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ABSTRACT

REVELATION 6:9-11: AN EXEGESIS OF THE FIFTH SEAL
IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE
ESCHATOLOGICAL DELAY

by

Patrice Allet

Adviser: Ranko Stefanovic

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: REVELATION 6:9-11: AN EXEGESIS OF THE FIFTH SEAL IN THE LIGHT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DELAY

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The fifth seal of Revelation has most often been treated from an anthropological perspective that appears to be clearly inadequate to account for the depth of this trigger passage located in a climactic setting. In and around the fifth seal, the text suggests indeed that the persecution of the last days has occurred. Imminence and delay do seem to intersect in the passage, creating a crisis of eschatological proportions which, in turn, raises questions of theodicy. The purpose of this dissertation is to increase understanding of the fifth seal as a whole through a focused study of its delay motif in light of similar relevant occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.

The “delay” approach is justified by the important presence of the “How long?” motif in the question section of the fifth seal and the call to “wait/rest for a little while” in the answer part. The occurrence of the word χρόνος (the duration aspect of time) also

points to an extension of time in connection with the crisis pointed out in the text. Further, delays and apocalypses are closely related where persecution and martyrdom often raise the question of eschatology and, by the same token, that of theodicy.

After the introduction chapter, chapter 2 of this dissertation surveys the dominant views on the fifth seal from the second century to the present. Chapter 3 deals with the exegetical analysis of Rev 6:9 in order to come to terms with the stage setting of the delay question. Chapter 4 surveys the usage of the “how long” motif in the Old Testament and the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic tradition and probes the imminence/delay tension from the interaction of the fifth seal with preceding context. Chapter 5 completes the exegetical and theological analyses of the resolution section of the fifth seal (6:11) and addresses issues of fulfillment in the text and the succeeding context to derive the theological meaning for the interval. The last chapter synthesizes the findings of the entire study.

Regarding the timing of the eschatological fullness, everything, even the delay, stays within God’s control and he is not subjected to the human time perception. He controls human history according to his benevolent purposes and establishes the time of the end. God’s answer does suggest that the End coincides with (1) the totality of the eschatological people of God as determined by the wisdom of God’s purposes, (2) the fullness of God’s missionary program through radical sacrificial witness, (3) the fullness of the measure of iniquity, (4) the general resurrection of dead witnesses, and (5) the transformation of the cosmos.

By delaying the final judgment, the theodicy in the fifth seal appears to be founded on the mercy of God in favor of the inhabitants of the world. Therefore, in

God's program, the theological meaning of the interval is that time is allowed to save the inhabitants of the earth and the fifth seal is an invitation not to let death stand in the way of radical witnesses in order to accomplish that purpose.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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ESCHATOLOGICAL DELAY

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Patrice Allet
January 2015

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AcT	<i>Acta Theologica</i>
ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i> . 1946-
ANF	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
AThR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3d ed. Chicago, 2000
BDB	Brown, F., S. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. <i>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Lafayette, 1981
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
Bib Tod	<i>Bible Today</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
BVC	<i>Bible et vie chrétienne</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>

<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CTR</i>	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
CSEL	Copus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
DARCS	Daniel and Revelation Committee Series
<i>DLNT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> . Edited by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids. Downers Grove, 1997
<i>DTC</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</i> . Edited by A. Vacant et al. 15 vols. Paris, 1903-1950
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
<i>EDB</i>	<i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>
<i>EDNT</i>	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by H. Balz, G. Schneider. ET. Grand Rapids, 1990-1993
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex auditu</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church. Washington, DC, 1947-
GCS	Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte

<i>HALOT</i>	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon to the Old Testament</i> . Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
<i>Hok</i>	<i>Hokhma</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick et al. 12 vols. New York, 1951-1957
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962
<i>IDBSup</i>	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume</i> . Edited by K. Crim. Nashville, 1976
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> . Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979-1988
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCSBR</i>	<i>Journal of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series

JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LD	Lectio divina
L&N	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> . Edited by Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida.
LSJ	H.G. Liddell, Robert Scott, and H. Stuart Jones, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
NAC	New American Commentary
NCCS	New Covenant Commentary Series
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
<i>NIBD</i>	<i>New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by J. D. Douglas and M. C. Tenney. Grand Rapids, 1987
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>NRTh</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NTC	New Testament Commentary
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PG	Patrologia Graece. Edited by J.-P. Migne.

PL	Patrologia Latina. Edited by J.-P. Migne.
<i>PRR</i>	<i>Presbyterian and Reformed Review</i>
PTS	Patristische Texte Und Studien
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RevScRel</i>	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
<i>RevThom</i>	<i>Revue Thomiste</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
<i>SBFLA</i>	<i>Studii biblici Franciscani liber annus</i>
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
SCh	Sources Chrétiennes
SDABC	Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for the New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
StudNeot	Studia neotestamentica
SupNovT	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti pseudepigraphica
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>

<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964-1976
<i>TDNTA</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974-
<i>TG</i>	<i>Theologie der Gegenwart</i>
<i>ThStKr</i>	<i>Theologische Studien und Kritiken</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TTZ</i>	<i>Trierer theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980
<i>TZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>UNT</i>	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>USQR</i>	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>WW</i>	<i>Word and World</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

At the end of his treatment of the fifth seal, Moses Stuart noted the introduction of a critical element of delay that has been largely overlooked by most commentators:

The circumstance of delay we should regard with particular attention; for it explains the ground for various *episodes* (if we may so name them), which are seemingly introduced in order to delay the final completion of the first catastrophe. The writer, by such a plan, has prepared the way for the admission of interesting matter, indirectly connected with his main design, and yet consistent with the general plan which he had in view. Considerations of this nature have hitherto been scarcely regarded by most interpreters of the Apocalypse: as every one will see who is conversant with commentaries on this book.¹

The situation has changed little since Stuart wrote.² Notwithstanding the existence of

¹Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1845), 2:163.

²A few scholars have dealt with the issue of delay in Revelation from different perspectives but not in the context of the fifth seal per se. About the structure of the first three septets, F. F. Bruce observed that “the heptads are parallel to some extent, the trumpets and the bowls especially so. But all of them are marked by . . . ‘cancelled conclusions’; the final irrevocable judgment is regularly deferred – in confirmation to the Bible’s uniform witness to God’s reluctance to press His ‘strange work’ to a full end” (“Revelation to John,” *New Testament Commentary*, ed. G. C. D. Howley [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 629). Commenting on the vision of the rider on the white horse of Rev 19:11-21, R. Alastair Campbell found that the vision depicts not the Second Coming, but the victory of Christ over Babylon which opens the way to see the Millennium not as the sequel to the *parousia*, but as a symbol for the delay that Christians must expect before the kingdom comes in its fullness (“Triumph and Delay: The Interpretation of Revelation 19:11-20:10,” *EQ* 80, no. 1 [2008]: 3-12). Here one could include the recent attempts from literary critics to turn the delay problem into a hermeneutical key for the whole Apocalypse in general. Instead of the common idea of Revelation as a story about the end of the age, David Barr proposed a reading of the book as “a story that never ends” (“Waiting for the End That Never Comes: The Narrative Logic of John’s Story,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise [New York: T & T Clark, 2001], 101-112). From a reader-oriented feminist exegesis, Tina Pippin found that the ending of the Apocalypse is disruptive in nature, “opening the ambiguity of the text to the reader, whose response cannot

many questions involving a delay in the fifth seal, an in-depth investigation of them, let alone of the fifth seal generally, has yet to be conducted.

The fifth of the seven seals (Rev 6:9-11) is recognized as a key text for understanding Revelation.³ Yet, assessing its critical role in the book as a whole is hindered by numerous questions that arise as one examines it. The fifth of the seven seals (Rev 6:9-11) has many points of contrast with the previous four (6:1-8), provoking questions in the reader's mind. Those seals each involve a horse that patrols the earth and causes great damage. When the fifth seal is broken, however, one sees souls languishing under an altar and wondering how long it will take before justice is done in their case. After receiving a white robe, the souls are encouraged to rest for a little while longer until they are joined by other fellow martyrs. This shift in form and content from the previous seals engenders its own set of questions. Perhaps more important, however, are the questions raised by the content itself of the fifth seal.

Revelation 6:9-11 suggests a major crisis requiring an urgent response. Yet, the move toward resolution is suspended when the slain souls are told to "wait for a little

be predetermined. The reader participates in the endless end of the world every time the story is heard or read" (*Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992], 88); Charles H. Talbert thought that "delay is a strategy to stimulate the hearer's interest without arriving at an untimely end" (*Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994], 37).

³The pivotal position of this text for the book of Revelation has been noted in several studies. John Paul Heil has established "the key literary role of this text in the unraveling of the plot of Revelation" ("Fifth Seal [Rev 6:9-11] as a Key to the Book of Revelation," *Bib* 74 [1993]: 229). Commenting on Rev 6:9-11, William Milligan affirmed that "the vision contained in these words is unquestionably a crucial one for the interpretation of the Apocalypse" (*The Book of Revelation*, Expositor's Bible [Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1889], 97); Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza maintained that the vision of the fifth seal has "a key rhetorical position within the overall narrative of Revelation" (*Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 64); George B. Caird believed that the answer to the martyrs' cries is important for the theology of Revelation as a whole (*Revelation of John the Divine*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries [HNTC] [New York: Harper Row, 1966], 86); James Stuart Russell regarded the passage as "a crucial test of any interpretation of the Apocalypse" (*Parousia: New Testament Doctrine of Christ's Return* [Bradford, PA: International Preterist Association, 1999], 394).

while longer.” Thus, another set of questions arises. First, why is a delay introduced in such a context of emergency and for what purpose? As one begins to explore this question, several other questions arise:

1. The fifth seal is marked by a complex symbolism: an altar, slaughtered souls, testimonies, and the gift of white robes. What is the cumulative effect of this symbolism and how is it connected to the eschatological “delay” problem⁴ in the fifth seal?

2. The “How long?” motif recurs frequently in apocalyptic texts,⁵ but its presentation here in Revelation is quite unusual. Historically, the query is associated with living messengers concerned with a climactic upsurge of evil that endangers the survival of God’s cause. In Rev 6:9-11, the query comes from slaughtered witnesses. Why is the traditional apocalyptic “How long?” query presented in such a way here?

3. The fifth seal belongs to a larger context in which another crisis is resolved promptly by the inauguration of the Lion/Lamb in heaven. How does the fifth seal connect with this introductory vision and with the rest of the seal septet?

4. In apocalyptic texts, the “How long?” motif is associated with the fulfillment of

⁴This study avoids the word “problem” in the sense of a crisis of delay that has supposedly affected the development of early Christian thought as hypothesized by Martin Werner (*The Formation of Christian Dogma*, trans. G. F. Brandon [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957], 40-71). For a critique of Werner’s thesis, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Emergence of Catholic Tradition [100-600]*, vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 123-132. For a review of the four schools of thought on the subject of the significance of eschatology in the New Testament and their treatment of the alleged de-eschatologization of early Christianity in connection with the “problem” of the delay of the *parousia*, see David E. Aune, “Significance of the Delay of the *Parousia* for Early Christianity,” in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 88-95. Following Richard J. Bauckham, I use the word in the simple sense of the fact that “the delay raised questions which had to be answered” (“Delay of the *Parousia*,” *TynBul* 31 [1980]: 1).

⁵Ezekiel 12:21-28; Hab 1:2; Isa 6:11; Dan 8:13; 9:1-2, 24-27, 12:6; Zac 1:12; 4 Ezra 4:33-44; 2 Bar. 81:3; *Apoc. Ab.* 27-29; 2 Bar. 21:19-23:7; 26-27.

divine programs designed to remove obstacles that stand in the way of God's action.⁶

What are these obstacles in Revelation and how will they be removed during the delay?

5. The fifth seal raises the issue of how a just God can fail or delay to give justice to his righteous ones who suffer unjustly at the hands of the wicked. If it is also true that the "problem of the delay is the apocalyptic version of the problem of evil,"⁷ how does the fifth seal answer the issue of theodicy?

6. The fullness of time is measured differently in apocalyptic texts.⁸ In the fifth seal, the cause or limit for the delay is established by the action of a verbal form of πληρώ⁹ where the concept of number to be completed or a course to be fulfilled is often supplied for the sake of clarity. What exactly marks the end of the delay and which aspects of the multivalent verb πληρώ are implied in 6:11?

⁶Commenting on the purpose of "delay" motifs in apocalyptic texts, Graydon F. Snyder noted that "in apocalyptic passages, the 'delay' motif continues as a literary convention either to accommodate the end time of the oracle to the present day (when the revelator belongs to the past e.g. Daniel) or to allow time for the purposes of God to be fulfilled" ("Sayings on the Delay of the End," *BR* 20 [1975]: 27).

⁷Bauchham, "Delay of the Parousia," 7. About the struggle of apocalyptists with theodicy, he showed that they "were vitally concerned with the problems of theodicy, with the demonstration of God's righteousness in the face of the unrighteousness of his world" (*ibid.*). Talking about the entire corpus of ancient Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic, G. E. Ladd saw "the chief interest of these books [as] the solution of the problem why the righteous are suffering, and when and how the deliverance of the kingdom of God will come" ("Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?" *JBL* 76 [1957]: 192). See also J. L. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 380-395; Crenshaw, "Problem of Theodicy in Sirach," *JBL* 94 (1975): 47-64; Tom W. Willet, *Eschatology in the Theodicies of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra*, JSPSup Series 4 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989); A. L. Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of 1V Ezra*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 29 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977). For a discussion of various aspects of the concept in relation to the Old Testament, see J. L. Crenshaw, ed., *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, vol. 4, *Issues in Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

⁸Cf. Rainer Stuhlmann, *Das eschatologische Maß im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 8-22.

⁹R. Schippers defined this verb and its cognates in the following terms: "πληρώ as fill, complete, fulfill, accomplish, carry out; πλήρης as full, filled, complete; πλήρωμα as that which has been completed, fullness; ἀναπληρώ as fill up" ("πληρώ," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology [NIDNTT]*, ed. Colin Brown [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986], 1:733).

A Statement of the Problem

It appears that the frequent anthropologically centered treatment of the fifth seal is clearly inadequate to account for the meaning of this trigger passage.¹⁰ Given the context of imminence where the vision seems to be concerned with eradicating evil from the entire world, can the understanding of this text be improved by connecting the delay query to a theodicy related to a delayed eschaton?¹¹ What kind of theological solution is thereby offered to the suffering of faithful witnesses in this particular context?¹²

Rationale for the Study

The above-noted questions are indeed interesting, but do they merit the kind of attention that the present study gives them? In other words, what justifies this “delay” approach in unraveling the theodicy of the fifth seal? First, the “How long?” motif in itself is a leading clue. Building on August Strobel’s research¹³ on the history of the

¹⁰Brian K. Blount rightly noted that “it is 6:9-11 that provides the initial rationale for God’s activity of judgment, sets up the witnesses’ successful participation with God, and prefigures the messianic celebration by chronicling the dead witnesses’ passionate and ultimately irresistible call for just judgment” (*Revelation: A Commentary* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009], 132).

¹¹E. Schüssler-Fiorenza rightly pointed out that “both the question and the answer appear at first glance to correspond to those of Jewish apocalyptic theology which also has questions about the time of the end” (*Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985], 48). For Mark Reasoner, “Revelation is primarily a theodicy of persecution, not a definitive time line of the future or a sure guide to persecutions that were taking place” (“Persecution,” *Dictionary of Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 908). If prayers, as Samuel E. Balentine submitted, have something to say about God’s character and the pray-ers’ concern, the study of the fifth seal could be enhanced by a focus on God’s character and human coping as proposed in this dissertation (*Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue*, *Ouvertures to Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993], 48).

¹²See Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 62.

¹³August Strobel, *Untersuchungen zum eschatologischen Verzögerungsproblem: Auf Grund der spätjüdisch-urchristlichen Geschichte von Habakuk 2,2 ff.*, *SupNovT 2* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1961). See also E. Otto who showed that “2:3 wurde spätnachexilisch zum locus classicus theologischer Bearbeitung des Verzögerungsproblems eschatologischer Heilserwartung” (“Habakuk/Habakukbuch,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, ed. Horst Robert Balz, Gerhard Krause, and Gerhard Müller [New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985], 14:304).

delay passage of Hab 2:2, Snyder showed that, at the end of the first century, the “How long?” motif has become “a literary convention to introduce the reason for the delay”¹⁴ in early Judaism. Second, the call to “wait/rest for a little while” with the occurrence of the word χρόνος (the duration aspect of time) points to an extension of time in connection with the crisis.¹⁵ Third, delays and apocalypses are closely related. Snyder shows that “the rise of apocalypticism coincides with the rise of delay motifs in prophetic eschatology” to the point where “apocalypticism and ‘delay’ cannot easily be separated.”¹⁶ Finally, John S. Pabee also noted how persecution and martyrdom often raise the question of eschatology and, by the same token, that of theodicy.¹⁷

Is the “delay” approach to the fifth seal compatible with the surrounding literary context which is so full of a sense of imminence? The important tension of the imminence and delay of the end has been also recognized in parallel studies on

¹⁴G. Snyder, “Sayings on the Delay of the End,” 27. On the transition of the motif to Christianity, see also N. T. Wright who argued: “The motif of delay (‘how long, O Lord, how long?’) was already well established in Judaism, and is hardly a Christian innovation, as is often imagined. The church expected certain events to happen within a generation, and happen they did, though there must have been moments between AD 30 and 70 when some wondered if they would, and in consequence took up the Jewish language of delay” (*New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 463).

¹⁵Gerhard Delling, “χρόνος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9:591-593.

¹⁶G. Snyder, “Sayings on the Delay of the End,” 29.

¹⁷See John S. Pabee, *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*, JSNTSup Series 6 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1985), 13-46, 86-92. On the connection between suffering, theodicy, and eschatology, G. E. Ladd wrote, “The basic problem of Jewish eschatology is theodicy. How could a just God allow His people, who were loyal to the law, to suffer evils at the hands of the Seleucids? Why did He not intervene to deliver His people, who were willing to die rather than break the law? Apocalypses have been called “tracts for bad times”; they offer a theological solution to the enigma of the sufferings of a righteous people. The solution is that God is presently no longer active in history; evil is regnant, and suffering must be endured (1 En. 9:11; 42:3; 89:58-75). God, however, will soon intervene to destroy evil and bring the eschatological salvation. The apocalyptists despaired for history; salvation for them was altogether eschatological” (“Revelation, Book of,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]*, completely rev. and reset ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1988], 4:173).

apocalyptic literature. Bauckham, for example, established that the delay was “one of the most important ingredients in the mixture of influences and circumstances which produced the apocalyptic movement.”¹⁸ His research showed that imminence and delay can coexist without discrediting each other and the tension became also part of the Jewish eschatological tradition that was passed on to the New Testament era. For him, Revelation is in fact totally continuous with Jewish apocalyptic literature since “the theological factors which promoted the imminent expectation” are thereby also balanced with “the theological factors accounting for the fact of the delay”¹⁹ in the same tight paradoxical tension.

Charles L. Holman’s research traces the rise and development of eschatological expectations through the Old Testament, Second Temple Jewish, and Christian eras. He found a connection between the rise of apocalyptic thinking and the postexilic crisis that arose from the nonfulfillment of prophetic hope.²⁰ Like Bauckham, he considered that the delay/imminence tension, embodied within prophetic and apocalyptic expectations from the very beginning, ended up being relayed to the early Christianity.²¹ To renew dwindling expectations, Holman thought that the proclamation of a fresh message of

¹⁸Bauckham, “Delay of the Parousia,” 4.

¹⁹Ibid., 5. He noted that imminence and delay were held in tension in Jewish apocalypticism even though “delay ought to have discredited the imminent apocalyptic hopes, if only it had been squarely faced in the cool light of reason” (ibid.). However, Jewish apocalyptists were distinctive, for him, because they explained delay and imminence theologically by appealing to God’s sovereignty. God has determined the time of the end and delay as part of his unalterable will (ibid., 7).

²⁰Charles L. Holman asserted that the “delay of the new age may have been a very significant underlying factor that contributed to the apocalyptic world views” (*Till Jesus Comes: Origins of Christian Apocalyptic Expectation* [Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1996], 46).

²¹Ibid., 155. See the whole section “Part Three: Expectation in New Testament Apocalyptic Writings” (ibid., 103-147).

imminence was, in fact, the apocalyptists' special way of coping with the delay.²²

Examining the question of the delay of the *parousia* in Rev 10, Feuillet observed a similar delay/imminence tension. He inferred that the author of Revelation regarded the End as an impending fact but, unlike any other New Testament writer before, he handled it in paradoxical terms as a forthcoming and yet chronologically distant reality.²³

Purpose of the Research

It is hypothesized that theodicy and the problem of the eschatological delay are crucial for the understanding of the fifth seal. Imminence and delay seem to intersect in the text, creating a crisis of eschatological proportion. The purpose of this dissertation is to increase understanding of the fifth seal as a whole through a focused study of its delay motif in light of similar relevant occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.²⁴

²²See his following concluding statements: "It is not too much to say that expectation may have been a way of reckoning with delay" (Holman, *Till Jesus Comes*, 82). Likewise, "Thus I conclude that the theme of an imminent end is basically a way of coping with delay" (ibid., 98).

²³André Feuillet, *L'Apocalypse: Etat de la question*, Studia Neotestamentica, Subsidia 3 (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1963), 67-69. For further clarifications on this paradox, see André Feuillet, "Le chapitre X de l'Apocalypse, son apport dans la solution du problème eschatologique," in *Sacra Pagina, Miscellanea Biblica Congressus Internationalis Catholici de Re Biblica*, ed. J. Coppens, A. Descamps, and E. Massaux, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium (BETL) 12-13 (Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, 1959), 2:414-429. This paradox is encapsulated in the following summary statement: "En somme, le but essentiel du chapitre X de l'Apocalypse nous paraît être d'introduire la période proprement dite de la prédication de l'Évangile aux nations, et surtout de souligner le paradoxe qui la caractérise : la fin est proche, et cependant sa venue peut encore attendre pendant un temps indéterminé. Un tel paradoxe invitait à voir dans la proximité de la fin dont parle si fréquemment le christianisme primitif tout autre chose qu'une question de date" (ibid., 2:426).

²⁴This study flows from the recommendations of James H. Charlesworth on the importance of the Pseudepigrapha for "an exploration of the parallels between Jewish and Christian theodicies, especially regarding the delay of the eschaton or the *parousia*" as one of the significant works left for future research (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha & the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of the Christian Origins* [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998], 91).

Methodology

The method of this study is adapted from the intersection of the exegetical and theological approach of the New Testament suggested by Roger Lucas.²⁵ On one hand, the text is examined in context using tools from historical and literary analysis. The task involves the following steps: (1) A historical analysis to sketch the historical background and understand the apocalyptic atmosphere of the time, (2) a grammatical analysis and philological examination of keywords, (3) a literary analysis to deal with the issues of form, function, and importance of the fifth seal in the literary structure of Revelation, and (4) an intertextual analysis to identify the significant literary parallels, allusions, and echoes to the seal series and to deal with the interplay between the text and subtext.

On the other hand, based on the claim that the issue of “delay” is critical to figure out the fifth seal, a tradition-motif analysis is included in the process. This issue is already found in the Old Testament (with the “Day of the Lord” prophecies),²⁶ in apocalyptic writings (with the last-day judgment), and in the New Testament (with Christ’s *parousia* and his coming kingdom). The significant motifs occurring within the

²⁵Roger Lucas, “Time of the Reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 in Light of Early Christian Session Theology” (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1997), 15-16. See also Robin Scrogg, *Christology in Paul and John*, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 23-32.

²⁶See Antje Labahn, “The Delay of Salvation within Deutero-Isaiah,” *JSOT* 85 (1999): 71-84. Cf. Robert P. Carroll who, after examining various OT passages from the prophetic tradition, argued that the idea of eschatological delay is not easily defensible (“Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition?” *ZAW* 94 [1982]: 47-58). However, he admitted “the intimations in the prophetic traditions of an awareness of a delay in the realization of future expectations . . . [where] delay is only posited in order to be denied” (*ibid.*, 58).

delay tradition in biblical apocalyptic texts will be used to enlighten the delayed hopes in the fifth seal.²⁷

Presuppositions or Assumptions

My argumentation is based on the following presuppositions:

1. The book of Revelation is a coherent and consistent literary unity in which verbal repetitions and conceptual correlations need to be investigated seriously.²⁸

2. The date for the composition of Revelation lies at the end of Domitian's reign²⁹ when the impending death of the apostolic witnesses and the appearance of other

²⁷On the need for more theological/thematic studies in the interpretation of the Apocalypse, see Joel Nobel Musvosvi, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse" (PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1987), 34. For the value of a combination of historical exegesis and theological methodologies as a potentially fruitful approach to the interpretation of the Apocalypse, see Feuillet, "Le chapitre X de l'Apocalypse," 2:428. About the challenge of this venture, Jean Levie asserted, "La grande difficulté d'interprétation de l'Apocalypse est d'unir une *exégèse historique* aussi rigoureuse que possible . . . à une interprétation *spirituelle* de la prophétie (la rendant bienfaisante et éclairante pour un chrétien d'aujourd'hui). Il est permis de penser que la réussite parfaite de cette double interprétation n'a jamais encore été obtenue jusqu'à ce jour" ("Review of *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, by Joseph Bonsirven," *NRTh* 75 [1953]: 760). Also Jon Paulien, "Recent Developments in the Study of Revelation," *AUSS* 26, no. 2 (1988): 170. For a discussion related to the problem of method, see Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2001), 1-5; and Gerhard F. Hasel in connection with wider aspects of this topic for NT theology in general (*New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 204-220).

²⁸See Frederick D. Mazzaferri, *Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (BZNT) 54 (New York: de Gruyter, 1989), 37; Richard J. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1993), 1.

²⁹In accordance with Irenaeus's testimony (*Adversus Haeresis* 5.30.3), this study follows the majority of commentators and NT scholars of this century in dating the composition of Revelation to about 95 C.E. For those favoring the late date based on the internal and external evidence, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 948-962; Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard C. Kee, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 466-469; Norman Perrin and Dennis C. Duling, *New Testament, an Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 113; Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Invitation to the Book of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 62-63; Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:406; D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 473-476; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guide to the New Testament Exegesis 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 43-46; John P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 26-27; and A. Yarbro Collins, "Dating the Apocalypse of John," *BR* 26 (1981): 33-45.

apocalyptic authors led to questions about the delay of the eschaton.

3. The Old Testament is considered a more important reference point from which to view Revelation³⁰ than Jewish apocalyptic, which nevertheless remains important for showing how the Old Testament texts were used around the time Revelation was composed.³¹

³⁰For some significant discussion of the use of the Hebrew Bible in Revelation, see Henry Barclay Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* (1906; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), cxi-clviii; Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988); Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, JSNTSup Series 115 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Steve Moyise, "The Language of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse," *JSNT* 76 (1999): 97-113; Gregory K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup Series 166 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1998); Gregory K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); J. P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17-19:10*, European University Studies 23, Theology 376 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989); Albert Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezéchiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Bib* 43 (1962): 436-476; Randolph Rogers, "An Exegetical Analysis of John's Use of Zechariah in the Book of Revelation: The Impact and Transformation of Zechariah's Text and Themes in the Apocalypse" (PhD dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002); Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup Series 93 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994); Jules Gambier, "Les images de l'Ancien Testament dans l'Apocalypse," *NRTh* 77 (1955): 113-122.

³¹Numerous authors have stressed the importance of Jewish apocalyptic for a deeper understanding of Revelation. Grant R. Osborne affirmed that "the one general agreement among most commentators is that the background is to be found in the common apocalyptic world of John's day" (*Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [BECNT] [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 1). Bauckham observed that "Revelation is an apocalypse, whose primary literary context is the tradition of Jewish and Christian apocalypses. Both in form and content it is heavily indebted to this tradition. . . . But since the important work of scholars of a previous generation, such as R. H. Charles and I. T. Beckwith, very little fresh work has been done by way of comparing and contrasting Revelation with the rest of the apocalyptic literature" (*The Climax of Prophecy*, xi-xii). For more on this subject, see his chapter 2, "The Use of Apocalyptic Traditions" (*ibid.*, 38-91). From a form-critical perspective, J. J. Collins insisted on the continuity in the literary relationship between Revelation and Jewish apocalyptic by observing the closeness of the parallels between them ("Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews and the Genre of Revelation of John," *CBQ* 39 [1977]: 330-337). For a wider discussion of its impact for the New Testament apocalyptic in general, see James H. Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983); J. J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth, eds., *Mysteries and Revelation: Apocalyptic Studies since the Uppsala Colloquium* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991); J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); Stephen Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Post-Exilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to Revelation*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper, 1963); D. S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); Paul D. Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

4. Because Revelation synthesizes prophetic, apocalyptic, and epistolary material, the use of a complex hermeneutic is necessary to do justice to its themes.

5. The interpretation of the book must relate to both the *Sitz im Leben* of the original readers of John and to future fulfillments in harmony with the Apocalypse's theology of the end.

Definition of Terms

With the study of such a concept as the delay in an apocalyptic context, words like “eschatology,” “*parousia*,” “apocalyptic,” or “theodicy” will frequently be used, but they can be confusing since their meaning often varies from author to author. Following are working definitions offered to clarify the usage of the terms for the present study.

Parousia: Refers to the glorious coming of Christ and is used interchangeably with the coming of the eschaton and the judgment of the inhabitants of the earth because they appear as different aspects of the same reality, that is, the time of consummation where God settles the scores and rights all the wrongs done on earth in the time of his patience.³²

Apocalyptic: In simple terms, strongly suggests the imminence or impending approach of the end times. For all intent and purposes, this research follows the definition from the caucus on Apocalyptic of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1977 as “a genre of revelatory literature within a narrative framework, in which a revelation is

³²For an excellent discussion of this term, its background and use in the NT, see A. Oepke, “παρουσία, πάρεμι,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 5:858-871; Sylvester O. Francisco, “The Greek Words *Parousia*, *Apokalupsis*, and *Epiphaneia* in the New Testament” (MA thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1950). For the bivalent function of the *parousia* of Jesus as salvation and judgment within early Christianity, see Aune, “Significance of the Delay of the *Parousia* for Early Christianity,” 106.

mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”³³ To this must be added that the genre normally seeks to “interpret present, and earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.”³⁴ Collins, McGinn, and Stein further enriched this meaning by including “the belief that God has revealed the imminent end of the ongoing struggle between good and evil in history.”³⁵

Eschatology: Covers any body of ideas about the end times or the last days of the world and refers both to the apocalyptic consummation of history and the prophetic vision of a this-worldly new act of God arising out of the flow of history.³⁶

³³John. J. Collins, ed., “*Apocalypse: Toward the Morphology of a Genre*,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9. For further clarification on this term, see also L. J. Kreitzer, “Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development (DLNT)*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 55-68; Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Early Christian Apocalypses,” *Semeia* 14 (1979): 61-121; James C. Vanderkam, “Recent Studies in ‘Apocalyptic,’” *WW* 4 (1984): 70-77; J. J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

³⁴Adela Yarbro Collins, “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 7. She is here building on the suggestions from David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 13-64, and David E. Aune, “The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65-96.

³⁵John J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein, “Introduction,” in *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*, ed. Bernard J. McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen J. Stein (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), ix.

³⁶See John T. Carroll, “Eschatology,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (EDB)*, ed. David N. Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 420-422; and Dale C. Allison, “Eschatology of the NT,” *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB)*, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 2:295. For a survey of the debate on the meaning of the term *eschatology*, see Hans-Peter Müller, *Ursprünge und Strukturen alttestamentlicher Eschatologie* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1969), 1-7. About the origin of this term and further details about the differentiation between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology, see Paul D. Hanson, “Jewish Apocalyptic Against Its Environment,” *RB* 68 (1971): 34-35; Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Apokalypsis and Propheteia: The Book of Revelation in the Context of Early Christian Prophecy,” in *L’Apocalypse Johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. J. Lambrecht, BETL 53 (Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, 1980), 105-128.

Theodicy: In contrast with the traditional definition from the philosophy of religion which considers only those theodicies which were strictly rational as theodicies, this study uses this term in the sense of the sociology of religion of Berger, who views “any attempt to explain evil and death in terms of religious legitimations, of whatever degree of sophistication or rationality as a theodicy.”³⁷

Limitations of the Study

The review of literature reveals how the dense symbolism of the fifth seal has raised debates on several issues, such as the state of the dead, the expiatory virtue of a martyr’s death, the value of martyrs’ intercession, and so on. This study does not directly address these issues, since the focus here is a theological exegesis of the text in the light of the eschatological delay problem. Furthermore, the ethical and theological issues related to the “vengeance” theme are not dealt with in any significant depth since they have already received enough attention.³⁸ Finally, the theological implications regarding

Allegedly, prophetic hope was characterized as worldly and historical, centering on the hopes of Israel, whereas apocalyptic hope in despair of history conceived of the kingdom of God as beyond history. Against the general tendency to differentiate between prophetic and apocalyptic hopes, see G. E. Ladd who noted to the contrary that the separation of the two hopes, prophetic and apocalyptic, fails to recognize “that the prophetic hope also involves a divine breaking in to history. . . . The OT conceives of God as acting redemptively in history, and as finally bringing it to its consummation in the kingdom of God. History does not produce the kingdom: for evil has befallen both men and nature. Nothing less than a mighty inbreaking of God can avail to accomplish Redemption” (“Eschatology,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, completely rev. and reset ed. [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979-1988], 2:132). See also Ladd, “Why Not Prophetic-Apocalyptic?” 192-200.

³⁷Peter L. Berger, *Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 54-55. See also J. L. Crenshaw, “Theodicy,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume (IDBSup)*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 895-896.

³⁸Issues of vengeance are discussed by W. Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John,” *CBQ* 28 (1966): 300-311; Alan Le Grys, “Conflict and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” *ExpTim* 104 (1992): 76-80; Adeline Yarbrow Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 729-749; Adela Yarbrow Collins, “Oppression from Without; the Symbolization of Rome as Evil in Early Christianity,” *Concilium* 200 (1989): 66-74; Musvosvi, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse,” 20-30.

the delay in the rest of John's Apocalypse are pointed out only in a summary way since the richness of those themes cannot be exhausted within the limits of this dissertation.

Design of the Study

The first chapter lays the foundation to the research by focusing on the introductory and background issues. It includes a discussion about the problem and purpose of the study, the justification for the research, methodology, and delimitations.

Chapter 2 surveys the dominant views on the fifth seal from the second century to the present. It pays particular attention to the early church, the reformers, and critical readings of the past one hundred fifty years. Key motifs and salient issues are identified, but special attention is given to the treatment of the *quousque tandem* indictment of the martyrs against the inhabitants of the earth.

Chapter 3 deals with the exegetical analysis of Rev 6:9 to come to terms with the stage setting of the delay question. Some of the issues and the views from the preceding chapter will be assessed to determine to what degree the customary exegetical procedures have been helpful in determining the theological significance of the fifth seal and its eschatological delay motif.

Chapter 4 surveys the usage of the "how long" motif in the Old Testament and the Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic tradition to find data useful for the study of the delay in the fifth seal. Specifically, this enterprise analyzes how the tension related to the delay motif is being played out in texts such as the lament Psalms, the prophets, and Daniel (the Hebrew Bible apocalyptic) to find possible points of convergence with Rev 6:9-11. It also entails a theological analysis focusing on the interaction of the fifth seal with preceding context with a special attention given to the theme of imminence/delay.

Structural parallels and intertextual relationships are dealt with here.

Chapter 5 completes the exegetical and theological analyses of the resolution section of the fifth seal (6:11). It also traces its fulfillment in the succeeding context to derive the theological meaning for the interval.

The Conclusion gives a summary of the findings and conclusions of the research.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION OF THE FIFTH SEAL

Inasmuch as several explanations about the fifth seal exist and yet no full history of interpretation is available on the passage, this chapter attempts to fill the void in order to locate the special focus of this dissertation. However, an exhaustive survey is an impossible task because of the wealth of material from the extensive scholarship on the Apocalypse of John during the history of interpretation. Therefore, my assessment will be limited to principal methods of interpretation and the views of influential commentators, but the survey will attempt to cover the full spectrum for the treatment of the fifth seal.¹ This chapter surveys the history of the opinion² from the earliest

¹Following is a list of particularly helpful guides in the selection of the key authors: E. B. Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 4th ed., Etudes Bibliques (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1933), ccxxxv-cclxxiv; Edward B. Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ: Or, A Commentary on the Apocalypse, Critical and Historical*, 5th ed. (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1862), 4:275-563; Wilhem Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 6th ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1906), 40-18; Henry Barclay Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cxcvi-ccxix; R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse; Being Lectures Delivered Before the University of London* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 1-78; M. Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:450-475; Feuillet, *L'Apocalypse*; Arthur Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Le Roy Edwin Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945); Ranko Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, vol. 22, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1996), 8-112.

²Commenting on the benefits of biblical humanism and its resources, Basil Hall called for a renewal of serious history of exegesis which “is one of the most neglected fields in the history of the Church and its doctrines. . . . The opportunity has come for a fresh reading of Christian thought and life not only in the Reformation age, but also in the Patristic age and in the high Middle Ages. This work when accomplished, will change for the better some fixed patterns of interpretation” (“Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries,” in *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. S. L. Greenslade [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963], 3:76).

interpretation down to the present, making use of the generally accepted division of church history into periods.

Earliest Interpretation of the Fifth Seal Until the Middle Ages³

Unfortunately, no actual commentary written prior to the sixth century is still in existence. To get a feel for the treatment of the fifth seal at that time, one needs to refer to surviving quotations from lost commentaries. For this period, marked by the popular application of the Origenic “anagogical” or “spiritualizing” principle to Apocalyptic exposition both in the West and the East,⁴ the impact of two major exegetes, Victorinus of Pettau and Tyconius the Donatist, as well as the early Greek scholia, will be assessed.

The Early Quotations

For multiple reasons, the fifth seal is often quoted by Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 230), the influential anti-Gnostic African polemist known as the “champion of the flesh, its dignity and its future resurrection.”⁵ Reacting against the disincarnated spiritualism of the Gnostics, Rev 6:10 is used to defend the corporeal nature of the human soul from the

³For works that have been helpful to this section regarding interpretation of the Apocalypse in the particular context of early Christianity and the Middle Ages, see Douglas W. Lumsden, *And Then the End Will Come: Early Latin Christian Interpretations of the Opening of the Seven Seals* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001); Yves Christie, “Traditions littéraires et iconographiques dans l’interprétation des images apocalyptiques,” in *L’Apocalypse de Jean: traditions exégétiques et iconographiques IIIe-XIIIe siècles: actes du Colloque de la Fondation Hardt, 29 février-3 mars 1976*, ed. Renzo Petraglio (Geneva: Droz, 1979), 109-134; E. Ann Matter, “Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 38-50.

⁴See Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 309-310.

⁵Francine Cardman, “Tertullian on the Resurrection” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1974), 162.

fact of its special visibility to the spiritual eye.⁶ Further, in harmony with the special emphasis African Christianity placed on martyrdom, the same text promotes the martyrs as “blessed conquerors” from their ability to offer prayer in heaven.⁷ He also inferred from the text that if “uncleanness is washed away by baptism; the stains are changed into dazzling whiteness by martyrdom.”⁸

Against those who prayed for the end to be delayed in *De oratione*, Tertullian used the fifth seal as an example of a prayer for hastening the end, since that is the point when avenging occurs.⁹ *De resurrectione mortuorum*¹⁰ explained the delay as an allowance for the imminent judgment plagues to fall first on the world, the beast, and the devil himself before the fulfillment of the final events. Finally, according to *Scorpiace*, the same text urges the readers not to fear martyrdom, but rather, the penalty of fearing it. For this work, assured in the hope of revenge, the martyrs’ souls are now patiently

⁶In response to the spiritualizing tendencies of Heomogenes, Tertullian insisted on the fact that the souls of the martyrs were clearly recognizable to John as he stood “in the Spirit” of God. See Tertullian *De anima* 8:5, 9:8 (*ANF*, 3:188-189) and also Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 38:4 (*ANF*, 3:573). For an overview of Gnosticism as one of the most influential trends within the church in the second century, see Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 1-2. Barclay Newman claimed that Revelation itself had, in fact, anti-gnostic purposes (“The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis: Critique of the Iranaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse,” *NTS* 10 [1963-1964]: 133-139).

⁷Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 1:330. Tertullian went as far as claiming that those reposing under the altar are martyrs who alone may enter paradise before the resurrection through the key of their own blood.

⁸For some extra perspectives on Tertullian’s views on the superiority of blood baptism (martyrdom) over water baptism, see also *De baptismo* 16, 1-2 (*CCCM* 1:290-291).

⁹Tertullian, *De oratione* 5:3 (*ANF*, 3:683).

¹⁰Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 25:1-8 (*ANF*, 3:563).

reposing in peace under the altar as they await the admission of others to fill up their company in glory.¹¹

Regarding early occurrences in apocryphal writings, a liturgical application of Rev 6:9-11 is associated with the Lord's appearance for judgment in the *Epistula Apostolorum*, whose content points to an early date ca. 150.¹² This writing explains the delay by the necessity of partaking in the cup before the coming of the Lord together with those who were willing to die for his sake.

Dated between 262 and 313, the *Anonyma Apocrypha liber Ezrae* 6¹³ cites the text while dealing with the prediction of impending doom against the world because of prevailing iniquity.¹⁴ This short oracular Christian writing identifies persecution and the unjust suffering endured by a select group of righteous as the major cause for God to bring in the eschaton.¹⁵ To receive the reward God intended for them at that time,

¹¹Tertullian, *Scorpiace* (ANF, 3:645-646). This treatise deals with the antidote to the sting of the "scorpions" (Gnostics, Valentinian, and others) who attempted to dissuade the faithful from martyrdom.

¹²Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung*, 2 vols. (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1959), 1:134. This epistle is a report of conversations supposed to have taken place between the eleven disciples and Jesus Christ after his resurrection. Some of the events related to the delay before this event are: (1) the coming of the Lord in the form of the angel Gabriel to open the door of the prison, (2) his spending a night of watch with the disciples to commemorate the last supper at the end of which comes the Agape, and (3) the disciples' second imprisonment followed by a miraculous release from prison for the sake of witnessing and preaching what was handed to them.

¹³Robert Weber, *Biblia sacra: Juxta Vulgatam versionem* (Stuttgart, Germany: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969).

¹⁴For a complete overview of the questions of introduction to this work, see Theodore A. Bergren, *Sixth Ezra: The Text and Origin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-25.

¹⁵It is the accumulation of human sinfulness and unrighteous deeds that drives God to strike the earth in anger: "I will no longer be silent about their impieties. . . . Innocent and just blood cries out to me, and the souls of the just cry out continuously" (15:8). With the eschaton, God intends to destroy evil in the world and reward the faithful with the joy of a new coming era of righteousness (16:53-54).

however, the chosen ones must resist sin and adhere strictly to the moral and ethical codes of the book.

Another allusion is included in the anonymous Gnostic writing, *Hypostasis of the Archons*,¹⁶ which deals with the origin and nature of the archontic powers peopling the heavens and the Ogdoad in connection with how human destiny is affected by the primeval happenings.¹⁷ To rescue the “immortals” from the oppression of the Archons, a “delay,” tied to the completion of the number of “Chaos,” is expected before the appearance of the “Seed”¹⁸ after three generations.

Allegorical application was a frequent feature of the early interpretation of the fifth seal. Challenging the sophisticated ruling class of the Hellenistic world, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215), in his Book II of the *Paedagogus*,¹⁹ referred to the white-robe imagery against dyeing clothes and the ostentatious display of fine and abundant stylish clothing.²⁰ Guided by his ethical emphasis regarding the theme of “witnessing,” he stated that there is no need for any color; the “natural color of truth should suffice.”²¹

Origen of Alexandria (ca. 185-ca. 254), founder and promoter of the allegorical

¹⁶Roger Aubrey Bullard and Martin Krause, *Hypostasis of the Archons* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970). For a discussion on the dating of this work whose content seems to indicate a third century C.E. production, see James M. Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 152.

¹⁷See the introductory note in Bullard and Krause, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, 3. According to this Gnostic writing, the delay motif is expressed with the language of the fifth seal and other Johannine allusions. The delay will end with the appearance of the “True” man in a creaturely form who will “teach them about everything, and will anoint them with the anointing of eternal life, which has been given him from the kingless generation.” (ibid.)

¹⁸Ibid., 144.

¹⁹Clemens Alexandrinus *Paedagogus* (ANF, 2:265). The work is a presentation of a repertory of practical moral rules.

²⁰Ibid., 2.108.3 (ANF, 3:265). He insisted on virtues such as simplicity and modesty.

²¹Ibid.

school in Caesarea, views the fifth seal from an expiatory angle where martyrdom is a more efficient and victorious purification than water baptism. Immersion, for him, related to the martyrs' own blood that compares in virtue to Christ's redemptive blood,²² and their association with the celestial altar is proof of their glorification and elevation over all "aeris potestates" in heaven. *Exhortio ad martyrium* cites the same text²³ in parallel with Christ's death to claim the power for martyrdom to bring cleansing to many.²⁴ Further from Rev 6:9-11, *Homiliae in numeros* raises the fear that the fading away of martyrdom would lead to the end of the remission of sin.²⁵

On a more exegetical note, Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-ca. 236), a pupil of Irenaeus, turned to Rev 6:9-11 in his commentary on the book of Daniel, taken as "the norm for the understanding of Revelation."²⁶ The fifth seal, for him, was clearly connected to the delay of the *parousia*. Writing at a time when martyrs' suffering and the cruelty of persecutors was creating an obsession for end-time prophecies,²⁷ he used the

²²Origen *Homelia in Iudices* 7.2 (GCS 30:508; SCh 389:179-180). For him, martyrdom was, in fact, a reward (Origen *Homelia in numeros* 9 [SCh 29:168-169]).

²³Origen *Exhortio ad martyrium* 30 (GCS 2:27); Origen, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 62.

²⁴Commenting on John 6, Origen defended the idea that martyrs could earn the remission of sin for the world: "Il faut penser qu'il s'opère une délivrance aux dépens des puissances malfaisantes grâce à la mort des saints martyrs. . . . Car elle entame le mordant des attaques lancées par ces puissances contre leur victime; leur force en est entamée et affaiblie; et d'autres que les martyrs, grâce à leur défaite sont en grand nombre délivrés de la pression qu'exerçaient sur eux les puissances mauvaises qui les accablaient et les perdaient" (*Commentarii in Ioanem* 6.275-276 [GCS 10:162; SCh 157:338-339]).

²⁵Origen *Homiliae in numeros* 10.2 (GCS 30:71-72; SCh 29:194).

²⁶Isbon T. Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John* (1919; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 321.

²⁷Hippolytus *In Daniele* 4:22 (SCh 14:186-187). The obsession for the end-time prophecy is treated as a dangerous curiosity and a misplaced human indiscretion for the Day of the Lord whose timing has been kept hidden from us in God's wisdom. For a comprehensive study of Hippolytus's analysis of the martyrological passages of Revelation and his views on the concept of the delay of the *parousia*, see David G. Dunbar, "The Delay of the Parousia in Hippolytus," *Vigilae Christianae* 37 (1983): 313-327; and W.

text to reinforce the virtues of hope and patience. He saw the salvation of mankind to complete the number of elected saints as rationale for the delay. Since martyred souls are ordered to wait, the delay of the end, for this author, stays at any rate under the sovereign control of God, and if the martyrs have to wait, others should too.²⁸

Departing from eschatology, Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) referred the fifth seal to the life of the Church and the crises of his day.²⁹ In a climate of persecution, apostasy and internal opposition, he appealed to patience in *De bono patientiae* from the same text to reprove any desire for vengeance. Revenge, for him, was a sovereign prerogative of God.³⁰ Further, in his *Testimonia ad Quirinum*, Cyprian returned to the passage to defend the blessings resulting from martyrdom.³¹ Lastly, the same text discourages over-reliance on martyrs' intercession for the remission of sins because no one, not even the martyrs, may hasten the time of God's forgiveness and judgment.³²

Based on a high view of God's sovereignty and justice, Ambrosiaster (345-410), author of the pseudo-Augustinian *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, rejected any hint of "impatience" in the fifth seal. For him, the text was about the assurance that

Brian Shelton, *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hyppolytus: An Early Church Presbyter's Commentary on Daniel*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008), 64-65, 108-112.

²⁸Hyppolytus *In Daniele* 4:22 (SCh 14:186).

²⁹Judith L. Kovacs, Christopher Rowland, and Rebekah Callow, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 254.

³⁰Cyprian *De bono patientiae* 21 (ANF, 5:490). Patience, viewed as the ultimate Christian virtue, is needed to await God's timing and the completion of the number of martyrs.

³¹Cyprian *Testimonia ad Quirinum* 3.16 (ANF, 5:490). Cf. also with Ignatius who begged his peers on his way to martyrdom not to interpose with the pouring out of his life as a libation to God on his altar (*Epistle to the Roman Christian* 2).

³²Cyprian, *De lapsis; and, De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* [CCCM 3:231], trans. Maurice Bévenot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 28-29. The intercession of the martyrs is inefficient because they too needed to be vindicated first.

God's providence will ultimately avenge the impious war waged against the saints at the fitting time.³³ He saw a two-fold purpose to the announced delay: God wants to strike terror on persecutors and encourage patience in his people. However, even this "apparent" delay stays within God's control inasmuch as the time for the end obeys a fore-ordained plan.

Among the early general quotations of the fifth seal, Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 265-ca. 340) alluded to the fifth seal in Book V of his *Historia ecclesiastica* when he dealt with the special kind of heroism of the martyrs who fought the wars for truth and piety in Gaul.³⁴ The fervent bishop Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367) illustrated how the text was used as a lesson on prayer in a set of *Tractatus super Psalmos*.³⁵ With respect to the reform ideas of early Christianity, Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397) proposed an ascetic understanding of this passage in his *Apologia prophetae David*. The imagery of the souls under the altar is compared to the sacrifice of young bulls who are not laboring

³³Ambrosiaster *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 127 1.68.1, 2 (CSEL 50:117). To reinforce the assurance, he insisted on the fact that the souls are "under the altar," i.e., they are currently participating in the reign of Christ and the Church. Impatience is ruled out because the saints already know that God will act in a timely way in the future and that vindication can neither be anticipated nor deferred.

³⁴Eusebius referred to those heroes as the ones "who were worthy to fulfill the number of martyrs," finding there a direct fulfillment of the prophetic word contained in the fifth seal (*Historia ecclesiastica* 5.1.13 [CPG 3495; SCh 41:9]).

³⁵Dealing with Ps 141:1, Hilarius Pictaviensis cited the text to encourage believers not to be timid in their petition to God but to sound their prayers boldly in a "loud and courageous shout to God" (*Tractatus Super Psalmos* 139.16 [CSEL 22:788]). In the preface to this commentary, he applied the seven unsealings to events in the life of Christ from his incarnation to his final coming for judgment. They represent respectively Christ's corporality, passion, death, resurrection, glory, kingdom, and judgment (ibid., 22:7).

but are being labored by asceticism or hardship to purchase the grace of Christ³⁶ for their own sake.

Against Vigilantius,³⁷ Jerome of Stridon (ca. 340-420) referred to Rev 6:9-11 to defend the literal heavenly existence of martyrs and the efficiency of their mediatorial ministry.³⁸ Another prominent ascetic writer from Southern Gaul, John Cassian (ca. 360-435), found in the passage arguments in favor of “the continuance of the soul.”³⁹ Finally, Fulgentius (ca. 468-533), African Bishop from Ruspa, cited the text in his treatise on forgiveness to challenge those who tended to delay the timing of their conversion.⁴⁰

The results of the survey of this section indicate a dominance of Origen’s spiritualizing method. The earliest interpretations of the fifth seal tend, thus, to focus more on issues of martyrs and ascetic spirituality, patience, and confidence in God’s providence. Only Tertullian and Hippolytus did pay attention to the text in context and emphasized the end-time connections.

³⁶Ambrose *De apologia prophetarum David* 1.17, 85 (CSEL 32.2.354; SCh 239:187). For a similar view, see also Didymus the Blind (d. 398) in Ekkehard Mühlberg, ed., *Psalmenkommentare aus der Katenenüberlieferung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975), 375.

³⁷Vigilantius was a former disciple of Jerome who turned against him upon his return to his homeland, Gaul. For further details about Vigilantius see William S. Gilly, *Vigilantius and His Times* (London: Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley, 1844).

³⁸Jerome *Against Vigilantius* 6 (NPNF, 6:419). Vigilantius opposed prayers offered for the dead, but Jerome thought that if apostles and martyrs could pray for others while still in their “unvindicated” bodily state, they could do so even more once they had won their crowns, overcome, and triumphed.

³⁹John Cassian *First Conference of Abbot Moses* 14 (NPNF, 11:301). The reality of the survival of the soul is proved by the fact that “in the Apocalypse the souls of them that are slain are not only said to praise God but to address Him also” (ibid.).

⁴⁰Fulgentius *De remissione peccatorum* 2.5, 1-3 (CSEL 91A:683-684). For him, the time of vengeance will bring irrevocable retribution after which forgiveness will be inaccessible. Against the impatience of the saints, the fifth seal is a reminder that the time for vengeance is being postponed for a little while by the highest ordinance to allow first for the fulfilling of the number of their fellow servants and brothers.

Victorinus, Tyconius, and Their Successors

In the third century, Victorinus (died ca. 304), bishop of Pettau in Styria (Austria) who pioneered the recapitulation approach, provided the first exegetical interpretation of Rev 6:9-11 in the first full commentary on Revelation.⁴¹ Revised by Jerome, his work shaped in different ways the exegesis of the Apocalypse in the West in the early Middle Ages. Characteristic of his approach, the Apocalypse turned into an anti-Roman polemical writing. Victorinus found that Revelation focuses on the imminence of Christ's *parousia* where, because of the threats to early Christianity, Diocletian's persecutions appeared as a sign of an impending apocalyptic change.

Taking the first six seals as pictorial illustrations of the Lord's prophetic words in Matt 24 representing part of God's end-time judgment on the world, Victorinus understood the fifth as displaying the fate of the saints who have died during this time. However, Victorinus thought "under the altar" meant "beneath the earth" (i.e., the place of Hades itself). Contrary to the wicked, the saints are shielded in a zone of Hell removed from the pains and fires. The disturbing closeness to their persecutors and executioners, for him, justified the impatient desire for revenge of the martyrs who long for their just rewards and the damnation of the wicked. Their cry for vindication was heard but they had to wait since vengeance occurs only at the end of time.

With the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, the fourth-century expositors faced a new situation where the anti-Roman apologetics needed to be toned down to facilitate the process of integration. Tyconius (died ca. 400), a north-African Donatist, was a key author who responded to the new circumstance by promoting a blend

⁴¹Victorinus Poetovionensis *In Apocalypsim* 6:9-11 (CSEL 49:52; S Ch 423:33).

of Origen's spiritualizing methods and Victorinus's recapitulation approach.⁴² His commentary (ca. 380), based on seven mystical rules with traces of literal or historical application,⁴³ has been influential for the contemporary and much of the later medieval interpretation of the Apocalypse.⁴⁴ Seen as a result of the Resurrection event, he referred the seals septet as Christ's installation of his reign and that of the Church, but no data on the fifth seal are available because of a break in the fragment of the reconstructed commentary after the disappearance of the original.⁴⁵

Even if he failed to publish a full commentary, Augustine (384-430), bishop of Hippo, still deserves to be noted here for his key role in popularizing the spiritualizing views of this tradition.⁴⁶ Dealing with Ps 78:10, he used the fifth seal to show that such prayer comes from perfect saints and has nothing to do with any desire for selfish revenge. It reflects, instead, a longing for vindication by God's judgment because they

⁴²R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 12. For a study of the impact of Tyconius on the interpretation of the Apocalypse, see Kenneth B. Steinhauser, *Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius: A History of Its Reception and Influence*, European University Studies, series 23/301 (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1987).

⁴³For text and translation of the *Book of Rules* see William S. Babcock, ed., *Tyconius: The Book of Rules* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); for further discussion on the *Rules* see the introductory notes in F. Crawford Burkitt, *Book of Rules of Tyconius Newly Edited from the Mss., with an Introduction and an Examination into the Text of the Biblical Quotations* (Cambridge: University Press, 1894); and for a more thorough analysis of the *Rules* see Pamela Bright, *Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic*, vol. 2, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁴⁴For the extent of Tyconius's influence in medieval exegesis, see Matter, "Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis," 41-50; and Steinhauser, *Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius*, 28-196.

⁴⁵Tyconius's treatment of the fifth seal is hinted at by commentators who have clear affinities with him. For an account of the reconstruction of this commentary, see Stefanović, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation* 5, 23, n. 1.

⁴⁶Further on the connection between Tyconius and Augustine, see Paula Fredriksen, "Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (London: Cornell University Press, 1992), 20-27.

delight in his justice out of their love for him.⁴⁷ From Rev 6:9-11, he inferred that even in times of persecution, they indeed continue to reign with Christ and will do so even during the short tribulation after Satan is released.⁴⁸

Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) was another one of such authors. He commented on the fifth seal in his *Dialogorum libri iv.*⁴⁹ From a parallel in Isa 61:20, he affirmed that martyrs who now receive a single robe representing the bliss of the soul will also receive a second reward on the Judgment Day in the form of their glorified body. Then, instead of the present glory of their soul alone, they will rejoice in the double glory of body and soul.

As the first commentator who often closely reproduces Tyconius's spiritualizing views,⁵⁰ Primasius of Hadrumentum (sixth century) was typical of how this school dealt with the problematic outburst of the souls under the altar. Denying any selfish motivation for revenge or even any desire contrary to God's will, he interpreted their call for vindication as nothing but a prayer against the reign of sin and for the coming of the

⁴⁷Augustine *Exposition of the Psalms* 78:10. The martyrs' plea is for the correction and not the destruction of their enemies while their hatred is directed not at persons but at vices. Thus, Cassiodorus Senator (ca. 487-ca. 580) rejected pure revenge because vengeance was incompatible with saintly people. However, since temporal vengeance is the means by which force and injustice are repelled by just retribution, the true aim of the prayer is the conversion of the enemies in the hope that temporal punishment might avert their eternal damnation (*Explanation of the Psalms* 78:10 [ACW, 52:281]). Elsewhere, Cassiodorus saw Rev 6:9-11 as addressing the consolation offered to the saints while they were ordered to wait patiently for the completion of the number of their fellow servants (*Complexiones in epistolas et acta apostolorum et Apocalypsim* 11.5.11 [PL 70:1409]).

⁴⁸Augustine *De Civitate Dei* 20.13. He also discussed whether the 3½ years of the last persecution under the Antichrist should be reckoned in the thousand years of the Devil's binding and whether the Saints will reign with Christ then.

⁴⁹Gregory *Dialogues* 4.26 (FC, 39:218-219). In a different context, Gregory dealt with the fifth seal where he thought that the "rest yet for a little season" to reassure the martyrs of the certainty of retribution and the "answer to await the gathering of their brethren is to infuse into their minds the delays of a glad awaiting that while they long after the resurrection of the flesh, they may be further gladdened by the accession of their brethren who remain to be gathered to them" (*Moralia in Iob* 2.8.11 [CSEL 143:66-67]).

⁵⁰Primasius *Com. Super Apocalypsim* 2.6 (CSEL 92:99-100; PL 68:838-839).

kingdom. Unlike Victorinus, Primasius taught that “the martyrs, though apparently resting beneath the earth among their enemies, wait for Judgment Day safely under the altar, which he describes as either the unity of the church or their testimony in the name of Christ.”⁵¹ God’s final response comes only after the full number of elect has been made complete.⁵²

Bede the Venerable (ca. 673-735), chronicler of English Christianity, was another important author who helped to perpetuate the Tyconian tradition. Bede’s commentary (ca. 730) pioneered a sevenfold division of the text and defined his doctrine of the Six Ages of the world that significantly impacted later medieval theology.⁵³ Located within the second division extending from 4:1-8:1, the seven seals refer to different stages in the development of the Church until the end of the world.⁵⁴ However, the fifth seal itself is treated ahistorically as a description of the present glory of the souls in heaven underneath the golden altar of incense viewed as a solitary place of eternal praise.⁵⁵ On the white-robe imagery, Bede followed the double-reward idea of Gregory the Great and

⁵¹Lumsden, *And Then the End Will Come*, 38.

⁵²See Lumsden again for the connection between the perfection of love and the end time for Primasius: “Their profusion of charity will all the more quickly add members to their ranks and bring about the day of judgment; for this reason they are clothed in indescribable happiness, symbolized by the white robes” (ibid., 39).

⁵³For a further analysis of Bede and his connection with the Tyconian tradition, see G. Bonner, *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary*, Jarrow Lecture, 1966 (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: J. and P. Bealls, 1966), 11-14.

⁵⁴See Kovacs, Rowland, and Callow, *Revelation*, 81; Robert E. Lerner, “Medieval Return to the Thousand-Year Sabbath,” in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 54.

⁵⁵*Explanatio Apocalypsis* 2.6 (PL 93:148). In defense of the alleged offensive nature of the martyrs’ cry, he insisted that the prayer was not motivated by a vindictive feeling of “hatred towards enemies for whom in this world they are entreated, but from love of justice with which they agree as those placed near the Judge himself” (ibid.). The prayer sought the dawning of the Day of Judgment that will put an end to the kingdom of sin, inaugurate the kingdom of God, and lead to the resurrection of their dead bodies (Primasius).

the delay is contingent upon the filling up of the number of brothers.⁵⁶

Ambrose Autpertus (or Ansbertus, died 781), an Italian monk, was also another key promoter of the Tyconian tradition. He viewed the martyrs' act of the offering of their lives to God in the fifth seal as an *imitatio Christi* sacrifice.⁵⁷ The thrust of God's response is to stimulate patience until the end of the delay necessary to complete the number of brothers.

Among later commentators who interdependently refer to the Tyconian method⁵⁸ as mediated by Bede and Ambrose Autpertus are Alcuin (ca. 735-804), Carolingian scholar from Frankland;⁵⁹ Haimo of Auxerre (died 843);⁶⁰ *Glossa Ordinaria*, a standard

⁵⁶Bede further suggested that the white robes may represent their joy on learning, by the revelation of the Lord revealing to them, that the wicked are to be condemned at the end of the world, and that even many are to be associated to their number by martyrdom. Thus filled with love and content with that consolation, they await the filling up the number of their brethren [*Explanatio Apocalypsis* 2.6 (PL 93:148)].

⁵⁷Ambrose Autpertus *Exp in Apocalypsin* 4.6.9-12 (CCCM cont. Med. 27.283-289). Other thoughts from his exposition include the inevitability of persecutions, the corporeality of the soul, the actual presence of the souls in glory and their special proximity to the mediator, the prayer for justice and bodily resurrection (Primasius), and the double reward (Gregory).

⁵⁸For deeper insights on the issue of interdependence among Alcuin, Bede, and Ambrose, see Thomas W. Mackay, "Apocalypse Comments by Primasius, Bede, and Alcuin: Interrelationship, Dependency and Individuality," in *Papers Presented at the 13th International Conference on Patristic Studies in Oxford 1999*, ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold, *Studia Patristica* 36 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2001), 28-34. For a discussion of the sources of Berengaudus and his indebtedness to Ambrosius, Alcuin, and Haimo of Auxerre and their sources, see Derk Visser, *Apocalypse as Utopian Expectation (800-1500): The Apocalypse Commentary of Berengaudus of Ferrières and the Relationship between Exegesis, Liturgy, and Iconography*, vol. 73, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996), 2-3.

⁵⁹Alcuin *Com. in Apocalypsin* 4.6.9 (PL 100:1126) repeats Ambrose's *imitatio Christi* sacrificial view of the martyrs' death. In connection with the altar, two categories of martyrs, one visible and the other hidden, are presented as carrying on the offering of a living sacrifice to God the Father. "Under the altar," where they are awaiting immortality, is interpreted as a special closeness to the Mediator. Because the gift of a white robe is associated with the enjoyment of eternal bliss in spirit only, the saints are viewed as longing for the resurrection of their body. The purpose of the delay is to complete the gathering of their brothers.

⁶⁰Haimo *Exp in Apocalypsin* 6:9-11 (PL 117:1027-1031). The altar is identified with Christ himself; because of their communion with his body, the souls are also assimilated to the altar underneath while they await the resurrection of their body that will usher them into their future glory after being transformed in the likeness of God's angels. He identified two forms of martyrdom (one hidden and the

medieval commentary (published ca. 1100) from the Fathers with marginal gloss attributed to Walafrid Strabo (ca. 808-849);⁶¹ Bruno of Segni (1049-1123);⁶² and Anselm of Laon (died 1117).⁶³

Loosely connected to Bede and Ambrose, Berengaudus of Ferrières (late ninth cent.) displayed his independence by being the first to explain John's visions as covering all of sacred history since creation. Working with a scheme of seven ages of the world, Berengaudus applied the first six seals to the time from Adam to the rejection of the Jews in the fall of Jerusalem, with the fifth applied to martyrs of New Testament times when Christ "explained to the doctors of the Church his parables and dark sayings about the suffering of his disciples, and their after glory."⁶⁴

Those who declined the allegorical suggestions of the tradition in favor of the more historical approach of Victorinus include Beatus (died 798), a Spanish monk from

other manifest) that he blended with the idea of a double reward (Gregory). The white robe, for him, symbolized the joy of eternal bliss coming as a preliminary reward of baptism and the prize of martyrdom until their brothers are completed.

⁶¹*Glossa Ordinaria* allows for some recapitulation between the visions of the seals and trumpets which is applied in the visions to the life of the church until the end. Taken as a word of consolation to the persecuted faithful through the promise of their impending crowning, the fifth seal displays souls in a place kept as a secret hidden from all inhabitants of this earth. The thrust of the text is a call to patience in the expectation of their fellow servants and brothers from further persecution (*Apocalypsis B. Joannis* 6:9-12 [PL 114:722]). For the source criticism data for this work, see Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation* 5, 28, n. 3.

⁶²Bruno Segni *Exp. in Apocalypsin* 2.6 (PL 165:638). He viewed the fifth seal as a notice that the time of the enjoyment of the full reward was delayed until the appearance of the antichrist and the martyrdom of other saints. He also repeated Gregory's comments on the double reward given to the souls under the altar as an answer to their cry for vindication.

⁶³Anselm of Laon *Enar. in Apocalypsin* 6 (PL 162:1524). Like Strabo, he found in the text God's word of consolation to those who did not fear to face open persecutions for his sake. The saints are thus being encouraged in a double sense: by the gift of God's grace and the joyous perspective of being reunited with their fellow-servants. The rest of his ideas are very similar to those of his predecessors.

⁶⁴Berengaudus *Expositio super septem visiones libri Apocalypsis* 6:9-12 (PL 17:921-922), trans. Edward B. Elliott, *Horae* 1:374. On matters of details, Berengaudus reproduced ideas of the Tyconian school. The "little season" ends with the Judgment Day and the delay is "brief" because the present wait in comparison to the future time is really short.

Liébana who compiled his commentary (ca. 780) that sees the seals as seven ages of world history;⁶⁵ Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129) regarded the Apocalypse⁶⁶ as focusing on “events before as well as after Christ’s first advent”;⁶⁷ Richard of St. Victor (died 1173), a native of Scotland, applied the seals visions to the prediction of seven stages of the church’s history where the fifth seal discloses the divine consolation offered to all the martyrs in general between the time of the hypocrites and the persecution coming with the apparition of the Antichrist right before the end of time;⁶⁸ and Anselm of Havelberg (12th cent.), whose work on the Apocalypse prepared for the radical changes of the next century, structured “the seven seals as seven periods of the church history.”⁶⁹ His treatment of the fifth seal as a description of the martyred Christians in all ages was thematic rather than chronological.

In this period, a stronger eschatological treatment of the fifth seal surfaces with

⁶⁵Beatus *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, 1:617. For the sources behind Beatus’s commentary, see Matter, “Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis,” 45. Beatus explained the Apocalypse through a patchwork of writings borrowed from a variety of Church Fathers. He included long extracts from the texts of the Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Church, especially Augustine, Ambrose, Irenaeus of Lyons, Isidora of Sevilla, and other sources. For Beatus’s personal acknowledgment of indebtedness, see Steinhäuser, *Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius*, 151, n. 308.

⁶⁶Rupert of Deutz *Com. in Apocalypsin* 4.6 (PL 169:948-954). Referring to the crime and fate of Cain, he interpreted the cry of the fifth seal as a prayer for judgment against the Jewish people who have persecuted God’s messenger by pouring out innocent blood. For him, the source was not personal vengeance, but a desire based on some prior knowledge of what God intends to do.

⁶⁷Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 42.

⁶⁸Richard *In Apocalypsim* 2.8 (PL 196:768-769). The general content of his exposition on the fifth seal replicates the ideas of his predecessors, especially Ambrose and Alulfus. See Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 234.

⁶⁹Kovacs, Rowland, and Callow, *Revelation*, 81. Providing the foundation for the application of the seven seals to chronological periods of church history, Anselm of Havelberg stated, “Truly the seven seals which John saw as he tells us in his Revelation are seven successive states of the church from the coming of Christ until all things will be consummated at the End and God will be all in all” (*Dialogues*, 1.7, cited in Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Tradition in the Middle Ages* [1979; reprint, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999], 114).

Victorinus, who read the text as a sign of the end-time persecution in parallel with the synoptic apocalypse. However, the eschatological imminence is again toned down by the impact of the spiritualizing views of Tyconius which lasted until the Medieval period. The treatment then favored the righteous as already participating in the reign of Christ and the Church, or even already enjoying some of the end-time reward in advance. Waiting a little while gave rise then to lengthy discussions on the state of the dead.

The Early Greek Scholia

Oecumenius (early 6th cent.), a Greek Bishop, was author of the oldest of the three Greek commentaries on the book of Revelation inspired by the allegorical methods of Origen with few allusions to historical events.⁷⁰ He believed that the first six seals reflect events of Christ's earthly life, while the seventh points to his *parousia*. Couched in a context of a struggle with demons, the fifth seal is applied sacrificially to martyrs who suffered on behalf of the godly word of the old covenant and of the church or synagogue.⁷¹ Interestingly enough, the cry is interpreted as a prayer, not against human beings, but against demons who make their home with mortal beings. The rationale for the delay is that it was unfair to deprive "those who had shown the same courage as they had should be thwarted and lose their crowns of martyrdom by the premature destruction

⁷⁰See Oecumenius, *Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse: Now Printed for the First Time from Manuscripts at Messina, Rome, Salonika and Athos*, ed. H. C. Hoskier, University of Michigan Studies: Humanistic Series 23 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1928), 4-5.

⁷¹Oecumenius, *Oecumenius* 4.12.1 and 4.13.5 (FC, 112:72-73). Oecumenius's text of Revelation reads "the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for *the church* which they had," instead of *the witness* (emphasis mine). He explained this by describing the people of the old covenant as the synagogue or church of those who believed in God. They died, not only for their own sakes, but also for the whole community because their blood has the virtue of building up the knowledge of God.

of the demons who were drilling them.”⁷²

Andreas, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (ca. late 6th cent.), who helped ensure a place for the Apocalypse in Eastern Christianity,⁷³ interpreted the seal visions as events from the earliest church to the end of the world. In the fifth seal, he saw the saints praying for the full consummation of the world, but they are ordered to wait with patience for their brethren to be perfected first.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, hoping for the blessings of the vision, the saints, clothed with the white robe of their virtues and anticipating the eternal delights, enjoy blissful repose in the bosom of Abraham.

Arethas from Caesarea in Cappadocia (ca. 860-ca. 940), reckoned as one of the most scholarly theologians of the Greek Church, compiled the oldest extant Greek commentary (*scholia*) on the Apocalypse, quoting his predecessors extensively.⁷⁵ From Oecumenius, he borrowed the idea of the fifth seal as a cry of martyred saints against the demons whom they hold directly responsible for their torture. He viewed the martyrs as prophets and wise men before the incarnation of Christ, impatient of God’s long-

⁷²Oecumenius, *Oecumenius*, 4.13.6.

⁷³Elliott described his work as integrating “a larger mixture of literal, here and there, than Tichonius, Primasius, or Ansbertus” (*Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1:356). This work is important as the first commentary on the book that has come down to us, also as the source from which most of its later commentators have drawn. For a recent appraisal of this Greek bishop, see Eugénia Scarvelis Constantinou, “Andrew of Caesarea and the Apocalypse in the Ancient Church of the East: Studies & Translation” (PhD dissertation, Université Laval, 2008). She basically defended a view of this bishop as one “who was attempting to quell apocalyptic fears through his commentary, not to inflame them” (*ibid.*, v).

