smyrna suffers as the victim of the abuse of power.

Jesus informs the group that it will face more than religious opposition; it will also encounter political opposition, and some members of the congregation may suffer death. While the congregation must navigate the difficulties of remaining faithful in the midst of its suffering at the hands of the powerful, the assembly has the opportunity to bear witness through death. Jesus confronts as a divine king and encourages the congregation to continue to live as citizens of his kingdom and remain faithful unto death, promising that those who live as citizens of his kingdom will experience life and never die again.

This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 64.

<sup>2</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 136.

with the sociocultural situation of the congregation in order to reveal the powerlessness of this community and the encouragement of this community amid its difficulty. The textual analysis will utilize social actor analysis to demonstrate the congregation's weakness compared to other social actors. The intertextual analysis will demonstrate that John draws on a known tradition within Christian Judaism to encourage the community's perseverance in light of its suffering. The intratextual analysis will demonstrate that John presents a progressive shift in power leading to a complete reversal of power where the archenemy of the community suffers while those who demonstrated faithfulness no longer experience the weakness they previously did.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

Like the other cities mentioned in Rev 2–3, Smyrna possessed wealth.<sup>3</sup> The city achieved prosperity through trade and the gifts of benefactors who beautify the city.<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris identifies the city as “an ally of Rome.”<sup>5</sup> As such an ally, the city served as a provincial center for the imperial cult, requesting to construct a second imperial temple in the province.<sup>6</sup> The building of an imperial temple dedicated to Emperor Tiberius promotes imperial worship throughout the region, especially in the city.

Smyrna had a notable Jewish population. Just as the city was an ally of Rome, the Jews in Smyrna seemed to have an amicable relationship with the government. As this group maintained its alignment with the Roman Empire, members of the Jewish community distinguished themselves from Christians who identified themselves as Jews.

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<sup>3</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 53.

<sup>4</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 342.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, *Revelation*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 36.

Such distance between those Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not lead to Christians losing their exemption from mandated imperial worship.

The separation between these two sects of Judaism eventually led to members of the Jewish community aligning with Rome to bring accusations against local Christians. Various people, known as *delatores*, worked with the Roman government by bringing accusations against others.<sup>7</sup> Later history reveals that for some within the Christian sect of Judaism, such allegations resulted in imprisonment. Roman imprisonment did not serve the purpose of reform or rehabilitation. Instead, the government used prisons as a temporary form of restraint until one's trial, which would result in either release or official punishment, usually death.<sup>8</sup>

### Textual Analysis

Though not all of the churches of the Apocalypse endure persecution, some congregations, like the one in Smyrna, do not possess the power to resist those who come against them. The text of the entire message portrays the powerlessness of this group, as the themes of suffering and death permeate the message.<sup>9</sup> The inability of the congregation to defend and protect itself reveals the disadvantages this congregation experiences in their attempt to follow Christ. The message expresses concern with this community's suffering.<sup>10</sup> Within this message, John portrays the church as a suffering congregation that, like Christ, will have some who suffer death at the hands of the Roman Empire. The community has little power, and some of its members suffer as religious and

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<sup>7</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 64–65.

<sup>8</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 116.

<sup>9</sup> Rissi, *Future of the World*, 108 n. 209; Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 60.

political victims. The message associates the church with few activities, reinforcing their lack of authority in their social context.<sup>11</sup> This powerless church can only hope for the intervention of Jesus and the exercise of his power on their behalf.

#### Identification of Social Actors

John writes the message at the command of Christ. He directs the message to the angel of the church in Smyrna—the church’s heavenly representative. The church’s opposition, the synagogue of Satan, highlights the synagogue and Satan as social actors in the message. Their self-identification as Jews provides yet another social actor who neither performs nor receives any activity. The one having ears receives the call to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, while the conqueror receives a promise from Christ. These social actors come together to reflect the suffering the church in Smyrna experiences for its dedication to Christ.<sup>12</sup>

#### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 2:8)

The introduction of the message encourages the congregation to remain faithful to Christ and to resist conformity to the empire. John does this by depicting Christ as one who exercises power over death and the Roman powers that bring about death. Jesus suffered death at the hands of the Roman Empire but overcame the power of the empire through his resurrection.<sup>13</sup> This introduction of Christ resists Rome since Christ died by Roman crucifixion.<sup>14</sup> His present state of living and communicating with the church demonstrates

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<sup>11</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 281.

<sup>13</sup> Carter, “Matthew and Empire,” 129; Pillar, *Resurrection as Anti-Imperial Gospel*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Carter, *Roman Empire and the New Testament*, 15.



his power over the Romans and their execution system. This presentation of the exalted and glorified Christ aims to encourage the church to remain faithful to Christ and his kingdom, no matter the cost.

Jesus's introduction to the church in Smyrna reiterates the language of Rev 1:17–20. Jesus appears via two sets of contrasting concepts—ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος (the first and the last, 2:8) and ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (who was dead and came to life, 2:8).

Rev 2:8	ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος (the first and the last)
Rev 1:17	ἐγὼ εἶμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος (I am the first and the last)
Rev 2:8	ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (who was dead and came to life)
Rev 1:18	ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἶμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων (I was dead, and, behold, I am alive forever)

The text presents Jesus with this unique title that identifies him with the Lord God who sits on the throne.<sup>15</sup> John utilizes this language to refer only to Jesus (Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13), but maintains a relationship to God at the beginning and the end of the Apocalypse.<sup>16</sup> The first two occurrences connect Christ's presentation as the first and the last with his death and resurrection. The presentation of "the first and the last" in conjunction with Jesus's resurrection also highlights his authority over death.<sup>17</sup> This presentation of Christ's power sets Jesus—the one who died by Roman crucifixion—as a divine being who stands in opposition to the empire.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 247.

<sup>16</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 150.

## Ecclesial Interaction (Rev 2:9, 10b)

This portion of the study utilizes social actor analysis to reveal that the congregation suffers at the hands of those with whom it interacts. The interaction of this congregation with others reveals that the community possesses no power in relation to those around it. The assembly consistently functions as the social patient, in the majority of the clauses in which it appears. The presentation of this congregation as the victims of the exercise of power by those the empire and those who associate with it reveals the congregation's inability to defend itself against those who oppose it.

While the body of most of the messages open with a mention of the church's works (e.g., Rev 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15), this one begins with the mention of the congregation's θλίψις (tribulation, Rev 2:9).<sup>19</sup> The mention of tribulation connects this assembly with John, who models that faithfulness to Jesus and his kingdom can result in tribulation (cf. Rev 1:9).<sup>20</sup> While John experiences tribulation in the form of exile, the congregation experiences tribulation in two forms: poverty and slander.<sup>21</sup>

In the midst of a financially prosperous city that maintains positive relations with Rome and the imperial cult,<sup>22</sup> the congregation experiences poverty (2:9).<sup>23</sup> Since this poverty functions as a form of their tribulation, it seems unlikely that it results from any inactivity or negligence on the part of the church.<sup>24</sup> Instead, their poverty probably results

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<sup>19</sup> Aune, "Form and Function," 191.

<sup>20</sup> Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 51. *Contra* Thompson, "Sociological Analysis of Tribulation," 149. Thompson states that while the message speaks of tribulation, it refers to a future expectation, not the present. The message to the community in Smyrna addresses both present and future tribulation. John also identifies himself as a brother and partner in the tribulation (Rev 1:9). These features of text suggest that even no actual distress affected the group, John perceived such tribulation.

<sup>22</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 274.

<sup>23</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 161. Aune explains that this congregation's state was likely unusual, as no other messages mention an assembly experiencing this form of tribulation or weakness.

<sup>24</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 52.

from some external pressures they face in their local society.<sup>25</sup> One such form of external pressure likely resulted from the church's refusal to participate in the pagan rituals that were intertwined with the economy.<sup>26</sup>

John identifies the second facet of the church's tribulation as βλασφημία (slander Rev 2:9). While the text identifies the congregation as the target of this slander, John further describes the slander as ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους (from those saying they are Jews, Rev 2:9). This language activates these self-proclaimed Jews in relation to the activity of committing slander, demonstrating their exercise of power in relation to the assembly at Smyrna. These individuals likely functioned as *delatores* for the Roman government who brought accusations against Christians.<sup>27</sup> Such accusations could result in imprisonment, poverty, and death.<sup>28</sup> The alignment of this group with the empire leads John to declare they are not who they claim to be and to identify them as συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ (a synagogue of Satan, 2:9).<sup>29</sup> John delegitimizes the congregation's opposition by declaring the untruth of synagogue's speech. Not only does it delegitimize their self-presentation, but it also invalidates the slander this group presents against the congregation in Smyrna.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Royce, *Poverty and Power: The Problem of Structural Inequality*, 254. Royce explains that the development and maintenance of poverty takes place through the exercise of power. If this congregation experiences poverty as part of their tribulation, it likely results from their inability to control their circumstances.

<sup>26</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Keener, *Revelation*, 115. When John notes this group as the source of the blasphemy the congregation experiences, he also connects them to the empire and Satan. In the same way that John sees Satan as the source of the Roman Empire's power, he also functions as the source of this group's power in society.

<sup>30</sup> Hart, *Discourse, Grammar, and Ideology: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives*, 8.

The tribulation of the church in Smyrna does not end with their poverty or the slander they experience. The slander of the synagogue leads to the potential for further tribulation at the hands of Satan. The parallel structure of the text reveals that the church will suffer imprisonment.<sup>31</sup> The text says μέλλεις πάσχειν (you are about to suffer, 2:10). The explanation of their suffering provides an understanding of what they will experience, for the hear μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν (the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, 2:10). Here, John activates the devil as the social agent who acts on a segment of the congregation that functions as the social patient.<sup>32</sup> While imprisonment was a reality at the hands of the empire, the period for their tribulation should be understood figuratively.<sup>33</sup> The construal of the devil as the social actor performing the imprisonment reveals the ultimate source of the church's opposition and highlights his work through the government.

When explaining that some of the church will experience imprisonment, the pronoun ὑμῶν reinforces the understanding that the angel of the church functions as a collective singular noun for the entire church, given the shift from the use of the singular "you" (v. 9) to the plural "you" (v. 10). This shift in number also reveals that a subgroup of the church will undergo this experience. This imprisonment serves to test the entire congregation for ten days. Though some might assert that this tribulation lasts a literal ten days, the fact that Revelation functions as an apocalypse leads to the more likely

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<sup>31</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> van Leeuwen, "Representation of Social Actors," 62. The text represents the empire via symbolization, a form of overdetermination where a "fictional" or mythic social actor represents an actual social actor who engages in practices associated with the real world; Keener, *Revelation*, 116. Keener explains that the act of imprisonment was a form of punishment within the Roman Empire.

<sup>33</sup> Ramsay, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 199–200.

conclusion that the period is symbolic and highlights that the tribulation will occur for a limited time.<sup>34</sup>

The use of the passive voice with the word *πειρασθήτε* (may be tested, 2:10) suppresses the social actor who tests the individuals and focuses the church's attention on their experience of testing. The congregation's function as a social patient once again highlights their subjection to some other power. The congregation's lack of power and status as a victim within society reveals the power structure in which those in Smyrna who exhibit faithfulness to Christ find themselves.

#### Divine Confrontation (Rev 2:10a, 10c)

This section of the study describes the interaction between Christ and the congregation, namely the use of imperatives and the promised actions of Christ that benefit the community, which demonstrates his power in relation to the assembly. In light of the powerlessness of the congregation and how the church responds to its hopeless situation, Jesus expresses no disapproval of this community. He only encourages the church to continue what it is already doing. He issues a series of commands and notes the reward for complying with his instructions. These commands and promises support the reader's understanding that Christ exercises authority over the congregation. This revelation of Christ as one who resisted the empire models for this church that while they exhibit passive resistance toward Rome, they will conquer the empire, just as Christ did. This presentation of Christ highlights for those in Smyrna the power of Christ over that of Rome. John focuses attention on the church's function as God's people in their present

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<sup>34</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 166; Keener, *Revelation*, 116; Lupieri, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 119; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 37; Fee, *Revelation*, 32.

society by not giving attention to any activities of Christ in relation to the synagogue or Satan.

### *Christ's Actions Toward the Church*

When reading of a powerless church that suffers at the hands of Satan and has no hope of deliverance except for Jesus, one might find herself or himself disappointed to discover that Christ does not perform many activities and does not promise to prevent or end their suffering. He focuses on instructing these people how to live as faithful citizens of his Kingdom. The message to the church in Smyrna encourages the church to persist in their behavior toward the empire and resist the powers that come against them, even if it means giving their lives. The composition urges disregard for Rome's power and might, as Christ declares his power to reverse the effects of any potential execution, just as God raised Jesus from the dead. Ultimately, the message calls the church to identify with Christ in his death. In response to that identification, the church will identify with Christ in living.

### Admonition

Christ encourages this congregation in the face of danger. The resistance of the church to the empire makes them enemies of Rome. Within the context of the empire, they should fear death at the hands of the government.<sup>35</sup> Instead of encouraging them to embrace this fear, Jesus encourages them to resist this paradigm. He issues commands to the church. Though a subset of the church will experience this season of imprisonment and testing,

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<sup>35</sup> Whitlark, *Resisting Empire*, 157.

the entire church receives these commands. The communal aspect of resistance becomes evident, as the experiences of a subset of the church impact the entire congregation. For this reason, the church must maintain solidarity in their resistance to Rome.

First, Jesus commands *μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν* (fear nothing which you are about to suffer, 2:10). With the promise of new tribulation, the church receives the call not to fear. For those who resisted Rome, the empire did not offer imprisonment as a form of rehabilitation. It functioned as a method for compelling obedience or retaining those awaiting trial or execution.<sup>36</sup> Such understanding leads to the next command.

The church also receives the instruction *γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου* (be faithful unto death, 2:10). Remembering that John uses the term faithful in his earlier presentation of Jesus leads to the understanding that this call to be faithful unto death bears with it the call to be like Christ.<sup>37</sup> With the understanding that imprisonment would likely lead to death, the church receives the call to die at the hands of Rome in the name of one whom the government has already executed.

### Requital

Jesus promises life to those who remain faithful. For a church that has no power and receives commands to maintain their resistance to a government through which Satan works, Jesus does not deliver them from suffering but reverses the deadly effects of the empire. Jesus makes an offer to the church that only he could make. Immediately following the command to be faithful unto death, Christ extends to those in the church in

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<sup>36</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 166; Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 37; Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 152.

<sup>37</sup> Mangina, *Revelation*, 61. Mangina explains that the call to be faithful forms a link between the assembly in Smyrna who receives the command to be faithful and Jesus, who is faithful (cf. Rev 1:5).

Smyrna the reward of the crown of life (2:10). This crown functions as the blessing of the ultimate bestowal of honor on the recipient by Christ. Just as Jesus overcame the power of the empire by his resurrection, Jesus offers to overcome the power of the empire by extending eternal life to those who suffer death because of faithfulness to him.<sup>38</sup> Though some in the church may experience the pains of death and the congregation may feel the impact of such loss, the temporary effects of their suffering serve as encouragement to the church to maintain their resistance to the empire and endure tribulation.

#### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 2:11)

The social actor analysis in this portion of the study reveals that the conclusion of the message offers the suffering congregation the promise of a reversal of power. For a community that has experienced and will experience the power of other entities, this offer provides hope to encourage them to remain faithful to Christ. Since the community has already received encouragement to be faithful unto death, they recognize that they might die at the hands of the empire. The promise to the overcomer presents, for the first time in this message, the activation of the congregation in relation to another social actor—the second death (Rev 2:11). While Matthijs den Dulk explains that this language “is notoriously hard to expound,”<sup>39</sup> CDA reveals that the subjection of the congregation to the power of the Jews, the Roman Empire, and Satan himself will ultimately result in the congregation’s possession of power in relation to the second death. While the

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<sup>38</sup> Scaer, *James, the Apostle of Faith*, 53; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 244; Aune, “Odes of Solomon,” 339.

<sup>39</sup> den Dulk, “Promises to the Conquerors,” 517.



congregation will not suffer because of the power of the second death, the community's oppressors will.

### Textual Summary

The textual analysis of the message to the church in Smyrna provides the understanding that the church faces, and will continue to face, external opposition and persecution.

Though the church lacks power, Jesus appears to the congregation in a manner by which he serves as the ultimate model of witness and encourages those in the church in Smyrna to follow his example. Jesus's model challenges the church to exercise civil disobedience against the empire, to maintain a firm, steadfast faithfulness to him, and to maintain the hope of eternal life. In light of the church's lack of power, Jesus promises to exercise his authority on their behalf. For those who remain faithful to Christ, they will not only identify with him as those who die but as those who will live forever.

### Intertextual Analysis

John's composition of the message to the angel of the church in Smyrna incorporates material that recalls the suffering of God's people under the weight of ungodly rule but notes the receipt of a reward at the end of the period of tribulation. The materials that find a new home in the text of the Apocalypse highlight the benefits of maintained faithfulness to God in the midst of their present situation. They also urge the church to resist the Roman Empire and the synagogue of Satan.

## Testing and Receipt of the Crown of Life (Rev 2:10 → Jas 1:12)

In light of the close connection between the Apocalypse and the book of Daniel, it comes as no surprise that multiple writers appeal to Daniel 1 when discussing the time of testing in the message. In this passage, the writer presents a similar scenario where Daniel and his companions find themselves captive under Babylonian rule. Daniel chooses not to defile himself with the king's food (Dan 1:8) and tells the steward who oversees them Πείρασον δὴ τοὺς παῖδάς σου ἐφ' ἡμέρας δέκα (Test your servants for ten days, 1:12). He requests vegetables to eat and water to drink. After the period of testing, they have a better appearance than those who eat the king's food.

Rev 2:10	ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα (for ten days you will have tribulation)
Dan 1:12	Πείρασον δὴ τοὺς παῖδάς σου ἐφ' ἡμέρας δέκα (test your servants for ten days)

In the message to the church, the testing comes to followers of Jesus living under Roman rule. It also presents a model to the congregation for resisting the ungodly empire under whose oppression they live. While both texts present a discourse regarding the duration of their testing, the texts contain differences that decrease the likelihood of this Danielic passage serving as the intertext for Jesus's promise of tribulation. While Daniel asks for this period of testing, the church in Smyrna does not. Though Daniel and his companions maintain better results than their counterparts, the church in Smyrna receives a call to exhibit faithfulness in death. The stakes appear higher for those Christians in Smyrna. They risk imprisonment and death.

While the Apocalypse maintains some significant parallels with Daniel, that does not mean that the Danielic material functions as the most likely intertext for this passage.

Another component of the message directly connects to their testing and tribulation. Jesus promises the crown of life to those who remain faithful unto death. The integration of this material requires that John's use of Daniel regarding a time of testing receive reevaluation. The concept of receiving the crown of life after a period of testing/tribulation presents a more likely source for the intertext.

While scholars often focus on the length of the tribulation the church will experience, John alludes to the language of the epistle of James to present the understanding that faithful endurance of trials and tribulation, which usually result in death, results in the receipt of the crown of life. In the message to the church in Smyrna, Jesus informs this church that they *πειρασθήτε καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα* (may be tested and have tribulation for ten days, 2:10). While the textual analysis reveals that some within this church will endure hardship and additional tribulation, the intertextual analysis provides the understanding that those who endure will experience victory.

For a church that will be facing hardship, the intertextual connection contained in the message serves as a reminder of God's promise from the past and has the potential to encourage them in their tribulation. Jesus promises those who remain faithful unto death *δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς* (I will give you the crown of life, Rev 2:10). When the study of the intertextual relations moves beyond the number ten to the concept of testing and the receipt of a crown, new intertextual candidates appear. This idea of receiving a crown appears in multiple passages, but most scholars have narrowed the potential intertext to two passages: 1 Pet 5:4 and Jas 1:12.

Some scholars note that *τῆς δόξης στέφανον* (the crown of glory) mentioned in 1 Pet 5:4 refers to the crown of life mentioned in Rev 2:10. While many of them

acknowledge the distinction between the phraseology of the two texts, some assert that the concepts parallel one another. While both texts present the crown as an eschatological reward that Christ gives, the Petrine material notes the faithful shepherds and elders as the recipients of the crown of glory (1 Pet 5:1–2), while Christ promises the crown of life to the overcomer (Rev 2:10). The use of different terms, along with the mention of different recipients of the crown, reduces the likelihood of 1 Pet 5:4 functioning as an intertext of Rev. 2:10.

Of the two passages, the language of Revelation finds its strongest thematic parallel with the epistle of James. Both texts refer to the receipt of τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς (the crown of life, Rev 2:10; Jas 1:12). James notes the receipt of this crown after the person exhibits endurance during times of trial (πειρασμός, 1:12). For John, receipt of the crown functions on the same principle. Jesus explains to the church that some of them will experience imprisonment so that they may be tested (πειράζω, 2:10). The parallels between these texts highlight the common discourse presenting the crown of life as a reward for enduring testing.

Since the crown functioned as the prize received by the victor in the Greek sporting events, the image serves as one with which the various audiences of the Apocalypse would have been familiar. In the face of death, the reward of the crown of life demonstrates an identification with Christ, who overcame death, presents opposition to the activity of the empire, the human agency responsible for the deaths of the faithful, and highlights the function of Jesus as the author or giver of life.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

The intratextual analysis of the message to the congregation in Smyrna presents Christ's opposition to the Roman imperial powers by addressing the imprisonment and death of members of the assembly by presenting a reversal of power in which Satan experiences imprisonment and they sit on the seat of power. Just as Christ experienced death at the hands of the Roman Empire and came to life, those in Smyrna who experience death at the hands of the empire will also come to life. The intratextual themes presented between the message to the church in Smyrna and the later portions of the Apocalypse provide a consistent foundation for understanding that this message calls for faithfulness in the midst of opposition, even when it means giving one's life.

This message maintains intratextual connections with the second (4:1—16:21) and third (17:1—21:8) visions of the Apocalypse. The first intertextual connection reiterates the interaction that the assembly has with the devil, where they demonstrate their faithfulness unto death. The second depicts a reversal of power where the devil experiences what he does to the faithful. The third presents those who have suffered at the hands of the devil now exercising power. The connections of these themes in the message to the later portions of the text depict Christ's opposition to the empire by avenging those who have suffered as victims of the empire, reversing the effects of the empire's exercise of power over them, and placing those who served as victims into places of power.

#### Faithful unto Death (Rev 2:10 → Rev 12:11)

As with the other messages, the message to the church in Smyrna provides the conqueror a promise. Revelation 12 gives those in the congregation a picture of what it looks like

for them to conquer. The message to the church in Smyrna gives a call to *γίνου πιστός ἄχρι θανάτου* (be faithful unto death, 2:10). The text Rev 12:11 uses that same language to demonstrate the actions of faithful to the same extent. While some may understand it simply as a call to be faithful throughout one's life and apply this to all Christians, the second vision of the Apocalypse reveals that John had a specific concept in mind that pertains to the situation of those to whom he writes in Smyrna.

