

The Faithful and True Witness of Revelation 1:5 and 3:14

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I. Introduction

“The faithful and true witness” is a phrase that occurs twice in the book of Revelation (1:5; 3:14).¹ Because this phrase is mentioned at the beginning of the book, it sets the stage for everything that comes later. Therefore, a correct understanding of the meaning of the “faithful and true witness” will guide one’s understanding of the entire book of Revelation.

It should be noted that the concepts of faithfulness and witnessing are found throughout the entire Bible. The Old Testament uses the word witnessing and its derivatives (*ed, ud, etc.*) over 200 times.² As for the New Testament, the word witnessing and its cognates (*martyria, martys, etc.*) are used 181 times.³ Over one third of which are found in the works of John; 49 of them are found in the gospel of John and the Johannine epistles, as well as 17 times in Revelation. Faithfulness and its derivatives are used over 700 times in both testaments, 175 times in the Old Testament alone.⁴

¹ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

² Search conducted for words with Strong’s Numbers H5707 *’ed* “witness” (69x), H5713 *’edah* “testimonies” (26x), H5749 *’uwd* “testify” (49x), H5715 *’eduwth* “testimony” (59x), and H8584 *te ’ud’ah* “testimony” (3x) using www.blueletterbible.org.

³ Search conducted for words with Strong’s Numbers G3140 *martyreō* “bear witness” (86x), G3141 *martyria* “witness” (37x), G3142 *martyrion* “testimony” (20x), G3143 *martyromai* “testify” (3x), and G3144 *martys* “witness” (34x) using www.blueletterbible.org.

⁴ Search conducted for words with Strong’s Numbers H529 *’emuwn* “faithful” (5x), H530 *’emwnah* “faithfulness” (49x), H539 *’aman* “believe” (108x), H540 *’aman* (Aramaic) “believe” (3x), G4100 *pisteuō* “believe” (264x), G4102 *pistis* “faith” (244x) and G4103

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Since the concept of witnessing is very broad in the Bible, I have limited this article to six: in *ed* and *martys*, in Psalm 89, in Isaiah 40-55, in the Johannine writing, in faithfulness, and in the character of God. The main emphasis throughout this article is on how each category enhances our understanding of the meaning and use of the phrase the “faithful and true witness” in Revelation.

II. The Concept of Witnessing in *Ed* and *Martys*

A. Meaning and Use of *Ed* (עֵד)

The Hebrew word *ed* translated as witness, appears some 69 times in the Old Testament and comes from the root *ud* meaning “return” or “repent,” and “do again.” Carl Schultz explains the meaning of *ed* as follows: “A witness is one, who by reiteration, emphatically affirms his testimony. The word is at home in the language of the court. A witness is a person who has first-hand knowledge of an event or one who can testify on the basis of a report which he has heard (Lev. 5:1).”⁵

The Old Testament recognizes that a witness can be dependable or false. In a former instance the word is qualified by *emet* “truth” (Prov. 14:25; Jer. 42:5), by *emuna* “firmness” (Prov. 14:5), and by *ne’eman* “confirmed” (Isaiah 8:2). To designate the unreliable witness, the word is qualified by *shequer* “false” (Ex. 20:16), by *kazab* “lie” (Prov. 21:28), by *beliyaal* “worthlessness” (Prov. 19:28), by *hamas* “violence” (Ex. 23:1; Deut. 19:16; Ps. 35:11).⁶ Moreover, a careful examination of the Old Testament reveals that “the ultimate witness is God Himself, who is shown to be keenly aware of man’s integrity (1 Sam. 12:5; Job. 16:19) and equally cognizant of man’s sin (Jer. 29:23; Mal. 3:5).”⁷

In summary, the word *ed* brings to mind the concept of a courtroom in which the witness has the choice to be either true or false in their testimony. When it relates to God, there is no question regarding His reliability as a witness.

B. The Meaning and Use of *Martys* (μάρτυς)

Martys, translated as witness, would seem to come from the root *smr*, which means “to bear in mind,” “to remember,” or “to be careful.” Hence, *martys* was probably one who gave testimony, “calling up into

pistos “faithful” (67x) using www.blueletterbible.org.

⁵ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, editors R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), 648.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 649.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 649.