⁷⁴Andreas of Caesarea *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (PG 106:215-458, 1387-94).

⁷⁵For the clarification of deeper issues of authorship and affinities among the documents attributed to Oecumenius, Andreas, and Arethas, see Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, cc; and John C. Lamoreaux, “The Provenance of Ecumenius Commentary on the Apocalypse,” *VC* 52, no. 1 (1998): 88-108.

suffering and delay.⁷⁶ The delay until the end of the world is justified by the perfecting of the brothers.

For the Eastern authors of this period, the influence of Origen's spiritualizing method still seems to linger quite heavily on the interpretation of the fifth seal. However, Andreas and Arethas distinguished themselves from the rest by addressing, albeit distantly, the issue of consummation in the fifth seal. They insisted that the delay before the End coincides with the eschatological perfecting of the brethren.

Summary

The exegesis of the fifth seal from surviving quotations of the first three centuries reveals minimal eschatological preoccupation except by a few writers. Hippolytus, for example, viewed Rev 6:9-11 as offering a rationale for the delay of the *parousia*. However, under the influence of the Origenic spiritualizing method, many tended to interpret the fifth seal more in terms of moral life than as prophecy. The "waiting" aspect of the passage was applied to teachings on patience and confidence in God's providence. Expiatory meaning was often derived from the text in early martyrdom literature and in subsequent ascetic writings where personal reform was emphasized as persecutions died down in later years.

In harmony with his eager expectation of a post-*parousian* kingdom, Victorinus restored the eschatological content of the text by suggesting therein a sign of the imminent breakthrough of the end called forth by vengeful martyrs. Later, however, this imminence was downplayed again in the spiritualizing views of Tyconius that dominated

⁷⁶Arethas *Com. in Apocalypsin* (PG 106:594-595).

the reading of the Apocalypse until Medieval times. Much of the debate centered, then, on the location of the martyred souls while awaiting their eternal reward and on the ethical estimate of their vengeance cry. The kingdom's expectation was by and large tempered with the image of the righteous already participating in the reign of Christ and the Church (Victorin, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster) or even already enjoying some of the reward normally reserved for the elect at the end of time (Jerome).⁷⁷ From the martyrs' communion with Christ in heaven, many have claimed a priestly mediatorial role for them.

For many expositors both from the West and East, the thrust of the passage is related to a prayer for the coming of Judgment Day where explanations were needed about the delay. Since divine vengeance is strictly an end-time feature (Victorinus), delay is explained by the fact that the time for judgment and vindication is not yet ripe. Thus, allowance is made either to gather the brethren or for imminent judgment plagues to fall first on the world, the beast, and the devil himself (Tertullian), or to complete the number of "Chaos" before the appearance of the "Seed" (Hypostasis of Archons), or to save mankind and complete the number of elected saints (Hippolytus), or that the appearance of the antichrist and the martyrdom of other saints must occur first (Bruno).

The reality of the delay is also taken as a warning from God to strike terror on persecutors and encourage patience in his people (Ambrosiaster). In the east,

⁷⁷See Christe, "Traditions littéraires et iconographiques dans l'interprétation des images apocalyptiques," 112. T. W. Mackay observed the emergence of a "de-eschatologizing" of the Apocalypse in the fourth century that influenced the commentaries of Primasius and Bede until the early Middle Ages. As factors, Mackay highlighted the preoccupation with church and its triumph, the absorption of "Romanitas" into biblical exegesis, and the influence of Tyconius's rules and Augustine's approval thereof ("Early Christian Exegesis of the Apocalypse," in *Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors Presented at the 6th International Congress on Biblical Studies in Oxford 1978*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, JSNTSup 3 [Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1980], 257-261).

Oecumenius justified the delay by the fact that it is unfair to deprive others of their crowns of martyrdom by the premature destruction of the demons, while Andreas and Arethas insisted on extra time for the perfecting of the brethren first.

Interpretation of the Fifth Seal from Joachim of Fiore until 1850

After mounting interest in the meaning of history and prophecy in the late twelfth century, later commentators turned even more “to the apocalyptic passages to unlock the meaning of history.”⁷⁸ However, Joachim of Fiore, founder of an eschatological school,⁷⁹ is the one who really opened the floodgates for the insertion of specific historical data into commentaries on Revelation. I now turn to Joachim and his impact on the Catholic and Protestant interpretation of the fifth seal in the Reformation and post-Reformation period before dealing with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries counterattacks of the Spanish Jesuits.

Joachim of Fiore and the Pre-Reformation Period

Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1132-1202), influential expounder of prophecy in the Middle Ages, was famous for his two works: (1) his commentary on the Apocalypse viewed as the key to Scripture and the whole of history and (2) his Concord of the New and Old Testaments.⁸⁰ Those publications not only impacted greatly the Spiritual

⁷⁸Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay, 1978), 113.

⁷⁹R. H. Charles described this school as a “revival of the methods of Irenaeus and Victorinus with borrowing details from the school of Tyconius, found in their own day mystically shadowed forth as well as the impending end of the world” (*Studies in the Apocalypse*, 26).

⁸⁰Joachim of Fiore, *Expositio in Apocalypsim* (Venice: F. Bindoni and M. Passini, 1527; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964), 6:9-11 and Joachim of Fiore, *Concordia novi ac veteris Testamenti* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1964). See also Marjorie Reeves and B. Hirsch-Reich, “De septem sigillis,” *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 21 (1954): 211-247. The Septem sigillis is a short treatise in which

Franciscans but also later Protestant commentators.⁸¹ He promoted the doctrine of the three ages, thus dividing history into three stages where each age is in fact presided over by one of the three persons of the Trinity.⁸² The first six parts of his commentary cover the Age of the Son and the fifth seal is found in Part II (Apoc 8:2-11:18) that deals with the martyrs' struggle with pagan persecutions.⁸³ Applying the seals to the age of martyrdom, Joachim connected the fifth seal to the historical period between A.D. 800 to 1200 where Romish Christians suffered persecutions and martyrdom caused by Saracens in Spain and Mauritania. He thought that the martyr-number would be completed through the events of the sixth seal which precedes the great Sabbath of the last seal.

Joachim's position elicited diverse reactions in Catholic circles. He was opposed by Albertus Magnus (1200-1280), German Dominican theologian, who applied the seals to the entire life of the church and referred the fifth seal to a hidden consolation intended for the souls resting in the seventh age. This consolation was expressed in gracious

Joachim summarized the double persecutions of the two Testaments by comparing the seven seals of the Apocalypse in the Old Testament and their opening in the New Testament. Further on the authenticity of this tract, see Marjorie Reeves, *Joachim and the Prophetic Future* (London: SPCK, 1976), 198-188.

⁸¹Irena Backus mentioned two aspects of Joachim's hermeneutic that attracted Protestant commentators of the Apocalypse: "First, his idea that after a series of struggles there would emerge an age in which the faithful would be in some sense 'closer' to God than hitherto, and, second, his idea that the Antichrist was an unspecified individual (emanating from Rome) who would combine all the heresies" (*Reformed Readings of the Apocalypse: Geneva, Zurich, and Wittenberg* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], xviii).

⁸²The first is the time under the Jewish law which lasted until Christ's first advent; the second is under the gospel which lasted until Joachim's own time; and the third refers to the era of the freedom of the Spirit. Each age has forty-two generations, each lasting about thirty years, and the Age of the Son ends according to his calculations in 1260.

⁸³As a demonstration for the *concordia* between Old and New Testament events, Elliott described Joachim's views on the fifth seal as a symbol for "the period from Hezekiah to Judah's captivity by the Babylonians; after previous partial suffering from the Egyptians under Pharaoh Necho . . . [its opening corresponds to] the tribulations of the church from Charlemagne to the time now present. The Greek Church now separated from the Roman. German Emperors from Henry the 1st (men worse than heathens) endeavour to destroy the liberties of the Church. The Latin or Roman Empire answers to Babylon" (*Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 4:387).

words to those faithful saints so that they might not be scared by the occurrence of the great tribulations.⁸⁴ On the other end, the “radical” Spiritual Franciscan leader Petrus Iohannis Olivi (1248-1298)⁸⁵ followed Joachim by referring the fifth period of the fifth seal to the 500 years from the beginning of the Carolingian empire in 801. However, unlike his master, he described this stage as the apostasy of the faithful Church of Rome which began to act like the synagogue of the reprobate who persecuted Christ and his Spirit.⁸⁶

During the Pre-Reformation time, a major alternative to recapitulationism emerged with the continuous-historical approach. It started with Alexander of Hales (ca. 1185-1245), a Franciscan layman from Bremen, who applied the prophecies of the Apocalypse to events through a continuous reading of church history from the primitive church in chap. 1 to the eschaton in chap. 22. Chapters 6-9 predict the first five centuries of the Christian era where the seals refer to judgments upon the Pagan Roman empire and the fifth seal depicts martyrs under Trajan’s reign.⁸⁷ The thrust of the passage is taken as

⁸⁴Albertus, *Apoc. B. Joannis* 2.6.9 (in *B. Alberti Magni Ratisbonensis episcopi, Ordinis Praedicatorum, Opera Omnia*, ed. Augustus Borgnet [Paris: Apud Ludovicum Vivès, 1899], 570). Triumphant in a triple war, the Saints receive a threefold divine consolation as evidenced by the following facts: (1) The martyred souls are seen as under the Lord’s protection, (2) each received a white robe as reward, and (3) the assurance that their desire will be fulfilled. In the interim, Albertus viewed the souls as reposing, i.e., waiting patiently, because the delay is “brief” in comparison to the eternal life promised to them.

⁸⁵Like Joachim of Fiore, Olivi combined his pattern of double sevens with a threefold division of world history into the ages of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For an appraisal of this controversial Catholic apocalyptic theologian, see Warren Lewis, “Peter John Olivi: Prophet of the Year 2000: Ecclesiology and Eschatology in the ‘Lectura Super Apocalipsim’; Introduction to a Critical Edition of the Text (PhD dissertation, Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, 1975).

⁸⁶Petrus Iohanni Olivi *Lectura super Apocalipsim* 6:9-11. This period will also be characterized by the appearance of the mystical antichrist whose persecuting activities precede that of the great antichrist.

⁸⁷Alexander of Hales, *Alexander Minorita: Expositio in Apocalypsim*, ed. Alois Wachtel, *Monumenta Germaniae historica: Die deutschen Geschichtsquellen des Mittelalters 500-1500*, vol. 1, *Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* (Weimar: H. Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1955).

the prediction of a short delay before their persecutors are judged and their persecution ends with the victory of Christianity over paganism at the time of Constantine.

Similarly, Petrus Aureolus (1280-1322), an ally of Pope John XXII against the spirituals, patterned his commentary on Alexander's⁸⁸ while carefully avoiding the anti-papal and reforming tendencies of some of the Joachite authors of his time.⁸⁹ Out of the ten persecutions faced by the Church under the Roman Emperors, Aureolus saw the fifth seal as a prediction of the third to the ninth post-Neronian ones by Trajan, Mark Anthony, Severus, Maximus, Decius, Valerianus, and Aurelianus.⁹⁰

However, Nicholas de Lyra (ca. 1270-1349), a fourteenth-century Franciscan biblical exegete,⁹¹ was the one who firmly established this approach by applying the Apocalypse to events of world and church history from John's time to the end of the world with no repetitions.⁹² Covering the historical period from Jesus Christ to Julian the Apostate, the seven seals belong to the first of the seven ages of Church history with the fifth seal dealing with the persecution of the Church from Trajan to Diocletian. De Lyra

⁸⁸See the introductory note in Philip D. Krey, trans., *Nicholas of Lyra's Apocalypse Commentary*, Commentary series (Kalamazoo, MI: Published for TEAMS by Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 14.

⁸⁹Marjorie Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages; A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 183-184.

⁹⁰Petrus Aureolus, "Revelation," in *Compendium sensus litteralis totius divinae Scripturae* (Ad Claras Quas [Florentiae] [Quaracchi]: Ex Typ. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, 1896), 468-469.

⁹¹For a presentation of Nicholas de Lyra's exegetical influence, see A. Vacant and E. Mangenot, eds., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (1923-1972), s.v. "Lyre (Nicholas de)"; Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les quatre sens de l'écriture*, 2 vols., Théologie 42 (Paris: Aubier, 1959), 2:344-367.

⁹²Nicholas of Lyra, *Post. in Ap. 6* (in *Biblia latina cum postillis Nicolai de Lyra, Part IV, New Testament* [Nuremberg, Germany: Anton Koberger, 1493]), 87-91.

justified the delay before the judgment day and the final reward by the need for more Christian martyrdom.⁹³

The twelfth century witnessed, with Joachim, a shift that would gain momentum mainly during the Reformation, when the apocalyptic applications of Christian symbolism stood up against the ecclesiological themes of the earlier period. Treating the fifth seal as prophecy, but not necessarily always being connected to the End, the authors of this period were concerned more with the historical fulfillment of the persecution in the text. The issue of identifying the protagonists in the text included a series of oppressions of the Jews by Romans or of the Church afterward by the Jews or pagan and/or papal Rome.

The Reformation Period

Beyond the Catholic circle, historicism with or without repetition had a major impact on the Reformation period. Martin Luther (1483-1546), the main leader of the Reformation in Germany, summarized his views on the Revelation in his *Preface to the New Testament* where the seals announce, as Elliott put it well, “the *physical or political* evils under which the Church and world connected with it was to suffer [emphasis

⁹³De Lyra’s influence lingers on the seventeenth-century Catholic author Bartholomaeus Holzhauser (1613-1658), who interpreted the Apocalypse as a summary of world history applied and compared to Church history until the end of the world. Holzhauser viewed the seals as the description of a two-staged spiritual war between the kingdom of Christ and that of the world: first the era of the Jews and the Gentiles, then that of the heretics and the Antichrist. Close to the end of the first period, the fifth seal covers the 200 years of persecutions of Christians from the time of Trajan to Diocletian. “Wait for a little time” intimates a short delay where other martyrs must be added under the last persecutions, by Diocletian and Maximus before the church enjoys an era of peaceful rest under Constantine (*Interprétation de l'Apocalypse, renfermant l'histoire des sept âges de l'église catholique*, trans. Ignace Nicolas Wuilleret [Paris: L. Vives, 1856], 250).

his].”⁹⁴ The fifth seal, however, is approached thematically as a figure of the martyrdom of the saints amidst the continual persecution of the Church from the beginning to the End.⁹⁵

However, Francis Lambert (1486-1530), professor at Marburg, was the first Protestant to tackle the Apocalypse using its pattern as a scheme for understanding church history. Taken as partly chronological, partly thematic, he departed from Joachim slightly on the fifth seal that figures “the persecution of the saints in all ages, though their affliction by the papacy had been especially acute since the seventh and the eighth century.”⁹⁶

Representative of a Protestant adaptation of Joachimist exegesis as mediated via Lambert on the English Reformation, John Bale (1495-1563), fierce antipapist bishop of Ossory, treated Revelation as a mirror of church history in his *Image of Bothe Churches*.⁹⁷ He explained the seals septet as a prefiguration of the mysteries of the seven ages of Christ’s Church, but the fifth seal, on a more thematic rather than chronological note, figures the martyrdom of Christ’s saints through persecutions like the “Waldeans, Publicans, Albigeans” by the papal Antichrist, and at all other times since the ascension

⁹⁴Elliott, *Horæ Apocalyptice*, 4:438. Luther related the seals and the trumpets to events in church history from the beginning to the time of Mohammed.

⁹⁵Martin Luther, “Preface to the Revelation of St. John [II],” *Luther's Works (LW)*, American ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955-1976), 35:402.

⁹⁶Franz Lambert, *Exegeseos Francisci Lamberti Auenioensis, in sanctam diui Ioannis Apocalypsim, libri VII* ([Apud inclytum Hessiae Marpurgum]: [Franz Rhode], 1528), 127.

⁹⁷John Bale, *Image of Bothe Churches* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1849). W. T. Davies characterized this work as “perhaps the most important prophetic and polemic interpretation of Scripture produced by the English Reformation” (*A Bibliography of John Bale* [(Oxford: Printed for the Society at the Oxford University Press, 1940), 214]).

of Christ.⁹⁸ Until the restoration of their full tranquility by God, they have to wait patiently because more persecutions need to occur briefly before the avenging of their death.

In his *Meditations on the Apocalypse* (dated in 1587), John Foxe, famous British martyrologist, associated the first four seals with the great empires of the book of Daniel where the fifth seal is applied primarily to the martyrdom of Christians under the Roman emperors from Nero to Diocletian. Expecting a second intense wave for later, Foxe thought it would last about three hundred years under the Antichrist with a delay of one thousand years between the persecutions before Satan would be loosed for a short while.⁹⁹ Foxe's influence can be noted on the Scots mathematician John Napier (1550-1617).¹⁰⁰

Among the Zurich reformers, Theodorus Bibliander (ca. 1504-1564) dealt with the Apocalypse in his *Relatio fidelis* where he held that the seals and trumpets were successive ages.¹⁰¹ One of the innovative aspects of his approach was to link up "the opening of the seven seals to universal history from the Creation of the world until the end of time."¹⁰² Relating the seven seals to the Roman Empire and the papal (Roman)

⁹⁸Bale, *Image of Bothe Churches*, 322-323.

⁹⁹John Foxe, *Eicasmī seu meditations in sacram Apocalypsīm* (London: Geor. Byshop, 1587), 98-99. Waiting is justified by the fact that God's vengeance would come only after the future persecution where enough martyrs need to be added to complement the number of martyrs preset by divine precision.

¹⁰⁰See John Napier, *Plaine discovery, of the Whole Revelation of S. John* (Edinburgh: Andrew Hart, 1611), 139-144. He applied the seals from the time from Christ's baptism in AD 29 to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 71 where the fifth seal covers the years AD 57-64, the time of the persecutions under Nero and his successors that were about to be avenged by God in a short while.

¹⁰¹For further biographical details on Bibliander and his contribution to the scientific reaction of the Renaissance, see Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:338-339; Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, ccliv; Backus, *Reformed Readings of the Apocalypse*, 96-100.

¹⁰²Backus, *Reformed Readings of the Apocalypse*, 95.

dominion, he applied the fifth seal to the period from Constantine until the appearance of the fully matured Antichrist during the reign of Pepin III the Short and Pope Paul I in the eighth century.¹⁰³

Following Bibliander, Zwingli's disciple Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) authored a commentary in which the seals ran concurrently until the End. The fifth seal, for him, figured "the martyrdom of the saints, begun by the Roman emperors, continued by the Arians and then for above 500 years by Antichrist, and even until now."¹⁰⁴

With the dawn of the Protestant Reformation, the fifth seal became involved in the increased antipapal attacks among Protestant apologists. Much of the treatment of this text was spent on identifying the timeframe for the persecution predicted by the text. The fulfillment of the two waves of the fifth seal was connected with the harassment of the Church by pagan and/or papal Rome with the climax generally assigned to their own time viewed as part of the tribulation preceding the End.

¹⁰³Theodor Bibliander, *Relatio fidelis* (Basel, Switzerland: Oporinus, 1545), 132. Commenting on the slight change in the time frame of the fifth seal in connection with Bibliander's antimillennial views, Backus observed that this author interpreted "the *thousand years* of the chaining up of Satan as a period in the past covering some of the fourth and some of the fifth seal. Satan, far from being unleashed 'for a little while,' has been unleashed since 1070 and the time of the First Crusade" (*Reformed Readings of the Apocalypse*, 99).

¹⁰⁴Heinrich J. Bullinger, *Hundred Sermons Upon the Apocalips of Jesu Christe* ([London]: John Day, 1561), 88-89. For biographical details on Bullinger and an analysis of Bullinger's schemes see Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:339, and Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 4:442-250. Bullinger's treatment of the fifth seal includes a debate (1) on the glorious state of the souls under the safety of Christ in heaven, (2) on the issue of impatience of those saints, (3) on the Christian ethics behind the cry for vengeance and the sovereign justice of God, and (4) on the absurdity of the power of mediation ascribed to the martyrs.

The Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Jesuits and Their Successors¹⁰⁵

Rejecting the “historicist” approach, Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), a Jesuit priest of Salamanca, published his commentary based on the idea that “the Apocalyptic foresaw only the nearer future and the last things, and offered no anticipations of intermediate history.”¹⁰⁶ He treated the Apocalypse as if it were a commentary on Matt 24, making it start with the early period of the church. In fact, Ribera was not wholly futurist because he applied the first five seals to historical events from the time of the author.¹⁰⁷ The fifth seal, for him, depicted martyrs from Trajan’s persecutions who were reprimanded to be patient and to cease their cry of vengeance.¹⁰⁸

Following Ribera, Cornelius Lapse (1567-1637), Flemish Jesuit professor of biblical exegesis, contended that the seals, trumpets, and vials belonged to the future with the first beast of Rev 13 taken as the Antichrist. In the fifth seal, the souls under the altar refer to anyone who suffered martyrdom in general, not by persecuting Jews (Alcazar), but either by the Roman Emperors, or the Goths, the Arians and other heretics, or the

¹⁰⁵For extra perspective on the historical background and the character of the interpretive strategy of the counterreformation, see Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:486-489.

¹⁰⁶Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, ccxiii. About this author’s view, Froom notes that “Ribera assigned the first few chapters of the Apocalypse to ancient Rome, in John’s own time, the rest he restricted to a ‘literal three and half years’ of an infidel Antichrist who would bitterly oppose and blaspheme the saints just before the second advent” (*Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:289).

¹⁰⁷It is only from the sixth seal onwards that he saw events associated to the brief time of Antichrist at the end of the age. For discussion on his views, see Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, cclv; Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 4:481-483; Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:490; and Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 61-62.

¹⁰⁸Francisco de Ribera, *In Sacram B. Ioannis Apostoli & Euangelistae Apocalypsin Commentarii* (Lyon [Lugduni], France: Ex officina Iuntarum, 1593), 146-154. He related the first five seals to the time from the establishment of the Church by the Apostolic preaching to Trajan’s reign.

Turks and the Saracens.¹⁰⁹ They are asked to wait for a little while until the completion of the number of their brothers who would be killed by the Antichrist right before the end.

Also adopting Ribera, Manuel de Lacunza (1731-1801), Jesuit priest from Santiago who was influential in the development of nineteenth-century beliefs in an imminent Millennium,¹¹⁰ saw the object of the first four seals as the removal of Paganism that led to the rise of the apostasy which had been leavening the church from the start until gradually overpowering it entirely. Being an ecclesiastical event, this apostasy is only mentioned incidentally as the subject of the fifth seal but is fully described under the sea beast and the lamb-like “beast which wrought miracles in his presence, their common period being forty and two months.”¹¹¹

Luis de Alcazar (1554-1614)¹¹² was a Spanish Jesuit who pioneered a reading of the Apocalypse linking most of its prophecies to events in the early Church and to the activities of the Antichrist as already fulfilled in the past.¹¹³ If we take the book as a

¹⁰⁹Cornelius Lapidus, *Commentaria in Acta Apostolorum, Epistolas Canonicas, et Apocalypsin* (Lyon [Lugduni], France: Iacobi and Matthaei Prost, 1627), 121. Like Ribera, he referred the first five seals to the entire life of the church until the future time of the antichrist which is described in the sixth seal right during the period immediately preceding the end of history. The martyrs' cry is interpreted as a prayer of vengeance petitioning God to put an end to their suffering and judge their persecutors.

¹¹⁰For an appraisal of Lacunza as a key link in the chain of interpreters of Bible prophecy who saw human history inexorably leading to the glorious return of Christ, see Alfred Vaucher, *Une célébrité oubliée: Le P. Manuel de Lacunza y Díaz (1731-1801)* (Collonges-sous-Salève, France: Fides, 1941; 2nd ed. revised under the title of *Lacunziana: Essai sur les prophéties bibliques*, 1968).

¹¹¹Manuel de Lacunza, *Coming of Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, trans. E. Irving (London: L. B. Seeley, 1827), 1:26. The two witnesses, viewed as moral bodies, are the source for the second round of martyrs who would join in with the ancient martyrs and complete the number of joint-heirs of the kingdom.

¹¹²Luis de Alcazar, *Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi* (Antverpiæ, Netherlands: Apud Ioannem Keerbergium, 1614).

¹¹³See Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 63; M. Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:389.

continuous and connected work, with chaps. 5-11 focusing on the conflict of the Church with the Synagogue, he referred the first five seals to the victories of the Church until the fall of Jerusalem as represented in the sixth.¹¹⁴ The fifth seal refers to the cry of martyrs killed by the Jews and “wait for a little while” is a rebuke for patience and to abstain from their vengeance cry.

Among those who followed Alcazar, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), a Dutch theologian and jurist who used “objective” philological, historical and archaeological tools to explain the Apocalypse, viewed “the persecuting Jews and persecuting heathen Rome as the main objects of chapter iv-xix.”¹¹⁵ He interpreted the seals as God’s decree against the Jews for the period lasting from Christ to the Jewish war where the fifth seal represents the martyrs who were first slain in Judea—Stephen, James, and others.¹¹⁶

Henry Hammond (1605-1660), Anglican scholar, also treated the seals as the fulfillment of Christ’s prediction concerning the Jews in Matt 24. He related the fifth seal to “the great persecutions and slaughters of the Christians wrought by Jews, added to their crucifying of Christ, provoked God’s vengeance on them, which should shortly be

¹¹⁴For the rest of his scheme where chaps. 11-19 are applied to heathen Rome and carnal and worldly powers; chaps. 20-22, to the final conquests to be made by the church, and also to its rest, and its ultimate glorification, see M. Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:388. Alcazar discriminated between two groups of Jews in the seals where the first four represent the conversion and happiness of the Jews who believe in Christ and the last three depict the unhappiness and punishment of Jews rebelling against Christ.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 1:390. For other details on Alcazar’s views, see Froom, *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 2:506-509.

¹¹⁶Hugo Grotius, *Hugonis Grotii annotationes in Vetus & Novum Testamentum* (London: impensis Jos. Smith, Guil. Mears, Jos. Pote, & N. Moody, 1727), 413. The martyrs’ setting is the altar of burnt offering in heaven and the end of the little season awaits the completion of their number from further persecutions of Christians by the Jews.

poured out in fury, then still going on to slay more.”¹¹⁷

Jacques B. Bossuet (1627-1704), an eminent French Roman Catholic author, applied the seals to the triumph of Christianity over the Judaism and Paganism of the Roman Empire where the fifth seal is simply disclosing persecutions of Christians in general. The “wait for a little while” indicates God’s desire to warn the saints about three things: “le délai de la vengeance, la brièveté de ce délai, et les raisons de son conseil éternel.”¹¹⁸ Revelation 7, for him, explained the cause of this delay and how the number of elect is to be fulfilled.¹¹⁹

Later writers who have been influenced by Alcazar through Grotius and Bossuet include: J. J. Wettstein (1693-1754), a New Testament critic from Basel,¹²⁰ and Johan G. von Herder (1744-1803), a poet and literary critic. Wettstein provided helpful rabbinic sources behind the fifth seal and suggested that the polemic of the text is an “*accusatio Judaeorum, qui discipulos Christi vexaverant.*”¹²¹ Herder viewed the fifth seal as an outburst of the Christian martyrs amidst the confusion and blood from the judgment

¹¹⁷Henry Hammond, *Paraphrase and Annotations Upon All the Books of the New Testament*, new ed. in 4 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1845), 4:48.

¹¹⁸Jacques Bossuet, “Apocalypse avec une Explication,” in *Oeuvres complètes de Bossuet, évêque de Meaux*, ed. Jacques Bossuet (Paris: Lefèvre, 1856), 1:431. His Apocalyptic commentary (1660) was produced to counteract the influence of Protestant works by relating the prophecies of the Apocalypse to the first five centuries of the Church’s existence. On the purpose of the delay, he suggested that the total number of his martyrs must first be completed and the elect taken out from the infidels, wherever they might hide.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 432.

¹²⁰For more details about Wettstein’s approach, see Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, cclix.

¹²¹Johann Jakob Wettstein, “Αποκαλυψις Ιωαννου θεολογου,” in *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Amsterdam: Ex officina dommeriana, 1752; reprint, Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1962), 2:774. He divided the Apocalypse into two parts whereby the first one (chaps. 6-11) deals with Judea and the Jews and the second with the Roman Empire (12-22). The seals are interpreted as a figure of the fate of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. For him, the “souls under the altar” were Christians in Judea who were persecuted, and were about to be vindicated.

scenes of the other seals.¹²² However, the righteous vengeance is delayed by the judge because the timing for the Judgment Day is not yet ripe. The delay awaits the number of the fellow-brothers, the measure of sin, and the blood of martyrs to be filled.

In the Counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, because the first five seals referred to the early first centuries and the coming of the end related to a distant future, the kingdom expectation was weakened in the exegesis of the fifth seal for that time. “Wait for a little while” was simply relegated to a warning of a delayed vengeance that was justified by an appeal to God’s eternal decrees. Others appropriated the idea of a reprimand to be patient and to cease the cry for vengeance.

The Post-Reformation Period

On the Reformed side of the post-Reformation period, the antipapal theologian Nicolas Colladon (died 1586), close associate of Calvin, published a commentary showing the enduring influence of Joachimist exegesis.¹²³ Based on a strict parallelism between the fifth part of the seal/trumpet/bowl series and Rev 20:3-5, where the martyrs in Rev 6:9 are seen as sitting in judgment with Christ, Calladon viewed the text as the assurance of the redemption of the elect who would reach the kingdom of heaven regardless of the woes they have to endure for a short while.

¹²²Johann Gottfried Herder, *Maran atha, das Buch von der Zukunft des Herrn des Neuen Testaments Siegel* (Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, 1779), 67. In opposition to Bengel, he published his Apocalypse commentary following Wettstein’s application of the seals to the fate of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation.

¹²³Nicolas Colladon, *Methodus facillima ad explicationem sacrosanctae Apocalypseos Joannis Theologi*, 2nd ed. (Morges, Switzerland: n.p., 1584). For Colladon’s relationship to Calvin and his exegetical method and the significance of this commentary and as a fulfillment of Calvin’s long-term project of publishing his views on the Apocalypse, see Backus, *Reformed Readings of the Apocalypse*, 66-72. She also drew attention to the fact that his exegesis was “overridden by his desire to show that the visions of the Apocalypse concerned solely the excesses and the ultimate downfall of the papacy” (ibid., 74).

Responding to both the futurism of Ribera and the preterism of Alcazar, Thomas Brightman (1562-1607), an Anglican Calvinist, commented on Revelation within the church-historical tradition. He applied the fifth seal, which deals with the salvation of all martyrs placed under the benefit of Christ's death, to persecutions from the time of John to Gallienus.¹²⁴ The short rest is the temporary respite of forty years where the church on earth enjoys a quiet time and prosperity until the martyrdoms of the last pagan persecution under Diocletian.¹²⁵

Partially influenced by Joachim through Colladon, David Pareus (1548-1622), a Calvinist professor who opposed Alcazar, applied the Apocalypse (1618) to the contemporary Church, especially the papacy.¹²⁶ He referred Rev 6:9-11 to the blessedness of the martyrs slain "from Nero unto Boniface the third, the first Antichrist."¹²⁷ Under the safeguard and protection of Christ, they are depicted in white robes as a mark for glorious conquerors. For him, the delay before the avenging awaits the completion of the number of martyrs to be slain under the Antichrist.

Influential for the post-Reformation church/world historicist interpretation of Revelation, Joseph Mede (1586-1638), a professor of Greek at Cambridge, published his *Clavis Apocalyptica* in 1627, and his Commentary in 1632, built on a recapitulative reading where the different sequences of the Apocalypse overlap through history. Relating the first six seals to the successive states of the Roman Empire from the time of

¹²⁴Thomas Brightman, *Revelation of St. John* (Amsterdam: Printed by Thomas Stafford, 1644), 225. This was published posthumously in 1616.

¹²⁵See Elliott, *Horæ Apocalyptiæ*, 4:468.

¹²⁶David Pareus, *Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John*, trans. Elias Arnold (Amsterdam: Printed by C. P., 1644), 119.

¹²⁷Ibid. Paraeus limited the parallel to only between the seven seals and the seven trumpets.

Vespasian until Constantine, Mede saw the fifth seal as one of the most important persecutions of Christians begun by Diocletian. The cause of the delay is to accommodate more of their brethren to be likewise slain until revenge arrives at the sounding of the Trumpets.¹²⁸ Mede's scheme was very popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with followers like Henry More¹²⁹ (1614-1687), James Durham¹³⁰ (1622-1658), Pierre Jurieu¹³¹ (1637-1713), William Whiston¹³² (1667-1732), Isaac Newton¹³³ (1642-1727), Matthew Henry¹³⁴ (1662-1714), Charles Daubuz¹³⁵ (1670-1740),

¹²⁸Joseph Mede, *Key of the Revelation*, trans. Richard More (London: Printed by R. B. for Phil Stephens, 1643), 54. The bestowal of the white robe to the martyrs, for him, alluded to the custom of the Jewish Levitical priesthood to try to examine the candidates before admitting them into the court of priests to worship in the proper attire before the throne of God day and night.

¹²⁹Henry More taught that the wait for a little while ended when the fellow Christians were slain under Licinius, Julian and the Arians, "after which the solemn vengeance should be taken of the bloody Empire under the time of the Trumpets, though the sealed ones should be preserved" ("Revelation of St. John the Divine" in *An Illustration of Those Two Abstruse Books in Holy Scripture, the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of S. John* [London: M. Flesher, 1685], 234).

¹³⁰James Durham referred the fifth seal to all the persecutions that occurred before the edict of Constantine. This seal is not concerned with prophecy since its scope is not to point out new events in history but to lay down some solid grounds of comfort for God's people (*Learned and Complete Commentary upon the Book of the Revelation* [Glasgow: John Bryce, 1764], 281-304).

¹³¹Pierre Jurieu, *Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies*, 2 vols. (London: [n.p.], 1687), 1:49-64.

¹³²William Whiston, *Essay on the Revelation of St. John* (London: Printed for the author, and sold by John Whiston, 1744), 163.

¹³³Isaac Newton saw the fifth and sixth seals as referring to the letters to the seven churches, "for they relate to the Church when she began to decline, and contain admonitions against the great Apostasy then approaching" (*Isaac Newton's Observations on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John: A Critical Edition*, Mellen Critical Editions and Translations 2, ed. S. J. Barnett, and Mary E. Mills [Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1999], 279).

¹³⁴Matthew Henry applied the opening of the seals to prophecies regarding the church in the first three centuries from the ascension of Christ to the reign of Constantine. However, his comment on the fifth seal is thematic: "A support and consolation to those who had been and still were under great tribulation for the sake of Christ and the Gospel" ("Exposition, With Practical Observations, of the Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 4th ed. [London: Printed for J. and P. Knapton, 1737], reprinted as *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. [Old Tapan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, {197-?}], 6:1143). The delay is explained by the necessity of the fulfillment of the number of the fellow-sufferers and the filling up of the measure of the sin of persecutors.

¹³⁵Charles Daubuz saw the martyrs as sacrifices offered to God and the gift of white robes to the

Moses Lowman¹³⁶ (1680-1752), John Gill¹³⁷ (1697-1771), and William Hales¹³⁸ (1747-1831).

Dissatisfied with Grotius/Bossuet, Campegius Vitringa (1659-1722), professor at Franeker, commented on the Apocalypse where the epistles, seals and trumpets series represent successive and not contemporaneous (Mede) states and fortunes of the Christian Church from the time of John to the end.¹³⁹ He referred the seals-vision to the outward destinies of the Church from Trajan until the end of the world. The fifth seal, for him, dealt with the persecutions and martyrdoms of Waldenses, Bohemians, Albigenses and other modern martyrs during the period extending beyond 1700 unto the time closely preceding the judgment on the Antichrist as figured in the sixth seal.¹⁴⁰ The verb πληρώω

martyrs as a staged access to some new sort of service leading to full priesthood (*Perpetual Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ed. Peter Lancaster [London: Printed for the author and sold by W. Innys, 1730], 284).

¹³⁶Moses Lowman, *Paraphrase and Notes of Revelation with Annotations*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Caddell, 1773), 72.

¹³⁷John Gill, *Exposition of the Revelation of S. John the Divine* (London: Printed for George Keith, 1776), 67. The seals are viewed as “pledges of what God would do in the destruction of Rome Papal, as here in the destruction of Rome Pagan: for these seals, at least the first six of them, concern the Pagan empire, and the state of the church in it; and are so many gradual steps to the ruin of it, and to the advancing and increasing of the kingdom of Christ; and these, with the seven trumpets, which the last seal introduces, reach from the times of the apostles to the end of time, as appears from Rev 10: 6,7” (ibid.).

¹³⁸William Hales commented on the “wait for a little while” in those terms: “The martyrs are to wait for their reward, along with the *two faithful witnesses*, to be slain in the *last woe*, Rev. 11:7-12, at the *resurrection of the just*, or *first resurrection*, Rev 20:4-6” (emphasis his) (*New Analysis of Chronology and Geography, History and Prophecy*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. [London: C. J. Gilbert & F. Rivington, 1830], 3:599-600).

¹³⁹Campegius Vitringa, *Anakrisis: Apocalypsios Joannis apostoli* (Amsterdam [Amstelodami]: Ex officina Henrici Strickii, 1729), 280.

¹⁴⁰Elliott, *Horæ Apocalyptice*, 4:506-507. Vitringa regarded the white robe as a token of their justification in heaven and is made to correspond symbolically to their justification by the church on earth: “Significatur hoc emblemante, 1st Deum intermedio hoc tempore, sua curaturum providentia, ut causa horum martyrum in Ecclesia publice justificaretur; 2nd Martyrum horum quo tempore Deus in Ecclesia causam illorum justificavit, magnam in Ecclesia fore *gloriam*. Agnoscendos enim illos esse in Ecclesia, et deprædicandos veluti consortes regni et gloriæ Christi” (*Anakrisis*, 273-274).

indicates that the fulfillment of the delay awaits the completion of the whole measure of the sufferings appointed to them.

Applying the Apocalypse to events of Church history, Johann A. Bengel (1687-1752), famous textual critic and post-Reformation theologian in Württemberg,¹⁴¹ saw the first four seals as the bloom of the imperial power and as referring to what is visible and past while the latter three refer to what is invisible. The scene of the fifth seal is applied to the blessed dead, the Apostolic Martyrs, including also the Waldenses; their plea is not motivated by a purely vindictive spirit, but out of a concern for the honor of the holiness and truth of their Lord. Taking a “Chronus” as equal to $1,111\frac{1}{9}$ years, he applies the little season to the period from A.D. 98 to A.D. 1209 “when to the *Martyrs* under *heathen Rome* were added to those under the *Romish Papacy* [his emphasis].”¹⁴²

Among early nineteenth-century historicist authors, W. Cuninghame (1775-1849), Esquire of Lancaster, applied the seals to the history of the Church rather than to the secular affairs of the Roman Empire. Revelation 6:9-11 refers to the persecutions by the papal hierarchy during the Reformation.¹⁴³ The delay marks the time between the “Reformation and the seventh Trumpet when the cries of the martyred saints are

¹⁴¹He commented twice on this book: first in *Erklärte Offenbarung Johannis* (see Johann Albrecht Bengel, *Bengelius's Introduction to His Exposition of the Apocalypse*, trans. John Robertson [London: Sold by J. Ryall and R. Withy, 1757]); and in *Gnomon of the New Testament* (see Johann Albrecht Bengel and J. C. F. Steudel, “Apocalypse,” in *Gnomon of the New Testament*, rev. and ed. Andrews R. Fausset, trans. J. Bryce [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1877], 5:172-388).

¹⁴²Bengel and Steudel, “Apocalypse,” 5:228.

¹⁴³William Cuninghame, *Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse*, 3rd ed. (London: Thomas Cadell, 1832), 20-21.

completely answered and the overwhelming judgments of God are poured forth on their enemies.”¹⁴⁴

George Croly (1780-1860), an English theologian who connected the seals to events from the settling of Christianity in the fourth century down to the end of the world, applied the fifth seal to events of his own time (after 1793).¹⁴⁵ The souls under the altar are identified as those who perished during the persecution of the preceding years, and the overall meaning of the fifth seal is “an announcement that the divine interposition must be delayed for a time . . . and that there shall even be new trials of the Church, new persecutions of the faithful in which many shall be slain.”¹⁴⁶

George S. Faber (1773-1854), English vicar, referred the first four seals to four Empires of Daniel’s visions: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome;¹⁴⁷ and the fifth seal to persecutions of Christians under the Roman emperors until their interruption by the edict of Galerius in A.D. 311. However, A.D. 604 marked the end of the peaceful interval when the saints of God were handed by the ruling powers of the Empire to the persecuting powers of the little Western horn (seen as Rome papal) in fulfillment of the second wave of persecution predicted in Rev 6:10.¹⁴⁸

As example of an early nineteenth-century preterist approach, G. H. A. Ewald (1803-1875) related the Apocalypse not to the fall of Jerusalem, but chiefly to Rome and

¹⁴⁴Cuninghame, *Dissertation on the Seals and Trumpets of the Apocalypse*, 23.

¹⁴⁵George Croly, *Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1838), 74.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷George S. Faber, *Sacred Calendar of Prophecy*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London: W. E. Painter, 1844), 2:202-205.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 2:225.

the Pagan Emperors. For him, the fifth seal depicted the result of persecutions from the previous seals which had been especially destructive to Christians, such as already causing many martyrs to fall under them.¹⁴⁹

From a perspective similar to the kingdom-historical method, Moses Stuart (1780-1852), professor at Andover, focused his commentary (1845) on “the great and leading concerns of the church, and those only.”¹⁵⁰ As part of the prophetic portion of chaps. 6-11 providing a symbolic picture of “*the humiliation and the prostration of the Jewish persecuting enemies of the Church* [emphasis his],”¹⁵¹ the fifth seal is designed to raise powerful sympathies in preparation for the final battle.¹⁵² Insisting on the inevitability of some delay before the full accomplishment of the martyrs’ wishes, Stuart recommended that special attention be given to the circumstance of this delay because of its connection to the main design of the book. Chapter 11, portraying the destruction of the two

¹⁴⁹G. H. A Ewald, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin Johannis exegeticus et criticus* (Leipzig, Germany: Librariae Hahnianae, 1828), 154-155. Viewed as a cry of vengeance to God, the martyrs’ plea is marked by a sense of urgency but they are instructed that more severe hardships are to be expected before their imminent deliverance. For him, the answer was meant to stimulate their patience until the perfecting of the number of martyrs (ibid., 156-157).

¹⁵⁰M. Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:203. He viewed the organizing principle of the book’s message around three distinct catastrophes (1) The fall of Jerusalem, in chaps. 6-11, (2) the fall of Nero, and ultimately, of Pagan Rome in chaps. 12-19, and (3) the overthrow of God and Magog at the end of the millennium, in chaps. 20-22:5. In his special introduction to chaps. 6-11, he defended the idea that “the prophetic portion is all *symbolical picture*; but not such a picture as to constitute a regular history of wars and calamities. In its very nature, most of it is *generic*, and not individual and specific” (emphasis his) (ibid., 2:139).

¹⁵¹Ibid., 2:141.

¹⁵²Ibid., 2:163. And he added on the fifth seal that “the awful array, symbols of the work of destruction about to be accomplished, have been summoned, have taken their places, and formed the ranks of the army. Before marching into the battle their ardor is now to be excited. In accordance with the design of rousing up powerful sympathies on such an occasion, the persecuted and slaughtered Martyrs are presented, lying covered with blood at the foot of the altar where they have been sacrificed, and crying aloud to the God of Justice to take cognizance of their wrongs and vindicate their cause” (ibid., 2:159).

illustrious slain witnesses, is viewed as the *terminus ad quem* of the delay.¹⁵³

W. M. L. de Wette (1780-1849) also treated the Apocalypse as totally unrelated to the fall of Jerusalem and referred it primarily to Rome and the Pagan Emperors.¹⁵⁴ The fifth seal is applied primarily to the martyrs of Nero's persecution, but may include both the past martyrdom of Stephen and James by the Jews and, proleptically, those from future persecution of Christians.¹⁵⁵ Wait for a little while is viewed as a rebuke to the martyrs to abstain from their vengeance cry, to be quiet and wait until their career might be completed, or that they might be completed in the sense of finishing life, or of moral perfection.

Adam Clarke (ca. 1762-1832) viewed the seal as part of the images from chaps. 6-11 depicting "the calamities which should fall on the enemies of Christianity and particularly the Jews . . . as well as the preservation of the Christians under those calamities."¹⁵⁶ The fifth seal is unrelated to any new event but serves to "comfort the

¹⁵³M. Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2:145. Chap. 11 is taken as the critical point where the cry for vengeance is meted out in fulfillment of what was predicted in chap. 6 concerning the other martyrs.

¹⁵⁴See Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, cclx.

¹⁵⁵Wilhelm M. L. de Wette, *Kurze Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis*, Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Neuem Testament 3/2 (Leipzig, Germany: Hirzel, 1862), 91. In accordance with Rev 8:3, he apprehended the setting of the fifth seal as the altar of incense because they are awaiting the hearing of the prayers which are offered with the incense. Nuancing between the fellow servants and their brothers from the future martyrdoms, de Wette suggested "das Eine die Bezeichnung des Christen dem gemeinschaftlichen Verhältnisse zu Christo, das Andere der christlichen Gemeinschaft nach" (ibid., 93).

¹⁵⁶Adam Clarke, "Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The New Testament of Our Lord and Savior Jesus-Christ*, ed. Adam Clarke and Daniel Curry (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 2:592. He attributed the reason why the martyrs became "victims of idolatry and superstition" to their attachment to Christianity.

followers of God under their persecutions, and to encourage them to bear up under their distresses.”¹⁵⁷

Representing early nineteenth-century futurism, Edward Irving (1792-1834), founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church, interpreted the first seals as judgments in revenge of the martyr’s blood subsequent to the time of Constantine, but the sixth seal is yet future.¹⁵⁸ He extended the fifth seal to portions of chaps. 11, 19, and 20 where the early fulfillment concerns the completion of an initial company of martyrs, but the ultimate accomplishment awaits another group of “fellow-servants and brethren, who are to be killed as they were” in the future. Based on chaps. 12 and 13, he referred the duration of a delay of forty-two months before the ultimate slaughter and the vengeance upon the pagan Roman despots.¹⁵⁹

Joseph Tyso treated the seals, trumpets, and vials as yet unfulfilled prophecy. He views the fifth seal as a prediction of persecutions against the Christian Church from the days of the Apostles to the start of the Millennium.¹⁶⁰ The “white robes,” for him,

¹⁵⁷Clarke, “Revelation of St. John the Divine,” 2:593. In the answer section, the white robe is taken as a symbol of purity, innocence, and triumph while the wait a little while suggests a rest until the “cup of the iniquity of the Jews would be full, they should then be punished in mass.” He added that the “little while” is the time “elapsed between their martyrdom . . . and the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans” (ibid.).

¹⁵⁸Edward Irving sees the seals as “several distinct actings of power and sovereignty, whereby Christ asserteth that right which God hath acknowledged and assumeth that possession which God and every creature hath guaranteed to the Lamb which was slain” (*Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1831], 1251-1263).

¹⁵⁹Irving put the timing of the fifth seal in perspective by asserting that “the fifth seal therefore stands at that point of time when the confederate power of the false prophet and the beast with ten crowned horns came to act in concert against the saints of the Most High: the first four seals refer to a period anterior, and joining on thereto: the last two seals are consequent upon the forty and two months during which the new form of power reaped the second company of martyrs” (ibid., 1258).

¹⁶⁰Joseph Tyso, *Elucidation of the Prophecies* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1838), 141. He found therein a description of “the sufferings of the martyrs in this world, and their happiness in the world to come: it shows also the desire of departed saints that God would interpose on their behalf” (ibid.).

referred to the departed saints' purity and the rest for a little while as a necessary delay for their fellow-servants and their brethren to join them in martyrdom during the 1260 days when the beast shall make war with the saints and shall overcome them (Rev 13:5-7).

Like Victorinus, William de Burgh (1800-1866), Irish Apocalyptic expositor, related the seals to prophecy of future events occurring only at the *parousia*.¹⁶¹ In parallel with Ezek 14:13-21 and the signs of the Lord's coming in Matt 24, de Burgh suggested that the fifth seal marks an intensification of hostility against God's people, which explains why Christ switches to "extraordinary" weapons to avenge the blood of his people on the great day of his wrath as seen in the sixth seal.

James H. Todd (1805-1859) also took the seals as an exact fulfillment of the Lord's end-time prophecy of Matt 24. In accordance with the predictions of Daniel and St. Paul, the fifth seal becomes a prophecy of a grievous persecution of the Church occurring actively at the period of Christ's Second Advent.¹⁶²

Like the earlier Protestant Reformers, the post-Reformation authors used the fifth seal quite often in their apology against the Pope. They also interpreted their suffering as the sign that they were living in the end time. Paradoxically, while reacting against authors of the Counter-Reformation Roman Catholic Church, some of the Protestant

¹⁶¹William de Burgh, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Dublin: Richard Moore Tims, 1839), 150. The opening of the seals is interpreted as the expected judgment acts of Christ against the kingdoms of this world when "he takes to himself his great power to reign" (Rev 11:17) and claims his inheritance (ibid.).

¹⁶²James H. Todd, *Six Discourses on the Prophecies Relating to Antichrist in the Apocalypse of St. John* (Dublin: printed at the University Press, 1846), 103. This period of future persecution "will last but a short time only before the last great effort of the enemy, in which the number of the martyrs shall be fulfilled, which shall be immediately followed by the day of Christ" (ibid., 106).

exegetes ended by adopting the ideas of their opponents. Those also referred the application of the first wave of persecution of the fifth seal to the first-century Roman persecution, while the second phase and the coming of the end was referred to a distant future.

Summary

In summary, the twelfth century witnessed a paradigm shift from the earlier ecclesiastical applications to the apocalyptic themes of Christian symbolism that significantly impacted authors from the Reformation. Under the influence of Joachim, many commentators in pre- and Reformation times tended to give to the historical events of their own day an eschatological connotation or dimension, but apologetic concerns more often than not obscured the exegesis of the seals as a whole. Even in the Counter-Reformation reaction, the eschatological content of the seals kept being accounted for by some either as a reflection of the experience of the author and the original audience or as referring to distant future events associated with the end of the world.

Various views on the historical fulfillment of the fifth seal included (1) the oppressing events of their time for historicists where the Protestant version saw papal Rome as the persecuting Antichrist, (2) the early persecution of Jews by Romans or Christians by the Jews, or pagan Rome for Preterists, whereas, (3) Futurists tended to refer the second wave of persecution to the future period right before the coming of Christ. Commentators viewed the role of the seal as edification for God's followers to encourage faith and endurance in troubled times or to raise powerful sympathies in preparation for the final battle (Stuart). "Wait for a little while" was taken as the notice of a delayed vengeance with justification for God's eternal decrees (Bousset). Others

(e.g., Ribera, Alcazar, de Wette, et al.) saw a reprimand to be patient and to cease their cry for vengeance.

Explanations about the post-delay events included further persecutions by Diocletian before an era of peaceful rest for the Church followed the victory of Christianity over paganism under Constantine (Alexander and de Lyra) or by papal Antichrist (Bale). The martyrdom would be ended shortly after the completion of the elect (Bullinger) or the sounding of the trumpets (Mede) or the completion of the number of martyrs by other victims of the Antichrist right before the end (Lapide) or from further persecutions of Christians by the Jews (Grotius). The fulfillment referred to the number of elect as revealed in chap. 7 (Bossuet), or the number of fellow-brothers, or the measure of sin and the blood of martyrs (Herder), or the whole measure of the sufferings appointed to martyrs (Vitranga), or to the completion in the sense of finishing life, or of moral perfection (de Wette). Some were even specific about the length of the little while: forty years (Brightman), 1,000 years (Foxe), $1,111\frac{1}{9}$ years (Bengel), and forty-two months (Irving).

The Fifth Seal in the Critical Readings of Revelation Since 1850

The dawning of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on the importance of logic and reason led to doubts on the reliability of prophecy, the authenticity of the Apocalypse, and the reality of biblical eschatology as a whole. Issues related to the source traditions behind Revelation took precedence over exegetical methodology.¹⁶³

¹⁶³Commenting on this trend, Bauckham asserted that “the source-critics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who divided Revelation into a number of disparate sources incompetently combined by an editor, could do so only by crass failure to appreciate the specific literary integrity of the

Two of the three historically focused readings, the preterist and futuristic methods, flourished but historicism struggled during the last one hundred fifty years. This period saw the emergence of the idealist approach and the rise of eclecticism characterized by diverse blending of the systems of interpretation.¹⁶⁴

Church and World Historical Methods and the Later Developments

During this period, the scholarly use of the church and world historical method declined, mostly due to its inability to relate to the original audience and to the lack of agreement among its practitioners on the historical application of the different plagues. After its demise came an attempt to salvage the method through the kingdom-history approach that refers the visions of the Apocalypse to a prediction of the great epochs in history from the viewpoint of the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom.¹⁶⁵

Using a world/church historical method with an antipapal bias, E. H. Elliott (1793-1875), professor at Trinity College in Cambridge, viewed the seals as revealing the coming temporary prosperity and then the decline and fall of the heathen Roman Empire from A.D. 96 to 395.¹⁶⁶ For the fifth seal, from the perspective of prophecy, he found a prefiguration of some notable era of Christian martyrdoms caused by the Romans,

work as it stands" (*The Climax of Prophecy*, ix-x).

¹⁶⁴One should also note the fresh contribution of the social sciences and literary criticism to the interpretation of the Apocalypse during this period. Given the breadth of its scope and variety, a truthful presentation of this approach cannot be attempted in this short survey, but the insights that are pertinent to the understanding of the fifth seal will be noted in the assessment chapter.

¹⁶⁵For a historical context behind the birth of this method, see Wainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 135-136.

¹⁶⁶Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticae*, 1:119-121.

whereas on the level of history, it relates to the persecution under Diocletian from A.D. 303 to 312.¹⁶⁷

From a kingdom-historical perspective, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802-1869), Lutheran biblical exegete, treated the seals visions as different preliminary phases of the Lord's judgment against a hostile world but in favor of his church. Seen as a purely poetical description, the setting of the fifth seal is described as part of "*such catastrophes as bring in view the final judgment on the world, and in connection with that the glorification of the church* [emphasis his]."¹⁶⁸ Specifically, the text is applied not only to martyrdoms under Nero and Domitian, but also to other suffering "amid the approaching catastrophes of the Roman dominion."¹⁶⁹ "Wait for a little while" is viewed as resting in blessedness until the fulfillment of the delay pointed out in Rev 10:6, 7.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷Elliott, *Horæ Apocalypticæ*, 1:207-209. On the timing of the final avenging and reward, he debated the authenticity of the adjective in the phrase "yet a little season" because the delay ended being longer "according to the standard by which it might be measured" (ibid., 1:232). The significance of the delay is tied to the completion of another and different series of martyrs about to be slain under the Antichrist (ibid., 1:233).

Albert Barnes (1798-1870), an eminent American Presbyterian expositor, closely followed in Elliot's footsteps (*Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Book of Revelation* [New York: Harper, 1859], xxxix). Like Elliott, he referred the fifth seal to the persecutions of the Roman Empire, "particularly in the time of Diocletian, AD 284-304:—the last of the efforts in the pagan world to extinguish the Christian name" (ibid.). Waiting for a little season simply suggests that a delay is necessary for other events to occur before vindication happens after all the number of martyrs was complete.

¹⁶⁸Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St John: Expounded for Those Who Search the Scriptures*, 2 vols., Clark's Foreign Theological Library 22 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1851), 1:320. He understood τὰς ψυχὰς as the murdered animal souls which according to Gen 9:5 are in the blood. In his emphasis on the preliminary nature of the seals, Hengstenberg defended that the "how long" motif in the cry of the martyrs amounts to a call for powerful immediate actions against the Roman Empire according to the prophet's inquiry and expectation (ibid., 1:321).

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 1:325. Before the final judgment on the enemies of the kingdom of God, a delay is introduced in the vision and ends "when the world, through the continued persecution of the church, had filled up the measure of their sins" (ibid., 1:321).

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 1:331. On the purpose of the delay, Hengstenberg opted for the easier reading πληρώσωσιν and supplied τὸν δρόμον (Acts 20:22-24; 2 Tim 4:7) to signify that God's servants should complete or fulfill "their course or their work."

Among eschatological adaptations of the church historical method for this period, Isaac Williams (1802-1865), top member of the Oxford movement, claimed Victorinus saw the seals septet as an “emblematic history of His [Jesus’] victory on earth” from his enthronement in heaven until the last days. He allowed for a double fulfillment for the martyrs’ cry: first by the Lord avenging the martyrs in the destruction of Jerusalem and then on the Day of Judgment regulated by the end of the world at his imminent second coming. On the duration of the delay, he suggested that the “rest for a little season” may be “till the end of the thousand years of Rev 20:5.”¹⁷¹

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885) saw the seals as a prophecy of the seven ages of the Christian Church from the first Advent of Christ to the end of the world.¹⁷² The fifth seal disclosed, for him, the blessed condition of the faithful departed in Paradise (Luke 23:43). The imagery of this vision, for him, was derived from the sacrificial service of the Temple (Exod 40:29, Lev 4:7, 8:15, and Isa 29:1) and the purpose of the delay was for the accomplishment of the number of the other martyrs.

In that vein, Johann P. Lange (1802-1884), German Protestant professor, viewed the seals (ca.1874) as seven fundamental forms of the world’s course on earth where the fifth refers to the “*Martyr-history* of the kingdom of God as the core of *World-history* [emphasis his].”¹⁷³ He believed the martyrs’ plea calls for the final judgment to

¹⁷¹Isaac Williams, *Apocalypse: With Notes and Reflections*, New ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1889), 96.

¹⁷²Christopher Wordsworth, *New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus-Christ, in the Original Greek*, 2nd ed. (London: Rivingtons, 1872), 2:188-193.

¹⁷³Johann Peter Lange, *Revelation of John* [microform], trans. Evelina Moore, enlarged and ed. E. R. Craven (New York: Charles Scribner, c. 1874), 163.

anticipate their vindication before the whole world. The purpose of the delay is to fill up the full number of the elect.

Combining the Church-historical and the Symbolic-historical approaches, Henry Alford (1810-1871), Dean of Canterbury, applied the openings of the seals “to the various arrangements of God’s providence, by which the way is prepared for the final opening of the closed book of His purposes to His glorified Church.”¹⁷⁴ Like Victorinus, he saw the first four unsealings as preparatory acts (signs or judgments) and procedures whereby Christ establishes his reign on earth prior to the *parousia*, while the fifth contains the longing for consummation of martyred saints who cry “for vengeance, as blood is often said to do.”¹⁷⁵ In his opinion, the seven trumpets “occur during the time of waiting” mentioned in the fifth seal.¹⁷⁶

As a later development of this methodology, Richard C. H. Lenski (1864-1936) applied the visions of Revelation to the history of Christianity in the world until the last

¹⁷⁴Henry Alford, “Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου,” in *The Greek Testament: With a Critically Revised Text*, vol. 4, pt.2, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co., 1866), 612. He took the seals “to be contemporaneous, and each of them to extend through the whole life-time of the Church,” although he admits “that they may receive continually recurring, or even ultimate fulfillments, as the ages of the world go on, in distinct periods of time, and by distinctly assignable events.” *ibid.*, 4:618. For an analysis of his methodology, see R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse*, 55. Alford is closely followed by C. J. Vaughan (1816-1897) who viewed the seals as “predicted troubles amidst which and in which is to be heard the cry of creation for the coming of the Lord Jesus, amidst which the Church of Christ is invited to see by faith the controlling hand of God,” where the fifth seal introduces the sign of martyrdom (*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John* [London: Macmillan and Co., 1865], 205).

¹⁷⁵Alford, “Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου,” 4:619. “The cry of the martyrs’ blood has been ever going up before God since Stephen fell: ever anon, at some great time of persecution, it has waxed louder: and so on through the ages it shall accumulate and gather strength, till the issue of Luke 18:1ff is accomplished” (*ibid.*, 4:620). He saw the cry fulfilled in the judgment of the trumpets which is to be delayed for awhile. Meanwhile the delay is meant for God’s elect to be gathered out of the four winds and the complete number sealed before the judgments invoked by the martyrs descend on the earth, the sea, and the trees. “Wait for a little while” signifies that they individually rest in blessedness though their collective cry for vengeance is not yet answered.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 4:631, 665.

day in a synchronic interrelationship.¹⁷⁷ He saw the martyrs as coming neither from the OT nor from the Great Tribulation, but from the time of Stephen until the time of John's vision, while including also their successors at the end of time. Favoring a numerical fulfillment, Lenski saw it as the will of God that "so many [martyrs] . . . attain the high distinction of a bloody death."¹⁷⁸

From a theological-historical perspective, George B. Caird (1917-1984) believed that Revelation views history figuratively where the impending historical crisis was in reality the persecution of the church and not the end of the world.¹⁷⁹ For him, "prominent among these martyrs would be those who had died in the persecution of Nero, but all others are included from Stephen to Antipas. Perhaps John meant to include the martyrs of the Old Testament."¹⁸⁰ His preferred meaning on the fulfillment clause of v. 11 was that "the death of the martyrs is the means by which God is to win his victory over the powers of evil, and only total victory can bring about the consummation of God's purpose."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷Clarifying the synchronic approach, Richard C. H. Lenski stated that "what the visions reveal runs parallel to a great extent. This is the case with regard to the first five seals, the sixth takes us to the end which may come at any moment. One vision may reach far back, another may concentrate on the end. Dates are not revealed, are not to be sought" (*Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* [1943; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963], 216-217).

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 235-236. For him, "it was forty years after Christ's death before the Jewish nation was destroyed; Stephen's martyrdom was not enough" (*ibid.*).

¹⁷⁹Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 12. However, he believed the description of the historical events is made with the use of an eschatological language in order to give more theological depth and urgency to the present crisis.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*, 87. The other two possible meanings discarded by Caird are "that God has a limited number of vacancies in heaven, which he has determined to fill up with martyrs, and that the End will come when the full tally is made up; that salvation is here regarded as a corporate experience, so that John and his contemporaries could say about the martyrs of the past what the author of Hebrews said about the saints of the Old Testament—'only in our company were they to reach perfection' (Heb 11:40)" (*ibid.*).

Exemplifying a recent church-historical application, Jon Paulien referred the unsealings of chap. 6 to “events on earth from the cross to the Second Coming, with particular focus on the gospel and the experience of the people of God.”¹⁸² Drawing a parallel between the fifth seal and the great tribulation of Matt 24:21-22 in the Synoptic Apocalypse, he considered that it “fits well with the great persecutions of the Middle Ages and the conclusion of the investigative judgment. The end has been delayed. The gospel task is not yet complete when this seal draws to a close.”¹⁸³

Proponents of the approach had difficulty agreeing on the nature and historical application of the event in the fifth seal. The theories regarding the timing of the persecution ranged from the time of Nero, Domitian, Diocletian, the Middle Ages, or even the End.¹⁸⁴ However, the lack of consensus also affected the reliability of the school’s eschatological views on the fifth seal. Here again, the eclecticism of the period under review reveals how historicist authors also used a mixture of elements from different methods in their interpretation of the significance of the delay.

¹⁸²Jon Paulien, “Seven Seals,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 1:226. He viewed the seven seals as dealing “with the ongoing period in which God’s people are in the process of overcoming” (ibid., 1:203).

¹⁸³Ibid., 1:226. Commenting further on the significance of this parallel between the seals and the Synoptic Apocalypse, Paulien stated that the former described “the entire Christian Age, not just its end-time” (ibid., 1:225). For another prophetic application of the fifth seal to a heavenly judgment scene, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *Le cri du ciel: Etude prophétique sur le livre de l’Apocalypse* (Damarie-lès-Lys: Vie et Santé, 1996), 93-96; and “Revelation,” *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 7:778.

¹⁸⁴See John Court who commented on “the arbitrary manner in which the age precipitating the final crisis is identified with the age of the interpreter” (*Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], 8).

Spiritualizing Methods

Frustrated by the three historically-based methods, many nineteenth-century scholars looked to symbolism, allegory, and typology for an alternative method of interpretation of Revelation known as the “idealist” approach. The method refers the symbols in the Apocalypse not to historical events, but to timeless spiritual truths or to an ongoing struggle between good and evil during the church age until the *parousia*.

From a symbolical-historical perspective, William Milligan (1821-1893) treated the Apocalypse as defining moments in the struggle between light and darkness in church history. Applied to the beginning of the Christian era, the fifth seal, for him, marked a critical transition “from the material into the spiritual, from the visible into the invisible world.”¹⁸⁵ He took the martyrs as coming neither from the present nor the future but from the past, and they were “not of Christianity, but of Judaism.”¹⁸⁶

David N. Lord (1782-1880) interpreted the first four seals as different classes of ministers, while the fifth seal disclosed the “views and feeling with which the martyrs pass into the invisible world, and their justification and admission to rest till the domination of antichrist shall reach its close.”¹⁸⁷ In that vein, James Wells (1838-1924) built on a structural parallel with Zech 6 and strove to find the meaning of the seals vision in the blessings of the gospel powers. The martyrdoms in the fifth seal, for him, resulted

¹⁸⁵Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, 96.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., 102. He believed that the martyrs when they died “were not made perfect, they passed rather into a holy rest, where they waited until, like Abraham, who ‘had rejoiced that he should see Christ’s day,’ they saw it and were glad.” The little time of v. 11 referred to “the interval between the moment when the souls were spoken to and that when the killing of their brethren should be brought to a close” (ibid., 98).

¹⁸⁷David N. Lord, *Exposition of the Apocalypse* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), 153. He judged that there is insufficient evidence to locate the beginning and end of the time frame for this seal but “the whole representation, however, indicates that it is late in the reign of the antichrist” (ibid., 157).

from rejecting all human tradition and the resolve to stand for the word of God alone while the delay awaited further persecution by papal Rome.¹⁸⁸

Based on parallels with Ezek 14 and Matt 24, William Lee (1815-1883), professor from Dublin, saw the seals as proclaiming God's judgments on the ancient Church. The first four seals visions, for Lee, did not refer to "any series of *successive* events, past, present, or future; although each of them may be *applicable* at different periods of history, particular events, and may admit of recurring fulfillments [emphasis his]." By contrast, the fifth pointed onward "to the great theme of the Apocalypse, the Lord's Coming; it adds to the groans of Creation the sighs of the martyred Saints."¹⁸⁹

More recently, Paul Minear viewed the primary target of the seals' judgments not as the Church's persecutors, but Christians who are faithless to their vocation. Comparing with the first four seals taken as a collage of traditional apocalyptic symbols, Minear found that the remaining ones dwell instead on the specific situations faced by the Asian congregations.¹⁹⁰ For him, the fifth seal then "reflects the same ordeals which had been set forth in the letters to the Asian congregation, the apparent frustration of those

¹⁸⁸James Wells, *Twenty-four Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: R. Banks and G. J. Stevenson, 1879), 84-88.

¹⁸⁹William Lee, "Revelation of St. John the Divine," *The Holy Bible According to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611)*, ed. F. C. Cook (London: John Murray, 1881), 12:576. The whole vision was meant to restrain their too ardent hopes and they were instructed to rest in heavenly peace and cease their cry as uttered in v.10 until the short delay (yet for a little while) comes to an end in Rev 10:6 (ibid., 12:578).

¹⁹⁰Paul Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Vision of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC: Corpus Publications, 1968), 74. For a review of his philosophy of history approach, see Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (1979; reprint, Naples, FL: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1986), 69-74.

who have been slaughtered as a result of their loyalty to God's saving work as confirmed by Jesus."¹⁹¹

Combining the idealist and futuristic approaches, Herman Hoeksema read the seals as historical symbols "of this present dispensation from its main aspects, the chief currents of events as they all flow toward the one great goal of all history, the perfection of the glorious kingdom of God in Christ Jesus."¹⁹² Thus the fifth seal, which encompasses the entire history of the present dispensation with an escalation at the end, does not in fact stress the martyrdom of the saints but rather presupposes it. Preferring a qualitative fulfillment, Hoeksema said that the terminus of the delay occurs when the fellow servants and brethren have fulfilled their course.¹⁹³

From an allegorical approach, Jacques Ellul studied the structure of the Revelation for its theological message and relevance to the church/world setting at the time of the writing and today. He took the seals as pictures of mixed forces driving history where the fifth underscores the crucial role of the prayer of martyrs to this effect.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹Miner, *I Saw a New Earth*, 75. He saw the interlude of 7:1-17 as God's response to both the martyrs' cry and that of their opponents. Regarding the first case, he said, "The whole chapter seven constitutes the answer to the complaint of the fifth seal, giving in detail the Lamb's reward to his faithful witnesses and closing the circle of worship which had opened with chapter 4" (ibid., 267).

¹⁹²Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!* ed. and partially rev. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 186. He thought that the fulfillment of the seals "undoubtedly must be looked upon as to a certain extent still future, and although there is a certain succession noticeable in the fulfillment of their prophecy in actual history, so that new elements enter in occasionally which have not been witnessed in the past, and besides, there is an increased clearness and vividness of their realization, nevertheless to a large extent the seals,—especially the first six—are being realized simultaneously" (ibid, 188).

¹⁹³Ibid., 230.

¹⁹⁴Jacques Ellul, *L'Apocalypse: architecture en mouvement* (Paris: Desclée, 1975), 153-170. He rejected the identification of the enemy figure with any particular city or nation and instead attributes the antagonistic imagery of Revelation to mere general collective human realities (ibid., 158).

Reviving the purely ahistorical approach, Eugenio Corsini viewed the first four seals as “an allegory of the spiritual history of man before the coming of Christ.”¹⁹⁵ After the four associated with the creation and fall of humanity, the fifth seal deals with the salvation of the just ones from the Old Economy before the events surrounding the death of Christ as depicted in the sixth seal.

Blending spiritual and contemporary-historical readings, Philip Carrington saw the seals as a kind of outline of history where “the first four seals represent the lawless spirit of man dominating creation and ruining it.”¹⁹⁶ The fifth seal, for him, referred not to Christian martyrs, but to the innocent dead in general from the pre-Christian era.

Using a modified idealism of a redemptive-historical genre, Gregory K. Beale offered an inaugurated end-time view of the events of Rev 6 that started immediately after Christ’s ascension. Among seals referring to Christ’s use of “evil heavenly forces to inflict trials on people throughout the Church age for either purification or punishment,”¹⁹⁷ the fifth is a request “for God’s vindication from deceased and glorified

¹⁹⁵Eugenio Corsini, *The Apocalypse: The Perennial Revelation of Jesus Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis J. Moloney, Good News Studies 5 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 140. He believed that Revelation was not about the end of the world or the coming of Jesus to the world at the end of time, but about the first coming of Jesus into the world.

¹⁹⁶Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 126. He later added: “The first four seals outline the domination of the world by self-will and brutal force, and exhibit history as a record of battles and conquests and plague and desolation” (ibid.).

¹⁹⁷Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 370. He saw the seals as occurring simultaneously throughout the church age, to “refine the faith of believers and punish unbelievers” (ibid., 371).

saints for the trials inflicted on them by their persecutors.”¹⁹⁸ The answer, for him, was to stimulate patience until “the sufferings [or full number] of their fellow servants should be fulfilled.”¹⁹⁹

Much of the “Idealist” method that grew out of the distrust for the historical-based methods is “somewhat more difficult to differentiate from earlier allegorizing approaches of the Alexandrians (Clement and Origen).”²⁰⁰ The approach frequently insisted on how the fifth seal expressed the ongoing problem of the struggle between good and evil. Unfortunately, by substituting a spiritual reading, this approach often tended to rob the delay in the fifth seal of its apocalyptic character.

Futurist and Eschatological Methods

For this period, the futurist approach thrived with its view of the Apocalypse as consisting of genuine prophecies and frequently assuming “that the long delay between the prophecy and its fulfillment is anticipated by the author or, at the very least, is

¹⁹⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 389. In identifying the martyrs, he stated: “Although OT saints could be included in the picture, the emphasis is on NT believers because the saints are described here as those who have been persecuted for their witness of God’s revelation as it has come in recent history through Christ. It is possible that only literal martyrs are in mind, but more likely ‘slain’ is metaphorical and those spoken of represent the broader category of all saints who suffer for the sake of their faith” (ibid., 390).

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 394. He showed that “the meaning would not be radically altered even if one of the active forms were preferred, since the general idea of a divinely determined destiny would still be implicit in the phrase ‘a little while longer’” (ibid., 395).