John reiterates the language of *ἄχρι θανάτου* (unto death) in the second vision of the Apocalypse (12:11). Additionally, both passages mention the faithful conquering (Rev 2:11; 12:11) and note the interaction of these individuals with the devil (Rev 2:10; 12:11). While both texts present the act of throwing another individual, the message reveals the devil exercising power by throwing members of the Christian community into prison. In the next vision, the devil was thrown to the earth (Rev 12:9, 10). In the city of Smyrna, there exists a potential for those who remain faithful to Jesus and resist the empire to experience imprisonment. According to Matthew Streett, imprisonment did not serve as the ultimate form of punishment, as imprisonment often led to death.<sup>40</sup> The later visions of the Apocalypse do not present imprisonment, but John notes that the faithful *ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου* (overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony and they did not love their lives unto death, 12:11). Like the Lamb, the faithful conquer through death. When compared to the message, John's language in Rev 12:7–12 no longer portrays the saints as those who function as victims of the devil. Instead, they now act upon Satan, whom John passivates, and depicts

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<sup>40</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 152.

them in a way that no one takes their lives but they lay their lives down. They do so at the hands of Satan, who acts through the empire to imprison members of the church in Smyrna and kill them.

Imprisonment of Satan and the Second Death (Rev 2:10 → Rev 20:3, 7)

The third vision (Rev 16:1—21:8) continues with the image of the reversal of power that John presents between the devil and the saints. Just as Satan throws some of the faithful into prison for a limited time (Rev 2:10), he experiences imprisonment before his final punishment. Revelation 20 provides the congregation in Smyrna with some additional encouragement to remain faithful to Christ and not to conform to the behavior of those around them and align themselves with the empire.

While both Rev 2:10 and Rev 20:2–3 associate Satan with the act of imprisonment, the later passage reveals that Satan now functions as the social patient—not the agent—of imprisonment. While the message warns the church that Satan is going to throw some of them into prison (Rev 2:10), the angel of God throws Satan into prison, revealing the limits of the devil’s power in relation to God and his agents. John notes that an angel comes from heaven holding τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου (the key of the abyss, v. 1), that which reflects the angel’s power to restrain the devil. He then binds the Satan and ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον ([throws] him into the abyss, v. 3). All of these actions serve the purpose of limiting Satan’s exercise of power and preventing him from deceiving the nations. At first glance, it does not appear that this language of an angel casting Satan into the abyss serves as an intratextual relation to the message, but John provides further details in support of this idea. As John shifts his discussion to the end of

the millennium—the time at which Satan’s binding ends—he identifies the abyss as τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦ ([Satan’s] prison, v. 7).

Just as Satan threw members of the congregation into prison and experienced divine reciprocation for his actions, representatives of the Roman government, the literal agent of imprisonment, also have power exercised over them. Revelation 19 explains that the beast and the false prophet (another title for the second beast), both of whom received their power from Satan, encounter a power greater than that which they received. When engaged in war with Christ and his army, both are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20). Though the text does not provide a social agent for this action, Christ, for whom John reserves every act of violence against God’s enemies, is the most appropriate candidate.

This use of language provides the suffering congregation with a look at the vindication they will receive when the angelic agent of God brings a similar punishment upon Satan and the Roman Empire that they inflicted upon God’s servants during their time of tribulation. Ultimately, this intratextual relation should encourage them to endure the tribulation prophesied to them, recognizing that their suffering will lead to their ultimate victory.

#### Came to Life (Rev 2:8b → Rev 20:4c)

After people have given their lives out of faithfulness to Christ, the third vision (17:1—21:8) presents the fulfillment of the promise of a future resurrection for the faithful who identify with Christ by suffering death at the hands of the empire. In the third vision of the Apocalypse, John presents the resurrection of the righteous dead (20:4). Here, he



presents Christ fulfilling his promise to reverse the effects of death at the hands of the empire by raising the faithful from the dead. This presentation of resurrection for those who resist the empire provides them a picture of their outcome for identifying with Jesus. He promises to give the faithful the crown of life. This promise also identifies those in the church with Christ—the firstborn of the dead who died and came to life.

The first intratextual connection in the message establishes a relationship between Jesus and the faithful, based on shared activity—coming to life. The presentation of Jesus as the one who ἐξῆσεν (came to life, 2:8) serves as a foreshadowing of that which will happen for those who remain faithful unto death. By way of this presentation and intratextual connection, John highlights that which lies in store for those in the church in Smyrna, and all who overcome.

Revelation 20 presents the audiences of the message with a summary of that which the faithful in Smyrna will experience. Verse 4 highlights the presentation of thrones and those seated on them. In addition to this group, John notes that he saw 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 (the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their forehead or right hand, 20:4b). The image of encourages recipients of the message to embrace the call to faithfulness unto death, as this text demonstrates that these people indeed give their lives in faithfulness to Jesus (cf. 13:15). John notes that these people ἐξῆσαν (came to life, 20:4c). Even as John presents Jesus as one who died and came to life (ἐξῆσεν, 2:8), he describes these people as those

who were dead and came to life. Though John notes that the rest of the dead come to life also (20:5), he distinguishes the two groups by noting that they did not experience the first resurrection, which determines them as recipients of the second death.

#### The Second Death (Rev 2:11b → Rev 20:6, 14; 21:8)

The third vision provides three distinct mentions of the second death, helping to define and give an image of the experience. The promise to the overcomer in Smyrna functions as the first promise presented in negative terms. Not experiencing the second death reveals Jesus's power to give eternal life; those who receive this gift from Christ will never die again. The vision presents the second death as an experience designated for those who do not exhibit faithfulness to Jesus.

The first mention of the second death in this portion of the Apocalypse occurs in conjunction with the fifth macarism of the Apocalypse and reiterates the promise that it will not hurt those who conquer. The text declares *μακάριος και ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ· ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν, ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ και τοῦ Χριστοῦ και βασιλεύσουσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ τὰ χίλια ἔτη* (blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection; over them the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and Christ and shall reign with him one thousand years, 20:6). John's presentation of the millennial reign of the saints highlights that the Apocalypse presents at least two resurrections. The designation of a first resurrection means that there must be at least a second resurrection. The mention of the second death for those who participate in later resurrections results in a different outcome.

Revelation 20:11–15 provides the second and third mentions of the second death within the vision. These mentions of the second death occur in the context of the judgment of those who rise in the second resurrection and appear before the great white throne. The text presents the outcome of those who fail to overcome. In contrast to the overcomer, the second death has power over them. In this portion of his vision, all who have a part in the second resurrection experience both resurrection and eternal damnation. This group of people receives judgment based on their works. Their punishment finds its basis in their names failing to appear in the book of life. These individuals are all punished by way of the second death, which John identifies as the lake of fire (20:14).

These mentions of the second death in other parts of the book provide a depiction of this experience, as well as the reasons why individual do and do not experience it. These later presentations of the second death should efficiently encourage those in the churches to remain faithful to Christ. They should also discourage those in some of the other churches from their wayward activities and attitudes.

#### Intratextual Summary

For a church that experiences religious and political opposition, John's writing demonstrates the outcome of their faithfulness and God's exercise of power against Satan, who utilizes the Roman government to oppose the Christians in Smyrna. The intratextual analysis of the message highlights Christ's opposition to the imperial rule of Rome. By raising the faithful from the dead and protecting them from the second death, which he administers, Christ demonstrates that he possesses power, like the empire, to prohibit and administer death. Christ not only reverses the effects of the empire's actions against the saints, but he brings judgment upon Satan—the power behind the evil works

of the empire. Ultimately, John's writing reveals Christ's actions, demonstrating his power over that of Rome and local deities.

### **Conclusion**

The use of CDA in analyzing the message to the congregation in Smyrna aids readers in recognizing John's portrayal of the assembly's weakness in relation to other social actors. The promise to the conqueror in the message and the fulfillment of that promise in later portions of the Apocalypse depict the reversal of power that the community experiences when its oppressors experience the second death, while the second death has no power over the conqueror. While the textual analysis presents the situation in which the church finds itself and extends the promise of freedom from suffering as the victims of power, the intertextual analysis provides a promise of reward for those who remain faithful to Christ and endure the tribulation that they will face. The intratextual analysis then shows the power reversal Jesus promises to the faithful and reciprocation upon the devil for their imprisonment. Such should encourage those who face opposition because of their faith in Christ and reassure them that they will receive a reward from Christ for their obedience to him.

## CHAPTER 7: PERGAMUM—FACING THE POWER OF THE SWORD

### Introduction

After his message to Smyrna, John writes to the church in the city of Pergamum, located approximately forty miles to the north.<sup>1</sup> While the message to the congregation in Smyrna highlights the church's lack of religious and political power, the message to the church in Pergamum reflects the congregation's weakness by revealing the death of a community member who exhibited faithfulness to Jesus. More notably, the church lacks political power, as they live in the same location where Satan has his seat of power. The weight of oppression can lead people to activities in which they would not usually engage. In the case of the church in Pergamum, injustice results in a community that stands at the crossroads of demonstrating allegiance to the kingdom of God or the Roman Empire. Christ's message to this church reveals a divided congregation.

The danger they face for unfaithfulness to Rome can incite fear in the church through the power of the sword. Jesus appears to this divided church as a divine king who bears a sword. He encourages the faithful to maintain their practices as the congregation exhibits a unified demonstration of loyalty to Jesus. Christ's confrontation of the church forces the church to choose by which sword they prefer to suffer—Christ's or the empire's.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 69.

This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction with the sociocultural situation of the congregation in order to encourage the community to remain faithful to Christ despite the present dangers it faces because of its loyalty to Christ. The textual analysis will utilize social actor analysis to reveal the social disadvantage the congregation experience in comparison to its opponents. The intertextual analysis explains that John draws on an ancient tradition that maintains direct connections with the sword this group faces. The intratextual analysis reveals Christ responding to the attacks of the empire against citizens of his kingdom and overturns the decisions of the empire against his servants.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

While the assembly in Smyrna is about to experience hardship and persecution at the hands of outsiders, the congregation in Pergamum has already experienced the pain of persecution. This city served as a local seat for the proconsul—an official empowered by the emperor to rule over the region. The proconsul not only had ruling authority but also maintained the power to judge and execute those he found guilty.

The city of Pergamum had various active cults in the area. The patron deity was Athena Nikephorus, who was recognized as a war goddess who brought victory. Some other deities also receive worship. The imperial cult also had a significant presence in the area. The first imperial cult began in Pergamum,<sup>2</sup> and the city was home of the first provincial temple, which they dedicated to Augustus. Numismatic evidence from

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<sup>2</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 42.

exhibition of faithfulness to Christ, Jesus extends the eschatological offer of that which exceeds anything Rome has to offer.

#### Identification of Social Actors

John's message presents multiple social actors, including John, who remains unnamed when Jesus gives the instruction to write the message to the angel of the church, who represents the entire church, including the various subgroups who hold to Christ's name, as well as those who hold to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The text also introduces Balaam, who received Balaam's teaching. These social actors serve as both political and religious opposition to God's people. Just as John provides ancient depictions that parallel the angel's opposition, he also provides a parallel for the angel—the sons of Israel. To emphasize the severity of the situation the church faces, John presents one social actor—Antipas—who suffers death at the hands of some unnamed entity. Here, John presents the image of a church facing the dilemma of remaining faithful to Christ or holding to alternative teachings that might spare them their lives.

#### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 2:12)

John represents Jesus as one who possesses power. Jesus appears in juxtaposition to the proconsul.<sup>4</sup> Here, John portrays Christ's ability to judge and exercise the power of the sword. This presentation urges the congregation's resistance to the empire and the imperial cult since Christ possesses the power of the sword.

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<sup>4</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 242.

Jesus appears to the church as ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν (the one having the sharp double-edged sword, 2:12). This description of Jesus parallels the initial visionary presentation of Christ where ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα ἐκπορευομένη (out of his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, 1:16). As with the previous messages, John's initial description of Jesus in Rev 1 and the presentation in the messages exhibit some slight variation.

The sword initially came ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ (out of his [Jesus's] mouth, 1:16) but later Jesus possesses the sword (2:12). This sword functions as the first symbol of violence and the only weapon presented in the first vision of the Apocalypse.<sup>5</sup> This image of Christ prepares the audience for his threat of using the power of his sword to wage war. Even as the message to the congregation in Smyrna demonizes the activity of the empire by attributing it to the devil, the same thing happens in this message by attributing the activity of the empire to Satan. Since the sword mentioned in Rev 2:12 is the same one that comes from Jesus's mouth, his words—that which most readily issues from the mouth—maintain the ultimate force of a judgment, even as the sword in Pergamum was used to issue judgments against those the proconsul found guilty. Though the proconsul possessed the power of the sword, Jesus comes bearing the sword to wield on behalf of his people. The message provides the congregation in Pergamum with the choice of by which sword they would prefer to die—the sword of the proconsul or the sword of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 44; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 146.



### Ecclesial Engagement (Rev 2:13, 14b–15)

This portion of the study utilizes social actor analysis to reveal that the assembly at Pergamum lacks power and begins to engage in unacceptable behavior to avoid suffering at the hands of the empire. The people of the congregation in Pergamum live under the shadow of an empire other than that of God and Christ. The presence of Satan's throne reveals that the Christians do not simply live under a worldly empire; they live under a satanically-empowered empire. Just as Satan will imprison some from the church in Smyrna (Rev 2:10), this congregation knows the experience of Satan's power. CDA reveals the subjection of this community to the powers of Satan and the reveals the desperate measures of conformity some members of the community take to preserve their lives from the empire's sword.

#### *Satan's Throne*

Instead of opening with the mention of the congregation's works, this message highlights the community's location and activity in relation to Satan's throne. This group dwells at the location of Satan's throne (2:13). The introduction of this throne presents a church that lives under the authority of an imperial power "in opposition to the kingdom of God."<sup>6</sup> The initial image of God possessing a throne in Rev 1:4 and the declaration of Jesus as the ruler of the kings on earth provide sufficient evidence to recognize God as King. The mention of another throne highlights the presence of another power that stands in competition with the kingdom of God and its citizens. Even as Satan stands in opposition to the people of God in the message to the church in Smyrna by way of

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<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Apocalypse*, 82.

religious opposition, the possession of his throne signifies that he comes against those in the church of Pergamum by both religious and political opposition.

Social actor analysis reveals that the congregation does not exercise power in relation to others. Though the congregation is powerless in comparison to Satan's throne, the community holds to Christ's name and does not deny his faith (Rev 2:13). These parallel statements present both positive and negative forms of the faithfulness this group exhibits toward Christ.<sup>7</sup> The circumstances under which they hold to Christ's name reinforces the understanding that the church lacks power. They do not deny Christ's faith even when they suffer at the hands of others. This congregation suffers due to the death of a community member named Antipas, whom Jesus describes as *ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου* (my witness, my faithful one, 2:13). This description identifies Antipas with Jesus who John describes as, *ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός* (the witness, the faithful one, 1:5).<sup>8</sup> Even as these designations connect to Christ's death, they do the same for Antipas *ἀπεκτάνθη* (who was killed, 2:13).

Multiple theories surround who functions as the responsible party for Antipas's death. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Ian Boxall assert that his death occurred at the hands of a mob.<sup>9</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins argues that the identification of Antipas as a witness suggests his participation in a trial.<sup>10</sup> While both options seem viable, the presence of the proconsul in Pergamum makes it likely that he stood trial and was found guilty, leading to his execution. The backgrounding of the social agent diminishes its

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<sup>7</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 184.

<sup>8</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 72.

<sup>9</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, "Apocalyptic and Gnosis," 570; Boxall, *Revelation*, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Collins, "Satan's Throne," 36.

significance within the realm of the message by identifying it and focusing the audience's attention on Antipas.<sup>11</sup>

### *Holding to False Teachings*

In light of the congregation's potential dangers, such as death, some in the congregation hold to more than Christ's name. Some hold to aberrant teachings. The vocabulary chain presented based on the repetition of the term hold (*κρατέω*, vv. 13, 14, 15) reveals that to which an individual in the congregation holds maintains great significance. While the entire congregation holds to Christ's name, two subgroups hold to aberrant teachings that infiltrate the assembly. The origins of these teachings reveal the external opposition the church faces. That to which the people hold reveals their faithfulness to Christ and presents the specific powers that stand in opposition to him.

The first subgroup holds to the teaching of Balaam. The text does not leave the audience lacking necessary information but notes that Balaam's teaching ultimately led the sons of Israel to engage in idolatry and sexually immoral practices (2:14). Likewise, the second subgroup holds to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (2:15). While Schüssler Fiorenza argues for a significant relationship between the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans,<sup>12</sup> the fact that the text refers to them as two separate teachings to which people hold reveals a distinction between them.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hart, *Discourse, Grammar, and Ideology*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> Kellhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 152.

### Divine Confrontation (Rev 2:14a, 16)

This portion of the analysis focuses on the commands Christ issues the community, which reinforce his power and authority over the congregation, and the threat he makes regarding his future actions in relation to the impenitent. The complexities of the message to the church in Pergamum reflect a situation in which the single presentation of Jesus speaks to various situations within the culture. The writing attacks the proconsul and the false teaching. While Christ commends the church for holding to his name, he expresses his displeasure with people in the church holding to aberrant teachings by declaring to the church ἀλλ' ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ (but I have [something] against you, Rev 2:14). The embrace of the teachings of Balaam, which likely maintain close links to the imperial cult,<sup>14</sup> along with the teachings of the Nicolaitans, reveal the danger in which the church finds itself. In light of the church's behavior where some hold to Christ's name while other groups hold to aberrant teachings, Christ calls this community to repent. In the event the church fails to comply with Christ's command, he promises to use his sword against those who disobey.

#### *Christ's Activity*

In response to the activity of the church, Christ demonstrates his authority by issuing a command to the church and making threats to the church based on its compliance with his command. The command and the promise of requital place the church in a situation where they all must choose between whether they will be faithful to Christ and

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<sup>14</sup> Kellhoffer, *Persecution, Persuasion and Power*, 152.

potentially suffer by the sword of the proconsul or if they will align themselves with the broader culture and suffer by the sword of Jesus.

#### Admonition

Christ calls the church to repent for its embrace of alternative teachings. In light of the divided loyalties manifested by the church, Jesus exercises authority over the church by issuing a single command—repent (2:16).<sup>15</sup> Since the immediately preceding portion of the text notes subgroups are holding to false teachings, it would seem that the call to repent might only apply to those holding to the false teaching. Use of the second-person singular imperative presents a different picture. As with the message to the church in Smyrna, the communal aspect of resistance functions as a vital component of the church's survival. While those holding to these alternative teachings need to repent for their disobedience to Christ, the faithful component of the church must stand against these false teaching to which those from among them hold. As a result, the entire church stands in need of repentance.

#### Requital

When giving his response to a lack of repentance, Jesus promises to come to the church. As the latter statement of requital explains, Christ coming to this congregation in no way brings comfort to this congregation. Jesus promises to demonstrate the power of his sword against the unfaithful. He will act against the defective subgroup of the church in the same way the proconsul has the power to act against those whom he judges as guilty.

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<sup>15</sup> Young and Fitzgerald, *Power of Language*, 75–76.

While the proconsul possesses the power to use the sword against those he deems disloyal to the empire, Christ wields the sword against those disloyal to him and his kingdom. Since he possesses the power to overcome death, the church has no reason to embrace the imperial cult, even if they receive threats of death.

Jesus issues a promise of requital to the church. This promise not only responds to the activity of the church but responds to the local situation the church faces. In this message, as with the one to the church in Ephesus, this statement of requital does not serve as one of comfort, but as a threat against the impenitent. Though the entire assembly receives the command to repent, Jesus explains that he will *πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου* (war with them with the sword of [his] mouth, 2:16). The use of the plural pronoun reveals that Christ will only war against the impenitent subgroup of the church, not the entire congregation. Christ does not hold the faithful responsible for the activities of the impenitent. Ultimately, those within the church in Pergamum discover that while they might suffer temporary consequences for failing to submit to the Roman Empire, they will suffer eternal consequences if they fail to submit to the authority of Christ.

#### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 2:17)

The social actor analysis of the promise to the conqueror reveals Christ's exercise of power to provide for the community and reverse any potential negative judgment of the proconsul against the faithful. The promise to the conqueror encourages the congregation's faithfulness to Christ through his offer to utilize his power to provide their needs and to declare innocent or acquit those who receive a judgment of guilt from the

proconsul. Christ's commitment to the overcomer occurs in a two-fold manner. The use of the dative case in reference to the overcomer (τῷ νικῶντι) reveals the beneficialization of the social actor in relation to Christ's act of giving. The promise offers both hidden manna and a white stone. These promises highlight resistance to the cults within the area and the proconsul of the empire.

### ***Hidden Manna (2:17b)***

As the message concludes, Jesus offers food to the overcomer. He promises to give the overcomer τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου (of the hidden manna, 2:17). Manna served as food that the Lord supplied to the Israelites during their sojourn through the wilderness. For the church in Pergamum, overcoming means holding to the name of Jesus in the face of potential death. Maintenance of such faith means that they do not engage in the practices of those who follow Balaam's teaching, which includes eating food associated with idol worship. Instead, Jesus promises to provide these individuals food to eat.

### ***White Stone (2:17c)***

In a place where Christians could be declared guilty by the proconsul and sentenced to death, Jesus promises to declare these people innocent before him. In addition to the manna, Jesus also promises to give a white stone to those who overcome. The promise of the white stone for the overcomer has received the attention of multiple scholars. Studies have related the white stone to Olympic victory stones, magical amulets of protection, and admittance stones to attend feasts. The presence of the proconsul in the city and the death of Antipas, likely after a trial, constrain the potential meaning of the stone to that which relates to the judicial system in which stones were used to declare innocence or

guilt.<sup>16</sup> The white stone was used to declare the innocence of the one standing trial.<sup>17</sup> As a result, no matter the ruling of the proconsul, Jesus promises the overcomer a declaration of innocence for faithfulness to him.

### Textual Summary

As the textual analysis reveals, each portion of the message to the church in Pergamum provides evidence of resistance to various powers manifested in the area. The resistance to the proconsul and the area cults that have infiltrated the church call on members of the assembly to exhibit faithfulness to Christ as God and King. No matter the ruling of the proconsul against this church, Christ commits to the overcomer to exercise his power as judge and declare them innocent.

### Intertextual Analysis

The intertextual analysis of the message reinforces opposition to the imperial cult. Multiple intertextual relations in the message maintain connections with the story of Balaam and Balak. The message itself states that Balaam ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλακ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι (taught Balaam to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality, 2:14). The text of Numbers maintains many parallels with the message and highlight the intermingling of politics and religion to bring about the downfall of God's people. Such activity leads to an intermingling of the Israelites with the Moabites. Ultimately, the people in the church, as well as all the churches, hear the

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<sup>16</sup> Wong, "Hidden Manna and the White Stone," 350.