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consciousness something one has experienced which cannot be ignored or forgotten, and which is now . . . brought to the notice of others.”⁸

The significant use of the word in the New Testament lies in connection with the testimony of the apostles to the life, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as authentic proof of His Messiahship (John 15:27; 10:35; Acts 23:11; 1 Cor. 15:15; 1 John 1:2). The intention of John’s uses of “witness” for Jesus in Revelation 1:5 and 3:14 can be compared to his usage in the Gospel account. Jesus claims in both John 3:31-33 and 8:12 that not only is God true but that He is the one who validates the testimony of Jesus.⁹

Furthermore, Scripture, God, and the Holy Spirit all testify that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the Savior of the world (John 13:21, 14-16; Heb. 5:17). As the Son of God, Jesus “is true not in contrast to what is false, but true because he can be trusted to communicate truth.”¹⁰ He is “a perfect witness to the nature of God. . . . The faithful witness who cannot lie and lived and spoke flawlessly the will of God, promises believers salvation’s grace and peace.”¹¹ In addition, by calling Himself the faithful and true witness in conjunction with “the Amen” of Revelation 3:14, Jesus is proclaiming His Godhood.¹²

“To bear witness” in the language of a court setting is of utmost importance to the book of Revelation. God’s people are on trial facing unjust courts that give unjust sentences based on false witnesses. Therefore, the assurance comes that the true witness will vindicate them. He will prove beyond any doubt that they are worthy because He is worthy. He is worthy because He is the Creator and Ruler of everything (He is the Ruler

⁸ Colin Brown, ed, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, trans with additions and revisions from the German *Theologisches Begriffslexikon Zum Neuen Testament* ed. by Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 1038.

⁹ James Arthur Walther, “The Address in Revelation 1:4,5a.” *Horizons In Biblical Theology* 17, no. 2 (December 1995): 165-180. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed August 17, 2015).

¹⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on The Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 65.

¹¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 25.

¹² Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentary series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 168 and “Revelation” in *Philippians to Revelation*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary series, Vol. 7, ed. by Francis Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 732.

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of God's Creation in Rev. 3:14) and because He has died and risen again to reign as a King ("the First Born from the dead and the Ruler of the kings of the earth" in Rev. 1:5).¹³

The phrase "faithful witness often entails suffering and persecution. In the Book of Revelation, for instance, Christians are about to enter a time of severe persecution, and some of them will be brought before the courts and sentenced to death. For this reason the seer of Patmos encourages them to 'hold' to the 'testimony of Jesus' [Rev. 12:17]."¹⁴ Here the "faithful and true witness" has combined Creation and Salvation together.¹⁵ God will vindicate His people because He is the True Witness who has created and redeemed the whole world. He is also an example to suffering believers: "As Christ had conquered suffering and death, so they too would conquer and share in his victory over the forces of evil [Rev. 2:10, 17:14, 20:4]. As their Lord had witnessed faithfully even unto death, they also must bear unflinching testimony [Rev. 2:13, 6:9, 19:11]."¹⁶

III. The Concept of Witnessing in Psalm 89

Scholars agree that careful study of the major elements of both verses which contain the phrase "the faithful witness" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14) reveals that they find their roots in Psalm 89.¹⁷ These major elements¹⁸ are:

- 1) The faithful (and true in Rev. 3:14) witness corresponds with Psalm 89:37;
- 2) The firstborn from the dead (Rev. 1:5) corresponds with Psalm 89:27;
- 3) The ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5) corresponds with Psalm 89:29;

¹³ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 66.

¹⁴ Brown, 1048-1049. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 934 also notes that as a faithful and true witness Jesus "becomes in this the pattern for his people."

¹⁵ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 16, edited by Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1049.

¹⁷ For example, see Stefanovic, 64; Kistemaker, 83; and G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Text Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 191-192.

¹⁸ As per the New International Version.

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- 4) The one who loves us (Rev. 1:5) corresponds with Psalm 89:1-2, 33;
- 5) The one who has freed us from our sins by his blood (Rev. 1:5) corresponds with Psalm 89:26;
- 6) The title of Amen¹⁹ (Rev. 3:14) corresponds with Psalm 89:9-14;
- 7) The ruler of God's creation (Rev. 3:14) corresponds with Psalm 89:11-12.

Thus, a careful study of Psalm 89, which has been noted to have Messianic significance,²⁰ will help us understand the motif of the faithful and true witness in the book of Revelation. Note that the above titles, which are applied to Christ, sum up His work and ministry. He is Prophet (faithful and true witness), King (ruler of the kings of the earth), Savior (firstborn from the dead, freed us from our sin by his blood), Priest (freed us from our sin by his blood),²¹ Creator (ruler of God's creation), and God (the one who loves us, the Amen).