²⁰⁰A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:410.

allowed by the text.”²⁰¹ Eschatological readings are included here for they also treat the events of Revelation as yet to be fulfilled. Dispensationalism, a radical form of futurism, achieved great popularity during the last 150 years, when the fifth seal was inevitably at the center of the debate on the great tribulation.

A nineteenth-century representative of the approach, William Bruce (1799-1882) viewed the whole Apocalypse as a portrayal of the final “state of the Church at the time of the end . . . as it appeared, not in the natural, but in the spiritual world”; however, he applied chap. 6 especially to particular historical parts of the book that disclose the successive periods of its decline.²⁰² He inferred from the fifth seal that “the state of the church which brings such sufferings on the faithful arises from the perversion of the Word.”²⁰³

William H. Simcox (1843-1889), an English scholar from Cambridge, agreed with a continuous historical approach²⁰⁴ on the first four seals, but referred the rest to the future. The fifth seal is the prediction of an interval between great ages of persecutions of the primitive Church under the Roman emperors and those of the last days under the

²⁰¹Stephen Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos: René Girard and the Apocalypse*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2009), 33. While lumping futurist and eschatological readings together, one must keep in mind the important nuance this author makes between the two approaches: “The futurist readings have to deal with the issue of the great length of time which has elapsed between the prophecy and its fulfillment and the consequent lack of relevance of the text for its initial hearers. The eschatological interpreter, on the other hand, usually believes that the world of the text is a world in which the events of the last days have begun; the events of eschatological promise are already part of historical experience” (ibid., 34).

²⁰²William Bruce, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (London: James Speirs, 1877), 137.

²⁰³Ibid., 147. He saw the fifth seal as the direct consequence of the first four seals which discloses “the state of the church, as to its understanding of the Word, from its first and best state, when the truth was in its purity and power, to its last and worst state, when truth had lost its life of love” (ibid., 137).

²⁰⁴William H. Simcox, *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, rev. G. A. Simcox, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1890), 87.

Antichrist. The cry of the fifth seal is interpreted as the saints sharing God's desire for the triumph of righteousness over sin while at the same time resting in God's assurance that it is for a good reason that triumph is delayed.²⁰⁵

Joseph A. Seiss (1823-1904), American Lutheran scholar, treated the whole of the seals vision as judgment seals. The fifth seal, for him, depicted martyrs of future judgment times who experience the great tribulation that all preceding saints and martyrs have escaped.²⁰⁶ The martyrs are contemplated as sacrifices to God and the intense vindictiveness of their cry, which is explained by a context of the commencement of the judgment proceedings, reflects their difficulty with the delay before consummation.²⁰⁷

F. Weidner, Lutheran professor from Chicago, found the key to the seals vision in the signs of the Lord's coming of Matt 24, where the first four are parallel with the sore judgments of Ezek 14:21. "The opening of the fifth seal corresponds to the disclosure of the great tribulation which shall overtake believers in connection with the manifestation of the Antichrist."²⁰⁸ "Rest for a little while" is counted as the promise of the soon-coming judgment of the Lord upon an ungodly world, but the end is not yet because other

²⁰⁵Simcox thought the delay was to allow the martyrs from the latter group to fulfill their course (Acts 13:25) or their work (*Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 92)

²⁰⁶Joseph Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, 9th ed., 3 vols. (New York: Charles Cook, 1906), 1:350.

²⁰⁷The reason for the delay is explained to them: "Their number is not yet full, and the world is not yet ripe for its doom" (ibid., 188).

²⁰⁸Franklin Weidner, *Annotations on the Revelation St. John the Divine*, Lutheran Commentary 12 (New York: Christian Literature, 1898), 89.

faithful ones have not yet fulfilled the offering up of their lives during this period of tribulation.²⁰⁹

Arguing from a mixture of eschatological and idealist readings, E. B. Allo (1873-1945) denied any association of the fifth seal with some direct earthly event since it is meant to reveal simply “une des causes secondes, dans le monde invisible, au ciel, des événements qui ont été présagés par l’apparition des Cavaliers, et dont le résultat va être résumé par avance au sixième sceau.”²¹⁰

Exemplifying an eschatological approach, Hanns Lilje (1899-1977) regarded the testimony of the end as the essential content of Revelation or “the matter which is its heart.”²¹¹ He interpreted the seals as a prelude to the end of the world, that is, “great acts of judgment with which God introduces the end of history.”²¹² The fifth seal, treated as minimally prophetic, was taken to raise the theme of persecution borrowed from the older apocalyptic tradition. In the text, he saw the author as answering one of the most difficult questions that has troubled the Church from its earliest stage until even today in the following terms: “Two painful experiences were pressing on the heart and mind of the church, the severity of the first persecutions, on one hand, and the disquieting fact of the delay of the Lord’s return, on the other.”²¹³

²⁰⁹Weidner, *Annotations on the Revelation St. John the Divine*, 89-90. Weidner favored Bengel’s idea of two classes in the reference to fellow-servant (future martyrs from the Gentiles) and their brethren (martyrs of Israel) but admitted that this cannot be positively determined.

²¹⁰Allo suggested that “Jean voit idéalement, et d’une manière encore générale et confuse, se préparer au ciel les jugements divins, avant d’avoir la vision détaillée de leur réalisation sur la terre” (VIII-XI) (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 85).

²¹¹Hanns Lilje, *Last Book of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 8.

²¹²*Ibid.*, 124.

²¹³*Ibid.*, 128.

Strong eschatological readings may be found also in the works of Charles H. Giblin and Abraham Kuyper. Exegeting Revelation from the perspective of the apocalyptic motif of the Holy War,²¹⁴ Giblin viewed the first four unsealings “as the equivalent of ‘oracles’ . . . announcing the theme of victory and of ongoing, earthly tribulations.”²¹⁵ The fifth seal, for him, disclosed souls of the martyrs from the past and their impatient plea for vindication, and the answer comes as an interim heavenly reward and through the Holy War of the sixth seal.²¹⁶ Denying any connection between the Apocalypse and history, Kuyper referred the prophecy of all the seven seals entirely to the future, that is, to that short period immediately preceding the *parousia*.²¹⁷ That the fifth seal refers to what will immediately precede the *parousia* is proof, for him, that the four preceding seals must apply to the time of the end.²¹⁸

From a dispensationalist angle, August van Ryn stated the popular pretribulationist view: “The opening of the seals ushers in the terrible judgments to fall upon this earth after the Church has been caught up to glory, as we saw in chap. 4:1.”²¹⁹

²¹⁴Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, Good News Studies 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 29. He said the following about John’s use of the motif: “Like other biblical data, however, the thematic of the Holy War is reborn in John’s Christian perspective and according to his own creative genius” (ibid.) and added further in his conclusion, “Most important, a consistent thematic, that of God’s Holy War, pervades John’s entire composition and serves to confirm the structural unity and coherence of Revelation and to impart to it a distinctive and dominant theological emphasis” (ibid., 224).

²¹⁵Ibid., 30.

²¹⁶Ibid., 80-87.

²¹⁷Abraham Kuyper, *Revelation of St. John*, trans. John Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1935), 22.

²¹⁸Ibid., 79. The fifth seal has nothing to do with what in the course of centuries takes place on earth, but solely refers to what shall come to pass when the time of the end draws near.

²¹⁹August van Ryn, *Notes on the Book of Revelation* (Kansas City: Waltherick, 1953), 87.

He related the fifth seal to martyrs from the first half of the tribulation period.²²⁰ Taking the seals as covering “the entire seven years of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan 9:27),”²²¹ John F. Walvoord applied the fifth to those slain in the second half of the great tribulation.²²²

For R. L. Thomas, a most recent dispensational scholar, the four previous seals were events reserved exclusively for the beginning of the birth pangs (Matt 24:8), but the fifth seal referred instead to the Great Tribulation where the martyrs belong to the group to be slain during the time of trouble immediately preceding Christ’s final coming.²²³ Based on verbal similarity, he took Rev 10:6 as the end of the delay of which God informs the martyrs in Rev 6:11.

Out of a blend of futurist and preterist approaches, George E. Ladd saw the seals judgment, not as part of the great tribulation itself, but as picturing “the forces that will be operative throughout history by which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God will be forwarded in preparation for the great tribulation.”²²⁴ He referred the fifth seal to

²²⁰van Ryn, *Notes on the Book of Revelation*, 92. For similar views, see Arno C. Gaebelein, *Revelation* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” 1915), 55; Henry M. Morris, *Revelation Record* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), 118; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Revelation*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 47; Gary C. Cohen, *Understanding Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 162.

²²¹John F. Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 135.

²²²Ibid., 123. For him, “the events pictured in the seals, trumpets, vials are instead a concentrated prophecy of the latter half of this week, i.e., a period of three and one-half years, designated as a time of wrath and the great tribulation, and constituting the introduction to the second coming of Christ” (ibid.). See also Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 4th ed. (London: Pickering & Inglis, [1948]), 145.

²²³Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 413-449.

²²⁴George Eldon Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 96. On the parallel between the thought structures of the Olivet Discourse and Revelation, Ladd saw “a time of preliminary troubles marked by evils in human society and in nature (the seven seals), followed by a short but terrible time of great tribulation (the seven trumpets and bowls, and the beast)” (ibid., 98).

“Christian martyrs of every age, perhaps those of the end in particular.”²²⁵ Discussing the duration of the “little while,” Ladd thought that this is “not to be understood in a mathematical way but John knows the end is not immediately to come, but that there is to ensue a time when the church would experience further martyrdom.”²²⁶

Following Beale but with a stronger futuristic perspective, Grant R. Osborne viewed the seals as preliminary judgments on the whole world in response to the imprecatory prayers for justice and vengeance of the fifth seal.²²⁷ For him, “the Plea is specifically answered in 18: 20, ‘God had judged her for the way she treated you,’ and implicitly answered in the judgment of 6:15-17.”²²⁸ Revelation 6:11 is an “announcement to the believers that this persecution will continue until the appointed time.”²²⁹

Futurists of this period renewed with Victorinus the eschatological treatment of the fifth seal where application to the end-time tribulation is paralleled with the synoptic apocalypse.²³⁰ Although this approach presupposes the historical fact of the delayed eschaton in its hermeneutic, surprisingly, the significance of the delay of the fifth seal is

²²⁵Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 104. He explained further that “John does foresee that in the end time the beast or Antichrist will wage fierce persecution against the church, almost to the point of its destruction” (ibid.).

²²⁶Ibid., 106.

²²⁷Osborne, *Revelation*, 269-271. He saw the fifth seal as an “imprecatory prayer for vengeance . . . for one of the primary emphases in the book is *lex talionis* (the law of retribution), defending why God has to judge evil humanity” (ibid., 284). Further on the form and eschatological significance of imprecatory prayer, see Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 517-524; F. W. Bear, “Imprecatory Element in the Psalms,” *PRR* 8 (1897): 491.

²²⁸Osborne, *Revelation*, 287.

²²⁹Ibid., 290.

²³⁰With the eschatological interpretation, the persecution is read as part of the events of the last days that are taken as already begun.

addressed rather lightly. “Wait for a little while” was often referred to the short period before the end and the shortness is emphasized through the contrast of the duration of present time versus eternity.

Preterist and Contemporary Historical Approach

With the rejection of the notion of prophecy, many modern biblical critics approached the Apocalypse simply as portraying the hopes and fears of the Christians in the first or early second century. Those scholars, known as Preterists or contemporary-historical critics, hold that the major prophecies of the book were fulfilled either in the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) or the fall of Rome (A.D. 476).

Among the early nineteenth-century representatives of this approach, F. H. C. Düsterdieck (1822-1906), biblical scholar from Hannover, interpreted the fifth seal as the prophetic announcement of the Lord’s coming, which is the invariable goal of Apocalyptic prophecy.²³¹ He warned against getting too specific about the setting, source, and significance of the martyrs’ cry and their reward because the entire representation results from simply dramatizing the thought. Favoring a short delay before Judgment Day announced in the sixth seal, Düsterdieck affirmed “micron

²³¹Friedrich H. C. Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 228. John’s Apocalyptic prophecy, for him, looks toward its proper goal, i.e., the Lord’s return, in such a way that there is presented within the historical horizon of the prophet, not only unbelieving Judaism, but also antichristian heathenism, and that too, under the concrete form of Rome ruling the world (ibid., 47). In harmony with the idea of the entire book, the meaning of the fifth seal-vision lies not in the prediction of any special future event “but in that both the cry of the souls of the martyrs for vengeance on account of the shedding of their blood, and also the answer given to them, stand in most definite relation to what is even in the seal-vision the invariable goal of Apocalyptic prophecy, viz., the prophetic announcement that the Lord cometh” (ibid., 228). The “wait for a little while” means not just the mere cessation of the vengeance cry, but that they are to enjoy rest in blessedness.

chronon” as the correct reading (contra Bengel).²³²

F. D. Maurice (1805-1872), Anglican theologian, applied the historical allusions of Revelation to the state of the Roman world before the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem.²³³ However, the seals are viewed symbolically where the fifth seal is not restricted to Christian martyrs of any age, but to all who go through the kind of tragic experience anywhere in the generations before his own, or in his own, or in the later times.²³⁴

In parallel with Mark 13:9, H. J. Holtzmann (1832-1910) also applied the fifth seal to the victims of Nero’s persecution.²³⁵ Blending “die religionsgeschichtliche Fragestellung Herman Gunkels mit der traditionsgeschichtlich-literarkritischen und der zeitgeschichtlichen Deutung,”²³⁶ W. Bousset (1865-1920), Göttingen New Testament scholar, referred the prophecy of Revelation to a forthcoming decisive battle between the Christian Church and their great adversary, the Roman Emperors and Rome on the issue of the worship of the Emperor. Assuming Neronic persecution as already in the past, he

²³²This author favored this meaning because it (1) corresponded with the entire view of the Apocalypse, (2) was in harmony with its actual content, and (3) cohered well with the preceding question εως ποτε κ.τ.λ. (Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 231).

²³³Frederick D. Maurice, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1885), vi.

²³⁴Ibid., 110-111. The cry was inspired by the spirit of sacrifice, for they had not “been pleading for their own redemption, but for the redemption of the earth from its tormentors” (ibid., 111). For him, the highlight of God’s response lay in the assurance that if they waited, the answer would come. He saw the following seal as an immediate partial answer.

²³⁵Heinrich J. Holtzmann, *Evanvelium, Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes*, Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament 4 (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1908), 446-447. Reflecting the Apocalypse’s perception that some more general and severe persecutions were still to come in a near future, “wait for a little while” could indicate, for him, that the martyrs ought to cease from their cry of vengeance until the brethren and fellow servants finish their course (Acts 20:24). However, Holtzmann chose the completion of the full number of martyrs from parallels in the apocryphal writings (*4 Ezra* 4:38, *1 En* 47:4, *2 Bar* 30:2) as the preferred *terminus ad quem*.

²³⁶Otto Böcher, *Die Johannesapokalypse*, Erträge der Forschung, vol. 41 (Darmstadt, Germany: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 14.

saw the fulfillment of the prophecy of the fifth seal in the impending time of great distress, in which the number of martyrs, ordained by God, would be complete.²³⁷

Relating the content of Revelation to the historical events of the author's own day, Henry B. Swete saw the fifth seal as an interpretation of the age of persecution for the church. He asserted that "the delay is itself part of the reward" and the cause of the delay is that the victims of Nero's persecution are to be joined by those who will suffer under Domitian and other Emperors.²³⁸ In that vein, Isbon T. Beckwith also took the fifth seal as alluding to Nero's persecution and the preparation stages to the threat of Domitian.²³⁹ On the completion clause, he saw "a modification of the familiar belief that the coming of the end was conditioned on the filling up of a predestined number of the elect."²⁴⁰

From a mixture of contemporary historical, eschatological and other methods, R. H. Charles viewed the breaking of the six seals as preliminary signs of the end of the present world order, where the text is seen as adapting a preexisting tradition behind the synoptic apocalypse where a few allusions to contemporary events have been inserted.

²³⁷Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 130. The martyrs' plea is seen as a cry of vengeance arising from mixed feelings of hatred and hope with no necessary hint of any pre-Christian or Jewish influence. Rather than de Wette's moral fulfillment, he saw a numerical completion of martyrs (*4 Ezra* 4:35-36; *1 En* 47: 2-4, *2 Bar.* 30:2). On the delay, he suggested that "der Apokalyptiker erwartet ein großes und allgemeines Martyrium in nächster Zeit" (ibid.). The Martyrs have to suspend the vengeance call in patience and wait for their fellow servants and brethren who would shortly fill up the number of martyrs before the End.

²³⁸Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 91-92.

²³⁹Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 524. The martyrs' plea was attributed "not to sinful vengeance but to a yearning for the triumph of the cause of God and the coming of his kingdom," where their prayers for judgment has a recognized influence in bringing about the end-time happenings (cf. Luke 18:7) (ibid., 265, 526).

²⁴⁰Ibid., 527. He stated that "already the saints are *in part* accorded the glory of the reward of a heavenly blessedness (emphasis his)" (ibid.).

Linked with the Neronic persecution and the threat of Domitian,²⁴¹ the fifth seal, for Charles, dealt with Christian martyrdom (Matt 13:9-13; 24:9-10, Luke 21:12-18) but “instead of reproducing the stereotyped description of persecutions still to come . . . our author refers in unmistakable language to a great persecution in the past” from a heavenly perspective.²⁴²

More recently, comparing Rev 6 with Mark 13, Pierre Prigent concluded in favor of a Christian reinterpretation of Jewish apocalypses²⁴³ and dealt with the fifth seal simply as one of the very classical “signes avant-coureurs de la Fin: la persécution des fidèles (ct. Mc 13: 9; Lu 21:12).” In his application, he added the martyrs of the Old Testament to the victims from Nero’s persecution.²⁴⁴

Based on traditional Jewish and early Christian sources, David Aune took the events of the seven unsealings, excepted the fifth, as the tribulations that will introduce the end. He linked the fifth seal with Christian martyrs from Nero’s time and the delay to “the necessity of suffering in the plan of God, for more Christians must yet die before the eschaton can be inaugurated.”²⁴⁵ For him, the *quousque tandem* belonged to the context

²⁴¹R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols., International Critical Commentary 43 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 1:174-177. Commenting on the fulfillment of this seal, he concluded that this “looks back to the martyrdoms under Nero,” and anticipates a final and universal persecution under Domitian which would follow “in a little time.” In this persecution, he [John] expected the number of martyrs to be completed. Then would ensue the End” (ibid., 1:177).

²⁴²Ibid., 1:171. He thought that the “note of personal vengeance cannot be wholly eliminated from the martyrs’ prayer” and views Rev 19:2 as a description of its fulfillment (ibid., 1:175).

²⁴³Pierre Prigent argued that “ce chapitre serait à comprendre comme la réponse, en langage traditionnel, à la prière pour la venue du Christ. Cette venue est normalement précédée des signes apocalyptiques annoncés par la tradition juive” (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 3rd edition rev. and expanded, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament 14 [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000], 203).

²⁴⁴Ibid., 209-211.

²⁴⁵David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 52B (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 424.

of impatient prayers with “the common perception that too long a period has intervened between the commission of an outrage and its just recompense.”²⁴⁶

From a combination of preterist and futurist readings, Robert H. Mounce viewed the seal as “a series of preliminary judgments representing forces operative throughout history by means of which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God are being carried out prior to the end.”²⁴⁷ He dealt with the fifth seal as an explanation for Christian martyrdom. The “wait for a little while” referred to “the victims of Nero’s persecution who are about to be joined by those who will give their lives rather than pay homage to Domitian as divine.”²⁴⁸

For Ian Boxall, the fifth seal referred to the faithful of both the old and new covenants from Abel to the victims of the recent persecution by Nero, but he allowed for “the possibility that John also sees the martyrs of the visionary future.”²⁴⁹ Regarding the delay, he stated, “Indeed, an early Christian reader would probably associate such signs (as does Mark) with the imminent coming of Christ. But the end is not yet. In Revelation, Christ’s coming will be delayed for several chapters.”²⁵⁰

Arguing from a critical feminist-political interpretation and theo-ethical

²⁴⁶Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 411. He referred the fulfillment clause to the notion that a predestined number of martyrs must die before God will avenge their deaths, as found both in early Judaism and early Christianity.

²⁴⁷Robert H. Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT), rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 139.

²⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 149. He took the sixth seal as the answer to the martyr’s plea (*ibid.*, 150).

²⁴⁹Ian Boxall, *Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (BNTC) 18 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 114.

²⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 117.

assessment of Revelation, Schüssler-Fiorenza saw chap. 6:1-17 as depicting the actual situation of the churches from the perspective of the risen Christ, where the seals “reveal and highlight the true nature of Roman power and rule. . . . They function to articulate symbolically a sociopolitical critique of the imperial rule.”²⁵¹ The fifth seal, for her, was not only a “plea for vindication of those who are oppressed and slaughtered but also a plea for the vindication of God in the eyes of those who have placed their trust in God.”²⁵² She believed that the length of the short while and the day of justice depend not only on God, but on the community’s decisions for martyrdom.²⁵³

Preterists and contemporary historical interpreters have been helpful in reminding us that the fifth seal needs to have some relevance for the first-century readers. In this period for this school, the classical application to the two waves of persecution applied to Nero’s persecution as the starting point and ending with the tribulation at the time of Domitian is still quite popular. However, eclecticism again makes it hard to derive any firm pattern of interpretation for the delay in the fifth seal that could be taken as characteristic for this period.

Special Literature on the Fifth Seal

Despite the importance of the fifth seal, special literature on the text is scarce and can be reviewed rapidly in chronological order. First, Pierre van den Eynde dealt with Rev 6:9-11 as a theodicy defending the divine ability to work in and through “disorder.”

²⁵¹Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 63.

²⁵²*Ibid.*, 64.

²⁵³Choosing elsewhere NT eschatology as the proper horizon for the understanding of Revelation, Schüssler-Fiorenza saw the preoccupation of Rev 6:9-11 as “the meaning of the present situation of the community and the date of God’s judgment on those dwelling on earth” (*Book of Revelation*, 46-47).

He did mention the delay as a problem for the audience of Revelation,²⁵⁴ but only in an incidental way. Second, Feuillet connected the fifth seal to the messianic expectation of the Old Testament. The slain souls are identified as pre-Christian martyrs who had lived and died in faith because of the absence of the words “of Jesus” after “witness” and a supposed similarity of Rev 6:9 with Matt 23: 32-35.²⁵⁵ He took the “how long?” motif as “une expression d’impatience caractéristique de l’époque vétérotestamentaire, qui est essentiellement une ère d’attente,” and “for a little while” as “le peu de temps qui sépare les préparations de l’accomplissement final.”²⁵⁶ Third, Musvosvi dealt with Rev 6:9-11 for the sake of the theme of vengeance in Revelation. He interpreted this text from a covenant and theodictic perspective,²⁵⁷ but his thematic methodology leaves out much of the immediate literary context. Finally, Heil traced the interrelationships of Rev 6:9-11 with the rest of the book and concluded that the fifth seal acts as a trigger text for the plot of Revelation.²⁵⁸ He did not deal directly with the “how long?” motif because verbal parallels are missing in the textual network, but he indicated a dramatic and verbal connection between the “rest for a little while” of 6:11 and the “no more delay” of 10:6. The delay is viewed as a brief interval where “temporal restraints are placed on God’s

²⁵⁴Pierre van den Eynde maintained that “on sent la communauté décontenancée par le retard de la parousie” (“Le Dieu du désordre: commentaire synthétique d’Apocalypse 6:9-11,” *BVC* 74 [1967]: 45).

²⁵⁵André Feuillet, “Les martyrs de l’humanité et l’agneau égorgé: Une interprétation nouvelle de la prière des égorgés en Ap 6, 9-11,” *NRTh* 99 (1977): 189-207.

²⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 198-199.

²⁵⁷Musvosvi treated the fifth seal as a “legal plea for the heavenly judge . . . to retry their case and to render a verdict that will vindicate them and demonstrate the integrity of God as Lord and protector of the covenant community” (“Vengeance in the Apocalypse,” 238).

²⁵⁸Heil, “Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 229. About the status of martyred saints, he observed, “The position of the souls under the altar in heaven allows us to consider their ‘rest’ to be heavenly rest. That the souls are told to rest ‘yet a little while’ implies that they have already been resting and are not being told merely to cease their lamentful prayer” (*ibid.*, 228).

judgment and vindication of the blood of the souls.”²⁵⁹

The special literature reveals the richness and complexity of the themes involved in the fifth seal which need to be put in its proper theocentric and eschatological perspective:

1. God
2. Evil expressed by meaningless death of faithful witness
3. Unexplained delayed judgment and justice
4. Reward for faithful
5. Delay reaffirmed
6. Time of consummation expressed by the completion of faithful witness.

At first glance, those ideas belong to a theodicy through eschatology, but this topic in relation to the fifth seal has not yet received any sustained treatment in a monograph.

Summary

The pertinent results of this section may be summarized quite succinctly. During the last 160 years, the eschatological reality of crisis behind the fifth seal was acknowledged widely across the various systems of interpretation, yielding diverse results on the interpretation of the text. Generally, commentators viewed the passage either by giving to the historical events of their own day a cosmic and eschatological significance, or by treating the text as a reflection of the experience of the author and the original audience who are understood to have regarded their own time as the eschatological time, the last days, or at least as the time immediately before the last days.

²⁵⁹Heil, “Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 233-234.

Many modern commentators seemed to have struggled with the issue of the vindictiveness in the fifth seal that was interpreted as displaying a sub-Christian theology which has failed to grasp the nature of God's love and the ethical imperative of forgiveness.

A two-phase crisis in the fifth seal was frequently observed, but the attention focused more on the delimitations of the implied interim time between the two phases rather than on the delay itself. On this matter, (1) proponents of salvation-history (e.g., Feuillet, Harrington, et al.) suggested that it starts at the end of the time of Israel and reaches its climax in the time of the Church, (2) moderate futurists referred the persecutions arising right before the coming of the *parousia*, whereas dispensationalists (e.g., Gaebelien, Walvoord, Ryrie, et al.) placed the limits between the rapture of the church and the great tribulation (beginning and end of the seventh week of Dan 9:27), and (3) preterists (e.g., Charles, Mounce, Swete, et al.) proposed two waves of persecution, starting under Roman emperor Nero and reaching its culminating phase under the reign of Domitian.

Some (Hengstenberg et al.) thought that the delay ends with the seventh trumpet, based on 10:6; while others (Allo, Giblin, et al.) took 6:11 as the terminus and regarded the sixth seal as an implicit answer to the martyrs' prayer. However, Beale et al. saw the commencement of the answer later in 8:3-5 and throughout the trumpets series. Debates on the length of the "little while" persisted among the twentieth-century commentators: three and a half years (Buchanan); at least five years into the tribulation period (Henry Morris); others refuse a mathematical interpretation (Ladd). Idealist scholars (e.g., Allo, Johnson, Beale, et al.) often wrestled with the theological problem associated with the

little season as compared to the long years of waiting through history. Most commentators, however, believe that the time span for this “little while” cannot be definitely determined.

Conclusions

The principal argument of this chapter is that despite their continuing interest in Revelation, Apocalypses, and the importance of the delay in apocalyptic thought in general, scholars have so far failed to offer a consistent exegetical interpretation of the fifth seal in light of the eschatological delay. In particular, my examination shows how the dominance of outside factors such as the struggle with Gnosticism, the transformation occurring in the early martyrology literature, the spiritualizing tendencies of later church fathers, and the overdependence on a framework of ideas derived from outside sources have tended to divert the elucidation of the fifth seal away from its apocalyptic context.²⁶⁰

The range of differing interpretations of the fifth seal and its complex symbolism demonstrates the difficulty that exegetes have had in understanding this passage. The difficulty arising with the confusing historical applications led to the call for the supplementation of a theological method that can account better for the eschatological

²⁶⁰For an understanding of how issues of martyr spirituality overpowered the interpretation of Revelation, see Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:451-452; and Donald Riddle, “From Apocalypse to Martyrology,” *ATR* 9 (1926-1927): 260-280. On a more general methodological note, see Finamore who stated, “As with the historical methods, the spiritual method is over-dependent on a framework of ideas derived from a source external to the text and through which the text can be read. This might be the history of salvation, and so one would find references to Adam, his fall, the fall of the angels, the ministry of Christ and so on. On the other hand, it might be ideas about the evolution of human enlightenment, in which case the text will be allegorized in another way. The text tends to be subjected to forced interpretations so that it can be made to fit the commentators' framework; some framework is necessary but not one so rigid that forced interpretations of some of the texts details become inevitable” (*God, Order and Chaos*, 32).

function of the passage.²⁶¹ Throughout the history of interpretation, much has been said about this, but insufficient attention has been given to the connection of the fifth seal with the problem of the eschatological delay. However, the “dying of the righteous” motif as a crucial eschatological signal at the beginning and end of the fifth seal gives us not only two terminal points, but also a delay to account for.

As important as the problem of delays is for apocalypses in general, after perusing the literature, I have been unable to find any major article or monograph focusing on the question of theodicy and the theological end-time significance of the fifth seal. Two areas of research appear in need of clarification: a traditional analysis of the delay motif in the cognate literatures, and an exegetical study of the fifth seal to seize the full impact of the end-time significance of this particular text. Therefore, this dissertation, by proposing a focus on the delay to enrich the understanding of the fifth seal, closes a gap in New Testament scholarly literature.

²⁶¹Schüssler-Fiorenza argued that “all scholarly attempts to arrive at a definite one-to-one interpretation of certain passages or of the whole book seem to have failed. This failure suggests that the historical-critical paradigm of research has to be complemented by a different approach that can do justice to the multivalent character of the language and imagery in Rev” (*Book of Revelation*, 21).

CHAPTER III

STAGE SETTING FOR THE DELAY

QUERY IN THE FIFTH SEAL

As seen in the review of literature, the reading of the fifth seal has greatly suffered from the tendency to superimpose the framework of individual eschatology—that is, the fate of the individual immediately upon death—and martyrology upon a text yet found in a context exhibiting the concerns of corporate and universal eschatology.¹ It will be shown that such an approach runs into serious difficulties because of textual limitations. In accordance with the purpose of this study, the current chapter explores the discrepancy between expectations and reality as it relates to the issues of theodicy in the introductory part of the text. I will start with some preliminary textual observations about Rev 6:9-11 and then proceed to the issues related to the staging of the delay inquirers, the causes of the death, and the relevant first-century applications.

¹For divisions of eschatology (in both OT and NT criticism) according to content (e.g., national, individual and universal), and time perspective (e.g., transcendent, consistent, realized, etc.), see Carl Steuernagel, “Die Strukturlinien der Entwicklung der jüdischen Eschatologie,” in *Festschrift für Alfred Bertholet zum 80 Geburtstag*, ed. W. Baumgartner, O. Eissfeldt, K. Elliger, and L. Rost (Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 479-487; Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted: The Formation of Some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts and of the Eschatological Discourse Mark 13 par.*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 1 (Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1966), 3, 15-16; E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Eschatology of the NT,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 272-277; T. E. Vriezen, “Prophecy and Eschatology,” in *Congress Volume: Copenhagen 1953*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1953), 199-229; E. Jenni, “Eschatology of the OT,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville, Abingdon, 1962), 2:126-133; and A. Yarbro Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” 736.

Preliminary Textual Observations

As an orientation, this section deals with a quick overview of the text, and highlights the meanings of ambiguous words, phrases, and any significant points of grammar and syntax. After a translation of Rev 6:9-11, this section shifts to issues of delimitation and then offers an outline of the text into three smaller textual units. Important exegetical notes are also added to sketch a basic picture that can be used as a starting point to assess the issues in the text and identify its themes of imminence/delay.

A Translation of Revelation 6:9-11²

⁹ Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον.

⁹When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the witness which they had maintained;

¹⁰ καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· Ἔως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;

¹⁰ And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood from those who dwell upon the earth?”

¹¹ καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἑκάστῳ στολὴ λευκή, καὶ ἐρρέθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἕτι χρόνον μικρόν, ἕως πληρωθῶσιν καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτενεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί.

¹¹They were each given a white robe and told to rest yet for a short time, until both their fellow-servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were about to be slain even as they, had been completed.

Issues of Delimitations and Outline of Revelation 6:9-11

While other parts of the Apocalypse can be very complicated since boundaries sometimes become unclear within and between the later Septet series, Rev 6:9-11 is different. The location and delimitations here are rather quite straightforward. It belongs

²This translation is mine. Unless specified, the English translation comes from the New American Standard Bible for the rest of the study.

to the first cycle of vision dealing with the seven seals which starts with 6:1 and probably runs to 8:1. In the vision cycle, Rev 6:9-11 covers the opening of the fifth seal which is followed by the last two.

The scene of the fifth seal has some features that are distinct from the rest of the seals. It is not prefaced by any living creature inviting John to come and see. A change in the syntax occurs in the numbering where numeral “τὴν πέμπτην (the fifth)” comes before the substantive “σφραγίδα (seal).” Further, a change in imagery can be noted where the “horses/riders” are traded for “souls under the altar.” Thus, because of clues from both form and content, the passage can easily be delimited from its immediate context for a focus study of its meaning and function within John’s Apocalypse.

Revelation 6:9-11 describes itself in three clear parts, corresponding in this case to their verse numbering.³ The first unit or the preamble is the primary vision that covers all of v. 9. Contrary to the previous seals where John first heard the voice of one of the four living creatures calling forth a horse, he immediately introduces this portion as a visionary experience with his commonly used “I saw (εἶδον)” formula.⁴ This formula is followed by a temporal clause that indicates when John “saw.” That point in time is after

³Other structural analyses of Rev 6:9-11 that are somewhat similar to my own are: Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 387-388; Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 21 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 248-250; Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat, “Cri et attente des martyrs: place et sens de Ap 6, 9-11 dans l’Apocalypse de Jean,” in *Cieux nouveaux et terre nouvelle (Ap 21, 1): Pertinence du livre de L’Apocalypse pour l’Église d’Afrique: Actes du dixième congrès: Dakar, du 25 juillet au 01 août 2001* (Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo: Association panafricaine des exégètes catholiques, 2004), 70-71.

⁴E. Delebecque, “‘Je vis’ dans l’Apocalypse,” *RevThom* 88 (1988): 160-166; E. Delebecque, “‘J’entends’ dans l’Apocalypse,” *RevThom* 89 (1989): 85-90. See also G. K. Beale, “The Hearing Formula and the Visions of John in Revelation,” in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honor of J. P. M. Sweet*, ed. M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 167-179. For David A. DeSilva, “The author keeps the reader/hearer conscious of the oracular and visionary nature of the revelation throughout the book. Every ‘and I saw’ serves to anchor the validity of the thing seen in the One who sends visions to the prophets to warn and exhort the faithful of God” (“The Social Setting of the Revelation to John: Conflicts Within, Fears Without,” *WTJ* 54 [1992]: 284).

the Lamb has broken the fifth seal on the scroll.⁵ The rest of vv. 9-11 seems to be simply the description of what John “saw.”

Thus, leaving out the introductory clause in v. 9a (Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα), the text easily can be outlined into three parts: a section dealing with the primary vision followed by two sections organized in a simple question-answer format.⁶

1. Preamble or primary vision: slaughtered souls under the altar
 - (a) Twofold cause for martyrdom (v. 9b)
 - [1] Because of the word of God
 - [2] Because of the witness they bore
2. Question section: Martyrs’ request (v. 10a) (ἕως πότε)
 - (a) Invocation of the Sovereign Lord with two attributes
 - [1] Holy
 - [2] True
 - (b) Impatient twofold petition against earth-dwellers: (v. 10b)
Why do you delay?
 - [1] To exercise judgment and
 - [2] To avenge martyrs’ blood
3. Answer section: God’s response (v. 11)
Twofold response:
 - [1] Symbolic act: white robe given to each martyr (v. 11a)
 - [2] Statement to martyrs: Patience (v. 11bc)
Twofold exhortation to wait
 - [a] A while longer (v. 11b)
 - [b] Until the [number] of martyrs is complete (v. 11c)
(ἕως πληρωθῶσιν)Twofold enumeration:
 - {1} Their fellow servants
 - {2} Their brothers who would be slain as they were

The primary vision displays an imagery suggesting violent death to which a certain altar is associated. A twofold reason is also given for this death: διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, because of the word of God and because of the

⁵Note the aorist indicative with the temporal conjunction ὅτε which suggests that the punctiliar action of opening preceded the seeing.

⁶This outline is adapted from Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 387.

witness which they had maintained, where διὰ with the accusative carries a causal force.⁷ The imperfect active indicative form of the verb suggests a sustained testimony in the past.

Verse 10 forms the second unit. This is the question part which begins with an introduction unveiling the cry of the slaughtered souls. Not only the pitch (ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) and the note of impatience (ἕως πότε), but the whole content of the martyrs' cry (οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν) adds to the intensity of the crisis. The cry itself has a two-fold content in the form of an invocation to God, mentioning two of his important attributes followed by a petition. In turn, the twofold concern for differed justice and delayed vengeance against their oppressor identified as “those that dwell upon the earth” constitutes the content of the petition.

Verse 11 forms the third unit. This response segment is presented by the verbs “given” (ἐδόθη) and “told” (ἐρρέθη), both in the passive voice which may indicate a circumlocution for God. The response has a twofold content: a symbolic act of granting the gift of a white robe (στολὴ λευκή) and an exhortation to ἀναπαύσονται which comes from a verb that can mean “to rest” or “to cease.” Although meant to be brief, an undetermined time element is included in the wait ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν, “for a little while.” The terminus is given: until the completion (πληρωθῶσιν) of a group with a twofold listing καὶ οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν, “both their fellow servants and their brothers.”

⁷J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida suggested that διὰ is used as a marker of “cause or reason, with focus upon instrumentality, either of objects or events—‘because of, on account of, by reason of’” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (L&N), electronic edition of the 2nd ed. (1996), s.v. “διὰ”).

Summary

This basic structural analysis of Rev 6:9-11 reveals a passage consisting of three parts. The first introduces a segment of John's visionary experience, while the two other parts describe what was seen in that segment.

1. In the preamble section which sets the stage for the delay inquiry, what is seen are slaughtered souls from under an altar. The cause of their death is related to the word of God and the witness they had maintained.

2. In the question unit, the hearing section displays with great intensity the outcry of the slain martyrs pleading with God to act at once. Troubled by deferred judgment and delayed vengeance, their plea rises: "Why do you delay?"

3. The response section introduces white robes as an instant reward to each martyr and a call to wait for a little while. The *terminus ad quem* of the delay is noted: until the full number of fellow servants, brothers, and sisters is reached.

4. Although Rev 6:9-11 allows for one to draw implications in addition to what is explicitly stated, questions remain, particularly with respect to the climactic perspectives on the unstated *terminus a quo* of the delay, the reality behind the concern for the delay, the purpose of the delay and its *terminus ad quem*. I will attempt here to explore the narrative motivation for the expectation of God's judgment in the preamble.

Issues Related to the Staging of the Delay Inquirers

The fifth seal opens up in a dramatic way with "souls crying under the altar." Unfortunately, dogmatic presuppositions have crept into the treatment of the text where

its tension is attenuated by a focus on immediate glorification, instead of eschatology.⁸

To come to terms with the frustrated expectations raised by the imagery, I will deal with (1) the significance of ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, (2) the presentation of the delay inquirers, τὰς ψυχὰς, and (3) the outcry from under the altar.

The Significance of ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου

The preamble creates a special expectation for justice by staging the delay questioners based on their location, ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, under the altar.

Obviously, altars are part of the natural inventory of the Temple connected to sacrifice or prayer to God. More importantly, E. E. Carpenter and P. W. Comfort reminded us from a study of the book of Numbers that altars constitute a central element of the temple sacrificial service which was treated with the utmost respect, especially as a location where truth and justice were uncovered (Num 5:25-26).⁹

Despite the ambiguity as to which one of the two known altars is in view, burnt

⁸Wilfrid J. Harrington is typical of those who view the purpose of the fifth seal as part of Revelation's strategy to divert the reader's attention from the *parousia* to the "heavenly blessedness after death," by portraying "the immediate happiness of the martyrs" (*Understanding the Apocalypse* [Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1969], 52-53). So Ernst Lohmeyer, who insists "Dieses glut- und bluterfüllte Buch hat kein einziges Wort für die Schilderung der Leiden unter den Christen übrig, wie es spätere Martyrien haben; es kennt Leiden und Tod um des Glaubens willen nicht als eschatologische Plage, sondern nur als Verherrlichung" (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16 [Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926], 60). Compare C. Grappe, "L'immolation terrestre comme gage de la communion céleste (Apoc 6:9; 7:14-15; 20:6)" (*RHPR* 79 [1999]: 71-82).

⁹E. E. Carpenter and P. W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 8. They insisted that in Numbers, "*Mizbeach* occurs in twenty-six verses to describe the centrality and importance that the altar held (Num 3:26; 4:11-26; 18:5). Altars were cared for meticulously and with great respect" (*ibid.*).

offering or incense, elements pertaining to the former seem to dominate in Rev 6:9.¹⁰

The sacrificial imagery from the Hebrew Bible has been one of the best keys to unlock the meaning of the scene, especially because the association of the words αἷμα (blood) and ἐσφαγμένων (slain), which often refer to the slaying of an animal for sacrifice.

Leviticus 4:7 features all the sacrificial blood as being poured out “at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”¹¹

If, indeed, the altar of burnt offering is in view, the martyrs’ death in Rev 6:9 seems to be reinterpreted here as a sacrifice to God, which does dramatically raise

¹⁰The ambiguity is raised by the fact that the term is introduced without any immediate precedent yet in a way that suggests familiarity to the reader. However, even though Rev 6:9 is the first of eight occurrences in Revelation, it is clearly associated through the theme of judgment to the altar of burnt offering (two other cases appear in 11:1 and 16:7) while four other instances (8:3[2x], 5; and 9:13) refer to the altar of incense through the idea of intercession, and the rest as a figurative extension for the temple (14:18). Commentators favoring the altar of burnt offering include, Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:265; Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 228-229; Holtzmann, *Evanvelium, Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes*, 446-447; Alford, “Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωάννου,” 4:619; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 84; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 103; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 89-90; Robert G. Bratcher, and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series: Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 115; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 133; Sweet, *Revelation*, 142; Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 315-318; and Paulien, “Seven Seals,” 235, n. 138; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 239-240; Musvosvi, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse,” 183-185.

Support for the altar of incense is derived from the association with Rev 8:3 and 19:13, where the heavenly altar of 6:9 is connected with the prayers of the souls (symbolized by the sacrificial incense) waiting to be heard. Obviously, this can be related somehow to the frustrated expectations in the fifth seal too. See R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:172; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 525; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 441-443; Bruce, “Revelation to John,” 644; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:475.

Noting the presence of the dual theme of sacrifice and prayer in 6:9-10, some scholars have even suggested a double meaning, where both altars are intended. For example, see Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 146-147; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392; Osborne, *Revelation*, 285. The double meaning is explained by the fact that the idea of sacrifice recalls the altar of burnt offering while the mention of prayers echoes instead the altar of incense. Cf. Thomas who dismissed the double meaning “in light of the radically different functions of the two altars” (*Revelation 1-7*, 442).

¹¹See also vv. 18, 25, 30, 34, 8:15; Exod 29:12, etc. According to Jon Paulien, “Since no blood was ever poured out at the base of the incense altar in the temple (Exod 30:1-10; 40:5), it seems likely that Rev 6:9-11 contains a reference to the sacrificial altar in the courtyard outside the temple (Exod 29:12; 40:6; Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 34, etc.)” (“The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 33 [1995]: 256, n. 49).

expectations for justice. In Judaism, the sacrificial emphasis attached to the souls of righteous “under the altar” is well documented, as R. H. Charles’s study indicates.¹² For example, Talmud Gittin 57b is a midrash on Abraham’s offering of Isaac, suggesting the idea of the martyr’s death as sacrifice; after seven of her sons had faced martyrdom, a mother is reported to have made the following request to her last one just before he was killed: “My son, go and say to your father Abraham, ‘Thou didst bind one [son] to the altar, but I have bound seven [sons to the] altars.’”¹³ However, difficulty arises in the fifth seal as the sacrifice seems to be ignored by God, whose action is delayed.

In the fifth seal, the prospect for justice is escalated to a cosmic level when this altar is referred to the context of God’s realm. Following an apocalyptic tradition that goes back to Ezekiel’s temple vision (Ezek 40:1-44:3), Revelation mentions a temple in heaven (cf. Rev 7:15; 11:19; 14:15; 15:6) which is “the heavenly counterpart and prototype of the earthly temple.”¹⁴ The heavenly altars, as Blount put it well, are simply “the cosmic prototypes for their earthly counterpart in the Jerusalem temple,”¹⁵ where the

¹²See R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:172-174.

¹³Similarly, the New Testament often talks of the martyr’s death in terms of a sacrifice. Jesus warned his disciples that the “hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (John 16:2). Paul analyzed his own pre-Christian commitment to persecute the church in similar terms (see Acts 8:1-3; 26:9-12; Gal 1:13-14). He addressed the death of Jesus who “gave himself up for us as an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph 5:2). Romans 8:36 compares the suffering of Christians as “sheep to be slaughtered.” Paul talked about “being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith” (Phil 2:17). Anticipating his own martyrdom, he used the same metaphor in 2 Tim 4:6, “For I am already poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”

¹⁴See G. A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989], 177.

¹⁵Blount, *Revelation*, 133. See also J. Roloff who viewed Rev 6:9-11 as simply another witness to Revelation’s awareness that “heaven contains a temple (cf. 7:15; 11:19; 14:15) that is the archetype of the earthly temple” (*The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John E. Alsup [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 89). Based on the testimony in Revelation (11:9, 14:17; 15:5), Richard M. Davidson thought that for John, “The heavenly sanctuary is not a metaphor for heaven, but a place *in heaven*”

predominating idea is that of a place where truth and justice are uncovered.

When connecting the fifth seal to the heavenly realm, many have struggled with the “difficulty posed by the presence of the dead in heaven prior to the end—the final judgment and the restoration of all things.”¹⁶ However, if the ministering of the sacrifice occurs in heaven, this does not necessarily mean that the inquirers themselves are actually there. In fact, “under the altar” has been associated at times with the language of burial for Jews in Palestine.¹⁷

From a typological perspective, the identification of the altar of burnt offering rules out any idea of a heavenly location for the martyred saints. This altar normally stood in the outer court of the Israelite sanctuary (Exod 40:29) which symbolizes earthly

(original emphasis) (“Sanctuary Typology,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 1:104). Osborne noted that “the idea of heaven as a temple occurs frequently in this book (11:19; 14:17, 16:17) and in the OT (Ps 11.4, Isa 6.1, Hab 2.20, Mic 1.2) and the altar is always in the heavenly temple” (*Revelation*, 284). Aune asserted that “in the *NT*, θυσιαστήριον refers to the heavenly altar only in Revelation (with the possible exception of Heb 13:10)” (*Revelation 6-16*, 405); see also J. W. Thompson, “Outside the Camp: A Study of Heb 13:9-14,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 58-59.

¹⁶Joel B. Green, “Three Exegetical Forays into the Body-Soul Discussion,” *CTR* 7 (2010): 15.

¹⁷As Rabbi Akiba taught, “He who is buried in the land of Israel is as though he were buried under the altar, for the whole land of Israel is fit to be the site of the altar. And he who is buried under the altar is as though he were buried under the throne of glory (‘*Abot R. Nat.* 26: 111. 1)” (Edmondo Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 145). It is also tied up with the special place promised by God to the soul of Moses in Debarim r. par. 11 “Go forth, delay not, and I will bring thee up to the highest heaven, and cause thee to dwell under the throne of My glory amidst the Cherubim and Seraphim and heavenly hosts” (ibid.). Talmud Sabbath 152b speaks of “the souls of the righteous are preserved under the throne of glory” (ibid.). In Palestinian Judaism, Lupieri also reported how the blood under the altar is connected to the burial in the Land, “In the Jerusalem temple . . . it is precisely under the altar of sacrifice that the blood of the sacrificial victims flowed (Lev 17:27; *n. Pes.* 5; *m. Yoma* 5:6; *m. Mid.* 3:2), and it was thus possible to imagine that the victims’ life ran under the altar and entered into the earth. This detail of blood under the altar must have been well known in first-century Palestinian Judaism, even as a result of criticism by the Essenes who argued from Scripture (see *TS* 52:12 and 53:5-6, which echoes Lev 17:13 and Deut 12:24) that the blood from the sacrifices should not be channeled into the valley of Kedron but rather should disappear down a shaft (*TS* 32:12-15 and see *m. Hul.* 2:9)” (ibid.). However, he added a final caveat: “The meaning of the passage changes dramatically depending on whether γῆ means the inhabited world or Israel, the Land” (ibid.).

and not heavenly things.¹⁸ Stephen S. Smalley insisted on the emphatic usage of the preposition “ὑποκάτω (under)”:

The seer’s choice of diction at this point reinforces the suggestion that the *souls* of the martyred, crying for vengeance ‘underneath the altar’, were not initially in heaven at all, but far ‘below’ it, on earth: on the same territory which has just been affected by the disasters of the first four seals.¹⁹

It is also interesting to note another view of the heavenly temple/sanctuary in support for this argument as proposed by Philo. According to this view, the sanctuary is a symbolic representation of the whole cosmos, earth being the holy place, and heaven the most holy. When this view is applied to the locus of the altar in Rev 6, it points to earth as the realm: it is from this side of the partitioning veil that the voice/blood of the slain souls cries out from the earth.²⁰

Further, given its special location in the fifth seal, the reference to the altar might

¹⁸Paulien established the fact that Jewish apocalyptic allows for only one temple in heaven which excludes the altar of burnt offering located in the outer court of the earthly temple (*Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 316). See Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” 100-111; Ranko Stefanovic, “The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation,” *AUSS* 44 (2006): 79-94. The heavenly dimension is typified instead by the altar of incense which, by virtue of its function associated with the most holy place (Exod 30:6-7; Lev 4:18; 1 Kgs 6:22; and Heb 9:3-4), came to be referred to as “the altar which is before the Lord” (Lev 4:7, 18; 16:18; 1 Kgs 9:25; Rev 9:13).

¹⁹Stephen S. Smalley’s argument runs as follows: “The preposition ὑποκάτω (*hypokatō*, ‘underneath’), in the sentence, ‘I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered,’ is emphatic, as in 5.3, 13: where the phrase ‘underneath the earth’ is distinguished from ‘on earth’ or ‘in heaven.’ Would John have used such forceful language if, following Lev. 4.7, he was *simply* referring to the existence of souls ‘at the *base*’ of the altar? Could he not have described their position as being ‘in front of’ (ἐνώπιον, *enōpion*) the altar, as earlier he had seen what appeared ‘in front of’, or ‘before,’ God’s throne (4.5-6)?” (emphasis his) (*Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005], 158). Also J. Ramsey Michaels, from John’s choice of language, raised “the distinct possibility that the souls he saw *under the altar* were not in heaven at all, but far below it on earth” (emphasis his) (*Revelation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 106). Paulien rightly noted, “Since the altar of burnt offering is never portrayed in heaven, rather is symbolic of Christ’s sacrifice on earth, these souls under the altar are not in heaven, they are in their earthly graves. They do not come to life until the Second Coming (Rev 20:4)” (“Seven Seals,” 235, n. 138). Stefanovic convincingly argued that “since the altar of sacrifice was not in the temple, but in the outer court, it is clear that the scene portrayed here takes place not in the heavenly temple but on the earth which was symbolized by the outer court of the temple” (*Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 244).

²⁰I am indebted to the insights of my external examiner, Dr Abraham Terrian, for this insight.

highlight more the ministering of sacrifice than the sacrifice itself. Then the focus in Rev 6:9 would be on the predominance of divine justice over the human sacrifice. As Blount insightfully noted, “Just as the heavenly throne is a symbol of God’s rule, ‘altar’ characterizes God’s judgment.”²¹ He insisted that “John imagines the altar to picture what will now happen *as a result* of the slaying. In other words, the altar does not represent killing: it personifies the divine response to it [emphasis his].”²² The problem in the fifth seal is that expectations for divine justice and judgment are not met.

In summary, the imagery of the altar brings to mind not simply a sacrificial perspective to God, but also especially an intense expectation for divine justice in heaven. At the base of the altar of burnt offering, the emptying of the victim’s blood simply meant that it was its life that was poured out. However, the problem in the scene of the fifth seal is that the sacrifice seems to go unnoticed by God and justice remains unmet.

The Presentation of the Delay Inquirers,
τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων

Another source of tension in the expectations of the text is raised by the term “τὰς ψυχὰς (the souls),” used to introduce the delay inquirers. Unfortunately, under the influence of Greek dualistic anthropology, this imagery is often applied to a depiction of

²¹Blount, *Revelation*, 133. Cf. Beale who overstated his case in asserting a “virtual equation in both Revelation and Jewish writings of this altar with the throne of God” (*The Book of Revelation*, 391).

²²Blount, *Revelation*, 133. He prefaced this quote by noting that “it is, in fact, the imagery of justice and judgment that has been the unifying theme throughout the first eight verses of the chapter. John extends it here with his focus on the altar. Just as the heavenly throne is a symbol of God’s rule, ‘altar’ characterizes God’s judgment. John does not picture a sacrificial slaying on the altar; the slaying, presumably with all the accompanying bleeding, takes place on earth” (ibid.).

life in the intermediate state.²³ Thus, the word ψυχή is equated with “the spirit,” that is, the immaterial part of a person that lives on after death.²⁴ However, the idea of souls as disincarnated spirits is a non-Hebraic notion.²⁵ In the Hebrew Bible, “שֵׁנַי (soul)” is not used as a kind of immaterial or, at least, invisible essential core of man.²⁶ Rather, the

²³Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 88; Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Vol. 19, *Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 170. Talbert explained the source of the concept, “Assumed here is what has been called the intermediate state (= a state of conscious existence between the death of an individual and the resurrection of the body at the final consummation). One finds a developed concept of the intermediate state in some circles of postbiblical Judaism (1 Enoch 22:8-13; 4 Ezra 7). This state is assumed in New Testament sources like Luke 16:19-30; 23:43; Phil 1:21-23; 2 Cor 5:8 and in non-canonical apocalypses like the Ascension of Isaiah 9 and the Apocalypse of Paul 14, 16. One also finds it assumed in the Revelation to John here in 6:9-11 and elsewhere in 7:14-17 and 14:13” (*Apocalypse*, 33).

²⁴Among those who saw ψυχή as the immaterial part of a person that continues to live after the body dies, see for example Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 115; Aune also believed that the location under the altar symbolizes nearness of these martyrs to God in the form of incorporeal souls (*Revelation 6-16*, 404).

²⁵For a review on how Hellenistic culture influenced the development of the belief in life after death in apocalyptic literature, see D. S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 385-390; and J. J. Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 38-43. On the wider discussion of the Greek influence on Jewish eschatology, see Thomas F. Glasson, *Greek Influence in Jewish Eschatology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961). For N. T. Wright, “We have been buying our mental furniture for so long in Plato’s factory that we have come to take for granted a basic ontological contrast between ‘spirit’ in the sense of something immaterial and ‘matter’ in the sense of something material, solid, and physical” (*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* [New York: Harper One, 2008], 153-154). He denied that such a view was characteristic of the regnant cosmologies of the first-century world of the apostles of the New Testament writings themselves (*ibid.*, 154). For a more recent critique of the default hermeneutical position by which many make sense of Bible’s anthropology is a dualistic one, i.e., presupposing that the theological anthropology of the Christian Scriptures assumes and supports body-soul dualism, see Joel B. Green, “Three Exegetical Forays into the Body-Soul Discussion,” 3-5. He established that even Rev 6:9-11 is very much comfortable with a monist understanding of the human person (*ibid.*, 15-17).

²⁶Louw and Nida offered three ranges of meaning for “inner self,” “life” or “person” (L&N, s.v. “ψυχή”). T. Friberg, B. Friberg, and N. F. Miller translated as life, soul; “a many-sided word with the meaning derived from the context (*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament (ANLEX)*, (2000), s.v. “ψυχή.” See also, Collin Brown, “Soul,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 2:1987-1988. Glenn E. Whitlock, “The Structure of Personality in Hebrew Psychology,” *Int* 14 (1960): 5-12. Clarifying the Hebraic notion of שֵׁנַי, E. Jacob explained, “Since life is characterized by the שֵׁנַי it is natural that death should sometimes be represented as the disappearance of this *nephesh* (Gen 35:18; 1 Kings 17:21; Jer 15:9; Jonah 4:3). The ‘departure’ of the *nephesh* must be viewed as a figure of speech, for it does not continue to exist independently of the body, but dies with it” (“Death,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible (IDB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], 1:802).

term is usually synonymous with “life” or the “whole person.”²⁷ Eduard Schweizer argued rightly that ψυχή in the New Testament does not carry any connotation of “life in the intermediate state any more than πνεῦμα does, not even in Rev. 6:9.”²⁸

Further, the context of the seals vision serves as a warning against any literal application of the imagery.²⁹ It is significant that the rest of the seals septet is always treated symbolically. For example, the horses found in the previous four seals are generally interpreted metaphorically. Why should this be different for the souls under the altar? Denying any support for the state of separate spirits in Rev 6:9, Vitranga rightly insisted that the symbol must be understood not dogmatically, but prophetically.³⁰

Significantly, blood is the seat of life, where “life,” “soul,” “self” are

²⁷See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), rev. and edited by Frederick Danker, trans. and adapted by William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3rd ed. (2000), s.v. “ψυχή.”

²⁸Eduard Schweizer, “ψυχή, κτλ.,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9:637-656. See A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:475; Michaels pointed out that the souls are not disembodied spirits but “people with voices and real bodies, like the ‘beheaded’ souls of 20:4” (*Revelation*, 106).

²⁹Cautioning about the symbolism in Revelation, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* notes, “It should be remembered that John is viewing pictorial representations, and that the rules governing the interpretation of such prophecies must be kept in mind when the meaning of the various symbols is sought. . . . As the details of a parable, not all features of a prophetic symbolization necessarily have interpretative value” (“Revelation,” *SDABC*, 7:778). For those who interpret the scene as pure poetic fiction, see Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 281; Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:263-264.

³⁰Vitranga, *Anakrisis*, 273-274. On the symbolical character of the fifth seal, Albert Barnes wrote, “We are not to suppose that this *literally* occurred, and that John actually saw the souls of the martyrs beneath the altars—for the whole representation is symbolical; nor are we to suppose that the injured and the wronged in heaven actually pray for vengeance on those who wronged them, or that the redeemed in heaven will continue to pray with reference to things on the earth; but it may be fairly inferred from this that there will be *as real* a remembrance of the wrongs of the persecuted, the injured, and the oppressed, *as if* such prayer were offered there; and that the oppressor has as much to dread from the divine vengeance *as if* those whom he has injured should cry in heaven to the God who hears prayer, and who takes vengeance” (emphasis his) (*Book of Revelation: With a Prefatory Essay on the Year-Day Principle* [London: Blackie, 1832], 159).

interchangeable terms in Semitic thought.³¹ Reaching back to Lev 17:11, the fifth seal establishes a clear link between life (ψυχῆς), blood (αἷμα), and altar (θυσιαστηρίου), which points to the sacrificial character of the martyrdom depicted therein. Thus, Eugene Boring was perhaps right in asserting, “The lives or selves of sacrificed victims could be thought of as being at the base of or ‘under the altar.’”³²

Linking 6:9 to 20:4, E. W. Bullinger pointed out that “the souls of them that were slain or beheaded (πεπελεκισμένων)” are simply persons: “John saw the dead persons.”³³ Those souls would then simply be people, but people who have been slaughtered and whose death represents, in some sense, a sacrifice to God. Such a sacrifice cannot go unheeded by a just and loving Deity.

That John is not speaking of disembodied “souls” that have left their bodies at death and “gone to heaven” or to the issue of where people go after they die is made clear by his use of ψυχή throughout the book.³⁴ This word has six other occurrences in

³¹Leviticus 17:11-14 (with key word underlined and Greek words from LXX): “For the life (ψυχή) of the flesh is in the blood (αἷμα), and I have given it to you on the altar (θυσιαστηρίου) to make atonement for your souls (ψυχῶν); for it is the blood (αἷμα) by reason of the life (ψυχή) that makes atonement. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, No person (ψυχή) among you may eat blood (αἷμα), nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood (αἷμα). So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood (αἷμα) and cover it with earth. For *as for the life* (ψυχή) of all flesh (σαρκός), its blood (αἷμα) is *identified* with its life (ψυχή). Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, “You are not to eat the blood (αἷμα) of any flesh (σαρκός), for the life (ψυχή) of all flesh (σαρκός) is its blood (αἷμα); whoever eats it shall be cut off.” See also, Gen 9:4, 15; Deut 12:23-24, etc.

³²M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* 59 (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 125. Also Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* 30 (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 130.

³³E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 640. He added, “They could not reign till they were made alive, hence in 20:4, we read that ‘they lived’” (ibid.). See also Lilje who applied the vision to “dead persons” (*Last Book of the Bible*, 128); Michaels affirmed that the souls are not disembodied spirits, but “people with voices and real bodies, like the ‘beheaded’ souls of 20:4” (*Revelation*, 106).

³⁴Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament Series (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), 75.

Revelation (6:9; 8:9; 12:11; 16:3; 18:13, 14; 20:4) and none really in a disembodied state. It is used twice in the sense of “life” in 8:9, “the creatures which were in the sea and had life (ψυχή), died”; in 12:11, overcomers in Christ’s blood “loved not their life (ψυχή) even when faced with death.”³⁵ However, it can also refer to “being” as a creature in 16:3 “every living thing (πᾶσα ψυχή ζωῆς) in the sea died”; or “person” in 18:13 “and slaves and human lives” (καὶ σωμάτων, καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων).

However, the drama in the fifth seal is compounded by the fact that the emphasis of the introductory scene is especially on the violent circumstances of the death: “they had been slaughtered (ἐσφαγμένων).” Even if the verb σφάζω (to slaughter) refers sometimes to an animal sacrifice ritual, the primary literal meaning is to kill a person with violence (cf. 2 Kgs 10:7; Jer 52:10 [LXX]).³⁶ In 6:4, this verb suggests a context of violence that prevails on earth. It is associated with the fate of prophets and saints in 18:24 as “all who have been killed (ἐσφαγμένων) on the earth.” When such killing of

³⁵Here the soul or life (ψυχή) is contrasted with death (θάνατος) where death fundamentally terminates the soul. The term ψυχή as life can be applied either to human or non-human. Verses 12:11, 16:3 and 18:13 nuance the reality of a “living soul” suggesting that a ψυχή can die. Boxall rightly suggested that John is perhaps “articulating the Semitic concept of *nefesh* (often translated by ψυχή in LXX) rather than a Greek anthropology: the very life-blood of these slaughtered ones (Lev 17:11), their personhood, is sustained by God despite their violent deaths” (*Revelation of Saint John*, 113).

³⁶For Otto Michel, “In LXX σφάζω occurs some 84 times. With few exceptions it is used for the Hbr. verbs *חָטַח* and *חָטַח* . . . [in the sense of] ‘to sever the neck,’ ‘to slaughter,’ . . . and in OT ‘to slay and cut up’ an animal for eating. It is hardly a technical term in sacrificial ritual but rather a profane expression. It is used 6 times of men in the sense ‘to slaughter,’ ‘to murder’” (“σφάζω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 7:929-930). About the Hebrew root, R. H. Alexander wrote, “The primary literal meaning of this root is ‘to deliberately slaughter or butcher an animal for food,’ but this concept is most often employed metaphorically to depict the slaying of men. The synonym *zābah*, though similar in its basic nuance, conveys the additional idea of ‘slaughter for sacrifice’ from which the offerer often partakes. *hārag* (q.v.) and *šāḥaṭ* (q.v.) are found in parallelism with *īābah*; *hārag* conveys the sense of killing with violence in war or conflict while *šāḥaṭ* emphasizes beating the subject in order to kill it” (“חָטַח,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody, 1999], 786). Louw and Nida render σφάζω as “to slaughter, either animals or persons; in contexts referring to persons, the implication is of violence and mercilessness—‘to slaughter, to kill’” (L&N, s.v. “σφάζω”). Friberg, Friberg, and Miller referred to the usage “of person put to death by violence, kill, murder” (*ANLEX*, s.v. ‘σφάζω.’).

God's people is related to God's altar, it creates a burning expectation for judgment and vindication.³⁷

A real tension is created when the "slain souls" metaphor is related to the status of Jesus in Rev 5:6. The souls appear, indeed, not only to imitate, but also to be identified with Jesus depicted as "a Lamb standing, as if slain (ἐσφαγμένον)."³⁸ Many recognize this vision to be a powerful reversal as it contrasts the victorious resurrection of Jesus with the imagery of his sacrificial death.³⁹ The association of these dead souls with the Lamb would suggest that their story, at least with regard to their death, should somewhat resemble that of the Lamb. Moreover, part of the frustration for the martyrs could lie in the fact that their own resurrection seems to be long overdue.

Thus, the link between the "slaughtered Lamb" and "slain souls" has a direct impact for the understanding of Revelation's ecclesiology. Stephen Pattemore saw in the "slain souls" a collective image for the witnessing church as "a martyr church, patterned

³⁷See Musvosvi who argued that the altar represents the sacrifice itself, and further, that this connects to the Hebrew Bible concepts of judgment and vindication ("Vengeance in the Apocalypse," 187).

³⁸Cf. in 13:3 the beast who is a parody of the Lamb is also depicted as if it had been slain (ἐσφαγμένην) and it is significant that the refusal to worship the image of this beast provides the rationale for the cause of the martyrs' killing (ἀποκτανθῶσιν) in 13:15.

³⁹As Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani noted, "Debout et égorgé ne vont guère ensemble, mais 'comme égorgé' prend valeur d'apparence, de trace de l'égorgement subi qui reste visible sur le corps debout. La mort violente de l'agneau égorgé est résorbée dans la vie de l'agneau debout" (emphasis theirs) (*L'Apocalypse de Jean: Révélation pour le temps de la violence et du désir, Chap. 1-11*, Lectio Divina (LD) 235 [Paris: Cerf, 2010], 170). For those who see a direct allusion to Christ's resurrection, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 351-352; Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 193; Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 77; Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary Series 18 [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011], 80-81; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 52A (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 352-352; Alfred F. Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1972), 134; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 78; Richard Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 60; etc.

after the martyr status of the Lamb.”⁴⁰ David L. Barr spoke of a major characterization of the people of God as a community of witnesses in Revelation, “Like Jesus the lion/lamb-slain . . . [they] are people of unimaginable power who are also people defeated, killed, abandoned.”⁴¹ The sense of impatience noted in the fifth seal is due, perhaps, because of God’s delay in extending Christ’s victory to his people.

It is then possible to conclude that the souls are under the altar because they have been sacrificed on it and their blood has been poured out at its base. The “slain souls” appear as a corporate representation for dead persons who sided with God, but ended up as sacrificial victims of senseless violence. They seem dissatisfied about God’s inaction. The postmortem violent stance explains the dramatic context of the delay questioning and its related issue of theodicy because of the discrepancy between expectation and reality regarding resurrection and vindication.

The Outcry From Under the Altar

For the sake of clarification of the frustrated expectations in the fifth seal, the last item that needs to be addressed is the issue of the dead persons crying out from under the altar. Bullinger used Rev 6:10 to illustrate a case of *prosopopoeia*, where the dead are depicted as speaking.⁴² This kind of personification finds its origin in Gen 4:10, where the Lord said to Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the

⁴⁰Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, Exegesis*, Society for the New Testament Studies Monograph Series (SNTSMS) 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 80.

⁴¹David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1998), 73.

⁴²Bullinger defined *prosopopoeia* as “a figure by which things are represented or spoken of as persons; or, by which we attribute intelligence, by words or actions, to inanimate objects or abstract ideas” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 867).

ground.” Hebrews 12:24 refers to this same text to compare the blood of Jesus that speaks more strongly than that of Abel.

Most commentators recognize a direct link between the crying out of the souls and the first murder recorded in the Hebrew Bible, which later inspired the motif of shedding innocent blood.⁴³ In Gen 4:10, the postmortem cry of Abel’s blood is essentially an outcry for justice and judgment that God did not ignore, whereas the fifth seal displays, as Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani rightly noted, the slain souls as speaking out not as “victims of an accepted sacrifice, but as the innocent ones of a murder that, like the blood of Abel, cries to heaven and stays unvindicated.”⁴⁴

The crying out of Abel’s blood, like that of all innocent blood, rises to God because the life of every living creature belongs to God.⁴⁵ Significantly, Gen 4:10-11 is,

⁴³E.g., Osborne, *Revelation*, 286; James Moffat, “Revelation of St. John the Divine,” *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (1942; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 5:392; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 445. Sweet called this motif the “stock theme of apocalyptic” (*Revelation*, 140). For Boxall, the language of Rev 6:10 “evokes the Jewish tradition of the blood of the righteous crying out for vindication, which traces its origin to the story of Abel (e.g. Gen. 4:10; 2 Macc. 8:3-4; 4 Macc. 17:22; 18:11; Mt. 23:35; *1 Enoch* 47)” (*Revelation of Saint John*, 114). Among others, see also Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 88; Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 232; Michaels, *Revelation*, 108-109; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 110; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 184; Reddish, *Revelation*, 131; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 408; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 87-88; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 102; Musvosvi, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse,” 47-48; Paulien, “Seven Seals,” 235; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 240; Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002); 65.

⁴⁴Delorme and Donegani noted that the dead witnesses, “ne s’expriment pas ici comme les victimes d’un sacrifice agréé, mais comme celles innocentes d’un meurtre qui, à l’instar du sang d’Abel, crie vers le ciel et reste impuni” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 191). Contra Joshua Owen who affirmed “that the martyrs’ blood cries out like Abel’s indicates that they and their offering were accepted by God while their persecutors were not” (“Martyrdom as an Impetus for Divine Retribution in the Book of Revelation” [PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008], 92, accessed April 11, 2010, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses).

⁴⁵Gen 9:4, 5; Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9; 8:15; 9:9; 17:11, 14; Deut 12:23; 2 Sam 4:11; Ps 9:12. Cf. *1 En.* 47:1-4 where “the blood of the righteous” is mentioned three times.

above all, a reminder of God's pledge to avenge the shedding of innocent blood.⁴⁶ God hates the shedding of innocent blood. The blood of the murdered Abel cries for vengeance until the murder is expiated by the death of the murderer. Stimulatingly for the polemic against the inhabitants of the Land, Num 35:33-34 records that the shedding of the blood of innocent human beings was viewed as a pollution (וְלֹא־תִקְבְּלוּ, "you shall not pollute/corrupt") and defilement (וְלֹא־תִטְמְאוּ, "you shall not defile") of the land. Such a revolting act raises expectations for inescapable divine judgment.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Matt 23:29-36 connects righteous blood/altar to slain prophets in Jesus' indictment of the Jewish religious leaders for their role in the martyrdom of the prophets of the past. Verse 32 raises the issue of filling up (πληρώω) the measure of the ancestors that bears upon the understanding of Rev 6:11, as will be discussed later. The reference to Abel and Zechariah, son of Barachiah, is probably an allusion to the entire scriptural history of the persecution of the righteous.⁴⁸ Only the pouring out of the innocent blood of martyr/prophet seems really significant for the imagery.

⁴⁶Cf. Deut 32:36-43 and *1 En.* 22:5-8.

⁴⁷See Num 35:9-4; Deut 21:1-9; 2 Sam 21:1; Ps 106:38. R. D. Cole clarified the rationale for this judgment, "But since God cannot endure sin and iniquity, such as the shedding of innocent human blood, those causes of defilement must be exacted from the land. The prophets were clear in denouncing the leaders of Israel and Judah because of their unrighteous acts whereby the lives of the innocent were minimized and demeaned through bloodshed. Hence they would echo the words of this passage in calling for the just recompense of those abusive of the poor, the widows, the orphans, and others. That recompense would be the extraction of the evil elements from the land they had defiled and polluted" (*Numbers*, New American Commentary 3B [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001], 556). For the fact that the shedding of innocent blood calls for retaliation, see Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), 70-72.

⁴⁸The scope is mapped by the choice of the first and the last pertinent murders in canonical history. Abel is the first righteous martyr mentioned in Scripture, and Zechariah's martyrdom, though not the last martyrdom to occur chronologically, was the last martyrdom described in Scripture (see 2 Chr 24:20-22). Carrington noted a double meaning in the dynamic imagery of the altar of Rev 6:9 which represents "now the innocent dead whose blood was poured out, now the guilty nation that shed the blood"; and that "the twin ideas of Blood-offering and Blood-revenge must be kept in mind if we are to understand Revelation" (*The Meaning of the Revelation*, 130).