<sup>17</sup> Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 66.



message that they will experience the same fate as Balaam is they hold to false teachings such as his.

#### Balak and Balaam: Collaboration of Political and Religious Power

The story of Balaam and Balak presents a royal figure who utilizes the aid of a religious figure to lead the people of God away from worshiping him. John notes that some in the church hold to the teaching of Balaam, following with the summary noting that he taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel. This stumbling block consists of both idolatry and sexual immorality. The background of this story not only ties the historical background of the text to the present situation of those in Pergamum but also serves as a parallel for Christ's promise to the impenitent.

The story of Balaam first appears in Num 22–24. After the crossing of the Jordan River, the people of Israel camp in the plains of Moab. After having seen what happened to the Amorites, the people of Moab were afraid. In response to this, Balak—the prince of Moab—hires Balaam to curse the people of Israel.

Balaam obeys the word of the Lord and speaks only that which the Lord speaks to him regarding the people of Israel. Balaam's obedience and oracle lead to a problem since Balak pays Balaam to curse the people of Israel, but he blesses them instead. After the declaration of three blessings upon the people of Israel, Balak desires to send Balaam to his home, but before he departs, he proclaims to Balak that which will happen to Moab at the hands of Israel.

Numbers 25 notes that Israel ritually defiled themselves by committing sexual immorality with Moabite women (v. 1). The text does not explain this defilement, but it also notes that the people ate their offerings and bowed down and worshiped their idols

(v. 2). The text of Num 22–24 does not assert that Balaam taught Balak to do these things. The idea that this may have been in Balaam's advice to Balaak comes from Num 31:16, where the text notes that the turn of Israel from the word of the Lord was in accordance with the word of Balaam.

This idea that the turn of Israel from the word of the Lord was based on Balaam's words could have been in an oracle, so what constitutes the Revelation text saying that Balaam *taught* Balak? The presentation of teaching alluded to in Num 31:16, does not only come from John's mind, as the language of 2 Peter relates the false prophets of the Old Testament to the false teachers of Peter's day. At the same time, it appears that John takes liberty with his interpretation of the Numbers text.

Wrath appears after the mention of this, as the wrath is immediately demonstrated after the instruction of Yahweh. In Revelation, Jesus declares that he will bring judgment by waring against the impenitent with the sword of his mouth. This promise also connects the recipient of the Apocalypse with the story of Balaam, as those who follow Balaam's teaching will find themselves experiencing judgment by the sword, even as Balaam experienced death by the sword (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22).

Though the story of Balaam discusses the people of Israel engaging in sexually immoral practices and idolatrous food practices, the presentation and prohibition of such practices among people dedicated to God extends beyond the Old Testament and into the New Testament. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35) provides instructions, particularly to Gentiles, regarding such practices. The early Christians discussed the inclusion of the Gentiles. Instead of attempting to force Gentile converts to take on a variety of Jewish practices with which even many Jews struggled to uphold, those in

Jerusalem sent a letter calling for these Gentile believers asking that they abstain from that which has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.

As a result, it should come as no surprise that later Christians were to uphold these injunctions established in Jerusalem. While it does not appear that John's use of this language comes from the message to the Jerusalem Council, he was likely well aware of these standards in Christian practice. Given his reference to the story of Balaam, it seems that this serves as the most likely intertext for John's language, which also serves as the earliest account of such practices in the Septuagint.

The story of Balaam continues to play a role in interpreting later portions of the message. The narrative reveals that Balaam suffers death by the sword at the hands of the righteous. This promise of Christ waging war with the sword reveals that those who follow his teachings will suffer the same fate. Though Balak summoned Balaam, the Lord spoke to him and told him not to go with the messengers sent by Balak. After a second request, the Lord permits Balaam to go but tells him that he is to follow his instructions only.

In going, the Lord became angry with Balaam and sent an angel to block the road and oppose Balaam's travel. Though Balaam did not see the angel, his donkey saw the angel holding a sword in his hands. The first two times the donkey saw the angel, he attempted to maneuver around the angel. Each time, Balaam struck the donkey. The third time the angel with the sword appeared on the path, the donkey could not move around him, and simply lay on the ground. Again, Balaam struck the donkey with his rod, eventually noting that if he had a sword, he would have killed the donkey. After this, the

Lord allowed Balaam to see the angel with the drawn sword, who then told him that if it had not been for the donkey's behavior, Balaam would have been dead.

### **Intertextual Summary**

Realizing that some in the church at Pergamum have embraced aberrant teachings, Jesus alludes to the story of Balaam, whose teachings resulted in the defection of God's people from their covenant with him. While the entire recount of Balaam's life does not appear in the message, material from the book of Numbers reveals that Balaam died by the sword, the same weapon with which Jesus declares he will war against the unfaithful. As a result, the intertextual analysis highlights that those who hold to the teaching of Balaam and that of the Nicolaitans will experience the same fate that Balaam did. Such a judgment should urge those in the church to hold to Christ's name.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

The intratextual analysis of the message presents Christ's opposition to the Roman Empire. Opposition to the empire takes place through the demonstration of that which happens to Satan's throne in later visions of the book as well as the later demonstrations of sexual immorality and idolatry. Christ opposes Athena appearing with a sword, just as some depicted the war goddess. The composition of these later portions of the text presents the fulfillment of God's promises to act in response to the activities of the empire and those who acquiesce to imperial culture.

## Satan's Throne (Rev 2:13a → Rev 13:2; 16:10)

The intratextual relations reveal the satanic source of the empire's power. The depiction of Christ's resistance to the Roman Empire escalates as one continues to go through the book of Revelation. Even as John notes that the church in Pergamum lives where Satan dwells and has his throne, the intratextual analysis of this message reinforces recognition of Satan as the ultimate power behind the activity of the empire. In addition to this, the second vision of the Apocalypse (Rev 4:1—16:21) reveals the interaction between God's agents and those who associate with Satan's throne.

While God shares his throne with Jesus—the earthly representation of his rule and reign (3:21), Satan also has a throne (2:13).<sup>18</sup> Audiences later discover that Satan shares his throne with the first beast (13:2)—the earthly representation of Satan's power.<sup>19</sup> The recognition of the beast's throne as the throne of Satan reveals to the churches that they engage in a spiritual battle that occurs on a much more significant scale than what they see within the context of the Roman Empire.

The first mention of Satan's throne, after the seven messages, discusses the transference of the throne of Satan into the hands of the empire. John uses the text of Rev 13 to present the idea that the empire receives its power from Satan himself. John explains that Satan ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ . . . τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ (gave to [the beast] . . . his throne, v. 2). As the audiences later see, the one possessing the throne brings death to the faithful (v. 7), just as Satan aimed to war against the offspring of the woman (12:17).

John connects the next mention of Satan's throne to God's execution of judgment upon it and the kingdom it represents. Revelation 16 presents the bowl judgments

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<sup>18</sup> Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 215.

<sup>19</sup> Pierce, *Spirits and the Proclamation of Christ*, 166.

contained in Revelation. After the third judgment, an angel declares the righteousness of the judgments on the people who follow the beast *ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν* (because they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, v. 6). The fifth judgment in this series directly impacts the throne of the beast—the throne he received from Satan (v. 2). After the fifth bowl was poured onto the throne *ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἐσκοτωμένη* (his kingdom become darkened, v. 10). Following this judgment, the throne of Satan or the beast receives no further mention, leaving it in the darkness of this cosmic drama.

#### Idolatry and Sexual Immorality (Rev 2:14 → Rev 9:20, 21; 21:8; 22:15)

John uses the later visions of his Apocalypse to highlight idolatry and sexual immorality. He associates these practices with those who do not follow Christ. When discussing the aberrant doctrine of Balaam, Jesus notes that Balaam's teaching resulted in the Israelites learning *φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι* (to eat food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality, 2:14). The intratextual analysis of Revelation shows that John connects the concept of sexual immorality with Rome and those associated with this city. John's depictions throughout the remainder of the book depict Christ destroying the Roman Empire and the judgment of those who engage in her acts.

Revelation 9:20–21 provides John's recounting of his vision regarding those who engage in idolatrous practices and sexual immorality. John notes the release of four angels who receive the assignment to kill one-third of humanity (9:15). The plagues experienced by those upon whom God pours his wrath result in catastrophic death with a third of all humanity dying. Despite this, John notes that the survivors of these plagues remained impenitent, identifying the specific works they engaged in as *προσκυνήσουσιν*

τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα (worshiping demons and idols, 9:20) and πορνείας (sexual immorality, 9:21). John provides this information to his audiences and reiterates such practice as that which Jesus had against the church in Pergamum (cf. 2:14). Though John presents the plague that has come among these unfaithful individuals, not all of the unfaithful die as a result of this activity. While many escape the plagues executed by the angels, none will escape the sword of Jesus Christ.

#### Wage War with the Sword of His Mouth (Rev 2:16 → Rev 19:15)

The third vision of the Apocalypse (17:1—21:8) reveals Christ fulfilling his promise to demonstrate the power of his sword. In the message, Jesus threatens the impenitent, noting ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου (I will come to you soon and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth, Rev 2:16).

The idea of waging war occurs multiple times in the later visions of the Apocalypse. Michael and his angels—agents of God—wage war against the dragon and his angels (Rev 12:7). People raise questions regarding who can wage war against the beast (Rev 13:4). The kings of the earth wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb overcomes (Rev 17:14). The final occurrence of waging war appears when Jesus wages war and actively responds to the question of who possesses the ability to wage war against the beast (cf. 13:4).

In Rev 19 Jesus comes as the rider on the white horse. In v. 15, John reveals the weapon of Jesus's warfare—ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα (a sharp sword). The royal battle between the political powers ensues; a sharp sword comes from Jesus's mouth so that with it he might strike down the nations. He wages war and tramples the nations—those who have drunk

the wine of Babylon's sexual immorality and succumbed to the deception of her sorcery. Those who experience plagues yet refuse to hold to Jesus's name experience his sword—the execution of might from which no one escapes (19:17–18). In addition to Christ waging war against the nations, the text presents him standing in direct opposition to the emperor by waging war against and defeating him (19:20). After the beast and the false prophet—the second beast of the Apocalypse—are captured and thrown into the lake of fire, John notes that Jesus slays the kings of the earth and their armies (19:21). The “rest” seems to include those who have refused to repent of their idolatry and sexual immorality. Ultimately Christ reveals that he has no equal and no one can war against him. His coming has negative consequences for the impenitent.

#### Intratextual Summary

The intratextual analysis of the message presents Jesus's opposition to Satan via his opposition to the Roman Empire and vice versa. John utilizes this presentation of Jesus to depict the ultimate destruction of Rome. Though Satan utilizes imperial power to bring suffering to the lives of the saints, Christ's exercise of power over the empire, depicted by Christ's attack on Satan's throne, vindicates the faithful. In addition to executing judgment on the throne and kingdom of the beast, Christ also judges those who fail to remain faithful and submit themselves to the aberrant teachings that have outsiders have manifested in the church. These presentations of judgment upon the beast, his kingdom, and those who hold to false teachings encourage those in the church to remain faithful to Christ.



### Conclusion

The examination of the dimensions of CDA supports the understanding that the message to the congregation in Pergamum encourages it to remain faithful exclusively to Christ and avoid conformity to the broader culture in which they live. The textual analysis reveals the assembly's lack of power and the understanding that some within the congregation have conformed to the broader, dominant culture. In response to the efforts of some in the congregation to avoid the sword of the proconsul, John recalls the story of Balaam and Balak. John's use of this story aims to discourage people from participating in imperial practices, reminding them that Balaam, whose teachings they follow, died by the sword. The intratextual analysis provides readers with a connection between Satan's throne and the sword of the empire; it also depicts the fulfillment of Christ's promise to wage war against the unfaithful, leading to the potential of death by the sword of either the proconsul or Christ. The message highlights Christ's ultimate power over the Roman Empire.

## CHAPTER 8: THYATIRA—THE POWER OF ACCOMMODATION

### Introduction

The church in Thyatira, located approximately forty miles southeast of Pergamum, receives the next message.<sup>1</sup> This congregation sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from the church in Ephesus. The church does not lack strength but significantly differs in how it uses its strength. While the congregation in Ephesus stands against those who made false declarations regarding themselves, the assembly in Thyatira embraces the false teachings of those who come among them, resulting in increased infidelity to Christ that results in sexual immorality, idolatry, and divisions within the church.

The unfaithful in the congregation must address their issues of fidelity to Christ while the faithful must continue to hold fast in their faith. Ultimately, the congregation must maintain solidarity in their attitude toward both Christ and those attempting to infiltrate the church with false teaching.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Jesus Christ corresponds with the church as a divine king who resists the congregation's use of power to enable those who collaborate with the Roman Empire to exercise influence among those who function as citizens in the kingdom of God.

This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Thimmes, "Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse," 135. The intertextual analysis provides additional support for recognizing Jezebel as an outsider.

with the sociocultural situation of the congregation to challenge the community regarding its inappropriate use of power to promote conformity to the Roman Empire. The textual analysis will examine elements of the text that highlight the church's possession of power and their empowerment of one who promotes the practices of the Roman Empire. The intertextual analysis presents the connection of this message with the story of Jezebel, who led the ancient people of God into sinful acts, much like the situation of the assembly in Thyatira. The intratextual analysis reveals that this person who exercises the power of the empire and leads people astray will find herself, along with her followers, suffering at the hands of Christ, while those who resist the empire and remain faithful will ultimately possess political authority.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

The city of Thyatira was known for metalwork and trade guilds. These trade guilds were pertinent to the economic prosperity of those in business. Membership involved participation in religious, sexual, and idolatrous activities. Participation in the guilds aided in growing one's business and establishing financial security. Failure to participate meant one was economically ostracized. While the trade guilds offered the opportunity to possess financial security and economic power, the connection of the guilds with various cults offered an opportunity for members of the congregation in Thyatira to conform to the broader culture and participate in the cult practices associated with the empire.

The metalworking that took place undoubtedly maintained some connections with the god Hephaestus, who was recognized as the god of fire and was also understood to

serve as the patron deity of metalworkers.<sup>3</sup> His image appears on coins from Thyatira's history.<sup>4</sup> Not only did Christians in Thyatira face issues regarding the worship of Hephaestus, but they also had to face issues regarding the worship of Apollo, who was considered the son of Zeus who manifested himself as the emperor, who people also recognized as the son of god. Numismatic evidence also supports the connection between Apollo and the emperor.<sup>5</sup> These sociocultural factors create an opportunity for the assembly in Thyatira to resist the culture at the risk of economic deprivation or embracing the broader culture at the risk of suffering alongside the empire.

### Textual Analysis

Like the churches above, the congregation in Thyatira faces pressures to conform to the broader society. The power of the trade guilds creates a virtually impossible economic existence for those who refuse to participate in the practices of the professional societies within the city. In the midst of religious, cultural, economic, and political opposition, this church—unlike the congregation in Ephesus—exhibits love to those around them. While the church maintains many excellent qualities, its demonstration of love overcomes its discernment, leading to the embrace of all who come among them. This openness leads to the infiltration of “Jezebel,” whom the congregation empowers to lead a segment of the church astray into sexual immorality and idolatry. In response to the church's failure to exercise power against this individual who leads others astray, Christ writes to the community as the one who exercises his authority against Jezebel and those who align

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<sup>3</sup> Mikalson, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 165.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 238.

<sup>5</sup> Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation*, 43.

with her teaching. To those who overcome, Christ promises the same kind of ruling authority he received from his Father.

### Identification of Social Actors

As with the message to the church in Pergamum, John presents social actors in the message who stand against the faithful teachings of Christ and his church. Satan and Jezebel function as the two social actors who attempt to undermine Christ's teaching. In close relation to Jezebel, John also presents her children. While some may consider those who commit adultery with Jezebel to be a distinct social actor, this group of individuals most likely serves as a subset of those the angel of the church represents. This same principle applies to those whom John identifies as Christ's servants who have received her teaching. At the other end of the spectrum, John presents God, whom he refers to as Christ's Father. John's association of social actors from the past and present with religious and political power reveals a church that must decide whether they will acquiesce to the broader culture for the sake of financial and political security or maintain their faithfulness to Christ.

### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 2:18)

The description of Christ challenges the power and worship of Apollo and the emperor. The message opens by describing Jesus as  $\delta \ \upsilon\iota\delta\varsigma \ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  (the Son of God, Rev 2:18). This language parallels the relationship between God and Christ as Father and Son, as noted in Rev 1:6. This language of sonship in relation to God reflects royal authority and opposition to the Roman emperor. Colonnades in the city contained inscriptions that identified Augustus, emperor of Rome from 27 BCE to 14 CE, as the son of god. Such

verbiage identified the emperor as both god and king. This title consistently referred to the emperor, whom many recognized as the descendant of the deified emperors who preceded him and the human manifestation of the god Apollo. As a result, the text of Revelation paints a picture of Jesus Christ as the God and King who reigns supreme every empire, including that of Rome.

Next, John describes Jesus as ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ (the one having his eyes as a flame of fire and his feet like burnished bronze, 2:18). When initially looking at these two designations, writers disagree regarding what exactly these features of Christ represent. Leon Morris argues, “The eyes indicate that he sees all and the feet that he will certainly and swiftly pursue all that is evil, possibly also that he will treat it down,”<sup>6</sup> while James L. Resseguie explains, “His eyes are like a blazing fire, a staring gaze that sees through the façade of the angel and his congregation to the inner nature of the church. . . . His feet, which are like metal refined of dross by a fire, accentuate his strong and stable presence in contrast to the destabilizing and compromising teachings” he finds in the congregation.<sup>7</sup> Though these ideas might be plausible, the lack of sufficient evidence for such assertions reduces them to mere speculation. While debate might surround the significance of these two descriptions, it seems most appropriate to recognize these descriptions of Christ as reinscriptions of language associated with the trade guilds.

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<sup>6</sup> Morris, *Revelation*, 70.

<sup>7</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 92.

### Ecclesial Engagement (Rev 2:19, 20b, 24a)

Social actor analysis focused on how the activation and passivation of social actors reveal that the congregation at Thyatira possesses power but uses it to promote conformity to the Roman Empire, enabling someone who collaborates with the empire to exercise power over a segment of the community. While the recipients of the messages are Christ's servants, this group of servants fails to live in a manner that demonstrates faithfulness to God, who is their master. The message reveals how a congregation that exhibits qualities of faithfulness to Christ aligns with and conforms to the surrounding culture.

#### *Activity of the Church*

John opens the body of the message by activating the angel of the congregation through possessivation and notes the congregation's works—love, faith, service, and patient endurance (2:19). The mention of love first contrasts the church in Thyatira with the church in Ephesus. The text furthers the contrast with the congregation in Ephesus by noting that the assembly in Thyatira had its latter works exceed its first works. Like the church in Ephesus, the concept of patient endurance highlights John's partnership with the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:19, cf. 1:9).<sup>8</sup>

Though the congregation exhibits love, its love and openness to outsiders result in the assembly's downfall. Analysis of the text reveals that the community exercises its power without discernment regarding the teachings welcomed among segments of the congregation.<sup>9</sup> The group exercises its power in relation to an outsider named Jezebel, who attempts to infiltrate the assembly and propagate the teachings and practices of the

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 145.

<sup>9</sup> Decock, "Works of God," 42.

Roman Empire. The message declares ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν (you permit the woman Jezebel, the one who calls herself a prophetess Rev 2:20). Here, John activates the angel of the congregation, while he subjects Jezebel in relation to the group that empowers her. Though John Christopher Thomas asserts that the use of the word ἀφεῖς “does not necessarily convey the idea of active participation, but rather of permitting, or allowing something or someone to continue” engaging in an activity,<sup>10</sup> the text reveals that the community does not function as a passive victim with regard to Jezebel’s activity. It permits her to behave as she does.<sup>11</sup> The congregation has the power to stop her but fails to do so. This kind of openness without discernment leads to Jezebel’s exercise of power among the congregation.<sup>12</sup>

### *Jezebel*

While many theories present various understandings of her identity, CDA reveals John’s use of symbolization where he takes a “fictional” social actor from the history of the Jewish people—Jezebel—and utilizes her to stand for an actual social actor or group of social actors engaged in the propagation of sexual immorality and idolatry.<sup>13</sup> After she comes in among the community, she διδάσκει (teaches, Rev 2:20). While John activates Jezebel in relation to this process, he passivates those Christ describes as τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους (my servants, 2:20). Only because of her entrance among the community does she exercise this power over Christ’s servants. Her teaching aims to guide these people to

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Apocalypse*, 146.

<sup>11</sup> Skaggs and Benham, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich, “Adapt or Resist,” 203.

<sup>13</sup> van Leeuwen, “Representation of Social Actors,” 62.



engage in idolatrous and sexually immoral practices in which followers of Christ were not to engage.

In addition to highlighting the sinful aims of Jezebel's teaching, he directly connects them to the empire and Satan who empowers the empire. The text notes that some people refer to her teaching as τὰ βαθέα τοῦ Σατανᾶ (the deep things of Satan, 2:24). Revelation's consistent connections between Satan and the empire reveal that Jezebel functions as a collaborator with the Roman Empire. Satan performs the act of throwing people into prison (2:10), and he possesses a throne in the city of Pergamum (2:13). The acts of imprisonment and possession of a throne serve as imperial functions. As a result, the connection between Satan and Jezebel's teaching directly ties her teaching to the empire Satan empowers.

In addition to teaching satanic concepts to the church, Jezebel πλανᾷ (deceives) them, leading them into evil practices (Rev 2:20). This activity reveals that Jezebel functions as one who stands in opposition to the assembly because she teaches and encourages the very things the church declares as practices Christians will avoid (cf. Acts 15:19–20). Such activity demonstrates that Jezebel stands in opposition to the unity of the congregation and ultimately functions as a false prophet in the community (cf. Deut 13:1–4). In light of Jezebel's activity, she remains hardened in her ways and lacks the desire to repent (Rev 2:21). As a result, she continues her practices and leads others in the church astray.

### *Activity of Those Jezebel Leads Astray*

The message reveals that a subgroup of the church learns Jezebel's teaching. While Jesus refers to those in the church as *τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους* (my servants, 2:20), this subgroup of the congregation that receives Jezebel's teaching does not behave as Christ's servants. It exhibits disloyalty to Christ by following the leading of Jezebel and engaging in sexual immorality and idolatry (2:20). While John backgrounds this group through the use of the infinitival clauses *πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα* (to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols, Rev 2:20), the social actors are recoverable as they are the recipients of Jezebel's teaching.