There are four major themes encompassed in Psalm 89 which illuminate Christ as witness in Revelation.

1) Faithfulness

The main focus of Psalm 89 is the faithfulness of Yahweh.²² This is evidenced by the use of the word אֱמוּנָה (*'emwnah*) seven times in this Psalm (vs. 1, 2, 5, 8, 24, 33, 49).²³ “Basically, the term applies to God himself ([cf] Deut. 32:4) to express his total dependability” and is used as a descriptor of the words, works, and attributes of God.²⁴ Yahweh is faithful

¹⁹ The use of “Amen” as a title for the faithful and true witness of Revelation 3:14 also can be linked to the God of Truth title of Isaiah 65:16. Beale, 299.

²⁰ Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, translated by J. R. Porter (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 59 and C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, Encountering Biblical Studies, edited by Walter A. Elwell and Eugene H. Merrill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 182.

²¹ Beale remarks “Christ expressed his love by redeeming his people from their sins through his *death* (‘blood’). People are released from their bondage to the power and penalty of sin by identifying by faith Jesus’s sacrificial death. This suggests a priestly function, since the OT priests accomplished sanctification and atonement for Israel by sprinkling the blood of sacrificed animals,” Beale, 191.

²² Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary Series, edited by Ben Witherington III and Bill T. Arnold (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 386.

²³ Additionally, the NIV translates אֱמוּנָה (“truth”) as faithfulness in Ps. 89:14.

²⁴ *TWOT*, 52.

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to His promises, covenant, and love (vs. 2, 3, 49). This faithfulness is not temporary, not only past history, neither a future event, but it is forever (vs. 1, 2, 4, 52). It is rooted in His nature and fulfilled by His might and power (vs. 8). His love and faithfulness are an “unconditional commitment” to humankind.²⁵ The heavens, the earth, the moon, and all God’s creation testify of His never ending faithfulness (vs. 5:11, 37). The evidence of His love surrounds all His creation (vs. 8).

2) Rulership

Psalm 89 portrays the faithful God as the ruler of the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything else (vs. 9, 11). He has power to stir them, power to calm them (vs. 9, 10), and the power to judge them (vs. 14, 32). This ultimate rulership comes from the fact that He is the creator and founder of everything (vs. 11, 12). “He judges and administers justice based on righteousness, truth, and equity” (vs. 14).²⁶ Therefore, the Israelites are here reassured that Yahweh is not an arbitrary ruler, nor is self-exalted in vain (vs. 13).

3) Past Evidence

Moreover, the Psalmist looks back at history and sees the hand of God at work as further evidence of His steadfastness and faithfulness to the covenant. He crushed Egypt and led the people through the Red Sea and through the desert into the Promised Land (vs. 10). He does the impossible for His people.²⁷ God has always stood by His people and never violated His covenant (vs. 34). The moon and the sun are the continuous reminder that, as God worked with and for His people in the past, He will continue to work with and for them in the future (vs. 36-37).

Even when it appears as if God is the cause of current troubles, “it is clear that the lament is an act of faith, for only Yahweh, who caused the trouble, can right the wrong . . . only Yahweh can restore the well-being of the community.”²⁸ Even in the lament, there is praise.²⁹ He has proven Himself faithful in the past and will also triumph in the future.

²⁵ Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., 387.

²⁶ Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Monographs, Vol. 29, series editor Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 41.

²⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 177.

²⁸ Brueggemann, 76.

²⁹ Westermann, 41.

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4) A Promise

At the heart of this Psalm, Yahweh promises His people that He will destroy their enemies and strike down their adversaries (vs. 23). Even “if future kings do not keep the commandments, that is, the covenant, then those kings will be punished, but the Lord will not take away the Lord’s *steadfast love*.”³⁰ Thus, the people of God know that Yahweh will stand by them always (vs. 24). They will have many enemies, but those enemies will face the destiny that Egypt did. The truthfulness of Yahweh is evidence that His “promise to the dynasty is as sure as creation (vs. 37)”³¹ as “the Davidic line will continue, as long as the sun and moon endure.”³²

The images evoked in Psalm 89 are evident in Revelation. Before John writes anything to the churches, he sets the stage by reminding them that Yahweh is faithful to His love, promises, and covenant by referring to Psalm 89 and the faithfulness motif in the Old Testament. In essence, he tells them that God was faithful in the past and He will be now and in the future because His faithfulness endures forever.