The allusion to the blood/altar could refer to a critical situation similar to that of 2 Chr 24:20-22 where the outcry of the blood of priests is being overheard instead of that of animal sacrifice.⁴⁹ Altars were anointed, consecrated, and set aside for priests to offer sacrifice to the Lord (Num 7:1, 84), as well as the place where their dedication offerings celebrated the completion of the Tabernacle (Num 7:10). With the slaying of priests, whose blood lies crying at the bottom of the altar, the ministry of the temple would be seriously compromised. The perspective of the approaching eschaton would escalate the issue into an eschatological theodicy.

Attempts have been made to identify expiatory or vicarious virtues in the martyrs' death like in some late Judaism works.⁵⁰ However, this is really hard to sustain in the light of the specificity of the Christian view of atonement.⁵¹ In the words of Philip E.

⁴⁹Discussing the Christological implication of Matt 23:39-36 which refers to the text in 2 Chr 24:20-22, W. H. C. Frend stated, "The prophets by their suffering at the hands of the Jewish nation, had been witnesses of God's mercy and judgment, and to the death and resurrection of Israel under the Old Covenant. Jesus, the last and greatest of the prophets, was witness to the same things under the New" (*Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church; a Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965], 82).

⁵⁰Cf. 2 Macc 7:18, 32, 38 and 4 Macc 6:28-29. For other references and perspective on the 4 Maccabees's attitude towards atonement and sacrifice, see, Adolf Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (New York: Ktav, 1967), 327-338, 441-456; Angelo P. O'Hagan, "The Martyr in the Fourth Book of Maccabees," *Studii Biblici franciscani liber annuus* 24 (1974): 94-120; Mitchell Glenn Reddish, "The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation" (PhD dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 44-56; Sam K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 91-96. For atoning value attributed to Isaac's Aqedah in rabbinic material, see G. Vermes's "New Light on the Sacrifice of Isaac from 4Q225," *JJS* 47 (1996): 140-145.

⁵¹For Eduard Lohse, "Das Leiden, selbst das Sterben, das die Juenger Jesu auf sich zu nehmen haben, hat keine selbständige in sich ruhende Bedeutung, sondern es ist eine unausbleibliche Folge, die sich aus dem eschatologischen Geschehen, das mit dem Kommen des Christus angebrochen ist, ergibt" (*Märtyrer und Gottesknecht; Untersuchungen Zur Urchristlichen Verkündigung Vom Sühntod Jesu Christi, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 64 [Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963], 199). For a contrast in the views on atonement between later Judaism and Christianity, see J. Downing, "Jesus and Martyrdom," *JTS* 14 (1963): 279-280, 284; S. K. Williams, *Jesus' Death as Saving Event*, 121-135. David N. Lord observed that "the souls are simply believers in Christ relying on his sacrifice for justification" (*Exposition of the Apocalypse*, 153).

Hughes, the martyrs' death "is not in any sense a repetition of Christ's unique and unrepeatable self-sacrifice, but a response of gratitude and devotion to their redemption."⁵² In deed, nothing in the fifth seal suggests any vicarious significance; the crux of the imagery refers, instead, to the idea of the death of the righteous in urgent need of vindication. Rather than being expiatory, as Reddish pointed out, the deaths of the martyrs were necessary for John only as "part of God's plan for bringing judgment upon the world."⁵³

Viewed from the perspective of the wicked-righteous dualism of the Apocalyptic, the preamble to the delay question presents the two key protagonists: the "souls under the altar," a corporate representation of the victimized righteous, versus "the inhabitants of the earth," their corporate faithless enemy. The victims are revealed first to inspire, perhaps, the church's prophetic endtime witness and the latter would unmask the hostility of the eschatological oppressors, as will be seen later.⁵⁴

Revelation's sanctuary typology suggests, perhaps, that the text displays, in the words of Richard Davidson, "not a literal altar, not literal souls' under the altar . . . , but

⁵²Philip E. Hughes, *Book of Revelation: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 88. Joseph Comblin wrote, "L'Apocalypse ne contient cependant pas de déclarations sur l'efficacité de cette mort sacrificielle des Chrétiens, comme elle explique l'efficacité de la mort et du sang de Jésus. Il semble que les attributs sacrificiels soient évoqués à propos des chrétiens par pure imitation des attributs de Jésus. Il ne semble pas que la Révélation de saint Jean veuille enseigner que la mort des martyrs ait vraiment une valeur d'expiation des péchés ou un pouvoir de substitution" (*Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse*, Bibliothèque de Théologie, Théologie Biblique Série III [Paris: Desclée, 1965], 6:159).

⁵³Reddish, "The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation," 166.

⁵⁴Gordon D. Fee called them the "two key groups of those who live on earth at the time of John's writing" (*Revelation*, 96). Interestingly, he also noted that the questions raised by the two groups are central, not only to the rest of the seals series, but to Revelation as a whole: "The martyrs ask, 'how long . . . until you avenge our blood?' (v. 10). The rest, on their day of judgment, cry out, 'the day of their [God and the Lamb's] wrath has come, and who can withstand it?' (v. 12)" (ibid.). Further on the protagonists in the fifth seal, see Allison A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 163.

rather an ecclesiological fulfillment in martyred saints and prophets whose blood spiritually cries out for vindication by God.”⁵⁵ No atoning value is intended in the imagery; the shedding of innocent blood, when connected with the altar, simply highlights an intense expectation for God’s judgment. For the sake of emphasis, the imagery of the “slain souls” crying out denounces perhaps the acute problem of the structural endtime violence of a wicked, “bloodthirsty,” corrupt society by first revealing its victims.

Summary and Theological Implications

The meaning of the introductory imagery is complicated because of uncertainties arising from the indeterminate nature of the text itself. However, the unclear details of the preamble, as Lilje rightly pointed out, actually become less important when compared to the great time question posed by the prayer: “When will it become plain that the sacrifice of our lives has a meaning?”⁵⁶

1. For now, it may be important to note only that the preamble places the delay question in a clear postmortem situation. The display of unvindicated martyred saints as interrogators raises inevitable issues about God’s justice and his benevolence towards them. This, obviously, is an important issue of theodicy.

2. The visionary context disallows a doctrinal conclusion on the intermediate state between the death of the saints and the coming of the Lord in Rev 6:9-11. Thus, the

⁵⁵Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” 110. See also Ladd who concluded, “That the souls were *underneath* the altar does not indicate their state or location in the intermediate state. It is just a vivid way of picturing the fact that they had been martyred in the name of their God” (original emphasis) (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 103).

⁵⁶Lilje, *Last Book of the Bible*, 128.

crying out of Rev 6:10 is only symbolic, like the crying out of Abel's blood in Gen 4. Strictly speaking, no immortality can really be inferred from this symbolic setting, since rather than the slain saints, it is their unjust death that cries out to God for vindication.

3. The "slain souls" could simply be a corporate representation of dead persons who sided with God, but ended up as sacrificial victims of senseless violence. They seem dissatisfied about God's inaction in such a dire situation.

4. Further, the preamble of the fifth seal could be a graphic depiction of dead saints as the innocent victim of a climactic violence. The spilling of innocent blood that appears to bear the theological character of a sacrifice or gift to God has a polluting effect on the earth that God has to cleanse.

5. If a context of imminence is assumed, the problem of theodicy becomes even more dramatic and raises issues of eschatological judgment and justice. All this would refer, perhaps, to a certain urgent plan that should normally trigger God's final judgment upon the world.

Issues Related to the Cause of Death

Revelation 6:9 attributes the cause of the death of witnesses to the word of God and the testimony they held.⁵⁷ The term μαρτυρία, "testimony," connects the fifth seal to Revelation's prominent witness motif. Throughout the book indeed, it appears in a variety of ways as the verbal form μαρτυρεῖν, "to testify," with the emphasis on "to

⁵⁷About the causal force of διὰ, Boring pointed out that the phrase "on account of" is "always used in Revelation for the result of an action, not its purpose" (*Revelation*, 82). In his grammatical notes, Aune also emphasized the overwhelming use of διὰ + accusative in the book "as a marker of cause or reason, with focus on instrumentality, either objects or events" (*Revelation 1-5*, clxxvii-clxxviii). He offered Rev 6:9 and also 20:4 which figure as prominent examples of the causal force of the phrase in the sense of "because of" (*ibid.*).

acknowledge the reality of something” only in the introduction and conclusion;⁵⁸ then ten times in the noun form μαρτυρία, “act of bearing witness”;⁵⁹ and finally five times as μάρτυς, “witness.”⁶⁰

As for its etymological source, H. Strathmann referred to the root *smer*, which suggests the idea of “to bear in mind,” “to remember,” “be concerned,” and concluded that a μάρτυς “would thus be one who remembers and can tell about something, i.e., a witness.”⁶¹ In continuity with non-biblical Greek, the New Testament chiefly uses “the concept of witness both in the sense of witness to ascertainable facts and also in that of witness to truths, i.e., the making known and confessing of convictions.”⁶²

Further complications arise for the understanding of the fifth seal because of the polyvalency of the term μαρτυρία which Roloff rightly called “one of the central

⁵⁸1:2; 22:16; 18, 20.

⁵⁹1:2, 9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11; 17; 15:5; 19:10 [2x]; 20:4.

⁶⁰1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17:6 (two of them refer directly to Jesus himself [1:5; 3:14]).

⁶¹H. Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:475. A. Court de Gebelin noted that the term “dans le grec chrétien désigne celui qui témoigne de la vérité par son sacrifice, le martyr et fait remonter la racine a un terme skr. *Smarati* ‘se souvenir’ et grec merimna, sens premier ‘souvenir’” (*Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, vol. 9, *Monde primitif analysé et comparé avec le monde moderne: considéré dans ses genres allégorique* [1773-1782], s.v. “μάρτυς, κτλ”). Louw and Nida translated the verb μαρτυρέω as “to provide information about a person or an event concerning which the speaker has direct knowledge—‘to witness’”; and where its derivatives μαρτυρία, ας *f*; μαρτύριον, ου *n* denote “the content of what is witnessed or said—‘testimony, witness’” (L&N, s.v. “μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, κτλ”).

⁶²Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.” *TDNT*, 4:489. See also Jonathan Knight who identified two distinctive features of the New Testament usage of the ‘martyr’ complex of words: “Its primary meaning is ‘witness’ in a legal sense. This is found in many references in John’s Gospel (e.g. John 1.7) and in other writings too (e.g. Acts 22.15). At the heart of the word lies the question of truth. The ultimate testimony to the truth is given by the second sense of ‘martyr.’ This denotes the willingness to die for what one believes to be true” (*Revelation* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 31). Of significance for the popularity of this term in the New Testament, James Strong mentioned 37 occurrences of the term with the sense of “‘witness’ fifteen times, ‘testimony’ fourteen times, ‘record’ seven times, and ‘report’ once. The range of meaning covers, “testifying as in the office committed to the prophets of testifying concerning future events” or “what one testifies, testimony, i.e. before a judge” (*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon* [1996], s.v. “μαρτυρία”).

theological terms in Revelation.”⁶³ Although translated simply as “witness,” “testimony,” “attestation,” “validation,” or “verification,” the word still has a rich connotation as suggested by Walter Bauer: (1) the confirmation or attestation on the basis of personal knowledge or belief as in “act of testifying,” (2) the forensic sense of a “testimony in court,” (3) the attestation of character or behavior as in a “statement of approval,” or finally (4) “a testimony that invites death” as in martyrdom.⁶⁴

It has been proposed that, by the time of Revelation, the term μαρτυρία had lost both of its New Testament forensic and evangelistic undertones in favor of martyrdom.⁶⁵ Understanding this witness motif is crucial because of its impact, not only on the preamble of the fifth seal, but also on the answer section. To seize up the meaning of this term as it relates to the issue of theodicy, I will focus on μαρτυρία and the identity of the slain witnesses, μαρτυρία, and the relationship with ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, μαρτυρία and some implications of the verb εἶχεν, and μαρτυρία and faithful witness.

μαρτυρία and the Identity of the Slain Witnesses

Undoubtedly, the identification of the slain witnesses in 6:9 is closely dependent on the cause of their death. In the text, this cause is introduced by a double διὰ in v. 9: διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, because of the word of God and because of the testimony they maintained. While the term μαρτυρία is generally

⁶³Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 20.

⁶⁴Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “μαρτυρία.” The term, for him, stresses “the content of testimony which Christians, or certain Christians (martyrs, prophets) possess: 6:9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4” (ibid.).

⁶⁵See the dispute on this issue between P. Vassiliadis, “The Translation of MARTYRIA IESOU in Revelation,” *BT* 36 (1985): 229-134, and F. Mazzaferri, “MARTYRIA IĒSOU Revisited,” *BT* 39 (1988): 114-122. P. Ellingworth reviewed the debate between Vassiliadis and Mazzaferri (“The Marturia Debate,” *BT* 41 [1990]: 138-139). Cf. T. W. Manson, “Martyrs and Martyrdom,” *BJRL* 39 (1957): 463-484.

associated eight times with martyrs as μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, “testimony of Jesus,” in Revelation,⁶⁶ it is unqualified as the more general τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον, “the testimony which they held,” in 6:9 (see also 12:11).

From the omission of the genitive Ἰησοῦ after μαρτυρία, it has been suggested that the slain witnesses were not Christians. Feuillet, for example, restricted the identification of the slaughtered souls only to pre-Christian martyrs who gave their lives for the cause of moral or religious truth.⁶⁷ However, this is quite overstated given the attraction to the two earlier occurrences of the same idiom in Rev 1:2, 9 as τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ with ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.⁶⁸ That the witnesses are Christ’s followers is further indicated, as Giesen pointedly notes, by the fact that the fellow servants and brothers

⁶⁶1:2, 9; 12:7, 17; 17:6; 19:10 [2x]; 20:4.

⁶⁷Feuillet, “Les martyrs de l’humanité et l’agneau égorgé,” 194-195, 201. See also Heinrich Kraft “Besser ist es wohl, hier daran zu denken, daß es sich um alttestamentliche und folglich ungetaufte Martyrer handelt” (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16a [Tübingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1974], 119). J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 110-111; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 85-86; Moffat, “Revelation of St. John the Divine,” 5:391. Isaac Williams found six reasons in Rev 6:9-11 to defend the idea that the “souls under the altar are the saints of the Old Testament.” Quoting Heb 11:39-40, he applied the fifth seal to “those under the Law who are in waiting—waiting for their perfection” (*Apocalypse*, 96-99). Cf. Carrington who thought that “the martyrs of which St. John is speaking here are not Christian martyrs, but innocent dead in general. It is not said that they were killed for the Witness of Jesus, but for the *Witness which they bore*, an awkward phrase which purposely avoids making them Christian” (original emphasis) (*The Meaning of the Revelation*, 132).

⁶⁸Mazzaferri affirmed that even if μαρτυρία is unqualified in 6.9, it has precisely the same meaning as μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ “since it is still in apposition to *logos tou theou*, and in a sanguine context at that” (“MARTYRIA IĒSOU,” 120). Further, Edouard Cothenet pointedly noted that the assumption that the slaughtered witness referred only to pre-Christian martyrs is rather hard to sustain because the text comes after the Enthronement of Christ which is supposed to have already taken place (“Le symbolisme du culte” [*Exégèse et Liturgie*, *Lectio Divina* 133 {Paris: Cerf, 1988}]). A. Pohl explained that the genitive Ἰησοῦ, of Jesus, may have been omitted simply for rhythmic reasons (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Wuppertaler studien Bibel, 2 vols. [Wuppertal, Germany: Brockhaus, 1971], 1:202, n. 214). See also Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 63.

happen to be the Christians dwelling on the earth.⁶⁹

In spite of the omission of the defining word, most scholars, however, agree that the genitive Ἰησοῦ, “of Jesus,” is implied in 6:9. The text is taken to reveal Christian martyrs, either those suffering at the hands of the Jews before the fall of Jerusalem,⁷⁰ or the victims of Nero’s persecution who await those threatened by Domitian.⁷¹ However, Boxall was perhaps right in extending the identification to the faithful of both the old and new covenants from Abel to the recent victims of Nero’s persecution without discarding “the possibility that John also sees the martyrs of the visionary future.”⁷²

As with similar occurrences of the formula in the rest of Revelation, scholars are quite divided on whether Rev 6:9 displays an objective genitive, that is, “testimony about

⁶⁹Heinz Giesen cited 6:11 in comparison with 1:9 and 12:10 (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 183). For Håkan Ulfgard, “One wishes there was more in the text to support such a clear distinction between Jew and non-Jew, pre-Christian and Christian in the people of God in Revelation. It is highly questionable whether it is permissible to draw the conclusions that 6:9 refers especially to pre-Christian martyrs (cf. Matt 23:35), while the parallel text in 20:4 has Christian martyrs in view” (*Feast and Future: Revelation 7:9-17 and the Feast of Tabernacles*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 22 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1989], 55-56, n. 234).

⁷⁰Friedrich Spitta, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Halle, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1889), 300. See also Alan James Beagley, “Sitz im Leben” of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church’s Enemies, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 50 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1987), 38-44.

⁷¹R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174-177; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 524; Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 103; Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 150; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 149; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 84; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406; Krodell, *Revelation*, 178; Prigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 210; Boring, *Revelation*, 124-125. Lenski believed they are not from the Old Testament but they are “from the time of Stephen until the time of John’s vision” (*Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 235-236).

⁷²Boxall, *Revelation of Saint John*, 114. Cf. Prigent who offered the following compromise “même s’il faut sous-entendre ‘de Jésus,’ cela n’exclut pas encore de manière définitive les martyrs de l’ancienne alliance: l’esprit prophétique qui les inspirait était directement relaté au témoignage de Jésus (Ap 19, 10)” (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 114).

Jesus,” or a subjective genitive, that is, “the testimony given by Jesus.”⁷³ It appears that perhaps both the objective and subjective sense may be included in the implied genitive, Ἰησοῦ, “of Jesus,” of 6:9. J. P. M. Sweet noted that the suffering depicted in the fifth seal is “the result of witness, which is not just their testimony *to* Jesus, but the testimony *of* Jesus, which they maintain [emphasis his].”⁷⁴

⁷³Supporters for the subjective genitive include Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “μαρτυρία”; Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.” 4:500-501; Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Subsidia Biblica 39 (1996; 2nd reprint of the 5th edition, Rome: Gregorian and Biblical Press, 2010), 752; Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 156-158, Allison A. Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study,” *NovT* 15 (1973): 75-76; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174; Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 102; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 526; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 183, 270; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 119; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 183; Henry M. Morris, *Revelation Record*, 108, Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 444; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 104; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 234; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:475; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406; and Mazzaferri, “MARTYRIA IĒSOU Revisited,” 114-122.

Scholars favoring an objective genitive include G. Kittel, “λέγω, λόγος, κτλ.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:127; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 13; A. T. Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 6, *The General Epistles and the Revelation of John* (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 6:343; E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 1000; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 157; Krodell, *Revelation*, 246; Martin Rist, *The Reader’s Guide to the Book of Revelation* (New York: Association Press, 1961), 459; Alford, “Ἀποκαλύπτει Ἰωαννου,” 4:618; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 84; Ford, *Revelation*, 96, 99; Vassiliades, “The Translation of MARTYRIA IESOU in Revelation,” 129-134; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Moffat New Testament Commentary, assisted M. K. Ross (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 119; Barnes, *Book of Revelation*, 186; Hughes, *Book of Revelation*, 17; Alfred Plummer, “Revelation,” *Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 22:188; G. W. H. Lampe, “The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev 19:10),” in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. W. C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984), 1:245-258; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, vol. 16, Sacra Pagina Series, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 94; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 78; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 240; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 157; Osborne, *Revelation*, 285-286; Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!*, 222-223; Fee, *Revelation*, 97; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 63; and Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 41.

⁷⁴J. P. M. Sweet, “Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*, ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 101-117. See also Beale who did acknowledge the popular option of the subjective genitive in 1:2, but still affirmed that, just as in 1:9; 6:9; and 20:4, “the genitives may also express the idea that these visions are ‘about’ God and Jesus” (*The Book of Revelation*, 183-184). Other scholars who saw the distinction between the objective and subjective sense as artificial include Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 249; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 78, 23; Delorme and Donegani, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 1:191; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 62; and Barr, *Tales of the End*, 3.

Further clarifications on the association of the slain witnesses of the fifth seal with Jesus can be derived from a key parallel text in Rev 14:12. In fulfillment to the cry of the slain servants of God in Rev 6:9-11, an angel announces therein the execution of a judgment upon the worshipers of the beast and the image and the recipients of the special mark. Located in the context of the final showdown between good and evil in Revelation, this message of this angel uncovers God's judgment upon the forces of evil and a warning to the weak who may contemplate defecting to beast-worship.⁷⁵

Revelation 14:12 starts with a call to endurance which seems to serve as a boost to perseverance for the faithful, Ὡδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, here is the perseverance of the saints.⁷⁶ Importantly, Osborne rightly insists on the fact that “Ὑπομονή (*hypomonē*, endurance) is the key ethical term in the Apocalypse. This is the last of seven occurrences (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12) and calls the believers both to wait on the Lord and to overcome evil (see on 1:9).”⁷⁷ These faithful ones bear similar

⁷⁵See A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12: 542. J. Massyngberde Ford sums up well the importance of “Rev 14 as a prelude to the victory to be completed by the figure on the white horse in Rev 19 and to the total destruction of the enemies’ force in chs. 19–20 but more fuel must be added to the fire. The next chapter resumes the theme of the wrath of God intimated in 14:10 and brings it to a climax” (*Revelation*, 251). Georges Beasley-Murray calls this verse the “punch line” for the words of judgment in the preceding verses (*The Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., The New Century Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 226).

⁷⁶See Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 658; Moffat, “Revelation of St. John the Divine,” 5:439; Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:413. For Beale, the motivation for endurance is that “they might avoid the eternal consequences of loyalty to the beast and receive an eternal reward (v 13)” (*The Book of Revelation*, 765). Hughes asserts that “the certainty of final judgment and of the triumph of justice is a strong encouragement to endure persecution and persevere in obedience to God’s will and in the faith that is concentrated on Jesus (cf. Heb. 12:1-3)” (*Book of Revelation*, 164).

⁷⁷Osborne, *Revelation*, 543. Tonstadt captures well the nuances of the relationship between the word of God and the commandments of God in the following quote: “God’s programme, message and purpose are in Revelation fielded under the inclusive term ‘the word of God’ or by the term ‘the commandments of God’, also to be taken in a broad sense and used almost interchangeably. Nevertheless, ‘the commandments of God’ cannot escape the ethical ring and the impression that it embodies the constitutional basis of the divine government. Therefore, while ‘the word of God’ safeguards the inclusive and comprehensive reach of these terms, ‘the commandments of God’, understood as a singular, invests the terms with a particular focus” (*Saving God’s Reputation*, 171).

characteristics to “the rest” of the woman’s seed in 12:17, who also keeps the commandments of God. They are further connected with the 144,000 of chapters 7 and 14 and with those who have been executed under the beast (13:15). The rest of 14:12 clarifies the nature of the patience/endurance, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. In the Apocalypse, the verb τηρέω, I keep, as pointed out by Osborne, is “another major term for ‘perseverance’ . . . occurring ten times (1:3; 2:26; 3:3, 8, 10; 12:17; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7, 9). On every occasion it means to ‘follow’ and ‘obey’ God’s commands, to ‘guard’ the truths of God in a world that has chosen darkness over light.”⁷⁸ The commandments of God, which is likely to be virtually interchangeable with the word of God in 6:9 (cf. 1:2, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 20:4), is introduced as a defining mark of the true followers of God in this climax of the cosmic conflict,

More importantly, the second part of 14:12 connects the faithful witnesses directly to Jesus with the genitive construction τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, the faith of Jesus. The debate is quite open as to the way the nouns are related to each other in this construction but in light of what has been said earlier on 2:13, the objective sense of faithful to Jesus in the sense of reinforcing loyalty might be preferred. Arguing from the fact that the “phrase πίστιν τηρεῖν, “to keep faith, to remain loyal,” was a common Greek expression,” Aune defends convincingly the case for an objective genitive where the phrase τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ would mean “(their) faithfulness to Jesus”⁷⁹

⁷⁸Tonstadt, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 171.

⁷⁹Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 837-838. See also Donald S. Deer, “Whose faith/loyalty in Revelation 2:13 and 14:12,” *Bible Translator* 38.3 (1987): 328-330; Roloff, *Revelation*, 176; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 215; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12: 542; Osborne, *Revelation*, 543-544.

However, Tonstad's case for a subjective genitive preference in the context of Revelation theodicy is also quite plausible. He surveys the four possible options, "the faithfulness of Jesus," "the faith of Jesus," "faith in Jesus," and "faithfulness to Jesus" and while admitting their validity, he concludes that the "greatest among these is the faithfulness of God in Jesus."⁸⁰ Reflecting on the implication of this view for the theodicy of the Apocalypse, he maintains that

The organic and intimate relationship between "the commandments of God" and "the faithfulness of Jesus" epitomizes the vindication of God's ways and ensures the resolution to the conflict. Lest this connection be lost, "the faithfulness of Jesus" is not to be seen merely as faithfulness to a flawed standard but faithfulness that shows the standard itself - and the Person whose character it reflects - to be free from blame.⁸¹

At any rate, what needs to be retained for now is the basic agreement that the testimony can in no way be divorced from Jesus Christ. Although the evidence might be insufficient to establish conclusively the identity of the martyrs within the fifth seal, there is no justifiable textual reason for restricting this to pre-Christian martyrs as Feuillet and others have done.⁸² However, the parallel passages reveal clearly a close loyalty of the slain witnesses to the Lord Jesus through whom God's character and the way he rules the world is revealed. Endurance is the key to enablement for persistent faithfulness in persecution.

⁸⁰Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation*, 194.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 179.

⁸²Heil pointedly notes that, "Feuillet errs not by including pre-Christian martyrs but by excluding Christian martyrs from the slaughtered souls" ("Fifth Seal [Rev 6:9-11] as a Key to the Book of Revelation, 224, n. 13).

μαρτυρία and the Relationship with ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ

Given the implied genitive, as the close parallel with 1:2, 9 indicates, the first issue is to determine the exact content of λόγος and μαρτυρία in the phrases τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, “the word of God,” and τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, “testimony of Jesus,” that impacts so much the cause of death in 6:9. The other issue is the force of the conjunction καὶ in the coordination of λόγος and μαρτυρία, whether they are two things or one in the fifth seal.

Favoring a conjunctive sense of καὶ, “and,” Strathmann suggested that “the Word of God and the witness of Jesus Christ are inseparably interwoven.”⁸³ He took the cause of the martyrs’ death in Rev 6:9 to be a loyal adherence to the Scriptures as a whole.⁸⁴ Taking καὶ as explanatory, Beckwith opted instead for an exegetical reading of καὶ, “even,” where “the whole expression, the word of God, *even the testimony borne by Jesus*, denotes the divine revelation which Jesus had given in the gospel; it is on account of *holding* that, that the Christians were martyred [emphasis his].”⁸⁵

⁸³Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ,” *TDNT*, 4:500.

⁸⁴Ibid. Strathmann also established a close connection between the λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4) or the ἐντολαὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (12:17) and the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, and inferred here a “twofold expression” for the Old and the New Testament. However, he warned, “The combination is not to be construed as referring to the OT on the one hand and the Christian message on the other” (ibid.). Following Bousset who sees the twofold formula as, “Ein plerophorischer Ausdruck für die christliche Offenbarung überhaupt” (*Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 183); Strathmann proposes the view of a “plerophoric expression for the Christian revelation in general” (“μάρτυς, κτλ,” *TDNT*, 4:500). For another example of the understanding of the term as the Christian revelation in general, see Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 277.

⁸⁵Beckwith inferred that the second phrase simply specifies the preceding words (*Apocalypse of John*, 526). For Mounce, “Instead of being coordinate, the second phrase (‘the testimony they had maintained’) may serve to make the first (‘the word of God’) more specific” (*Book of Revelation*, 147). Aune also interpreted καὶ exegetically: “Four times the phrases ‘the word of God’ and ‘the testimony by Jesus’ are closely associated or virtually equated (1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4) where the combined idiom relates the cause of death to ‘the message from God, that is, the witness borne by Jesus’” (*Revelation 1-5*, 14, 19). In the terms λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ and μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, M. E. Boismard saw a hendiadys (two words or phrases expressing one idea) which relates the reason for slaying witnesses to “la Parole de Dieu attestée par Jésus Christ” (*L’Apocalypse* [Paris: Cerf, 1959], 27). Thus *martyria* is given a verbal meaning in this translation.

Figuring the exact meaning of λόγος is difficult because it has such a variety of meaning, that is, “word, speech, language, narrative, statement, discourse, sayings, preaching, teaching, or even thing.”⁸⁶ On the possible meanings of λόγος in the Apocalypse, G. Kittel identified “the apostolic preaching, the testimony of martyrs, or the revelation itself, which is an elucidation and illustration of the *lógos* that is spoken by God and by the witness of Jesus.”⁸⁷ The formula τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ has often been associated with either the Apocalypse or the gospel message itself.⁸⁸

A theological key is offered by H. Ritt who surveyed the Hebrew word דָּבָר (“word, report, command”; also “thing, matter, affair”) which translates into λόγος (most often in the Pentateuch) and רִיבּוּא (most often in the prophets). He noted an interesting

In the vein, Caird attributed a verbal meaning to μαρτυρία where the cause of death refers to the maintaining of “the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus” (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 84).

⁸⁶Bauer identified three clusters of meaning for the term: “(1) communication whereby the mind finds expression; ‘word,’ where the term also refers to the revelation of God’s word, command or commission; (2) ‘computation, reckoning,’ and (3) the independent personified expression of God, ‘the Logos’” (BDAG, s.v. “λόγος”). Louw and Nida also offered quite a range of meaning: (1) “statement,” that which is said (L&N, s.v. “λόγος”), (2) “speech,” the action of speaking (ibid.), (3) “a title for Jesus in the Gospel of John as a reference to the content of God’s revelation and as a verbal echo of the use of the verbs meaning ‘to speak’ in Genesis 1 and in many utterances of the prophets—‘Word, Message’” (ibid.), (4) “the gospel,” the content of what is preached about Christ (ibid.), and (5) “event, matter or thing” (ibid.).

⁸⁷Kittel, “λόγος,” *TDNT*, 4:109.

⁸⁸Mazzaferrri took John’s book as the personal testimony of Jesus (“MARTYRIA IĒSOU Revisited,” 114-122). See also Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 57; and B. Dehandschutter who suggested that “what Jesus testifies” refers to “the contents of the book” (“Meaning of Witness in the Apocalypse,” in *L’Apocalypse Johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. J. Lambrecht, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologiarum Lovaniensium 53 [Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, 1980], 285).

Other scholars widen the understanding of the concept by combining it with “word of God,” where the whole expression idiom refers either to the contents of John’s preaching (e.g., Alford, “Ἀποκαλύψις Ἰωάννου,” 4:546; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 234) or to the gospel truth in general (e.g. Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 12, 249; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 526; Osborne viewed the term as “semitechnical formula for gospel truth and faithful Christian witness to it” (*Revelation*, 56). See also E. G. Selwyn who wondered instead of κήρυγμα “whether the word μαρτυρία and cognates would not describe better the primitive and indispensable core of the Christian message” (“Eschatology in 1 Peter,” in *The Background of New Testament and Its Eschatology, Festschrift for C. H. Dodd*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956], 395).

development of a “‘word of God theology’ that proceeds from the creation story and the prophetic revelatory event leads further to the wisdom literature,” which climaxes in the “deepest christological terminology in the Johannine prologue.”⁸⁹

Throughout Revelation, this fully matured “word of God theology” seems to be reflected as well especially in the usage of the singular form of λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, word of God (cf. 1:2, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 20:4). The content of John’s concept of the word of God appears to have indeed the prophetic sense of the divine revelation through Christ and his messengers.⁹⁰ Including the perspective of Rev 19:9, Ladd suggested that “the *word of God* is the gospel which God has given to men and by which they are saved, which includes the great facts of the resurrection and the lordship of Christ [emphasis his].”⁹¹

About the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, Merrill C. Tenney rightly views its content as including “all of the work of Christ: His preincarnate purpose, His earthly ministry of teaching, death and resurrection, His present work of intercession, and His future reign and judgments.”⁹² If this is true, the cause of death would be related to Christ’s

⁸⁹H. Ritt, “λόγος,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:357.

⁹⁰Interestingly, throughout the book of Revelation, the *logos* in its singular form (1:2, 9; 3:8, 10; 6:9; 12:11; 20:4) is always used with reference to the testimony of/about Jesus; whereas the plural form *logoi* (17:17; 19:9) is used with reference to the Book of Revelation (cf. point 4, p. 243).

⁹¹Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 104. So, Barnes, *Book of Revelation*, 48; Boring, *Revelation*, 82; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 97-98; Cf. Caird who interpreted the term as “the plan, **the purpose** of God for all mankind, for all creation, already **attested by Jesus Christ** in his life and teaching, when the ‘Purpose took human flesh’ (John 1:14)” (emphasis his) (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 11). A. F. Johnson took it as “the promises and acts of God revealed in this book [Revelation] that are realized through Jesus, the Word of God incarnate” (“Revelation,” 12:417); whereas Bratcher and Hatton understood it as “the truth or truths that God has made known by means of Jesus Christ” (*A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 11).

⁹²Merrill C. Tenney added, “Christ is God’s witness to the world of His holiness, His grace, and His power” (*Interpreting Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957], 44). Kraft found this witness

Scripture-based claims as the Word of God incarnate and its victorious implications.

According to the historical content of the testimony of Jesus, the phrase “the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus” does not just refer to a concept but to the whole event of the incarnation as well. Taken together, the expression “the word of God and testimony of Jesus” suggests broadly that the martyrs died as a result of confessing the divine revelation of Jesus as the incarnated word of God based on Scripture. In essence, the emphasis of the two phrases seems to relate the cause of the suffering of the witnesses directly to God and Christ: theirs is not an ordinary death. In so doing, this reinforces the expectation of their vindication and the issue of theodicy.

μαρτυρία and Some Implications of the Verb ἔχειν

The verb ἔχω has a rich connotation too. It translates the idea of “to have, to hold, to have charge of, to keep up, to maintain, to hold fast, to keep close, to sustain an action, to bear, to carry, to bring etc.”⁹³ The expression ἔχειν μαρτυρίαν, “to hold a testimony,” appears in 6:9; 12:17; 19:10 and Lampe suggests that the sense is “to maintain” or “to hold fast to” the confessors’ testimony which is contrasted with the idea of “keeping my word and not denying my name” in 3:8.⁹⁴

According to the context, the reason behind the witnesses’ death in connection

primarily in Jesus’ death and resurrection as producing eternal life and hope for the Christian (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 22).

⁹³Henry George Lidell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. and augmented Sir Henry Stuart Jones, Roderick McKenzie, et al. (1996), s.v. “ἔχω.” Louw and Nida offered a wide range of possibilities for this verb: “To have or possess objects in the sense of having control over the use of such objects” (L&N, s.v. “ἔχω”); “hold on to, to retain” (ibid.); “hold a view” (ibid.); “to be or to bear” (ibid.); “to experience a state or condition, generally involving duration, to experience, to have” (ibid.). Bauer did mention Rev 6:9 as an example of “holding fast to matters of transcendent importance” (BDAG, s.v. “ἔχω”).

⁹⁴Lampe, “The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev 19:10),” 253.

with the verb εἶχον, “they had maintained,” suggests a witness which they kept holding onto under adverse circumstances. This cause is either related to “maintaining their witness to the Lordship of Jesus-Christ”⁹⁵ or to “possessing the testimony that Jesus gave.”⁹⁶ Roloff went further in proposing here a progression of the concept of μαρτυρία in Revelation over the rest of its expression in the New Testament inasmuch “as it points to a direct correspondence between the testimony that human beings bear and the testimony that Jesus Christ himself has borne.”⁹⁷

The imperfect tense εἶχον, “they had held,” would refer to the constancy of the act of witnessing in the past and perhaps the consequent death that resulted from this.⁹⁸ Fee pointedly noted that the emphasis here is not so much “on the content of their testimony as such, but on their loyalty to it; it was “the testimony they had maintained.”⁹⁹ In

⁹⁵Many scholars also connect the testimony to the active showing forth of the Christian faith by word or deed in relation to the Lordship of Christ. Louis A. Brighton attributed the cause to “their witness to the Word of God” (*Revelation*, Concordia Commentary [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999], 169); for Schüssler-Fiorenza, it is “because of their witness to God and Christ” (*Revelation*, 63); for Boxall, it is because of “proclaiming God’s word, that is, the witness they bore to it” (*Revelation of Saint John*, 114); Blount referred it to “their nonaccommodating commitment to the word of God, which is the witness to the lordship of Christ” (*Revelation*, 132) and Smalley related it to “their witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ that believers have suffered. Testifying to their faith, in active resistance to Rome, brings about their physical end, which in turn leads to the coming of God’s kingdom” (*Revelation to John*, 157).

⁹⁶Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “μαρτυρία”; Zerwick and Grosvenor, *Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 752; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174; Henry M. Morris, *Revelation Record*, 108; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406; Lenski attributed the reason to their refusal “to disown God’s and Christ’s testimony” (*Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 234); for Ladd, it was for accepting the witness that Jesus gave that they were put to death (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 104). On a conciliatory note, Mounce insisted that holding this testimony received from Jesus would obviously involve their own testimony as well because the “two can hardly be separated” (*Book of Revelation*, 147).

⁹⁷Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 20.

⁹⁸See Aune who insisted on the importance of the tense “in a narrative setting dominated by aors. to emphasize a process occurring in the past that provides the background for a present activity, which is indicated by the aor. verb ἔκραξαν, ‘they cried,’ in v. 10” (*Revelation 6-16*, 383). He added that the imperfect εἶχον “indicates action in progress but antecedent to the complete action indicated by ἔκραξαν” (ibid.). For Osborne, it “dramatizes the past witness of the saints as it progressed” (*Revelation*, 285).

⁹⁹Fee, *Revelation*, 96.

support of this view, Caird pointed out that in Revelation, “the virtues most frequently praised are patience, endurance, constancy, and loyalty.”¹⁰⁰

The verb εἶχον emphasizes the idea of constancy in holding on to the claims of Scripture and the great facets of Christ’s incarnation. The slain witnesses stood up for their faith unto death, thereby displaying the endurance that appears as a cardinal virtue that leads to royal dignity in Revelation. Given the connection of their death with the victorious resurrected Christ, the incarnate word of God, the burning issue of the reality and delay of their own resurrection and glorification would come automatically to the forefront in a context of climactic evil.

μαρτυρία and the Faithful Witness Mandate

Testifying unto death supposedly binds up together the concepts of faithfulness and truthfulness to enhance the radicalism of the witness motif in the Apocalypse. In Rev 1:5, 2:13, and 3:14, such a combination is noted with reference to Jesus and Antipas who both ended being killed because of their testimony. This is probably the case in Rev 6:9-11 too as seen below.¹⁰¹

Jesus’ self-identity in 1:5 and 3:14, as the faithful witness, has indeed a direct bearing on the identity of the slain witnesses in 6:9 as it serves to also encourage other believers who are about to face severe persecution. The authenticity of Jesus, as the true witness (μάρτυς), is established by the fact that he died rather than compromise his

¹⁰⁰Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 27.

¹⁰¹Osborne pointedly noted that the fifth seal acts as a “turning point in the book, summarizing the faithful witness of the first part, the conflict of the middle portion, and the promise and vindication of the final section” (*Revelation*, 283). For how the fifth seal participates in the faithful witness motif of Revelation, see Heil, “Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 226.

witness and that his death is preceded by trial(s) somewhat comparable to that of his martyred followers. What is profoundly significant is that he is now portrayed as alive and bearing witness to John and to the churches, through the prophetic Spirit and the Apocalypse at hand. To the believers who were tempted to compromise their witness because of threatening persecution (even to death),” the text is meant to encourage them to overcome this temptation by following Christ’s example.

Similarly, in 3:14, Christ’s self-identify is portrayed as ὁ Ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, the Amen, the faithful and true witness. As the Amen, Christ indeed guarantees and confirms all the promises and plans of God (cf. 2 Cor 1:20). Commenting on the other two titles, Osborne insightfully notes,

The first title is defined further in the second, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός (*ho martys ho pistos kai alēthinos*, the faithful and true witness). All three terms are major concepts throughout this book. . . . It is clear that Jesus is the model for persevering “faithfulness” as a “testimony” to the world of the superiority of God’s way. In the Apocalypse both “faithfulness” (see on 2:10) and “witness” (see 2:13; 11:3; 17:6) are connected with suffering and especially martyrdom as the final “witness” to overcoming the world. Christ as the “slain Lamb” (5:6, et al.) is the epitome of such a “witness.”¹⁰²

More significantly, he is further immediately described in 3:14 as ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, the ruler of God’s creation, which suggest that as a result of persevering as a faithful witness to the Father in the face of trial even unto death, which he overcame, he was able to assume his role as the cosmic ruler.¹⁰³

In the address to the Pergamean Church, the description of the risen Lord in 1:5 is

¹⁰²Osborne, *Revelation*, 204.

¹⁰³Thus, as Beale puts it well, “Believers can take courage in the promise that if they maintain their faithful witness despite persecution, they too will reign with Christ, since they have won spiritual victory over compromise (cf. 2:10–11; 3:21). . . . They can have confidence that Christ has suffered the same thing and overcome it and that therefore they will be empowered to do likewise” (*The Book of Revelation*, 190).

applied as a tribute to a noble martyr, Antipas, who is actually important enough to be referred to by name (2:13). The town where he lived, Pergamum, is presented as the seat of the ultimate power opposing God and his people, namely “the throne of Satan” which has been taken to stand for nothing less than the Imperial Cult itself.¹⁰⁴ Anticipating the jurisprudential/forensic setting of 6:9-11, the executioner of justice, who comes here with the sharp, two-edged sword (2:12), is none other than the one bearing witness, the conquering/avenging Messiah of later chapters (17, 19).¹⁰⁵ This imagery of Christ’s judicial authority marks indeed the pronouncement of judgment and defeat of his enemies.

Interestingly, the Pergamean narrative provides helpful insights about faithfulness in witnessing that enlightens the significance of martyrdom in 6:9. Antipas is portrayed as, Ἀντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, Antipas, my witness, my faithful one, in 2:13 which can be paralleled with 11:7 and 17:6, where believers are reported to have been put to death because of their μαρτυρία. The application of the title to Antipas suggests in the words of Roloff, “the idea that he traveled the path of the witness up to his death in

¹⁰⁴For support in favor of relating the symbol to the emperor worship, see A. F. Johnson, *Revelation*, 12:440; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:61; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 46; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 33-34; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 63-64; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 246; etc.

¹⁰⁵This statement is perhaps a polemic against the Roman governor of Pergamum who is supposed to have the “the right of the sword” over its inhabitants so that he could put anyone to death at will. The imagery challenges Rome’s claims with the temporal sword whereby it is actually Christ who holds the ultimate judicial power over Rome. As Beale puts it well: “The judicial power of Christ’s sword is not only intended to judge apostates in the church (cf. 2:16), but also stands as a polemical image against the satanic center of Roman justice in Pergamum, which misuses its power to persecute Christians (Roman governors had the ultimate “right of the sword” [*ius gladii*, i.e., capital punishment])” (*The Book of Revelation*, 247). See also Caird, *Revelation of St John the Divine*, 37-38; A. F. Johnson, *Revelation*, 12:440; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 440; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 38; Leon Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 65-66; Osborne, *Revelation*, 141; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 183-184. According to Ladd, the sword may stand also as a symbol of judgment to the Pergamean believers who had become lax in their attitude toward pagan activities (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 46).

conjunction with and according to the archetypal image of Jesus (1:5).”¹⁰⁶

Two things related to loyalty stand out in the characterization of this special witness namely, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομα μου “You hold my name” and, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου, “and you did not renounce faith in me.” The first clause suggests indeed the idea of remaining faithful to Christ’s name as a loyal follower where the name suggests Christ’s self-revelation to believer.¹⁰⁷ The second clause suggests a refusal to disown the Christian faith viewed here perhaps as the body of truth about Christ.¹⁰⁸ Thus, to the present tense “continue to remain firm (κρατεῖς)” the past tense in the aorist active form “did not renounce (ἠρνήσω)” his faith. The double clause suggests indeed perseverance in the face of persecution in two different ways.¹⁰⁹

The genitive construction τὴν πίστιν μου, my faith, in 2:13 raises the question of whose faith/loyalty since it can be interpreted either as a possessive “the (Christian) faith” or in an objective sense “faith in me.” However, throughout the book of Revelation, as Osborne rightly points out, “πίστιν always refers to an active and

¹⁰⁶Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 51.

¹⁰⁷For an objective view of the genitive construction, see Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 105; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 67; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 52. For Bauer, the first verb implies that they remain closely united to Jesus (BDAG, s.v. κρατέω). Aune draws attention to an important parallel with Heb 4:14 where the verb is used in the clause “hold fast our confession,” which refers “to the confession that Jesus is the Son of God, and the synonym κατέχειν occurs in Heb 10:23 in the synonymous phrase ‘hold fast the confession.’” (*Revelation* 6-16, 184).

¹⁰⁸See Bauer, BDAG, s.v. ἀρνέομαι. The verb ἀρνέομαι means to state that one has no knowledge of or relationship to a person, or to refuse them as a leader (See Louw and Nida, L&N, s.v. “ἀρνέομαι.”). As Fee notes it, “The believers there would thus have had good reason, humanly speaking, to **renounce your faith in me**; that they did not do so is what stands center stage in this strong commendation of them. Here are followers of the Crucified One who have learned from experience that discipleship in his name could mean death at the hands of the Empire, just as Christ himself had experienced (emphasis his) (Fee, *Revelation*, 34).”

¹⁰⁹See Aune who emphasizes the rhetorical impact of the statement, “This clause is in the rhetorical form of an antithesis in which the initial positive statement (‘hold my name’) is reiterated and reinforced through a negative statement (‘you did not renounce faith in me’) (*Revelation* 1-5, 184).”

persevering trust in Christ (cf. 2:19; 13:10; 14:12) and is equivalent to πιστός, faithful.”¹¹⁰ The phrase is best viewed as objective genitive i.e. “faith/loyalty in/to me.”¹¹¹ Thus, faithful witnesses are those who do not deny their faith in Christ and stay loyal to him even when confronted with severe persecution.

Furthermore, Christ, the faithful witness, is crucified in the great city (Rev 11:8) and the witnesses are killed by the beast in Rev 11:3-13 because of their testimony. In Rev 12:11, the testimony relates to not loving life to the point of death. The anger of the dragon seems to be triggered by testimony in Rev 12:17. Babylon is drunk with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus in Rev 17:6. Chapter 20, v. 4, speaks of those beheaded for their testimony.

From an etymological perspective, W. H. C. Frend noted a shift in the usage of μαρτυρία from the general lawcourt terminology to the technical sense of being a blood-witness by the time of Revelation. For him, the shift occurred under the influence of the perception that a cosmic struggle rapidly was reaching its climax.¹¹² It was supposedly motivated by the combined pressure of a growing resentment of Christians for the Roman government together with the perception of a delay in the *parousia* that slowly drew a wedge between the Church and the persecuting state. Thus, by the time of Revelation, when the expectation of the eschaton was more vivid, “the suffering for which he [the

¹¹⁰Osborne, *Revelation*, 142.

¹¹¹See Deer, “Whose faith/loyalty in Revelation 2:13 and 14:12,” 328-330. Also Caird, *Revelation*; A. F. Johnson, *Revelation*, 12:542; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:369; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 46-47; Beale, *Revelation*, 246; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 35; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 215-216; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 249; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*; ; Osborne, *Revelation*, 142; etc.

¹¹²Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 87.

Christian] had been warned in the Gospels and the witness which the approaching End demanded had become synonymous in the term ‘martyrdom.’”¹¹³

However, Frend’s theory has been attacked by Trites’s application of a five-stage diachronic development of the term μάρτυς and its cognates, where it becomes totally synonymous with “martyr” at the end. Describing the five stages, he wrote,

- 1) Originally, μάρτυς meant a witness in a court of law with no expectation of death.
- 2) Then it came to mean a man who testified to his faith in a lawcourt and suffered death as the penalty for his witness.
- 3) Next, death is regarded as part of the witness.
- 4) Μάρτυς becomes equivalent to “martyr.” Here the idea of death is uppermost, though the idea of witness is not entirely lacking.
- 5) The idea of witness disappears and words μαρτυς, μαρτυρία and μαρτυρεῖν are used absolutely to refer to martyrdom.¹¹⁴

He concluded that “the words μαρτύριον, μαρτυρία, and μαρτυρεῖν have *not* arrived at the fourth and fifth stages of semantic change, and do *not* imply martyrdom as part of their dictionary meaning.”¹¹⁵ Looking at 6:9, Trites rightly noted that “the martyrs are ‘slain’ . . . for a testimony *previously* given—a point made crystal clear by the context” (emphasis his).¹¹⁶ Similarly, in 11:7, he showed that death is only “the penalty for

¹¹³Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 66-69.

¹¹⁴Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 72-73. For further support, see Norbert Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer: Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie*, Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 5 (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1961), 92-109, 114-192; Ernst Günther, “Zeuge und Märtyrer,” *ZNW* 47 (1956): 145-146; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Sanctus: Essai sur le culte des saints dans l’antiquité*, Subsidia Hagiographica 17 (Brussels: Société des bollandistes, 1927), 95-108; Comblin, *Le Christ dans l’Apocalypse*, 6:137.

¹¹⁵Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 80. Regarding Antipas in 2:13, Strathmann came to a similar conclusion: “He is not a witness because he is put to death; he is put to death because he is a witness, i.e., in the sense of the proclamation of the Gospel” (“μάρτυς, κτλ.” *TDNT*, 4:495). He added, “Yet he is a faithful witness (emphatic) because he cannot be deflected from his witness by death” (ibid.).

¹¹⁶Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 76. He also noted the repeated use of σφάζειν in 6:9; 6:4, 9; 13:3, 8; 18:24. About the witnesses of Rev 11:6, Trites noted that they “are given supernatural powers ‘during the days of their prophesying’ . . . and it is only *after* their μαρτυρία is completed that they are killed” (ibid., 78).

courageous witness, but not part of the meaning of μαρτυρία.”¹¹⁷

While martyrdom definitely plays an important role in the crisis behind the fifth seal, μαρτυρία by itself has broader implications than just death. Bauckham argued convincingly after exploring the usage of the term μάρτυς in the Apocalypse that it “does not yet carry the technical Christian meaning of ‘martyr’ (one who bears witness by dying for the faith).” For him, this term “does not refer to death itself as witness but to verbal witness to the truth of God.”¹¹⁸ Thus, the word μαρτυρία covers broader elements of meaning within it: witness to or confession of God, suffering, and, if need be, death.

Originally, according to Strathmann, the meaning of μαρτυρία belonged, indeed, to a lawcourt terminology in the sense of someone who certifies in court as to what he/she has seen or heard from first-hand experience.¹¹⁹ In that vein, L. Coenen and A. A.

¹¹⁷Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 78.

¹¹⁸Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 72. In that vein, Brian K. Blount asserted that witnessing, not dying, is the prominent activity even in Rev 6:9-11 inasmuch as Christian witness is the actual cause of the death of confessors while their martyrdom is only the result (“Reading Revelation Today: Witness as Active Resistance,” *Int* 54 [2000]: 398-412). Strathmann concurred that μαρτυρία in Revelation denotes a confession which culminates in the sacrifice of life (“μάρτυς, κτλ.,” *TDNT*, 4:474-514). For those who deny μαρτυρία (“witness,” and its related word group) as a technical term for “martyr” in the Apocalypse, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 190; Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer*, 97-105; Trites, “Μάρτυς and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 72-80.

If this is correct, the late second century AD distinction that was drawn between the “martyr” and the “confessor” (one who came under disabilities in consequence of their religion, but did not pay the ultimate price of death) has no relevance for the understanding of “witness” in the fifth seal. In clarification, I wish to point out that the term μάρτυς simply means one who witnessed to God. As Pobee rightly noted, “A man could witness to God by abiding in the commandments of God, whether with or without discomfort. It seems to us, therefore, that in the NT we should be prepared to see a fluidity about the word martyr, not distinguishing too sharply between the martyr and the confessor” (*Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul*, 19). Henceforth in this study, like Pobee, I use the word martyr in the broad sense of witness to or confession of God with an element of suffering, whether it ends in death or not. Cf. J. Massyngberde Ford who asserted that there is little textual support in Revelation for the view that the term “martyr” should be interpreted as one who dies for faith in Christ. Being a “witness” for God and Christ meant witnessing “in daily living, in households, in trade guilds, in public service and entertainments, and in the practices of popular piety” (“Persecution and Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” *Bib Tod* 29 [1990]: 141-146).

¹¹⁹Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.,” *TDNT*, 4:476-478.

Trites insisted that μαρτυρία is “initially always action; but it can then take on the sense of *martyrion*, evidence, as the content of the statement made, whereas the latter can never have the sense of an action.”¹²⁰ Regarding the Book of Revelation, they added,

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.” Under such circumstances words with forensic overtones are naturally given their full weight in John’s message of encouragement. Metaphors drawn from the lawcourt are never far from the author’s mind, as a study of chs. 11, 12, 18 and 19 confirms.¹²¹

In the fifth seal, the forensic usage of μαρτυρία would impact negatively the fate of the inhabitants of the earth for their killing of God’s servants since, in the legal sense, such witness always precedes judgment. Strathmann suggested that the term μαρτυριον has first and foremost a basic meaning of “objective proof” in connection with a witness for the prosecution in both the New Testament and Classical Greek.¹²² He insisted that the phrase εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς, “testimony to them,” in Mark 13:9 and the parallel Matt 10:18, 24, should be understood in the sense of incriminating evidence against them at the Last Judgment, rather than a witness to them so that they may believe. For him, “the

¹²⁰L. Coenen and A. A. Trites, “Witness, Testimony,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:1039.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 4:1048-1049. Elsewhere, Trites reinforced the message of encouragement of the Apocalypse by drawing attention to the rich vocabulary displaying forensic overtones. For him, the metaphors drawn from the lawcourt are never far from the author’s mind: “The use of nouns such as μάρτυς, witness (1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 11:3; 17: 6); μαρτυρία, testimony (1:2, 9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20: 4), σατανᾶς, Satan (2:9; 3:9; 12:9), ὁ διάβολος, the devil (2:10; 12:9, 12), ὁ κατηγορῶν, the accuser (12:10), κρίσις, judgment (14:7; 16:7; 18:10; 19:2), κρίμα, condemnation (17:1; 18:20; 20: 4), θρόνος, throne (2:13; 20:4,11f.), υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, Son of man (1:13; 14:14; cf. Jn 5:27), νεφέλη, cloud (1:7; 11: 12; 14:14-16; cf. Mark 14:62 par.), βιβλία, books, record books (used twice in 20:12 // Dan. 7:10); of verbs such as μαρτυρεῖν, bear witness (1:2; 22:16, 18, 20), ὁμολογεῖν, confess (3:5), ἀρνεῖσθαι, opposite of confess, deny (2:13; 3:8), κατηγορεῖν, accuse (12:10), κρίνειν, judge (6:10; 11:18; 16:5; 18: 18, 20; 19:2, 11; 20: 12f.), ἐκδικεῖν, avenge or vindicate (6:10; 19:2; cf. Luke 18:3, 5), ἔχειν with κατὰ, have against (2:4, 14, 20), εὕρισκιν, find (3:2); and of adjectives such as πιστός, faithful, trustworthy, dependable (1:5; 2:10, 13; 3:14; 17: 14; 19:11; 2 1:5; 22:6) and ἀληθινός, faithful (3:7, 14; 6:10; 15:3; 16:7; 19:2, 9,11; 21:5; 22:6)” (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 161-162).

¹²²Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.,” *TDNT*, 4:476-485.

goal of this witness is to make opponents guilty.”¹²³ From this perspective, the delayed vindication is even harder to understand.

However, in the New Testament, the term μαρτυρία also displays missionary features that enhance the goal of the faithful witness motif. The blood witness and the forensic nuance have not completely overshadowed the missionary dimensions of this term in the context of Rev 6:9-11. C. E. B. Cranfield believed that μαρτύριον can bear both the sense of “witness to” and a “testimony (or evidence) against,” where “witness” not only offers them a chance to believe but also a piece of evidence for the truth of the gospel that would be potentially incriminating at the end, if not accepted.¹²⁴ He insisted that “it is surely better to allow for the various ideas which are involved in the witness-imagery rather than to insist on choosing between ‘witness to’ and ‘evidence against.’”¹²⁵

The background of Isa 40-55 may also be helpful for the missionary nuance in the usage of μαρτυρία in the fifth seal.¹²⁶ In this passage depicting the missionary ideology

¹²³For textual support on μαρτύριον as witness for the prosecution, Strathmann suggests that the phrase means primarily ‘a testimony (or evidence) against’ in Jas 5:3; Mark 6:11, and cf. Mark 1:44-45 and even Matt 24:14, ‘the gospel will be preached as a testimony to all nations.’ “In these instances a chance to believe may be offered, but rejected testimony can transform into convicting evidence too” (“μάρτυς, κτλ.” *TDNT*, 4:503-504). Cf. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 184; R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 2/1–2 (Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1977), 1:329; and J. Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament II/1-2 (Zürich: Benzinger/Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978-1979), 1:240.

¹²⁴C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 397-398.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶On the missionary message of Deutero-Isaiah, see Robert Martin-Achard, *A Light to the Nations: A Study of the Old Testament Conception of Israel’s Mission to the World*, trans. John P. Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 8-30. For scholars who support Isa 40-55 as the background to the concept of faithful witness in Revelation, see Strathmann, “μάρτυς, κτλ.” *TDNT*, 4:481-485; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 17, 18; Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 71-73; Reddish, “The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 15-20; Comblin, *Le Christ dans l’Apocalypse*, 6:146-155; Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2003), 160; Owen, “Martyrdom as an Impetus for Divine

of Israel, Mark Bredin noted that “God’s servants, through their faithfulness, aim to bring about a transformation of their enemy to live according to the principles God established.”¹²⁷ Similarly, he argued convincingly that Revelation also links the concept of faithful witness with the calling to be God’s middlemen before the nations. As such, they “should be active in proclaiming the gospel until death to the nations hoping that they, too, will come to accept Jesus’ testimony as truth.”¹²⁸ G. W. H. Lampe goes even further in arguing that the vital role of a Christian is being a missionary where martyrdom is, in fact, “the most supreme and most effective mode of evangelism.”¹²⁹

For the religious sense of μαρτυρία, the context of the ruler cult polemic is pregnant for the witness motif of Revelation.¹³⁰ Swete convincingly argued that in Rev

Retribution in the Book of Revelation,” 60-65; and Suzanne de Diétrich, “You Are My Witnesses,” *Int* 8 (1954): 273-279.

¹²⁷Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 161. For different nuances on the primary goal of witness, see G. B. Caird who thought that it was not meant “to convince judge and jury, but to convince the adversary, so that he would withdraw his own case and acknowledge defeat” (*The Language and Imagery of the Bible* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980], 158), whereas, for Trites, “The task of the witness [is] not only to attest the facts but also to convince the opposite side of the truth of them” (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 46).

¹²⁸Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace*, 161. Comblin believed that witnessing in Revelation is based on a creative synthesis of two important threads of the OT and Jewish theology, i.e., the theology of witnessing and theology of martyr, which had never been connected before. He asserted that “L’originalité de l’Apocalypse de saint Jean est d’avoir introduit cette théologie du martyre dans une théologie du témoignage. Le martyre vient couronner, achever un témoignage” (*Le Christ dans l’Apocalypse*, 6:160).

¹²⁹G. W. H. Lampe viewed the suffering and death for the faith in the Hebrew Bible as primarily defensive or a matter of passive resistance, whereas in the Christian’s case they involved an “active testifying to the gospel” (“Martyrdom and Inspiration,” in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler*, ed. W. Horbury and B. McNeil [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 118-135). Similarly, Strathmann confirmed that for Revelation, “μαρτυρία undoubtedly means evangelistic confession and not just the testimony of blood” (“μάρτυς, κτλ” *TDNT*, 4:502). He added that it is the specific evangelistic confession that culminates in death.

¹³⁰The clash between the confession “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9) and the claim “Caesar is lord” has apparently led to significant harassment for those who refused to sacrifice to the emperor. For a discussion of Revelation in terms of an apostolic response to emperor worship and the emperor cult, see Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars; Historical Sketches*, trans. K. Smith and R. Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster, [1955]), 147-19; Rudolf Halver, *Der Mythos im letzten Buch der Bibel* (Hamburg: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1964), 118-126; and Jörg Frey, “The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult for the Book of Revelation: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Relation between the Seven

6:9, “If the two causes of martyrdom are to be sharply distinguished, the first will be the martyrs’ confession of the One Living and True God as against polytheism and Caesarism and the second, their witness to Jesus Christ.”¹³¹ On the cause of the hostility against early Christians, G. E. M. de Ste Croix said, “It was not so much the positive beliefs and practices of the Christians which aroused pagan hostility, but above all the negative element in their religion: their total refusal to worship any god but their own.”¹³²

In Isa 40-55, the “faithful witness” motif is used in the context of a great trial between the true God and the false god where the world is a kind of court-room in which the issue of who is the true God is being decided. In the contest, God is thereby represented by Israel (Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8) and the world by the pagan nations (Isa 50-55), where the former is supposed to testify before the world about the uniqueness, reality,

Letters and the Visionary Main Part of the Book,” in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune*, ed. John Fotopoulos, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 122 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 231-256. J. Daryl Charles emphasized that “at the core of the Christians’ dilemma in the first century was their refusal to adore the national gods and affirm Roman Imperial pretensions” (“Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5,” *CTR* 7 [1993]: 85). J. Nelson Kraybill defended as the majority opinion of modern scholarship that “pressure from imperial cult lies at the center of John’s concern” (*Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series 132 [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 24-56, quotation is on p. 26). Commentators who insist on the importance of this topic include, Henry M. Morris, *Revelation Record*, 35-40; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 197-201; A. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 69-73; Boring, *Revelation*, 18-24; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 29-30; etc. In addition, a number of scholars have examined the relationship between Revelation and the ceremonies associated with the Roman imperial court and cult: David E. Aune, “Influence of the Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 28 (1983): 5-26; P. Barnett, “Polemical Parallelism: Some Further Reflections on the Apocalypse,” *JSNT* 35 (1989): 111-120; P. J. J. Botha, “God, Emperor Worship and Society: Contemporary Experiences and the Book of Revelation,” *Neot* 22 (1988): 87-102; R. H. Wilkinson, “The *STŪLOS* of Revelation 3:12 and Ancient Coronation Rites,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 498-501; and S. J. Scherrer, “Signs and Wonders in the Imperial Cult: A New Look at a Roman Religious Institution in the Light of Rev 13:13-15,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 599-610.

¹³¹Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 90. Thus, Robertson interpreted the passage in the sense of “the confession of loyalty to Christ as opposed to emperor-worship” as in 1:9 (*Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6:343).

¹³²See G. E. M. de Ste Croix, “Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?” in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 105-152.

and deity of God.¹³³ Here, the mission of Israel as the light to the nations is first and foremost to overcome idolatry by witness.¹³⁴

This basic view of Israel's role as witnesses is clearly stated in Isa 43:10-13:

You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. ¹¹ I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. ¹² I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses, says the LORD. ¹³ I am God, and also henceforth I am He; there is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it? (cf. Isa 42:6-7; 44:8)

From this perspective, the slain witnesses of the fifth seal are displayed as a typological fulfillment of Israel as God's faithful witness.¹³⁵ For this reason, expectation of vindication and judgment from the only true and omnipotent God, whom they have faithfully represented unto death, is high indeed in a context of idolatry.¹³⁶

Other texts that assign the idea of religious representativeness in a trial setting to the faithful witness motif could be found in the so-called court tales of Daniel (chaps.

¹³³Strathmann, "μάρτυς, κτλ," *TDNT*, 4:484. Thus, Bauckham summed up the point of the Deutero-Isaiah in terms of "a judicial contest in which the claim of Yahweh to be the only true God, the Creator and the Lord of history, is vindicated against the gods of the nations" (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 73).

¹³⁴See Strathmann, "μάρτυς, κτλ," *TDNT*, 4:483-485.

¹³⁵Israel is displayed as the type for the faithful witness. Isaiah 40-55 reveals a controversy where the Lord confronts the false gods before the peoples assembled together (41:1) and judgment ensues (41:11). Judgment is the justice that proceeds from the testimony that God's witness gives (42:1, 4). The witness/servant is a model of suffering patience (42:1-4) and the faithful testimony of the servant is marked by affliction (Isa 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

¹³⁶Covenants have been successfully related to Ancient Near Eastern treaties. In these treaties, the vassal promises to give up an independent foreign policy on the condition that the sovereign protect him and defend him. Yahweh has covenanted with his people where he has pledged to protect them. For example, Ps 83 talks of Israel's enemies as God's enemies. When Israel is attacked by a foreign power, the sovereign, Yahweh, responds by protecting his people.

1-6).¹³⁷ There, God's witnesses risked persecution and death, rather than violate God's laws by submitting to idolatry. For G. K. Beale, the point of the faithful witness motif for both authors (John and Daniel) was a critique of "the status quo of apostasy, compromise and syncretism by emphasizing the expectation of eschatological judgment, deliverance and blessing."¹³⁸

The use of μαρτυρία within the fifth seal blends in the martyrological, forensic, missionary, and religious dimensions of the faithful and radical witness motif. The victims seem to be depicted as faithful witnesses having delivered a convincing testimony that should normally lead to a conviction in this judgment setting. As witnesses for the prosecution, their rejected testimony means incriminating evidence for their adversaries. When related to a breakdown of their witness to the world in the context of the idolatrous imperial cult, the cause of death accentuates God's responsibilities as judge.

Summary and Theological Implications

This section has uncovered the importance of the religious nature of the cause of death. The witnesses died because of their loyalty to the word of God and the preserving

¹³⁷Kraybill affirmed that "at least in spirit, though, the court tales stand behind John's radical stance of non-cooperation with corrupt government" (*Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 151). For Frend, the main lesson of the book of Daniel was to teach "that martyrdom was to be preferred to idolatry, even if the act of idolatry involved violation of only the least of God's commandments" (*Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 47-49). He also views "the Danielic view of world-history" as a major cause for bringing "the primitive Church into conflict with the Roman authorities" (*ibid.*, 104).

¹³⁸Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, 297-298. Elsewhere, he insisted that "Daniel is the most formative influence on the thought and structure of Revelation." G. K. Beale, "The Influence of Daniel upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse," *JETS* 27 (1984): 413-423. In the case of the Maccabees, O'Hagan, reviewed μάρτυς and related terms and concluded that the basic idea in the development of the metaphors was "the element of representativeness: all witnesses are somehow middlemen of someone or something before someone else" ("The Martyr in the Fourth Book of Maccabees," 94-95).

of the testimony of Christ as their own.

1. The absence of the possessive Ἰησοῦ after μαρτυρία does not warrant a pre-Christian setting for the fifth seal. It seems, instead, that the text allows for the faithful of both the old and new covenants from Abel to the victims of the recent persecution by Nero, as well as for the martyrs of the visionary future in the identification of “slaughtered souls.”

2. Taken together, the expression “the word of God and testimony of Jesus” suggests broadly that the martyrs died as a result of a total adherence to the divine revelation expressed in the written word of God. Beyond the radical faith in Scripture, the cause of death can also include the faithful upholding and proclaiming of the gospel truth of Christ’s claims as the Word of God incarnate and its victorious implications.

3. As important as the sacrificial imagery is, μαρτυρία still bears a verbal witness connotation that goes beyond just blood-witness at the time of the writing of Revelation: death comes in only as a secondary consequence of testimony. The interpretation of the text is thus broadened because of the capacity that the missionary and verbal witness mandate has to embrace more endtime functions of the Church than those contained by the mere blood-witness mandate. The term μαρτυρία does, indeed, blend in together rich and radical connotations of witness, suffering, death, and judgment.

4. Since the death of the slain witnesses is connected to the victorious resurrected Christ, the incarnate word of God, the burning issue of the reality and delay of their own resurrection and glorification is raised in such a context of climactic evil. If referred to a context of imminence, the usage of the term μαρτυρία transforms the initial meaninglessness of the martyrs’ death into one big issue of an eschatological theodicy.

5. The fact that the cause of death is directly connected to God suggests a certain accountability from his part. In a context of idolatry, the presentation of the dead witnesses, identified as the Lord's faithful champions, prepares the way for the questioning of God's covenant faithfulness as seen in the "How long?" query. At any rate, the elimination of such faithful witnesses is a knotty issue that God has to address.

Issues Related to the Relevant First-Century Applications

The fifth seal has indeed been linked to a situation of intense persecution whose seriousness lies allegedly behind the questioning about God's delay. To understand better the first-century relevance of Rev 6:9-11 and how this actually connects to the problem of imminence and eschatological delay, this section will probe the historical and theological context behind the crisis suggested in the fifth seal.

The Problem of Persecution

The "how long" plea itself does seem to suggest that the reality of an existential situation of persecution seems to have been in force for some time already. According to the traditional view, the occasion of Revelation, which coincides with the situation behind the fifth seal, was related to a time of persecution at the end of Domitian's rule.¹³⁹ Here, difficulties have surfaced for the interpretation of the fifth seal because doubt has been cast not only on the idea of an official persecution under Domitian, but almost on the entire characterization of his reign.

In the light of historical discoveries regarding the reign of Domitian, Barclay

¹³⁹Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.3; Eusebius, *Hist eccl.* 3.18.3. For further discussion on the patristic evidence, see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lviii-lx.

Newman disputed the factuality of any significant state-sponsored persecution of Christians in Asia during the reign of this Roman emperor.¹⁴⁰ As a result of his research contradicting the extent of Roman persecution at the turn of the first century, Newman argued in favor of a crisis of a religious nature behind Revelation. For him, the tension comes from struggles against religious forces incarnated by a libertine gnostic movement, rather than the political dangers generally thought to be the setting for the book.¹⁴¹

Dealing with the issue of the Apocalypse and Empire, Leonard L. Thompson reassesses of the representation of Domitian's reign by authors of post-Flavian period. He reconstructs Domitian's reign as being basically a good one and does provide useful insights on many aspects of society in the ancient Roman province of Asia, including treatment of the Christian and Jewish subcultures. He argues that writers contemporary to Domitian have tended to be positive about his rule while later writers have discredited him through deprecatory accounts of his reign in an attempt to enhance his successor Trajan.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," 133-39. See also Barclay Newman, *Rediscovering the Book of Revelation* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1968), 19. Steven J. Friesen also concluded that it "is now clear that political executions in the imperial center increased in Domitian's reign but there is no support of a systematic campaign against Christians in Rome or elsewhere" (*Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001], 143). See also Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁴¹Newman, *Rediscovering the Book of Revelation*, 11-19.

¹⁴²Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 95-115. See also Thompson, "A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation in the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 147-174. However, underscoring the flaws in Thompson's argument, Kenneth A. Strand rightly points out that: "(1) Bad rulers have usually acquired their reputation in spite of positive aspects of their reigns and primarily because of *spasmodic* harmful outbursts. (2) Though the ancient Roman historians gave their grim portrayal of Domitian during Trajan's time or later, this fact does not make their depictions more suspect than the favorable picture given by several poets and other writers during Domitian's reign (the latter could simply have been using flattery as a means to self-preservation!). (3) If Nerva and Trajan felt it necessary to discredit their predecessor Domitian, it seems strange that the attack was not against the whole Flavian dynasty. (4) Though the attempt of emperors to discredit forerunners is a well-known phenomenon, there is little, if any, evidence of it in the early Roman

In the vein, using methods of interpretation from the social sciences, history, and literary analysis, A. Y. Collins revisited the factuality of Roman harassment of Christians in the first or early second century, including the reigns of Domitian and Trajan. She concluded that “it is doubtful that the emperor cult was forced on Christians” at that time.¹⁴³ Rather than consoling Christians facing a full-blown persecution, the purpose of Revelation is simply “to point out a crisis that many of them did not perceive.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, the fifth seal simply exemplifies how the audience transcends its feelings of resentment and envy against Rome, but quickly adds that one cannot be sure about the exact circumstances of the deaths or identity of the persecutors.¹⁴⁵

Yarbro Collins’s thesis overstates the situation because the crisis is more than just

Principate. (5) Thompson’s thesis has no adequate explanation for the fact that Domitian was officially execrated (the opposite of apotheosized) at death. (6) At this early time, Roman persecution of Christians was not normally by imperial decision (Nero’s case was an exception), but was rather a local matter. (7) On the matter of persecution of Christians, Thompson’s theory hardly fits the evidence. Revelation’s evidences of *real persecution* are so weighty as to raise serious doubt regarding any reconstruction that views the persecution as merely ‘perceived’ (Emphases his)” (“Review of *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, by Leonard L. Thompson,” *AUSS* 29 [1991]:188-189).