### *The Rest*

The later portion of the message unveils a group referred to as *τοῖς λοιποῖς* (the rest, 2:24). This language refers to a remnant that exhibits faithfulness to Christ and resists Jezebel's teaching (2:24). The people who comprise this group *οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην* (do not hold this teaching, Rev 2:24) of Jezebel's. Here, John activates the rest, noting their response to the teaching. He reiterates this by explaining that they *οὐκ ἔγνωσαν* (do not know, Rev 2:24) the teaching. Their resistance to Jezebel's teachings reveals that they have the power to withstand her. Like this group, the rest of the church should stand firm in their exercise of such power.

### Divine Confrontation (Rev 2:20a, 21–23, 24b–25)

This portion of the study uncovers the activation of Christ and his actions against Jezebel and those who associate with her, denoting his supremacy over everyone in the

congregation at Thyatira. In response to the activity of the church and the situation in which they find themselves, Jesus exercises his power by evaluating the church. He commends and critiques the church for its actions. He commends the church for their works. The clause ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ (but I have [something] against you, Rev 2:20a) highlights Christ's dissatisfaction with their tolerance of Jezebel and the practices in which some in the church have engaged. Christ also endorses the behavior of those who refuse to follow her teaching. The clause ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις (but to you I say, the rest in Thyatira, Rev 2:24a) contrasts this group with those who have followed Jezebel's teaching and shifts the statement away from critique back to commendation.

For the first time among the seven messages, Jesus also promises to bring retribution upon those who oppose his kingdom. While he has consistently promised to act upon the church, he now declares his actions against the unfaithful. Christ acts toward those who exhibit unfaithfulness, Jezebel herself, and those who remain faithful. Jezebel and those who align with her will experience Christ's wrath. Christ also addresses those who remain faithful to him, encouraging them to continued faithfulness. As a divine king, Jesus promises royal power and authority to those who remain faithful to him.

### *Christ's Activity*

In response to the activity of the church, Jesus declares that Jezebel's time of teaching and deception has reached its limit. In this message, Christ's presentation as a king at the beginning of the message comes into play as he brings destruction upon Jezebel—the emissary of Satan—and her followers. Jesus also explains to those in the churches that

those who associate with her will experience Christ's wrath unless they repent. The faithful receive a presentation of Jesus that contrasts his activity toward them with his activity toward Jezebel and her associates. In this way, the faithful receive encouragement to persist in their faithfulness to Jesus and resist the power of the empire.

### Christ and Jezebel

Unlike the other messages, where the congregation has received critique, they also receive a call to repentance (2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). Immediately following the commands to repent comes a promise of requital (2:5, 16; 3:3, 20). While the message to the church in Thyatira has no such command to repent, it contains multiple promises, many of which John directs toward the unfaithful. After highlighting Jezebel's lack of desire to repent, he notes that Jesus βάλλω αὐτήν εἰς κλίνην (will throw her into bed, 2:22). This idiom that means "to cause to become very ill" provides the audiences of the Apocalypse with an interesting image,<sup>14</sup> since the practice of sexual immorality often finds an association with a bed, Jezebel's punishment will occur in the same place where she encourages people to commit sexual immorality.

### Christ and Jezebel's Children

In alignment with the Roman custom of destroying an enemy's progeny, Christ declares he will τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ (kill her children with death, v. 23). This statement, coming on the heels of hearing about what will happen to those who commit adultery with Jezebel might cause some to think that her children and those who commit

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<sup>14</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 269.

adultery with her are the same group of people. On the contrary, these two groups appear to be distinct. Unlike those who commit adultery, Jezebel's children, like their mother, receive no mention of the potential for repentance. Just as Christ fully commits to punish Jezebel, he also promises to kill her children.

#### Christ and those who Commit Adultery with Jezebel

In addition to Jezebel's judgment, Christ casts those who commit adultery with her into tribulation, unless they repent. Jesus says *βάλλω . . . εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην* (I will throw [those who commit adultery with Jezebel] . . . into great tribulation, Rev 2:22). The identity of those who commit adultery with Jezebel deserves attention. While some might argue that it is all of those who follow the ways and teachings of Jezebel, those who commit adultery with her are a sub-category of Jezebel's followers—those who were part of the church in Thyatira. This conclusion comes from the idea that committing adultery is used for as an expression to discuss the lack of covenant faithfulness exhibited by those who were considered people of God.

#### Christ and the Rest

In response to the faithfulness and loyalty of the remnant in Thyatira, Christ lays no burden on them. The passage takes a shift and redirects attention to a distinct segment of the audience Jesus refers to as *τοῖς λοιποῖς τοῖς ἐν Θυατείροις* (the rest of you in Thyatira, Rev 2:24). The contrastive conjunction *δὲ* (but) precedes this verbiage (Rev 2:24), highlighting that the discussion has shifted to a specific group and away from Jezebel, her paramours, and her children. In contrast to Christ's statement that he will *βάλλω* (throw,

Rev 2:22) Jezebel into bed, he explains to this group of people οὐ βάλλω ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βᾶρος (I will not cast on you another burden, v. 24). The idea that he places no other burden on this group that has remained within the church stands in contrast with the idea that he will throw into tribulation those who were in the church who have not remained faithful to him. Christ maintains this contrast in the instruction he provides this sub-group. Since the sub-group does not hold to Jezebel's teaching, like the unfaithful people in the church, he urges them to hold to what they have until he comes.

#### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 2:26–28)

While Jezebel is associated with the empire and exercises power, analysis of this portion of the message reveals that Christ will grant the overcomer political power. The message concludes with the promise to the conqueror. This portion of the message stands in direct opposition to the rule of the Roman emperor and his empire, as Christ promises to allow the one who overcomes to rule. This promise finds its foundation in Christ having received authority to rule from his Father, highlighting the relationship between God and Christ and the kingship they share. Critical Discourse Analysis uncovers the power of Christ in the promise that the overcomer will receive authority.

Unlike the other messages, the promise to the conqueror maintains an additional statement that elaborates on what it means to conquer. Here, the text identifies the individual as ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου (the one who keeps my works until the end, Rev 2:26). John juxtaposes this reference to keeping Christ's works with Jezebel and her works (cf. Rev 2:22c), which coincide with the activity of the worldly empire. Even as those who do not repent of Jezebel's works will experience tribulation (Rev 2:22b) those

who keep Christ's works will receive a reward (Rev 2:26). This portion of the text activates Christ and passivates the conqueror by beneficialization in relation to the granting of authority, as Jesus declares δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν (I will give that one authority over the nations, Rev 2:26). Immediately following this, John activates the conqueror and passivates the nations, identified by the pronoun αὐτοὺς, as Christ continues the promise by saying καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ (and he will rule them with an iron rod, Rev 2:27). The activation of the conqueror and the passivation of the nations reveals the power that Christ grants the conqueror over this group. Christ identifies with the conqueror in the receipt of authority by comparison to his receipt of authority when he declares that their receipt of authority will be ὡς ἐγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου (as I received authority from my Father, 2:28). This promise reflects the future power and reign of the overcomers from the church in Thyatira will experience.

The next portion of the promise also activates Christ and passivates the conqueror by way of beneficialization. In addition to the power Christ promises the conquer, he adds καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ τὸν ἀστέρα τὸν πρωϊνόν (and I will give to him the morning star, Rev 2:28). With the Roman Empire having conquered most of the known world, the promise of ruling over the nations presents the promise that Christ's kingdom also possesses authority over the Roman Empire. Within the context of this godly Kingdom, those who have remained faithful will receive the authority to rule, just as Christ rules. This additional promise of the morning star reinforces the promise of their future rule, as the morning star was understood to be a sign of victory over one's enemies.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Victor Sayings*, 139.

### Textual Summary

The textual analysis of the message reveals Christ's ultimate power and authority, even when a congregation misuses its power to promote disloyalty to Christ. The text of the message presents a divided church that faces the difficulties associated with a group allowing those who bear false teachings associated with the surrounding worldly culture to infiltrate the church. When discussing the relationship between Jezebel and the Roman Empire, Christ presents himself as the divine King who lays claim to his servants and presents the challenge of direct conflict between himself and the Roman Empire. While he notes that those who associate with the empire via participation in Jezebel's works will also experience a similar fate as she, he explains that those who remain faithful to Jesus will receive a similar outcome as he obtained from his Father.

### Intertextual Analysis

The intertextual connections contained in the message to the church in Thyatira provide additional support for Christ's opposition to Jezebel, her false teachings, and the Roman Empire with which she affiliates. Additionally, John uses the Old Testament to recount the story of Jezebel and her interactions, highlighting the outcome of her behavior. John also incorporates the prophecy of Jeremiah, highlighting the similar situation the church faces and the outcome of those who compromise their faith for the sake of economic advancement. Ultimately, John reappropriates language referring to the rule of the Messiah and applies it to the overcomer in the church, noting their ultimate rule over their oppressors.



## Son of God (Rev 2:18 → Psalm 2:7)

John utilizes the title  $\delta \nu\iota\delta\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\theta \epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  (son of God, 2:18) to introduce Jesus as a royal figure. When noting the presentation of the speaker as  $\delta \nu\iota\delta\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\theta \epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  (the son of God, 2:18), it becomes evident that Jesus fills this role (cf. Mark 1:1; Luke 4:3; John 10:36; Heb 4:14). In addition to this, the Old Testament provides an understanding for recognizing the kingship of Christ through this language. The Old Testament uses the concept of divine sonship to refer to multiple entities: angels, Israel, and the king of Israel.<sup>16</sup> Since John has already made a distinction between Christ and angels and the text does not present Jesus as a corporate entity, like Israel, this only leaves the understanding that John uses this language to present Jesus as a king. The New Testament carries the concept of divine sonship forward and narrows the idea of the son of God to the person of Jesus Christ, while “sons of God” refers to Christ’s followers (e.g., Luke 20:36; Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26).

The texts of 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7, and Ps 89:26–27 all refer to the ruler of God’s people as the son of God. The latter portion of the message to Thyatira also reveals an intertextual relation to Ps 2. The incorporation of the second psalm should come as no surprise. Early Christians consistently interpreted Ps 2 as a messianic psalm within the context of the New Testament. Various texts appeal to the writing as a foundation for the belief that Jesus fulfills the Davidic promise appearing in 2 Sam 7. Luke and Paul use the text in such fashion. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that John uses it in the same manner. The question for many readers comes in John’s use of such language—not for Christ but—for Jesus’s followers.

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<sup>16</sup> Winn, “Son of God,” 886.

The Revelation text and the psalm reflect a text discussing messianic rulership. At the same time, a problem arises in the discrepancy of who rules in each text. The resolution for this discrepancy comes from Jesus's noting that he will grant the authority, even as he received it from his Father. As a result, the thematic pattern of messianic rulership remains established in the text. The only real distinction is the understanding that Jesus shares his reign with the faithful.

Regarding the orientation of the text, John notes that those who do not obey Jesus will experience tribulation, hardship, and even death. The psalter provides a warning of death for those who fail to hold to the instruction of the Lord. In both instances, the audiences learn to obey such instructions.

The promise to the overcomer notes the reception of the authority to rule over the nations. Those who receive such power will rule them with a rod of iron. The language of this text is reminiscent of the second psalm, but the psalm refers to the Davidic Messiah. In Revelation, this promise goes to the overcomer who keeps Christ's works. This promise could initially lead to questions of difficulty in interpreting the message unless one reads further. The promise comes from Christ and notes that he gives this power, *ὡς καὶ ἐλάβην παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου* (even as I received [power] from my Father, 2:28). It is through this intertextual relationship the audience understands the presentation of Jesus as the son of God in the opening of the message. Psalm 2 notes the declaration of Yahweh that the Davidic Messianic king is his son. It is in this way that the son, who receives authority, as recorded in the psalter, grants that same authority to his followers.

## Jezebel

In the Old Testament, Jezebel was a queen who led people astray for the worship of God. The name presents someone who functioned as a royal/imperial figure who leads God's people astray. For almost any reader/hearer familiar with the Septuagint, the name Jezebel would remind audiences of the story of Jezebel, the pagan wife of King Ahab. However, the question that analysts must first answer is whether or not there is enough evidence to support the idea that there exists an intertextual relation between this passage the material contained in the Greek Old Testament.

In the Apocalypse, Christ explains that all the churches will know that *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστω κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν* (I am the one who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works, 2:23). What the passage reveals they will know functions as an intertextual relation between John's writing and Jer 17:10 of the LXX. Jeremiah declares, *ἐγώ κύριος ἐτάζω καρδίας καὶ δοκιμάζω νεφροὺς τοῦ δοῦναι ἐκάστω κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τοὺς καρποὺς τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων αὐτοῦ* (I the Lord examine the heart and test the kidneys to give to each according to his ways and according to the fruit of his manner of living). According to the Old Testament, God can know and judge the mind and heart. The fact that Christ asserts that people will know that he does these acts presents him not only as a ruler but as a divine ruler who can do that which even Caesar cannot—evaluate the inward thoughts of each person. As this section of the message ends, Christ notes that he will reward everyone according to her or his works.

### Ruling with a Rod of Iron (Rev 2:27 → Ps 2:9)

The promise of ruling highlights Christ's rule but appropriates this for the overcomer.

This connection also reveals Christ's receipt of power from his Father. As the message to the church in Thyatira opens, Jesus introduces himself to the congregation as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (the Son of God, 2:18). Intertextual analysis of John's use of this language reinforces the understanding that the text presents Jesus as a divine King. The idea of an individual functioning as the son of God maintained significant political overtones. While the Roman emperor was considered the son of a god, the political nature of "son of God" language did not originate with the Roman imperial context. For John, this language and the political overtones associated with it find their roots in the language of the Old Testament.

The political foundation of the title "Son of God" appears in both 2 Sam 7 and Ps 2. Psalm 2 functions as a royal messianic psalm within Jewish and Christian writings. Within the context of this psalm, the Lord declares to the royal servant Υἱός μου εἶ σύ (You are my Son, 2:7). The preceding and following verses of the psalm all speak of the rulership and authority of the Lord's Messiah, the one the Lord has set as King on Zion (2:6). The text reveals that any resistance to this ruler, whether it comes from people or the kings of the earth, would not succeed (2:1–2). It also explains that all the earth would function as this individual's inheritance (2:8), highlighting him now only as a king, but as ruler of the kings of the earth (cf. Rev. 1:4). His receipt of authority grants him the power to confer that authority to the overcomer (Ps 2:9; Rev 2:26–27).

Similar language regarding divine sonship appears in 2 Sam 7, where God promises David, the king of Israel, that his seed would sit on the throne forever (7:12–

13). When making this declaration, the Lord tells David, regarding this individual, ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν (I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me, 7:14). This language of sonship finds its way into the culture of this people, where they recognized their king as the son of God. Because of the recognition of Jesus as a descendant of David and the fulfillment of the Davidic Promise (cf. Acts 2), this presentation of Jesus as the Son of God would bring with it the opposition of Christ to the Roman emperor as the actual ruler of this people.

From both of these passages, members of the church should recognize that Christ's introduction reflects his kingship and reinforces the presentation of Christ's kingship in Rev 1. This use of language not only highlights Christ's kingship, but it stands in opposition to the emperor who was known as the son of god. In addition to this presentation of Christ as king, this intertextual presentation of Christ's kingship establishes a foundation for the local opposition Christ confronts in the message.

#### Intertextual Summary

The intertextual analysis of the message reveals that John presents a conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar. His use of Old Testament language both to present Jesus as King and to recall the story of Queen Jezebel presents the representatives of both kingdoms in a manner that highlights their opposition to one another. Just as Jezebel suffered destruction in the Old Testament, John notes that this Jezebel will also suffer divine judgment. The appropriation of royal messianic language to those who remain faithful to Christ highlights their inclusion in his kingdom and lays the foundation for how they function later in the book.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

John's message to the church maintains connections with the remainder of the Apocalypse to present the same idea. While he intratextually connects Jezebel to the Roman Empire, he also highlights the lack of penance those who associate with the empire exhibit, revealing Christ keeping his promise to throw into tribulation those who fail to repent of Jezebel's works. As promised, the latter portions of the Apocalypse reveal the fulfillment of the promise to grant royal authority to those who remain faithful to Christ.

Dealing with Deception (Rev 2:20 → Rev 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3, 8, 10)

The repeated presentation of the activity of deception highlights Jezebel's relationship with the empire. Only those associated with the empire commit this act. While the text of the message reveals that some in the church have come under the deception of Jezebel (2:20), the latter portion of the book reveals that deception functions as an imperial problem. John construes only those associated with the empire performing the act of deceiving. The text of the message notes the judgment that Jesus will deliver upon Jezebel, the one who deceives his servants. An intratextual analysis of the book related to this idea demonstrates Jesus's consistent actions toward those who deceive others. The intratextual analysis reveals the judgment of these individuals based on their works, namely seduction.

In addition to Jezebel, John notes three entities that engage in deception: the devil (12:9), the second beast (13:14), and Babylon (18:23). While each of these passages construes the entities and performing the act of deceiving, it directly connects Jezebel with these groups that stand in opposition to God's kingdom and aligns her with the

satanically-empowered empire of Babylon—Rome. Concerning each of these social actors, Jesus demonstrates his judgment based on works.

When first mentioned, Babylon—the Roman Empire—receives judgment for deceiving by sorcery (18:23) and *ἐν πυρὶ κατακαυθήσεται* (is burned up with fire, 18:8). The second beast receives judgment for performing signs *ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν* (by which he deceived, 19:20). Immediately following the capture of the second beast, he and the first beast *ἐβλήθησαν . . . εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς* (were thrown . . . into the lake of fire, 19:20). Finally, Satan receives judgment for his act of deceiving the nations. Revelation 20 presents a two-fold punishment for his deception. Verse 3 points out that an angel binds Satan for a millennium to prevent him from deceiving the nations until the period of his binding ends. After the thousand years, Satan comes to deceive the nations, but he, like the second beast, *ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς* (was thrown into the lake of fire, 20:10). This description of the outcome of those who deceive may very well provide some understanding of how Jesus will judge Jezebel (cf., 2:22). Ultimately, Jesus keeps his promise to reward each person according to their works.

#### Reward According to Works (2:23 → 14:13; 18:6; 20:12–13; 22:12)

Works play an essential part in the book of Revelation, especially in the message to the congregation in Thyatira. Jesus declares that he will reward each one according to their works (2:23). As noted in the intertextual analysis, this concept appears in the Old Testament, Second Temple Jewish literature, and other New Testament writings. In the latter portions of the Apocalypse, Jesus exercises his power to judge. Following his demonstration of that power, he rewards individuals according to their works.

Within the Apocalypse, the concept of reward based on one's deeds occurs in the second (4:1—16:21) and third (17:1—21:8) visions of the book, as well as the conclusion (22:6–21). In the message to the church in Thyatira, Jesus notes that all the churches will know that he rewards according to their works (2:23). In the second vision, John notes a beatitude, declaring a blessing upon those who die in the Lord (14:13); the Holy Spirit responds noting that *ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ' αὐτῶν* (their works follow them). In the third vision, two mentions of this concept occur. The first occurrence presents a voice from heaven crying out against the harlot imploring God to *διπλώσατε τὰ διπλᾶ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς* (repay her double for her works, 18:6). The second occurrence provides the understanding that the wicked will be resurrected from the dead and judged according to their works (20:12–13). As the work concludes, audiences hear for one last time that people will receive rewards according to their works (22:13). This last occurrence functions as a declaration for all audiences of the Apocalypse, urging them to remain or become faithful to Jesus, recognizing that a day of reckoning is coming.

#### Morning Star (Rev 2:28 → Rev 22:16)

The intratextual relationship between the message and the conclusion of the book reveals that the promise of victory comes in the form of Jesus, who identifies as the morning star. While much debate surrounds the identity of the morning star that Jesus promises to the overcomer in the church in Thyatira, at the end of the book John brings clarification to understanding the morning star. The planet Venus was often recognized as the morning star. Colin J. Hemer notes that “Venus had been seen as an emblem of authority since



Babylonian times.”<sup>17</sup> While writings have noted that the sight of the morning star was a positive sign leading people to expect victory, the Apocalypse reveals that those who are faithful experience death. This dissonance between the promise of victory and the experience of death leads to questions regarding whether the promise of the morning star holds true to what people commonly understand when reading or hearing the Apocalypse. Ultimately, the end of the text provides some additional understanding of Jesus’s promise of the morning star. As the text ends, Jesus identifies himself as ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωϊνός (the bright morning star, 22:16). Ultimately, the recipients of the messages learn that Jesus promises himself to the faithful as a reward they will receive.

#### Intratextual Summary

Analysis of the intratextual connections between the message and the text that follows reveals that John provides an image of Christ that highlights the outcomes of the empire and those who align themselves with Rome. Just as the message presents a promise to bring destruction to Jezebel and her children, all who find an association with Rome, including the personification of the city itself, experience destruction. As with the text and its intertextual connections, John later notes the positive outcome of those who demonstrate the loyalty toward Christ. Those faithful to Jesus receive power and authority, as they reign with him for a thousand years.

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<sup>17</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 126.

### Conclusion

The use of CDA to examine the interaction between social actors in the message, the relationship between the message and other writings, and the connections between the message and remainder of the book uncovers the congregations misuse of power to enable others to perpetuate false teachings among the community. Though the congregation has power, the community fails to exercise its authority appropriately to prevent the infiltration of those aligned with the Roman Empire. The textual analysis exposes the congregation's use of power to facilitate Jezebel's activity among the community, allowing her to exercise her authority over those within the assembly. This results in Christ promising to bring judgment upon Jezebel and those who align with her. The intertextual analysis highlights the relationship between the language appearing in the message and the language of a variety of Old Testament texts, leading to the depiction of rulers in conflict over the people in the assembly at Thyatira. The intratextual analysis reinforces Jezebel's alignment with Satan and the empire, based on the shared activity of deceiving, and discussing the rewards of both the faithful and the unfaithful. CDA reveals that the message encourages the use of power to maintain the integrity of the Christian community in Thyatira.

## CHAPTER 9: SARDIS—PRETENDING TO POSSESS POWER

### Introduction

Following the message to the church in Thyatira, John writes to the congregation in Sardis, approximately thirty-five miles to the southeast.<sup>1</sup> While two of the preceding churches possess and exercise power and two suffer because of the power abuse by others, this fifth church in the series of seven reflects a unique situation regarding its position and power among the seven. This congregation presents itself as possessing power, when, in fact, it may be the weakest of all the churches. The congregation lies on the brink of death.

Though the church experiences weakness, they have the ability to become strong. Jesus confronts this congregation for its pretentious behavior and challenges the assembly to become that which it claims to be. If this church gives up its concern for how others perceive it and recall their former state, Christ offers that they will have a name—in the book of life. For this church, allegiance to Christ and his kingdom results in Christ demonstrating allegiance before the Father and before the angels. Christ comes as a divine king to this congregation and challenges it to live up to its reputation as a people of power.