IV. The Concept of Witnessing and the Controversy in Isaiah 40-55

1) The Lawsuit between Yahweh and the World

In Isaiah 40-55, there are two lawsuits³³ or controversies. The first one is between Yahweh and the world. In this controversy, Yahweh and His witness, represented by Israel,³⁴ are placed on one side (Isa. 43:10, 12; 44:8) and the gods of the nations and their followers, represented by the pagan nations, on the other (41:1; 43:9; 45:20). The controversy concerns the claims of Yahweh as creator, and the only true God and Lord of history (Isa. 40:25-31; 44:6-8; 45:8-11, 21). Both the false gods and their pagan nation witnesses are challenged to produce a case against predicted prophecy which can be duly attested (41:22; 42:9; 43:9, 18; 46:9; 48:31). He invites them to “Set forth your arguments” (Isaiah 41:21). Their inability

³⁰ James Limburg, *Psalms*, Westminster Bible Companion Series, eds Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 304.

³¹ Brueggemann and Bellinger, Jr., 387.

³² Limburg, 304.

³³ Bandy, 4, 49.

³⁴ M. Greenberg, “Witness” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962; reprint 1981), 864.

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to do so is evidenced by their silence in the face of a challenge from the legal opponents; therefore they forfeit the case (41:24, 26-29).³⁵

On the other hand, Yahweh's ability to predict the "former things" can be established by the testimony of His witnesses, and this capacity constitutes a convincing piece of evidence in favor of His claims. Israel "is in a position to bear witness both to the prediction and to its subsequent fulfillment, and this is one of the main arguments for the case that Yahweh is God and the only Savior."³⁶ Israel can attest to fulfilled prophecy and she is to do so before the world (45:23-25). The determination is that "all gods are null and void. Only the God of Israel is in control."³⁷ God alone is in charge of future events and nations.³⁸

It is clear that the witnesses of Yahweh, which are both faithful and true, are His ability to predict the future and His people Israel, who attest to this fact. "The linkage between *the theological claim of Yahweh* and *the witness of Israel* is of primary importance. Indeed, Yahweh will not matter in the turn of history unless Israel gives evidence. Israel is instructed and empowered and authorized, and is able to 'retell the world.'³⁹

The great lawsuit or controversy, as told by the book of Revelation and the rest of the Bible, is full of confrontations between Yahweh and His people on one side, and the devil and his followers on the other. Throughout history the devil will try to produce signs and wonders to deceive God's people. His main attack is the Word of God, which contains His prophetic messages.⁴⁰ The concept of the faithful witness will first remind God's people of the inability of Satan to match God.⁴¹ Thus, they will not be deceived by him. Then, it will remind them of His ability to

³⁵ Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, Society for the New Testament Studies Monograph Series, edited by Matthew Black and R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: UK, Cambridge University Press, 1977), 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁷ Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series, eds. David Noel Freeman and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 176.

³⁸ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary Series, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 461.

³⁹ Walter Brueggeman, *Isaiah 40-66*, Westminster Bible Companion series, eds. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 57.

⁴⁰ See Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Rev 11:3-12," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 127-135.

⁴¹ Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Understanding the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1969), 53.

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predict history and His protection of the prophetic word. The whole book of Revelation itself is an indication of His knowledge of the future. It is, in fact, a prophetic book which proves beyond any doubt that God does know the end from the beginning.⁴² Yahweh has passed this knowledge to His followers, first, to assure them that He is the true God who controls everything and, second, to assure them that in times of trouble He will always be with them. There is no match for Yahweh. He is God alone.

Another implication to the concept of witnessing in Isaiah 40-55 that is important in the book of Revelation is that as Israel was God's witness to the world in the Old Testament, the church is His witness in the New Testament.⁴³ "Here is a striking picture of Messiah as God's Servant, and of men walking in His footsteps and being His witnesses."⁴⁴ The disciples started His ever-connecting chain of true witness. Finally, it is clear that the crucified Lord is the model of the Christian witness. He stands on one side of the cross. The believer is to witness on the other side of the cross. Thus, the concept of discipleship is very evident in the theme of witnessing (Matt. 28:18-20).

2) The Lawsuit between Yahweh and His People

The second lawsuit in these chapters is between Yahweh and His people. "The dispute about truth concerns theological claim about God, but it also concerns historical possibility; that is whether Israel will be emancipated for homecoming. There is a great deal at stake in this judgment for Israel, as there is for Yahweh."⁴⁵ The people complain of being forsaken (49:14), but God counters that He could never forget them and desires to bless them and save mankind (49:26).