¹⁴³Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 77. See also Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” 33-45; F. Gerald Downing, “Pliny’s Prosecution of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter,” *JSNT* 34 (1988): 105-123. Paul B. Duff also challenged the reality of a Roman persecution during the writing of Revelation and argued instead that the book is a rhetorically sophisticated response to leadership crises in the apocalyptic churches (*Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001]).

¹⁴⁴Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 77. She identified the Christians’ willingness to compromise with the pagan culture for economic, political, and social reasons as the source of the problem. The intention of the book, for Collins, was to produce an emotional catharsis in the hearers (see *ibid.*, 141-160) in view of awakening and intensifying of “Christian exclusiveness, particularly vis-à-vis the imperial cult” (*ibid.*, 73). Alternative psychological interpretations include John G. Gager who viewed the antagonist behind the crisis of Revelation in mythic terms and turned the Apocalypse as a whole into a sort of mythic therapy (*Kingdom and Community* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975], 50-57). Thus, Barr who believes that the Apocalypse functions as a “mythic therapy” that alters the audience’s perspective of the world from that of victims to victors: “It transforms them into a community of a shared vision of the struggle between Roman culture and Christian conviction; it engages them as participants in a cosmic struggle of good against evil. They are now the army of the slaughtered lamb ready to battle with the forces of the dragon” (*Tales of the End*, 178-180). Cf. the critique of the hermeneutics of those approaches by P. G. R de Villiers, “Persecution in the Book of Revelation,” *AcTh* 22 (2002): 47-70.

¹⁴⁵See Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 141-161. So Yarbro Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” 729-749.

imaginary: Historical evidence proves that persecution had actually begun.¹⁴⁶ Osborne rightly notes, “While persecution might not have been official, Christians did face much economic and social pressure to participate in Roman life, including the trade guilds with their idolatrous feasts and cultic practices as well as the imperial cult.”¹⁴⁷ After reviewing the historical facts, Raymond E. Brown offered a convincing portrait of reality:

The evidence does not warrant our attributing to Domitian a persecution in Rome of a ferocity nearly approaching Nero’s. It does warrant the likelihood that in his distrust of possibly dangerous deviations Domitian showed hostility to Gentiles who abandoned the state religion for the Oriental cults that advocated the exclusive worship of one aniconic God (Judaism and probably Christianity). . . . The Christians’ refusal to join in the public cult and perhaps to honor the divinized Domitian, when reported by those hostile to them, would have resulted in tribunals and sentences and martyrdom.¹⁴⁸

The internal evidence reveals many references to persecution that emphasize the importance of the problem for John’s Apocalypse. Revelation 1:9 opens with the author

¹⁴⁶See Kraybill who concluded, “In view of his allusions to persecution and martyrdom, it is likely John wrote Revelation during some episode of local persecution; there is no reason to believe he simply imagined suffering and violence. It is clear that the seven churches were in a hostile environment from two directions—the Jewish world and the Roman world. Not only pagan Rome but also the ‘synagogue of Satan’ (2:9; 3:9) had turned against them” (*Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse*, 198). Heil traced several key conceptual and verbal relationships between the fifth seal and the seven letters and concluded that the text reflects “the ordeals described in the letters to the Asian congregation, the apparent frustration of those who have been under pressure as a result of their loyalty to God” (“Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 226, 227). Summarizing the internal and external pressures faced by the audience of Revelation, Craig Koester came up with three major threats: “seduction by a false teaching that calls for assimilation to the Roman culture; conflict with the local synagogue and the threat of being denounced to the local authorities, complacency, born from the prosperity fostered by the Roman economic system” (“The Distant Triumph Song and the Book of Revelation,” *WW* 12 [1992]: 244).

¹⁴⁷Osborne, *Revelation*, 11. J. Massyngberde Ford thought that the crisis behind Revelation referred not to systematic persecution under Domitian, but to the daily oppression and social ostracism that resulted from Christians refusing to participate in the life of the Roman cult (“Persecution and Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 144-146).” Also J. Massyngberde Ford, “The Priestly People of God in the Apocalypse,” *Listening* 28 (1993): 246-247.

¹⁴⁸Raymond E. Brown added, “This analysis of Domitian’s reign that combines a basis in fact for some persecution or harassment of Christians with reactive Christian exaggeration seems more responsible to the evidence than either denying harassment of Christians under Domitian or supposing major persecution” (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 808-809).

depicted as being in exile “on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” In chaps. 2 and 3, degrees of tribulation and persecution seem already to have affected some of the seven churches (2:9-10) and have led to martyrdom (2:10, 13) for the same reason (2:3). As for the rest of the visions section, other clear references to martyrdom include 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2.

Understandably, the problem of persecution has been referred to the very occasion for this book’s composition¹⁴⁹ and to the reality behind the fifth seal. Actually, Giancarlo Biguzzi contended that the question whether Domitian was a persecutor is irrelevant because evidence for persecution is clearly established by the text of Revelation, notably by the theodicy question in 6:9-10.¹⁵⁰ Lilje rightly noted that this text, in fact, reflects two painful experiences for the audience of Revelation: “the severity of the first persecutions, on the one hand, and the disquieting fact of the delay of the Lord’s return, on the other.”¹⁵¹

Even if persecution were only a local affair as often suggested, the apocalyptic perspective of the author and his personal situation would be enough to explain why such suffering was presented in dramatic terms. Biguzzi averred that the crisis John wrote of was real, but since it was essentially local, many have a problem reconciling the

¹⁴⁹For example, Kümmel noted that the book’s own testimony suggests an atmosphere of severe oppression of Christians in the province of Asia where “the whole Christianity is threatened with a fearful danger” (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 467). Compare Martin Rist, “The Revelation of St. John the Divine,” *Interpreter’s Bible (IB)*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 12:354-358; Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 253-317; and Roland Schütz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes und Kaiser Domitian*, *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 32 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1933), 14-24.

¹⁵⁰Giancarlo Biguzzi, “John on Patmos and the ‘Persecution’ in the Apocalypse,” *Estudios Biblicos* 56 (1998): 215-216.

¹⁵¹Lilje, *Last Book of the Bible*, 128.

sweeping apocalyptic language of the book with the historical realities perceived through other sources.¹⁵² However, H. H. Rowley confirmed that the apocalyptic writer often tended to view the evilness of his time as the final fling of evil and to depict “the conditions he saw around him, but in a cosmic setting, viewed not merely as a local affair, but as something of universal significance.”¹⁵³

John’s involvement as a persecuted individual could easily account for his portrayal of what may seem local and insignificant from a disinterested point of view in universal and monumental terms.¹⁵⁴ However, it is obviously more than just his personal situation that is being described and illumined in the fifth seal. He seems to interpret what has already happened in cosmic and eschatological terms and builds on this existential situation to predict an intensification before the end as part of God’s decrees, that is, an imminent reality under total divine control.

Schüssler-Fiorenza has ably defended the traditional position: “Revelation reflects a political-religious conflict with the Roman Empire and a persecution of the church in Asia Minor under Domitian.”¹⁵⁵ For her, there was a widespread persecution under Domitian where many “inhabitants of the cities of Asia Minor, staggering under the

¹⁵²See Biguzzi, “John on Patmos and the ‘Persecution’ in the Apocalypse,” 219-220.

¹⁵³Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 146.

¹⁵⁴Schüssler-Fiorenza cogently argued that how we answer the question of whether or not the threat of persecution was real during John’s time depends “on whose perspective we adopt. One could argue from the perspective of well-to-do white Americans that no harassment, denigration, discrimination, or oppression of blacks existed at the time of Martin Luther King, Jr, although King was assassinated. The perspective and experience of blacks would be quite different! Similarly, the author of Rev. had adopted the ‘perspective from below’ and expressed the experiences of those who were powerless, poor, and in constant fear of denunciation” (*Book of Revelation*, 9).

¹⁵⁵Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Apocalyptic and Gnosis in the Book of Revelation and Paul,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 565.

colonial injustices of oppressive taxation often combined with ruinous interest rates, were suffering from the widening gap between rich and poor.”¹⁵⁶ Elsewhere, she argued that the “rhetorical situation” to which the Apocalypse was addressed was indeed a crisis in a time “characterized by exigency and urgency,”¹⁵⁷ a time which challenged the belief in Christ as Lord.¹⁵⁸

Despite the challenge about John’s language as the emotional outburst of a persecuted minority, the evidence for some form of Christian oppression at the end of the first century is material. However, the extent of the persecution is still a matter of debate. At any rate, even limited in nature or not, the problem of persecution makes the fifth seal especially relevant for the first-century audience as an already existing crisis of theodicy where God’s delayed intervention raises concerns about his goodness.

¹⁵⁶Schüssler-Fiorenza added, “They were afraid of Roman repression of disturbances, paranoid prohibition of private associations, and suspicious surveillance by neighbors and informants. Whereas the vast majority of the population suffered from colonialist abuses of power, exploitation, slavery, and famine, some citizens in the senatorial province of Asia enjoyed the benefits of Roman commerce and peace as well as comforts and splendor of urban life and Hellenistic culture” (*Revelation*, 126-127). She claimed the agreement of the majority of modern scholars on this issue. As support, she cited what she termed the majority of modern commentators like Swete, Charles, Loisy, Beckwith, Allo, Carrington Wikenhauser, Bonsirven, Behm, Brütsh, Féret, Boismard, Lohse, Cerfaux-Cambier, Caird, Visser, and Kiddle-Ross. For another perspective, see also R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174-177; Pierre Prigent, “Au temps de l’Apocalypse I: Domitien,” *RHPR* 54 (1974): 456-483; Pierre Pigent, “Au temps de l’Apocalypse II: Pourquoi les persécutions?” *RHPR* 55 (1975): 342-363; Pigent, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 210; Friedrich Bleek, *Dr. Friedrich Bleek’s Lectures on the Apocalypse*, ed. Th. Hossback and trans. Samuel Davidson (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 61, Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 149; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 84; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406. Reddish went so far as to picture the church in Revelation as “threatened by official persecution and martyrdom” (“Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse,” *JSNT* 33 [1988]: 85). For primary sources on Domitian’s insistence on greater divine titles than earlier emperors and his persecution of those who refused to acknowledge these new titles, see L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 95-115.

¹⁵⁷Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 192.

¹⁵⁸She suggests that the “experience of harassment, persecution, and hostility challenged Christians’ faith in Christ as Lord. Their experience of hunger, deprivation, pestilence, and war undermined their belief in God’s good creation and providence” (*ibid.*, 194).

The Problem of the Suffering of the Last Days

In the little Apocalypse, events related to the eschatological process come normally in three stages: the ὠδῖνες, “birth pangs” (Mark 13:8//Matt 24:8); the θλίψις, “tribulation” (Matt 24:21); and then the τέλος, “conclusion,” “end” of the world (Mark 13:7; Matt 24:6, 14).¹⁵⁹ To understand where the fifth seal fits in this apocalyptic scheme, this unit sketches the background for the idea of the tribulation of the last days.

In the New Testament, the usage of the term “last days” does generally elicit visions of apocalyptic catastrophe—doom, judgment, fire, and suffering—the end of the world, but they actually qualify an epoch, not just an event.¹⁶⁰ This process begins with the incarnation (Heb 1:2; cf. 2 *Clem.* 14:2) and compares with the “fullness of time” in Gal 4:4.¹⁶¹ That the present is the last time is evidenced in the events of the Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff.) and by the coming of scoffers, antichrist, etc. (2 Tim 3:1; Jas 5:3; 2 Pet 3:3; Jude 17- 18; 1 John 2:18; cf. *Did* 16:3; *Barn.* 4:9; 12:9; 16:5).¹⁶² Thus, the general sense of living in the last days for Christians at the end of the first century is quite predictable.

¹⁵⁹See A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:472.

¹⁶⁰See G. Kittel, “ἔσχατος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2:697-698. For OT references for “the last days,” see LXX Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; Dan 10:14; Gk. *L.A.E.* 13:2; *T. Jud.* 18:1; *T. Zeb.* 8:2; 9:5; *T. Dan* 5:4; *T. Jos.* 19:10. For an overview on the image of “birth-pains,” see G. Bertram, “ὠδῖν, ὠδῖνω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 9:667-674.

¹⁶¹Allo noted that, except for chaps. 1-3, the book of Revelation is essentially eschatological, not in the sense of covering just the brief period of the upheavals of the end, but it also includes in fact “toute la durée du monde actuel, quelque longue qu'elle puisse être, depuis l'Incarnation [the whole duration of the actual world, no matter how long it might be, since the incarnation]” (*L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, lxiii).

¹⁶²For the expression “the end of the age(s),” see 1 Cor 10:11; Heb 9:26; 1 Pet 1:20. Kittel noted that the “last days” ends in the New Testament with the last day “which brings with it the last plagues (Rev 15:1; 21:9), the overcoming of the ἔσχατος ἐχθρός (1 Cor 15:26) and proclaimed by the ἐσχάτη σάλπιγξ (1 Cor 15:52) the resurrection of the dead, judgment and salvation (John 6:39 f., 44, 54; 11:24; 12:48: ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ; 1 Pet 1:5: ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ)” (“ἔσχατος,” *TDNT*, 2:697).

The expression ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων refers to a woman who must endure pain for a child to be born and is applied to the pain and suffering that precedes the coming of the Messiah in Mark 13:19/Matt 24:21 and Rev 12:1-6. In Judaism, a woman in great travail because of childbirth characterizes the “last days” (1QH 3:7-10) and in *1 Enoch* 62:4, the expression refers to birthpangs in the face of the final judgment, while 2 Esd 4:42 uses the metaphor for the new birth of resurrection.¹⁶³ The expression ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων is almost a technical term for the sufferings which would immediately precede the new age.¹⁶⁴

Right before the end of the last days, the apocalyptic writings announce a special period of θλίψις μεγάλη, great tribulation.¹⁶⁵ Dale C. Allison explained that “Jewish eschatology has always envisaged eschatological salvation as coming to birth amid terrible tribulations: the worst of times will precede the best of times.”¹⁶⁶ Generally, the eschatological significance of θλίψις is traced back to Dan 12 where the opening verse states that “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”¹⁶⁷ According to D. S. Russell, this idea later became a part of “the

¹⁶³On the topic of the “last days” in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see Annette Steudel, “אחרית הימים in the Texts from Qumran,” *RevQ* 16 (1993): 225-246. Steudel’s conclusion regarding the writings from Qumran holds for the New Testament: the “latter days” or “last days” constitute the final period of ordinary time and include the present as well as recent events in the past and future events soon to come.

¹⁶⁴W. Radl suggested that this expression in Jesus’ eschatological discourse “refers first to afflictions as such, though perhaps also to the process of the world’s rebirth” (“ὠδίν,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3:506).

¹⁶⁵Heinrich Schlier noted this term as one of those singular polyvalent terms which is often used in the LXX “to describe several Hebrew terms which all more or less express the afflictions of life in various nuances.” This popular term “acquires its theological significance from the fact that it predominantly denotes the oppression and affliction of the people of Israel or of the righteous who represent Israel” (“θλίβω, θλίψις” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 3:140-142).

¹⁶⁶Allison, “Eschatology of the NT,” 295.

¹⁶⁷Daniel 7:24-25, an apocalypse-type text from the Old Testament, also reveals a period of tribulation faced by the elects before the final judgment.

main stream of apocalyptic thought.”¹⁶⁸

Regarding the motivation for apocalyptic writing, Rowley noted that the writers of the apocalypses “believed that they were engaged in a final struggle, that they were suffering the last great persecution, that never before had evil been so evil, and never again could it so raise its head, for its final destruction was nigh.”¹⁶⁹ The writer of the Assumption of Moses, for example, gave in detail what those days would hold.

And there shall come upon them a second visitation and wrath; such as has not befallen them from the beginning until that time—in which He will stir up against them the king of the kings of the earth and one that ruleth with great power—who shall crucify those who confess to their circumcision: and those who conceal (it) he shall torture and deliver them up to be bound and led into prison. And their wives shall be given to the gods among the Gentiles, and their young sons shall be operated on by the physicians in order to bring forward their foreskin. And others amongst them shall be punished by tortures and fire and sword—and they shall be forced to bear in public their idols—polluted as they are like those who keep them. And they shall likewise be forced by those who torture them to enter their inmost sanctuary and they shall be forced by goads to blaspheme with insolence the word, finally after these things the laws and what they had above their altar.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸D. S. Russell, *Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 272. He believed that the origin “goes back to Hos 13:13 (cf. also Isa 26:16-19; Mic 4:9-10; Hab 2:6) and finds its way through such passages as Zech 14:13 and Dan 12:1,” into apocalyptic literature (ibid.). For detailed pictures of the coming distress and examples of how the writers of these works return to it again and again, see *1 En.* 91-105 (especially 92:5-7; 99-100); *Sib. Or.* III (for instance, 532-51, 796-806); and *4 Ezra* (e.g., 5:1-12; 6:21-23; 9:3). The Great Tribulation in Jewish literature and the New Testament is discussed by Dale C. Allison, *The End of the Ages Has Come: An Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 5-82. For a discussion of the use of the motif in the Shepherd of Hermas, see R. Bauckham, “The Great Tribulation in the Shepherd of Hermas,” *JTS* 25 (1974): 27-40. For a sociological view of this topic in Revelation, see L. Thompson, “A Sociological Analysis of Tribulation in the Apocalypse of John,” 147-174.

¹⁶⁹Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 172. In addition, J. J. Collins stated, “[An] accurate generalization of apocalyptic patterns might say that the final judgment is preceded by a time of great distress, which may on occasion contain a historical description of the time of the author, but most often is future prediction, either entirely or in part” (“The Date and Provenance of the Testament of Moses,” in *Studies on the Testament of Moses: Seminar Papers*, ed. G. W. E. Nickelsburg, Septuagint and Cognate Studies 4 [Cambridge, MA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973], 20).

¹⁷⁰*As. Mos.* 8:1-5. Reddish reminded us that “although this passage is in reality a description of the sufferings under Antiochus Epiphanes, it functions for the author as a description of the last days” (“The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 52). In addition to official persecution, the theme of the final sufferings is expressed in different ways in apocalyptic writings: “It shall come to pass in those days that all the inhabitants of earth shall be moved one against another” (*2 Bar.* 48:32); the time will be such that “friends shall make war on friends like enemies” (*2 Esd* 6:24); babies and children shall be

Further, apocalyptic writing emphasizes the theme of the final sufferings “based upon the tenet that there is a fixed amount of tribulation to be endured before the end can come.”¹⁷¹ When the allotted sufferings and martyrdoms had occurred, then the end of this age would be near (*1 En.* 47:1-4; *2 Bar.* 30:2).

The idea of the “great tribulation” is indeed also a familiar feature of Christian eschatological tradition. In the little apocalypse, persecution is foretold as evidenced by Mark 13:9, 11-13; Matt 24: 9-10; and Luke 21:12, 16-17. This time of intense suffering was thought to be so overwhelming that “if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved” (Mark 13:20; Cf. *2 Bar.* 20:1; 54: 1; 83:1; *Barn.* 4:3).

In the case of the first cycle of visions (4:1-11: 19), A. Y. Collins observed that the persecution associated with martyrdom referred to the tribulation of the endtime. For her, the context of 1:9, with the association of the terms θλιψις and ὑπομονή, already suggested a clear reference to the great eschatological crisis which involves persecution.¹⁷² The similar terminological association in the letters to the seven churches is proof of “the eschatological character of endurance (ὑπομονή).”¹⁷³ Persecution in the seal series is even more clearly depicted for her as “a major eschatological event.” This

abandoned by their parents (*1 En.* 99:5); men will slay their own sons and grandsons; brothers will kill brothers (*1 En.*100:1-2). Members of the Qumran community interpreted their sufferings and persecution as part of the last “Great Tribulation” before the day of the Lord (1QM 1:11ff. and 15:1). During the time of intense woes, they believed God would protect them, after which, they expected to be rewarded with eternal blessing (1QM 1:8-9).

¹⁷¹H. M. Shires, *The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 166.

¹⁷²A. Yarbro Collins, “Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation,” 732

¹⁷³A. Yarbro Collins pointed out, “In the seven messages there is a repeated emphasis on the virtue of endurance or steadfastness (ὑπομονή). In most cases the reference is not to a general characteristic of the life of faith, but to the stance to be taken in the context of persecution which is seen as the tribulation (θλιψις) of the endtime” (“Political Perspective of the Revelation of John,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 249).

led her to conclude, regarding the first great cycle of visions, that “persecution is clearly an important element in the eschatological message of Revelation.”¹⁷⁴

In the Apocalyptic literature, martyrdom sometimes appeared as the ultimate sign that triggers God’s vengeance and the final consummation of the world. The *Testament of Moses* 9:6b–7 tells of the Jewish martyr Taxo telling his seven sons, “Let us die rather than transgress the commandments of the Lord of Lords, the God of our fathers. For if we do this, and do die, our blood will be avenged before the Lord.” Taxo has been interpreted as the one who provokes divine vengeance, thereby inaugurating the eschaton. Endurance and courage seemed to be responsible for bringing doom upon the oppressors. For Jacob Licht, the author of this work “expects that the vengeance provoked by Taxo to be God’s final vengeance on the enemies of His people, or in other words His deliverance, the coming of the future *aeon*” (original emphasis).¹⁷⁵

Jewish thought offers an interesting rationale for the relationship between witness and the final judgment. Abraham’s long intercession for the righteous of the city of Sodom (Gen 18:16-33) reflects the belief that “the presence of a few who are godly has a saving influence on the many who are ungodly.”¹⁷⁶ In Revelation, the very existence of

¹⁷⁴A. Yarbro Collins, “Political Perspective of the Revelation of John,” 734. For Feuillet, “L’auteur de l’Apocalypse ne songe nullement à atténuer, bien au contraire, le sentiment qu’ont toujours eu les chrétiens de la proximité de la fin ; cette conviction était en effet pour les chrétiens persécutés un motif puissant de consolation (cf. 1:3, 7; 3:11; 22:10, 12, 20)” (*L’Apocalypse*, 68).

¹⁷⁵Jacob Licht showed that “in the final stage of the eschatological events, the author of the *As. Mos.* expects God to react to the death of his faithful ones, Taxo and his sons. God will manifest his kingly rule and expel the devil (10:1)” (“Taxo, or the Apocalyptic Doctrine of Vengeance,” *JJS* 12 [1961]: 97). In a similar vein, Johannes Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary*, vol. 10, *Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1993), 228.

¹⁷⁶Another interesting conceptual parallel pointed out by Victor P. Hamilton relates to what “this story has to say about petitionary prayer, prayer as dialogue, and an omniscient, sovereign God moved to action or inaction by the intercessions of the faithful” (“Genesis,” *Baker Commentary on the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 23).

the world is compromised because the righteous are being cruelly eliminated by the inhabitants of the earth. Interestingly, Kiddle reports a Jewish belief where “the safety of the physical universe depended on the well-being of the saints, without whose presence on earth the continued existence of the world would have no justification.”¹⁷⁷

Second Thessalonians 1:5-10 reinforces the expectation of final retribution where the shedding of innocent blood upon the earth announces the certainty of God’s coming judgment. There, the persecutions (θλίψεις) of the last days are viewed as proof of the worthiness of the kingdom of God. This text assures that justice will prevail and God’s witnesses will be vindicated while the tormentors will be punished with finality. For the fifth seal, Martin Kiddle affirmed that the shedding of the innocent blood of the saints becomes the sure basis for the terrible judgments and it heralds the coming end.¹⁷⁸

Other factors can be noted to explain the sense of imminence at the end of the first century. The upheavals of A.D. 66-70 would have further heightened the eschatological expectations both among the Jews and the Christians. As a result of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, the scene of the fifth seal would be presented in heaven because God’s work of salvation and judgment continues from there. Based on passages understood as if the *parousia* should occur within the generation of those who have been with Jesus (Mark 9: 1; 13: 29, 30, 32), the upcoming death of the (last apostolic)

¹⁷⁷Kiddle, *The Revelation of St John*, 119.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 118-119.

witnesses at the time of Revelation could have increased the sense of the imminence among early Christians.¹⁷⁹

The fifth seal could then refer to a symbolic representation of the eschatological time of trouble against which Christians have been forewarned in the Gospels. The final stage of the last days was indeed expected to be filled with much suffering and woes. For those who were influenced by this belief that suffering must precede the end times, persecution and martyrdom could be more easily endured. Their death would have a cosmic dimension—it would help usher in the new age. At the time of Revelation, Christians had to deal with the delay of Christ’s return which must have seemed excitingly imminent after such events and with the world they had to continue living in.

The Problem of Complacency

As noted in the introduction, the “How long?” query is popular in apocalyptic texts but the presentation of the fifth seal is special. Historically, the question is tied to living messengers concerned with a climactic upsurge of evil, but here it comes from slain witnesses. How does this special presentation relate to the issue of complacency which has been considered as another major problem in the Church’s witness in Revelation?

¹⁷⁹For a rejection of the prevailing liberal view that delineates three distinct eschatologies in the New Testament—that of Jesus, that of the church at its beginning, and that of the later church, see C. E. B. Cranfield, “Thoughts on New Testament Eschatology,” *SJT* 35 (1982): 497-512. Cranfield argued that (1) “that there is an essential consistency of eschatological thought in the NT, an agreement which stands out all the more impressively in view of the undoubted differences of idiom, emphasis, and circumstance”; (2) “Insistence on the nearness of the end, on the shortness of the time which remains, is characteristic of the NT as a whole”; and (3) “There is evidence in the NT (John 21:23; 2 Pet 3:3ff) that there were *some* people who did misunderstand this insistence on the nearness of the end as certainty that the end would necessarily occur within at the most a few decades” (*ibid.*, 510). See also Heinz Giesen, “Naherwartung im Neuen Testament,” *TG* 30 (1987): 151-164.

J. P. M. Sweet applied the intense language “to the vividness of the author’s own experience . . . as well as to the complacency of the majority of Christians.”¹⁸⁰ From external and internal evidence, he argued that persecution was “local, occasional and selective rather than systematic, the result of overt witness-bearing and non-conformity, and could be avoided by not attracting attention.”¹⁸¹ For Bauckham, John addresses an array of situations where “by no means all of his readers were poor and persecuted by an oppressive system: many were affluent and compromising with the oppressive system.”¹⁸²

Reacting against the above psychologizing interpretations, Talbert claimed that “neither the text of Revelation nor any other apocalyptic writing, Jewish or Christian[,] verbalizes such an intent.”¹⁸³ Instead he opted for an “anti-assimilation” reading where

¹⁸⁰Sweet, *Revelation*, 27. He saw the church as being in grave danger of complacency and compromise (ibid., 26).

¹⁸¹Ibid., 28. See also Farrer who also judged that “the general theme of the book is an attack on laxity and compromise with the heathen ways” (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 36). Schüssler-Fiorenza mentioned that some Christians in Asia Minor defended the theological stance for the compromise with the emperor cult on the basis of political, economic, and professional (trade guilds) advantages (*Book of Revelation*, 195).

¹⁸²For Bauckham, “This compromising group needed instead words of ‘severe warning and calls to repent’” (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 15). Regarding the primary purpose of Revelation, Stefanovic wrote that it is “to help the first-century Christians in the Roman province of Asia with their condition and problems. Confronted with the growing hostility of Rome, as well as invading heresy and increasing apostasy within the church, the Christians in Asia were concerned with their own identity and existence. What would the future bring to the church? The book of Revelation was intended to provide the answer . . . God in Christ will vindicate them at a grand eschatological climax” (*Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 8-9).

¹⁸³Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 11. For others who insist on the danger of compromise raised by the insidious nature of imperial cult, see J. N. Kraybill, “Apocalypse Now: Revelation Says More about Church Life Today Than about How the World Will End,” *Christianity Today*, October 25, 1999, 37-38; Heinz Giesen, “Ermutigung zur Glaubenstreue in schwerer Zeit: Zum Zweck der Johannesoffenbarung,” *TTZ* 105 (1996): 61-63; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 34-36. Frey noted a shift in the theological focus of the Revelation in recent scholarship after the questioning of the reality of Domitianic persecution, “Rather than a book of comfort for martyrs, Revelation seems to be a prophetic adhortation to the addressees to remain faithful to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus and to keep themselves separate from ‘Babylon’—or even to leave that city (Rev 18:4)—in order to join the city of God, the New Jerusalem, eternal salvation.” For him the issue of imperial cult is still relevant because participation in the eternal

“Revelation is addressed to Christians, some of whom were willing to assimilate to a non-Christian milieu because of their spiritual anemia and lethargy.” He viewed the book as “a call to radical Christian commitment.”¹⁸⁴

Revelation 12:11, with its reference to testifying for God to the point of not loving life to the point of death, might be a polemical statement for the insiders’ failure regarding radical witnessing. From the Apocalypse’s insistence on martyrdom, one wonders if the fifth seal does not, in fact, participate in the polemic against a faith weakened by compromise.¹⁸⁵ The moot aspect of persecution, if it were true, could well support the possibility that Christians were compromising their faith and their witness by yielding to the claims of imperial Rome to avoid trouble.

It might also be related to Revelation’s insistence on ἡ ὑπομονή (patient endurance, steadfastness, perseverance) in the face of impending endtime persecution (cf. 1:9; 2:2 f., 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). For Friedrich Hauck, Revelation’s sevenfold repetition “extols ὑπομονή as the right and necessary attitude of believers in the last hour of the old aeon.”¹⁸⁶

The two-sidedness of ὑπομονή, its orientation to God and to the world, is particularly clear in Rev. “ὑπομονή is an endurance which is grounded in waiting, a waiting

salvation includes ‘keeping apart from impurity and idolatry (Rev 21:27; c. 2:7, 17; 3:5, 12 etc.) i.e.—at least among others—from the cult and commerce represented by the Roman imperium’ (“The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult for the Book of Revelation,” 235-236).

¹⁸⁴Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 11.

¹⁸⁵For Loisy, “L’auteur polémise contre les chrétiens qui ne sont pas trop intransigeants, il voudrait les trouver tous dans la disposition du martyr, il finit même par ne plus voir dans les croyants que des martyrs, comme si la grande persécution qui s’annonce, ou qu’il annonce, devait les envoyer tous au ciel. On est presque tenté de se demander si son manifeste, qui paraît destiné surtout à encourager l’espérance, ne voudrait pas la raffermir, instruire une foi qui tend à s’affaiblir, à s’acclimater dans ce monde au lieu d’en attendre le bouleversement” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 45).

¹⁸⁶Friedrich Hauck, (“ὑπομένω, ὑπομονή,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 4:588.

which expresses itself in endurance.” Waiting for Jesus (1:9; 3:10) is on the one side the attitude which fills the whole soul of believers. On the other side salvation depends on their steadfastness to the end.¹⁸⁷

Revelation’s insistence on endurance could suggest the idea of patience and not compromising the faithful witness, which also includes a missionary dimension as part of the process of conquering.

Regarding the problem of the lack of radical witnessing, Rev 21:7, 8 is especially relevant for its use of terms like δειλός, coward and ἀπίστοις, faithless to describe a group of compromised Christians.¹⁸⁸ It is interesting to note the emphatic position at the top of a vice list concerned primarily with the wicked enemies of the church who will deserve judgment.

⁷ ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα, καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός. ⁸ τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς καὶ □ ἀπίστοις καὶ ἐβδελυγμένοις καὶ φονεῦσιν καὶ πόρνοις καὶ φαρμάκοις καὶ εἰδωλολάτραις καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ψευδέσιν τὸ μέρος αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τῇ καιομένῃ πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ, ὃ ἔστιν ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεῦτερος.

⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. ⁸ But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Kraybill explained, “From John’s lonely vantage point as a persecuted prophet, the ‘cowardly’ (δειλός) may be Christians who were not brave enough to confess their faith publicly and accept the consequences.”¹⁸⁹ The term faithless (ἀπίστοις) would apply to

¹⁸⁷Hauck, (“ὑπομένω, ὑπομονή,” 4:588. About the eschatological tension of the concept, Hauck added, “It is particularly necessary as the suffering and enduring patience of martyr believers under persecution (2:2 f.; 19). The final clash between the power of the world and the community will also be the final and supreme test of faith. It will demand of believers supreme steadfastness if everything is not finally to be in vain (13:10; 14:12)” (ibid.). For a connection of the believers’ endurance as part of the process of “overcoming,” see Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 137.

¹⁸⁸As Beale explained it well, “δειλός may be translated ‘coward’ (cf. Sir. 37:11), ‘timid one,’ or ‘fearful one,’ the latter two renderings underlining the lack of courageous perseverance in the face of persecution. The following texts are added for the nuance ‘fearful:’ the LXX of Deut. 20:8; Judg. 7:3; 2 Chron. 13:7; Wis. 4:20; Sir. 2:12-13; 22:18; 1 Macc. 3:56)” (*The Book of Revelation*, 1059).

¹⁸⁹Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse*, 199.

“those who changed loyalties under pressure.”¹⁹⁰

Another possibility would be to relate the failure of radical witnessing described in Rev 21:7-8 to the context of the holy war with one of the traditions which have been considered as having a strong impact on the thought-world of Revelation. Many consider this as the source from which the Apocalypse draws its imagery and theology of conflict and victory.¹⁹¹ About the cowards, Valentine convincingly argued that they “are not sinners in general, but those who, in contrast to the *nikon* of 21:7, turn back in the holy war against the hostile powers of imperial Rome.”¹⁹² For him, it is clear that the term applied especially to apostate Christians.

¹⁹⁰Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse*, 199. On the significance of the rest of the terms in 21:8 for John, he wrote, “the ‘polluted’ (ἐβδελυγμένοις) those who accommodated in some way to pagan worship. People who informed on radical Christians, leading to their arrest and martyrdom, may be ‘murderers’ (φονεῦσιν) in the eyes of John. In the tradition of Hebrew prophecy, ‘fornicators,’ ‘sorcerers,’ and ‘idolaters’ may be syncretists who claimed loyalty both to Christ and Caesar; ‘liars’ (ψευδέσιν) could be apostates who, under questioning, denied ever having followed Jesus. John had no patience—and little compassion for people who showed less than complete loyalty to Jesus” (ibid.).

¹⁹¹For treatment of Revelation in the light of the holy war tradition, see Bauckham who dealt with warfare in Revelation in a whole chapter titled, “The Apocalypse as a Christian War Scroll” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 210-237). See also Charles Homer Giblin who discussed “The Cohesive Thematic of God’s Holy War of Liberation” in Revelation (*The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*); Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); she is followed by Barbara Wootten Snyder who argued for the combat myth as a structural device for Revelation (“Combat Myth in the Apocalypse: The Liturgy of the Day of the Lord and the Dedication of the Heavenly Temple” [PhD dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 1990]). For other proponents of the importance of the holy war for the understanding of Revelation, see J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 101; Yarbro Collins, “Political Perspective of the Revelation of John,” 241-256. Helpful here is Steve Moyise’s work that draws attention to the exegetical difficulty in ignoring the warfare imagery of Revelation (“Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb?” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise [New York: T. & T. Clark, 2001], 181-194). For brief reference to the Divine Warrior and the Conquest theme as the pervasive background of the NT, see G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 124-125, and 141-144.

¹⁹²J. Valentine, “Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation” (PhD dissertation, Boston University Graduate School, 1985), 243. On the contrast with the preceding verse, see also Osborne, who drew attention to the fact that the δέ, “but’s” “that connects 21:7 with 21:8 should have its full adversative force and may well especially be contrasting ὁ νικῶν (‘the conqueror’) with τοῖς δειλοῖς (‘the cowards’)” (*Revelation*, 741). In support for distinguishing this term from the rest of the list, he added, “While the rest of the list describes the unchurched and wicked who were the enemies of Christianity, this first term probably describes those in the church who fail to persevere but give in to the pressures of the world” (ibid.).

The complacency of the church could then refer to a “death” of a witnessing situation as predicted by such eschatological signs as Matt 24:9-13, Luke 18:8, and 2 Tim 3:1-3. To these accommodating Christians, the fifth seal invites endurance in faithful witness which inevitably spells confrontation with idolatrous powers (20:4), even if such radical action can lead to their deaths. The rewards and model of radical witnessing is meant to inspire loyalty.

The Problem of Evil

There is no doubt that the immediate power behind the persecution in the Apocalypse is diabolical.¹⁹³ Verse 2:10 shows clearly that it is the devil, alias Satan, known as the ruler of the forces of evil, who is behind the local authorities who persecute the people of God. In 12:9, the dragon is directly linked to the “ancient serpent,” that is, the diabolical character of Gen 3:1-15. According to 12:10, he is ὁ κατήγορ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν, the accuser of our brothers, that is, one who acts either as a prosecutor in the heaven’s court (see Job 1:6-12; Zech 3:1-4), or else, as a witness for the prosecution (like in Acts 23:30, 35; 25:16, 18). In chap. 13, the archenemy of God’s people transfers his power and his throne and great authority to the beast coming from the sea and causes it to prevail. Finally, the dragon is plainly recognized as Satan in the depiction of the millennium (20:2), understood here as a period during which he will then be bound.

The link between testimony and the victory over the devil is quite explicit in 12:11. As the opponent of truth, the archenemy is ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην, the

¹⁹³For a New Testament appraisal of the warfare against evil powers which stand behind evil man, see Roy Yates, “The Powers of Evil in the New Testament,” *EQ* 52 (1980): 97-111, and P. T. O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers and Their Relationship to Structures,” *RTR* 40 (1981): 1-10.

deceiver of the whole world, while one of its acolytes ἤνοιξεν τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ εἰς βλασφημίας πρὸς τὸν θεὸν, opened its mouth in blasphemies against God in 13:5 and the other, πλανᾷ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, deceives the ones who dwell upon the earth, in 13:14. In 16:13, foul spirits like frogs come from the mouths of all three as one is referred to as ψευδοπροφήτης, the false prophet. The deception is general; as Sweet put it well, the world is “in the grip of ‘false consciousness’ (*pseudos*).”¹⁹⁴

Within the larger context of the book, the issue of the killing of the innocent in the fifth seal is simply an (endtime?) expression of the problem of evil which clearly involves God and the archenemy of his people on a deeper level, although there is no doubt about God’s victory in the light of Christ’s death, the resurrection, and inauguration of Jesus, which will be elaborated later. By raising the “how long?” question, the fifth seal is an important contribution to the notion of Revelation as a theodicy of persecution.

Summary and Theological Implications

Of the fifth seal, Musvosvi rightly said, “John tried to present not ‘souls’ but ‘souls under the altar,’ a colorful representation of the reality of persecution and martyrdom.”¹⁹⁵ There, John addresses this troubling issue in the context of a well-known apocalyptic scheme to call attention to imminence.

¹⁹⁴Sweet, *Revelation*, 138. About the threefold activity of Satan, he noted that the roles of deception, accusation and destruction are combined in Jewish texts (*1 Enoch* 40:7 ff. 69: 4ff., *Jubilees* 1:20, 10:2-5; 48:25ff.) (ibid., 201). Sigve K. Tonstad examined the story-line of Revelation in an effort to demonstrate that theodicy is the central concern of the book. It is the “contour and force inherent in Revelation’s narrative that draws attention to the problem of the slaughter of Jesus and Satan’s unanswered influence in the world throughout much of the plot” (*Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* [New York: T. & T. Clark: 2006], 15). Tonstad suggested that the subjective genitive reading of “*pistis Iesou*” (14:2) represents the heart of the solution to satanic influence and deception” (ibid.).

¹⁹⁵Musvosvi, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse,” 209.

1. The text seems to be addressed to both the wayward compromisers and a small crew of disoriented, discouraged, and fearful remnant in order to jump-start radical witnessing in the context of the approaching eschaton. In such a situation, “dead” witnesses may have been brought forward behind the critical “how long?” question to reawaken commitment to radical witnessing.

2. While there is no developed persecution in the book, there was a great deal of daily political, social, and religious harassment for Christians, as well as signs of intensification on the horizon that could well be connected to a perception of imminence. For those who are, indeed, faced with the choice of either witnessing unto death or saving their lives through compromise with the world, John’s message would encourage them to be faithful witnesses.

3. In the New Testament, Christians experienced the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ as if the last days had begun. The reality of persecution and suffering in the fifth seal refers to the popular concept of the great tribulation that marks the end of the last days in apocalyptic literature and the New Testament. Especially after the events of A.D. 70 and the persecution at the end of the first century, the idea of the beginning of the end might have seemed very real for the audience of Revelation.

4. The “how long?” query raised by dead witnesses might also be connected to a “death of witnessing” situation for a church so blinded by complacency that she is failing to register the signs of the upcoming crisis. For the rest of the church who are not confronted with this sacrifice, the rewards and model of radical witnessing are meant to inspire loyalty.

5. The issue of killing the innocent in the fifth seal could also express a climax in

the problem of evil which clearly involves God and the archenemy of his people on a deeper level. Given the last-days situation behind the theodicy question of Rev 6:9-10, the elimination of Christians indeed signals that the very survival of the world is seriously compromised as faithful witnesses are removed.

Conclusions

The results of the exegetical analysis have uncovered how the introductory section serves to accent the dramatic setting of the theodicy by emphasizing the postmortem perspective of the delay questioning. Not only the polluting effect of spilling of innocent blood on the earth, but also the climactic upsurge of evil through the slaying of God's faithful witness is endangering the survival of God's cause and, therefore, calls for urgent judgment and justice upon the world. The fact that God's loyal champions are victimized while he fails to take or delays immediate action automatically raises serious issues of theodicy.

The dead witnesses' suffering resulted not only from a radical faith in Scripture as a whole, but also in Christ's claims as the Word of God incarnate who overcame the evil one by his sacrificial death. However, the word study on μαρτυρία revealed that the faithful upholding and proclaiming of the gospel truth constitute an important aspect of the activity that led to the martyrdom in the fifth seal. This missionary and verbal witness instead of a mere blood witness mandate broadens the functions of the Church as regards its impact on the coming of the eschaton.

After considering the stage setting of the delay enquirers and the issues surrounding the cause of their death, it is timely to probe the question section itself,

which uncovers a serious problem of delayed expectations. Other questions also remain about ascertaining the context of imminence. The next chapter will address some contextual issues to sort out the tension in the expectation of the text and how this relates to the problem of eschatological delay.

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPECTATION OF THE DELAY

QUESTION IN THE FIFTH SEAL

Revelation 6:10 constitutes the question unit that displays a sense of urgency and impatience. The opening line reveals the souls under the altar as petitioning God in a loud cry at what they perceive to be a delay in God's execution of his justice. The query could be either a questioning about the timing of God's judgment (why do you delay?) or a form of request for divine action (a prayer).¹ As a basis for discussion, three aspects of the petition commend themselves: the urgent tone of the plea, the significance of the unusual format of the prayer, and the way God is addressed and the content of the query itself. This chapter studies the text in interaction with the relevant Hebrew Bible background and its preceding literary context to determine their impact on understanding the tension in the expectations of the delay query in the fifth seal.

Issues Related to Delayed Expectations

The martyred saints are presented as sounding forth a loud cry (ἔκραξαν φωνῆ)

¹For an example of those who take the "How long?" as embedded in a prayer format, see Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 102; Michaels saw the prayer as the heart of the fifth seal: "It is the prime example of what was meant by the 'prayers of the saints' (5:8; compare 8:3-4)" (*Revelation*, 106-107); Heil noted that this is the only prayer of supplication in Revelation ("Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation," 242).

μεγάλη, “they cried with a loud voice”), which adds to the pathos of the petition.²

Beneath this urgent crying out for help lies hidden a crisis related to the need of the hour motivated, perhaps, by the imminent coming kingdom. To come to terms with the background of the eschatological delay, the next section explores the issue of delayed expectation in the Psalms and the writings of the Prophets. Because of the significance of the book of Daniel for understanding Revelation,³ the examination of the delay motif there will be treated separately.

Significance of ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ

The verb κράζω, “to cry out,” denotes in the Apocalypse the sense of a special emphasis which adds to the intensity of this “noisy” narrative. This loud cry is used often of divinely commissioned angels who execute his will either through a proclamation (10:3; 18:2), a command (7:2; 19:17), or a call to the Son of Man (14:15). The same intensity is linked to the martyred saints invoking God for help (6:10), and the great multitude praising God for his salvation (7:10). It occurs emphatically in reference to a woman with child (12:2) or a lament over the fall of Babylon (18:18-24).

This verb raises indeed great expectations for God’s intervention because of its

²The sense of urgency is depicted in the choice of the verb and the adjective connected to the outcry. Louw and Nida translated κράζω as “to shout or cry out, with the possible implication of the unpleasant nature of the sound—‘to shout, to scream’ (L&N, s.v. “κράζω”). About the pitch of the cry, they suggested that μεγάλη denotes “the upper range of a scale of extent, with the possible implication of importance in relevant contexts—‘great, greatly, greatness, to a great degree, intense, terrible’” (ibid., s.v. “μεγάλη”).

³Beale argued for the presence of references to Dan 2:28-29 in several passages of Revelation and implied that Dan 2 provides the framework for the whole Apocalypse (*The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, 277). He explained, “If it can be concluded that these Daniel 2 allusions in Revelation are intentional and draw with them the contextual idea of Daniel 2, then there is a basis for proposing that this idea provides the framework of thought for the whole of the Apocalypse, i.e., eschatological judgment of cosmic evil and consequent establishment of the eternal kingdom [emphasis his]” (ibid., 283).

special content in the beginnings of the history of Israel in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ Of significance for the new exodus motif, the LXX uses the verb “κράζω, (to cry out)” to translate the Hebrew terms קָרָא or קָרָא which both have emotional and powerful connotations when connected to the oppression of the people of God.⁵ The term refers to the cry for help of Israel and Moses in the wake of the exodus from the Egyptian bondage (Exod 2:23; 5:15; 8:12; 14:10). As Gerhard Hasel put it, “Theologically, it was always extraordinarily significant for Israel that its beginnings as a people were grounded in a cry for help (Ex. 2:23f.; 3:7,9; Dt. 26:7) from the social misery of Egyptian oppression.”⁶

Such cries for help played an important role in the survival of Israel too. They belonged to a socio-legal context in relation to the appeal of the aliens, widows, orphans, poor/needy, and the oppressed in Exod 22:21-27.⁷ Yahweh himself, as guardian of the law, was the enforcer of the demand for fair treatment of all “little” people anywhere in Israel. If the civil law deprived the weak ones of their right to justice, they naturally called on Yahweh (“cry out” in vv. 22, 26, [23, 27] with a “cry of distress” as in v. 22 [23]), who heard them and offered legal protection.

⁴According to Walter Grundmann, this term occurred, “predominantly in the Ps. in the context of crying or calling on God in some individual or national emergency” (“κράζω κτλ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 3:899).

⁵Gerhard F. Hasel suggested that the major emphasis of the basic meaning of the Hebrew root “falls on the loud and agonized ‘crying’ of someone in acute distress, calling for help and seeking deliverance with this emotion-laden utterance” (“קָרָא, קָרָא, קָרָא, קָרָא,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, ed. G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006], 4:114).

⁶Ibid, 4:120.

⁷Elsewhere, it is used for example of the cry of the Egyptians to Pharaoh for food (Gen 41:55); of the appeal of the indebted son of the prophet’s widow to Elisha (2 Kgs 4:1); and of the cry of the wandering and distressed people of God (Ps 107: 6). On this subject, see Richard D. Patterson, “The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature,” *BSac* 130 (1973): 223-234.

Walter Brueggemann noted how the cry for help as a turning point is critical in Israel's history as a whole. The exodus narrative starts, for him, "in Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7 as YHWH *hears and answers* the cries of the slaves [original emphasis]."⁸ In the two case laws in Exod 22:21-24 and 25-27, he saw "the pivotal point [to be] that YHWH *hears* the cries of those in need and *answers* decisively on their behalf [emphasis his]."⁹ For the four "case studies" of need and deliverance in the "highly stylized Song of Thanksgiving" in Ps 107, he noted that "each case pivots on the phrase, 'They cried to the LORD . . . and he delivered them' (Psalm 107:6, 13, 19, and 28)."¹⁰ He confirmed the pattern of "cry-hear" or "cry-save" for Judges from the narrative of 3:7-11, "1) Israel sinned; 2) YHWH gave sinful Israel into oppression; 3) Israel *cried out* to YHWH; and 4) YHWH responded to the cry with a rescue [emphasis his]."¹¹

Thus, the cry is directly linked to the certainty of God's imminent deliverance for the oppressed in particularly distressful individual or national crises, where God responds spontaneously by punishing the oppressor.¹² Commenting on the cry in Ps 82 and YHWH's characteristic response, James L. Kugel insisted, "But we ought not to lose sight of our particular focus. It says that hearing the victim's cry is a god's duty and

⁸Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 107.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 108.

¹²See Grundmann, "κράζω κτλ," *TDNT*, 3:902. James Kugel commented on Exod 2:21-24 as YHWH's commandment directed to the perpetrators of oppression: "It is the oppressed human's cry, in other words, that will unleash the chain of events that will ultimately result in your being punished. . . . This cry is worth considering, because it implies something about God that is at odds with our own beliefs. . . . It is addressed to the potential oppressor. If you do this, then he will cry out, and I will have to act. . . . If you victimize someone, then that someone will cry out and I will have to act against you" (*The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible* [New York: Free Press, 2003], 110, 111).

God's duty. It says that if that job is not properly performed, the very foundations of the earth will shake."¹³ In conclusion, he added, "God's ultimate self-revelation to Moses: I am by nature *khannun* and *rakhum* (despite all evidence to the contrary). I hear the cry of the victim; I can't help it."¹⁴

In the case of Rev 6:10, κράζειν bears perhaps similar "juridical overtones since the martyrs are crying out to God for justice"¹⁵ and the Lord comes through for the complainer. Significantly, the punctiliar sense of the aorist tense of the verb suggests a one-time decisive prayer which is answered without delay. Charles pointedly noted that the pleaders "are not represented as continuing to urge such supplications as in Jewish Apocalypses."¹⁶ This positive note is emphasized also, as noted by Aune, in the plurality of the pleaders: "It is argued in rabbinic Judaism that if God hears an individual cry to him, how much more will he hear when many cry?"¹⁷

In summary, the pitch of the "How long?" query reflects not only a sense of urgency and distress but it also sets the tone for the issues of theodicy that comes later in the text. Historically, out of his goodness, justice and omnipotence, God has been seen to respond to his faithful ones when they cry for help in the beginnings and survival of Israel. Regarding the fifth seal, this special content of the verb κράζω, "to cry out,"

¹³Kugel, *The God of Old*, 124.

¹⁴Ibid., 136.

¹⁵Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406. In support for this claim, he quoted POxy IV.717; PLond I.113,11b.

¹⁶R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:174. See also Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 151.

¹⁷Aune suggested the use of קל וחומר (qal wāhōmer), "lesser to greater," argument and found the rabbinic support in *Mek de-Rabbi Ishmael, Nezikin* 18 (see Jacob Z. Lauterbach, ed. and trans., *Mekhilta de-Rabi Yishma'el*, 3 vols. [Philadelphia: ha-Hevrah ha-Yehudit le-hotsa'at sefarim asher ba' Amerika, 694-695, 1933-1935], 3:143) (*Revelation 6-16*, 406).

might suggest great expectations about God's imminent deliverance on behalf of his martyred people to renew the exodus experience with the same power as the first one.

Significance of ἕως πότε and Delay Motif Outside the Book of Daniel

Their prayer begins in an unusual way with “ἕως πότε (How long?),” an expression disclosing an anguished plea for justice.¹⁸ In fact “ἕως πότε” is the LXX's rendition of the prominent Hebrew expression “הַיָּמִיךָ (How long?)” which is a well-known cry of afflicted Israel.¹⁹ The expression can be translated in two ways: either as introducing a rhetorical question in the sense of “why do you delay!” or just a simple question asking for an answer in the sense of “until when?”²⁰ Those concerns seem to be intimately related both in the lament Psalms and in the more temporally focused usage of the Prophets and Apocalyptic.

Usage of ἕως πότε in the Book of Psalms

“How long?” appears, indeed, predominantly in the Psalms as it introduces the perplexing question of the righteous who wonder when their pain will eventually end and

¹⁸Interestingly, the temporal particle ἕως is found only twice in Revelation and both occur in the fifth seal.

¹⁹See Victor P. Hamilton, “הַיָּמִיךָ,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 1266. Surveying the interrogative particle “הַיָּמִיךָ,” Hamilton observed that it appears “forty-three times in the OT, MOST frequently in Psa (thirteen times) and Jer (seven times)” (ibid.). Among those occurrences, he added, “Twenty-one times it follows the preposition ‘ad’ from the expression ‘ad māṭay until when’ or ‘how long?’ Such a construction is similar to the Hebrew ‘ad’ān(â) also meaning ‘how long?’” (ibid.).

²⁰Those two usages are documented by Hamilton, “In a few instances *māṭay* appears in a simple question asking for an answer with information; Ex 8:5; Neh 2:6; Dan 8:13; 12:6. Preponderantly, however, the word (or phrase) is used in a rhetorical question urging appropriate action by the addressee: (1) by God himself, 1 Sam 16:1; Ps 82:2; (2) by man addressed to God, Pss 6:3; 42:2; 74:10; 82:2; 90:13; 94:3; 101:2; 119:82, 84; (3) by man to his fellow man, Gen 30:30; 1 Kgs 18:21, inter alia” (ibid.).

why the delay.²¹ When such a protest is raised by God’s faithful ones facing martyrdom, then the issue of theodicy becomes too acrid to ignore.

In the face of seemingly endless suffering, the threat to faith for God’s people is terrible when Yahweh, their covenantal partner, fails or delays to give them justice.²² Especially significant is the question that rings out in many psalms יְהִי־עַד, “How long?” (Pss 6:3; 35:17; 62:3; 74:10; 119:84).²³ Psalm 13:2-3 illustrates the predicament of the psalmist using the synonymous phrase הֲלֹא־עַד, instead of the more frequent יְהִי־עַד:

²¹See Pss 13:1, 2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:1-3. Among commentators who acknowledge the importance of the background of those Psalms to various degrees for the understanding of the “how long?” of the fifth seal, see for example Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392-393; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 184; Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 75, n. 43; R. Bauckham, “Prayer in the Book of Revelation,” in *Into God’s Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 261; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 148; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 175; Boring, *Revelation*, 125; Osborne, *Revelation*, 86, Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 116; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406; etc.

²²About the psalmist as a covenant writer, P. C. Craigie wrote, “The theological richness of the psalms emerges out of a profound knowledge of God rooted in relationship; at bottom, the framework for all dimensions of that relationship is provided by the covenant” (*Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19, 2nd ed. [Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2004], 40). For the aspect of the threat to faith, see Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical Theological Study*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 52 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

²³Walter Brueggemann included the lament formula among four questions belonging to what he called “Israel’s countertestimony to Yahweh.” (1) How long? “The question is raised when Israel knows that its lived experience is incongruous with Yahweh’s intentionality and finds the lived experience unbearable. Israel fully anticipates that the God of its core testimony must and will act decisively to intervene and transform unbearable circumstances.” (2) Why? “This question arises out of circumstance of suffering that is senseless, especially in a faith wherein Yahweh is expected to be attentive and helpful. ‘Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?’ (Ps. 10:1).” (3) Where? The point of the question is that “Yahweh’s fidelity is *not here*, not in this circumstance of trouble, where it is needed and where it has been rightly anticipated [emphasis his].” A question which is usually put in the mouth of others, but clearly voices the psalmist’s own sense of dismay: ‘Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”’ (Ps. 79:10; 115:2). (4) Is? The question is used in the complaint against the leadership, both of Yahweh and of Moses in the rebellious confrontation of the wilderness: “He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ (Exod 17:7)” (*Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 319-321).

עַד־אֵנָה יִהְיֶה תִשְׁכַּחֲנִי גַצַּח	How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?
עַד־אֵנָה תִסְתִּיר אֶת־פְּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי:	How long will You hide Your face from me?
עַד־אֵנָה אֲשִׁית עֲצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי יְגוֹן בְּלִבִּי יוֹמָם	How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day?
עַד־אֵנָה יָרוּם אִיבִי עָלַי	How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

The psalm begins with a situation in which the wicked has got the better of the righteous (Ps 13:3b). The victim has cried out to God (1:2a), but the insufferable delay, indeed the lack of any indication that God has even paid attention, leads to despair.

The conventional complaint formula “How long?” is an important feature of the so-called lament Psalms (e.g., Pss 74, 79, 80, etc.) where a speaker (individual or corporate) in deep sorrow approaches God for favor, deliverance, and retribution on the enemy.²⁴ At times, this lament transforms into, as Westermann puts it, “accusatory questions and complaints directed at God”²⁵ as seen, for example, in Ps 74:9-11:

²⁴A lament psalm initially identified by Gunkel and refined by Westermann is generally comprised of five key elements: address, lament proper, petition, confession of trust, transition to praise. On a corporate level, they arose on several occasions of public calamity or disaster such as crop failure, pestilence, danger, or defeat by some enemy. The communal lament is a plea to God to act on behalf of the community, either through a confession of sin and plea for forgiveness or through a protest of corporate innocence. See Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, completed by J. Begrich, trans. J. D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), and Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), especially chap. 3, for further discussion on the form of lament in the biblical lament psalms.

²⁵Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 177. Marvin Tate went further and suggested an absence of closure in laments since “praise in the communal laments is usually latent and not overtly expressed, and the laments usually end with the problems laid out before God but unresolved” (*Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 [Dallas: Word Books, 1998], 253).

9	אֹתֵינוּ לֹא רְאִינוּ אִי־עוֹד נִבְיָא וְלֹא־אֶתְנוּ יָדַע עַד־מָה:	9	We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet, Nor is there any among us who knows how long.
10	עַד־מָתַי אֱלֹהִים יִתְרַף צָר יִנָּאֵץ אוֹיֵב שְׂמֵךְ לְנֶצַח:	10	How long, O God, will the adversary revile, And the enemy spurn Your name forever?
11	לָמָּה תִּשְׁיֵב יָדְךָ וַיִּמְיֶנֶךָ מִקְרֹב חֻקְךָ כָּלֵה:	11	Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? From within Your bosom, destroy <i>them!</i>

Here the questions and complaints “tread that thin line between reproach and judgment”²⁶ for it seems that the enemy has triumphed.

Thus, confronted with Yahweh’s absence or inactivity, the righteous throughout the book of Psalms often wonder whether Yahweh is “silent” (Pss 28:1; 35:22; 109:1; etc.); whether he has “forgotten” the sufferer (Pss 9:12; 10:12; 13:1; 42:9; etc.); whether he has “hidden his face” (Pss 10:1; 27:9; 30:7; 55:1; 104:29); or even if he is “asleep,” like the dying vegetation deities of Israel’s Canaanite neighbors (Pss 44:23; 78:65).²⁷ For the one who is praying and has to wait in such dire circumstances, God’s hiddenness can be an intolerable plight. Hence, the distressful “how long?” outcry comes out naturally.

Nevertheless, the wider context of the “How long?” in the Psalms of laments suggests a strong deliverance motif. Despite the dissonance resulting from the trust in God who is capable of restoring the proper order of life but yet delays, the expectation of deliverance for those who fear and trust in him remains vivid.²⁸ As Gerald H. Wilson put

²⁶Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 177.

²⁷Westermann explained that the question “how long?” just as the question “why?” is concerned about the absence of God and is often accompanied with verbs of anger (ibid.). For a thorough study of the hiding of God’s face motif in the Old Testament, see Samuel E. Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of God’s Face in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Balentine, “A Description of the Semantic Field of Hebrew Words for ‘Hide,’” *VT* 30 (1980): 137-153.

²⁸Tate noted insightfully, however, that “personal address dominates these laments; they do not turn away from God but *toward him in an act of faith*. He must reverse a situation which has developed beyond human resources” (emphasis his) (*Psalms 51-100*, 253). For Samuel Amirtham, expressions like

it, “The other side of the introduction to the laments is that they also represent hope. With all their questioning frustration with the apparent delay in divine response, the psalm writers consistently expect Yahweh to act.”²⁹

Another important usage of the “How long” formula can be found in the so-called imprecatory Psalms³⁰ where the issue of the call for vengeance is raised (Pss 79:10-12; 83:9-12; 137:7-9). Those psalms seem to be motivated by the fact that revenge is a vital prerogative of Yahweh (cf. Deut 32:35, 36, 41) who appears as a God of vengeance in the context of the privileged covenant relationship.³¹ The weight lies, as David W. Suter noted, on God’s twofold duty to exact “punishment both upon Israel for infidelity to the

“O God be not far from me” (Pss 22:11, 19; 38:22; 69:18; 70:5; 71:12; 141:1) and “Why, Yahweh, do you stand far off?” (Ps 10:1) are not prayers of God’s abandonment as they look at first glance, nor are they talking about laments’ separation from God; instead they affirm an assurance of actual presence of God in vivid form vis-à-vis the threatening world outside God’s protection” (“To Be Near and to Be Far Away from Yahweh: The Witness of the Individual Psalms of Lament to the Concept of the Presence of God,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 2 [1968]: 31-55).

²⁹Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, vol. 1, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:20. Also, James L. Crenshaw reminded us of H. Gunkel’s observation that “a peculiar feature of personal or individual laments within the Psalms [is] a decisive transition from plea to confident trust that Yahweh will act to rectify the situation” (*The Psalms: An Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 81-82).

³⁰Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney defined imprecatory psalms as “psalms in which a prayer for judgment (an imprecation) on the psalmist’s enemies is a leading feature of the psalm” (*Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, Tyndale Reference Library, electronic ed. [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001], 205). They added, “These psalms have their theological basis in the Abrahamic covenant, which said that curses would come upon Israel’s enemies” (ibid.).

³¹About the theological function of the theme of retribution in the Bible, W. S. Towner said, “The theme stands as a constant reminder of the seriousness with which the biblical writers understood God’s hatred of evil and injustice and his will to overcome them,” as well as underscoring the relationship between deeds and their moral consequences (“Retribution,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim [Nashville: Abingdon, 1976], 743-744). See also, H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament*, *Old Testament Studies* 31 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1995), 269-297. Page H. Kelly argued that in spite of the fact that the Israelites prayed to God for recompense and vengeance, those prayers were never accompanied “by acts of violence against one’s enemies. On the contrary, such prayers were a renunciation of the principle of retaliation and a recognition that the authority to avenge wrongs vested only with their God” (“Prayers of Troubled Saints,” *RevExp* 81 [1984]: 380). This is found in God’s affirmation: “vengeance is mine” (cf. Deut 32:25; Ps 94:1; Isa 63:4; Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30).

Covenant (Lev 26:25; cf. Luke 21:22) and upon other nations for their treatment of Israel (Deut 32:35; Isa 61:2).³² H. Kraus insisted on the theocentricity of the cry,

First, we must note that the cry for vengeance proceeds from the fact that Yahweh himself is being treated with contempt and his honor is defiled (Ps. 79:12). Then we must note that Israel does not set out to take revenge but prays to Yahweh and calls on him to do so (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). The “vengeance” for which Israel hopes is God’s judgment in response to the scorn and mockery of the enemy nations.³³

Kraus also rightly reacted against the superficiality of the depiction of such Psalms as “irreligious, unchristian, and repugnant,” allegedly typical of the Old Testament,

The prayer is that Yahweh will not allow his enemies free rein or let their rage go unanswered. It is expected that Yahweh will manifest his power in the world of the nations. Not alone in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament as well there is a certainty that this will not take place in an invisible, ideal realm of retribution, but in the reality of this world. . . . To set up a polarity of love and vengeance would involve a total misunderstanding of biblical truth.³⁴

³²David W. Suter, “Vengeance,” *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, ed. P. J. Achtemeier, Roger S. Boraas, et al., with the Society of Biblical Literature (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 1110-1111. On what the imprecatory prayers teach about God, Suter insists that “(1) First they tell us that in a moral universe God is not neutral. In the face of oppression, injustice, and tyranny, he has taken sides against the oppressor and has made the poor and needy the objects of his special concern (see Pss. 58:10-11; 94:1, 3, 6). (2) Judgment is the ‘strange’ and ‘alien’ work of God (Isa. 28:21): it is the dark side of his mercy and compassion. He blesses whenever he can; he judges whenever he must. Violence is done to the biblical concept of God whenever one of these activities is stressed at the expense of the other” (Kelly, “Prayers of Troubled Saints,” 380).

³³H. Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 67.

³⁴*Ibid.* Aune’s clarification about the apparent antithesis between covenant curses in prayers of vengeance and the New Testament commands to love rather than curse one’s enemies is helpful: “1) The psalmists and others who utter prayers for vengeance are not cursing others but pray that God will act justly, though it is clear that the negative features of such prayers are derived from ancient curse traditions. 2) The curse played an important role in ancient social life and was used in a variety of contexts: to force obedience to treaties, to frighten off thieves and grave robbers, to guarantee honesty in transactions. 3) Curses were widely used as a legal device that posited justice against injustice, and a distinction was often made between legitimate and illegitimate curses (illegitimate curses were attributed to enemies; cf. Pss 10:7; 59:13; 62:5; 109:17, 28)” (*Revelation 6-16*, 409). For further discussion, see P. Maiberger, “Zur Problem und Herkunft der sogenannten Fluchpsalmen,” *TTZ* 97 (1988): 183-216. On issues of form and eschatological significance of imprecatory prayer, see Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 517-524; Thomas, “The Imprecatory Prayers in the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 126 (1969): 123-131.

For him, the cry for revenge betrayed “the expectation of the oppressed people of God that Yahweh would bring the enemy nations to judgment for their scorn and contempt and that he would display his power in the world of the nations.”³⁵

In summary, the usage of the “How long?” query of the Psalms of laments blends the theodictic aspect of “why” evil is still allowed to wreak havoc in the life of the faithful ones and the temporal question “until when?” regarding the end. Because of the privileged covenantal relationship, the Lord is invoked as the God of vengeance to punish the psalmist’s enemies in retribution for injury. As the psalmist grapples with his unresponsiveness, Yahweh is somewhat reproached or impeached for failing or delaying to give justice to his faithful ones who were left to suffer. However, in spite of everything, the lament formula also stems from a trusting heart: The delay does not quite negate the psalmist’s expectation that Yahweh will finally come through to defeat his enemies.

Usage of ἕως πότε in the Prophets

The question, “How long?” of Rev 6:10 also parallels several prophetic passages from the Hebrew Bible, where the basic sense is “until when” in relation to a perceived delay of divine promises. In the postexilic era, the query betrays a longing for the era of

³⁵Kraus, *A Continental Commentary*, 67. About the theological rationale of those Psalms, K. Jesurathnam insightfully noted that “Psalms of lament also identify the cause of the lamenter with God’s cause and their enemies with God’s enemies. Therefore when they pray to God for recompense or vengeance against their enemies, it is the only possible weapon they possess as powerless against all their powerful ‘enemies’ or ‘tormentors’” (“Towards a Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics: Re-reading the Psalms of Lament,” *Bangalore Theological Forum* 34 [2002]: 11).

restoration in times when God seems to be disturbingly silent.³⁶

This chronological sense often appears to be connected to the fall of Jerusalem and Jeremiah's predictions of restoration after the seventy years of Babylonian Exile (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10; cf. also 2 Chr 36:21; Dan 9:2). The conditional nature of the prophecy in regard to the repentance of the people can be inferred from Jer 29:12: only אִם, "when (or if)" the people call and pray to God will he allow himself to be found and bring about the restoration.³⁷ This hope was expressed in terms of a time of covenant renewal, restoration of the people to the land, and the continuous service of the priesthood in the temple (Jer 30-34).

Focusing on the internal wrong, injustice, and oppressive violence in Israel before the exile, Habakkuk raises the "How long?" query with regard to God's ignorance of Judah's sin (1:2-4).³⁸ In this outcry, like Job, he does not hesitate to question God

³⁶The "How long?" plea also finds a natural place especially in the turmoil of the postexilic era which Simon de Vries described as "the time not of God's comfort but the time of God's absence" (*The Achievements of Biblical Religion: A Prolegomenon to Old Testament Theology* [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983], 342). Attempting to explain the dilemma of God's silence, R. L. Smith wrote, "Times when God is silent (when we think he should be vocal or active avenging the wrong and judging evil) are hard to understand. Job, Jeremiah and countless sufferers have asked this same question. Why does God not do something? Hosea said that like a lion God would rend and go away . . . 'I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face' (Hos 5:14b-15a). Sometimes the silences of God can be explained by the people's sins and their failure to repent. But that is not always true" (*Micah–Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary 32 [Dallas: Word Books, 1998], 104). See also Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 151-157.

³⁷Admitting the fact of substantial variation for the particle אִם (if, not, whether, when, since) inasmuch as the context and interpretation of the text determine the exact translation of this particle, J. B. Scott believed that the "basic meaning is 'if' and this meaning can be seen in most of its occurrences" ("אִם," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke [Chicago: Moody, 1999], 48).

³⁸Habakkuk 1:2 records a "cry for help" or the "cry to You 'violence!'" The first verb is שָׁעַר and occurs in the Piel form, emphasizing perhaps the intensity of the cry for help while the second is a Qal form of קָרַע. A similar cry and need for divine help are found in Job 9:17-20; 16:12-14; 19:7; 30:11-15. Jeremiah also complained of the violence and destruction of Judahite society (Jer 6:7; 20:8), a charge leveled by Ezekiel (Ezek 45:9). For J. G. Harris, "Habakkuk's first lament, therefore, was an indictment of the sins of a people who belonged to the ethical tradition of the covenant. His complaint of the evils of Judah was also a record of God's wrath at the violation of the moral requirements of the covenant.

because his theological understanding of him and his ways failed to harmonize with experienced reality.³⁹ His inquiry is one of theodicy, “the justice of God,” in the light of prevalent evil. God’s response shows that justice is on its way through the Chaldeans chosen as the instrument of his judgment (1:5-11). No immediate answer is given either about why God tolerates the state of affairs or the meaning in the interval of the delay.

At a pivotal turning point in Judah’s preexilic history, Isaiah uses the lament formula when he agonizes over an unusual commission that threatened the survival of the elect people of God as it involved hardening them in unbelief before her judgment (6:9-10).⁴⁰ No *terminus ad quem* is given in the direct answer except for the charge to keep on preaching until “cities are devastated and without inhabitant . . . and the land utterly desolate” (6:11).⁴¹ Yet, a possible underlying goal for this mission may still be

Whenever the moral elements of the covenant are violated there is a threat of judgement. . . . It is clear that this complaint is presented in characteristic prophetic and conceptual forms. It carries overtones of the Deuteronomic interpretation of history, that is, dependence on the divine law, adherence to a prescribed social and ethical norm, the actualization of obedience, social identity and preservation, and an agreed theology of life. Fundamental to the Deuteronomic view is the concept of divine election, the enactment of the terms of the covenant, the inevitability of judgement, and the final outcome in restoration and deliverance. Furthermore, on this view (cf. Dt. 25: 15, Ps. 51: 19), history falls within the sphere of the divine operation, is the sphere wherein God acts and moves. The contravention of this principle is the way of disaster and of inevitable punishment” (“The Laments of Habakkuk’s Prophecy,” *EQ* 45 [1973]: 21-25).

³⁹For Francis Andersen, Habakkuk’s plea “emphasizes his frustration and exasperation with the state of affairs at that time because he expects God to be concerned for justice. The opening interrogative ’ad- ’ana, ‘How long . . . ?’ applies to ’ez ’aq ’eleyka lamas [oppressive violence] as well as to siwwa’ti, which carries with it the idea of a cry for help” (*Habakkuk: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 25 [New York: Doubleday, 2001], 101).