This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 84.

with the sociocultural situation of the congregation to challenge the congregation for conforming to the broader society by pretending to possess power that it does not. The textual analysis will examine elements of the text that provide evidence for understanding that the congregation appears to have power when its reality is much different than others perceive it. The intertextual analysis presents the connection of this message to the concept of Christ's unexpected calling, which should promote faithfulness among the congregation. The intratextual analysis reveals that those in the community who honestly embrace the congregation's position of powerlessness leads to those individuals experiencing victory with Christ over those who illegitimately wield power in society.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

Located approximately forty miles southeast of Thyatira, Sardis was near the Pactolus River. At one point during the city's history, the river was said to provide gold to the area.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the city's wealth via the river, the legendary wealth of King Croesus, an ancient ruler of the city, was known throughout the region.<sup>3</sup> This history of the city remained in the minds and hearts of citizens for years to come.

Around 130 BCE, Sardis was incorporated into Asia and became a judicial center.<sup>4</sup> At this point in the city's history, the river no longer provided gold to the area, but the city maintained its historic reputation as a great city.<sup>5</sup> Respected citizens continued to meet at the palace of the former king, Croesus, to maintain the history and heritage of the city's former glory.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 310.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 276.

<sup>4</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 310.

<sup>5</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 310.

<sup>6</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 268.

Despite the reputation of the city, its experience after an earthquake in 17 CE highlighted the city's economic weakness and need for financial assistance. As a result, the emperor Tiberius granted the city tax relief for five years.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the tax relief, the city also received economic assistance to aid in its rebuilding.<sup>8</sup> In gratitude for the assistance, the city recognized the emperor as its founder.<sup>9</sup>

The city's living on its reputation of former glory does not reflect its strength. It highlights the present weakness of the group compared to its former state. Sadly, others within the city maintain this practice regarding other areas of their lives.

### **Textual Analysis**

The message provides a unique account among the churches regarding their interaction with the broader culture. Unlike the previous churches, the congregation in Sardis faces no external opposition. Though some may think that a lack of opposition results from accommodation, the text provides no evidence for such conclusions. The message reveals that this congregation living in a pluralistic society under Roman rule experiences no hardships. For a city that had multiple temples for the worship of a variety of deities and desired to have an imperial temple built, the peaceful presence of Christians seems virtually impossible. If Revelation functions as a document of resistance against the powers of Rome and the powers within the local municipalities, failure of the church to face opposition reflects a deficiency in the congregation related to the practice of bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

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<sup>7</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 268.

<sup>8</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 268.

<sup>9</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 310.

In light of the church's apathy in the midst of their environment, Christ appears in a fashion that does not stand in opposition to the imperial cult or some local deity. Instead, Jesus presents himself as the giver of the Spirit, who empowers the church for witness. Through this presentation of Christ, the congregation receives a reminder of their call to function as priests of God, even if that requires they take action that causes them to serve as the target of persecution.

#### Identification of Social Actors

Compared to most of the other messages, the message lacks social actors. The composition highlights the angel of the church, who represents both those on the verge of death and those who maintain their life in Christ. John does not highlight any interactions between the congregation and others. While this would lead some to note that the church has not acquiesced to the broader society, it also notes that they do not live in a fashion that stands in contradiction to the broader culture. In the midst of their self-sufficiency, John presents two other social actors to his audience, Christ's Father and the angels. Before them, Christ will confess the names of those who remain faithful to him, even if it means they sacrifice the peace they have in their religiopolitical context.

#### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 3:1a)

John opens the message to the congregation in Sardis by highlighting the relationship between Christ, the seven spirits, and the seven stars, signifying Christ as the one who empowers the church with the life-giving Holy Spirit. Jesus confronts the church as *ὁ ἔχων τὰ ἑπτὰ πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας* (the one having the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, 3:1). His possession of the seven stars highlights Christ's

divinity, as noted in the sociocultural situation of Rev 1. Christ's possession of the seven spirits of God does not appear in Rev 1, functioning as a distinction between the description of Christ in the message and the original vision of Christ in Rev 1:12–20.

In addition to the possession of the seven stars highlighting his divine authority, the location of the seven spirits of God connects Jesus Christ to the throne. As noted in the textual analysis of Rev 1, the seven spirits of God function as the heavenly representation of the Holy Spirit, the agent of the declaration of the kingdom of God throughout the world. Christ's possession of both the seven stars and the seven spirits provides a connection between himself, the Spirit, and the church in Sardis. His authority over the churches and his possession of the Spirit strongly assert his lordship.

The description of Christ having the seven stars leads some to argue for the existence of a similarity between the presentations of Christ to the churches in Ephesus and Sardis. Gregory K. Beale asserts that the parallel descriptions of Christ to the churches in Ephesus and Sardis as the one having the seven stars serve the same purpose.<sup>10</sup> While the seven stars represent the angels of the churches, their function within the presentation of each message depends on the entire description of Christ, not just one component.

#### Ecclesial Engagement (Rev 3:1b, 4a)

The social actor analysis reveals that the congregation in Sardis fails as a community to live up to its reputation and conforms to the broader society that maintains a reputation of possessing power that it does not have. The community functions in such a way that it

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<sup>10</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 272.

the communication of false apostles in Ephesus (Rev 2:2), the self-declaration of the synagogue in Smyrna (Rev 2:9), the teaching of Balaam in Pergamum (Rev 2:14), and the self-declaration and teaching of Jezebel in Thyatira (Rev 2:20). This serves as the first instance of confronting a church regarding what others say about it.<sup>12</sup> While this group does not speak regarding themselves, John writes *ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς* (you have a name that you live, Rev 3:1). Mention of the church's reputation highlights that while the assembly in Ephesus bears up for Jesus's name's sake (2:3) and the congregation in Pergamum holds fast to Jesus's name (2:13), the community has concern for its name.<sup>13</sup> Like the people above, who have made self-attestations regarding themselves, this group bears a false reputation. Though it has a name for being alive, the text declares *καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ* (but you are dead, Rev 3:1).

### ***Those Who Have Not Soiled Their Garments ("A Few")***

Despite the congregation's reputation, a remnant has not conformed to the ways of the broader city in attempting to live in the glories of its past. They have not stained themselves with the falsehood of possessing power. The text recognizes this subgroup as *ὀλίγα ὀνόματα ἐν Σάρδεσιν* (a few names in Sardis, Rev 3:4). Use of the term *ὀλίγα* (few) highlights this group as a minority group within the church. Unlike the broader segment of the church, this group hears *οὐκ ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν* (they have not soiled their garments, 3:4). This idea of not soiling their garments maintains the understanding that these individuals had not defiled themselves by participation in ungodly activities. While

<sup>12</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation of John*, 95.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 113.



this subgroup consists of people who have not soiled their garments, the contrast between this portion of the community and the rest of the assembly suggests that the broader segment of the congregation has defiled itself in some way. Generally speaking, the overall church stands unclean and stained before God.

#### Divine Confrontation (Rev 3:2–3, 4b)

This portion of the analysis combines the analysis of mood and social actor analysis to reveal that through both speech and actions, Christ exercises authority over the congregation in Sardis. Unlike the previous correspondences, the message to the church in Sardis does not begin with any form of commendation. After the declaration of knowledge of the church's works, Christ usually commends the church for some activity. In this situation, the lack of commendation comes as a surprise. Whatever the situation, Jesus reveals that this congregation fails to perform its duties as a church sufficiently. In his evaluation of the church, he proclaims οὐ γὰρ εὕρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου (for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God, 3:2). Osborne states that "juridical force" lies behind the use of the term εὕρηκά (I have found), noting the association of this statement with judgment.<sup>14</sup> Christ expresses satisfaction regarding those who have not soiled their garments. The text reveals this by use of the clause ἀλλὰ ἔχεις (but you have, Rev 3:4, cf. Rev 2:6a). In light of the critique and commendation Christ gives, he acts toward both the faithful and the unfaithful in the church, noting his admonition and promise of requital of the groups. Though the message does not provide much detail regarding the church's possession of power or exercise

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<sup>14</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 175.

thereof, the congregation experiences the power of Christ through his interaction with the church.

### *Christ's Activity*

Christ interacts with both the angel of the church and the subgroup of the church that maintains fidelity toward Jesus. Christ's interaction with these groups presents promises of requital based on their activities toward him. These presentations of Christ and his activity reveal the complexities and the gravity of reflecting Christ by being alive and having both a reputation and actions that reflect that life.

#### Admonition (3:2–3a)

In response to the church's failure to live according to their reputation, Jesus urges the congregation to come out of their present state and to live. The message contains a series of five commands that guide the church in rectifying their problem. These imperatives call for the church to exhibit diligence in their relationship with Christ. Jesus commands *γίνου γρηγορῶν καὶ στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν, οὐ γὰρ εὐρηκά σου τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ μου. μνημόνευε οὖν πῶς εἴληφας καὶ ἤκουσας καὶ τήρει καὶ μετανόησον* (wake up, strengthen what remains, remember how you received, keep what you received, and repent, Rev 3:2–3a).

The first command to the church to wake up provides support for understanding the declaration of the church's dead state as hyperbolic language.<sup>15</sup> Though the church is barely alive, this call to diligence reflects the understanding that the congregation appears

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<sup>15</sup> Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 273.

vibrant and alive but rests on the brink of death. Their lack of awareness regarding their situation also reflects unpreparedness for the coming of Jesus—an event for which all the servants of God should prepare themselves. Following this command, he tells them to strengthen what remains and is about to die. This statement also reinforces the understanding that the statement regarding the church being dead is hyperbolic and contrasts Christ with the local congregation. It reveals that not all the church is dead, but that which is alive is on the verge of death.

Jesus provides specific comments regarding the works of this church. The audience receives three final commands: *μνημόνευε* (remember, v. 3), *τήρει* (obey, v. 3), and *μετανόησον* (repent, v. 3). As in the message to the church in Ephesus, the call to remember reveals that this church has departed from that which was positive in their former state.<sup>16</sup> While the text does not provide details regarding how the church received or heard, the message refers to that which they received via both tradition and teaching they previously received. He goes on to tell them to obey or live according to that which they had previously received and heard, as the evaluation they received reveals that they have failed to maintain such standards. Finally, though the commands do not follow a logical or chronological order, the church receives the command to repent.

#### Promise of Requit (3:3b, 4b)

Like the message to the church in Thyatira, the message to the church in Sardis contains promises of requital for multiple groups. These promises target both the unfaithful and the faithful. The promises of requital urge the congregation toward the behavior Christ

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<sup>16</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 144–45; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 58.

white. Their worthiness, which results from them walking with Jesus in the present, serves as the basis for such requital.

#### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 3:5)

Analysis of this portion of the message reveals that Christ acts and utilizes his power on behalf of the one who overcomes. As the message to the church in Sardis concludes, the promise to the overcomer connects with the promise of requital. This promise not only encourages continued faithfulness but should also motivate the unfaithful toward repentance.<sup>18</sup> The message promises that ὁ νικῶν οὕτως περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς (the conqueror will thus be clothed in white garments, 3:5a), much like citizens would wear white when celebrating a victory.<sup>19</sup> In addition to this, the reward ties back to the works of the church and directly relates to the concept of one's name. The promise also notes that Jesus declares οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς (I will not blot the person's name out of the book of life, 3:5b) and ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ (I will confess the person's name before my Father and before his angels, 3:5c).

The first of these three promises maintains similarity to the promises of requital for the faithful. Just as those who have exhibited faithfulness, the text notes that the overcomer will also wear white garments. This promise, which Jesus makes to all in the churches, also demonstrates that this dead church does not stand beyond the possibility of restoration.

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<sup>18</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 54; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 160.

<sup>19</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 85.

The remaining two promises to the overcomer maintain lexical connections with the earlier portions of the message. For those who live up to their *ὄνομα* (name) for being alive, Jesus acts on their behalf. John activates Jesus in relation to the removal of one's name and notes that he will not remove their *ὄνομα* (name) from the book of life. The presence of people's names in the book of life equates to these people receiving the promise of eternal life within the city of God.<sup>20</sup> Just like the book of life in a local city served as a roster of the city's citizenship, the book of life contains the names of the citizens of the kingdom of God and Christ.<sup>21</sup> Unlike local books of life from which officials removed people's names before execution,<sup>22</sup> Christ notes the permanence of one's name in the book of life for conquering.

In conjunction with the promise of having their names in the book of life, John once again activates Jesus as the social agent who confesses the overcomer's name before God and his angels. Even as the opening of the message presents Jesus before the throne of God, highlighting the kingly function of judging, Christ's language of confessing the conqueror's name before God and his angels reinforces the judicial function God serves as king.

#### Textual Summary

In light of the church's activity and encounter with Jesus, the text reveals that the church maintains a responsibility to live up to its reputation, especially when it should stand in agreement with who Jesus is. Though the message does not provide details regarding the

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<sup>20</sup> Streett, *Here Comes the Judge*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 214; Koester, *Revelation*, 68.

<sup>22</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 225; Koester, *Revelation*, 68.

insufficiency of the church's works, the specific details maintain no significance for the present reader. Instead, those reading the text should make sure that they do everything within their power to ensure that Christ finds their works complete in the sight of God.

### **Intertextual Analysis**

The intertextual analysis reveals the opposition the message presents against the congregation's fears of those in the surrounding culture. Two of the intertextual connections relate to the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. These teachings of Jesus encourage his hearers to bear witness to him, no matter the opposition they will face. The third intertextual connection recalls Old Testament prophetic language that demonstrates the work of God enabling someone to fulfill their priestly duties. This image reveals that Christ calls the church to function as the priests he made them. The intertextual connections collectively call the church to live according to its calling, not to fear the empire, and to bear witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Come Like a Thief (Rev 3:3b → Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10)

In his promise of requital, Jesus tells the church in Sardis *ἐὰν οὖν μὴ γρηγορήσης, ἔξω ὡς κλέπτης* (if therefore you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, 3:3c). The New Testament presents the idea of Christ coming like a thief multiple times (Matt 24:43; Luke 12:33; 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10).<sup>23</sup> The presentation of Christ coming as a thief occurs consistently in an eschatological context; it reveals that the presentation of this

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<sup>23</sup> Papaioannou and Moyo, "Judgment Motifs in the Messages," 183.

language within the Apocalypse should not be read any differently than in these other New Testament writings.

The Matthean, Lukan, and Pauline materials combine this idea of coming like a thief with the urge for listeners to be awake.<sup>24</sup> While Luke speaks of the benefits of remaining awake, both Matthew and Paul present a contrast between those who are awake and those who are not. Matthew presents these individuals as servants (Matt 24:45)—a term that John uses to refer to himself and his audience. John's presentation of this concept should serve as a reminder to those in the church in Sardis that Christ has previously noted the outcomes of those who function as obedient servants, as well as those who do not.

The combination of the language of Christ coming as a thief and the close relationship between the language and the warning regarding a non-compliant response to the commands of Jesus should highlight for the church in Sardis that the negative aspects of Christ's coming await them if they continue along their current trajectory. The Matthean text reveals that at the coming of the Son of Man those who are unfaithful will be swept away and destroyed as in the days of Noah (Matt 24:30–31). Luke describes the outcome as being cut to pieces and placed with the unfaithful (Luke 12:46). Paul presents it as a sudden, inescapable destruction (1 Thess 5:3). Peter describes it as a time at which the destruction of heavenly bodies will occur, exposing the earth and the works in it (2 Pet 3:10). In each of these situations, the promise of requital has a negative impact on

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<sup>24</sup> Bauckham, "Synoptic Parousia Parables," 104–9; Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 138. Bauckham focuses on the Synoptic accounts, to create a connection between the words of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels and the Apocalypse. This limited scope does not invalidate the discussion of this language in other texts.

those who remain asleep and unaware of Christ's coming. This understanding should urge members of the church in Sardis to wake up and do the work of faithful servants.

Confession of Name (Rev 3:5b → Matt 10:33; Luke 12:8)

John draws on the language of the Matthean and Lukan writings to encourage those in the church to bear witness and not fear the religious or political entities that surround them.

At the conclusion of the message to the church in Sardis, Jesus speaks regarding the overcomer saying *ὁμολογήσω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πατρὸς μου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ* (I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels, 3:5b).

This promise presents a strong encouragement to this congregation regarding their future in the Kingdom. He presents the confession of one's name as the activity of Christ within the Synoptic tradition and reveals that Christ honors those who honor him by reciprocating the confession of their names, granting them access to the future heavenly kingdom.<sup>25</sup> This promise of confession serves as an encouragement for the individuals to fulfill their roles as faithful witnesses of Christ despite the dangers they may face.

Jesus's words function as a conflation of materials from two Gospel writers:

Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, this idea of Christ confessing people follows his encouragement of the disciples not to fear what may happen to them (Matt 10:26, 31).

Luke places the statement before the discussion of persecution. In both instances, Christ's confession of the faithful connects to future persecution (Matt 10:28; Luke 12:4, 11).

While Matthew's writing records Jesus noting his confession of people before God, Luke's composition presents Jesus confessing people before the angels. Luke notes that

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<sup>25</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 86.



the faithful will appear before synagogues, rulers, and the authorities—all groups that manifest power against the church in their present context. This suffering serves as the reality for some Christians in Asia Minor.

While various individuals face persecution, the church in Sardis appears only to seek to maintain the peace they appear to have. The church faces no opposition because they are not doing anything Christ has called them to do. The inclusion of this intertext primarily functions to motivate those in the church in Sardis to appropriate actions. Evidence for this comes from the Gospel accounts. The following verses in each Gospel present an adverse outcome for those who deny Christ (Matt 10:33; Luke 12:9), but the Revelation passage does not include these statements though they may be on the minds of those familiar with Christ's words during his earthly ministry.

#### Intertextual Summary

The intertextual analysis of the message draws on the words of Jesus in the Gospels to reiterate the outcomes of faithfulness and unfaithfulness as demonstrated toward Christ. The warning of Christ coming as a thief highlights his coming in eschatological judgment upon those who demonstrate unfaithfulness toward him. In addition to this, John also appeals to the Gospels to highlight the outcome of those who bear witness to Christ, highlighting Christ's reciprocation of their confession by confessing their names. Along with this, the understanding comes that for those in Sardis who maintain their failure to confess Christ, he will reciprocate their lack of confession.

### Intratextual Analysis

For the church, the intratextual analysis of the message reveals that the latter portions of the Apocalypse highlight that no middle ground exists between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. The effects of Christ coming like a thief divides everyone into two groups. John's discussion regarding being dressed in white distinguishes those who identify with the holy city from those who experience the nakedness of Babylon. The presence of one's name in the book of life differentiates those who have citizenship in the holy city from those who experience the lake of fire. These features of the Apocalypse come together to highlight the significance of engaging the surrounding culture and bearing witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, even when it means facing the dangers of religious and political opposition.

Clothed in White Garments (Rev 3:4–5 → Rev 4:4; 7:9, 13–14; 19:14; 22:14)

The clothes individuals wear plays a significant part in interpreting their role in the Apocalypse. The color of an individual's clothing highlights the affiliations of those social actors with others. Those who wear white align with Christ and his purposes: the twenty-four elders (4:4), the souls under the altar (6:11), the multitude coming out of the tribulation (7:9, 13–14), and the armies of heaven (19:14).<sup>26</sup> The white clothing of the conquerors from the church in Sardis identifies them with Christ and the holy city in which the overcomer will live.

The Christians in Sardis receive a promise from Jesus that those who overcome will walk with him in white garments. This presentation of the saints wearing white

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<sup>26</sup> Neufeld, "Under the Cover of Clothing," 72.

occurs multiple times throughout the Apocalypse. The first appears in Rev 6:9–11, with the breaking of the fifth seal. After the Lamb breaks the seal, John sees under the altar the souls of those who had died for the word of God and the testimony which they had. This group cries out asking how long it will be until the Lord avenges their blood. They each receive a white robe and instruction to rest until the completion of the full number of their fellow slaves to die, revealing more deaths will occur for the people of God.

John later sees an innumerable diverse group consisting of people from every nation. All of them wear white robes. When discussing the identity of these individuals, one of the twenty-four elders explains that they come out of the great tribulation (7:14). John already identifies himself as a brother and partner in the tribulation (1:9) and tells the church that they will experience tribulation, encouraging them to be faithful unto death. It appears that this multitude from every nation joins the number of the fellow slaves who were to die at the hands of others.

The third vision of the Apocalypse provides two more presentations of individuals in white garments. When John presents his vision of Jesus coming as the rider on the white horse, he notes that along with him the armies of heaven come those ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν (clothed with pure, white linen, 19:14). Though John does not provide much information regarding the identity of these individuals, the immediately preceding image John paints for his audience provides some clarity. This earlier portion of the vision presents the Lamb's bride, who has made herself ready. Though the text does not describe her as being clad in white, John notes that she was permitted to be clothed βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν (with pure, bright linen, 19:8), which he identifies as the righteous deeds of the saints. Though John uses two different words to describe the

clothing of the bride and the armies of the Lamb, the different terms in these descriptions, λευκὸν and λαμπρὸν, occur within the same semantic domain (LN 14.50).<sup>27</sup>

The message to the church in Sardis correlates the cleanliness of the garments with activities of those in the church. It seems likely that the deeds with which the bride clothes herself reflect the fulfillment of Jesus's promise in the latter portions of the text. Ultimately, each of these visions and the presentations of people dressed in white demonstrates that John uses his text to align these individuals with Jesus, who promises the faithful that they will wear white.

#### Name in the Book of Life (Rev 3:5 → Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27)

John utilizes the image of the book of life later in Revelation to urge those in the church in Sardis to embrace citizenship in the holy city. Additionally, those whose names do not appear in the book have no part in the holy city, as they maintain their citizenship with the worldly empire in which they live. Jesus promises to the conqueror that he would not blot their name out of the book of life. The intratextual analysis of this passage reveals that the book of life functions as that which contains the names of those who are righteous and truly alive—not those who are dead. An examination of the various texts contained within Revelation reveals the activity and eschatological destiny of all, based on the presence of their name in the book of life.

The presence or absence of one's name in the book of life directly correlates to the object of their worship. Throughout the Apocalypse, those whose names do not appear in the book of life engage in worship of the beast (13:8; 17:8). The text does not

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<sup>27</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 174.

explicitly state the object of worship for those whose names appear in the book of life, but those individuals do not worship the beast, demonstrating their faithfulness to Jesus. Like the Lamb—the one who possesses the book—they are slain (13:15, cf. 13:8). Even as these two groups of individuals perform different activities, John also reveals that they have two distinct eternal destinies.

When discussing the judgment of those who did not participate in the first resurrection, John notes that when these individuals rise from the dead, books were opened (20:12). He notes that another book—the book of life—was also opened (20:12). Since those who had already died at the hands of the beast for refusing to worship him had already risen from the dead, it becomes apparent that those who take part in the second resurrection do not have their names in the book of life. As a result, audiences discover that each one who rose in the second resurrection experience the same fate as the one they worshipped and ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός (was thrown into the lake of fire, 20:15, cf. 19:20).