Israel's complaint that her 'right' has been disregarded by her God is untrue. Yahweh is eternal, the indefatigable Creator of the whole earth, the never-failing source of strength available to his followers (40:27-31). Israel thinks she has labored in vain (49:4), and complains that Yahweh has forgotten her (49:14), but in view of his great love, this is impossible (49:15-16). Exiled Israel has been judged for her unfaithfulness (43:21-

⁴² Kistemaker, 594.

⁴³ Bandy, 156.

⁴⁴ "Isaiah" in *Isaiah to Malachi*, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary series, Vol. 4, ed. by Francis Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), 245.

⁴⁵ Brueggemann, 56.

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28), but Yahweh can receive her back again. He does accept her so that all men may recognize that He is the Lord of history (41:17-20).⁴⁶

The church will face many of the hardships that Israel faced in the past.⁴⁷ Therefore, at the beginning of His revelation, Christ reminds the believers that they are not abandoned nor forgotten or forsaken. Isaiah 40-55 serves to remind them of His eternal interest in them. The people of God will experience harsh times and feel that God has forsaken them as Israel of old felt. Yet the reality could not be further away.⁴⁸ “God grants those who trust in Him great endurance and vigor so that they (unlike the youths of the previous verse [Isaiah 40:30]) will never tire in their endeavors.”⁴⁹ The more difficult times are, the closer is the presence of God. And this is the theme of the book of Revelation. Yahweh will receive His people back again (Rev. 1:7).⁵⁰ And all people will know that He is indeed the Lord of history.

3) The Suffering Servant

There is another concept in Isaiah 40-55 that might shed light on the idea of the faithful witness in Revelation. It is the work of the suffering servant. As the suffering servant, the witness par-excellence sealed His testimony to the goodness of Yahweh by His suffering.⁵¹ Even in His own time, Jesus was recognized as Isaiah’s suffering servant.⁵² We can look to Jesus, the new true witness par-excellence, who has revealed the goodness of Yahweh in the New Testament and sealed His testimony by His suffering and death. “The servant ‘makes righteous’; that is qualifies the others to receive the benefits due to a responsible torah-keeper, so that those who should be harshly judged are declared to be innocent.”⁵³ Thus, the suffering and blood of Jesus are an enduring reminder of God’s ultimate faithfulness. Furthermore, Jesus serves as the model of how to stand firm under persecution by never compromising the truth of God (cf. 1 Tim. 6:13).

⁴⁶ Trites, 45.

⁴⁷ See Matt. 24: 9-10, 21-22; Mark 13:9-20; Luke 21:12; James 1:2; Rev. 2:8-11; 6:9-11; 13

⁴⁸ Oswalt, 555.

⁴⁹ Paul, 156.

⁵⁰ Ladd, 28.

⁵¹ Paul Del Brassey, *Metaphor and the Incomparable God in Isaiah 40-55*, BIBAL Dissertation Series, Vol. 9 (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1997), 165.

⁵² Oswalt, 588.

⁵³ Brueggeman, 148.

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Because of the association between suffering and witnessing (see Rev. 2:13; 11:3; 17:6; Isaiah 49:19-23; 50:6-7; 53), the word witnessing came to mean martyr later on in the history of the Christian church.⁵⁴ As we can see from Isaiah and Revelation, the true witness is the one who proves His testimony by suffering and death. They are the seal of the reliability of His witness.

V. The Concept of Witnessing and the Johannine Writing

John, in his gospel, reflects many of the thoughts found in Isaiah 40-55 and Psalm 89. In the first 12 chapters of his Gospel, John uses what can be considered forensic language to relate to his readers the cosmic lawsuit between God and the world, echoing the theme of Isaiah 40-55.⁵⁵ The issue under debate is plainly the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus (John 5:31-40).⁵⁶ In this gospel, Jesus is quoted repeatedly using the phrase “I AM” to signify that He is indeed testifying of Himself in relation to God.⁵⁷ The Jewish community is to believe in Jesus because of their belief in His Father.⁵⁸ John affirms that he has written his gospel so that people may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and through believing in His name, people may have eternal life (John 20:31). John revisits this

⁵⁴ Greenberg, 864.

⁵⁵ Trites, 112; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (New York, NY: Hendrickson Publishers with Continuum, 2005), 80; and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, Encountering Biblical Studies, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 33, 54.

⁵⁶ Dan Lioy, *Jesus as Torah in John 1-12* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 16-17.