⁴⁰See F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 19:201. Regarding Isaiah’s state of mind, see Sheldon H. Blank, “Traces of Prophetic Agony in Isaiah,” *HUCA* 27 (1956): 86-91. For a discussion on the hardening of Israel, see Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “Le motif de l’endurcissement (Is 6, 9-10) et la lecture d’Isaïe,” *Bib* 73 (1992): 208-239; John L. McLaughlin, “Their Hearts Were Hardened: The Use of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Book of Isaiah,” *Bib* 75 (1994): 9-17; Torsten Uhlig, *The Theme of Hardening in the Book of Isaiah: An Analysis of Communicative Action*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2, Series 39 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

⁴¹R. P. Carroll suggested that this usage may “have had an ironic element in that the formulaic appeal to Yahweh to end quickly the community’s destruction was answered by the assertion that the destruction would go on until cities were deserted and the land ruined (6.11-13)” (*When Prophecy Failed: Cognitive Dissonance in the Prophetic Traditions of the Old Testament* [New York: Seabury, 1979], 80).

repentance, and not just the announcement of judgment. Isaiah, indeed, expresses his basic faith that salvation lies beyond judgment after seventy years in captivity (6:13). Hope is thus maintained beyond the delay through the survival of a remnant.⁴²

Right before Zechariah, in the same historical context of Babylonian exile and subsequent return and restoration, Haggai submits that the new age with the postexilic blessings has been delayed. The people's lack of material prosperity was due to putting higher priority on rebuilding their own houses instead of God's temple. Evocating perhaps the Sinai theophany, hope beyond the delay is conveyed by עוֹד אֶחָת קָעֵט, "yet again, in a little while," Yahweh intends to "shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land" (2:6).⁴³ He promises also to "shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations . . . and fill this house with splendor" (2:7).⁴⁴

The "How long?" query is also found in the book of Zechariah. As the prophet was involved with the sanctuary, he wonders if the seventy years will be fulfilled (1:12)

⁴²Commenting on the positive use of the remnant idea, H. Wildberger wrote, "Does עַד אֲשֶׁר (until) focus upon the end of Israel or does it rather refer to the culminating point in time when total judgment would occur, at which time the salvation would also be set in motion? Since עַד אֲשֶׁר (until) is an answer to the question עַד מָתַי (how long?), the second possibility must be presumed to be the correct one. And yet, the interpretation finally has much to do with an overall understanding of Isaiah, indeed of prophecy in general. Even though the cities are devastated and the countryside is deserted, this does not yet mean that there is no longer an Israel and that the election has become meaningless" (*A Continental Commentary: Isaiah 1-12* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 273). See Gerhard F. Hasel who provided the most thorough and persuasive argument that the "stump" metaphor strikes a positive note of hope for a righteous remnant (*The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd rev. ed., Andrews University Monographs Studies in Religion 5 [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1980], 233-250). Also E. Jenni, "Jesajas Berufung in der neueren Forschung," *TZ* 15 (1959): 331-339.

⁴³God's revelation at Sinai probably offers the cue to the "yet again": The shaking would be a repetition of what had taken place previously at Sinai (Heb 12:26).

⁴⁴Based on Hag 2:19, "From this day on I will bless you," J. J. Collins suggested that "there are signs that the promised transformation was delayed. . . . It is apparent, however, that the Jewish community did not experience a transformation of fortune such as Haggai had promised" ("From Prophecy to Apocalypticism: The Expectation of the End," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. J. Collins, Bernard McGinn, and Stephen J. Stein [New York: Continuum, 1998], 1:131-132).

and why the delay (1:16).⁴⁵ Listening in on a heavenly conversation, he heard the Angel of the Lord who, distressed by long removal of divine favor from Israel, uttered the “How long?” query. The answer is that the seventy years of judgment will soon be past history. Yahweh is about to act to restore the kingdom. An eschatological turning point is at hand, marked with the completion of the reconstruction of the temple (1:16). The era of salvation is about to begin.

With the prophetic texts, the usage of the “How long?” query retains the initial theodictic sense of the Psalms of lament with a consolidation of the chronological sense of “until when?” in both the questions and answers about the postexilic delay. The delay in the manifestation of God’s righteousness is sometimes explained by the people’s sins and their failure to repent or by reinforcing the imminence of God’s deliverance. Hope beyond the delay is seen to be oriented toward the completion of the temple or the survival of a remnant.

Delay Motif with Regard to the “Day of the Lord”

In the Hebrew Bible prophetic writings, the “How long?” query is also at times implicitly connected to the timing of Yahweh’s decisive intervention in human affairs to

⁴⁵Regarding the computing of this period, K. L. Barker explained, “This period may be calculated from 605 B.C. (the time of the first deportation from the land) to about 536 or 535 (the time when the first returnees were settled back in the land), or from 586 (when the temple was destroyed) to 516 (when the temple was rebuilt). Either way, the point is that the people wondered why God was still angry with them when the appointed time of their punishment had expired (or was almost over)” (“Zechariah,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985], 7:612). For a discussion on Zechariah’s dependence on Jeremiah’s seventy years, see Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 25B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 117-118; A. Orr, “The Seventy Years of Babylon,” *VT* 6 (1956): 304-306; C. F. Whitley, “The Term Seventy Years Captivity,” *VT* 4 (1954): 60-72. For E. Lipinski, “Cette période de soixante-dix années était un temps de courroux divin (cf. Zach. i 12), que le peuple devait passer dans le jeûne et la pénitence (Zach. vii 5; Dan. ix 2-3)” (“Recherches sur le livre de Zacharie,” *VT* 20 [1970]: 38).

punish sin, restore the faithful of his people, and establish his rule over the nations. It is often referred to as the יום יהוה, “Day of the Lord,” formula which marks the provenance of Hebrew eschatology.⁴⁶ Here, what has been called eschatological delay is part of the horizon of questioning behind this concept in selected texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Although the concept behind the “Day of the Lord” is too complex to exhaust within the limits of this study, yet it might still be helpful, for the sake of a quick background, to note at least a few basic facts before tackling the delay passages per se. The precise term appears seventeen times in the prophetic books (Isa 2:12; 13:6,9; Jer 46:10; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18,20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7,14; Mal 3:23 [4:6]) but other cognate designations are clearly also relevant.⁴⁷ In essence, it was linked with prophetic salvation expectations among the people, but with

⁴⁶For a treatment of the “Day of the Lord” as an expansive term denoting any future time of God’s judgment and/or restoration, see R. Hiers, “Day of the Lord,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD)*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:82-83. As to the impact on New Testament eschatology, George R. Beasley-Murray rightly noted that “the conviction that judgments must fall prior to the coming of the kingdom of God is rooted in the teaching of the Old Testament prophets concerning the day of the Lord (for typical references see Am. 5:18ff., Isa. 2:12ff., Zech. 1:2ff.). This teaching was developed by the Jewish apocalyptists and it finds many echoes in the New Testament writings” (*The Book of Revelation*, 129).

⁴⁷Other terms used are: “day of the Lord’s anger” (Lam 2:22; Zeph 2:2,3), “the day of his burning anger” (Isa 13:13), “the day of the Lord’s vengeance” (Isa 34:8; 61:2), “the coming day is of the Lord” (Zech 14:1), “the day of vengeance” (Isa 63:4, Jer 46:10), “the day of his fierce anger” (Lam 1:12), “the day of destruction” (Job 21:30), “the day of evil” (Prov 16:4), “the day of the wrath of God” (Ezek 7:19), “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness” (Joel 2:2), a “dreadful” day (Joel 2:11), and a day of “disaster” (Obad 1:13) or simply “that day” (Isa 22:8,12; Jer 30:7). These expressions can refer to historical events in the past, e.g., the fall of Jerusalem (Lam 1:12; 2:22); to historical events in the immediate future of the prophet, e.g., the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. (Amos 5:18-20) or the defeat of Egypt in 605 B.C. (Jer 46:10); and they can refer to the eschatological day of the Lord (Isa 2:12; Ezek 13:5; Zech 14:1). Thus, the day of the Lord concept was used with considerable freedom to interpret various momentous events in the past or in the future. Cf. Heir Weiss, “The Origin of ‘the Day of the Lord’—Reconsidered,” *HUCA* 37 (1966): 29-60. The literature on the day of Yahweh is fairly extensive but see particularly L. Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems* (Prague: Nakladem Filosoficke Fakulty, 1948). Appendix A in G. W. Ahlstrom’s book documents over twenty-five OT words/phrases involving God’s wrath/judgment associated with and describing “Day of the Lord” in the OT (*Joel and the Temple Cult of Jerusalem*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 21 [Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1971], 62-97); A. S. Kapelrud, *The Message of the Prophet Zephaniah* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1975), 61-64.

judgment and doom among the earlier prophets.⁴⁸

The actual origin and the development of the יום יהוה “Day of the Lord” concept cannot be easily determined,⁴⁹ but whatever its source, the idea by the time of Amos seems to have taken deep root in the religious thought of Israel. Amos 5:18-27 is the *locus classicus* for יום יהוה where the prophet deals with the “Day” in anticipation of the Assyrian attack on the northern kingdom with eschatological overtones.⁵⁰ Initially, it referred to a specific judgment for a specific nation, but this seems to be universalized in the exilic period (Zeph 1:1-18; Ezek 7:1-27, 13:1-14; 30:1-2; Joel 1:1-20; 2; 3:9-21, Zech

⁴⁸The day of the Lord judgments are poured upon all of the nations (Obad 15, Zech 14:1), Israel (Amos 5:18-20), Judah (Joel 1:15), or all the inhabitants of the earth (Zeph 1:14-18). Joel 2:30-32 and Mal 4:5-6 suggest that those who repent beforehand may be spared.

⁴⁹H. Gunkel argued for a mythical origin (*Genesis* [Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1901], 242); see too H. Gressmann, *Der Ursprung der judisch-israelitischen Eschatology* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1905), 147; and L. Cerny, *The Day of Yahweh and Some Relevant Problems*, 34-44. S. Mowinckel contended that it derives from the rituals of the annual cultic festival celebrating the end of a certain period and the anticipation of new beginnings (*He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson [New York: Abingdon Press, 1954], 132, 145). G. von Rad held that the origin is to be found in Israel’s historical traditions of holy war (“The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” *JSS* 4 [1959]: 97-108, von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. [New York: Harper and Row, 1965], 2:123).

⁵⁰The Israelites expected a Theophany which would be a happy day for them, but a day of calamity for their enemies. Amos and the other prophets, however, reversed the hope associated with this day and proclaimed the “Day of the Lord” not as a day of deliverance, but as a Day of Judgment and gloom for Israel (Amos 5:18-20). Regarding the various historical fulfillments of the “Day of the Lord” prophecies, Richard L. Mayhue identified, “(1) the Assyrian deportment of Israel ca. 722 BC (Amos 5:18, 20), (2) the Assyrian invasion of Judah ca. 701 BC (Joel 1:15; 2:1,11), (3) the Babylonian exile of Judah ca. 605–586 BC (Isa 13:6; Ezek 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11; Zeph 1:7), (4) the Babylonian defeat of Egypt ca. 568 BC (Ezek 30:3), (5) the demise of Edom ca. 845 BC (Obad 1-14), and (6) the eschatological judgments of the Tribulation period (Isa 2:12; 13:9; Joel 2:31; 3:14; Obad 15; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5)” (“The Bible’s Watchword: Day of the Lord,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 22 [2011]: 66-67).

14:1-21).⁵¹ R. V. G. Tasker has succinctly summarized the development and significance of the concept,

The expression “the day of the Lord” at the time of the rise of the great prophets of Israel denoted an event to which the Israelites were looking forward as the day of Jehovah’s final vindication of *the righteousness of His people* against their enemies. One of the tasks of the prophets was to insist that in fact “the day of the Lord” would be a day on which God would vindicate “His *own righteousness*” not only against the enemies of Israel, but also against Israel itself.⁵² (emphasis his)

Often considered as incongruent with the idea of judgment, salvation appears, however, as its twin theological foil in the “Day of the Lord” imagery. The parenetic function of the “Day of the Lord” oracle was to stimulate repentance (Joel 2:30-32 and Mal 4:5-6) or faithfulness (Zech 14:1-21). Regarding the interrelationship between judgment and hope, Greg King wrote, “However, the Day is neither solely a time of judgment nor of salvation. It is a time of salvation through judgment, purification and blessing through purging.”⁵³ Hope comes especially through the survival of a remnant.

The prophets announce that a group from the covenant nation will emerge from the judgment and receive divine blessings. This group of survivors, called the remnant (Mic. 4:6-7; Zeph. 3:11-13), will be composed of people who seek Yahweh intently

⁵¹G. von Rad identified a crucial turning point with the fall of Jerusalem and the exile and wrote, “After this, prophecy becomes prophecy of salvation and the prophesied day of Yahweh means deliverance, restoration and ultimate salvation for the deeply humiliated people. The very day and hour of this change can be dated in Ez. (33:21f.)” (“ἡμέρα,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 2:946). He then described the change to prophecy of salvation associated with the “Day of the Lord” in the postexilic prophets in material terms: “We have full-blooded prophecies of the day of Yahweh which will bring judgment and destruction to the Gentiles but protection (Zech. 12:1 ff.), purification (Mal. 3:2), cleansing (Zech. 13:1 f.), the endowment of the Spirit (Jl. 3; Zech. 12:10) and paradisaean waters (Jl. 4:18; Zech. 14:8) to Jerusalem” (ibid.).

⁵²R. V. G. Tasker, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 45. He added, “This ‘day of the Lord’ throughout Old Testament prophecy remains a future reality, though there were events within the history covered by the Old Testament story which were indeed days of judgment both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her” (ibid.).

⁵³Greg King, “Day of the Lord,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible (EDB)*, ed. David N. Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 324-325. For the necessary entwining of the theme of judgment and hope, see W. Dryness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 219-237.

(Amos 5:4-6), manifest humility (Isa. 2:11-12; Zeph. 3:11-12), and live ethically (Amos 5:14-15). They will be gathered by Yahweh, restored to their own land, and enjoy Yahweh's presence in their midst (Amos 9:14-15; Zeph. 3:15, 20).⁵⁴

Ezekiel 12:21-28 reveals two disputation oracles that uncover the people's disdain for his prophecies. Prior to this, Yahweh's impending judgment and exile (Ezek 12:17-20) is depicted through the use of symbolic actions.⁵⁵ In reaction to the perceived delay, skeptics chose to challenge the very authenticity of such prophecies (v. 22), while others simply relegated their fulfillment to a far distant future long after their time.⁵⁶ Yahweh counters both by revealing the imminence and certainty of judgment: first, the "days are prolonged" is reversed into "the days are near," which pulls the day of the judgment and the "end time" back into the immediate future (v. 23), and second, he affirms his readiness to fulfill his words without further delay (v. 25).⁵⁷

Habakkuk 2:2-3 is a short eschatological passage⁵⁸ that contains the classic facet

⁵⁴King, "Day of the Lord," 324-325. He then went on to add the NT attestation of this fact: "Certainly Luke (21:24), Paul (Rom 9:22-24), and the author of 2 Peter (3:9) were sure that was true" (ibid.).

⁵⁵L. C. Allen suggested that "the time lag between Ezekiel's call to be a prophet of judgment in 593 and Nebuchadnezzar's eventual besieging of Jerusalem in 588 may well underlie the gibe" (*Ezekiel 1-19*, Word Biblical Commentary 28 [Dallas: Word, 1998], 198).

⁵⁶Horace D. Hummel observed that the actual intention of these skeptics was to cast doubt about the validity of all prophecy (*Ezekiel 1-20*, Concordia Commentary [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005], 348).

⁵⁷On the reversal of the saying, W. Zimmerli wrote, "Against the timeless drawn out imperfect יארכו 'become long' there appears the conclusive angry perfect קרבו 'have drawn near,' and against the indefinite הימים 'days,' the days of fulfillment, הימים 'the (judgement) days,' determined by reference to the day of Yahweh. Against the contemptuous ואבד כל הזון there appears the דבר כל הזון 'that which was contained in the prophetic vision as the message (of Yahweh),' which clearly points to the expression דבר יהיה. Verse 25 elaborates it still further: 'For I, Yahweh, I speak'" (*Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 2 vols., Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 1:281).

⁵⁸Bauckham affirmed that "Hab 2:3 and the history of its interpretation contain the basic apocalyptic 'explanation' of the delay, insofar as it may be called an explanation" ("Delay of the Parousia," 5).

of apocalyptic delay, which could well be Yahweh's response to the "How long?" of 1:2. There, the fulfillment of the vision appears to "linger," suggesting a delay beyond what is expected or intended (cf. Gen 19:16; 43:10; Exod 12:39; Judg 3:26; 19:8; 2 Sam 15:28) as in 1:2-4. However, the text appeals to God's sovereignty by describing this fulfillment as לְמוֹעֵד, "for an appointed time," at "the end."⁵⁹ As a witness to God's plan in the face of the delay, the prophet is to write down the vision⁶⁰ perhaps for the sake of mission where future readers/hearers may run to spread the message.⁶¹ Balancing the impatient prayer (1:4), the delay motif is used to increase patience (2:3) among the righteous

⁵⁹The word מוֹעֵד "appointed time" combines with קֵץ "end" to suggest the end to a historical era determined solely by God's discretion. It is possible to understand the text as intimating that the vision pants (or hastens) toward the end. About the delay, C. L. Taylor said, "The vision or revelation is still maturing or building up to its time, its appointed time, the hour, not far away, which has been surely fixed; for it hastens, 'pants,' hurries to the end, i.e., to the fulfillment which 'will not fail,' and is inevitable" ("Habakkuk," *Interpreter's Bible (IB)* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981], 6:988). According to him, the background of the oracle can be traced to the popular belief that futuristic expectations had not materialized because they had been delayed (ibid.). J. N. Boo Heflin noted that the end here "may refer to the termination of Babylonian power but, more likely, to the eschaton" (*Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai* [Grand Rapids: Lamplighter Books, 1985], 90).

⁶⁰Regarding the characterization of the vision, J. Gerald Janzen argued that in 2:3a, עוֹד "yet" should be emended to עָד "witness" so as to parallel עֵדוּת which, according to them, means "testifier." The verse should then read, "For the vision is a witness to the appointed time, a testifier to the end—it does not lie" ("Habakkuk 2:2-4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances," *HTR* 73 [1980]: 55-57). Elsewhere, Janzen insisted, "That vision, so written, is to serve as a witness and a testifier to the fact that God has set an appointed time, which will have the character of a rendezvous, and which will bring to an end the period of judgment announced in 1:5-11" ("Eschatological Symbol and Existence in Habakkuk," *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 404). He suggested that the noun vision-עֵדוּת is in fact the rhetorical and hermeneutical center of the book (ibid.). Based on Ugaritic parallels, Daniel Sivan believed that the original may have read "because the vision (has been written down) as a witness to the appointed time" (*A Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* [Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997], 40. See also L. Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon to the Old Testament* (1994-2000), s.v. "עוֹד."

⁶¹This possibility is underscored by J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews, and M. W. Chavalas who speak of the fact that professional messengers who run to spread the message of their lords, are common in ancient royal courts such as those in ancient Mari and Babylon (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 792). An alternative reading is suggested by J. M. Holt who pointed out that the main verb is רָץ and the emphasis is not on "reading" but on "running." Thus the more accurate translation for him is that "the revelation is given so that a reader may run." However, he took "running" as a "figure of speech" and emphasized, instead, ethical responsibilities as seen in his preferred translation "so he who reads it may live obediently" ("So He May Run Who Reads it," *JBL* 83 [1964]: 298-300).

(v. 4).⁶² However, the gist of the motif is that the fulfillment will not be late, that is, it “will not miss God’s scheduled time; it will not delay a moment beyond its appointed time.”⁶³

Against the backdrop of the Assyrian yoke, the eschatological phrase **ביום ההוא**, “In that Day,” at the onset of Isa 10:20-27, shows that Isaiah anticipates salvation through the survival of a remnant.⁶⁴ Yahweh is clearly seen as restraining the oppressing and destructing effect of the foreign rule.⁶⁵ However, before the deliverance, a possible intimation of delay is hinted at in the prophetic answer “for yet in a very little while” (10:25, cf. 26:20, 29:17).⁶⁶ Prior to this, Isaiah spoke (v. 22) of “a fixed period which

⁶²Janzen insightfully commented on the “response which is desirable on the part of the one who hears/reads it: he is to ‘run’ (רוץ) and not to sit idle or stop; and he is to ‘wait’ (קָהָה) and not to break off to go elsewhere, or to give up and do something else, or to focus his interest on other concerns. He is to exercise *patience* in its two fundamental modes of action and passion. (This two-sided response, it may be noted, is portrayed here exactly as it is in that slightly later and much more fully developed eschatological vision in Isa 40:1-31. In the latter vision, it may be noted further, Yahweh is portrayed as coming in v 10; Israel is portrayed as dispirited and faint in vv 27, 30; and in v 31 the faithful recipients of this eschatological vision are those who *wait* -קָהָה for Yahweh and *run*-רוץ)” (“Habakkuk 2:2-4 in the Light of Recent Philological Advances,” 68).

⁶³Ibid. Even though, to the human mind, the period between prediction and fulfillment may be longer than the prophecies seemed to have indicated, it will not be late according to God’s timetable. For Kenneth L. Barker, “God reminded the prophet of the certainty of the message but without the promise of meeting Habakkuk’s time schedule” (*Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, New American Commentary 20 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 324).

⁶⁴The word יום, “day” appears some 127 times in a variety of contexts in the book of Isaiah. That the Lord has a day on which judgment will occur is the leading theme right from Isa 2:6-22.

⁶⁵As John N. Oswalt put it, “Since Assyria is under God’s hands, the destruction which she brings will not be total but will be subject to God’s larger purpose” (*The Book of Isaiah 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 268-269).

⁶⁶About the question that could be behind such an answer, R. P. Carroll noted, “The most likely question that a beleaguered community in ancient Israel would have asked is ‘how long?’” (“Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 50). However, he saw here a sharp contrast with the answer of Isa 6:11, which he attributed to later editing for a later reactualization of the text where the “inevitability and actuality of judgment are accepted but not its ultimacy” (ibid.). For John D. W. Watts, the text implies that “hope is still alive for a remnant. But it must be postponed until the agenda of destruction for the kingdom of Israel is fulfilled” (*Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary 24 [Waco: Word Books, 1985], 192). Regarding the historical application, John N. Oswalt wrote that “it is not necessary to refer it directly to the events of 701 B.C. nor even to the events of 620-609 B.C., when Assyria was finally destroyed. Rather, here it speaks of that future time when all the punishment at the hands of the nations will be over and the

must run its full course before salvation is experienced.”⁶⁷ In an attempt to be reassuring, the prophet introduces this programmatic element to show the brevity of the present distress or judgment as he rehearses the past history of deliverance from Midian and Egypt (v. 26).

Isaiah 66:5-9 is another significant text where the delay motif relative to the Day of retribution occupies its literary context.⁶⁸ Actually the whole section (chaps. 56-66) has been seen as a delay segment within a bulging apocalyptic framework.⁶⁹ This context

purified ‘remnant’ of God’s people (see 4:2-6) will be brought home” (*Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary Series [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 176).

⁶⁷Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” 50. He also insisted that the time indicators add an “element of determination” which shows that “what is happening is a controlled thing with definite limits, even though what survives may only be a remnant” (ibid.). He added, “The programme of a decreed destruction with a possible deliverance at the end of the programme moves prophecy in the direction of apocalyptic thought with its ages of a fixed nature” (ibid.).

⁶⁸Regarding the subject of retribution and the foes of Israel, Claus Westermann related the “day of vengeance” to the “day of YHWH” (e.g., Isa 34:8; 61:2; 63:4), but denied any reference to Israel’s foes (*Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library [London: SCM, 1969], 367). However, B. Schramm suggested that prophetic theology always “proclaims the message of שנת רצון for Israel and of יום נקם for her enemies,” by referring to Isa 34:8 and 63:4 (*The Opponents of Third Isaiah*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 193 [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1955], 145). Rectifying Schramm’s views, John D. W. Watts rightly asserted that Isa 34:8 “actually portrays vengeance against Zion, as 1:24 had predicted, that is, against YHWH’s enemies within Zion. To miss this point in Isaiah is to miss an essential nuance of its message. Schramm’s point that ‘acceptance’ and ‘vengeance’ pair opposite behaviors is correct, but the words do not automatically point to preset groups. Isaiah’s message is that YHWH’s vengeance against any of his enemies, from within Israel or without, works together with his comforting acceptance of his ‘servants’ to create the kind of situation in which a relation between YHWH and his people is possible (cf. 63:4). Schramm’s summary that ‘good news for someone implies bad news for someone else’ misses the point made by these chapters that YHWH’s servants, both Israelite and foreign, will worship together in the new temple” (*Isaiah 34-66*, Word Biblical Commentary 25, rev. ed. [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005], 873-874).

⁶⁹Regarding the proto-Apocalyptic character of Isa 56-66, see Hanson, *Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 21. About the apocalyptic eschatology of those chapters, B. S. Childs claimed that chaps. 56-66 were deliberately dehistoricized so that they could be read as the eschatological fulfillment of the prophecies of chaps. 1-55 (*Isaiah* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 447). For James Muilenburg, “The eschatology resembles that of chs. 34-35 more than that of chs. 40-55. It is more apocalyptic in character, more tragic in its pessimism, more dualistic, more cosmic in its depths. The new age will be ushered in by the creation of a new heaven and earth (65:17; cf. 66:22)” (“Isaiah 40-66,” *Interpreter’s Bible (IB)* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981], 5:414). For the distinction between eschatology and apocalyptic, Rowley saw the prophets as those who “foretold the future that should arise out of the present, while the apocalypticist foretold the future that should break into the present. . . . The apocalypticists had little faith in the present to beget the future” (*The Relevance of Apocalyptic*, 38-39). K. Rahner added, “To extrapolate from the present into the future is eschatology, to interpolate from the future into the present is apocalyptic”

allegedly addresses the unfulfilled eschatological hope of Isa 40-55 with the failure of the anticipated blessings of the return from the Babylonian exile.⁷⁰ In fact, chap. 66 is part of God's answer to the communal lament (59, 63-64) where the cause of delay is credited to Israel's sins (59:1-2, 20) that apparently have led God to hide his face (64:7) and to keep silent (64:12).⁷¹ Verse 66:5 raises the issue of the "when" regarding the shaming of

("The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Assertions," in *More Recent Writings*, trans. Kevin Smyth, Theological Investigations 4 [Baltimore: Helicon, 1966], 370). Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, "Some Thoughts on the Interpretation of Eschatology," *Concilium* 1, no. 5 (1969): 22-29. Regarding the delayed eschaton in this passage, see H-J. Kraus, "Die ausgebliebene Endtheophanie," *ZAW* 78 (1966): 317-332.

⁷⁰Although the return did occur, the furnishing of the temple, rebuilding of the wall and the restoration of the city were still left incomplete (60:7, 10; 62:7, 9) leaving a gap between expectation and experience that had to be explained. Chapters 56-66 are often referred by modern scholars as the so-called Trito-Isaiah, written supposedly in a post-exilic setting while chaps. 40-55 are termed Deutero-Isaiah, produced allegedly in a Babylonian captivity context and chaps. 1-39 are set in Jerusalem before the exile. The postexilic setting of the Third in contrast to Second Isaiah was inferred on the basis on the references to the temple and to sacrifices. However, von Rad noted that Second Isaiah has strongly influenced Third Isaiah and this, for him, suggests a teacher-pupil relationship. However, the key difference, for him, is that Second Isaiah climaxes with the expectation of the restoration of Jerusalem while Third Isaiah begins with the long overdue salvation still pending. See von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:280-281. Today, it is commonly accepted that Third Isaiah reclaims the unfulfilled prophecies about salvation in Second Isaiah, and reinterprets them for a new generation. However, C. R. Seitz was, perhaps, right, "It is quite possible that Chaps 40-55 treat different *aspects* of the restoration of Zion than do Chaps 56-66. . . . The distinction becomes thematic and theological, and it does not necessitate separation along Babylonian/Palestinian, exilic/postexilic, or visionary prophet/disillusioned community lines" ("Isaiah, Book of [Third Isaiah]," *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1982], 3:503). For conservative scholars who reject the division while maintaining the unity of the entire book, the authorship by Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.E., and the chapters of the so-called Third Isaiah as predictive prophecy, see O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950); E. J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah* (London: Tyndale, 1955) and *Who Wrote Isaiah?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993).

⁷¹Unconvincingly, R. N. Whybray asserted, "Although at first sight verse 1 might suggest that this chapter contains Yahweh's answer to the preceding lamentation, there is no connection between these two passages" (*Isaiah 40-66*, New Century Bible Commentary [1978; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 266). Moreover, P. D. Hanson cogently argued that the lament "is tightly bound to chapter 65," which furnishes the answer to the query in 64:12 (*Dawn of Apocalyptic*, 80-81). Further on the unity of chaps. 65 and 66, C. R. Seitz maintained that "chap. 65 and chap. 66 should be read together. . . . Chapter 66 is a logical, direct, sustained continuation of the argument of chap. 65" ("The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, *Introduction to Prophetic Literature, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Jeremiah, the Book of Baruch, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Book of Lamentations, the Book of Ezekiel*, ed. L. E. Keck, et al. [Nashville: Abingdon, 2001], 545). Regarding 64:12 and God's silence, James Muilenburg wrote, "The prophet is borne down by God's silence. His loud and passionate outcry, his confession and penitence, his many pleas, and his appeals to the memory of the past are designed to move God to reveal himself in word and deed" ("Isaiah 40-66," 5:744). For G. V. Smith, the basic theological question of the lament was "what can people do to ensure that they can enter God's kingdom and do not experience his vengeance?" He went on to suggest that "the eschatologically oriented answer to this lament in 65:1-66:14 explains God's future plans for all people from every era of history. It indicates that God has and always

Israel's foes that should normally coincide with the "Day of the Lord" (61:2; 63:4), but the promised retribution, while certain, carries with it the idea of a yet future fulfillment.⁷² Further, this verse shows skeptics, who trust instead in cultic practices affluent in Jerusalem (3-5), scoffing at the faithful, described as הַתְּרַדִּים, "the tremblers," for their hope in the delayed eschatological promises of Yahweh.⁷³ The totally unexpected end time is disclosed through the imagery of a birth that is not delayed by a period of labor in vv. 7-9.⁷⁴ Here again, the program of the delay is not only linked to the

will reject those who offer pagan sacrifices (65:2-7,10-12; 66:3-4,15-17) but will allow his contrite and humble servants to enjoy the pleasures of his kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth (65:17-66:2,10-14b). Thus the whole section (63:7-66:24) is eschatologically oriented, describing what people of all ages need to do if they want to enjoy the riches of God's glorious new kingdom" (*Isaiah 40-66*, New American Commentary 15B [Nashville: B. & H. Publishing Group, 2009], 666-667).

⁷²In a timeless way, Childs interpreted v. 6 as indicating that the voice comes from God's heavenly temple (*Isaiah*, 541). However, W. A. M. Beuken viewed a future application to the time of restoration, "That God comes 'from the city,' is in accordance with TI's [Third Isaiah] vision of Zion, where his glory has settled again (Cf. 60:14; also 60:2,7,13,19-20; 62:12)" ("Does Trito-Isaiah Reject the Temple? An Intertextual Inquiry into Isa 66:1-6," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in Honour of Bas van Iersel*, ed. S. Draisma (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1989), 61). Muilenburg also read the first line of v. 6 as "the sound of uproar from Zion," and further develops the idea by noting its future realization. According to him, "The great theophany on the day of the Lord is implied" ("Isaiah 40-66," 5:764). This delay of God's wrath against his people was already pointed out in 43:8, as John H. Sailhamer put it well: "The time of God's judgment would be delayed and thus extended past present events and into the distant future. Likewise in 64:8, the prophet's plea asking for God to interfere immediately receives an unexpected answer, which calls for patient expectation of a yet future intervention" (*NIV Compact Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 377).

⁷³Paul Volz interpreted the words eschatologically where those who tremble at God's word "wait for an eschatological utterance on the day of Yahweh" (*Jesaja II*, vol. 9/2, Kommentar zum Alten Testament [Leipzig, Germany: W. Scholl, 1932]) as quoted in English in Muilenburg ("Isaiah 40-66," 5:763-64). The latter also distinguished between the two groups by asserting that "the one lives by faith and hope and trust in the word spoken through the prophets; the other relies on the efficacy of a material temple and a syncretistic sacrificial system" (ibid.).

⁷⁴John Goldingay captured how the delay and its resolution loom in the horizons of the questioning behind Isa 66:7-17 with the birth imagery. "'When, when?'" is a question behind much of chapters 56-66. 'Now, now,' Yahweh finally responds, or perhaps 'instantly, instantly.' When it comes, transformation will come in a moment, like a woman giving birth as soon as her waters break instead of going through four or ten or twenty-four hours of labor (7-8). Verses 9-13 then take the metaphor of a woman in labor further. The problem might be that Jerusalem knows all about being in labor but still struggles and tires for what seems an eternity (and in due course dies of exhaustion without giving birth). 'Would I let that happen to Jerusalem?' Yahweh asks. The answer is a resounding No! (v. 9). She will give birth, and if the members of the audience, who are her children, rejoice in anticipation of that now, they will drink at her breasts" (vv. 10-11) (*Isaiah*, New International Biblical Commentary 13 [Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 2001], 371). For Westermann, "This simple imagery is developed along two lines. First

repentance of God's people, but also, perhaps, to the theme of mission as inaugurated in 61:1-11 and climaxing with some of the people being sent as witnesses among the nations (66:17-24).⁷⁵ Hope, at the end, is described in terms of a new creation.

The "Day of the Lord" denotes the time when God intervenes in human affairs to execute judgment upon evildoers and deliver his people from the hand of the oppressor. The delay motif is associated with the "Day of the Lord" oracle to promote repentance. Yet, the fulfillment stays under the control of the omnipotent sovereignty of God who has appointed a time for the end. Imminence is maintained where the brevity of the time factor invites faithfulness to Yahweh in a testing period. Hope at the end of the delay comes through a remnant motif coupled at times with a strong missionary emphasis.

this is miraculous birth: the birth and the beginnings of the birth-pangs are simultaneous (v. 7). Secondly, this is unprecedented—'who had heard such a thing?' (v. 8a); what this means is explained in v. 8b: 'for as soon as Zion was in labour she brought forth sons' (*Isaiah 40-66*, 419). Muilenburg also stressed the eschatological significance of the text, "Suddenly, miraculously, Zion is transformed. The great eschatological act, introduced by the return of the glory of God to his holy temple, whence he comes forth to judge the earth, now makes of Zion an entirely new city with a new people. . . . Salvation comes as unexpectedly and swiftly as judgment. . . . Such an event is unprecedented; no one had ever witnessed such a wonder. In this very moment, so it seems to be implied, the child is about to be born, and God will bring the birth to completion. . . . The thought is eschatological throughout. . . . The time of the Lord's coming is the time of new birth and God will bring to completion what he has begun. The solemnity of his assurance is marked by the repetition of vs. 9b, 9d, the twofold emphatic I and the direct questions" ("*Isaiah 40-66*," 5:765-766).

⁷⁵G. F. Snyder thought that "the shift from judgment to exhortation in the Day of the Lord sayings was, of course, a shift from doom or vengeance to mercy and mission" ("Sayings on the Delay of the End," 22). He takes 59:1-2 as "clearly dealing with a delay motif—the delay being due to the sin of the people. If vv. 1-2 determine the context of the chapter, then v. 20 means simply that on the Day of Judgment Jahweh will prove to be a redeemer for those who have repented" (*ibid.*, 24). According to Westermann, the sense of 42:6-7 is that "God has designated Israel to be a light to the world and to mediate salvation to it; she is to bring enlightenment and liberation to others" (*Isaiah 40-66*, 100-101). R. E. Clements took the theme of "a light to the nations" and illustrates how this theme operates in early chapters (2:5; 9:2; 10:17), the middle section of the book (42:6-7,16; 49:6; 50: 10-11), as well as this final series of chapters (60:1-3)" ("A Light to the Nations: A Central Theme of the Book of Isaiah," in *Forming Prophetic Literature: Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D. W. Watts*, ed. J. W. Watts and P. R. House [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 57-69). He concluded that "the nations are expected to participate in Israel's salvation, not simply as onlookers and spectators, but directly as those who will enjoy its benefits" (*ibid.*, 68-69).

Significance of ἕως πότε and Delay Motif in the Book of Daniel

In Daniel, the expression “How long?” as “Until when?” suggests a questioning about the duration of time with emphasis on the endpoint of the delay.⁷⁶ In this apocalyptic context, the resolution of the theodicy is expressed through a transcendent eschatology where the delayed expectations for the display of God’s righteousness often find universal and even cosmic solutions.⁷⁷

Daniel 8

To come to terms with the “How long?” of Dan 8:13, it may be helpful to start with a brief overview of the whole chapter which actually looks like an enlargement or amplification of Dan 7. Similar to Dan 7, chap. 8 includes beasts and horns as symbols for empires, but a prophetic symbol of a period of time is added. The symbols include (1) a ram with two horns of unequal length standing for the Medo-Persian empire that

⁷⁶Bauer noted that the term is used “to denote the end of a period of time, till, until (BDAG, s.v. “ἕως”). Louw and Nida saw the temporal particle ἕως as “the continuous extent of time up to a point (L&N, s.v. “ἕως”).” Friberg, Friberg, and Miller translated the term “as a temporal conjunction; (a) to link the event marking the end of a time period to another element in the sentence till, until” (*ANLEX*, s.v. “ἕως”). For A. Kretzer, the word “can indicate both the continuity and the finality of an action. It can be used for what is continuing, for what is already concluded, and also for the future time period. In individual cases it can indicate a local limitation as well as a limitation of degree and measure” (“ἕως” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 2:97).

⁷⁷The apocalyptists’ transcendent eschatology insists that the meaning of history can only be found beyond history, and that a human being can only find ultimate value for his life in a resurrection beyond death. For the impact of this idea on theodicy, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 373-400. Regarding the radical way in which the problem of evil is handled in Apocalyptic, Bauckham asserted that it implies “the expectation of the End, when all wrongs would be righted, all evil eliminated, and God’s righteousness therefore vindicated. . . . This universal challenge to the righteousness of God demanded a universal righting of wrongs, an elimination of evil on a universal, even cosmic scale” (“Delay of the Parousia,” 8). For an appreciation of the notion of future retribution and final justice as a fully developed motif in intertestamental Judaism, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, Harvard Theological Studies 56 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 211-218; H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life After Death: Paul’s Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in I Cor. 15*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 71 (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1974), 211-214.

defeated the Babylonian supremacy (8:3-4, 20); (2) a male goat, “coming from the west” for Alexander’s triumph establishing the Greek empire that took over from Persia before its fourfold split—represented by horns (8:5-8, 21); (3) an evil little horn that came forth “out of one of them” (8:9) with characteristics recalling that of Dan 7 which stood for Rome;⁷⁸ and finally, (4) a definite prophetic time period of 2300 evenings and mornings.

Daniel 8:13 discloses the prophet eavesdropping on a celestial conversation where the “How long?” query⁷⁹ in the sense of “Until when?” is raised.⁸⁰ Like elsewhere, the lament formula seems to be closely tied to the issue of divine justice and the deliverance of God’s people from oppression.⁸¹ One angel asks (8:13), “How long will the vision

⁷⁸Daniel 8 parallels Dan 7 in many respects, directly evoking the “little horn,” and also evoking its “outrageous” utterances (Dan 8:10-12; 25; cf. Dan 7:8, 25). The aggressive power of this horn is seen through its defiance of the hosts (v. 10), its confrontation of the “prince of the hosts,” from whom it removes his daily sacrifice and overthrows his sanctuary (v. 11); its trampling of the truth (v. 12); and its persecution of the saints (v. 24). The only important difference between the symbolism of the little horn of Dan 7 and 8 is that the symbol is part of the fourth beast for chap. 7, while it appears to replace the fourth in chap. 8. Some interpreters view the little horn as representing an individual king, Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king of the Syrian kingdom. However, William H. Shea offered convincing arguments against this view and in favor of Rome; see Shea, “Why Antiochus Is Not the Little Horn of Daniel 8,” in *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 25-55. Three of the 7 reasons against Antiochus are given (William Shea, *Daniel 7-12: Prophecies of the End Time*, The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1996], 97-98; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family*, vol. 1, *God Cares* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1981], 151-161, 174, 183-186, 204, 222, 264, 269, and 277).

⁷⁹The angel’s cry of Dan 8:13 “How long?” until the restoration of the temple has a close parallel in Zech 1:12. For commentators who have noted a parallel on Daniel’s “listening in” on angelic discourse with Zech 1: 12; 2:7, see James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, International Critical Commentary 23 (1927; reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950), 340-341; J. J. Collins and A. Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 335-336.

⁸⁰In Dan 8:13, Gerhard F. Hasel noted that “the emphasis is not duration (how long) but termination (until when) and what follows. This exegetical insight finds contextual support in the temporal ‘until’ (‘ad) in the answer of verse 14a which in turn is followed by ‘then’ (‘waw after temporal information) in the last part of verse 14” (“The ‘Little Horn,’ the Heavenly Sanctuary, and the Time of the End: A Study of Daniel 8:9-14,” in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 2 [Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986], 378-461).

⁸¹It is clear from the angel’s interpretation (v. 24) that the “host” and “stars” represent “the mighty and the holy people.”

about the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?”⁸² Another angel responds by specifying the duration of the delay, “until 2,300 evenings and mornings,”⁸³ which culminates in the cleansing of the sanctuary. Thus, a “How long?” query connects to the important idea that God’s wrath is conditioned by a clear time limit.⁸⁴

⁸²André Lacocque regarded the audition in vv. 12-13 as the heart of the chapter: “The point of the question is found in its first words: ‘How long?’ This is the question *par excellence* of the apocalypse, the reason the Author wrote chapter 8” (*The Book of Daniel*, trans. D. Pellauer [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], 165).

⁸³Because of the reference to the evenings *and* mornings, some have assumed that the 2300 days figure represents the count of the regular twice-a-day sacrifices which would be missed during the period of desecration. The actual length of the desecration would then be 1150 days or roughly three years, two months and ten days. Carl F. Keil is typical of other scholars who rightly take the expression *evenings and mornings* as a way of speaking of ordinary days: “A Hebrew reader could not possibly understand the period of time 2300 evening-mornings of 2300 half days or 1150 whole days, because evening and morning at the creation constituted not the half but the whole day. Still less, in the designation of time, ‘till 2300 evening-mornings,’ could ‘evening-mornings’ be understood of the evening and morning sacrifices, and the words be regarded as meaning, that till 1150 evening sacrifices and 1150 morning sacrifices are discontinued. We must therefore take the words as they are, i.e., understand them of 2300 whole days” (*The Book of Daniel*, Bible Commentary on the Old Testament, trans. M. G. Easton [1867; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959], 304). Furthermore, Gerhard Pfandl summarized four cogent reasons taken from S. J. Schwantes (“‘*Ereb bōqer*’ of Dan 8:14 Re-examined,” *AUSS* 16 [1978]: 375-385) to support such an interpretation: “1. There is no linguistic evidence for linking the ‘2300 evening-morning’ expression to the daily sacrifices. It must be assumed that “evening-morning” refers to the *tāmîd* sacrifice. 2. The morning and evening sacrifices, called the *’ōlat tāmîd* (‘continual burnt offering’) were considered a unit and apparently viewed as a single sacrifice, although it came in two parts. Thus even if the expression ‘evening-morning’ referred to the daily sacrifices, it would be incorrect to halve the 2300 figure. 3. The evening-morning sequence is not part of the sanctuary language. When the morning and evening sacrifices are mentioned in the OT, *bōqer* always precedes *’ereb*. 4. The LXX and Theodotion understood it to denote ‘days’ and translate, ‘Until evening and morning days two thousand and three hundred’” (*The Time of the End*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 1 [Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992], 261). For historicists who have generally interpreted the expression to be prophetic days where a day stands for one literal year, see Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ*, 3:434; Thomas R. Birks, *First Elements of Sacred Prophecy: Including an Examination of Several Recent Expositions and of the Year-Day Theory* (London: W. E. Painter, 1843), 360; William Ramsey, *An Exposition of the Book of Daniel: With Practical Observations* (Edinburgh: Thomas Grant, 1853), 210; Uriah Smith, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation*, rev. ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1972), 202-207; William Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 1, rev. ed. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 56-88; Hasel, “The ‘Little Horn,’ the Heavenly Sanctuary, and the Time of the End,” 435.

⁸⁴Daniel L. Smith-Christopher pointedly noted that “the second major theme of this chapter is that the time of wrath is limited and thus the people’s suffering is limited as well. This is surely one of the most powerful appeals of apocalyptic literature and apocalyptic movements. Theologically, it is one of the most important messages of the book of Daniel for a modern world. It is the promise of the gospel that darkness will not last forever, that innocence will not be crushed forever, that justice will be had” (“Daniel,” in *The*

Based on the close parallel between chaps. 7 and 8, Jacques B. Doukhan demonstrated how the “How long?” and this cleansing or restoration of the sanctuary in chap. 8 referred to the Day of Judgment of chap. 7.⁸⁵ It is significant that the sanctuary language in the text points to the annual Yom Kippur background (Lev 16) which typified the last judgment that would involve the total eradication of sin from the universe.⁸⁶ Actually, Israel experienced this day “as the actualization of the last judgment.”⁸⁷ With the awareness of judgment, this day was supposed to lead to a corporate repentance and to the fullness of God’s Great Pardon.⁸⁸

Through the Yom Kippur background, the lament formula also connects with the longing for a cosmic salvation or re-creation. Because the sanctuary is often linked with the earth in the OT, Doukhan maintained that “the cleansing of the sanctuary is . . . the

New Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 7, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature, Daniel, Additions to Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, ed. L. E. Keck, et al. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 118.

⁸⁵Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 127. For him, “Chapter 8 follows the same structure as chapter 7:

Chapter 7: beasts/kingdoms-little horn-judgment

Chapter 8: beasts/kingdoms-little horn-cleansing of the sanctuary” (ibid.).

⁸⁶Doukhan provided the following convincing support for this background: (1) The association of the ram and the goat; (2) The “Prince” (technical term for the high priest) which refers to Michael (10:5, 13, 21; 12:1) dressed in a way suggesting the highest officiant during the Day of Kippur; (3) The Septuagint translation of this term with the Greek word *katharisai* (to purify), a technical word used to refer to Kippur; (4) Rashi’s recommendation about the text needed to be read in the context of the Day of Atonement (ibid., 125-129).

⁸⁷Ibid., 127.

⁸⁸Doukhan put it well: “The Day of Atonement was the only time when the totality of the people of Israel and the whole space of the sanctuary were totally ‘purified’ (Lev. 16:17, 33, 34). It was also the only time that the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies in the sanctuary and physically present himself to God (Ex. 30:6-10; Lev. 16:2, 14)” (ibid., 129). For an overview of the logic behind the Levitical system of ritual purity where the sins of the people are transferred to the sanctuary and accumulated there, only to be completely purged once a year at the Day of Atonement, see Jacob Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray,’” *RB* 83 (1976): 390-399, and Angel M. Rodriguez, “Transfer of Sin in Leviticus,” in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 169-197.

sign of the total purification of the whole earth on the day of God's judgment.”⁸⁹ Thus, the essential significance of the event at the endpoint of the delay refers to a historical, not just a spiritual, salvation. To save completely, God must transform the world.⁹⁰

Significantly, the lament formula receives an exact answer in the vision of Dan 8 described by its angelic interpreters as the “vision of the (2300) evenings and mornings” (Dan 8:14, 26). Contrary to Ezek 12:26, the delay motif is set by the summons to seal up the vision properly “for it pertains to many days in the future” (v. 26).⁹¹ Actually, this fulfillment is also called “the time of the end” in v. 17 and refers to the eschatological termination of Israel’s oppression by wickedness.⁹² A sense of determinism can be noted in Dan 8:19, viewed as the fulfillment of the “appointed time” of Hab 2:3,⁹³ as it announces “the end, or the latter days of the wrath” (בִּאֲחֵרֵי־הַזֶּעֶם).⁹⁴ The three verses

⁸⁹Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 129. He added, “Biblical theology understood the Israelite sanctuary as representative of the whole world that God created. The description of the construction of the sanctuary in Exodus 25-40 parallels the narration of the creation of the world in Genesis 1:1-2:4. Both occur in seven stages and both end with the same technical phrase: ‘finished the work’ (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 40:33)” (ibid.).

⁹⁰For Doukhan, “salvation implies the destruction of the very cause of suffering and death. Not a mystical or psychological experience, salvation is an event of cosmic proportions that comes from beyond and is situated in history” (ibid., 131).

⁹¹As Pfandl rightly pointed out, “This future is the apocalyptic of the end as the larger context of Dan 8 shows. The parallelism between Dan 2, 7, and 8 indicates that the end of the Little Horn in 8:25 will be at the time when the kingdom of God breaks into history and is given to the saints (7:27)” (*The Time of the End*, 246). For a demonstration of this parallelism, see ibid., 226.

⁹²The noun קֵץ, “end,” implies the termination of a certain object, activity, or period of time (cf. Lam 4:18; Ezek 7:2–3; 21:25, 29). It recurs frequently in Daniel (8:17, 19; 9:26; 11:6, 13, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 6, 9, 13), closely associated with the term “appointed time” (מֹדֵעַד, Dan 8:19; 11:27, 29, 35; 12:7), as in Hab 2:3. Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm took קֵץ אֶת in the sense of (eschatological) end-time in Dan 8:17; similarly קֵץ as end-time in Dan 8:19 also (*HALOT*, s.v. “קֵץ”).

⁹³Dan 8:17, 19 (cf. 26) evokes Hab 2:3, in which the prophet anticipates a vision that “awaits its set time; it hastens to the end,” where the same words are used for “vision,” “the set/appointed time,” and “end.” For support, see Collins and Yarbrow Collins, *Daniel*, 337, 339. He also points that the interpretation of 1QpHab makes clear that the “end” refers to the final days (ibid., 337).

⁹⁴Scholars are divided about whether the word “wrath” (אַף) refers to that of the “little horn” or that of God, but Lacocque remarked that this word, “except for Hos 7:16, always designates the wrath of

taken together reinforce the strong eschatological focus of the vision: Salvation occurs at the end of time and history.

In the reply, the delay of the divine wrath is explained through the theological motif that sin must run its course before it is punished. This wrath relates to the rule of the nations, which is recognized to be increasingly reckless in its violence and defiance (v. 19). Yahweh remains relatively silent, waiting as he allows the transgressions (הַפְּשָׁעִים) of foreign rule to escalate to completion (Dan 8:23). Ernest Lucas traces the source of this motif in Gen 15:16 where “God delays action against ‘the Amorite’ until it is plainly obvious that they deserve punishment (cf. Lev. 18:25; Deut. 9:5). Judgment is delayed so that it may be clear, when it is passed, that it is justly administered.”⁹⁵

The background of the “How long?” in Dan 8 is the crisis of faith in relation to the desecration of the temple and the oppression by the little horn (8:13). Reaching out to the time of the end, the answer connects to the motif of Day of Judgment and endtime salvation. The query is here also closely tied to the issue of divine justice in the face of

God” (*The Book of Daniel*, 170). Also Pfandl, who after reviewing relevant OT text, suggests that “it seems that *za am* became a *terminus technicus* for God’s judgments in the time of the prophets; and when Daniel used it with the article (*hazzaam*), it was well understood by his readers” (*The Time of the End*, 245). Further, he believed that “the last days of the wrath” (בְּאַחֲרֵי הַיָּמִים) was in fact understood eschatologically. For an eschatological understanding of “מוֹעֵד,” see K. Koch, “מוֹעֵד,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006), 8:172. This eschatological understanding of the “wrath” (זַעַם) in Dan 8:19 (like in 11:36) is probably derived from Isa 10:25.

⁹⁵Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Series 20 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002], 225. As an explanation of the two ways in which the motif is developed in later Jewish thought, he added, “The delay is seen as evidence of God’s mercy, giving ample time for even the most wicked to repent (Wis. 12:10; cf. 11:23). However, what of the innocent who suffer at the hands of the wicked while God is patient with them? On the one hand, they should share God’s merciful attitude (Wis. 12:19), but, at the same time, the experience of suffering can be seen as a process by which God disciplines them so that they may avoid final destruction for their sins (Wis. 12:20-22). This is applied specifically to the experience of persecution under Antiochus: ‘For in the case of the other nations the Lord waits patiently to punish them until they have reached full measure of their sins; but he does not deal in this way with us, in order that he may not take vengeance on us afterward when our sins have reached their height. Therefore he never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people’ (2 Macc. 6:14-16)” (ibid.).

out-of-control evil, but hope beyond the crisis is maintained with two claims in the text: the sanctuary shall be restored (v. 14) and the oppressor “will be broken without human agency” (v. 25b). This will be done within the timeframe predetermined by God.

Daniel 9

Daniel 9 begins with the seer searching the old books and perplexed about the correct application of Jeremiah’s seventy-year prophecy concerning the period of Jerusalem’s desolation (v. 2). Regarding the connection with Dan 8, Doukhan pointed out the importance of the connecting key word “understand” as “the golden thread woven through the passage” where it becomes clear that “the prophecy of the 70 weeks provides the missing information necessary to understand the prophecy of the 2300 evenings and mornings.”⁹⁶ Seeing that Babylon’s dominance is drawing to its end and that Jeremiah’s promised restoration (Jer 29:10) is not materializing, Daniel earnestly prays for it.

It is clear from Daniel’s prayer that the reason behind the delay is the impenitence of Israel. The awareness of prolonged judgment provokes a prayer of repentance that seeks to move God to mercy (Dan 9:3-19). In the process, the lament formula of the previous chapter seems to give way to a deep penitential prayer.⁹⁷ Through the

⁹⁶Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 141. He demonstrated the importance of the connecting verb *bin*, “Daniel is ‘appalled by the vision’ that he finds to be ‘beyond understanding’ (*eyn mebin*, verse 27). . . . The book of Daniel employs the same word, ‘understand’ (*bin*), for the prophecy of the 70 years (Dan. 9:22) and later for the prophecy of the 70 weeks” (ibid., 132). Further on the link between Dan 8 and 9, see Jacques Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9: An Exegetical Study,” *AUSS* 17 (1979): 1-22; William H. Shea, “The Relationship between the Prophecies of Daniel 8 and Daniel 9,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshner (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 228-250.

⁹⁷For J. E. Goldingay, “The communal prayer of confession is a postexilic phenomenon. Likely it develops from the preexilic community lament, but lament and protest with their characteristic ‘Why?’ have disappeared now that the Deuteronomistic covenant theology offers an intelligible understanding of contemporary experience of adversity to which the appropriate response is rather confession of God’s justice and of human failure” (*Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary 30 [Dallas: Word Books, 1989], 235).

confession of the sin of the people and their continued disobedience to the God of the covenant,⁹⁸ Daniel admits Israel's full responsibility for the exile they are now experiencing. His prayer draws clearly on the Deuteronomistic theology⁹⁹ (exile as punishment for sin) which emphasizes the idea of rewards or punishments for covenantal allegiance or malfeasance and offers a contrast with an apocalyptic, more deterministic view of history.¹⁰⁰ It appears that the prayer functions as Daniel's heroic attempt to

Here, he followed Claus Westermann, "Struktur und Geschichte der klage im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 66 (1954): 48-49, 74-75, English translation in Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 171-172, 206. Cf. Samuel Balentine who in his survey of scholarship on penitential prayer poses an important question: Does exile call for "penitence or protest," "a theology/ideology of shame or one of resistance"? Instead of understanding lament and penitence in either/or terms, he proposes that we should "think of lament and penitence as shifting accents within a common response to historical calamities" ("I Was Ready to Be Sought Out by Those Who Did Not Ask," in *Seeking the Favor of God*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. F. Falk, and R. A. Werline, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature 21 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 18).

⁹⁸Samuel Balentine saw the proclamation in Dan 9:4 as the emphasis of the prayer which adds a crucial element to the chapter, "The LORD is the 'great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love'" (*Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, 108). For him, "This proclamation grounds not only the hope for forgiveness, but also the promise of ultimate restoration. God is a 'keeper of covenant'" (ibid.).

⁹⁹The Deuteronomistic language of the prayer is widely recognized. For Goldingay, "the prayer's repetitiveness also reflects that of the Deuteronomistic covenant tradition to which the prose prayers of confession belong. . . . In terms of that tradition, the prayer is an acknowledgment of the covenant God (vv 4, 7a, 14b, 15a), of the breaking of the covenant through Israel's failure to keep covenantal commitment (vv. 5-6, 7b, 8, 9b-11, 15b), and of the appropriateness of God's treatment of Israel in the framework of the covenant (vv. 11b-14). It appeals to the graciousness that lay behind God's covenantal commitment (vv 9a, 16a, 18b) and implicitly to the possibility of forgiveness and restoration announced in the covenant for people who repent of their covenantal failure" (*Daniel*, 234). See also Collins and Yarbro Collins, *Daniel*, 350; Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 361; Michael A. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 487. An entire essay is devoted to this subject by H. J. M. van Deventer, "The End of the End, or, What Is the Deuteronomist (Still) Doing in Daniel?" in *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets*, ed. J. C. de Moor and H. F. Van Rooy, Oudtestamentische studiën 44 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 62-75.

¹⁰⁰The nature of the actual relationship between the Deuteronomic and apocalyptic theology history has been at the center of heated debate. Regarding the overcoming to the latter over the former in the course of history according to apocalyptic thought, P. D. Hanson explained, "The dynamic of a history which is the living out of a genuine covenant relationship yields to the inflexibility of a history which becomes a timetable of cosmic events" ("Old Testament Apocalyptic Re-examined," in *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Issues in Religion and Theology 2 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 57). For Gerald H. Wilson, the prayer is "either a clumsy attempt to provide orthodox, Deuteronomistic corrective to the deterministic worldview of Daniel or has undergone a metamorphosis and now serves simply as a substitute for a prayer of illumination" ("The Prayer of Daniel 9: A Reflection on Jeremiah 29," *JSOT* 48 [1990]: 92). Bruce W. Jones focused on a "changed interpretation of history" as being at the heart of the chapter's message. Because Deuteronomistic retribution was insufficient to bridge the gap between

personally fulfill the requirements for restoration set out in Jer 29 by seeking God's face.¹⁰¹ His plea in v. 19, "Do not delay," betrays his eagerness.

However, in response to his prayer, Gabriel appears with a new revelation to inform Daniel that the divine forgiveness and the time of restoration will come in a distant future. A decreed seventy weeks [of years] is, indeed, proclaimed for the full measure of God's judgment to fall upon the Jews and Jerusalem (v. 24).¹⁰² In accordance with Lev 26, this new revelation in Dan 9:24-27 suggests that the fulfilment promised by

the traditional plea of retribution and the present conviction of innocence, it was replaced by a view on history that sees the calamity as decreed according to a predetermined time that calls for patient waiting ("The Prayer in Daniel IX," *VT* 18 [1968]: 488-493). Rodney A. Werline admitted the dissonance and argues that ancient authors did not always expound their ideas coherently or systematically. Rather, the author of Dan 9 attempted to "hold together" ideas of his particular group and conventional notions of covenantal fidelity, wishing to be faithful to both ("Prayer, Politics, and Social Vision in Daniel 9," in *Seeking the Favor of God*, vol. 2, *The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. F. Falk, and R. A. Werline, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature 22 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 17-32). Pieter M. Venter asserted that neither theology is meant to serve as a corrective to the other. Instead, they together create a "montage" that stresses the sovereignty of God, and therein reflects the quietism of the מְשַׁכְּלִים whom most scholars now consider to be the group standing behind the apocalyptic visions of Daniel ("Daniel 9: A Penitential Prayer in Apocalyptic Garb," in *Seeking the Favor of God*, vol. 2, *The Development of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. F. Falk, and R. A. Werline, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature 22 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 33-49).

¹⁰¹For Gerald H. Wilson, "The prayer is best understood as an attempt to have Daniel fulfill the conditions for restoration set out in Jer 29:12-14" ("The Prayer of Daniel 9," 97). John S. Bergsma insisted that "Daniel prays a prayer of confession in vv. 3-19 because he understands Jer. 29.12-14 to mean that the restoration of Jerusalem is conditional upon the repentance of the people" ("The Persian Period as Penitential Era: The Exegetical Logic of Daniel 9:1-27," in *Library of Second Temple Studies: Exile and Restoration Revisited: Essays on the Babylonian and Persian Periods in Memory of Peter R. Ackroyd*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers, Deirdre Fulton, and Lester L. Grabbe [London: Continuum International Publishing, 2009], 56). Similarly Paul L. Redditt took the prayer as an explanation for "why the full restitution of Jerusalem promised in Jeremiah 25 and 29 has not materialized: because the community needs to fervently return to the Lord and confess its sinfulness" ("Daniel 9: Its Structure and Meaning," *CBQ* 62 [2000]: 249). C. L. Seow defended that Daniel understands the prophecy correctly, and affirms that "the promise of future restoration is . . . contingent upon the right response to God, a response which Daniel takes up in the prayer (*Daniel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003], 136-137). For him, Dan 9 can't be properly interpreted "apart from the prayer of confession and supplication" (*ibid.*, 137).

¹⁰²Dan 9:20-23 has often been taken as an exegesis of Jeremiah's 70 years oracle. Typically, Michael A. Fishbane suggested that the "delay necessitated revision" of Jeremiah's prophecy in Dan 9 and he inferred that such "delay" of fulfillment is a frequent motivator for inner-biblical exegesis ("Revelation and Tradition: Aspects of Inner-Biblical Exegesis," *JBL* 99 [1980]: 357-359). Compare Alex Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 214-221. However, such a claim is not supported in the text itself.

Jeremiah at the end of seventy years has been delayed by a factor of seven because of the sinfulness and impenitence of the Jewish people.¹⁰³ It appears that the lack of repentance, which is the underlying condition for the realization of Jeremiah's prophecy, is the cause of the delay which, however, is not meant to last indefinitely. Daniel views the entire Restoration as an era of continuing wrath, rather than as an era of eschatological bliss.¹⁰⁴

God's answer through Gabriel does not specify the starting point of the decree, but it is said to be initiated with the start of the restoration of Jerusalem. As a prophetic marker, Gabriel announces the Messiah to Daniel: "Know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again . . . even in times of distress" (9:25). About the central focus of the Book related to the establishment of the divine kingdom, Sailhamer found in chap. 9 the introduction of a new idea of a delay: "When the Anointed One does come to establish the kingdom, he will be cut off [v. 26]; thus the fulfillment of the vision in Jeremiah is to be extended still further into the future."¹⁰⁵

Daniel 9 is an example of where the "How long?" query before the restoration of Israel is answered precisely with the year and the date. Through what seems to be a revising of the prophecy of Jeremiah, vv. 21-27 elaborate a timetable in a "periodization

¹⁰³For support that the period suggests that the seventy years of punishment due according to Jer 25:11/29:10 are being exacted sevenfold in accordance with Lev 26, see Anthony A. Bevan, *A Short Commentary on the Book of Daniel for the Use of Students* (Cambridge: University Press, 1892), 146; J. E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 257; Doukhan, "The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9," 8. Fishbane suggested that "Daniel [turns] to a confessional prayer—that is to precisely that type of prayer required by Lev. 26.40 for the remission of sins and the termination of the sabbatical cycles of doom and desolation for the land" (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 489).

¹⁰⁴As De Vries put it, the "dominating apocalyptic motif of this chapter regards what the prophets expected to be an era of salvation as an era of wrath. Daniel 9:25 refers to it as 'troubled times'" (*The Achievements of Biblical Religion*, 342).

¹⁰⁵Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 411.

of history based on sabbaths and jubilees.”¹⁰⁶ The “seventy weeks” of years in v. 24 seems to be linked indeed with ten jubilee cycles of forty-nine years each.¹⁰⁷ This results in an eschatological transformation of Jeremiah’s prophecy, as Lester L. Grabbe explained,

The ten sabbatical years (10 x 7) of Jeremiah become ten *jubilee* cycles (10 x 49) by implication (cf Lev. 25:8-12). Jeremiah’s prophecy now no longer refers simply to the length of the exile but takes on a theological and cosmic dimension: it centers around the temple and its sanctity, rather than the land and the people (though the question of sin is central in both prophecies), and it refers to an apocalyptic endtime, not just the return of the exiles.¹⁰⁸ (emphasis his)

However, the background of the jubilee theology combines with themes from Day of Atonement (like in Dan 8) to raise great expectations for an eschatological judgment

¹⁰⁶Redditt, “Daniel 9,” 236-237. Gabriel answers Daniel’s prayer by revealing that the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy is divided into separate periods of seven, sixty-two, and a seventieth in which desolation, war and abomination prevail.

¹⁰⁷There is evidence of a significant dependence of Dan 9 on concepts and language found in Lev 25-26. For a defense of the close literary relationship between Lev 25 and 26, see John S. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 115 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 82- 83; Doukhan underscored that “the event to which the 70 weeks point receives a *theological* dimension; it has something to do with the Jubilee, just as the prophecy of Jeremiah had something to do with the sabbatical year” (“The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9,” 8, 20). For Tim Meadowcroft, “the applicability [to Daniel 9] of Lev. 25-26 with its jubilee theology . . . has been amply demonstrated” (“Exploring the Dismal Swamp: The Identity of the Anointed One in Daniel 9:24- 27,” *JBL* 120 [2001]: 433). See also P. Grelot, “Soixante-dix semaines,” *Bib* 50 (1969): 182-186; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 486; Collins and Yarbrow Collins, *Daniel*, 352- 353; Redditt, “Daniel 9,” 247; Devorah Dimant, “The Seventy Weeks Chronology (Dan 9, 24-27) in the Light of New Qumranic Texts,” in *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 106 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1993), 57-76; Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 178, 192.

¹⁰⁸Lester L. Grabbe, “The End of the Desolations of Jerusalem’: From Jeremiah’s 70 Years to Daniel’s 70 Weeks of Years,” in *Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis: Studies in Memory of William Hugh Brownlee*, ed. Craig A. Evans and William Stinespring (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 68. Bergsma asserted that “ten jubilees constitute a period of quintessential completeness: ten, somewhat like the number seven, symbolizes wholeness, completeness, integrity” (*The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 227). He built here on the meaning of the number 10 from Keith A. Burton (“Numbers,” *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David N. Freedman [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 974). For the recurring motif of ‘ten jubilee cycles until the eschaton’ in Second Temple literature,” see e.g., Klaus Koch, “Sabbatstruktur der Geschichte,” *ZAW* 95 (1983): 403-430.

and salvation.¹⁰⁹ Jubilee, as Doukhan noted, “brings a renewal; it is a new creation. Everything returns back to its original state.”¹¹⁰ This is confirmed in the six-fold purpose given for the seventy weeks of years or the period of ten jubilees in Dan 9: 24. Six infinitives are used to justify the decree of delay before the end of the seventy weeks [of years] allotted to the Jewish people: (a) to finish transgression, (b) to make an end (or complete the measure) of sin (cf. 8:23), (c) to make atonement for iniquity, (d) to bring in everlasting righteousness, (e) to seal up visions and prophecies, and (f) to anoint the holy of holies.¹¹¹ Then, at the end phase of the period of ten jubilees, as Bergsma puts it, “all will be complete: sin will be finished, iniquity atoned for, and ‘eternal righteousness’

¹⁰⁹It is significant that the year of jubilee is celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month which coincides with the Yom Kippur according to Lev 25:9. Bergsma cogently argued that the jubilee was the socio-economic expression of the Day of Atonement, “Just as the Day of Atonement re-establishes wholeness in the cultic and spiritual realm, the jubilee re-establishes it in the social and economic realms” (*The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 91-92, and 227). Mark J. Boda dealt with the influence of a priestly doctrine of repentance and the parallel terminology regarding sin in Dan 9 and argued “a narrative connection between penitential prayer and the Priestly tradition of penitence through confession exemplified in the Yom Kippur ritual but mediated through the exilic perspective of Lev 26” (“Confession as Theological Expression: Ideological Origins of Penitential Prayer,” in *Seeking the Favor of God*, vol. 1, *The Origins of Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism*, ed. M. J. Boda, D. F. Falk, and R. A. Werline, Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature 21 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006], 32-33). Building on the connection between the language and themes from the prayer of Dan 9:3-13 and the rite for the Day of Atonement in Lev 16, André Lacocque suggested a *yom kippur* liturgy lies behind the original setting of the prayer (“The Liturgical Prayer in Daniel 9,” *HUCA* 47 [1976]: 132-142). Elsewhere, he insisted on the close relationship between Day of Atonement and jubilee themes: “Charles . . . has not seen the close relation between the jubilarly division of time in Dan. 9 and the Great Day of Forgiveness *Yom ha-kippurim* . . . There is no doubt that an eschatological accent here [in the Day of Atonement/Jubilee] has been taken up by Daniel” (Lacocque, *The Book of Daniel*, 192).

¹¹⁰Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9,” 20.

¹¹¹As H. C. Leupold declared, “In these six statements we have the sum of all the good things that God promised to men perfectly realized” (*Exposition of Daniel* [1949; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969], 416). Keil noted: “From the contents of these six statements it thus appears that the termination of the seventy weeks coincides with the end of the present course of the world” (*The Book of Daniel*, 349); Collins and Yarbro Collins suggested that “together they constitute eschatological ideal” (*Daniel*, 353); and Joyce G. Baldwin added that the verse “is speaking of the accomplishment of God’s purpose for all history. These great acts will affect not only Israel but all of humanity” (*Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978], 169).

ushered in.”¹¹² Daniel 9:27 suggests that the trial would last until the decreed destruction (כלה ונהרצה) was poured out on the one who brought desolation.¹¹³

Similarly, the background of Leviticus also ends on a positive note: “If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers . . . then I will remember my covenant with Jacob” (Lev 26:34, cf. also Jer 25:11). This *protasis* is fulfilled in the confession of Dan 9:24; therefore, as Lars Hartman noted, “The *apodosis*, that God remembers the covenant, is represented by the 70 weeks which finish the transgression, bring in everlasting righteousness and seal vision and prophecy.”¹¹⁴ The theocentric basis of God’s covenant faithfulness in the prayer is well captured by Balentine,

Further, the prayer also makes a particular contribution with respect to the question of Jerusalem’s future. The LORD is the “great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love.” This proclamation grounds not only the hope for forgiveness but also the promise of ultimate restoration. God is a “keeper of covenant.” With Gabriel’s announcement that the desolations must run their allotted time “until the decreed end” (v. 27), the full meaning of God’s covenant fidelity is defined in terms of the present crisis. God *will* maintain the covenant, not because of Daniel’s prayer of penitence but for God’s own sake.¹¹⁵ (emphasis his)

The missionary emphasis in the extended seventy weeks (of years) oracle is emphasized by the special portrayal of the scope of the Messiah’s work in Dan 9:27a, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week.” Building on the word רבים, “many” (v. 27), in biblical tradition, Doukhan underscored the “strong universal

¹¹²Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 227.

¹¹³Dealing with the topic of inner-prophetic allusion in Dan 9:26-27, Fishbane traced the usage of the terminology “decree of destruction” back to Isa 10:22-23 where it is used to depict the end of the wicked including faithless Israel and the restoration of a remnant (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 490); and Lucas surmises that this remnant may be “equated with the wise of Dan 11:33-35 and 12:10” (*Daniel*, 251).

¹¹⁴Lars Hartman, “The Function of Some So-called Apocalyptic Timetables,” *NTS* 22 (1975-1976): 4.

¹¹⁵Balentine, *Prayer in the Hebrew Bible*, 108.

connotation” of the Messiah’s mission (see Ezra 3:12; Dan 12:2).¹¹⁶ He inferred that “the Messiah in this passage is the Messiah of all peoples, the Messiah who will save the world.”¹¹⁷

In Dan 9, the delay motif brings together even more the above-noted concerns of theodicy and the apocalyptic preoccupation for the question of the End. There, it appears that the issue of eschatological delay becomes especially acute in postexilic Judaism as a result of Jeremiah’s prophecy which, for various reasons, lends itself to re-interpretation. From the perspective of a Deuteronomic theology of history, Dan 9 uncovers how the impenitence of the people may be responsible for the postponement of a scheduled divine intervention. This is, however, counterbalanced by a sense of divine determinism and encouragement to Israel through calculations of time before the end in a language of “sabbaths and jubilees.” Of significance for the interim, a missionary motif seems to be inserted with the forecasting of the Messiah who will save the world.

Daniel 12

At the close of the book, Dan 12 ends with further issues regarding the delay until the end. Another “How long?” which echoes directly that of 8:13, is raised by a heavenly being in 12:6 as a query into the time of the fulfillment of the vision: “How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?” Concerned about what he has heard, Daniel also wonders about the outcome in 12:8.

An enigmatic answer is given: “As soon as they finish shattering the power of the

¹¹⁶Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 141. He suggested that the term is often used by prophets “to designate the peoples and the nations implicated in the universal adoration of God.” Also Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Dan 9,” 21.