When John speaks of the eschatological outcome of those whose names appear in the book of life, he reveals the reward associated with not having one's name blotted out of the book. When John provides his vision of the holy city, he notes that οἱ γεγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου (the ones written in the Lamb's book of life, 21:27) will enter the city. Even as those who worship the beast spend eternity with him in the lake of fire, those who worship God and the Lamb spend eternity with them in the holy city. John highlights their presence by noting that the presence of God and the Lamb make the city a temple (21:22). He also notes that the Lamb functions as the lamp of the city (21:23).

Ultimately, John's intratextual development throughout the book presenting names being in the book of life reveals that even those people in Sardis who have a name, the presence of their names in the book of life function as the accurate measurement of their reputation and destiny.

### Intratextual Summary

The later portions of John's composition reveal the connections that he makes with the message to the church in Sardis. John notes the warning of Christ coming as a thief, providing a warning for all to make sure they are busy doing the work to which Christ calls them when he comes. The clothing of these people provides significant parallels of identification regarding the kingdom of God. In addition to the clothing of those bearing witness finding association with the kingdom of God, John also connects the book of life to the message, revealing that those who overcome receive eternal life in the kingdom of God.

### Conclusion

The use of CDA in the analysis of the message to the congregation in Sardis reveals that this community does not respond appropriately to its lack of power within society. Instead, the assembly pretends to possess power it does not have. The textual analysis reveals the congregation's lack of interaction with other parties, highlighting the community's lack of power. The intertextual analysis of the message recalls language that appears in other New Testament writings and encourages the weak congregation to exhibit faithfulness to Christ, recognizing that the demonstration of faithfulness will lead to Christ demonstrating faithfulness to the overcomer through the confession of that

person's name. The intratextual analysis highlights the reward of those who endure tribulation. As a result, the congregation hears the charge to accept its weakness within society and to recognize that Christ will reward the overcomer for demonstrating faithfulness in the midst of weakness.

## CHAPTER 10: PHILADELPHIA—THE POWER OF IDENTITY

### Introduction

Following the message to the congregation in Sardis, John writes to the church located approximately thirty miles to the southeast in the city of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> Like the church in Smyrna, this congregation lacks power and experiences the dominance of another religious group—the synagogue. The conflict between these groups centers on which community possesses the authority to claim the identity of the people of God. Compared with the active Jewish community in Philadelphia, the church, consisting of both ethnic Jews and Gentiles, lacks power. They continue to lack power due to having doors closed to them, yet they remain faithful to Christ and his kingdom.

In light of this church's situation, Jesus's correspondence encourages the congregation and highlights a reversal of power between the two religious groups. In response to the disagreement regarding who has the identity of Jew, Christ declares the church as the rightful heirs of the kingdom. Because of the church's faithfulness to him, he promises to mark the church as his own and to protect them from judgments he will send upon the unfaithful. Christ encourages this church in its faithful resistance to the religious pressures in its city and promises that though they have little power, he grants them power by declaring their access to the kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 88.



Critical Discourse Analysis will contribute to the understanding of the message through the examination of how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction with the sociocultural situation of the congregation to honor the community for its faithful, countercultural stand. The textual analysis will examine elements of the text that reveal the congregation's weakness in society and Christ's promise to reverse this situation. The intertextual analysis presents the connection of this message to the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, where he presents a promised reversal of power for the faithful people of God. The intratextual analysis reveals the transition of this group as a powerless entity to one that possesses power granted by Christ.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

The city of Philadelphia had good relations with the Roman Empire. The city dated its historical documents based on the year after his victory at Actium in 31 BCE.<sup>2</sup> Like Sardis, the location received a tax exemption from the Emperor Tiberius for five years, along with financial assistance to aid in the rebuilding of the city after a devastating earthquake.<sup>3</sup> As an expression of gratitude, the city referred to itself as Neocaesarea.<sup>4</sup> As rulers changed, the city later took the name Flavia Philadelphia to honor Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian—the Flavian emperors.<sup>5</sup>

The text of the message to the congregation in Philadelphia presents the understanding that the church had a conflict with the synagogue. While Hemer and Mayo

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<sup>2</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 321.

<sup>3</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 336.

<sup>4</sup> Ramsay, *Letters*, 69.

<sup>5</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 322.

argue that there is a lack of external evidence to support the presence of a Jewish community in Philadelphia during the composition of the Apocalypse,<sup>6</sup> Asia Minor maintained one of the largest concentrations of Jewish settlements in the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Later writings report that the Jewish population in Philadelphia had become so influential that they began to attract Gentiles and members of the Christian community during the early second century. Undoubtedly, the rise in influence did not instantly occur but likely had earlier stages during the time at which John composed the Apocalypse.

### Textual Analysis

The text of the message to the church in Philadelphia reveals that the congregation has “little power” (3:8b) but remains faithful to Jesus. Opposition for the congregation comes from the synagogue. The text of the message to the church in Smyrna and the history of that city evidences Jews reporting local Christians to the local authorities; the message provides no direct evidence for such a conclusion.<sup>8</sup> Instead, it appears that the conflict between the church and the synagogue revolves around who claims the identity of God’s people and serves as the heirs of the Kingdom.

While some people in the congregation come from an ethnic Jewish background, within the context of early Christianity, many followers of Jesus continued to participate in the local synagogue. With the rising conflict between Jews who embrace Jesus and those who do not, Christian Jews experienced exclusion from the synagogue. Though shut out of the synagogue, John’s message to this community explains that Jesus has

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<sup>6</sup> Hemer, *Letters*, 175; Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 62–63.

<sup>7</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 278.

opened the door of the Kingdom to them. Additionally, John identifies the faithful in the church as true Jews comprising the Israel of God (cf. Gal 6:16) and notes that Jesus will give them a permanent place in God's temple. Here, John writes to the church in Philadelphia, presenting the promise of Jesus to exercise his power on behalf of his servants who suffer as victims of the synagogue of Satan in Philadelphia.

#### Identification of Social Actors

As with the messages to the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira, John's presentation of social actors consists of those from the past and present. While the angel of the church faces significant difficulty, John introduces the historic royal figure David to his audience and presents Christ as the present embodiment of David's royal power.<sup>9</sup> Within the present context, John once again presents the synagogue of Satan—a group that first appears in the message to the church in Smyrna.<sup>10</sup> He also presents the Jews, a group with which the satanic synagogue identifies. John also introduces the world as a social actor. While some might not consider the world to function as a social actor, the text and the context of the passage reflect the understanding that reference to the world presents people, not the planet.<sup>11</sup> John's presentation of social actors reveals the powerlessness of the angel of the church in comparison to the religious opposition present in Philadelphia.

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<sup>9</sup> Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 161.

<sup>10</sup> Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition," 313.

<sup>11</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 331.

### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 3:7)

The opening of the message portrays to the congregation Christ's royal and irrevocable power. Jesus appears to the church in four ways: ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει (the holy one, the true one, the one having the key of David, the one who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens, 3:7). The depiction of Christ as holy and true recalls the language of Isaiah and describes God in a later vision of the Apocalypse. As a result, the intertextual and intratextual analyses will address the uses of those titles. Christ's possession of the key of David and his activity also recalls the language of Isaiah and will receive additional attention in the intratextual analysis.<sup>12</sup> Possession of the key represents Jesus's royal authority and power to grant or restrict access to the kingdom of God.<sup>13</sup>

With the possession of a key comes the authority and ability to open and shut. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the final description of Jesus in this message notes him as one having the ability to open and close, highlighting the irrevocable nature of his authority to admit to and to restrict from the royal kingdom and the presence of God. No one can close what Jesus opens, and no one can open what he shuts (3:7). This declaration of Jesus's activity plays a significant role in understanding the message to the assembly. The supremacy of Christ's in the exercise of his power regarding access to the kingdom of God plays a significant role for the Christians in Philadelphia who have had doors closed to them.

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<sup>12</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 131.

<sup>13</sup> Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 161.

### Ecclesial Engagement (Rev 3:8b, 10a)

This portion of the study utilizes social actor analysis to present the understanding that the assembly lacks power. This message reveals that the congregation demonstrates faithfulness amid powerlessness. The assembly faces opposition and can likely alleviate its oppression by conforming to the practices of those in their local environment. Because of their firm stance, Christ opens a door for the church and grants the congregation power by giving them access to his Kingdom and forcing the synagogue to acknowledge his love for the church.

#### *The Church has Little Power*

The Philadelphian congregation functions as a marginalized group. The message explicitly states that the church lacks power. The lack of activity directed toward others reinforces the church's state. While some assert that the statement *μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν* (you have little power, Rev 3:8) refers to the spiritual power of the church, the feedback and the lack of rebuke to the congregation make this line of thinking unlikely.<sup>14</sup> Instead, the little power this church possesses refers to the lack of size, social influence, and political prominence this congregation has in the midst of their city.<sup>15</sup> This understanding provides a plausible reason for why the message includes so little interaction with other social actors. While the community does not possess much power, the congregation maintains unity in its exhibition of faithfulness to Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 162.

<sup>15</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 171. Kraybill notes that loyalty to Jesus costs this congregation politically. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 285–6. Beale notes that the congregation lacks size and social standing within the community.

Two clauses highlight the activity of the congregation through the use of contrastive language. Christ declares ἐτήρησάς μου τὸν λόγον (you have kept my word, 3:8). In his comments to the assembly, he immediately follows this by saying οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου (you have not denied my name, 3:8). In each of these clauses, the community functions as the activated social actor. The presentation of the congregation's activity demonstrates that their faithfulness to Christ does not come from the power they possess in society. Instead, they exhibit this faithfulness despite their lack of power compared to the surrounding culture.

The declaration that they have not denied Christ's name leads to the understanding that this congregation has faced opportunities to deny Christ. The church in Philadelphia resists the surrounding culture and does not deny Christ's name. The congregation's resistance costs the community its potential power and influence in the city.

### *The Synagogue of Satan Says They are Jews*

The congregation in Philadelphia faces a similar opponent as the one in Smyrna—the unbelieving Jewish community (cf. 2:9; 3:9).<sup>16</sup> The groups stand in conflict over who has the identity of God's people.<sup>17</sup> As in the context of Smyrna, they falsely claim they are Jews, based on their “[ethnic] identity and religious heritage.”<sup>18</sup> They fail to recognize

<sup>16</sup> Harrington, *Revelation*, 70; Archer, *I Was in the Spirit*, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 133–4; Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 225. Though the clearest conflict rests between the congregation and the synagogue in these locations, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza proposes the idea that the rivalry exists “between the Jewish community and some (i.e. ‘messianic’) Jews.” Schüssler Fiorenza, “Words of Prophecy,” 14.

<sup>18</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 101.

that those who follow Christ function as “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).<sup>19</sup> While this group claims to be the people of God, they oppose those who are faithful to God and Christ.<sup>20</sup> As a result, it functions as a religious community that opposes Christ and his church, aligning itself with Satan and the empire he empowers.<sup>21</sup>

#### Divine Confrontation (Rev 3:8a, 9, 10b–11)

Critical Discourse Analysis contributes to the understanding of Christ’s possession and use of power on behalf of his people through social actor analysis, where Christ exercises his power on behalf of a weak congregation. He does this to the point of establishing a reversal of power between the assembly and the synagogue of Satan. This is the second message where Christ acts on those who stand against the church. He demonstrates his authority over both the church and the synagogue. In response to this church’s activity of remaining faithful to Jesus despite their possession of little power, Christ comes as one who has ultimate authority and will act on their behalf. Though this church faces hardship, they receive encouragement to remain steadfast in their opposition to the Roman Empire and the synagogue of Satan. Jesus declares an elevation of the status of those in the church and a humbling of those whom he refers to as the synagogue of Satan.

#### *Admonition*

Through his admonition to the church, Jesus encourages their continued faithfulness. The church receives the command to κράτει ὃ ἔχεις, ἵνα μηδεὶς λάβῃ τὸν στέφανόν σου (hold

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<sup>19</sup> Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 101; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 90.

<sup>20</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 89.

<sup>21</sup> Caird, *Commentary on the Revelation*, 52.

fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown, 2:11). Initial thoughts regarding the reference to a crown lead readers back to the message to the church in Smyrna—the other church that receives no critique from Jesus. In the context of his message to the church in Smyrna, Jesus promises to give to the faithful in the church in Philadelphia the crown of life. In light of the broader discussion of followers of Jesus receiving a crown, it seems most likely that the crown to which the members of the church must hold is the crown of life.

### ***Requital***

Christ declares his requital for multiple groups in the message. The positive outcome for one group has negative consequences for another. The church in Philadelphia and the synagogue experience a significant reversal in the power structure in which they have been.

The first mention of Jesus's activity toward the faithful finds its foundation in the Christophanic descriptions appearing at the beginning of the message. Though the church in Philadelphia lacks power, they have obtained the approval of the one who has all power. Jesus declares that he has set before the church an open door that no one can shut (3:8). The reason for opening this door provides the details of what Jesus knows regarding their works. Jesus presents this form of requital in light of their having kept his name (3:8). The declaration of Christ's activity toward the church before the identification of this church's works highlights the significance of what Jesus does for this group in light of the opposition they face.

Considering their faithfulness, Jesus does more than set before them an open door. He notes that he will act against the synagogue of Satan. They will come and bow down



at the feet of those in the church (3:9). Though Christ has acted on behalf of this church and blessed them in the midst of their weakness, he promises that those who oppose this church will recognize his favor on it.<sup>22</sup> While this statement serves as a positive form of requital for those who have been faithful to Jesus, it also presents the negative requital for those who oppose his people. Those who have stood against the church will learn that Jesus has loved his followers in Philadelphia.

In addition to these promises, Jesus also presents a promise of requital where he performs the same actions as those who have been faithful to him. Jesus proclaims to the church ὅτι ἐτήρησας τὸν λόγον τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου, καὶ γὰρ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ (because you **have obeyed** my word regarding faithful endurance, I **will keep** you from the hour of trial, 3:10). This presentation of preservation serves as a positive result for having kept Christ's word. At the same time, it has adverse effects on τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (the ones who dwell on the earth, 3:10). While this does not become apparent here, the intratextual analysis will later reveal the identity and actions of those who dwell on the earth. Though the full understanding of these people does not occur until later in the text, audiences of this message can gather that merely living on the earth does not make one an earth-dweller, since those who have exhibited faithfulness to Christ will not endure such trials.

The final promise of requital concerns Jesus's coming. John records that Jesus declares ἔρχομαι ταχύ (I am coming quickly, 3:11). The messages to Ephesus and Pergamum both present Jesus declaring his coming by using the term ἔρχομαι (2:5, 16). In these two preceding messages, Jesus's coming carries with it threats for impenitence.

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<sup>22</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 133.

For a church like Philadelphia—one that receives no critique—Jesus’s coming maintains a positive tone for the faithful in the church. In light of the previous promises of requital, Jesus’s coming takes on a threatening tone for those who exhibit unfaithfulness to him and stand in opposition to those who follow him, while it simultaneously presents a message of comfort to those who remain faithful to him.

### Christ’s Interaction with the Synagogue of Satan

The message to the church in Philadelphia functions as the second message in which Jesus acts against the church’s opponents. In this situation, Jesus exerts power over those who have opposed his church and exercised their authority over them. Their abuse of power and opposition to the church lead to the synagogue of Satan understanding that those in the church have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

During this time, many Jews maintained a hope that the Gentiles who oppressed and exercised power over them would one day bow down at their feet.<sup>23</sup> John reverses the power differential between the church and the synagogue by presenting Christ as the champion of the Jewish and Gentile church, who exercises authority over the synagogue and forces them to humble themselves before the church.<sup>24</sup> The activity of Christ toward the church justifies the assembly and identifies the community as God’s people.<sup>25</sup> Whereas those in the church experience ostracization from the synagogue as those who would thus have no place in the kingdom of God, Jesus opens the door of the kingdom to them and declares them as his own. Through his authority as the one who holds the key

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<sup>23</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 90.

<sup>24</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 237.

<sup>25</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 74.

of David, he grants access to the kingdom of God that the synagogue of Satan attempts to prohibit. This functions as a demonstration of Christ's authority and royal power to grant access to the kingdom of God.

The language of Christ regarding the self-talk of the synagogue of Satan becomes much stronger than in the message to the church in Smyrna. While the message to the church in Smyrna notes that the synagogue of Satan does not function as the Jews they claim to be (2:9), the message the congregation in Philadelphia presents Jesus declaring that they lie (3:9). The use of such language highlights dissatisfaction with the activity of this group and declares his pleasure with the church. Immediately after this, Christ notes that he will make the synagogue of Satan come and bow down before the feet of those they have oppressed. This reversal of roles presents Jesus as one who favors the church for their faithfulness to him, while he executes judgment on those who have resisted him and his people.

#### Christ's Interaction with the Church

John uses this message to present Christ's requital of the church in a unique fashion. Unlike the other churches that hear the promise of requital after the evaluation of its works, this church hears it before. Within his message, Christ sets an open door before the church, loves this church (3:8; cf. 1:5), and keeps this church from the hour of trial, while the earth dwellers are tried (3:10; cf. 8:13). The requital toward the church seems to find its basis in what the church has already done, not contingent on what they will do.

Christ calls this church to perseverance. He declares that he is coming soon. For this congregation, Christ's coming should bring comfort.<sup>26</sup>

#### Promise to the Conqueror (Rev 3:12)

The social actor analysis of this portion of the message contributes to the understanding that Christ exercises his power on behalf of this congregation to protect them. In addition to the protection, Christ grants them power by way of access to the temple of God. The conclusion of his message reinforces for the congregation that Christ possesses the authority to determine who obtains access to the kingdom of God. John's composition reveals that the promise to the conqueror appears in two primary components in which Christ appears as the activated social actor in relation to the processes mentioned. First, the overcomer receives power in the form of access to God's temple. Second, this individual receives a seal of divine ownership and protection.

In the first part of promise, Christ declares regarding the conqueror ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον ἐν τῷ ναῷ τοῦ θεοῦ μου καὶ ἔξω οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃ (I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and out he will never go, Rev 3:12) To this group for whom Christ has opened a door and given access, he now notes that those who conquer will have a permanent place in God's eschatological temple. Since the believers in Philadelphia have suffered at the hands of those who call themselves Jews, having a place in God's temple would be a fitting promise for these individuals. Jesus opening the royal kingdom to these people provides the understanding that they have a place in God's kingdom. Christ has

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<sup>26</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 165.

opened a door for them that no one can shut and has promised that the conqueror will have a place of permanence in God's kingdom.

The second portion of the promise further identifies those who conquer as those who have citizenship in the holy city and serve as the actual people of God. This portion of the promise reveals Christ's power and authority over them. They will have God's name and the name of the city of God on them. Christ proclaims *γράψω ἐπ' αὐτόν* (I will write on him, Rev 3:12). The name of God on these individuals signifies God's ownership and protection of them. The name of the city on these people notes their citizenship in the holy city. Unlike their citizenship in Philadelphia, those who conquer have their ultimate citizenship in the New Jerusalem, where they will live with God and Christ. In addition to God's name and the name of the holy city, the text notes that Christ's name will also be on these people, noting his ownership of these individuals. This concept of writing on these individuals identifies them with God and Christ, not with the culture in which they live.

### **Intertextual Analysis**

In addition to John's use of the text itself to communicate Christ's pleasure with the church for their interaction with the broader culture, he incorporates material from the writings of Isaiah to highlight Christ's activity on behalf of the people who remain faithful to him. John's incorporation of these materials reinforces from an Old Testament context the vindication of these people and identifies them as the actual people of God, while those who will bow before them function as those whom Christ does not claim as his own. John's language highlights Christ's royal power to grant and restrict access to the kingdom of God. As a result, this congregation finds reinforcement from John's use

of other texts in which Christ identifies them as the people of God who have access to his presence.

#### Key of David—Opens and Shuts

The opening of the message introduces Jesus Christ in two ways that seem to maintain a close intertextual connection. As the message begins, Jesus introduces himself as ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαυίδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει (the one having the key of David, who opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens, 3:7). This language, as reflected in the textual analysis, provides the understanding that Christ functions as the one who grants access to the kingdom of God. John's presentation of Christ's language draws on Isaianic material.

Within the context of Isaiah, language functions as part of a prophetic oracle the prophet gives Eliakim regarding his elevation in his service to King Hezekiah. The “key of the house of David promised to him by Yahweh serves as a symbol of his great authority.”<sup>27</sup> As the royal steward exercised complete control over the palace and governed access to the king's presence, so Christ holds the power of admission to and exclusion from God's kingdom. This authority finds support from the promise of Rev 3:12a in the same message.

Since the Christians in Philadelphia find themselves facing a situation in which individuals question their identity as God's people and they have lost access to the synagogue, this promise ultimately stands in opposition to the power of the broader Jewish population in Philadelphia. The language of Isaiah highlights how the kingdom

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<sup>27</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions*, 130–1.

access is granted by Christ to those in the churches and does not come from the broader Jewish community that seeks to exclude this group from the kingdom of God.

### Bow Down

If there were any question regarding who functioned as a faithful Jew, this second intertextual connection provides the answer. As part of the promise of requital, Jesus notes that he will make those of the synagogue of Satan προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνώσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε (bow down before their feet and they will know that [Christ has] loved the [church in Philadelphia], 3:9). The intertextual relation alludes to Isa 49:23.

Each text presents the language of people bowing down at the feet of the faithful and gaining knowledge about God's activity in relation to his people. The presentation of the material reflects a situation in which the people of Israel are suffering under the oppression of Gentiles. God promises them that there would be requital brought in the midst of this situation and that the oppressors of these individuals would ultimately find themselves bowing down before these people of God. John uses material that initially highlighted Gentiles bowing before Jews and acknowledging God's activity and that those who wait on him will not experience future shame. He reappropriates the material and uses it to present Jews bowing before a group comprised of both Jews and Gentiles,<sup>28</sup> acknowledging that God loves them. This language highlights that those who call themselves Jews are not Jews and that those who are in the church should readily recognize themselves as such. To emphasize that their present disadvantage is only

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<sup>28</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 237–8.

temporary, John takes up an image employed by Isaiah to illustrate the future reversal of the circumstances of the faithful remnant vis-à-vis their oppressors.

### **Intertextual Summary**

John's allusion to Isa 49 reinforces the understanding that those to whom he writes serve as the actual people of God, while those who stand against them are of Satan. Just as the people of God in Isaiah were those who were weak compared to those around them, John's use of Isaianic language presents those in the church in a similar manner.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

Encouragement of the church continues after the first vision of the Apocalypse (1:9—3:22). The second (4:1—16:21) and third visions (17:1—21:8) demonstrate the benefits and rewards they will receive for their faithfulness. These visions also depict the activities and outcomes of the earth-dwellers, who oppose the congregation for their demonstration of faith in and loyalty to Jesus. John's use of these later visions highlights the function of God, who executes judgment on those, like the synagogue of Satan, who persecute the church. In addition to God's activities of vindication and judgment, John also notes that God blesses those who exhibit faithfulness to him. Despite the synagogue of Satan claiming the label of "Jew" for themselves, Christ identifies those who are faithful to him as such and grants them protection from his judgments and citizenship in his eternal kingdom. The text of the message and its associated intratextual connections urge those in the church to remain faithful to Christ in the midst of persecution for their faith.