⁵⁷ I found the following ten textual references to Jesus’ proclamation as the “I AM” in the gospel of John:

- “I AM the bread of life,” 6:35, 48;
- “I AM the light of the world,” 8:12, 9:5 ;
- “Before Abraham was born, I AM,” 8:58;
- “I AM the gate of the sheep,” 10:7;
- “I AM the good shepherd,” 10:11;
- “I AM the resurrection, and the life,” 11:25;
- “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I AM,” 13:13;
- “I AM the way and the truth and the life,” 14:6;
- “I AM the true vine,” 15:1;
- “I AM he,” 18:5.

⁵⁸ Karoline M. Lewis, *John*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 117.

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theme of Jesus as “I AM” in Revelation.⁵⁹ Jesus is reiterating that He is the eternal, sovereign I AM of the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14),⁶⁰ which in turn testifies to the quality of Jesus’ witness.⁶¹

In the context of the lawsuit in the gospel of John, Christ is the representative of God, and the Jews are the representatives of the world. While the Jews base their argument on the law, Jesus appeals to “John the Baptist [who] ‘bears testimony’ to Jesus as the coming Savior of the world (John 1:7-8, 15, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:32). The works that Jesus did were a testimony that he came from the Father (John 5:36). [And] the OT Scriptures were a testimony to Jesus (John 5:39).”⁶² Trites maintains:

The lawsuit reaches its climax in the proceedings before Pontius Pilate in which Christ is sentenced to death. Paradoxically, however, Christ’s death is the means whereby he is glorified and draws all men to Himself (12:28, 32). By His apparent defeat on Calvary, Christ wins His case and ‘overcomes the world’ (16:33). Instead of the cross being His judgment, it is really the judgment of the world; by it every mouth is stopped and the whole world is found guilty before God (12:31; cf. Romans 3:19).⁶³

⁵⁹ While verses like Rev. 1:18 allude to divinity and are translated as “I am,” below are 6 examples of the particular phrase “I AM” (ἐγώ εἰμι) in Revelation :

- “I AM the Alpha and the Omega,” Rev 1:8;
- “I AM the First and the Last,” 1:17;
- “I AM he who searches hearts and minds,” 2:23;
- “I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,” 21:6;
- “I AM the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End,” 22:13 (cf. Isa. 44:6; 48:12);
- “I AM the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star,” 22:16.

⁶⁰ Some OT references are:

- “I AM” Ex. 3:14,
- “I am he,” Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12,
- “The first and the last,” Isa. 44:6; 48:12.

⁶¹ Beale, 199, 213-214.

⁶² Fred Lewis Fisher, “Witness, Witnessing” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1280. John uses the actions of Jesus to demonstrate the fulfillment of Scriptures and therefore make “use of Scripture as one the major witnesses to Jesus.” See also Lincoln, 70 and John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, ed. Graham N. Stanton, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments series, gen. eds. G. I. Davies and G. N. Stanton (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2009), 125-126.

⁶³ Trites, 112-113.

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Therefore, “the cross entails the legal defeat of Satan. . . . He is ‘cast out’ of the heavenly lawcourt, so that he can no longer accuse those who follow Christ; he has been vanquished by the uplifting of the Son of Man”⁶⁴ (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 12:31f). Judgment is given against the so-called ruler of this world who is found to have no legitimate claim on the people of God. It is Christ who, as the faithful and true witness, has the proper claim on His people.⁶⁵ In the lawsuit against the world, Jesus and all those that witness of Him, testify “to Jesus’ messianic identity while convicting the world (including ‘the Jews’) of its guilt of sin and unbelief.”⁶⁶

As to the concept of witnessing in the Johannine epistles, it centers on the fact that the apostles testify to the authenticity of the work and life of Jesus. The opening words of the first epistle have the emphasis upon the apostles or eye-witnesses of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-2). The same passage stresses the apostles’ other role as advocates who try to convince people concerning the Word of Life. They saw and testify to it, proclaiming that eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to them so that all you may have fellowship with them (1 John 2:1-3; cf. 4:14). John embraces the idea that “the role of witness is not limited only to testimony that certain things really happened. A witness also proclaims the meaning and significance of those events. The emphasis on the “descriptions of something perceived by the senses means that the writer [John] cannot be thinking merely of a message that is heard. He must be thinking of the appearance of the ‘Word’ described” in his gospel account—Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ And for John, the significance of what happened in Jesus can be summarized by one word: *life*. Jesus himself is the life of God (1:1) and came to give eternal life to those who believe (1:2).⁶⁸ The above concept is carried throughout the three Johannian epistles (see 1 John 2:22; 2 John 7:3; 3 John 11).