¹¹⁷Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 141.

holy people, all these events will be completed” (v. 7).¹¹⁸ The end time is further linked to “a time, times and half a time” in v. 7 (which is a repetition of 7:25) and two new waiting periods are set in terms of 1,290 days (v. 11) and 1,335 days (v. 12). This numerical pattern connects to Dan 9, which itself answers the concerns about the *terminus ad quem* of the 2,300 days prophecy of Dan 8, to attest that Yahweh is the God of history. Those delays reach down to the time of the end in vv. 4, 5 where the call to keep the words secret and seal the book confirms a postponed fulfillment for Daniel’s prophecies.¹¹⁹

The influence of the oracle of Hab 2:3 is seen again in the reference to an appointed time and the blessing pronounced on those who keep waiting in 12:12. Fishbane argues that the word used for “wait” in v. 13 is an allusion to Hab 2:3b (a verse already echoed strongly in 11:27b), where the same root is used, with its call to wait patiently in a time of uncertainty because God’s purposes will ultimately become clear and be fulfilled.¹²⁰ For him, this background transforms the whole section on Dan 10-12 into a source of exhortation, consolation, and assurance in harmony with the general intent of apocalyptic literature.¹²¹

¹¹⁸Smith-Christopher saw a “collective reference to the entire period of suffering that has been seen in chaps. 1-12” (“Daniel,” 7:149). For Collins and Yarbro Collins, the reading could be “at the end of the power of the shatterer of the holy people” (*Daniel*, 369).

¹¹⁹Noting the rhyme and the similarity of the words סָמְרָה “closed” and סָמְרָה, “sealed” in Dan 12:9, Smith-Christopher suggests that “the thought is a stock phrase about apocalyptic secrecy” (“Daniel,” 7:149).

¹²⁰Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 492-493. For further on the use of Hab 2:3 in Daniel, see Michael A. Fishbane, “From Scribalism to Rabbinism: Perspectives on the Emergence of Classical Judaism” (*The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989]).

¹²¹Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 492. Hellholm notes that apocalypses are generally “intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by divine authority” (“The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John,” 27).

To Daniel, one of the heavenly being says, “Go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age” (12:13).¹²² About the verbs הלך, “to go, to walk,” and עמד, “to rise,” Doukhan notes, “Waiting is not passive . . . it is on the contrary, a walk forward, a way of action and of life.”¹²³ He adds that this walk is conceivable for Daniel because he waits in anticipation of the “final destination, the resurrection ‘at the end of the days.’”¹²⁴ Of significance for the issue of the resolution of the theodicy in the fifth seal as will be seen later, Daniel also emphasizes a two-stage resurrection as seen in how the pair “rest-stand up” responds to the pair “sleep-wake up.”¹²⁵ Thus, resurrection is depicted here as an eschatological event coinciding with the appearance of Michael according to Dan 12:1. It occurs at the conclusion of the final time of distress and immediately after the defeat of the tyrant

¹²²The idea of delay comes out strongly in the LXX rendition of this verse: “But go thou, and rest; for *there are* yet days and seasons to the fulfilment of the end; and thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”

¹²³Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 190.

¹²⁴Ibid. On the double usage of the word קץ, “end,” in v. 13, Doukhan also notes that “the personal end of Daniel (verse 13a) merges in the cosmic ‘end of days’” (verse 13b) (ibid.). Commenting on the eschatological significance of this verse, J. J. Collins states that “in Dan. 12:13, Daniel is told that he will rise from his rest at the end of the days. The end, then, is the time when the archangel Michael intervenes and the resurrection takes place, roughly what later tradition would call the end of the world” (“From Prophecy to Apocalypticism,” 145).

¹²⁵See Jacques B. Doukhan, “From Dust to Stars: The Vision of Resurrection(s) in Daniel 12, 1-3 and Its Resonance in the Book of Daniel,” in *Resurrection of the Dead Biblical Traditions in Dialogue*, ed. Gert van Oyen and Tom Shepherd, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 249 (Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2012), 88-89. He insightfully notes that “The difference of meaning between the two pairs of verbs is noteworthy. It is as if Daniel’s resurrection marked a slight chronological span, a step forward between the resurrection of the group of righteous he represents and the group of righteous represented by the שׂוֹמְרֵי, suggesting that the resurrection of Daniel will follow chronologically the resurrection of the שׂוֹמְרֵי, as resting follows sleeping (see Job 3,13) and standing up follows waking up (Isa 26,19). This observation would be supported by the syntax of the verbs in parallel: while the verb describing the state of sleeping is a participle, expressing the duration of a condition . . . the verb describing the resting is in the imperfect . . . expressing a future unique action . . . thus indicating that the experience of resting is not identified with the lasting condition of sleeping, but happens only at a given moment, as a result of the sleeping” (ibid., 88).

(11:45), that is, at ‘the end’ (v. 4). In other words, as Cavallin puts it well, “the resurrection is one of those events which accompany that decisive change of the ages, which is one of the most important characteristics of Jewish apocalyptic.”¹²⁶

Resurrection appears here also as a crucial breakthrough in the problem of theodicy and retribution.¹²⁷ Standing for a transcendent eschatology, Dan 10-12, as J. J. Collins notes, provides a rationale for martyrdom that goes beyond the parallel stories in Dan 3 and 6, “The apocalyptic vision no longer entertains the hope for miraculous deliverance in this life. The hope for salvation is beyond death.”¹²⁸ About the judicial meaning of the event in Dan 12:1-3, Nickelsburg justifiably contends that resurrection functions “as vindication of the righteous martyrs and punishment of the unpunished apostates.”¹²⁹ Daniel 12:2 insists indeed that all will rise up for their retribution.¹³⁰

¹²⁶Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 27.

¹²⁷Cavallin puts into perspective the problem and provides helpful insights on the impact of the solution: “As long as the collective functions as a real unity, a certain balance between success and failure in the lives of the individual members of the collective may be kept. The Divine justice is vindicated by the history of the generations. But when the individual stands alone, *retribution* becomes a real problem: Why do the righteous suffer and even die an early death, perhaps childless, whereas the ungodly flourish in a long life, with riches, sons and daughters? The promise of life to those who keep the commandments of Yahweh would in such a new context make these questions burning” (ibid., 24).

¹²⁸Collins and Yarbro Collins, *Daniel*, 403. He also comments on the importance of Dan 12 in those terms: “Even if one takes a maximalist view of the evidence for resurrection in the Hebrew Bible, the hope expressed in Daniel 12 was exceptional. At the beginning of the second century B.C.E., Ben Sira wrote that ‘whether life is for ten or a hundred or a thousand years, there is no inquiry about it in Hades’ (Sir 41:4), and that ‘from the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased’ (17:28). The pessimistic conclusion of Qohelet (‘all are from the dust and all turn to dust again’) was unimpeachable on grounds of conformity to tradition. Daniel’s use of biblical phraseology, especially from Isaiah, gave the impression of continuity with tradition, but the continuity was with a minority view and involved considerable innovation. No biblical text before Daniel had spoken, even metaphorically, of a double resurrection of the righteous and the wicked and a judgment of the dead” (ibid., 395).

¹²⁹Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, 5.

¹³⁰Baldwin suggests that sometimes Hebrew *rabbîm* (“multitudes”) may have the force of “all,” even though the word may also mean “multitudes” (NIV) or “many” (KJV) (*Daniel*, 204). About the lack of consensus in the application of this term in v. 2, Cavallin notes: “Some would find the dogma of the universal resurrection of both the good and the wicked here. Some would restrict the resurrection in this

Doukhan summarizes the important truths concerning the resurrection as set forth in this passage:

“1) The Resurrection is physical, historical, and concerns the human individual. . . . 2) The Resurrection is universal and concerns the destiny of humankind. . . . 3) The Resurrection is an eschatological event. . . . 4) This Resurrection concerns essentially the righteous (represented chronologically first by the *רְבִים* and then by Daniel) and exceptionally a special kind of the wicked”¹³¹

In Dan 11 and 12, the recurrence of the word *רבים*, “many,” may support the importance of the teaching mission for the interim. The heroes are the *משכילים*, “the wise ones,” amidst the people who “will give understanding to the many” (*יבינו לרבים*) (11:33) and—through teachings and martyrdom—lead them to righteousness (*מצדיקי הרבים*) (12:3).¹³² Here, Fishbane notes how the background of Isa 52-53 suggests an assimilation of the ministry of the *משכילים* to that of suffering servant of YHWH,

The preceding references to *משכילים*, to ‘vindication’, and to ‘the many’ allude to and even reinterpret the great ‘servant’ passage of Isa. 52:13-53: 12. It is said there of this righteous (*צדיק*) servant that he ‘will prosper (*ישכיל*)’ (52:13) and ‘will vindicate (*יצדיק*) . . . the many (*הרבים*), (53: 11).¹³³

Ultimately the kingdom of God shall prevail over all earthly tyrants and political powers but the hope of salvation is beyond death. Israel needs to await the eschatological end for its restoration. The presentation of the time table, the references to an “end,” and

passage to Israel, while others would include outstanding good or evil non-Israelites. Still others limit the resurrection to the exceptionally wicked or righteous, or even to the righteous in Israel” (*Life After Death*, 26).

¹³¹Doukhan, “From Dust to Stars: The Vision of Resurrection(s) in Daniel 12, 1-3,” 96-97.

¹³²Lacocque is typical of scholars who have held that the *maškilîm* make the *rabbîm* righteous by their death, so that their martyrdom is propitiatory (*The Book of Daniel*, 230). However, Collins and Yarbro Collins rightly point out that “it is simpler, however, to suppose that the *maškilîm* make the common people righteous by instructing them, and so that instruction rather than martyrdom is the means of justification” (*Daniel*, 393). For Baldwin, “Those who lead others to righteousness, then, are those who demonstrate their faith and encourage others to faith, and this the humblest believer can do” (*Daniel*, 206).

¹³³Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, 493.

the notion of an “appointed time” clearly reinforce the belief that temporal delay is under God’s control and is in some sense determined by God. “How long?” is resolved in the prediction of the resurrection (12:1) which is undergirded, as Doukhan explained, by two opposing theologies in tension: retribution and redemption.¹³⁴

Summary and Theological Implications

This section reveals how the cry for help stems from that original union rooted in Israel’s origins and reaffirmed over and over again during the history of the covenant people: Yahweh is implored to prove himself again as the God of Exodus who recognizes their suffering and would act to repeat the Exodus. The usage of the “How long?” suggests a gap between expectation and experience that had to be explained.

1. “How long?” displays concern for both theodicy and a temporal enquiry into the Psalms and the prophetic writings. It emanates with both passion and impatience from preoccupied human or heavenly beings who expect God to act and reverse the predicament of his people.

2. Betraying a crisis of faith, “How long?” often introduces a delay motif caused by the perceived silence or hiddenness of God who seems relatively inactive while his faithful ones are oppressed. The believer’s perplexity arises from the apparent failure of God to act against injustice in a timely way.

3. In Daniel, “How long?” displays a strong eschatological preoccupation where it looks like a variant of the questioning about the time of the End. This apocalyptic

¹³⁴Doukhan explains, “The theology of retribution—resurrection is determined on the basis of merits (judgment is an essential part of the resurrection process), and the theology of redemption—the ‘standing up’ of the resurrected ones depends on the ‘standing up’ of Michael, and resurrection is given as a gracious act of salvation turning the obscure dust into shining stars” (“From Dust to Stars: The Vision of Resurrection(s) in Daniel 12, 1-3,” 98).

context ties the query with the final Judgment itself. The delay motif in prophetic writings is also associated to a coming time of judgment often referred to as the Day of the Lord that bears eschatological undertones too. As final judgment, it has a universal focus involving all men, not just the covenant people.

4. In the prophetic texts, the emphasis is on God's sovereignty over the timing of events in the universe. Longer waiting periods with calculations of time until the end typify the answer to the query in Daniel. Timetables promote the world, or even cosmic history, as a meaningful process which reinforces the belief in God's sovereignty at work in history. Theologically, the time prophecies, as Shea notes, "appear to delimit periods during which adverse circumstances, or evils, are permitted by God to prevail."¹³⁵

5. Impatience in the query is met with a call to patiently wait for the fulfillment at God's appointed time. God will act in a timely way and the pious person should wait patiently. The assurance of divine intervention comes with encouraging words which intimate that "the situation [of suffering] would lead to the glory of the faithful and to shame of the apostate."¹³⁶

6. God's answer often comes with an insistence on imminence. So with the "Day of the Lord," the delay motif is tied to the concept not to excuse, in the words of Snyder,

¹³⁵Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*, 57. In this vein, André Lacocque writes, "The central message, whatever the numbers proposed to establish it, is that there is a limit to the revolt against God, an end to the suffering of the Saints" (*The Book of Daniel*, 165).

¹³⁶Hartman, "The Function of Some So-called Apocalyptic Timetables," 4. For him, where Jewish apocalypses speak of the imminence of the end, they do so not primarily out of an interest in calculating dates. Rather they are concerned to encourage faith and endurance (*ibid.*).

“the tardiness of the fulfillment, but to bring it closer to the present time.”¹³⁷ Ultimately, this aims at encouraging and boosting endurance through suffering unto the end.

7. Delayed divine intervention is due at times to the sin and unfaithfulness of the covenant people. As for the meaning for the interval, the motif is used to support with threat of judgment an exhortation to repentance or faithfulness. It can be also at the service of special concerns such as rebuilding the temple or further preaching.

8. Delayed response is marked at times with the emphasis on God’s predetermined design with the concept of appointed time, which suggests a denial of the objectivity of the delay. The cause for delay seems due to the human inability to perceive the actual events and the lack of patience to wait. As a theological response to issues of theodicy, prophetic writings seem to stress that even those apparent delays belong to the purpose of God.¹³⁸

9. Delay gives rise to the theme of mercy. The motif attests to the graciousness that lay behind God’s covenantal commitment and implicitly to the possibility of forgiveness and restoration announced in the covenant for people who repent of their covenantal failure. Hope at the end of the delay comes often through a remnant motif.

10. Delay turns into opportunity for apocalyptists to promote a transcendent form of eschatology. They go beyond the prophets in proposing that the ultimate meaning of

¹³⁷G. F. Snyder, “Sayings on the Delay of the End,” 22-23. Similarly, even the depiction of history as a timetable indicates, as Hanson notes, “how close men are to the ultimate event which would break the power which the inimical powers hold on the elect” (“Old Testament Apocalyptic Re-examined,” 57).

¹³⁸As pointedly noted by Elizabeth Achtemeier, “The world is not as God intended it, and God is setting it right. God’s purpose cannot be thwarted (cf. Isa 55:10-11); it is speeding toward its completion. Indeed, those actions of God that seem to reverse his march toward his goal—as the Babylonian conquest of Judah seemed to Habakkuk to reverse that march (1:12-17)—may not be reversals at all but integral parts of God’s purpose to save his earth” (*Nahum–Malachi: Interpretation* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1986], 43).

existence cannot be found within history.¹³⁹ The apocalyptic vision takes in supernatural and cosmic dimensions where the inbreaking of the new age will involve dissolution and recreation of the whole cosmos. God's faithful ones can afford to lose their lives because of the promised resurrection and a greater glory in the next at the eschaton.

11. Eschatological delay also gives rise to the theme of mission. The motif delay is seen as evidence of God's mercy toward the nations, giving ample time for even the most wicked to repent. The delayed punishment of the other nations and avenging his people is justified because the Lord waits patiently until the enemies have reached full measure of their sins. In the process, the missionary role of Israel as God's middlemen is reemphasized.

“How Long?” and Issues of Theodicy

Significantly, the “How long?” question of the fifth seal is addressed to God because all justice in Israel is ascribed to him: Yahweh is Lord and judge (Deut 1:17). Also, the cry for justice is directed to God inasmuch as such acts of unjustifiable pain and bloodshed are viewed as being perpetrated directly against God himself. Rather than a forceful demand, the outcry appears more as an appeal from a subordinate in the same fashion as the oppressed people in the Hebrew Bible.

Significance of ὁ δεσπότης

The urgency of the address stems out of a special relational dynamic. God is

¹³⁹Commenting on the importance of transcendent eschatology for a satisfactory theodicy, Wolfhart Pannenberg writes, “In some sense atheism has a point in arguing that the world ought to be different if there were a God who cares for man and even for every individual. Only the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future . . . can finally decide about the reality of God” (“Can Christianity Do Without an Eschatology?,” in *The Christian Hope*, ed. G. B. Caird, et al. [London: SPCK, 1970], 31).

thereby invoked as δεσπότης, master, which basically means someone who has absolute power over another or an owner of slaves.¹⁴⁰ Karl H. Rengstorf traces the etymological development of the term from the domestic to political sphere where δεσπότης ends up meaning “an absolute ruler in the sense of an unlimited possibility of the exercise of power.”¹⁴¹ The term, for him, implies essentially “ownership.”¹⁴²

As a recognition of his Lordship and his omnipotence, δεσπότης is rarely applied to God (cf. Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24, Rev 9:10 – the only occurrence in Revelation) in the New Testament but it is closely related to κύριος, the common title for God.¹⁴³ The title basically carries, as Moffat points out, the implication of “divine might, majesty, power, and authority.”¹⁴⁴ When used to address God in praise, communal prayer, and petition (Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, Rev 6:10), G. Haufe suggests “a strictly theological meaning” whereby when a pray-er “designates himself as slave (Luke 2:29), the sociological use of the word is transferred to the relationship between human being and God, as now the

¹⁴⁰See Louw and Nida, L&N, s.v. “δεσπότης.” Elsewhere in the New Testament the word “master” (i.e., owner of slaves) (see, 1 Tim 6:1-2; Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18).

¹⁴¹Karl H. Rengstorf, “δεσπότης,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2:44. In the domestic usage it meant “the master of the house who normally rules unconditionally his family and household”; or “the lord as distinct from the slave.”

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³About how the two terms meet to emphasize God’s omnipotence in the LXX, Rengstorf submits that “in the majority of other passages δεσπότης is simply used for God with a clear emphasis on His omnipotence: ὁ πάντων δεσπότης, Wis. 6:7; 8:3 (cf. also 3 Macc. 2:2). This helps us to understand the relation between δεσπότης and κύριος in the usage of the Gk. Bible. If κύριος is here a name for God, God is κύριος because He is τῶν πάντων δεσπότης. The classical proof of this statement is to be found in Job 5:8: κύριον δὲ τῶν πάντων δεσπότην ἐπικαλέσομαι, a saying which is followed in v. 9ff. by reference to the power of God and to the fact that it is unlimited” (Rengstorf, “δεσπότης,” 46).

¹⁴⁴Moffat, “Revelation of St. John the Divine,” 5:391. See also Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 344; Alford, “Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωαννου,” 4:619; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 105; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 158.

Creator (Acts 4:24) and Judge (Rev 6:10) is in view.”¹⁴⁵

Since δεσπότης also refers to Christ elsewhere in the New Testament (Jude 4; 2 Pet 2:1), the query suggests perhaps the special relationship between the lamenters and him. It might also betray their faith in the victory of the risen Christ which guarantees theirs too. Heil rightly notes how the prayer in Rev 6:10 “expresses the master/servant relationship the souls and their fellow servants have with the risen Jesus, the ‘slaughtered’ Lamb (5:6, 12) who is now their ‘master.’”¹⁴⁶ As a statement of the victims’ faith in the issue of conflict of sovereignties, the use of δεσπότης might be polemical against the prevalent ruler cult.¹⁴⁷ Aune submits that the “term δεσπότης, ‘master,’ is a regular Greek translation of two Latin terms for the Roman emperor, *dominus* and *princeps*”; and notes several cases where Domitian is addressed “as δεσπότης, ‘master,’ and θεός, ‘god.’”¹⁴⁸ Building on this, Blount rightly notes that by hijacking this emperor’s title and reapplying it to God, the souls were “rhetorically

¹⁴⁵G. Haufe, “δεσπότης,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:291.

¹⁴⁶Heil, “Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 227.

¹⁴⁷On the issue of polemic against the Roman imperial ruler in this text, see Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 407; Akira Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 222; and Fee, *Revelation*, 97. See also Dominique Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Fribourg, Switzerland: University Press, 1974); Steven J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia, and the Cult of the Havian Imperial Family* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1993).

¹⁴⁸Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 407. Of significance for the issue of theodicy, elsewhere, Aune argues that God’s role in the Revelation correlates to the Hellenistic and Roman conception of gods and kings who administer justice. He affirms, “The primary role of the Roman emperor . . . was that of rendering justice; this corresponds to the ancient conception that Zeus and Jupiter were guarantors of justice and that they provided sanctions supporting the maintenance of the laws and customs of men” (“Influence of the Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 8). To understand the religio-political context of the fifth seal and the critique of Roman power, see Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 31-39. He explains, “The Roman Empire, like most political powers in the ancient world, represented and propagated its power in religious terms. Its state religion, featuring the worship both of the deified emperors and of the traditional gods of Rome, expressed political loyalty through religious worship. In this way it absolutized its power, claiming for itself the ultimate, divine sovereignty over the world” (*ibid.*, 34).

slapping Caesar in the face. Even in lament, they witnessed.”¹⁴⁹

From the perspective of theodicy, the title witnesses to a faith that seeks answers from the only all-powerful God whose justice allegedly guarantees life. This very faith puts God on the stand too because of his status as the authentic Sovereign. As soon as possible, as van den Eynde notes, “God owes it to himself to avenge the spilled blood and to use force, the only argument that perpetrators of violence understand. To wait for God would be breaking his word, a lack of honor and a sign of weakness [translation mine].”¹⁵⁰

The way God is addressed suggests a special creator/creature relationship which implies ownership and a responsibility for judgment, deliverance and protection. With δεσπότης, God’s absolute power or omnipotence as well as his authority is recognized more fully. Out of this omnipotence, God is here implicitly pressed to act promptly in giving justice to his faithful witnesses who have suffered martyrdom because of their faith. This also may be a statement of faith in the polemic against the prevalent ruler cult where the martyrs acknowledge God as their only sovereign master, not the emperor.

Significance of ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός

As a witness to the reverence of the lamenters, the Lord is addressed from the perspective of two of his special attributes as “ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, the Holy One and the True one” that will be shown to have an important bearing on the theological message

¹⁴⁹Blount, *Revelation*, 134. Also J. Massyngberde Ford who concurs, “In Rev 6:10 the martyrs use the title to acknowledge that God is the authentic sovereign” (*Revelation*, 99).

¹⁵⁰For van den Eynde, “Le plus tôt possible, Dieu se doit de venger le sang et d’employer la force, seul argument qu’entende le violent. Attendre pour Dieu, serait manquer à sa parole, à son honneur et faire preuve de faiblesse” (“Le Dieu du désordre,” 41). Compare William Barclay, *Revelation of John*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 11-12.

of the query.¹⁵¹ After having acknowledged God as their sovereign master, they now proclaim his sinless and truthful character.

As a tribute to his sinlessness, the title ὁ ἅγιος, “the holy one,” is quite straightforward since it is a normal Jewish way of recognizing God as שׁוֹדֵק, holy, the Wholly Other and alone worthy of worship in the LXX.¹⁵² This parallels the expression “the Holy One of Israel” which is often applied to God in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Isaiah where “it serves to place the sins of Isaiah’s society in stark contrast to God’s moral perfection (Isa 30:11) and expresses God’s absolute separation from evil (Isa 17:7).¹⁵³ It generally denotes, as Hengstenberg puts it well, “God’s absolute separation from the world, in its impotence and transitoriness.”¹⁵⁴

As the guarantor of moral and legal standard, God is also referred to as ὁ ἀληθινός, “the true One.” About the application of ἀληθινός to God in the Judeo-Christian sphere, R. Bultmann establishes the influence of תְּנִיחָה (firmness, truth), “where the meaning hovers between ‘trustworthy,’ ‘truthful’ and ‘righteous.’”¹⁵⁵ Elsewhere in Revelation, the word ἀληθινός is used to qualify οἱ λόγοι, as words more or less

¹⁵¹See R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:85-86; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 99; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 283; and Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 137-138.

¹⁵²See 2 Kgs 19:22; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 41:14; Jer 2:3; 3:16; 50:29; 51:5.

¹⁵³T. E. McComiskey, “שׁוֹדֵק,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 788.

¹⁵⁴Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, 268.

¹⁵⁵R. Bultmann, “ἀλήθεια, ἀληθής, ἀληθινός κτλ,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:249 (see Exod. 34:6; 2 Chr 15:3; Ps 85:15). He underscores the background where “appeal is made to God as תְּנִיחָהּ רַב רַב ‘rich in faithfulness and truth’ (Ex. 34:6), as תְּנִיחָהּ לְאֵל (Dt. 7:9), as תְּנִיחָהּ לְאֵל (Ps. 31:5), as the Guarantor of moral and legal standards. As such, God is worthy of the absolute confidence both of the righteous and of man generally” (ibid., 1:236).

connected to God (19:9; 21:5; 22:6).¹⁵⁶ As the ὁ ἀληθινός, “the true One,” God is “wholly trustworthy and reliable in his words and actions.”¹⁵⁷

The way of appealing to God’s character for the martyrs suggests a genuine concern for his righteousness. With ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, Beckwith notes, “God is appealed to in his character of apartness from all evil, his absolute holiness, which cannot tolerate the iniquity perpetrated and as one who is true to that ideal of holiness.”¹⁵⁸ At issue is God’s own character. Beale draws attention to ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός in Rev 6:10 as essentially synonymous with ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια, “true and righteous,” in 16:7 and 19:2, which leads him to conclude that this description implies that “God is being asked to demonstrate his holiness and standard of truth by bringing wrongdoers to justice.”¹⁵⁹

The attributes ascribed to God point perhaps to the faith of the lamenters in their assured vindication. Otto Procksch insightfully notes that “if God is invoked by martyrs as the avenger of innocent blood (Rev. 6:10), in His attributes as ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός there is found a guarantee of the detection of religious crimes which constitute sacrilege.”¹⁶⁰ Significantly, this title is also ascribed to Christ himself in Rev 3:7 (cf.

¹⁵⁶After examining those occurrences, Isabelle Donegani concludes: “1) Dans l’Apocalypse, ἀληθινός; conserve le sens qui est le sien dans la LXX et le NT: vrai, véridique, véritable, ceci dans la mesure où la vérité d’un être ou d’une chose est vérifiée et accréditée par sa solidité et sa fiabilité. 2) Dans l’Apocalypse ἀληθινός; désigne Dieu considère dans sa fonction de juge et de goël (6, 10) et qualifie ses voies et jugements (‘justes et véridiques’; 15, 3; 16, 7; 19, 2), mais aussi ses paroles (‘fidèles et véridiques’; 21, 5; 22, 6)” (“A cause de la Parole de Dieu et du témoignage de Jésus . . .”: *Le témoignage selon l’Apocalypse de Jean. Son enracinement extra-biblique et biblique. Sa force comme parole de sens*, Etudes Bibliques 36 [Paris: Gabalda, 1997], 331).

¹⁵⁷A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:452.

¹⁵⁸Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 526.

¹⁵⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392. This is based on his understanding of the phrase ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια in Rev 16:7 and 19:2 as a reference to “God’s standard of truth.”

¹⁶⁰Otto Procksch, “ἅγιος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:101.

Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69; 1 John 2:20) where both cases suggest “one who is set apart from wickedness and ‘faithful’ . . . to vindicate his people in their suffering.”¹⁶¹

In conjunction with δεσπότης, the attributes serve to reinforce the sovereignty of God, who has the reputation of ruling as the Holy and True One. As such, he cannot allow evil to go unpunished. From the stance of the theological horizons of Isa 40-55, the allusion to the divine attributes “true (ἀληθινός)” and “holy (ἅγιος)” could imply even a hint of “provocation” in the victims’ faith. There, as Erich Zenger submits, the gods control history and “a true god (or rather, *the* true God) must be judged by whether ‘there is a reward for the righteous’ in that god’s realm. Ultimately, this is a question of theodicy. Where the righteous find no justice, God has forfeited existence [emphasis his].”¹⁶²

With those attributes, they seem to recognize God as their sovereign master, the One whose divine character is without sin and true. To delay his judgments in such a context of oppression would be a terrible breach of integrity since the outcry raises questions about God’s sovereignty, his power, his honor, his truthfulness, and his holiness. As a statement of faith, those attributes suggest that God can be counted on to vindicate his faithful ones in their trials and to reward them for their suffering.

Significance of the Use of the Verbs κρίνω and ἐκδικέω

Another set of problems arises again by the individual-centered treatment of the

¹⁶¹Osborne, *Revelation*, 287.

¹⁶²Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Wrath* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 37.

text and its so-called vindictive drive.¹⁶³ The first verb connected to the “How long?” query relates to κρίνω (to judge), which further confirms the judgment emphasis in the meaning of the fifth seal. Of significance for Revelation’s concept of judgment is the frequency at which the term occurs: (1) eight times as a verb κρίνω through the book (11:18; 16:5; 18:8, 20; 19:2, 11; 20:12-13), (2) four times as the noun κρίσις (14:7; 16:7; 18:10; 19:2), and (3) three times as the noun κρίμα (17:1; 18:20; 20:4). As shown later, each occurrence refers to a judicial process seemingly triggered by the fifth seal.¹⁶⁴

The other verb tied to the “How long?” query relates to ἐκδικέω (to avenge or to procure justice for someone) which occurs six times in the New Testament, two of which are in the Apocalypse (6:10 and 19:2). This verb is derived from the Hebrew verb נָקַם which means to take vengeance on, to punish or execute justice. It relates everywhere in the LXX and in the New Testament to the idea of punishment or retribution.¹⁶⁵

Although, separated here for the sake of a focused discussion, the two verbs, κρίνω and ἐκδικέω, are actually closely related to one another. On this relationship,

¹⁶³Timothy Jenney, for example, is representative of those who think that “rather than global or international problems, it addresses the personal problem posed by Christian martyrdom: When will God avenge us?” (“Revelation,” *Full Life Bible Commentary to the New Testament*, ed. French L. Arrington and Roger Stronstad [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 1575). Unfortunately, the interpretation of this section has often been sidetracked by the vengeance language that has been labeled pre-Christian, sub-Christian, or even unChristian.

¹⁶⁴A section of a later chapter will focus on the various literal and thematic correspondences of the fifth seal within the succeeding context where the theme of the execution of judgment (in chaps. 11, 14, 16, 18 and 19) is developed in a manner suggesting the fulfillment of the fifth seal.

¹⁶⁵Friberg, Friberg and Miller translate the noun as “an act of retributive justice *vengeance, punishment, revenge*” (*ANLEX*, s.v. “ἐκδίκησις, εως, ἦ”). Bauer offers the following range of meaning for ἐκδικέω: “1) to procure justice for someone, *grant justice*, 2) to inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done (of special significance in an honor/shame-oriented society) *punish, take vengeance for*, 3) to carry out one’s obligations in a worthy manner, *do justice to* (BDAG, s.v. “ἐκδικέω”). G. Schrenk concludes that in Rev 6:10, the usage “follows the LXX pattern with the meaning of revenge” (“ἐκδικέω κτλ.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 2:442-446). For a helpful short discussion of the theme of vengeance in Revelation, see Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 160-164.

William Shea notes: “It is possible that the judging and avenging are one and the same action. The other alternative is that they are successive. In this case the judging would be judicial in character, while the avenging would be executive in character.”¹⁶⁶

Significantly, judging the world is indeed an inevitable subset of having dominion: God’s role as the judge of the world issues directly from his status as the Sovereign Lord of history. The language of the text echoes the theological content of the term *שפט* in the Hebrew Bible whereby, as J. Gordon McConville notes, “the authority to judge is an entailment of the authority to rule. Ruling, judging, and delivering from oppression are once again closely bound up with each other.”¹⁶⁷ This responsibility of rule and judge of the universe implies divine wrath as the necessary response to a situation when evil climaxes in the world (6:16-17; 11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15).

Since *ἐκδικέω* can mean both “avenge” and “procure justice for” someone, the cry for vindication could implicate God’s reputation in a special way if the plea refers to a public vindication of God’s justice. Such a precedent is found in the case which apparently provides background text of Ps 79:5-10 where God is called upon to reveal

¹⁶⁶William Shea, “The Mighty Angel and His Message,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 2:304. Further, he finds possible support for a two-phase sequence at the end of v. 11 “where the process of making up the number of the saints is hinted.” As rationale, he argues that “to make up such a number would require some sort of decision-making process.” See also Swete who interestingly translates “οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς” as “dost Thou refrain from pronouncing judgement and executing vengeance” (*Apocalypse of St. John*, 91).

¹⁶⁷J. Gordon McConville, “The Judgment of God in the Old Testament,” *ExAud* 20 (2004): 29. He adds this insightful comment about what makes God such a sovereign judge: “The idea of God as judge is one of the most pervasive metaphors applied to God in the OT. Perhaps only that of kingship lies deeper as the root metaphor, since in the ancient world it is characteristically kings who judge or who authorize judgment. Kingship and judgeship, therefore, are never far apart; it is the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of heaven and earth that makes his court the universal court of appeal” (*ibid.*, 25).

himself.¹⁶⁸ Then Mounce would be right in arguing that “their cry for vindication leads to the fundamental theological point of revelation—that God will vindicate himself by vindicating his people.”¹⁶⁹

Of significance for the issue of theodicy, the combination of the attributes is also found in Deut 32:4 in the context of a *rîb* against Israel.¹⁷⁰ In opposition to the faithlessness of Israel, Moses, a character witness for Yahweh, proclaims his uprightness, “a God of faithfulness and without iniquity,” and the perfection of his actions, “a God who is righteous and just in all he does.”¹⁷¹ Such descriptions, as E. H. Merrill points out, “are especially apropos in a legal setting in which the reputation of the Lord may be under attack as he himself proceeds to level charges of impropriety against his covenant

¹⁶⁸The significance of the allusion to Ps 79 is well captured by Beale, “John’s emphasis on God’s defending his own reputation by judging sinners who have persecuted the righteous is also evoked by ‘will you not vindicate our blood,’ which is an allusion to Ps. 78(79):10 LXX: ‘let the vindication of your servants’ blood that has been poured out be known.’ In Psalm 78(79) this expression of vindication is introduced earlier by the question of ‘how long?’ it would be until God acted against the enemy (vv 5-6). The psalmist appeals to God to uphold his glorious name (v 9) and to demonstrate the truth of his existence (v 10) by judging sinners because they have not called on God’s name and have wrongly oppressed his people (v 6)” (*The Book of Revelation*, 392-393).

¹⁶⁹Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 153. He adds, “The faithful are to live with the assurance that God is in command of his universe. At the moment it may appear that the forces of evil have gained the edge, but the one who defeated those very forces by means of his sacrificial death on the cross will return at the end of time to claim his own people and destroy forever all that stands in opposition” (ibid.).

¹⁷⁰According to Beale the only instance where those attributes are jointly applied to God is in Deut 32:4 (*The Book of Revelation*, 393).

¹⁷¹Commenting on those attributes, Robert Bratcher and Howard Hatton note, “The first quality, **faithfulness**, describes God as someone who does what he says he will do, who keeps his promise: “a trustworthy God” (NJB). We may also say “You can always trust what he promises,” or even “He always does what he promises to do.” The second quality, **without iniquity**, describes him as never doing anything wrong; in this context, however, it may be that NPSV “A faithful God, never false,” is closer to the meaning, the second term being the negative way of stating what the first one says. Another way to express this is “and never breaks his promises [or, words]. **Just and right**: these are very close in meaning, with the sense of ‘true,’ ‘up right,’ ‘honest,’ ‘fair’” (emphasis theirs) (*A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series: Helps for Translators [New York: United Bible Societies, 2000], 535).

partner Israel.”¹⁷² God “judges Israel for idolatry with the same judgments as in Ezek 14:21, etc. (32:24–25) and then encourages the faithful Israelites and Gentiles by punishing their persecutors (32:43, τὸ αἷμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκδικᾶται καὶ ἐκδικήσει).”¹⁷³

In the Hebrew Bible, the shedding of the innocent blood, נִקְיָנוּת, is a crime that requires compensation, often the death of the murderer.¹⁷⁴ Spilled blood that has not been avenged by a human kinsman inevitably cries to God for vengeance.¹⁷⁵ Caird insightfully refers us to Hebrew thought for the understanding of God’s special role in retributive justice,

Hebrew has only one word (*n^eqamah*) to cover all three [the English words: revenge, vengeance, and retribution]. The reason for this is that in Hebrew law there was no public prosecution; even a charge of murder had to be brought to court by the next of kin, the redeemer of blood (*goel haddam*). There was thus no occasion to separate personal vengeance from retributive justice, even when these ideas were applied by analogy to God.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷²E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 410. He prefaces this statement in those terms, “In the context of self-defense these attributes speak most particularly to the Lord’s own character. Thus he is also faithful in the sense that he is dependable (*’ēmūnā*; cf. Pss 88:11; 89:2–3, 6, 9; Isa 25:1; Hos 2:19), devoid of any hint of injustice (*’ēn ’āwel*), a God who is righteous and just in all he does (v. 4b)” (ibid.).

¹⁷³Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 393.

¹⁷⁴See Gen 9:5-6; Num 35:33; Deut 32:43, 2 Kgs 9:7, Ps 79:10 and Joel 3:21 and the formula “his blood is on his head” in Josh 2:19; 2 Sam 1:16; 1 Kgs 2:33, 37; Ezek 33:4; Matt 27:25. Cf. in the NT, 2 Thess 1:4-10 where the idea of the *righteous blood shed upon the earth* in the cause of Christ is, if it be rightly understood, also tied to the certainty of his coming judgment.

¹⁷⁵Aune explains, “Once human blood has been shed, it is frequently said that such blood ‘cries out,’ i.e., to God who hears it, for vengeance (Gen 4:10; 2 Macc 8:3; 2 Esdr 15:8; *Sib. Or.* 3.313; cf. Ezek 3:18, 20; 35:6” (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 408). For B. Kedar-Kopfstein, “Yahweh is the doresh damim, ‘avenger of blood,’ who does not forget the cry of the afflicted (Ps 9:13[12]; cf. 72:14). He intervenes when human justice proves to be powerless or irresolute in executing his command” (“נִקְיָנוּת,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006], 3:249). In late Judaism, the classic example of the blood of Abel, as the first martyr, is often quoted as crying for vengeance so much that even the earth refused his blood (*Gen Rab* 22.22; *Sib.Or.* iii.311-313, cf. 2 Macc 8:3-4). Van den Eynde says about Rev 6:9, “lorsque le sang est versé pour ‘la Parole,’ Dieu a un double motif de vengeance, car il se sent atteint doublement” (“Le Dieu du désordre, 41).

¹⁷⁶Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 13.

Here, the background of the later chapters of Isaiah (e.g., Isa 43:14; 61:2) provide the special content of God's role as the avenging kinsman who bears the responsibility to vindicate his wronged people.

Further, Musvosvi's doctoral dissertation has ably shown that vengeance belongs to the juridical context of the covenant or treaty relationships between God and his people.¹⁷⁷ This context suggests a special "relationship in which the Master has the authority to protect and avenge the blood of his servants."¹⁷⁸ In view of the unfair human verdicts against his saints, God must "retry" the case between them and the persecutor. Simply, vengeance refers to God's duty to reverse the unjust judgments of earthly courts and restore the kingdom to the saints. This is inspired by the covenant love that promises God to be an enemy to his people's enemies (cf. Exod 23:22).¹⁷⁹

Based on the martyr's proclamation, God is addressed with attributes that are vital to the covenant. As such, protecting as well as defending his own when they are wrongly accused and executed is expected from the covenant God. As Elmer Smick puts it, "God cannot be true to his character of holiness and justice if he allows sin and rebellion to go

¹⁷⁷See Musvosvi, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse," 268-280. This dissertation explores the theme of vengeance in Revelation from the background of several Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, the Old Testament, and Pseudepigrapha in an attempt to resolve the issue whether the concept expresses a vindictive human attitude or a divine attribute of justice. Musvosvi concludes in favor of the latter. See also Aune who comments on the curses found in the imprecatory prayers of the Hebrew Bible in the following terms: they "were an integral part of the covenant relationship (derived from Near Eastern treaties, commonly sanctioned by curses) and were not simply unrestrained examples of human wickedness but originated from the conception of a holy and just God who curses those who do not turn from evil" (*Revelation 6-16*, 409-410).

¹⁷⁸Musvosvi, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse," 216.

¹⁷⁹See F. C. Fensham, "Clauses of Protection in Hittite Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *VT* 13 (1963): 141-143.

unpunished.”¹⁸⁰ About God’s truthfulness, Hengstenberg rightly noted,

The divine truthfulness in keeping promise is only a particular element of the truth, and the idea of the truth is weakened, if it is wholly confined to that. The martyrs sought for revenge as such, so that the nature of their God might manifest itself therein, which would otherwise be at fault; for if revenge was wanting God could not be God; as certainly as he is the holy and the true, he must execute it.¹⁸¹

Concerns have been expressed about the vengeance cry being unChristian and unethical. Typical of this position, Kiddle states that “the modern conscience is shocked at the passionate longing for vengeance breathed out by the martyrs, and, indeed, it is beyond doubt lower in tone than the lofty spirit of forbearance which distinguished the Christian church in its earliest days.”¹⁸² However, as Smalley reminds the critic of this prayer, the New Testament abounds with curses, as well as blessings (e.g., Matt 25:41,

¹⁸⁰Elmer B. Smick, “מִקְדָּשׁ,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 598-599. For Mounce, the reputation of God is at stake here: If God does not intervene to judge the wicked, the justice of God is questionable (*Book of Revelation*, 148).

¹⁸¹Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, 268.

¹⁸²Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, 119. Cf., Schüssler-Fiorenza who responds to the charge of the cry being sub-Christian in the following terms, “The demand of Rev. for judgment must be understood as an outcry for justice for those who are exploited and killed today. John thus resounds the call of the prophets to repentance and justice. In doing so he continues the call and promise of the prophet Jesus. Against the forces of economic, political, and religious oppression within the Roman empire the mythopoeic vision of Rev. shows that God’s and Christ’s reign and salvation are different from those of the dominant culture. The last chapters of Rev. portray a world free of evil and suffering in order to give hope to those who are suffering and oppressed because they will not acknowledge the death-dealing political powers of their time” (*Revelation*, 24-25). Zenger also offers a perceptive critique of “Christian reservations and prejudices about the psalms that speak of divine judgment or even cry for it” that has some relevance here: “We have suppressed in our Christian consciousness the idea that judgment is for the sake of justice, especially for those who are the victims of injustice, and that the purpose of this judgment is to restore everything ‘as it should be’ – and even to confront the wicked with their injustice in such a way that they honor justice through their repentance” (*A God of Vengeance*, 64). Finally, on a positive note, Peels concludes his study on the topic with those words, “The preaching of God’s vengeance offers a deep comfort to believers. All injustice that is not repaired, all oppression and opposition, all shame, fear and doubt, will be put to an end by God. The problem of evil is completely done away with in the avenging judgment of God” (*The Vengeance of God*, 312).

Acts 13:10-11; 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:8-9; Rev 22:18-19).¹⁸³

Given the context of tribulation and unjust suffering and the proclamation of God's trustworthiness, inaction or delay from his part obviously raises serious questions about his goodness towards those he loves. About this issue acutely related to theodicy, C. Mervyn Maxwell suggests that God is vindicated as a caring God only when he is seen to respond in a timely way to the crises of his faithful ones.¹⁸⁴ The appeal to God in the fifth seal seems to draw from the Hebrew Bible's perception of God's role as the protector of a just world order, which is deeply rooted, as Zenger reminds us, "in the recollection of the love of YHWH for Zion/Jerusalem/Israel experienced in history."¹⁸⁵

The query of the fifth seal may be a reflection of the real struggles that were troubling John's community. This is not so much, as Roloff rightly suggests, "the inevitability of death but the question of God and of the accomplishment of his salvation."¹⁸⁶ The issue is that God does not seem to intervene and the promise of his end-time dominion is delayed. Spronck refers the intensity of the plea to "the apparent

¹⁸³Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 161. Further, it must be noted that, in harmony with the principle of divine retribution, the burden for the vindication is predicated fully on God who claims exclusivity for the prerogative of vengeance even in the New Testament (cf. Luke 18:7-8, Rom 12:19 and 2 Thess 1:8).

¹⁸⁴C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, vol. 2, *God Cares* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1985), 186-187. Also Schüssler-Fiorenza, who sees "the vindication of God in the eyes of those who have placed their trust in God" as an important part of the martyrs' plea (*Revelation*, 64).

¹⁸⁵Zenger, *A God of Vengeance*, 50. Here also the intense language of the fifth seal is perhaps "the expression of passionate love—and can be properly understood and comprehended only by those who love" (*ibid.*).

¹⁸⁶Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 88. This situation finds parallels in the theological background related to the imprecatory prayers in the Hebrew Bible. The prayers, as Aune points out, "typically arise in situations in which the wicked appear to prosper while the righteous are victimized; in this apparent discrepancy between injustice and justice, the honor, majesty, and truth of God are in question (*Revelation 6-16*, 410). Similarly Peels suggests that the usage of the imprecatory prayer thought form in Rev 6:10 may be due to a similar situation that equally calls for the breakthrough of God's kingdom in liberation and vengeance (*The Vengeance of God*, 24).

silence of God while the innocent is oppressed, his non-intervention to restore the order of justice; in short, it is the ‘not yet’ of his dominion that troubles the martyrs.”¹⁸⁷

The cry of Rev 6:10 has nothing to do with irrational vengeance but with retribution. According to Zenger, retribution is “the rescue of the victims of injustice, and the restoration of the right order that had been destroyed for the good of humanity.”¹⁸⁸ Therefore, Osborne is perhaps right in suggesting that the reason why Rev 6:10 draws from the imprecatory prayers for vengeance is because “one of the primary emphases in the book is *lex talionis* (the law of retribution), defending why God has to judge evil humanity.”¹⁸⁹

In light of God’s later response to their petition, which is eschatological and cosmic in scope, it is reasonable to conclude that the martyrs seek more than personal

¹⁸⁷Joël Spronck writes about the outcry, “C’est un cri d’espérance et de foi, un cri d’indignation et de révolte aussi, avivé sans cesse l’absence actuelle ou par le retard du plein accomplissement eschatologique. Autrement dit, c’est à nouveau l’apparent silence de Dieu devant l’innocent écrasé, sa non-intervention pour rétablir l’ordre de la justice bref, le ‘pas encore’ de son Règne que stigmatisent les martyrs. Lancé presque insolemment à la Face de Dieu, ce cri vengeur traduit le désir ardent des martyrs, leur attente impatiente et anxieuse (ἀποκαταδοκία: Rm 8,19; Ph 1,20) de voir s’instaurer définitivement des cieux nouveaux et la terre nouvelle où *justice* habite (2P 3,13; cf. Ap 21,1)” (*La patience de Dieu: Justifications théologiques du délai de la Parousie* [Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Greggoriana, 2008], 152). For Krodel too, “What makes persecution so difficult to bear is not just the loss of freedom and even the loss of life but the apparent inertia of God for whose sake persecutions are endured. Nothing happens. God does not seem to care. **How long, Lord?**” (emphasis his) (*Revelation*, 176).

¹⁸⁸Zenger, *A God of Vengeance*, 38.

¹⁸⁹Osborne, *Revelation*, 284. Here, one finds perhaps almost an expression of a theology of *lex talionis* as paralleled in 2 Esd 15:5-11: “⁵Beware, says the Lord, I am bringing evils upon the world, the sword and famine, death and destruction, ⁶because iniquity has spread throughout every land, and their harmful doings have reached their limit. ⁷Therefore, says the Lord, ⁸I will be silent no longer concerning their ungodly acts that they impiously commit, neither will I tolerate their wicked practices. Innocent and righteous blood cries out to me, and the souls of the righteous cry out continually. ⁹I will surely avenge them, says the Lord, and will receive to myself all the innocent blood from among them. ¹⁰See, my people are being led like a flock to the slaughter; I will not allow them to live any longer in the land of Egypt, ¹¹but I will bring them out with a mighty hand and with an uplifted arm, and will strike Egypt with plagues, as before, and will destroy all its land.” Klyne Snodgrass emphasizes the fact that “the origin of the *lex talionis* was not revenge but the assurance that evil would be dealt with and that justice would prevail” (“Introduction,” *ExAud* 20 [2004]: ix). See also R. Westbrook, “Lex Talionis and Exodus 21, 22-25,” *RB* 93 (1986): 52-69, esp. 58.

vindication. Their cry appears instead as a longing for the final judgment and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.¹⁹⁰ Support for this can be found when God's judgment in favor of his martyred people is conveyed in cosmic and eschatological terms later in Revelation (cf., e.g., Rev 11:18; 19:2; cf. also 11:15b, 16b). In connection with the divine attributes of the plea, Hughes sums up well the rationale of the questioners' faith,

Since unholiness and falsehood are a rebellious affront to their Lord, who is *holy and true*, they desire that he should purge the earth of the ungodliness and violence by which it is defiled. They also long for the final judgment, which will be in absolute accordance with holiness and truth [original emphasis].¹⁹¹

The intensity and impatience of the plea has nothing to do with any personal hatred and loathing of other human beings but rather with the restoration of a just world order in a context of climactic evil. It is a cry in fact for the vindication of God himself

¹⁹⁰As Lohmeyer puts it well: "Die bitte um Rache ist die Bitte um das endgericht, d.h. das Kommen des Christus; erst das vollzogene Gericht bringt den Märtyrern vollendete Seligkeit (The cry for vengeance is the cry for the last judgment, i.e. the coming of Christ, only the full judgment brings the martyrs perfect bliss)" (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 61). Otherwise, the eschatological focus of the outcry has been widely recognized: Kraft views the prayer as instrumental in causing the coming of the End (Das schreien der Gerechten gilt als Mittel, das Ende der Welt herbeizuführen) (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 119). William Lee interprets also the quousque as a prayer for the coming of Christ from martyred Saints who are retrospectively measuring the lapse of time ("Revelation of St. John the Divine," 12:576). Hoeksema speaks of a quest for "the final manifestation of righteousness and justice and for the glory God" (*Behold, He Cometh!*, 225). Alford observes that the cry is continuous with the previous seals where prayers for the extension of Christ's reign can be heard" ("Αποκαλυψις Ιωαννου, 4:612-618); Beckwith attributes the deep intent of the martyrs' request "not to sinful vengeance but to a yearning for the triumph of the cause of God and the coming of his kingdom" (*Apocalypse of John*, 265, 526). Robert Wall goes further in saying: "The martyrs' plea, addressed to the **Sovereign Lord, holy and true**, in expectation of Christ's imminent return (6:11), seeks God's eschatological vindication of their faithfulness. Their petition is not for vengeance against their persecutors; they are more concerned about their status within God's righteous reign than within an anti-Christian kingdom ruled by those secular elite who had convicted and executed them as 'the enemy' [emphasis his]" (*Revelation*, NIBC18 [Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1995], 111).

¹⁹¹Hughes, *Book of Revelation*, 89. Schüssler-Fiorenza sees "the vindication of God in the eyes of those who have placed their trust in God" as an important part of the martyrs' plea (*Revelation*, 64). See also Maxwell, *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family*, 186-187.

or, as Mounce puts it, a cry “for the reputation of God” (theodicy) and not for revenge.¹⁹²

As victims of a systemic injustice gone wild, the dead saints could not understand why the delay, that is, why God takes so long to put an end to all this.

Significance of ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

Although the object of the verb κρῖνω is not stated, it is clearly implied that the earth-dwellers mentioned in the next clause are the actual target of the judgment requested by the martyred saints. The phrase τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (the inhabitants of the earth) appears several times in the Apocalypse, always in sharp contrast with the saints who faithfully follow the Lamb.¹⁹³

Many have seen in this expression a semitechnical designation of faithless humanity in its hostility to God, that is, those who are at home in the present wicked world.¹⁹⁴ From the standpoint of apocalyptic dualism and its pessimism, Rev 6:9-10

¹⁹²Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 148.

¹⁹³See Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 (two times); 13:8, 12, 14 (two times); 17:2, 8.

¹⁹⁴Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 105; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 392. Beckwith talks about the “earth-dwellers as a technical phrase for unbelievers” (*Apocalypse of John*, 526). Mounce cites 1QH 8: 19-36 “where the dwellers on earth are set over against the army of the holy ones” as he refers to Millar Burrows (*Dead Sea Scrolls* [New York: Viking, 1955], 404-405) (*Book of Revelation*, 149, n. 11). So Minear who views “Earth” as a term which is the “common denominator for all antichristic forces” (*I Saw a New Earth*, 264). Although it has four distinctive uses in this apocalypse: (1) It is used with heaven to denote the range of God’s creation. (2) It signifies the sphere where God is making a new creation. (3) Most frequently it is used for that which has been corrupted and destroyed by those opposed to God. (4) It is the area in which God inflicts His punishments. Sweet views the sojourners of the land as a stock expression for the “worldly” (*Revelation*, 142). See Theodore Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (1924-1926; reprint, Wuppertal, Germany: R. Brockhaus, 1986), 65; C. H. Giblin, “Revelation 11:1-13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 444. Blount sees in the term “a Johannine euphemism for those who oppose God and God’s people” (*Revelation*, 134). Lenski takes the expression as qualifying “men on earth in general but the ungodly who have no home but earth and want no home but earth” (*Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 236). L. L. Thompson interprets the phrase to mean “non-Christians” (*The Book of Revelation*, 104). Buchanan sees in the expression “the foreigners in the promised land whom Palestinian Jews hated” (*The Book of Revelation*, 173). A. F. Johnson says, “The ‘inhabitants of the earth’ distinguishes the Christ rejectors of the world from the true, faithful followers of the Lamb” (“Revelation,” 12:492). Schüssler-Fiorenza insists that “the expression has a universal connotation and refers to all people hostile to the church” (*Book of Revelation*, 63, n. 91). Cf. A. Feuillet who

might suggest a radical distinction between two camps that further justifies the call for a final judgment. The distinction appeared in the letter to the church at Philadelphia in 3:10 where protection is promised from trial that will test the earth-dwellers. Thus a polarization occurs between two key actors of this Apocalypse: the dead saints on one side and the earth-dwellers on the other. John by his description of the cry of the martyrs, as Pattemore puts it, has “introduced a division within humanity and set up a tension, in the cry for judgment and vindication, which will dominate the remainder of the book.”¹⁹⁵

The side of the righteous is qualified in Revelation as, (1) faithful witnesses (2:13, 3:14, 11:3; 13: 6), (2) those who are closely linked to the spirit of prophecy (19:10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6,9), (3) the persecuted witnesses because of the word of God and/or the testimony of Jesus (1:9; 6:9; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4), and (4) those who reacted against the worship of the beast or its image and refused his mark on their foreheads or their hands (20:4).

This opponent side is characterized as those who worshipped the beast and its image and received its mark on their forehead (13:15-17; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20).¹⁹⁶ In 13:7-8, it appears that this rebellion is a generalized moral cancer that has affected the entire earth, which might explain why dead saints are brought forward to call God for action. R. L. Thomas captures the climactic nature of the hostility: “It is not just the beast from the sea who will appear later to vent his wrath against the people of God. The

unwarrantedly restricts the set of expression to the Jewish persecutors of the church (“Essai d’interprétation du chapitre XI de l’Apocalypse,” *NTS* 4 [1958]: 183-200).

¹⁹⁵Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 86.

¹⁹⁶Stefanovic views the distinguishing factor for the identification of the earth-dwellers is those who have accepted the mark of the beast instead of the seal of God (Rev 16) (*Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 142).

whole race is in rebellion and is set on removing as many of God's servants as possible."¹⁹⁷ The final destiny for the sojourners of the earth, identified as the enemy of God and his people, is the lake of fire (13:20).

In relation to the witness motif of Revelation, the unrepentant attitude of the reprobate earth-dwellers may be critical for the understanding of the climax in Rev 6:9-11. On one hand, Bauckham sees the crux of the unsealed scroll (Rev 10:9-11) as the conversion of the nations.¹⁹⁸ On the other, it is the unrepentant attitude of those confronted with the gospel in Revelation that becomes later the justification for John's theodicy.¹⁹⁹ Taken together, those statements enlighten the rationale of the outcry.

From their limited perspective, the dead saints express their impatience for God's judgment perhaps because of the thought that evil had reached a dangerous climax in the way they had been treated. In this culmination of hostility, evil is clearly overpowering the good in a dangerous way with the execution of God's witnesses. The unrepentant attitude of the earth-dwellers who persist in their violence suggests that a climactic point where all the persuasive and redemptive potential of the Church's witness has been

¹⁹⁷Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 446. Referring to the connection of Rev 6:10 with Rev 13:8, 14, Dürstendieck argues that "the dwellers 'on the earth' are here, by virtue of the connection, according to the generic view, 'all nations,' in contrast with the servants of God" (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 230).

¹⁹⁸Bauckham notes, "What judgments alone failed to effect (9:20-21), the witness of the 'two witnesses' does effect" (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 279; see the whole discussion on p. 238-337). See also Trites, "The New Testament Concept of Witness," 169-170; van den Eynde, "Le Dieu du désordre," 47-51; David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," *NTS* 18 (1972): 412; A. Feuillet, *Johannine Studies* (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1964), 249-250; A. Yarbro Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message 22 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), 73.

¹⁹⁹See Grant Osborne, "Theodicy in the Apocalypse," *TJ* 14(1993): 63-77. Also Yarbro Collins who defends the idea that the eschatological woes and the destruction of the earth are portrayed as divine retribution for the persecution of the saints ("Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation," 720-750). Cf. Pattemore who asserts that "John by his description of the cry of the martyrs . . . has also introduced a division within humanity and set up a tension, in the cry for judgment and vindication, which will dominate the remainder of the book" (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 86).

exhausted. Hence, the passionate call expresses vexation, even exasperation, for the application of a long overdue judgment.²⁰⁰

Summary and Theological Implications

The tone of the cry and the way God is put on stand suggest a situation of dire emergency that refers perhaps to the birthing of the new age. The difficulty about the vengeance language of the fifth seal comes from the failure to note both the strong theocentric focus and how the impatience for justice in the “How long?” query relates indeed to cosmic salvation in a special context of imminence.

1. God had long ago promised and guaranteed that the principles of his righteous government will prevail in the end and he had also committed to the recompense of his people, the vindication of their wrongs and the overthrow of evil. The query cuts to the heart of both the Lord’s reputation as the God of the covenant and the authenticity of his witnesses who have died for their faith.

2. The theodicy and its expectation for retributive justice is prompted by the cry for justice raised by the shedding of innocent blood. God’s sovereignty cannot allow such evil to go unpunished. With the unavenged killing of the innocent, God’s justice is at stake and he has to do something about it.

3. Rather than personal revenge, the question unit focuses on God’s responsibility as protector of a just world order. The tone of the “How long?” query presents itself as an impatient prayer that is expressed in the form of a challenge to God as the all-powerful

²⁰⁰Aune points out that the query is informed by the context of impatient prayers which suggest “the common perception that too long a period has intervened between the commission of an outrage and its just recompense” (*Revelation 6-16*, 407). In this vein, Delorme and Donegani observe, “Ce qui monte de l’autel n’est pas la fumée des sacrifices ou la prière s’élevant comme l’encens vers Dieu, mais le cri d’impatience provoqué par le retard de Dieu qui ne fait pas justice” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 191).

and loving Deity whose justice guarantees existence. At stake in the outcry is the whole issue of the claims of God's trustworthiness towards those he loves.

4. Instead of a thirst for revenge, the outcry is in fact a faith-filled protest of righteousness against evil. In the light of John's theology of power, the "How long?" query is directed to God as the heavenly Ruler and Judge, who is holy and true, because he is the last resort qualified to reverse the world's judgment upon his people.²⁰¹

5. Behind all this lies the intense hope for the revelation of Christ's kingdom where real justice will be fully served. Only then would Christ appear to fulfill the claim as Lord "holy and true," the real Master of the universe, and only then would the martyrs be finally vindicated as his authentic witnesses.²⁰² This call for God's final judgment seems to be motivated by the hope that this action would establish the complete victory of God's cause and reveal his attributes.

6. The climactic nature of text can be further related to the delay in the manifestation of God's endtime justice that will eradicate evil from the world.²⁰³ The content of the previous seals contributes to a sense of living a period of fulfillment. What the martyrs, who had given their life for God's cause, fail to understand is why the final

²⁰¹The prayer of the martyrs is for God, as Mitchell G. Reddish puts it well, "to reverse the judgment of the world so that the purpose of their dying, as well as the sovereignty of God might be revealed" ("Revelation," *Mercer Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Watson Mills and Richard F. Wilson [Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995], 1333).

²⁰²About the martyrs, Caird says, "They have gone to their death in the confidence that God's word, attested in the life and death of Jesus, is the ultimate truth; but unless in the end tyranny and other forms of wickedness meet with retribution, that faith is an illusion" (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 85).

²⁰³The intensity of the outcry would be incomprehensible if not related to an eschatological time where decisions are final. Seiss indeed wonders, "If the whole scene did not relate to the judgment period, it would be difficult to avoid attaching the idea of intense vindictiveness to this utterance" (*The Apocalypse*, 1:368).

coup de grace that should rid the world of evil is delayed.²⁰⁴

7. At the base of the victims' reaction lies obviously the belief that the time for God to take the necessary action to restore a just world order through the installation of his kingdom on earth is long overdue.²⁰⁵ Thus the outcry "How long?" expresses "a sense of eschatological delay in God's giving justice to his people."²⁰⁶

8. But the theodictic concern of the Psalms is balanced with hopeful elements of trust in the martyrs' outcry too. As Fee puts it well, "Their question is not one of *if* or *whether*, but in keeping with the Psalmists, it is *when* ("How long?"), since God's holiness and trustworthiness are foundational to their expectation of judgment on those responsible for their deaths [emphasis his]."²⁰⁷

"How Long?" and the Interaction with the Preceding Context

The fifth seal belongs to a larger context of seven unsealings that flow from a heavenly sanctuary scene (chaps. 4 and 5) focusing on the worship of the One sitting

²⁰⁴Also Lilje notes that the point of the martyrs' question is the "final accomplishment of God's plan, for whose sake they have sacrificed their lives, and thus for the speedy visible assurance that their sacrifice has not been in vain" (*Last Book of the Bible*, 129).

²⁰⁵About the spirit of the outcry, Bede writes, "The souls which offered themselves a living sacrifice to God pray eternally for his coming to judgment, not from any vindictive feeling against their enemies, but in a spirit of zeal and love for God's glory and justice, and for the coming of that day when sin, which is rebellion against him, will be destroyed. . . . And so in that prayer wherein Christ teaches us to forgive our enemies, we are also taught to say, Thy kingdom come" (*Explanatio Apocalypsis* 6:10 [CCCM 121A: 301-303]).

²⁰⁶Richard Bauckham, "Revelation," *Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1294.

²⁰⁷Fee, *Revelation*, 98. So Krodel who concurs, "This is, first, a question arising from faith that clings to God's promise and power, even though his power is no longer self-evident. It is, second, a question about God's own vindication. When will you vindicate your righteousness and establish your will, your rule, on earth as it is established already in heaven? In short, the question is, when will you vindicate your people who are oppressed and slaughtered by your enemies who despise you and kill us?" (*Revelation*, 176).

upon the throne (4:2) and the Lion/Lamb (5:6).²⁰⁸ Tied together by hymns of praise, this double scene introduces images, motifs, and theological themes that have far-reaching implications for the seals septenary as a whole (Rev 6-8a) and the fifth seal in particular.²⁰⁹ For added perspectives on the understanding of the delay motif in this passage, I will now turn to the interaction with the preceding literary context by focusing on the introductory vision and the key location of the fifth seal in the literary structure.

“How Long?” and the First Part of the Introductory Vision

As a background to the expectations about God as δεσπότης, Rev 4 features a

²⁰⁸Dealing with the thematic relations between sanctuary introductions and the series they introduced, Davidson said, “The introductory sanctuary scenes not only structure the book of Revelation and demonstrate its spatiotemporal progression, but they also serve to enhance the message of the main sections they introduce” (“Sanctuary Typology,” 116). See also Maxwell, *The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family*, 164-166. Jon Paulien viewed the introductory vision as a stage setting for the respective vision and remains constantly in view throughout the vision (“Seven Seals,” 212). Elsewhere, he added, “Each introductory vision provides the setting for the subsequent activity and remains in the background right up to the conclusion of the vision” (“Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions,” in *Symposium on Revelation*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992], 1:195). Taking the scene as a kind of stage prop, John Wick Bowman believed that “the considerable activity in heaven forms part of the background for the action depicted in the succeeding scenes” (*Drama of the Book of Revelation* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955], 45).

²⁰⁹On the unity of the chaps. 4 and 5, Pierre Prigent claimed that they form a single vision featuring “une liturgie juive adaptée au christianisme [a Jewish liturgy adapted to Christianity]” (*Apocalypse et Liturgie* [Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1964], 46-79). Anton Vögtle saw them as the two elements of a “doppelstufigen Himmelson” [double-stepped heavenly vision] (*Das buch mit den sieben Siegeln* [Freiburg, Germany: Herder, 1981], 48). Analyzing the literary and thematic parallels between chaps. 4 and 5, Ekkehardt Müller concluded that though they are distinct units, these two chapters constitute clearly a double scene that serves as introduction to the seven seals (*Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, 199-205). For Jan Lambrecht, “The unity of the chapters, however, is constituted by (1) the term ἄγιος (a Leitmotiv of ch. 5—see vv. 2.4.9.12—which already appeared in 4:11); (2) the “One who is seated on the throne” in ch. 4 but also in 5, 1.7; (3) the presence in both chapters of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders; (4) and 5:13-14 where God and Christ are acclaimed together” (“A Structuration of Rev 4:1–22:5,” in *L’Apocalypse Johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, ed. J. Lambrecht, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 53 [Gembloux, Belgium: J. Duculot, 1980], 90). Other scholars who support the unity of those chapters include Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 66; Sweet, *Revelation*, 113; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 21-21; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:461; Boring, *Revelation*, 101; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 504; Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 126; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 185-186; Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, 195-225; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 311-312; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 67; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 85; etc.

heavenly scene emphasizing God's sovereign majesty through a description of the divine throne and its surroundings.²¹⁰ Rowland underscores the privileged perspective as things are revealed "as they actually are in the heavenly world."²¹¹ Charles captures well this perspective from the viewpoint of contemporary Apocalyptic literature,

With chapter iv. there is an entire change of scene and subject. The dramatic contrast could not be greater. Hitherto the scene of the Seer's visions had been earth: now it is heaven. On the one hand, in ii-iii. we have had a vivid description of the Christian Churches in Asia Minor, - which is to be taken as typical of the Church at large, - the ideals they cherished, their faulty achievements and not infrequent disloyalties, and their outlook darkened in every instance with the apprehension of universal persecution and martyrdom. But the moment we leave the restlessness, the troubles, the imperfectness, and apprehension pervading ii-iii., we pass at once in iv. into an atmosphere of perfect assurance and peace. Not even the faintest echo is heard here of the alarms and fears of the faithful, nor do the unmeasured claims and wrongdoings of the supreme and imperial power on earth wake even a moment's misgiving in the trust and adoration of the heavenly hosts. An infinite harmony of righteousness and power prevails, while the greatest angelic orders proclaim before the throne the holiness of Him who sits thereon, who is the Almighty and from everlasting to everlasting, and to whose sovereign will the world and all that is therein owes and has owed its being.²¹²

The vision provides the setting for the sealed scroll that God holds in his right

²¹⁰God's throne has been taken as the unifying theme for the two scenes of chaps. 4 and 5: see L. W. Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 5 (1985): 105-124. On the importance of the throne-room vision for the understanding of Revelation, see Didier Rochat, "La vision du trône: Une clé pour pénétrer l'Apocalypse," *Hok* 49 (1992): 1-21. About the OT usage of the term, see Daegeuk Nam, "The 'Throne of God' Motif in the Hebrew Bible" (Th.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1989). Nam wrote, "The throne of God in the Hebrew Bible, by way of its various implications and symbolisms, represents God's existence and character, His attributes and ability, and all the titles and relationships which God holds toward His creation, especially human beings. In short, it stands for the totality of God, i.e., who He is and what He does in sustaining the universe and bringing about the salvation of His people" (ibid., 464). For the OT connection of the imagery to the motif of salvation and judgment, see Otto Schmitz, "θρόνος," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 3:161-163. On the significance of the throne imagery in the double vision of Rev 4 and 5, see Krodel who referred to them as a prelude which "discloses the control center on which all reality is dependent and from which all actions of judgment and salvation emanate" (*Revelation*, 152).

²¹¹Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *JSJ* 10 [1979]: 138.

²¹²R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:102-103. He is closely followed by J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 87; and Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 415.

hand. In this scene, the Enthroned receives praise and adoration from residents of heaven based on the acts of Creation. While interesting connections have been made with early Christian/imperial liturgical backgrounds, the primacy of the Hebrew Bible–Jewish background of Ezek 1, Isa 6 and Dan 7 has more plausibility as the source that opens up better the meaning of the text.²¹³ In essence, those texts lay emphasis upon God’s sovereign rule as a prelude to his role as judge.

In a special way, God’s featured attributes reinforce expectations of salvation, judgment and *parousia*. According to the hymn of the four living creatures in 4:8, God is depicted as the “Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come.”²¹⁴ This statement is highly theological. To the Jews, it synthesizes the revelation of God’s sovereignty (Exod 3:14) and the prophetic passages which announce that God will “come” to save and judge (e.g., Pss 96:13; 98:9; Isa 40:10; 66:15; Zech 14:5).

To the Christian, this “coming” would be identified with the *parousia* of Jesus

²¹³For the assessment of continuity and discontinuity with the source imagery, see D. Sanger, “Θρόνος,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:156-157. Rowland paralleled chap. 4 with the vision of God found in Apocalyptic sources like the book of Enoch, Qumran literature and the *Merkavah* visions and concludes in favor of a radical similarity (“The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” 137-154). Hurtado critiqued and rejected Rowland’s thesis of the lack of Christian influence in chap. 4 (“Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies,” 105-124). For a review of the liturgical options and arguments in favor of the OT-Jewish background and the importance of Dan 7, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 313.

²¹⁴The participle ὁ ἐρχόμενος, who is coming, has been sometimes referred to the future eternity of the Father in this so-called formula of immutability, but Lenski thought that it was not a substitute for the “One who shall be,” but “One who is coming in the consummation of the last day” (*Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 186). In addition, Klaus-Peter Jörns argued that the participle does not designate the eternal essence of God (as is done by “who was and who is” but points to a future imminent action of God) (*Das hymnische Evangelium, Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung*, Studien zum Neuen Testament 5 [Gutersloh, Germany: Mohn, 1971], 26-29). For a defense about translating the participle as “who is coming,” see J. D. Robb, “Ho Erchomenos (‘Who Is to Come’—N.E.B.),” *ExpTim* 73 (1962): 338-339.

Christ and include the proclamation of Jesus as supreme and universal Judge.²¹⁵ Here, John inserts his views on the *parousia* right into his doctrine of God. Beasley-Murray noted here a powerful transformation of a revelation of God in terms of time “from a colourless description of God’s unending existence into a dynamic conception of Deity, which believes that His coming to intervene for the salvation of His people, and therefore of the world, is grounded in His very nature as the God of Redemption.”²¹⁶

The confession of the uniqueness of God as creator is important for the polemic against the ruler cult noted in 6:10. At 4:11 the hymns of the 24 elders proclaim indeed,

<p>Ἄξιός εἰ, ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν, ὅτι σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα, καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.</p>	<p>You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.</p>
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Chapter 4 ends with a majestic worship response because worship is a central issue that confronts the audience of Revelation (chaps. 12-13). Resseguie noted that the text addresses one of the main plot threads of Revelation, stressing that “God is infinite,

²¹⁵Bauckham suggested that this coming is related to the establishment of God’s sovereignty on earth as it is in heaven. For him, “Chapter 4 is primarily a revelation of God’s sovereignty, as it is manifest and acknowledged in heaven. Only a little acquaintance with prophetic–apocalyptic literature is required for a reader to infer that this vision prepares for the implementation of God’s sovereignty on earth, where it is presently hidden and contested by the powers of evil. In other words, the kingdom of heaven is to come on earth as it already exists in heaven” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 249). Elsewhere, Bauckham suggested that Revelation should be understood as a description of the fulfillment of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 23-53). See Matter for similar applications in some medieval exegesis (“Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis,” 49).