## Holy and True (Rev 3:7 → Rev 6:10)

The message to the suffering saints in Philadelphia depicts Christ as ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός (the holy one, the true one, 3:7). For this church that receives a promise of vindication for their suffering, the later appearance of these terms highlights God as a judge who avenges his people. The church in Philadelphia faces opposition from the synagogue of Satan, and Christ promises them that tribulation will come upon those who dwell on the earth (3:10). For a church that has been mistreated by others, the presentation of Jesus as “holy and true” reappears as a title where the people of God who have suffered ask their God and King to vindicate them and execute judgment on those who dwell on the earth. In this scene of the Apocalypse, they receive a white robe and instructions to wait. Jesus’s self-presentation as the holy one and the true one comes together uniquely as God later appears as the holy and true in the second vision (4:1—16:21) of the Apocalypse. The content of the message to the church in Philadelphia provides the groundwork for understanding Christ presenting himself as both holy and true. Revelation 6:10 presents the souls of the martyrs crying out for the Lord to avenge their blood. When reflecting on the contents of the message, Jesus promises to execute vengeance on the synagogue of Satan. Those who oppose the church will learn of Christ’s love for the Christians in Philadelphia.

Revelation 6 reveals that in the midst of Christ’s promise those who had little power yet who kept Christ’s word died, likely at the hands of those who were not faithful to Jesus. Those same individuals now ask how long it will be until the Lord avenges their blood on the earth dwellers (v. 10). Despite the breaking of the first four seals, where war, famine, and death move across the earth, this does not function as the vengeance that

the martyrs expect. Following their call for vengeance, they receive white robes and the instruction to rest a little longer, until the number of martyrs reaches its fulfillment (6:11).

The connection of the presentation of Christ as holy and true with the breaking of the fifth seal moves the vision forward. Here, Christ promises to keep the faithful from the universal hour of trial coming upon the earth dwellers. This protection occurs when the 144,000 receive the seal of God before the earth, sea, or trees are harmed (7:3). After this sealing, the vision progresses with saints and angels providing praise and adoration to God, acknowledging him as holy, in light of the judgments he brings upon the world of earth-dwellers (15:3–4; 16:5–7).

#### Earth-dwellers (Rev 3:10 → Rev 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8)

Like the kings of the earth, the text mentions another group of people associated with the earth, τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (those who dwell on the earth, 3:10). The intratextual connections with the second and third visions of the Apocalypse reveal that the earth-dwellers function as those who align themselves with the worldly empire, as opposed to the kingdom of God. This group of people appears multiple times throughout the book, but they first appear in relation to an hour of trial is coming on the entire world to try those who dwell on the earth. While it may seem clear that a trial on the whole world would affect all those who live on the earth, further reading provides the understanding that these earth dwellers are not just people who live on the earth, as the faithful followers of Jesus also dwell on the earth.

Though Jesus informs the church in Philadelphia of this coming hour of trial, there seems to be a delay in this the fulfillment of this promise. It is with the breaking of the fifth seal that the cries of the souls of the slain faithful call out to God asking how

long it will be until he avenges their blood on those who dwell on the earth. These people who have suffered and died at the hands of the earth-dwellers expect God to avenge them.<sup>29</sup> The cries for vengeance make clear for the audience that these earth-dwellers stand in opposition to Christ and his church. Despite what appears as a delay, Jesus keeps his promise that these earth dwellers will experience trial.

The second set of judgments reveals the trials of the earth dwellers. Between the sounding the fourth and fifth trumpets, an eagle declares three woes against the earth dwellers, noting that these woes will come at the sound of the next three trumpets. The first trial occurs when scorpion-like locusts would sting people, causing pain and the desire to die, though they could not die (9:1–12). The second trial appears as a combination of the death of one-third of humanity and the torture of the two witnesses (11:1–14).

#### Write Names (Rev 3:12 → Rev 7:3; 14:1)

Since the church faces opposition from a group that claims to be Jews, the congregation depends on God to identify them as his own. He does this by identifying them as Jews. Jesus also mentions that he will write his name and the name of his God on those who overcome (3:12). As audiences move through the visions of the Apocalypse, they discover that the second vision provides a presentation of the fulfillment of this promise, but not where one might initially think it occurs. Revelation 13 recounts John's vision of two beasts. As he concludes his recount of the second beast, he notes that the beast *δῶσιν αὐτοῖς χάραγμα ἐπὶ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν τῆς δεξιᾶς ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ μέτωπον αὐτῶν* (gave a mark to

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<sup>29</sup> Aune, "Apocalypse of John," 11.

them on their right hand or forehead, Rev 13:16). Immediately following John's mention of the mark of the beast, he presents another group—those who refuse to accept the mark.

The next chapter begins by presenting the 144,000, ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν (having [the Lamb's] name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads, Rev 14:1). This group of one hundred forty-four thousand appears earlier in the vision. John first introduces them in Rev 7. He notes that before any harm comes to nature, an angel declares that none of nature should be harmed ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν (until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads, 7:3).

John's presentation of the two groups highlights the allegiances of these groups.<sup>30</sup> His use of terms between Rev 7 and Rev 13 provides a depiction of the activity of sealing (σφραγίζω) the slaves of God that stands in contrast with the act of giving a mark (χάραγμα) to the earth dwellers, who worship the beast. Those who dwell on the earth pledge their allegiance to the kingdom of the beast and worship him, while those who have the seal of God pledge their allegiance to God and Christ and worship them. Both of these seals consist of names, denoting to whom and to which kingdom they belong.

The terms John uses to describe the seal and mark maintain close semantic relations. They both occur in the semantic subdomain of non-verbal communication. The term σφραγίζω (to seal, LN 33.484) comes from the term σφραγίς, which is a "seal, primarily indicating ownership,"<sup>31</sup> while the term itself is the act of sealing. This understanding of the term reinforces the relationship established at the beginning of the

<sup>30</sup> Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, 67–68.

<sup>31</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 443.

text, noting Jesus as master and the recipients of the Apocalypse as his slaves. John uses another term to refer to the beast and his mark. He notes that the second beast gives a *χάραγμα* (mark, LN 33.482), which functions as “a mark of loyalty to the [first] beast.”<sup>32</sup>

While the terms used appear in the semantic subdomain of non-verbal communication, both the mark of the beast and the seal of God represent decipherable material—names. The beast’s mark is τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θηρίου (the name of the beast, Rev 13:17). When discussing the one hundred forty-four thousand, John describes those who have God’s seal as having τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ([the Lamb’s] name and the name of his Father, 14:1). Ultimately, this provides the understanding that Jesus fulfills his promise to place the name of his God and his name on these slaves when the angels seal the servants of God to keep them from destruction.

#### New Jerusalem (Rev 3:12 → Rev 21)

Jesus makes many promises to the one who overcomes. Within the list, he knows that he will write on the overcomer the name of the city of God, which he identifies as the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. The end of the third vision presents the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. The descent of the holy city juxtaposes the ascension of the beasts of the empire. It also accentuates the expectation of the physical manifestation of the kingdom of God on the earth and associates the faithful with the kingdom that is ultimately victorious.<sup>33</sup> The physical position of the holy city above the worldly kingdom of the Roman empire also reveals that the domination of Rome by the heavenly city. The beginning of the fourth vision describes the city after it

<sup>32</sup> Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 443.

<sup>33</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 205–6.

comes down to earth. The writing of the name of the city on the individuals denotes citizenship.

### Intratextual Summary

For a congregation that experiences opposition from the broader culture, mainly from a religious community with which many within the community formerly identified, John connects the latter portions of his writing back to the message to highlight that they function as part of the community of God. While the message speaks of vindication on behalf of this faithful church, the latter visions of the Apocalypse reveal universal activities of judgment and vindication on behalf of the faithful. In light of the difficulties the congregation in Philadelphia faces in their city, Christ promises them citizenship in the holy city that he prepares for this people. Ultimately, the intertextual analysis of John's writing reveals his understanding that while the church currently faces opposition and rejection for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ, they receive acceptance from Christ.

### Conclusion

The use of CDA to analyze the message to the congregation in Philadelphia unveils the portrayal of a weak community that possesses minimal power in relation to those with which it interacts. The weak state of the church demands Christ's intervention to place the congregation in a position of power. The textual analysis reveals the weak state of the congregation but promises that the congregation's opponents will bow down before them. The textual analysis also introduces a group known as the earth-dwellers, who readers later discover act against those who follow Christ and align themselves with the Roman Empire. The intertextual analysis highlights the relationship between the message to the

assembly and various passages from the writing of Isaiah. While the Isaianic passages highlight the enemies of the Jews bowing down before those they have oppressed, the message notes the synagogue of Satan bowing down before the congregation, signifying a shift in the power dynamic in which this assembly originally appeared. The intratextual analysis reveals that the earth-dwellers have had some hand in the death of those faithful to Christ. It also highlights John's identification of the faithful in this congregation with the true Israel of God, reinforcing the shift in the power dynamic promised in the message.

## CHAPTER 11: LAODICEA—THE POWER OF WEALTH

### Introduction

John writes his final message to the church in Laodicea, located approximately forty miles southeast of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> His correspondence highlights what happens to a church that fails to maintain fidelity to the kingdom of God and chooses to gain power through association with a worldly system. Unlike the church in Smyrna that is poor, this community experiences the power of wealth.<sup>2</sup> The church's possession of economic power through compromise with Rome leads to the assembly adopting the attitudes of their local city. The congregation's practice of obtaining wealth through the exploitation of others leads to a divine confrontation.<sup>3</sup>

Christ's message to the assembly in Laodicea challenges the church to resist the attraction of wealth at the cost of its soul. In light of the community's situation, Jesus calls the congregation to give up their societal power in exchange for political power in the eschatological age. Such a shift in allegiance can leave the congregation in the wealthy city of Laodicea as a destitute group of people among the population of Asia Minor. Despite the risk, Jesus confronts this church for their unfaithfulness and calls them to honor him and demonstrate their allegiance to his kingdom by releasing themselves from the intoxicating drunkenness of the Roman Empire's wealth.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 236.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, 278.



This chapter will utilize Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how the textual, intertextual, and intratextual dimensions of the message come together in conjunction with the sociocultural situation of the congregation to challenge the assembly for conforming to the broader society and participating in the economic systems of the empire. The textual analysis will examine elements of the text that provide evidence for understanding that the text discusses the topic of economic exchange. The intertextual analysis presents the connection of this message to the concepts that already appear within the Jewish tradition regarding faithfulness to God in relation to economics. The intratextual analysis reveals that the community giving up its economic power will result in its ultimate possession of political power in God's eschatological kingdom.

### **Sociocultural Situation**

While many of the cities mentioned in the previous messages experienced prosperity, Laodicea possessed a level of economic success that rivaled other cities in the region.<sup>4</sup> The city prospered economically and aided the economic security of the region through the military colony present in the area.<sup>5</sup> Some citizens of Laodicea from the first century BCE possessed great wealth.<sup>6</sup> Many of them provided the funds to improve the area. In addition to the monies associated with the various patrons and benefactors within the city, the area had also achieved a reputation for its textile industry and advances in healthcare.<sup>7</sup>

The monetary power of this city led to self-sufficiency even in relation to the empire. Though the city suffered damage because of multiple earthquakes, Laodicea

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<sup>4</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 192; Williamson, *Revelation*, 92.

<sup>5</sup> Barr, *Tales of the End*, 44.

<sup>6</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 192.

<sup>7</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 193; Barr, *Tales of the End*, 44.

declined the aid of the empire after the earthquake of 60 CE, a geological catastrophe that ravaged multiple cities of Asia Minor.<sup>8</sup> Though demonstrating some self-sufficiency, the city understood that the emperor functioned as the ultimate benefactor of the entire empire. In light of his status as a benefactor, Laodicea received a stadium that Domitian sponsored during his reign.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between Laodicea and the Emperor Domitian should come as no surprise when examining the relationship between the economic power of the city and the worship of the emperor. Given the economic prosperity of the city, analysis of the currency from this area during the latter part of the first century CE reveals various aspects of the history of the location. Since there has yet to have been an imperial temple discovered in the area, “evidence for an imperial temple in Laodicea is entirely numismatic.”<sup>10</sup> The image of an imperial temple on a Laodicean coin from the time of Domitian supports the relationship between the economic power of the city and the presence of the imperial cult.<sup>11</sup> The economic advancement of Laodicea provided a comfortable environment for those in the city, as long as they fulfilled the requirements of economic advancement. Engagement in these requirements necessitates John’s writing to the assembly in Laodicea.

The citizens of the city also rely on the source of their wealth, which prevented them from relying on God and serving as a faithful Christian witness in their city.<sup>12</sup> Concerning the empire, it operates within the Roman society’s patronage system. While

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<sup>8</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 92.

<sup>9</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 79.

<sup>10</sup> Cukrowski, “Influence of the Emperor Cult,” 60.

<sup>11</sup> Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse*, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 35.

the city of Laodicea experiences wealth, based on the textile industry and the financial status and activity of benefactors,<sup>13</sup> those in the church embrace the systems of their society and submit themselves to the power and provisions of their benefactors instead of to that of Christ.

### Textual Analysis

While some argue for the disenfranchisement of all the churches from Roman society, which often led to poverty, the church in Laodicea does not experience poverty. It possesses power through its wealth.<sup>14</sup> While the congregation possesses wealth and exhibits self-sufficiency, Christ confronts the church regarding its alignment with society. Like the church in Sardis, the community in Laodicea receives no commendation. The entire congregation has compromised with the broader culture for the sake of economic power. The members embrace the wealth of the empire and find themselves with a threat of rejection from Christ. Based on Jesus's love for the congregation, he brings correction and grants the opportunity for repentance.

While the assembly sees itself as powerful, Jesus proclaims that the assembly's power comes from the congregation's alignment with Rome. Jesus utilizes food and drink imagery to highlight his power in determining the church's future relationship with him and the congregation's responsibility in appropriately responding. Ultimately, the message offers the congregation the opportunity to exchange its economic power in this age for political power in his Kingdom.

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<sup>13</sup> Harrington, *Revelation*, 74–75.

<sup>14</sup> Malina, "Wealth and Poverty," 357.

### Identification of Social Actors

The message has few social actors. In addition to the angel of the church, John presents only God as a social actor in addition to those who appear in all of the messages (3:14). John introduces God in the Christophanic introduction. He portrays God as the one who possesses creation. At the end of the message, he introduces him again as Christ's Father, who possesses royal authority. Such a portrayal reveals a church that must decide whether it will acknowledge the kingship of God or continue to look to the Roman Empire as its source of provision.

### Presentation of the Divine King (Rev 3:14)

The introduction of Christ to the church in Laodicea recalls the language of Rev 1:5, which highlights the majesty and authority of Christ over all creation, including the system of government with which this church has aligned itself.<sup>15</sup> While not all of the descriptions of Jesus appear in the visionary portions of Rev 1, most of them do appear in some earlier portion of the text. Jesus introduces himself in three ways: ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation, 3:14). Though Steve Moyise asserts that the history of Laodicea does not aid readers in developing an explanation for this presentation of Christ,<sup>16</sup> the message and its relationship with the preceding material assist in understanding the foundation for at least two of these descriptions. The three-fold presentation of Jesus provides a description of Christ that would have resonated with the

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<sup>15</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 412.

<sup>16</sup> Moyise, *Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 35.

original recipients of the message and emphasized the kingship of Jesus, as opposed to the rulership of Caesar.

### *Amen*

Unlike the previous message, the first description John uses to present Jesus to the church does not appear in Rev 1. In addition to the introduction maintaining no parallels in the first chapter, a titular usage of the term “Amen” exists nowhere else in the New Testament. John presents Jesus as ὁ Ἀμήν (the Amen, 3:14). Though the term precedes the vision, as it appears in Rev 1:6–7 and functions as a statement of affirmation, as in virtually every other use in the New Testament, this titular usage denotes Jesus as true and provides a foundation for recognizing his message in the same way.

### *Faithful and True Witness*

The second title John uses to present Jesus to the congregation functions as an expansion of the first. The description of Jesus as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός (the faithful and true witness, 3:14) recalls the language of John’s description of Jesus as ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (the faithful witness, 1:5). It also recalls the description of Antipas in the message to the church in Pergamum, where Jesus describes him as ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου (my faithful witness, 2:13), identifying a follower of Jesus who ἀπεκτάνθη (was killed, 2:13). Christ stands in contrast with this congregation, as the church in Laodicea has been anything but faithful and true as witnesses of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 68.

### *Ruler of God's Creation*

The most striking presentation of Jesus in this message highlights his status as ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (the ruler of God's creation, 3:14). This statement overtly declares Jesus as ruler. While some people translate this nominal clause as "the beginning of God's creation,"<sup>18</sup> the introductory text of Revelation encourages the understanding that the term ἀρχὴ presents Jesus as ruler within this context and the later portions of Revelation depict all creation ascribing God, along with Christ, majestic attributes.<sup>19</sup> With Jesus established as divine king and ruler over all, the remainder of the message provides an understanding that what follows functions as the declaration of the ultimate ruler of all things.

#### Ecclesial Interaction (Rev 3:15, 17)

Identification of the vocabulary chain contributes to the understanding that this portion of the message discusses economics. Additionally, the multiple relational clauses that appear in this portion of the message discuss the congregation in relation to the topic of economics. Recognizing that the city of Laodicea possesses great wealth and economic power, the text reveals that the Laodicean congregation conforms to the surrounding culture regarding economic standing. The activation of the congregation is realized by possessivation in relation to the assembly's works as presented as the body of the message opens with Οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα (I know your works, Rev 2:15). The presentation of three relational clauses that present the angel as the social actor who is neither hot nor

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<sup>18</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 256; Capes, "Preexistence," 960; Osborne, *Revelation*, 203; Trafton, *Reading Revelation*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Koester, "Message to Laodicea," 412.

cold supports the understanding that the congregation has conformed to the surrounding culture.

The message explains that the community is οὔτε ψυχρὸς . . . οὔτε ζεστός (neither cold nor hot, 3:15). The discussion of cold and hot has led to the idea that the text refers to one's spiritual state of being hot or cold in their relationship with Christ. Horton asserts that hotness reflects a relationship with Christ while coldness reflects being away from Christ.<sup>20</sup> As a result, a lukewarm state presents those who fail to commit to Christ fully. These ideas stand in contradiction with the biblical understanding that Christ desires that all repent (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). The assertion that Christ would desire someone to be unfaithful stands in opposition to call to faithfulness within the Apocalypse. Porter asserts that this recalls the usefulness of hot and cold water in the city of Laodicea.<sup>21</sup> While placing the discussion in the context of Laodicea's background and asserting that the language recalls the city's hot and cold springs, Koester explains that "the metaphor might fit the cool water at Colossae, which was presumably good to drink, but it would not suit the hot water from the Hierapolis."<sup>22</sup> Though these ideas have received some support, an alternative view appears more satisfactory.

When considering the situation of the congregation in Laodicea, the text provides no doubt that the assembly has become like the surrounding community. The language of the message regarding the state of the group simply reinforces that image. Those things which are hot are distinct from the that which surrounds it. The same principle applies to

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<sup>20</sup> Horton, *Ultimate Victory*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Porter, "Lukewarm Water," 147.

<sup>22</sup> Koester, "Message to Laodicea," 409.

those things that are cold. Because the congregation has identified with the broader culture, it has lost its distinctive characteristics and is therefore lukewarm.<sup>23</sup>

The message portrays the church identifying with the surrounding culture. It has become so much like the surrounding culture that it has no features that distinguish it from their broader society. The lack of internal divisions among this church reveals that the entire congregation—not just a subset—defects from its role as a church. This church’s participation in the economic systems of local society places it in a position where opposing the imperial system would negatively impact the assembly, as the opposition would effectively lead to the church biting the hand that feeds it.

The church depends on the systems of the empire by embracing its identity as a client in its local context. The church identifies with the city and highlights its relationship with the resources it has at its disposal. John notes that this church says Πλούσιός ειμι και πεπλούτηκα και ουδέν χρείαν ἔχω (I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, 3:17). This portion of the text contains a vocabulary chain that reveals the message discusses economics. Each of these terms relates to the idea of their prosperity and economic power. This functions as another way by which the church has become like the surrounding culture.<sup>24</sup> Like the other parties who have spoken regarding themselves, the church discovers the inaccuracy of its claims and must face the realities of their state.

πλούσιος	πλουτέω	χρεία
Rich	Prospered	Need
LN 57.26	LN 57.28	LN 57.40

<sup>23</sup> Mathews, “Function of Imputed Speech,” 332.

<sup>24</sup> Williamson, *Revelation*, 93.



### Divine Confrontation (Rev 3:16, 18–20)

Analysis of this portion of the text reveals that Christ exercises power over the congregation and confronts the assembly regarding their economic power by urging them to engage him in economic exchange. The commands Christ gives the group reinforces his power compared to that of the assembly. In addition to these two aspects of analysis, social actor analysis reflects Christ power over the congregation, based on the actions he performs in relation to the community. In response to the activity of the congregation, Christ confronts them because of its lack of faithfulness to him and lack of dependence on him as a benefactor. In contrast to the unfaithful church that speaks falsely regarding itself, Jesus presents himself as a faithful and powerful ruler who calls the church to come to him to resolve the problems it faces. Ultimately, he extends the offer for the church to experience his fellowship and service.

### *Jesus Declares the True State of the Church*

Christ notes that the church does not recognize its actual state. Jesus follows this with the desire that it would be one or the other (3:15). He goes on to identify the group as *χλιαρός* (lukewarm, 3:16).

The congregation has become like that which surrounds it and does not distinguish itself from the surrounding culture. Jesus points out the false manner by which this group presents itself and reveals the truth about who they are. He identifies them as *ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινός* (the wretched and pitiable, 3:17),<sup>25</sup> then goes on to explain what makes them wretched and pitiable.<sup>26</sup> In contradiction to the church's self-

<sup>25</sup> Koester, "Message to Laodicea," 420.

<sup>26</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 208.

declaration, the congregation is πτωχός (poor, 3:17).<sup>27</sup> While the term they use to describe themselves relates to their wealth and lack of need, the message presents their poverty and need. John then proceeds to explain that they are τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός (blind and naked, 3:17). The church's blindness reveals its inability to see themselves accurately due to spiritual blindness. While they wear some of the best clothing available, their nakedness reflects their compromise with the broader society, which will also be made naked.<sup>28</sup>

### *Admonition*

Though this church appears to have abandoned any faithfulness to Jesus or his kingdom, this message functions as the only one where Jesus immediately follows his critique with counsel. This counsel guides the congregation in rectifying the problems that contribute to its wretched and pitiable state. At the same time, the advice serves as that which it cannot do, Jesus tells a church that he declares as poor to make purchases from him.