⁶⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁶⁵ Lincoln, 352 and Trites, 113.

⁶⁶ Köstenberger, 33.

⁶⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, New International Commentary on the New Testament series, Gen. ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 101. See also Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary series, Gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 54.

⁶⁸ Marianne Maye Thompson, *1-3 John*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/IVP-NT/1John/Witness-Word-Life> (accessed September 23, 2015).

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In contrast, the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14-22 is the antithesis of Christ's "faithful and true witness." They "are indicted for being generally *ineffective* in their faith. . . . It was ineffective either because it was nonexistent or because it was consistently compromised by their participation in idolatrous facets of the Laodicean culture."⁶⁹ Here the title of Christ is used as a reprimand and a reminder of what kind of witnesses they are expected to be in order to be a part of the new creation.⁷⁰

The concept of witnessing in the gospel of John and its affirmation in the epistles is crucial for the understanding of the concept of the faithful witness in Revelation. It serves to remind God's people that the victory over the devil, sin, and death has already been won by Christ. The devil has been defeated and no longer has any power over them. The character, life, teaching, and miracles of Jesus testify to the fact that He has been victorious. The testimony of John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the apostles confirms this reality.⁷¹ This assurance of God's victory and the defeat of Satan is essential to people who are persecuted and cast out as a result of their participation in the cosmic controversy by taking the side of God. It is their assurance of salvation and deliverance.⁷²

VI. The Concept of Witnessing in Faithfulness

It was mentioned above that faithfulness is the dominant theme of Psalm 89 which serves as the basis for the witness in Revelation 1:5 and 3:14. However, it is very important to note that the faithfulness of Yahweh is not confined to Psalm 89; it is the dominant theme of the entire Bible. We often read in the Old Testament of the faithful God who keepeth the covenant (Deut. 7:9, KJV), or we read of David speaking about the LORD "whose faithfulness reached unto the clouds" (Psalm 36:5). Moreover, we find the same term used throughout the New Testament. Paul frequently employs it in His epistles, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9); "He will remain faithful" (2 Tim. 2:13). Furthermore, in the epistle to the Hebrews we read of Christ as the "merciful and faithful High Priest" (2:17). The Bible closes with another reminder that God, through the work of Jesus, is faithful and true (Rev. 19:2). Thus, also, the "works of God are executed in the world

⁶⁹ Beale, 303.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁷¹ W. E. Vine with C. F. Hogg, *Vine's Topical Commentary: Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 136.

⁷² Beale, 270-271.

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by Jesus: during his earthly existence through his love unto death (1:5) and in his risen and exalted life as judge and mighty warrior (19:11).⁷³

Now the question arises as to the significance of this theme of the faithfulness of Yahweh to the content of the book of Revelation. Revelation was written to tell God's people what "soon will take place" (Rev. 1:1). The book then proceeds to explain that they will face many trials, temptations, persecution, and even death. Some of them will be discouraged, others will be depressed, and still others will be left in terrible pain and agony. They will be in desperate need of a word of assurance and love. Thus, John at the beginning of his book, before he writes anything, reminds them of God's absolute sovereignty (Rev. 1:5-6). As they ascend to the mountains or go down to the bottom of the earth, they are to remember that God is in control. He is the sovereign ruler over everything, even death. "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Rev. 1:17-18).⁷⁴

If nature is not enough to remind them of God's love, there is the other element of past evidence. In reality, John tells the churches that as God was with His people in the past, He will be with them in the future (Rev. 3:14, 21). Look at the record, God has delivered His people and remained with them since the beginning of time. We find evidence throughout Scripture of God's providence; e.g. the Flood (Gen 9), the Passover (Ex. 12-13), the Sanctuary (Ex. 25:8, 29:45), the Psalms proclaim the victories and protection of God (Ps. 23, 61, 62, 89, 139). The incarnation of Christ—the Emmanuel, God with Us—and the resurrection are the embodiment of the love and saving power of God. We are reminded that the most common theme in the Bible is God is with us.⁷⁵

⁷³ Paul Decock, "The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful in the Apocalypse of John," *Neotestamentica* 41 no. 1 (2007): 64.