In response to the state of the church in Laodicea, Jesus calls the church to make purchases. He counsels the congregation ἀγοράσαι (to buy, 3:18) three things from him. Each purchase brings resolution to the problems the church faces. He first tells them to buy gold ἵνα πλουτήσῃς (so that [they] might be rich, 3:18). This purchase solves the issue of their poverty. He tells them buy white garments ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου (so that you may clothe yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, 3:18). The purchase of garments resolves the problem of

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<sup>27</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 259.

<sup>28</sup> Neufeld, "Under the Cover of Clothing," 73.

their nakedness. Finally, he tells them to buy salve ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς (to anoint [their] eyes so that [they] might see, 3:18), resolving the issue of their blindness.

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Purchase</u>	<u>Remedy</u>
πτωχός (57.53) Poor	χρυσίον Gold	ἵνα πλουτήσῃς (57.26) so that you might be rich
τυφλός (24.38) Blind	κολλούριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς Salve to anoint your eyes	σου ἵνα βλέπῃς (24.7) to anoint your eyes so that you might see
γυμνός (49.22) Naked	ἱμάτια Garments	ἵνα περιβάλλῃ (49.3) καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνῃ τῆς γυμνότητός σου so that you may clothe yourselves and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen

The church cannot use the material wealth of their benefactors, upon which they have become dependent, to purchase these things from Jesus. As a result, readers should see this language as symbolic.<sup>29</sup> Because of this, Robert Wall asserts that the goods Jesus admonishes them to purchase “symbolize repentance and also divine gifts that provide the repentant one with the spiritual goods necessary to turn around and follow Christ.”<sup>30</sup> This repentance leads to a reversal of both their spiritual and social conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus adds a note regarding why he says what he does to the congregation. He declares ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω (as many as I love, I correct and discipline,

<sup>29</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 141.

<sup>30</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Mathews, “Function of Imputed Speech,” 334.

3:19). The idea of correction bears with it the understanding of Jesus noting the issues of the church so that they will recognize their wrongdoing, while the discipline serves the purpose of the church living responsibly. Though this church has demonstrated unfaithfulness to God and Christ, the message functions as one of love and care with the aim of the community functioning as faithful citizens of God's kingdom.

Jesus tells the church to be zealous and repent (3:19). For a church that has acquiesced to the surrounding culture and has not remained faithful to live as God's servants, the call to be zealous comes as no surprise. This call to be zealous functions as a call to be committed to the kingdom of God. Immediately following the call to be zealous, Jesus calls the church to repent of that for which it received critique—their dependence on both their material possessions and economic success.

***Promise of Requit*** (3:16, 20)

Unlike most of the messages containing commands, the negative promise of requital does not directly connect to the commands given. For example, in the messages that call for repentance, John presents a conditional statement that notes the outcome of not following the command. Instead, the promise Jesus extends the congregation in Laodicea connects to the present state of the church and his offer of fellowship with them. Both promises of requital incorporate food and drink imagery.

The presentation of this group as lukewarm reveals the state of this church compared to the surrounding culture. Both hot and cold materials maintain a different temperature than that which surrounds them. These terms of hot and cold function on a spectrum, but the problem with the church is that it is neither cold nor hot. This language

reflects that it no longer functions differently than their surrounding culture,<sup>32</sup> but have acquiesced to it, which has led to the distinction between the two being indeterminable, except to Jesus.

#### Vomiting the Church (3:16)

In response to the lukewarmness of the church, the congregation receives a promise of rejection. Jesus notes that he will vomit the church out of his mouth (3:16). Even as Jesus tells the church in Ephesus that he will separate it from his presence if they do not repent, this serves as another image where the unfaithful become separated from Jesus for their lack of faithfulness.<sup>33</sup> The idea of Christ vomiting the church out of his mouth serves as “a graphic image of rejection.”<sup>34</sup> Such graphic presentation of separation from Jesus for unfaithfulness stands in juxtaposition to the presentation of food and drink imagery for those who enter a relationship with him.

#### Sharing a Fellowship Meal (3:20)

Jesus declares *ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν, [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ* (I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him and he with me, 3:20). In contrast to Jesus vomiting the church from his mouth, it receives the opportunity for a relationship with him, as identified by the image of sharing a meal. The depiction of Christ knocking on the door waiting for

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<sup>32</sup> Koester, “Message to Laodicea,” 415.

<sup>33</sup> Koester, “Message to Laodicea,” 416.

<sup>34</sup> Koester, “Message to Laodicea,” 412–13.

Laodicean assembly who conquer that he will give them power in the future kingdom.<sup>38</sup> This congregation receives a promise of future royal power for their allegiance to Christ and his kingdom,<sup>39</sup> instead of allegiance to a kingdom that ultimately falls under the authority of Christ who rules God's creation. As with the message to the church in Thyatira, the royal power and authority of overcomer stem from the royal authority and power Christ receives from his Father.<sup>40</sup>

### Textual Summary

The textual analysis of the message to the church in Laodicea reveals that John's use of language depicts Jesus as a divine king who confronts the church for its lack of faithfulness to God, demonstrated by its acquiescence to the broader culture. This analysis reveals that its lack of faithfulness to God maintained direct ties to its dependence on their material wealth obtained through dependence on the Roman Empire. This reliance on its material goods led to its actual state of poverty and Christ's extension of the offer of a relationship with him.

### Intertextual Analysis

While John's presentation of language in the Apocalypse presents the church looking to other sources for its provision and identifying with the worldly culture that surrounds it, his use of other sources highlights this understanding while providing an appropriate

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<sup>38</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 194–95.

<sup>39</sup> Gallusz, *Throne Motif*, 177. Gallusz asserts that while each reward reflects the situation and background of the respective congregation, this promise summarizes all the previous promises. Like the preceding messages, the promise to sit on a throne fits the context of the message. For information regarding the relationship of the situation of the congregation at Laodicea and the promise of sitting on thrones, see the intratextual analysis.

<sup>40</sup> Vanni, *L'Apocalisse*, 162.

perspective that the congregation must consider. John draws upon material with which both he and his audience would likely have familiarity. Through the use of the biblical and extra-biblical texts, John notes the supremacy of the exalted Christ over early rulers, the love of Christ for those who receive discipline, and the future promise of royal power.

#### Faithful and True (Rev 3:14 → 3 Macc 2:11)

The presentation of Jesus to the church in Laodicea identifies him as *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* (the faithful and true witness, 3:14). The use of the language referring to God as both faithful and true occurs in 3 Macc 2:11 when Simon the high priest and the people pray regarding the activities of Ptolemy IV Philopator. While the narrative presents multiple scenarios in which the Jewish people face opposition from an ungodly ruler,<sup>41</sup> the book opens with the presentation of political and religious conflict between the people of God and an ungodly ruler, a similar situation to that which John and his audience face. The work consistently presents patterns of reversal between the ungodly and the faithful.<sup>42</sup>

The narrative begins with a recount of Philopator's victory in battle. As he surveys the areas of his newly acquired territory, he goes to Jerusalem. While there, he attempts to enter the Temple (3 Macc 1:10). In his attempts to do so, many try to dissuade him from such actions. Ignoring the pleas of the people, Philopator becomes even more determined to enter the holy place. The people implore the Lord to prevent these actions from taking place.

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<sup>41</sup> Cousland, "Reversal, Recidivism, and Reward," 46–48.

<sup>42</sup> Cousland, "Reversal, Recidivism, and Reward," 42–45.

Additionally, the promise of their royal power and authority is predicated on Christ having received royal power and authority from his Father (Luke 22:29; cf. Rev 3:21). The Matthean material places this statement in the context of the pericope discussing wealth in which a wealthy young man refuses to give up his wealth for the sake of following Jesus. After Peter notes that they have left everything to follow Jesus, Christ then notes that, unlike the rich man who chose his possessions over Jesus, they will sit on thrones.

The context of each passage speaks to the church and contributes to understanding the message. The Matthean material reinforces the understanding of the congregation's reliance on wealth, based on its desire to maintain wealth, like the rich man in Matthew.<sup>45</sup> The text also reveals that which the assembly will lose if it continues to rely on the empire, instead of Christ, to meet their needs. The Lukan passage reinforces the church's dependence on the city's benefactors, noted by Luke's reference to Jesus's mention of benefactors who rule over the Gentiles. Both of these passages come together in the reinforcement of the message to abandon their reliance on the empire and their worldly possessions and exhibit faithfulness to Christ, even when it will mean remaining in Christ amid the persecution of his body—the Church.

#### Intertextual Summary

John's incorporation of other materials into his writing recalls the history of the people of God, highlighting that in the midst of living under the rule of powerful nations and peoples that God consistently reigns supreme. While those in the church should recognize

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<sup>45</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 216.



this reminder, John draws on additional resources to remind his audience that the discipline that results from their disobedience comes from God's love for them as his people. Ultimately, this discipline should lead to submission to Christ, which then results in Christ sharing his royal power with those who remain faithful. As a result, John's incorporation of resources reinforces the message of the text that Jesus functions as King, who provides for his people in this age and the age to come.

### **Intratextual Analysis**

Though Colin Hemer says that other sections of the Apocalypse do not refer back to the message to the church in Laodicea as distinctly as they refer to the other messages,<sup>46</sup> the message maintains multiple intratextual connections with the other visions of the book. The message to the church in Laodicea maintains four distinct intratextual relations to the material appearing in Rev 4–22. For a church that receives no commendation, it should come as no surprise that four intratextual relations connect to the third vision of the text and guide the audiences of the Apocalypse toward adverse outcomes of judgment for those whom Christ deems unfaithful. Additionally, for four of the five intratextual relations, the analysis provides some unique aspect of the judgment people should expect when reading this message.

#### Imperial Wealth (3:17 → Rev 6:15; 13:16; 18:3, 19)

Christians had to resist any entanglement with Rome that would compromise their allegiance to the kingdom of God.<sup>47</sup> John discourages economic collaboration with the

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<sup>46</sup> Hemer, *Letters to the Seven Churches*, 208.

<sup>47</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 100.

beast's name. This highlights that John does not come against wealth, as the poor also bear the name of the beast and suffer wrath.

Though John notes the activities of individuals, despite their socio-economic status, he also brings attention to the responses of those who have become wealthy because of their activities within the context of the empire. When speaking regarding the fall of Babylon, the text notes that reason for this judgment, as noted by the use of the conjunction ὅτι (because, 18:3), results from individuals, namely merchants, acquiring wealth through her luxury. At her destruction, these individuals κλαίουσιν καὶ πενθοῦσιν ἐπ' αὐτήν (weep and mourn over her, 18:11), for no one buys their goods. Not only do merchants respond in this way, but those associated with trade by way of the sea ἔβαλον χοῦν ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἔκραζον κλαίοντες καὶ πενθοῦντες (threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and mourning, 18:19). Here, they note that the shipowners had grown rich through the means of trade with the wealthy city.

The church in Laodicea declares its wealth (Rev 3:17). They fail to resist the empire. They do not heed the prophetic call to come out of Babylon. They take part in the sins, and John notes that, unless they repent, they will experience the plagues that come upon her. The connection John makes between the self-proclaimed wealth of the congregation and the acquisition of wealth that people achieve through the empire should encourage those in Laodicea to repent and abandon their ties with the empire that is going to destruction.

## Nakedness (Rev 3:17 → Rev 17:16)

The intratextual analysis of the message reveals that the third vision of the Apocalypse provides those in the congregation at Laodicea an image of their future if they maintain their alignment with the economic systems of Rome. John connects the nakedness of the church in Laodicea with the harlot (Rev 3:17; cf. Rev 17:16),<sup>53</sup> who later appears naked in the text. Before the judgment of the harlot, Christ makes a declaration of blessing and notes that people need to keep their garments on (Rev 16:15). This serves as another warning to those who are naked and associate with the empire. As the third vision begins, audiences find that the harlot receives the judgment of God by way of the ten horns and the beast making her naked. This judgment of the city highlights for the church in Laodicea that they do not want to have any part of her.

Toward the end of the second vision, Jesus declares a blessing upon those who keep their garments on. Though various individuals have noted that this statement does not seem to fit with the surrounding co-text, it comes immediately after the mention of preparation for a future battle in which Christ comes. This cry functions as a warning for those who have not repented that they still have the opportunity to do so.<sup>54</sup> They must do so quickly, for Christ will come like a thief, and they do not know the hour at which he will arrive. Shortly after Christ's declaration, the third vision of the Apocalypse begins where God judges the harlot, and she experiences nakedness.

Just as the language of the message to the assembly in Laodicea reflected the topic of economics and finance, the description of the clothing of the great city, especially the color of her garb, reveals that she possesses great wealth and stands in

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<sup>53</sup> Räßle, *Metaphor of the City*, 94.

<sup>54</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 659.

opposition to God and Christ. She does not wear white, like those associated with Christ.<sup>55</sup> Instead, she wears fine linen, purple and scarlet; she adorns herself with gold, jewels, and pearls (18:16). Her clothing and jewelry signify her status.<sup>56</sup> The presentation of the great city recalls the prosperous textile industry of Laodicea that contributes to the wealth of the city and the church. While the church exercises power through their financial prosperity and wealth, the assembly witnesses John's presentation of the great city with which he identifies the community. Though she exercises power, she will be made naked. Through this image, John calls the church to repentance by purchasing from Christ white robes with which to clothe itself to cover the shame of its nakedness.

#### Sitting on Thrones (Rev 3:21 → Rev 20:4–6)

The third vision of the Apocalypse (Rev 17:1—21:8) contains language that recalls the promise to the overcomer in the congregation at Laodicea. The intratextual analysis of the message reveals the reversal of power for those who hear Christ's call to give up their wealth and riches. John encourages those in the congregation in Laodicea to distance themselves from the Roman economic system by highlighting the reward of political power in Christ's kingdom for those who refuse to embrace the financial structures of the empire (Rev 20:4–6). John's vision highlights the ruling authority of those who conquer, identifies them by their dissociation from the Roman economy, and presents their reign alongside that of Christ.

The texts of Rev 3:21 and Rev 20:4 portray activated social actors who perform the act of sitting on thrones. In the message to the community in Laodicea, Christ

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<sup>55</sup> Neufeld, "Under the Cover of Clothing," 71–75.

<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, "Economic Critique," 354.

death for their refusal to worship the beast, but they rejected the mark of the beast, preventing them from engaging in commerce, as they could not “buy or sell” without the mark (13:17).<sup>62</sup> As a result, those in Laodicea discover that the people who refuse to engage the economic structures of Rome will be vindicated and experience a reversal of power for their faithfulness to Christ as they look to him as their ultimate benefactor.<sup>63</sup>

Revelation 20:4–6 reveals to the congregation in Laodicea that the call Christ gives them to refuse to engage the economy of Rome will lead to suffering.<sup>64</sup> Their tribulation should not discourage them from following Christ in this matter. Instead, this vision of the “millennial reign of the saints” should encourage them to function as loyal members of Christ’s kingdom, for John reveals that those who suffer for their refusal to engage the empire economically will experience political power within the context of Christ’s kingdom. Though they suffer at the hands of the one who has a throne, the conquerors from Laodicea will come to recognize that the throne that caused them suffering and the ruler who sat on that throne have experienced destruction. Now, those who suffered will sit on thrones and will reign with Christ for a thousand years.<sup>65</sup>

#### Intratextual Summary

While those in the assembly look to the wealthy citizens of their city as their benefactors, John reveals that throughout the rest of the text judgment will come upon those who fail

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in the religious and economic systems of the empire function as the same ones who sit on the thrones and receive the authority to judge.

<sup>62</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce*, 151.

<sup>64</sup> Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> While many refer to this passage as depicting the millennial reign of Christ, the text does not limit the reign of Christ on the earth to a thousand years. Only the servants of Christ exercise a limited reign. Some argue that readers should recognize the number as symbolic, as the idea of a thousand years reflects an eternal reign of God’s people.

to rely upon Christ to meet their needs. Those who obtain their riches and wealth through the empire will lose their source of wealth through the destruction of the empire. Just as white clothing associates people with the new Jerusalem, the presentation of the group's state of nakedness reveals their association with Babylon—the city which will be made naked and brought down to destruction. While Christ judges and wages war against those who align with Rome, those who align with Christ receive the reward of participating in and exercising royal authority in his eternal kingdom.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the use of CDA aids readers in recognizing that the message to the congregation in Laodicea challenges the economic power of the Roman Empire and criticizes the congregation's acquisition of power through the ungodly means of affiliating with the empire. The textual analysis challenges the assembly regarding its wealth, emphasizing the poverty of the congregation despite its possession of material wealth. In conjunction with the textual analysis speaking against the assembly's wealth, the intertextual analysis highlights connections between the text of the message and other writings that portray the negative outcomes of dependence on and a love for riches over and above one's relationship with the kingdom of God. The intratextual analysis discourages the congregation's engagement with the economic systems of the empire by through the book's later description of the empire's destruction due to Rome's practices of economic injustice. Ultimately, the message portrays a reversal of power where those who align with the empire for the sake of obtaining wealth find themselves destitute with the empire that suffers God's judgment.

## CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation highlights the kingship of Christ in resistance to the Roman Empire and its activities, particularly its abuse of power in how it persecutes the Christians and oppresses the nations. This dissertation reveals that the first vision of the Apocalypse (Rev 1:9—3:22) depicts Christ as divine King who confronts the citizens of his kingdom and rebukes many of the congregations for their failure to operate as citizens of the kingdom of God, demonstrated by their conformity to the surrounding culture. Christ's requirement that his followers act like citizens of his kingdom does not depend on the position the community holds within any power dynamic.

The messages to the congregations reflect a variety of power structures. Most of the communities lack power in their local context, while some possess it. The analysis reveals that those assemblies that lacked power were more conducive to maintained faithfulness than those that possessed it. This did not hold true was when communities that lacked power pretended to possess it or attempted to circumvent their lack of power within their local context. In each situation, the groups that possessed power failed to exercise it appropriately. The messages portray Christ's concerns regarding how citizens of his kingdom behave; they also reveal his responses to how each assembly operates in its position (or lack) of power.

Critical Discourse Analysis offers an approach for analyzing power with texts. It provides a multidimensional examination of Rev 1–3 to reveal how various aspects of the text contribute to John's presentation of an alternative Kingdom that functions in a

highlight the kingship of God and urge his audiences toward his desired outcome. He then appropriates this language to Jesus, identifying him with God and noting the kingship of Christ. The intratextual analysis reveals that the language of Rev 1 appears in later portions of the book and reemphasizes the kingship of God and Christ, namely their performance of royal activity.

The congregations in Smyrna, Pergamum, and Philadelphia lack power. The community in Smyrna lacks economic and political power, demonstrated by their poverty and imprisonment. The assembly in Pergamum suffers from political disadvantage, based on its location where Satan dwells and has his throne. The assembly in Philadelphia has little power compared with the synagogue in the city. For the congregations in Smyrna and Philadelphia, Christ extends promises of requital that yield a definite benefit. While the community in Pergamum lacks power, this group fails to exhibit faithfulness to Christ as King and to demonstrate allegiance to his Kingdom. As a result, the promise of requital for this congregation exhibits Christ's exercise of power to the community's detriment.

The messages associate congregations in Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea with the idea of possessing power. Each of these communities receives a negative promise of requital from Jesus, based on their actions. The assembly in Ephesus exercises power without love. The congregation in Thyatira has power but uses it to accommodate those who stand in opposition to the kingdom of God. The assembly in Sardis appears to be active, pretending to possess power, when in fact it may be the weakest of the assemblies and requires life support. The community in Laodicea possesses power through its affiliation with the economic practices of the empire and seems to focus only



on itself. In the cases of the congregations in Ephesus and Laodicea, Christ threatens them with rejection. To the community in Thyatira, Jesus promises to come violently upon them in judgment. For Sardis, a group that pretends to have power, Christ threatens to put their power to the test through the element of surprise.

While it may appear that Christ comes against only those communities that possess power, readers of the Apocalypse must remember that Jesus threatens the communities in Pergamum and Sardis. Additionally, the congregation in Ephesus received a commendation for its exercise of power but also received criticism for how it executed its authority. No matter the circumstance, Christ exhibits concern for how those assemblies under his control demonstrate their commitment to his kingdom while they live and operate in the power structures of this world. The fulfillments of the threats appear later in the book and reveal that the impenitent who received those promises will suffer the same fate as Rome and those who align with the empire if they continue to disavow their citizenship in the kingdom of God and align with Rome. In the same way, the promises to the overcomers in each community will serve as a reward to those who fulfill their obligations. While the promises to the individual assemblies do not function universally, all of these promises culminate in the one universal promise to the overcomer—the holy city.

John legitimizes the power of the kingdom of God against that of Rome throughout the Apocalypse. While the kingship of God and Christ appears within the book of Revelation, this study provides the understanding that the beginning of the book declares their kingship to the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse. Instead of embracing the idea that the throne room scene (Rev 4–5) functions as the first full presentation of

their royal status, the introduction and first vision set the stage for recognizing their supremacy throughout the book. This initial proclamation of divine kingship prepares audiences for the demonstration of the wrath of the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb. The preview of judgment on those outside the Christian communities should urge the congregations to continued faithfulness to the kingdom of God.

### **Final Comments**

While John's writing relates to Christian interactions with the Roman Empire at the end of the first century CE, the message of the Apocalypse functions no differently for twenty-first century Christians regarding their interactions with worldly empires. Those who follow Christ must recognize that, while living in the context of their local governments, their ultimate citizenship belongs to the heavenly kingdom of God and Christ. If John's original audience faced opposition for their faithfulness to Christ, the Church, no matter the time in history, should expect the same.

Since the Roman Empire during the time of Constantine, many Christians, particularly those in the West, have reinterpreted the Apocalypse through a lens of triumphalism, while they actively accommodate the empires in which they live. For John and his original audiences, the Apocalypse unmasked the worldly empire and revealed it as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of Satan, which was at war with the people of God. Today, many Western Christians appear to establish their primary allegiance as that to their earthly kingdom, while failing to consider the implications of such attitudes with regard to their citizenship in the kingdom of God. Instead of attempting to preserve the establishment of the oppressive powers with which many Western Christians have become comfortable, they should read the Apocalypse through the lens of those currently

experiencing marginalization, oppression, suppression, and tribulation. This should transform the tribulation of which John speaks from that which is in the future to that which many segments of the Church have experienced throughout its history. Christians have a responsibility to identify their “Rome” and assess their relation to it. They must ask themselves if they, like Eusebius, have transformed their presidents, kings, prime ministers, and rulers into their saviors. The sinful nature of all the world’s systems encourages the hope of seeing the fulfillment of the heavenly declaration that the kingdom of the world has become that of our God and his Christ, and he will reign forever (Rev 11:15).

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