⁷⁴ Jerome Neyrey reminds us that in the gospel of John Jesus is granted the eternalness of God. "We learned that an aspect of Jesus' equality with God was the power to 'have life in himself' just as God does (5:26). Later, Jesus will tell us that he has the power to lay down his life and the power to take it up again (10:17-18), which precludes his corruption or the end of his existence. . . . [T]he claim is made that this 'life in himself' extends into the past, such that, unlike Abraham, Jesus did not 'come into being' but always 'was' or, more accurately, always 'is.'" Jerome Neyrey, *The Gospel of John*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary series, gen. ed. Ben Witherington III (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167.

⁷⁵ John Ortberg, *God is Closer than You Think* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 16.

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Still further, the assurance becomes that justice will be fulfilled. “Because God is faithful and true (Rev. 19:11), his judgments (Rev. 19:2) and his words in human language are faithful and true (Rev. 21:5; 22:6). There is no lack of fidelity in God’s person, thought or promise.”⁷⁶ God has promised to put an end to His people’s agony and to destroy their adversaries. Righteousness and justice will take place; they are the foundation of His throne.

A final comment concerning the faithfulness of God is its link to His ultimate rulership over time and nature and the fulfillment of His promises (Col. 1:17-19).⁷⁷ “By Him all things consist, or stand together on His faithfulness.” It is due to His faithfulness⁷⁸ and love that we are not consumed (Lam. 3:22).

VII. The Concept of Witnessing and the Character of God

One of the dominant themes of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has come to reveal the character of God. He said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). John further stresses that “no one has seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father’s side has made him known” (John 1:18). Only Christ can do that because He is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact presentation of his being” (Heb. 11:27), full of grace and light (John 1:17; 1 John 3:7).

Jesus has represented the character of God by the way He lived and walked and taught and performed His miracles. “In fact, the NT makes little attempt to describe God except in terms of Christ.”⁷⁹ Whenever we look in the face of Jesus, we know that God is friendly, compassionate, loving, just, and righteous by nature. That is His nature. The righteous, loving, compassionate, and friendly way is His way of conducting business. The acts of creation and redemption are based on them.

The character of God is really the heart of the cosmic controversy, which is the basic content of the book of Revelation. The whole issue is

⁷⁶ Gordon R. Lewis, “God, Attributes of” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd edition, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 495.

⁷⁷ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 103.

⁷⁸ As in Psalm 89 the word $\pi\sigma\sigma$ is used here. It is often translated “mercy”, “lovingkindness,” or “faithful.” The New Living Translation uses “faithful love” in Lamentations 3:22.

⁷⁹ C. F. D. Moule, “God, NT” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962; reprint 1981), 431.

whether God is just, righteous, and loving or not.⁸⁰ Thus, the motive of the faithful witness serves to remind the whole universe that God is all that He claims to be. The character and life of Jesus testify to the whole universe and throughout all history that the character of God is beyond reproach.⁸¹ Looking to Jesus will remove any doubt that might exist in any mind about God. He is the God who even died because of His love and His righteous ways (John 3:16). Therefore, let everyone know that Satan has no basis for his accusations against God. God has been vindicated by the perfect life of Christ.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper we have studied the concept of witnessing in relationship to (1) the meaning of *ed* and *martys*, (2) Psalm 89, (3) Isaiah 40-55, (4) the Johannine writings, (5) witness in faithfulness, and (6) the character of God.

We have found out that the above areas contribute richly to “the faithful and true witness” motif in the book of Revelation. The above concepts serve to remind the Christian church always of the following:

(1) The faithful and true witness is an eternal reminder of God’s great interest in and love for His people. They will face many hardships, but He will always be with them to deliver them and be their God. The motif is a reminder of God’s deliverance and protection as His people face deception and persecution from their enemy, Satan.

(2) The faithful and true witness is a reminder to the church that God has a lawsuit against the world. His power lies in His prophetic word. Yet, the other gods fail to prove themselves as generous and authentic gods by failing to sustain and prove their words.

(3) The faithful and true witness is a reminder to the Christian church that Jesus Himself has been the ultimate witness to the character of God. By His life, work, teaching, and death, God’s character has been vindicated. God will win the cosmic controversy. All the accusations of Satan are groundless.

(4) The faithful and true witness is a reminder to the Christian church that Jesus will make sure that the prophesies of Revelation will come true. Over the years and the delays believers will lose heart and get discouraged.

⁸⁰ Bandy, 263-264.

⁸¹ Köstenberger, 430-432.

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The faithful and true witness will remind them that God is true to His word and nothing in the world will derail His purpose.

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