²¹⁶George R. Beasley-Murray continued, “His Name is ‘The One who is and was and *is to come*.’ And His Name is His character. His Name signifies that His coming for judgment and redemption is rooted in His very Being. He shall come, for He must come in order to be what He is, the God of Salvation. It is significant to note other earlier occurrences of the title in Rev 1:4, 8 but in the reversed order of ‘who was, and is and is to come’” (“The Second Coming in the Book of Revelation,” *EQ* 23 [1951]: 43). Thomas asserted that the transformation arose because of the special emphasis of Rev 4 on the past creative activity of God (*Revelation 1-7*, 363).

transcendent, eternal, the creator, and sovereign. God alone is worthy of worship.”²¹⁷ As creator, he alone has ultimate power over everything and deserves to be worshipped, not the emperor. The creation’s de-crowning before him denotes his conquest over Satanic power, which has been shown to be the active force behind the ruler cult that dare challenge God’s sovereignty.

Of significance for the expectations of justice, the first part of the introductory vision promotes God as the only Sovereign ruler of the universe, which implies his role as the guarantor of the world’s moral order.²¹⁸ It sets the stage to understand both his role as supreme Judge in the final judgment called for in the query and the polemic against the ruler cult which lies at the cause of the martyrdom of the saints under the altar. The emphasis on his Creatorship creates anticipation for the coming of the new age. God is clearly in charge of everything that happens and “How long?” refers then to the question regarding when evil will be allowed to have temporary triumphs.

“How Long?” and the Second Part of the Introductory Vision

Chapter 5, which is simply the continuation of the previous chapter, reemphasizes hopes for a victorious eschatological vindication and sets the stage for the judgment

²¹⁷For Resseguie, the questions raised by the chapter are central to the polemic with the ruler cult of the Apocalypse: “Who is worthy of worship? Who is at the center: God or counterfeit gods? The true Sovereign or imitators? The creator or the creation?” (*The Revelation of John*, 114). Regarding the occurrence of a creation theme in the passage, Bauckham wrote, “Jewish monotheism in New Testament times was defined by the doctrine of creation and by the practice of worship. The one Creator of all things is God and he alone may be worshipped” (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 48).

²¹⁸Equally important is the fact that this sovereignty is also central in the question section of the fifth seal.

vision of the next chapters.²¹⁹ The vision has been viewed as a setting “wherein the resurrected Christ was installed and exalted upon the throne of the universe at the right hand of God the Father as a co-regent or viceroy.”²²⁰ The Lamb also receives the same praise and adoration from occupants of heaven previously given to the Enthroned, but inspired this time by the acts of Redemption. By virtue of location, the Lamb is closely identified with the Enthroned: he is right in the midst of the throne (5:6).²²¹

The chapter speaks to the expectations related to Christ’s eschatological rule with further variations on the themes of the ruler cult polemic. Of significance for its central role in the whole Apocalypse, Schüssler-Fiorenza took the chapter as a report of the inauguration of “Christ’s Kingship” motif with a particular focus on the theological issue of power: “Who is the true Lord of this world?”²²² From the concluding statement of 3:21 and building on Oriental mythology, she took “the enthronement of Christ as ruler

²¹⁹See Ferdinand Hahn, “Zum Aufbau der Johannesoffenbarung,” in *Kirche und Bibel: Festgabe für Bischof Eduard Schick*, ed. Otto Böcher et al. (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1979), 149. Also Sweet who argued, “Chapters 4 and 5 are still then, part of the frame work, by which the visions of destruction must be interpreted. But they are also closely linked with chs. 6 and 7, in developing the themes of the letter to Smyrna and Philadelphia: Christian endurance and the assurance on which it is based” (*Revelation*, 114).

²²⁰Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation* 5, 301. On the significance of this enthronement, see Edouard Cothenet, “La venue ou les venues de Christ dans l’Apocalypse” (*Exégèse et Liturgie II*, *Lectio Divina* 175 [Paris: Cerf, 1999]); Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 51-55; Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Berlin: Akademie, 1962), 27. For a discussion on the polemical parallels with the Imperial cult, see J. D. Charles, “Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb,” 85.

²²¹Ronald Herms, *An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: The Narrative Function of Universal Language in the Book of Revelation*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 143 (New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 158. Krodel also believed that this heavenly throne-room “visualizes the order by which all creation is ultimately defined (4.1-11) and the perspective from which all activity in the cosmos is ruled (5.1-14). It is here that the seer delineates the parameters in which judgment and salvation take place” (*Revelation*, 152).

²²²Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 58.

and judge of the world and its destiny”²²³ as being the theme of chaps. 4 and 5.

Regarding the eschatological significance of the event, she wrote, “By opening the seals, Christ exercises this power, setting in motion the events of the end time.”²²⁴

The imagery of the sealed scroll reinforces the idea of the inauguration of Christ’s kingship that raises expectations regarding the consummation of history. As the key to uncover the sense of the imagery, Stefanovic cogently argued in favor of a Covenant book of Deuteronomy in the light of its function within the OT enthronement ritual.²²⁵ For him, the sealed scroll symbolizes the enthronement of the risen Christ as Lord of the universe and “the *biblion* would then signify the rightful transfer of the kingdom.”²²⁶ He tagged part of its contents to the Apocalypse itself, but reserves its final opening “for the future eschatological period that will bring history to its foreordained conclusion.”²²⁷

The key Christological designations add to the expectations for a decisive eschatological victory. Significantly, even before the scroll is unsealed, the outcome is unveiled by one of the elders who announces in Rev 5:5: ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς

²²³Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 61. Paulien believed, too, that Rev 4-5 is an elaboration of 3:21 that describes the enthronement of Christ. He proposed the NT concept of mystery with its perennial eschatological sense as background of Rev 5:1-5. That mystery, the fullness of the gospel, though hidden for ages, has been revealed in “the last days” through the coming of Christ (“Seven Seals,” 202-203, 217-218).

²²⁴Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 61. See also Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 24. For her, John “does not seek to comfort the persecuted Christian community with reference to past and future history, but with reference to the eschatological reality of God’s kingdom” (ibid., 55). She backed her theological conclusion by a study of the communicative situation and literary-social function of Revelation and maintains that “the main concern of the author is not the interpretation of history but the issue of power. The focal point of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ of eschatological salvation is not history but the kingdom of God and the rule of Christ” (ibid.) See a reply to Schüssler-Fiorenza by A. J. Bandstra, “History and Eschatology in the Apocalypse,” *CTJ* 5 (1970): 180-183.

²²⁵Stefanovic, *The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5*, 255-292.

²²⁶Ibid., 322.

²²⁷Ibid., 313.

φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαβίδ, behold the lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered. As Mounce noted, “both of the titles ascribed to Jesus are taken from the common stock of Jewish messianism.”²²⁸ The “lion of the tribe of Judah” is from Gen 49:9-10 which depicts Jacob’s blessing upon his son Judah and the imagery invokes majesty and authority.²²⁹ “The root of David” is another messianic title derived from Isa 11 that predicts one who would come from the stump of Jesse to restore the faithful remnant (Isa 11:1, 2, 4 and 10). Those titles are surely quite vital for the ideal Davidic messiah who is expected to initiate God’s eschatological activity.

The Christological designations also clarify the manner in which the enemies are overcome in this eschatological victory. When the seer actually looks, the majestic Victor appears, not as a lion, but “in the astonishing and paradoxical shape of a lamb with the marks of slaughter upon him.”²³⁰ From this paradox,²³¹ Caird believes to have found

²²⁸Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 131.

²²⁹For other examples, see Jer 23:5, 6; cf. *T. Jud.* 24:5; 1 Macc. 3:4; 4 *Ezra* 11:1-23, 46. On the language used here, see J. D. Charles, “An Apocalyptic Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1-14),” *JETS* 34 (1991): 465. For other references relating God’s ultimate and final control over the cosmos with his people marching behind the Davidic Messiah against the forces of evil, see 2 *Esd.* 12:31-39; 13: 5-50; 2 *Bar.* 72; *Pss. Sol.* 17:23-24; *T. Levi* 18:11-12; *T. Dan* 5:10-12; *T. Reu.* 6:12; Zadokite Document 9:10-20. About the Christological application of this text, Osborne observed that “Yahweh as divine warrior is often depicted as a lion (Job 10:16; Isa. 31:4; Jer. 50:44; Hos. 5:14; Amos 3:8), and Jesus now assumes that role as divine warrior” (*Revelation*, 253).

²³⁰Mathias Rissi, *Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19:11-22:15*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series 23 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), 8-9. Beckwith asserted that the primary emphasis is on the Lamb of the Jewish cultus (*Apocalypse of John*, 315), but Norman Hillyer argued convincingly that this Lamb should be linked with the Paschal lamb instead (“‘The Lamb’ in the Apocalypse,” *EQ* 39 [1967]: 230). Those who believed that John has reinterpreted the Jewish apocalyptic imagery of the lamb in light of the Passover Lamb include Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 96-97; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 124-126; and Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 78. For an exposition of how the Exodus paschal Lamb enhances the liberation/victory motif of the whole scene, see Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 119-121. On the consistent use of Passover theme and parallels to End times in Revelation, see D. C. Juster, *Revelation: The Passover Key* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1991).

²³¹George R. Beasley-Murray compared Rev 5 with *The Testament of Joseph* 19—which reproduces the traditional expectation of Israel’s deliverance—and infers that “the unusual element in it is

a key for Revelation's method of the Hebrew Bible interpretation: "Wherever it says 'Lion', John intends the reader to understand 'Lamb'" (emphasis his). For him, "wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross."²³² In the vein, Bauckham concurs, "when the slaughtered Lamb is seen 'in the midst of' the divine throne in heaven (5:6; cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ's sacrificial death *belongs to the way God rules the world* (emphasis his)."²³³

Of significance for the unraveling of the issue of theodicy in Revelation, Caird underscores that through the revelation of the slaughtered lamb "omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love."²³⁴ Tonstad rightly adds that this revelation is actually an act of persuasion not to be primarily contrasted to the "cruel and coercive ways of Roman imperial power" but a persuasion that "has a cosmic dimension, aiming not only to show that the cosmic conflict will not be won by force but

the idea that God will send 2 Messiahs for this purpose, the kingly Messiah from Judah, fittingly represented by the Lion, and the priestly Messiah from Aaron, depicted as a Lamb. However, the deliverance comes in the orthodox way, i.e., by conquest in battle for the Messiah Lamb is a mighty warrior. His representation as a Lamb has nothing to do with sacrifice, but with his origin as the young champion of the flock of God" ("How Christian is the Book of Revelation?" in *Reconciliation and Hope*, ed. Robert Banks (Exeter, England: Paternoster, 1974), 278). About the contrast on the sacrificial and warrior imagery, Mounce suggested that "there is not . . . much difference between the two positions unless one insists on taking the images in their most literal sense. A slaughtered lamb and a messianic warrior are not mirror opposites but ways of portraying stages in the redemptive ministry of the Messiah—first as a sacrifice for sin, then as a warrior returning for victory" (*Book of Revelation*, 133, n. 21).

²³²Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 75.

²³³Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 64.

²³⁴Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 75.

also, and more importantly, to reveal the character of the divine government.”²³⁵

Conquest terminology, reinterpreted with new symbols, reinforces the hopes for a great eschatological victory. With the messianic war imagery, chap. 5 introduces the Conquest imagery whose prominence is seen through the frequent appearance of the verb *νικάω* (16 times) in Revelation.²³⁶ The conquering is probably a direct allusion to the exodus-conquest theme that has given rise to the holy war tradition.²³⁷ Given the context of Christ’s investiture, the appearance of the tradition here should come as no surprise. Jan A. du Rand showed that the messianic war imagery was actually directly linked to the whole process of establishing the kingdom of God on earth.²³⁸ Bauckham rightly

²³⁵Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 142.

²³⁶For a defense of the military connotation of the term, see Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 30.

²³⁷Franck Cross cogently argued that “the central event which gave rise to the holy war tradition in Israel is the exodus and conquest, and not the primordial battle of creation” (“The Divine Warrior in Israel’s Early Cult,” in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. A. Altmann [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966], 25). For an alternate position and a basic treatment of the Holy War theme in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, see von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh,” 97-108. For the role of the theme of Holy War in Jewish eschatological expectation, see R. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 3-18; J. J. Collins, “The Mythology of Holy War in Daniel and the Qumran War Scroll: A Point of Transition in Jewish Apocalyptic,” *VT* 25 (1975): 596-612; J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 16 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Yarbrow Collins, “Political Perspective of the Revelation of John,” 241-256; W. J. Heard, “The Maccabean Martyrs’ Contribution to Holy War,” *EQ* 58 (1986): 291-318; W. H. Brownlee traced the trajectory of the transformation of God as warrior into God the martyr by focusing especially on what occurs in intertestamental times, notably against the background of 1, 2, and 4 Maccabees (“From Holy War to Holy Martyrdom,” in *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of G. E. Mendenhall*, ed. H. B. Huffmon, F. A. Spina, and A. R. W. Green [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983], 281-292). Neil Forsyth further develops the influence of the combat myth in the Scriptures (*The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987]). For a general overview on the subject, see Norman Gottwald, “War, Holy,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*, ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 942-944.

²³⁸Jan A. du Rand, “‘Your Kingdom Come on Earth as It Is in Heaven’: The Theological Motif of John,” *Neot* 31 (1997): 59-75. Regarding the context of imminence, David E. Aune noted, “A final eschatological war is a frequent motif in prophetic and apocalyptic scenarios of the series of events which bring the present age to a decisive end (Ezek 38:7-16; 39:2; Joel 3:2; Zech 12:1-9; 14:1; 1 En. 56:5-7; 90:13-19; 99:4; Jub. 23:23; 4 Ezra 13:13-34; Sib. Or. 3:63-68)” (“Qumran and the Book of Revelation,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam [Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1998], 641).

affirmed that the idea of a battle was still real, even if the conquest occurred through the new symbol of sacrificial death rather than armed conflict.²³⁹

The tense of the verb used in connection with Christ's sovereignty confirms the definitive character to his victory. In 5:5, the verb νικάω, to win, is expressed in the historical aorist, which points to a victory that has already taken place once and for all in the past.²⁴⁰ The aorist verb ἐνίκησεν, he has conquered, is emphatic.²⁴¹ About the decisiveness of this triumph, Bauernfeind noted, "This is not a provisional victory but the final and unlimited victory which only the ἄρνιον, the κύριος κυρίων καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων (17:14), can win."²⁴²

²³⁹Bauckham denied the idea of "passive" resistance, since his view of the Apocalypse is that of a Christian war scroll which uses lavishly a holy war language (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 213-237). As to the specific usage of the holy war thought-form in Revelation, he offered the following caveat: "The distinctive feature of Revelation seems to be, not its repudiation of apocalyptic militarism, but its lavish use of militaristic *language in a non-militaristic sense* [emphasis his]" (ibid., 233). Similarly, Steve Moyise's study on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation confirmed Bauckham's perspective but also shows that the effect of the militaristic language of the text on the reader is provocative as it forces an interaction between military imagery and Christian ethics (*The Old Testament in the New: An Introduction*, Continuum Biblical Studies Series [New York: Continuum, 2001], 125-127). Among the early church Fathers who taught that conquering was achieved through martyrdom, Tertullian dealt with the use of the verb νικάω (conquer) in Revelation and stated, "Who, pray, are these so blessed conquerors, but martyrs in the strict sense of the word?" (*Scorpiace*, 12 [ANF, 3:645-646]). Similarly, testimony and conquering are linked together by Augustine of Hippo who presented the martyrs as "drawing upon themselves by their testimony the hatred of the world, and conquering the world not by resisting it, but by dying" (*The City of God*, 22:9 [NPNF, 2:491]). Further on martyrs and holy war theology, see Adela Yarbro Collins who defended the view that passive suffering was actually a part of the holy war theology thought-form ("Political Perspective of the Revelation of John," 241-256).

²⁴⁰The same tense is used for the verb νικάω and καθίζω in 3:21 to refer each to a single historical fact of Christ's victory at the cross, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven followed by his sitting down at God's right hand. See Alford, "Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωαννου," 4:592, Robertson, *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 324; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 164-165, Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 64-65; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 326.

²⁴¹Mounce noted that it figures prominently right after ἰδοὺ, behold, at the head of the phrase "in an unqualified and in an emphatic position" (*Book of Revelation*, 144).

²⁴²Otto Bauernfeind, "νικάω κτλ.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 4:944. Mathias Rissi also sees the absence of object as proof that "his victory to be unlimited and absolute" ("The Kerygma of the Revelation to John," *Int* 22 [1968]: 7).

The resurrection and exaltation of Christ offer a reinterpretation of the martyrs' situation. It can be noted that the language of execution indeed ties "the souls who were slain (τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων)" in 6:9 with the "Lamb who stood as though it had been slain (ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον)" in 5:6.²⁴³ The martyrs' death, as Caird suggested, is the means by which Christ replays the triumph of the cross (3:21).²⁴⁴ As Beale puts it well, "Seen from the heavenly perspective, such sufferings ironically advance the kingdom of God, as was the case with Christ himself."²⁴⁵

Christ-worthiness provides a special content to the eschatological hopes of redemption. It is significant that the Lamb's conquest is celebrated because it qualifies him for the opening of the scroll. This can be valued even more after recalling the

²⁴³About the verb σφάζω, it is interesting to note that it is applied 5 times to Jesus in the Apocalypse: 5:6, 9:12; 13:8. Within Revelation this verb is used both for slaughtering (6:4; 13:3) and martyrdom (6:9; 18:24). J. Massyngberde Ford pointed out that "although 'slay,' Gr. *sphazō*, may be used in the sense of an animal sacrifice ritual, the more usual meaning is 'to kill a person with violence'; cf. 2 Kings 10:7; Jer 52:10 (LXX)" (*Revelation*, 90). She added, "Therefore, the slaughter of the lamb and the function of his blood must be seen against the background of battle and/or martyrdom" (*ibid.*). For a defense of how Isaiah 53:7 is basic to understanding the image, see Comblin, *Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse*, 20-34. About the resurrection symbol attached to verb ἐστηκὸς used to depict the standing slain Lamb, see Jean-Pierre Charlier, *Comprendre l'Apocalypse*, 2 vols. [Paris: Cerf, 1991], 1:158.

²⁴⁴Caird went as far as suggesting that the essence of the Scroll refers to "the story of how the final victory would be won by continued martyrdom" (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 87). See also *ibid.*, 296-299. The idea of the conqueror, though found elsewhere in a few contexts specifically concerning martyrdom (Rom 8:37; John 16:33) is central to the theology of the Apocalypse. This connection has been interpreted in a different sense: Klassen said, "Victory comes not by engaging in armed battle but by refusing to love one's life so much that one resists martyrdom and through consistent patterning of one's life upon the Lamb's sacrifice" ("Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John," 306). Lampe believed that "Christ's death is re-presented in each martyrdom" ("The Testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev 19:10," 258). Trites asserted that "the testimony of the martyrs in life and death is valued only in so far as it is a repetition or continuation of the testimony of Christ" (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 162). For others who viewed the term as "conquest by sacrificial death," see A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 165, and Reddish, "Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse," 88-90. For an extensive development of the special nature of the victory of the Lamb and his followers, see Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 3-185.

²⁴⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 389. Reddish insists that "appearance is not reality, for the one who appears 'as though it had been slain' is in actuality the true victor. The martyred Christ has conquered by his act of self-sacrifice. A part of the new symbolic universe, the higher vision, which John creates is that martyrdom is not defeat but victory. This is true not only for the Supreme Martyr, but also for his followers" ("Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse," 92).

heightened tension in heaven, earth, and under the earth from the opening verses as the answer to the angel’s question (“Who is worthy?”) was delayed. Taking seriously the question within the narrative context of cosmic conflict, he surmises that “*theodicy* seems the more adequate term for the cosmic perspective of the storyline that is expressed, refined and resolved in the hymns (emphasis his).”²⁴⁶

The interpreting hymn (5:9-10) provides indeed the essential gist of Christ’s conquering and his worthiness:

Ἄξιός ἐστι λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους,¹⁰ καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation;¹⁰ you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.

The basis of the Lamb’s worthiness is established by three verbs: (1) ἐσφάγης, he was slain; (2) ἠγόρασας, he purchased; and (3) ἐποίησας; he made.²⁴⁷ Those verbs are treated by Mounce as a historical fact (he was slain), with its interpretation (he purchased a people for God with his blood), and its results (he sets up God’s kingdom).²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 150. For him, this question is conditioned by the cosmic conflict and “sharply focuses the issue brought before the council and the plot of Revelation in a wider sense” (ibid.). He firmly believes that “only when the contextual horizon of the hymns is taken to be the cosmic conflict more than the claims of the Roman Empire will the force of the hymnic portions be felt in full” (ibid.).

²⁴⁷See Pohl, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 1:184.

²⁴⁸Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 135. About the interpretation of the verbs, a few observations are in order. (1) For the interpretation of ἐσφάγης as a historical aorist that points to Christ’s death on Calvary, see Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 106; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:469, Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 206. For variant ways of looking at the three reasons, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 359; Fee, *Revelation*, 84-85; and Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 361. (2) Louw and Nida translated ἀγοράζω in the figurative sense of “to buy” (L&N, s.v. “ἀγοράζω”) or “to cause the release or freedom of someone by a means which proves costly to the individual causing the release—‘to redeem, to set free’ (ibid.).” Cf. 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23. See also Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “ἀγοράζω.” It is important for one’s understanding of John’s word that one notices God ransoms Israel not by “paying someone off,” but by delivering the people from slavery of Egypt (e.g., Exod 6:6, 13). Bratcher and Hatton thought that the “phrase *by thy blood* means ‘by means of your blood,’ ‘by means of your death,’ referring to the verb ‘you

The conquest language gives rise to a successful universal mission motif. The initial result is expressed in terms of gathering a people drawn from all the nations to be “a kingdom and priests” (5:9-10). While the slaying of the Passover lamb in Egypt redeemed the Hebrews from the Angel of death, the slaying of this Lamb provides redemption for all mankind. The particularity of the Old Testament symbol is universalized as seen in the fourfold listing of “every tribe and language and people and nation.”²⁴⁹ Thus, as Bauckham put it, “the Lamb’s conquest, which had the initial effect

were slain.’ As in 1:5, *blood* stands for violent death, or else sacrifice [emphasis theirs]” (*A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 104-105). About the particular meaning of the verb ἀγοράζω in this context, they added, “Christ’s death was the price that was paid so that people may belong to God (which is what *for God* means). The verb is also translated sometimes as “redeem,” as in 14:3. Here and in similar passages in the New Testament concerning the death of Christ, nothing is said about whom the price was paid to, and a translation should not imply that there was a seller to whom God paid this price” (ibid., 105). On the covenant aspect of the purchase price, said J. Massyngberde Ford, “In the OT the reference to blood is to the blood that seals or reaffirms the covenant. In Exod 12:3-13, 21-27, the blood of the paschal lamb aids in Israel’s liberation from Egypt; sprinkled on the doorposts it warns the destroying angel that the residents are Yahweh’s people. The blood sprinkled on the altar representing Yahweh (cf. Exod 24:6-8) and on the people signified a blood relationship, a community of life between the two, since ‘the blood is (or is the bearer of) life’ (Gen. 9:4)” (*Revelation*, 94-95). Thus, it is the sacrificial death of Christ that causes the deliverance of man from all bondage to the world and its mighty powers (5:9; 14:4), so that man is enabled to conquer the enemy himself (12:10-11). About the beneficial effects of the blood of Christ, see Paul B. Decock, “The Symbol of Blood in the Apocalypse of John,” *Neot* 38 (2004): 157-182. Cf. Loren Johns who denied the idea of atonement in 5:9 (*The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 167 [Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 169-179, and 203-205). In spite of the fact that the Apocalypse does not reject the traditional atonement soteriology (1:5), Johns defended the idea that the focus of this verse is instead on Jesus’ nonviolent resistance to the point of death (ibid., 176). Based on the interconnectedness of Christology and ethics, he suggested that like Jesus, the Asian believers are called to “defiant martyrdom” (ibid., 179). (3) Louw and Nida rendered ποιέω in terms of “to produce something new, with the implication of using materials already in existence (in contrast with κτίζω ‘to create,’ L&N, s.v. “κτίζω”)—‘to make, to fashion’” (ibid., s.v. “ποιέω”). On the new exodus application, Krodell wrote, “As the exodus resulted in Israel’s nationhood, so Christ’s ransom resulted in a new people of God **from every tribe and tongue and people and nation**. Moreover, the ransomed became **a kingdom and priests to our God** (cf. 1:6). Christ **made**, that is, he created a kingdom of priestly people in which the promise of Exod 19:5-6 is fulfilled” (emphasis his) (*Revelation*, 166). Also Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 61.

²⁴⁹The same four occur but in different order throughout Revelation in 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; and 14:6 (also 10:11 and 17:5 which has kingdom or multitude instead of tribe; cf. Dan 3:4, 7, 29; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14). Those who defend the universal scope of the new exodus include Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:469; Prigent, “L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean,” 197; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 85-91; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 206-208; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 118-119; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 81; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 361-362; etc. For Mounce, the text counters the exclusivism of Judaism where “the church was genuinely ecumenical, recognizing no national, political, cultural, or racial boundaries” (*Book of Revelation*, 136). The ecumenical aspect of the mission of the Church is also captured in Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 81. Beale takes the phrase to suggest “not the

of redeeming the church from all the nations, has the aim of bringing all the nations to repentance and the worship of God.”²⁵⁰

The anticipation of the eschatological victory is crystallized in the universal praise of Rev 5:13c, ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, be praise and honor and glory and power for ever. Revelation 5 ends also on a worship note involving again the heavenly court of the earlier chapter but “myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” of angels have joined in to offer a praise of cosmic proportion to the Lamb’s victory.²⁵¹ As Beale put it, “This scene anticipates the universal acclamation to be offered at the consummation of all things. . . . Rev. 5:9–12 and 5:13 are good examples respectively of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ time reference of chs. 4-5 in particular and of the Apocalypse in general.”²⁵²

As a celebration of redemption in the inauguration of Christ’s Sovereignty, the second part of the introductory vision creates a strong anticipation for the time of

redemption of all inhabitants of the earth without exception but all without distinction” (*The Book of Revelation*, 359). For an interesting reflection on universal salvation and paradoxical language, see Boring, *Revelation*, 226-231.

²⁵⁰Bauckham continued, “Thus God’s kingdom will come, not simply by the deliverance of the church and the judgment of the nations, but primarily by the repentance of the nations as a result of the church’s witness. It achieves this aim as the followers of the Lamb participate in his victory by their suffering witness” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 258).

²⁵¹Ibid., 169. Bauckham rightly noted that “worship is the response to God’s glory and his future coming and to the Lamb’s accomplishment, past, present, and future” (ibid.). Regarding the resolution of the theodicy of the Apocalypse, Tonstad asserts that, “The ceaseless acclaim of the heavenly beings proves that they, as witnesses to the conflict from its beginning, have been fully persuaded by the character and by the means of the One who sits on the throne (4.8-11; 5.9-14). If the theodicy in the book of Revelation is thought of in strict dictionary terms as ‘vindication of God’s justice in tolerating the existence of evil’ (*Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* [New York: Random House, 1997], 1335), God has, in the figure of the slaughtered Lamb, prevailed” (*Saving God’s Reputation*, 142).

²⁵²Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 365. Krodell asserted, “The homage of creation of v. 13 is itself the anticipation of the praise of the world to come (21:22–22:5). It is *not* an evaluation of the world’s *present state*. But ‘in the Spirit’ (4:2) John sees and hears in heaven that cosmic praise which on earth is yet to come” (his emphasis) (*Revelation*, 168). Osborne suggested that “eschatology is the message of 5:1-4, the deep desire to see the seals opened and the scroll detailing the end of this age and final triumph of God finally opened” (*Revelation*, 266).

consummation. The achievement of the work of Christ in chap. 5 is expressed, as Bauckham put it well, “in the combination of the two motifs of messianic war and new exodus.”²⁵³ A third major motif is also implicitly added to inspire the role that the church, as the eschatological people of God, has to play in the universal coming of the kingdom: Christ as the faithful witness.²⁵⁴ With the assurance of final victory conveyed in the introductory vision, the sufferings of faithful witness are no longer meaningless.

Key Structural Location of the Fifth Seal

No real agreement exists among scholars on the extent of the coverage of the introductory vision in chaps. 4 and 5.²⁵⁵ However, the undisputed fact is that this vision governs at least the seals septet and, therefore, forms an important base for the interpretation of the individual removal of seals. Before drawing the theological implications related to the impact of the introductory vision for the significance of the fifth seal, I will review the key position of this text within its particular literary unit.

The simplest way to look at this structure is to break the literary unit of Rev 4-7 into a prelude, an introductory vision, the six seals, and the liturgical conclusion

²⁵³Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 75.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

²⁵⁵Scholars see the extended vision as lasting till 11:19 or 22:6 or some other point in the text. Christopher Rowland, for example, goes as far as regarding that the scene as “preparatory to the material which forms the core of the book, the sequence of seven seals, trumpets and bowls, all of which arise directly out of the events it describes” (*The Open Heaven*, 415). For Beasley-Murray these chapters “may be viewed as the fulcrum of the Revelation” (*The Book of Revelation*, 108). Minear claims “this vision serves to prepare for all the later visions” (*I Saw a New Earth*, 67). Corsini views the block of Rev 4 and 5 as an introduction to the seven seals which follow in chaps 6-8:1a (*The Apocalypse*, 118); whereas A. Yarbro Collins takes them as the beginning of an extended vision which lasts until 8:5 (*The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 32-34). Aune sees here the disclosure of God’s eschatological plans that run from 4:1 to 22:9 (*Revelation 1-5*, 266). For Ladd the first vision covers 4:1 to 16:21 (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 15, 70). Lohmeyer is probably right in holding that Rev 4 serves a double function, namely, (1) to preface the entire apocalyptic part of Revelation in general and, (2) to combine with Rev 5 as the introduction for the seven seals in particular (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 41).

including the seventh seal in an ABA' pattern.²⁵⁶ As far as the demarcation of the unit, Ernst R. Wendland suggested a contrastive inclusion from the fact that “a voice is heard in heaven (4: 1)—silence in heaven (8:1).”²⁵⁷ Based on common liturgical elements and similar settings, the rest of Rev 4-5 confirms, indeed, the idea of an *inclusio* with the closing scene of Rev 7:9-17, where a great multitude joins in the heavenly court in acclamation of the final victory to God and the Lamb.²⁵⁸ See table 2.

²⁵⁶I am indebted for the chiasmic structure to Jean-Pierre Charlier who, however, excluded chap. 4 as part of the inaugural vision (*Comprendre l'Apocalypse*, 1:150); and to Ekkehardt Müller, who yet does not single out the fifth seal as the apex of the chiasm (*Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, 287). Otherwise, the general outline for this septet, according to K. Strand, includes (1) an introduction (Rev 4-5), (2) six unsealings (Rev 6 in composition of 4+2 and +1 later), (3) an interlude (Rev 7), and (4) the seventh seal (Rev 8:1) (“The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 25 [1987]: 112).

²⁵⁷Ernst R. Wendland, “7 X 7 (X7): A Structural and Thematic Outline of John’s Apocalypse,” *Occasional Paper in Translation and Textlinguistics* 4 (1990): 378.

²⁵⁸About the beginning and end of the vision, Michel Gourgues notes that 4-5 and 7b both have their setting in heaven with quite a few common elements (“‘L’Apocalypse’ ou ‘les trois apocalypses’ de Jean?” *ScEs* 35 [1983]: 305-306). Further on this parallel, see Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium*, 89. See table 1.

Table 1. Common motifs from introductory and concluding vision

Motifs	Beginning <i>(Rev 4, 5)</i>	End <i>(Rev 7:9-17)</i>
The throne of God	4:2-10	7:9, 10, 15
The angels around the throne	5:11	7:11
The elders	4:4, 10; 5:5-14	7:11, 13
The 4 living creatures	4:6-9; 5:6, 8, 11	7:11
The Lamb in the midst of the throne	5:6-8; 12ff.	7:12
The same praise	4:11	7:12

Table 2. Thematic parallels between introductory and concluding vision

The Introductory Vision		The Concluding Vision
<i>Rev 4</i>	<i>Rev 5</i>	<i>Rev 7:9-8:1</i>
John's ascent (vv. 1-2a)	John's vision of scroll (v. 1)	Introductory formula (v. 9a)
Display of the Enthroned and his court (vv. 2b-8b)	Display of sealed scroll and quest for its opening (vv. 2-5)	Display of triumphant throng in heavenly court (vv. 9b; 13-17)
Acclamation of God's Sovereign Lordship (vv. 8c-9)	Acclamation of worthiness of the Lamb (vv. 6-10)	Acclamation of victory to God and Lamb (v. 10)
Response of heavenly court (vv. 10-11)	Response of heavenly court (vv. 11-14)	Response of heavenly court + the great multitude (vv. 11-12)

Further, the fifth seal is couched between the first four seals, which present characteristics of earthly plagues, while the sixth seal is cosmic in nature, and the seals are also arranged in an ABA' pattern. Bringing everything together, Rev 4:1-8:1 presents itself as a kind of chiasmic structure with regard to the occurrence of hymns, events and the place of action, with the fifth seal as the focal point.²⁵⁹

- A The prelude and the inaugural vision (chaps. 4-5)
- B The first four seals (6:1-8)
- C The fifth seal (6:9-11)
- B' The sixth seal (6:12-17)
- A' The closing vision and the seventh seal (7:1-8:1)

At this stage, it is enough to note that the key position of the fifth seal is confirmed within the literary unit covering Rev 4-8:1. A direct literary relationship is

²⁵⁹Concerning the events and location, see table 3.

Table 3. Key position of fifth seal based on events and location

Events	Location
The introductory vision (Chaps. 4-5)	Heaven
The first four seals (6:1-8)	Earth
The fifth seal (6:9-11)	Earth/Heaven
The Sixth seal (6:12-17)	Earth
The closing vision and seventh seal (7:1-8:1)	Heaven

thus clearly recognized between this text and the introductory vision which comes with themes of reversal. Without presuming on what will be said in this discussion of the interaction with the succeeding context, it seems safe to say that in the vision of the fifth seal, the author looks back to the content of the introductory vision and the preliminary judgments, as well as forward to the final judgment and restoration themes.

The chiasm suggests that the crisis behind the fifth seal is important enough to elicit such a grandiose theological response that displays the sovereignty of God and Lamb through transcendent worship scenes. From this standpoint, where the true battle happens not on earth, but between God and Christ against Satan, the chiasm also provides the means to reinterpret the martyrs' earthly situation. They become aware of their roles in a cosmic drama, the outcome of which has already been settled by God's omnipotence.

Summary and Theological Implications

In a unique way, the introductory vision proclaims God as the Creator, great King, Judge, and Warrior. It displays a breakthrough for earth's history through the heavenly investiture of Christ's kingship and creates anticipation for the time of consummation.

1. Based on parallels with Dan 7, the opening vision has sometimes been viewed as a divine courtroom, end-time proceeding.²⁶⁰ However, no explicit language of judgment can actually be noted from the scene itself.²⁶¹ There the expectations for the

²⁶⁰Daniel 7 is a case where the suffering and persecution of the saints is expressed against the backdrop of the endtime sanctuary judgment. According to the Bible, this coincides with the end where God will settle all the scores and right all the wrongs committed against his children. For example, R. Dean Davis defended the idea that the heavenly assembly convenes for the purpose of installing an eschatological judge worthy to prosecute God's judgment on earth inhabitants (*The Heavenly Court Judgment of Revelation 4-5* [Lanham: University Press of America, 1992], 168-170). See also Jörns who stressed the theme of divine judgment in Rev 4 (*Das hymnische Evangelium*, 40-42).

²⁶¹As Jon Paulien rightly pointed out, "In fact, John selects throne room imagery from Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1-10 but avoids employing their judgment aspects" ("Seals and Trumpets," 193). Earlier, he

final judgment remain strangely unmet. “How long?” could apply to why the grand inauguration of Christ’s kingship, which entails judgment duties, is not yet carried to its consummation.²⁶²

2. The chiastic structure that shows the fifth seal from below somehow triggers the display of a grand theological response from above in the introductory vision.²⁶³ This is perhaps because the conflict of sovereignties between Christ and Caesar is only a projection in human history of another conflict far larger in scope: the contest between the rightful lordship of Christ and the usurped lordship of Satan.²⁶⁴ The query refers to how much longer the latter will appear to be winning the day.

3. The exaltation of the risen Christ and his heavenly installation offers a triumphal reinterpretation of the dead witnesses’ plight on earth. The faithful witnesses’ death is greatly enhanced by the example of Christ. Persecution no longer means defeat.

noted perceptively that the common denominator among the Hebrew Bible background to chaps. 4 and 5 “is not judgment but a description of God’s throne” (ibid., 187).

²⁶²Paulien added, “It seems inconceivable that Revelation 4-5 could be the end-time judgment scene when that judgment has not yet begun even by the time the fifth seal is opened” (“Seals and Trumpets,” 193). About the expectation of judgment in the hymns or prayers, Giblin noted that this does not appear until the martyrs call for judgment in 6:10 (*The Book of Revelation*, 34).

²⁶³For a discussion of John’s literary technique of the above/below point of view, see Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 43.

²⁶⁴See Paulien who suggested that “the grand introductory scene (Rev 4-5) impresses upon us that the scenes that follow are a visible and earthly *expression* of the invisible and heavenly conflict between Christ and Satan” (“Seven Seals,” 238). See also the influential article by Aune who asserted that Rev 4-5 deliberately draws from the imperial court to contrast the superiority of God over that of Caesar (“Influence of the Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” 5-26). Regarding the impact of the combat motif in Rev 4 and 5 on the conflict in fifth seal, the chief contention of the chapters is the sovereignty of God and Christ. The combat motif may not be predominant throughout 4:1-11, but it appears consistently. God’s power is illustrated in the sea of glass (4:6; cf. 15:2) and seismic activity (4:5; cf. 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). In 5:1-14, the war motif is more pronounced. On this matter, Bauckham wrote, “And so in effect it contested on earth the divine sovereignty which John sees acknowledged in heaven in chapter 4. The coming of God’s kingdom on earth, must therefore be the replacement of Rome’s pretended divine sovereignty by the true divine sovereignty of the One who sits on the heavenly throne” (*Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 34). Paul Minear also addressed the issue of sovereignties in conflict (*I Saw a New Earth*, 228-234).

“How long?” questions in particular the end of the temporary triumphs of evil.

4. Sacrificial witnessing provides special meaning for the mission of the church in advancing the reign of Christ. Just like the kingship of Christ was inaugurated by the death of the “Faithful Witness” par excellence, its extension and consummation on earth occur by the same kind of radical witnessing as indicated by Rev 6:11.²⁶⁵ Rather, their deaths are an integral part of God’s mysterious plan of salvation.

5. Worship is a fitting response to the affirmation of God’s Sovereignty and to the investiture of the Davidic messiah as the conquering King who will judge all the world. From then on, as Bauckham noted, “every stage of God’s victory—through chapter 1-19—is accompanied by worship in heaven.”²⁶⁶ As the universal acclamation anticipates the consummation of all things, the “How long?” could be nostalgic.

²⁶⁵Christ’s victory is that of sacrificial witnessing unto death which aims at bringing all nations to repentance and worship of God. Similarly, as Bauckham put it, when his followers “maintain their witness even to death and are seen to be vindicated as true witnesses, then their witness participates in the power of his (Christ’s) witness to convert the nations” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 281). He insisted that because the decisive battle in God’s eschatological war against all evil, including the power of Rome, had been won by the faithful witness and sacrificial death of Jesus, the triumphant messianic army consists of followers of the Lamb who participate in his victory by following his path to death. Further, “the victory does not consist in their mere death as such, but in the faithful witness to the point of death (2:13; 11:7) following in the path of Jesus whom Revelation 1:5 calls ‘the faithful witness’. The value of their witness is derivative from his, it is maintaining his witness, and so the victory of their faithful witness as far as death is derivative from his victory” (ibid., 228-229). For Reddish, John keeps the image of Christ as the conquering warrior or the glorified Lord in tension with the martyr figure in order to motivate Christians to take their witness seriously. He suggested that Revelation contains a martyr Christology in which Christ is portrayed as a proto-martyr in order to encourage the hearers to endure in the face of persecution (“Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse,” 85-95). About the scroll, Brighton reached a somewhat similar conclusion that “*the most important part of the message concerns Christ’s present and future reign in glory and the current faith and mission of the church in the midst of all the agony and death throes of the human race and its history [emphasis his]*” (*Revelation*, 139).

²⁶⁶Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 34-35. Bauckham added, “In the end, the book is about the incompatibility of the exclusive monotheistic worship portrayed in chapter 4 with every kind of idolatry—political, social and economic idolatries from which more narrowly religious idolatry is inseparable” (ibid., 35).

“How Long?” and the Structural Parallels

Following the opening vision are the seals which are, as Minear put it, “various descriptions of a single set of consequences released by the Lamb’s victory.”²⁶⁷ In the first four seals (6:1-8), commands are issued by the four living creatures that release different horses and riders bearing some similarities to that in Zech 1 and 6. Content-wise, the seals display characteristics that resemble the Synoptic Apocalypse. For added perspectives on the delay in the fifth seal, I will now turn to the intertextual conversation with the Old Testament structural parallels and the synoptic parallels.

“How Long?” and the Old Testament Structural Parallels

The symbolism of the variously colored horses as depicted in the first four seals follows the pattern of a blended version of the two nocturnal visions of Zech (1:7-15 and 6:1-8). However, the order and color are not a perfect match since the rides of the cavaliers are red, sorrel, and white in Zech 1; red, black, white, and grey in Zech 6, and white, red, black, and pale in Rev 6.²⁶⁸ The color of the horses and the object of their respective riders seem to match the nature of their mission.²⁶⁹ In Zech 1 and 6, both the

²⁶⁷Minear, *I Saw a New Earth*, 74.

²⁶⁸The color of the last horse in Revelation seems to be an interpretation of the difficult עָרֵבָה, reddish-brown (LXX: ψαροί, dappled-grey) (Zech 1:8) and אֶמְצִים בְּרָדִים, strong dappled (LXX: ποικίλοι ψαροί, spotted dappled-grey) (Zech 6:3) with an equally obscure pale-green or grayish color. W. D. McHardy suggested that the Hebrew יֶרֶק may also have influenced John’s interpretation γλωρός, pale, pale yellow, or greenish-yellow (“The Horses in Zechariah,” in *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, ed. Matthew Black and Georg Fohrer, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 103 [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968]: 177).

²⁶⁹As Austin Farrer put it, “The horsemen of Zechariah are distinguished from one another by the colour of their mounts, and by nothing else. Zechariah’s text is, however, somewhat confused. Red, black, and white are mentioned; so is dapple-grey. St John rearranges them to suit his scheme. White for victory, red for slaughter; black must do for famine (we read of blackened faces, where famine coincides with a scorching drought). To get a colour for pestilence, St John gives the forced description of dapple-grey” (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 99).

horses and the chariots appear to act as servants of Yahweh.

Following right after the four horses as in Zech 1, the “How long?” query of the fifth seal echoes that of Zechariah as it voices a call on behalf of God’s oppressed people. In Zechariah, the disappointment for God’s chosen people springs out of the report of the horsemen “inasmuch as it told of rest and quiet, whereas the ‘shaking of all nations’ was the predicted sign of returning favour to Zion (Hag. 2:7, 21, 22).”²⁷⁰ Even if John switches the voice of the outcry from the Angel to that of the slaughtered witnesses, God responds directly with an encouraging word of comfort in both cases.

With the horse imagery, the idea of warfare is further confirmed where both Rev 6 and Zech 1 reflect indeed a situation of oppression of God’s covenant people by foreign rule. As Lenski reminded us, “in the Orient the ass and the camel are the animals used for transportation. Horses are connected with war, conquest, triumph.”²⁷¹ Similarly concerning the chariot of Zech 6, Joyce Baldwin noted that they “formed the storm troops in ancient warfare.”²⁷² Furthermore, other Hebrew Bible passages like Ezek 38:4, 15; 39:20 also support the idea of war horses as symbols for the eschatological battles.

²⁷⁰T. T. Perowne, *Haggai and Zechariah, with Notes and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), 71.

²⁷¹Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 220. Otto Michel suggested that horses and chariots form the core of the armies of Israel, Syria, Assyria, and Persia. Horses were especially valued for their speed and strength (cf. Job 39:19ff.). God’s power is sometimes depicted in terms of horsemen and chariots (2 Kgs 2:11; 6:17). However, the horse can also symbolize an alien power in which Israel should not confide in (Ps 76:6; Hos 1:7) (“ἵππος,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 3:336). About the horsemen of Revelation, Buchanan said, “[They] had a different mission—one that would please the holy war theologian. Each horse reported something that indicated a time of war: The first one went out with a bow and arrows to fight. The second took peace from the land and destined people to slaughter one another in war. The third indicated a shortage of grain which made prices soar. There would be famine, because the fields were left unplanted or were destroyed in war. The fourth horseman would bring pestilence, plaguing the nation with disease” (*The Book of Revelation*, 154).

²⁷²Joyce G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972), 96.

In Zech 1, the riders are sent by Yahweh on a patrol mission around the earth, but their function in Rev 6 is much more sinister. From Zech 1:15, as Joyce Baldwin noted, “it is evident that the earth’s peace was the result of injustice and inhumanity.”²⁷³

Contrasting the assignment of the horsemen of Zech 1 and Rev 6, John M. Court wrote,

There may well be some irony in the reapplication of Zechariah’s ‘peaceful patrols’ and ‘messengers of promise’ to the subject-matter of the Apocalypse. It seems likely that John has worked up the details of the picture far more deliberately in his symbolism than was the case with this imagery in its original context in the visions of Zechariah.²⁷⁴

Following the pattern of the initial red horse of Zech 1, the opening of the first seal also reveals a white horse that appears as the leader for the rest of the horsemen. The only action related to this lead figure in Rev 6 is described in terms of “conquering and to conquer” (6:2).²⁷⁵ Some scholars have argued that this first rider is a figure of the antichrist,²⁷⁶ but Cullman and others seemed more consistent with the symbols used throughout the book when they interpreted this horseman as representing “the preaching

²⁷³Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 96.

²⁷⁴Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, 58.

²⁷⁵In the phrase, νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ, conquering and to conquer, the participle plus the purpose phrase is awkward. J. Massyngberde Ford saw here the idea of continuance in the sense of conquering continually (*Revelation*, 106); Lenski viewed it as to “completely conquer, with finality” (*Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 223); whereas Alford applied the purpose clause, “in order to conquer,” to a victory that lasts forever (“Ἀποκαλύψεις Ἰωαννου,” 4:613).

²⁷⁶For an exegetical defense of the first seal as representing Antichrist and the forces of evil, see Mathias Rissi, “The Rider on the White Horse: A Study of Revelation 6:1-8,” *Int* 18 (1964): 407-418; Mathias Rissi, *Time and History* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1966), 72-73. For others who hold negative views of the white horse, see Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 517-519; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 80-81; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 141-142; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 86; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 126-127; A. Feuillet, “Le premier cavalier de l’Apocalypse,” *ZNTW* 57 (1966): 258-259; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The First Horseman of Revelation 6,” *BSac* 153 (1996): 212-226; and Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 375-379.

of the gospel in the world.”²⁷⁷ Paulien convincingly argued that “although the Greek word for ‘conquering’ is used to refer to the beasts and their persecution of the saints, the more *immediate* context of 6:2 is the ‘conquering’ of Christ on the cross (5:5, 6, 9; cf. 3:21), which provides the basic substance of the gospel proclamation.”²⁷⁸

The coverage of the horsemen visions in Zech 6 suggests the idea of universality. According to Zech 6:5, the horses or carriages symbolize “the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all of the earth.”²⁷⁹ Their mission is to execute judgment upon Babylon, Egypt, and the other nations of the world.

²⁷⁷Oscar Cullman, “Eschatology and Missions in the New Testament,” in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube in honour of C. H. Dodd (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 415-421. This can be deduced from a number of factors: First, throughout Revelation, white is a positive color (see Paulien, “Seven Seals,” 228). J. C. Poirier agreed that this figure is not to be identified with the Antichrist. In Poirier’s estimate, “he is instead cast in the drama as heaven’s avenger, with a wholly positive role in God’s plan” (“The First Rider: A Response to Michael Bachmann,” *NTS* 45 [1999]: 261). Further, *Sanhedrin* 93a distinguished red, yellow, and white horses and said that the appearance of a white horse is a favorable sign. Second, the rider has features that parallel those of the conquering Rider of 19:11 who is clearly identified as Christ the “Word of God.” See Z. C. Hodges, “The First Horseman of the Apocalypse,” *BSac* 119 (1962): 324-334; and Michael Bachmann, “Die Apokalyptischen Reiter: Dürers Holzschnitt und die Auslegungsgeschichte von Apk 6,1-8,” *ZTK* 86 (1989): 33-58. Third, the rider bears the characteristic of the Messianic king of Ps 45 which is normally applied to Christ. See William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1940), 113-118. Fourth, some of the differences in the features noted between the first rider of Rev 6 and that of Rev 19 may be simply accounted for by the contextual difference of inaugurated victory in chap. 6 and realized victory in chap. 19 (see *ibid.*, 229). Fifth, the mention of a bow (symbol of victory) without the arrow implies victory by peaceful means. And last, according to Mark 13:10, the gospel must first be preached to all nations before the Messianic woes begin. For ancient commentators who supported the identification of the first rider with Christ and the victory of the gospel, see Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.21.3; Victorinus, *In Apocalypsim* 6:9-11; *Explanatio Apocalypsis* 2.6. For other modern scholars defending this view, see Alford, “Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωαννου,” 614; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 222-223; Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 352; Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 143-144; Charlier, *Comprendre l’Apocalypse*, 168-170; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 96-98; Joseph Considine, “The Rider on the White Horse,” *CBQ* 6 (1944): 406-422; Stanislas Giet, *L’Apocalypse et l’histoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), 151; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 224; Allo defended the idea that the preaching of the gospel before the end is the prominent element in the synoptic apocalypse (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 91-102).

²⁷⁸Paulien, “Seven Seals,” 228.

²⁷⁹Commenting on this verse, Baldwin stated that “the steeds are, like the winds, God’s messengers (Ps. 104:4), and like the winds they travel over the face of the whole earth. All the earth belongs to the Lord whether the inhabitants acknowledge Him or not, and He gives orders concerning it all” (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 131).

The universal coverage of the riders is confirmed by the fact that the colors stand for the four points of the compass (Zech 6:6). It is likely that the same idea might be present in Rev 6 too, where the whole earth is afflicted by the warning judgments of the riders.

Importantly, A. J. P. Garrow also noted the possibility that “the use of ‘a fourth’ refers to commission to the riders to warn one quadrant of the earth each, so that the whole earth has an opportunity to repent before the final judgments contained in the scroll are executed.”²⁸⁰ Building on this and the idea of the gathering of the nations initiated by Rev 5:9, Bauckham argued that the purpose of these limited judgments was tied to the attempt to bring sinful humanity to repentance. He added, “This becomes clear in 9:20-21, which indicates that they have failed in this purpose.”²⁸¹

From these observations, it is hard to imagine, in the words of Prigent, John

²⁸⁰A. J. P. Garrow, *Revelation* (London: Routledge, 1997), 18. See Roloff who believed that the motif of the horses or carriages arose from ancient cosmological ideas which presumably were taken up by John “because from its origin it was suited to illustrate the fact that all regions of the world, or all four directions of heaven, are affected by the plagues. Similarly to that, he has the four riders dispatched by the four creatures at the throne of God, who symbolize the rule of God over the world in their delivery to all four directions of heaven (cf. at 4:6-7)” (*The Revelation of John*, 85-86). Otherwise, the other possibility would be to refer the idea of “a fourth” to the increasing intensity of destruction within the other cycles of judgment as other scholars did. For example, Mounce asserted that “the fourth seal affects ‘the fourth part of the earth’ (6:8), the trumpets destroy a third (8:7, 8, 10, 12), and the destruction by the bowls is complete and final (16:1ff.)” (*Book of Revelation*, 155). So Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 81, 104; Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 125; and Sweet, *Revelation*, 178.

²⁸¹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 258. About the preliminary nature of the judgment depicted by the seals and the salvific intent, see Charles Brüttsch who said, “Comme nulle précision ne permet de localiser les événements décrits, il convient sans doute d’y reconnaître une première série générale des principaux jugements divins; ceux-ci visitent périodiquement l’humanité et annoncent la fin du monde, telle que la Bible l’envisage, en ses grandes lignes. Le jugement dernier, d’envergure mondiale, est précédé de verdicts partiels jalonnant les siècles et destinés à réveiller les consciences” (*La Clarté de l’Apocalypse*, 5th ed. [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1966], 119). He also believed that the seals are warnings designed to promote change (ibid., 263). Cf. Mounce who talked about “a series of preliminary judgments representing forces operative throughout history by means of which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God are being carried out prior to the end” (*Book of Revelation*, 139). Allo thought that “Jean voit idéalement, et d’une manière encore générale et confuse, se préparer au ciel les jugements divins, avant d’avoir la vision détaillée de leur réalisation sur la terre (VIII-XI)” (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 85). Osborne referred the seals to “preliminary judgments on the whole world that prepare for the trumpets, and bowls” (*Revelation*, 269). So Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie*, 203, and Boring, *Revelation*, 119.

writing Rev 6:1-8 without having the two visions of Zechariah in mind.²⁸² John clearly alludes to Zech 1 and 6 for the images of horses or colors even if he alters somewhat the original visions to suit his own purposes. He borrows terms, themes, context, and structure from Zech 1 and 6 to provide a scene that describes the coming appearance of God on earth. The horse imagery suggests some form of endtime divine endeavors into human affairs on an international scale. Although raised by differing subjects—the martyred saints in Revelation and the Angels in Zechariah—the “How long?” query stresses in both contexts the vindication of God’s name through his response to his people’s oppression.

“How Long?” and the Curses of the Covenant

In contrast to the visions of Zechariah, the activity of the last three horsemen of Rev 6 appears to be a follow-up on the covenant theme raised by the scroll. This seems

²⁸²Prigent, “Il est difficile d’imaginer notre auteur écrivant Ap. 6,1-8 sans avoir les deux visions de Zacharie présentes à l’esprit” (*L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 204). The majority of commentators agreed about the presence of Zech 1 and 6 in Rev 6; see D. W. Hadorn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 18 (Leipzig, Germany: Deichert, 1928), 83; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 86-88; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 264; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 59; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 174; Alford, “Ἀποκαλύπτεις Ἰωαννοῦ, 4:612; F. F. Bruce, “Revelation to John,” 643; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 131; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 140; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 389; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:472; and J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 103-104. The idea that John transforms the images of Zechariah into new presentations which have little in common with Zechariah’s original vision is defended by R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:161-162, and Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation*, 162. Those who defended the primacy of a Zech 6 background in Rev 6 include Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 372; Leon Morris, *Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 103; and Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 115; whereas Marco Jauhiainen was more convincing in his arguments in favor of not overlooking Zech 1:8-17: “First, the fact that John sees horsemen rather than chariots naturally forms a stronger link with Zech 1. Second, both Rev 6 and Zech 1 reflect a situation where the nations have the upper hand over the people of God, and there is the question of when the roles will be reversed. In both contexts, the description of the horses is also followed by the cry, ‘How long?’ Third, unlike the chariots in Zech 6, the horsemen of Rev 6 are not appeasing God’s wrath. Indeed, in contrast to various other calamities in Revelation nothing is said regarding the targets or purpose of the horsemen” (*The Use of Zechariah in Revelation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 199 [Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005], 64).

to correspond to that of agents of judgment assigned to reinforce the covenant curses that originate from the Holiness Code of the Pentateuch (Lev 26:21-26 especially) which is also reproduced in Deut 32 and 33.²⁸³ Rewards and punishments are indeed offered there as consequences for obedience and disobedience to its stipulations and “war, famine and pestilence” appear as the penalty covenant rupture.²⁸⁴ Of significance to the series of seven judgments, the phrase “I will punish you for your sins seven times over” recurs four times (Lev 25:18; 21; 24; 28) as a means to bring God’s people to repentance.

In the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Bible, the concept turned into stereotyped images for the covenant woes that expressed God’s judgment upon Israel’s failure to repent from apostasy, a judgment that climaxed into the Babylonian exile (cf. Jer 15:2-3; Ezek 5:12-17; 14:12-23; Hab 3:2-16), as seen above, where the nations had the upper hand over Israel. In most cases, the object of these punishments is the chosen people who are being judged for their unfaithfulness to the covenant relationship with God.

However, upon their repentance, Yahweh punishes those who shed their blood.²⁸⁵

²⁸³See Paulien, “Seven Seals,” 222; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 219-220. Gordon Campbell also developed the covenantal nature of the series of sevens in Rev 1-16, and argued that these septets constitute “*mini covenant lawsuits*.” He proposed that Lev 26 serves as a *Vorlage* for the four septets of judgment regarding covenant rupture” (emphasis his) (“Findings, Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls: Variations upon the Theme of Covenant Rupture and Restoration in the Book of Revelation,” *WTJ* 66 [2004]: 67, 72). For commentators who viewed Lev 26 as the background for the series of seven judgments, see e.g., Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 373; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 282.

²⁸⁴In addition to those four classic curses mentioned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, D. Stuart showed that they were not the exclusive ones and provided a broader list of covenant curses (*Hosea-Jonah*, Word Biblical Commentary 31 [Waco: Word Books, 1987], xxxiii–xxxix). J. Potin believes that the plagues related to the first seals that originate from Jewish tradition about the judgments that threaten the transgressors of the Ten Commandments: for the sixth, the sword; for the seventh, pestilence/death; for the eighth, famine; for the ninth, often wild beasts; for the tenth, famine or captivity” (*La fête juive de la Pentecôte* [Paris: Cerf, 1971], 1: 96-100). See also Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation*, 169-171.

²⁸⁵About the redemptive and salvific motive of the judgments, L. E. Cooper wrote, “Therefore God was zealous to judge the people and vindicate his holiness and righteousness. His zeal works two ways to promote redemption. It moves him to punish sin so people will know he is not indifferent to unrighteousness, and it moves him to redeem and restore a remnant lest the unbelieving nations should

Revelation 6 is heavily influenced by similar passages, especially in Ezekiel. In Ezek 5:12-17, Yahweh predicts that his wrath will fall upon Jerusalem and his own people and that a third of the people will die by plague and famine, a third will die by the sword, and a third will be scattered to the winds. Ezekiel 14:12-23 is also seminal for the first four seals. As Beale put it, “Ezek. 14:21 is explicitly quoted in Rev. 6:8b, where it functions as a general summary of the preceding trials of conquest, sword, and famine, the first two of which include ‘death.’”²⁸⁶ Yet, hope beyond God’s judgment is relayed through the survival of a small remnant as a cause for consolation in vv. 22-23.²⁸⁷

However, with the mounting injustice at the time the exile, God’s judgments would be reversed and turn increasingly against the nations who were afflicting his people. As seen above, the Hebrew Bible references, such as Jer 25:12; 50, 51; and Dan 9:2, indicate that the reversal from the curses is expected to occur at the end of seventy years of captivity. Zechariah 1:8-17 and 6:1-8 happen to mark the dramatic turning point in that process. The basic message of the visions is one of comfort and assurance because the time of the restoration of the temple, the cities, and the prosperity of God’s people is imminent.²⁸⁸

question his faithfulness” (*Ezekiel*, New American Commentary 17 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 104). See also G. A. Cooke, who identified these two opposite actions as ones that reveal God’s zeal to accomplish the redemption of the non-Hebrew nations (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, International Critical Commentary 21 [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1937], 1:61).

²⁸⁶Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 372.

²⁸⁷Allen pointed out, “However, it would not be a case of human love bringing a measure of consolation. Rather, the factor of consolation is raised to a divine plane, the exiles’ coming to understand the will of God and the constraint that triggered his radical action” (*Ezekiel 1-19*, 220).

²⁸⁸About this turning point, R. L. Smith wrote, “Even though no visible signs of the intervention of Yahweh on behalf of his people were evident at this time, the message of Yahweh was clear—the long night of waiting (‘seventy years’) was over. Yahweh still had compassion and was jealous for Israel” (*Micah–Malachi*, 191).

Helpful are two patterns observed by Musvosvi from the Hebrew Bible that enlighten the vengeance expectations of the fifth seal. The first is associated with persecution and vengeance related to Israel's troubles and deliverances: "(1) Covenant broken by Israel; (2) God exacts vengeance on the covenant violators, usually by sending foreign armies; (3) the call for and performing of repentance on Israel's part; and (4) God brings vengeance upon those who shed Israel's blood."²⁸⁹ The other scenario relates to the persecution of prophets where the idea of covenant rupture is absent: "(1) giving God's message (witness); (2) persecution on account of righteousness; (3) call for vengeance (Jer 20:12; Dan 3:17); and (4) implied or stated promise of vengeance."²⁹⁰

The relationship between the first and the next three seals is inspired by a new referent with regard to the blessing-curse of the covenant. As Paulien pointedly noted,

In the NT context, of course, the covenant is to be understood in terms of the proclamation of the gospel of what God has done in Christ. The New Israel in Christ (5:9-10) conquers when it reckons itself into the victory of its commander, the slain Lamb. But failure to appropriate the gospel produces inevitable and ever-increasing consequences.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹Musvosvi, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse," 153. Tremper Longman suggested a somewhat similar pattern with respect to the Divine Warrior motif in the light of the covenant theology in the Hebrew Bible, "God has covenanted with his people and this relates to his warring activity in two ways: (a) Covenants have been successfully related to Ancient Near Eastern treaties. In these treaties the vassal promises to give up an independent foreign policy on the condition that the sovereign protect him and defend him. Yahweh (or in the case of the NT, Christ) has covenanted with his people. He has pledged to protect them. Thus, Israel's enemies become his enemies (Psalm 83). When Israel is attacked by a foreign power, the sovereign, Yahweh, responds by protecting his people. (b) In covenant treaties, there is a curse section. If the vassal breaks the covenant, the sovereign executes the sanctions against him. If Israel breaks covenant, the covenant curses become effective. Thus we find in the OT that when Israel breaks covenant, Yahweh, the Divine Warrior, attacks his own people" ("The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif," *WTJ* 44 [1982]: 307, n. 37). If this background is accepted, Grant R. Osborne was perhaps right in asserting that the martyred saints "are reminding God of his covenant obligations and asking for vengeance, namely for the covenant curses to be poured out on those earth-dwellers who have rejected God and killed his people" ("Moving Forward on Our Knees: Corporate Prayers in the New Testament," *JETS* 53 [2010]: 266).

²⁹⁰Musvosvi, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse," 154.

²⁹¹Paulien, "Seven Seals," 224.

About the rarer occurrences of vengeance prayers in the New Testament, Aune noted that this is due to their association, “not with the blessing-curse alternatives of covenant theology but with the proclamation of the gospel and the eschatological judgment.”²⁹²

The issue of the focus of the seals judgment is not easily resolved. It is clear that the people of God have a share in the sufferings recorded in Rev 6:1-8.²⁹³ A. Johnson applied the first four seals primarily to the new covenant community in the sense of “conflicts directed at Christians to test them and to sift out false disciples (6.10).”²⁹⁴ Beale first suggested that the purpose of the horsemen is “to judge unbelievers who persecute Christians and in order to vindicate his people,”²⁹⁵ but then added that “the church community is the focus of the judgments [too].”²⁹⁶ Reacting against such a position, Pattemore insisted on the following caveat:

Thus although the origin of the four-fold punishments lies in the covenant relationship between God and his people, well before John’s time they have become conventional symbols of God’s response to human rebellion. God’s people may share them by virtue of their membership in the human race, but they are not the particular focus.²⁹⁷

²⁹²Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 410.

²⁹³Pattemore rightly noted that this may be supported “by the observation that throughout these verses John avoids the use of the phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, which he typically uses for unbelieving humanity” (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 71). See Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8. Also Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 148-149.

²⁹⁴A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:473. He quickly added that “this interpretation need not necessarily eliminate the fact that the seals may also refer to judgment on mankind in general. . . . Each of them unleashes events that separate false belief from true. The destruction of Jerusalem is a case in point (Luke 21:20ff.). The white horse is released to conquer. As he goes forth, judgment falls on the unbelief of Israel (Luke 21:22-23), while at the same time there is a testing of believers to separate the chaff from the wheat (cf. Luke 21:12-19)” (ibid.). Buchanan restricted the application to God’s people of the old covenant, “The author assumed that the tribulations he and his contemporary Jews were suffering were deserved punishments for having broken their contract with the Lord” (*The Book of Revelation*, 174).

²⁹⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 372.

²⁹⁶Ibid., 372-373.

²⁹⁷Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 73.

“How Long?” and Synoptic Apocalypse Parallels

It is the Lamb who opens the seals (6:1) and thereby sets in motion “the beginnings of the birthpangs.” The content of the seals septet corresponds to the eschatological discourse of Jesus recorded in Mark 13 and parallels. For Charles, “the more we study the Seals in connection with Mark xiii., Matt. xxiv., and Luke xxi., the more strongly we shall be convinced that our author finds his chief authority in the eschatological scheme set forth there.”²⁹⁸ Since Charles, the development of this

²⁹⁸R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:158. The results are presented in table 4.

Table 4. Parallelism between synoptic gospels and Revelation 6

<hr/> Matthew 24:6,7, 9 ^a , 29	<hr/> Mark 13:7-9 ^a , 24-25
1. Wars 2. International strife 3. Famines 4. Earthquakes 5. Persecutions 6. Eclipses of the sun and moon, falling of the stars, shaking of the powers of heaven	1. Wars 2. International strife 3. Earthquakes 4. Famines 5. Persecutions 6. (As in Matthew)
<hr/> Luke 21:9-12 ^a , 25-26	<hr/> Revelation 6
1. Wars 2. International strife 3. Earthquakes 4. Famines 5. Pestilence 6. Persecutions 7. Signs in the sun, moon, and stars; men fainting for fear of the things coming on the world; shaking of the power of heaven	1. Wars // Spread of Gospel 2. International strife//wars 3. Famine 4. Pestilence (=Death and Hades) 5. Persecutions and witness 6. Earthquakes, eclipse of the sun, ensanguining of the moon, falling of the stars, men calling on the rocks to fall on them, shaking of the powers of heaven

Matthew’s list is nearly identical to Mark’s, whereas Luke’s differs slightly. For a rebuttal on the distinction between warfare (1st seal) and international strife (2nd seal), see Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 91; for the illustrative function of Mark 13:8a, see George R. Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (London: Macmillan, 1957), 38. For obvious reasons, John moved the “great earthquake” to the end of the septet (6:12-17), even though the earthquakes are mentioned prior to the famines in the Synoptic apocalypse. The position of the earthquake is not driven merely by the aim of regrouping cosmic signs together, but it is the sign *par excellence*, as will be shown further, that marks the conclusion of this age.

parallelism with the Olivet discourse has also been noted by many expositors.²⁹⁹

The seals symbolize perhaps the primary result of the events of the inauguration of Christ depicted in Rev 4 and 5 and raise anticipations for the time of consummation. As Bandy put it, they “represent the continuous nature of the ‘already/not yet’ tensions characteristic of the intervening time between ‘this age’ and the consummation of the ‘age to come.’”³⁰⁰ The first four seals belong together because they are rather alike in structure and deal with earthly plagues which are caused by God as a prelude to the Last Judgment, which seemed to be the focus of the martyrs’ cry.

Seal 1 is positive, and the language of conquest probably refers best to the triumph of the gospel (Mark 13:10; Matt 24:14) by assimilation to the immediate context. Seals 2-3 deal with the evils of war, famine, and pestilence which form part of the

²⁹⁹See Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1965), 181-192; Loisy, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 142; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 231-252; Paulien, “Seven Seals, 225; Allo, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 90-92; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 139-140, 515; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:472-473; Krodel, *Revelation*, 170; D. Wenham, “The Rediscovery of Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse,” in *Gospel Perspectives 4: Rediscovery of Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse*, ed. D. Wenham and R. T. France (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1984), 296-307; Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, 286, also “The Use of Daniel in the Synoptic Eschatological Discourse and in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*, vol. 5, *Gospel Perspectives*, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield, England: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1984), 129-151; Sweet, *Revelation*, 135-136; Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 202-204; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 416; Schussler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 42, n. 1; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 95-109; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 129-130; Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, 48-52; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 172-190. For a much more radical thesis, see A. Wikenhauser, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Regensburg Neues Testament 9, 3rd ed. (Regensburg, Germany: Friedrich Pustet, 1959). He sees Mark 13 as standing behind the whole of the visionary portion of the Apocalypse. As an outline for Revelation, Farrer also turns to Mark 13 where he identifies the common idea of the “short time” before the end as the basis to understand the book. He emphasizes that the form of Revelation corresponds to the schema of the “Danielic half-week of tribulation” and the “eschatological discourse” of Mark 13 (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 5-19). He divides the end time into three periods of time which follow one another: (1) The “day of waiting of the saints” (chaps. 1-3; 4-7); (2) the “day of the usurpation of the Antichrist” (chaps. 8-14); and (3) the day of Christ” (chaps. 15-22) (*ibid.*, 31-32).

³⁰⁰Alan Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 197.

“normal” historical catastrophes.³⁰¹ Seal 4 could be viewed as a summary of the two previous seals. Seal 5 relates to persecution and witness; Seal 6 deals with “cosmic upheavals, signs in the sun, moon, and stars, resulting in the shaking of the powers of heaven and the distress of nations on earth.”³⁰² This can be tabulated as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Parallelism between Revelation 6 and the synoptic apocalypse

Revelation 6: 1-17	Synoptic Apocalypse
1. White horse: Bow, Crown, Conquest	1. Spread of Gospel, Mark 13:10
2. Red horse: Sword	2. Wars, Mark 13:7,8, 12
3. Black horse: Scales, Famine	3. Famines, Mark 13:8
4. Pale horse: Death and Hades	4. Pestilence, Luke 21:11
5. Dead witness: “How long?”	5. Persecutions and witness
6. Great earthquakes, Sun, moon and stars,	6. Earthquakes, Luke 21:11, Mark 13:8 Sun, moon, and stars affected, Mark 13:24-25
Fig tree—shaking of the powers of heaven	Fig tree—shaking of the powers of heaven, Mark 13:25, 28-29.

Thus, the six unsealings, uttered in the language of the eschatological woes, disclose the agencies by which God leads up the consummation of salvation and judgment.

The striking thematic parallels between the two texts suggest that the seals share the same pattern of judgment prior to the *parousia* as in the eschatological discourse of

³⁰¹See Boring, *Revelation*, 126. Also Brüttsch who argues, “Comme nulle précision ne permet de localiser les événements décrits, il convient sans doute d’y reconnaître une première série générale des principaux jugements divins; ceux-ci visitent périodiquement l’humanité et annoncent la fin du monde, telle que la Bible l’envisage, en ses grandes lignes. Le jugement *dernier*, d’envergure mondiale, est précédé de verdicts partiels jalonnant les siècles et destinés à réveiller les consciences” [As no precision is given to locate the events described, it is probably appropriate to recognize a first general series of major divine judgments; those periodically visit humanity and announce the end of the world, as intended by the Bible, in broad outline. The last judgment, of global proportion, is preceded by partial verdicts spread over centuries and intended to awaken consciences.] (*La Clarté de l’Apocalypse*, 119).

³⁰²Krodel, *Revelation*, 170.

Mark 13 and parallels.³⁰³ However, the language of Rev 6 does not show sufficient similarities and parallels to Mark 13 in order to infer a direct literary dependency as Charles does.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, as Reddish put it, “the similarity of the Gospel accounts to lists of eschatological woes found in earlier Jewish apocalypses indicates that such eschatological events were stock motifs of apocalyptic literature.”³⁰⁵

With the sixth seal, cosmic plagues are uncovered to describe the end. Before the concluding seal, an interlude is introduced which harks back to the fifth seal and anticipates subsequent key events. Finally, an emphatic seventh occurs and regularly “latches on to” or dovetails with the following section of Revelation.

Thus the vision of the seals parallels, both in content and order, the eschatological

³⁰³About the affinities between Mark and the author of Revelation, Norman Perrin noted that “both are experiencing a period of turmoil and an accompanying resurgence of apocalyptic; one because of the Jewish War and the other because of time of persecution of the church. Both address their readers directly out of their narrative: Mark by a parabolic discourse, sections of teaching on discipleship, an apocalyptic discourse, and so on; John of Patmos by letters to the churches and interpretations of his visions. Both have essentially the same purpose: to prepare their readers for the imminent Parousia” (*The New Testament, an Introduction: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976], 165).

³⁰⁴See R. H. Charles who supported a direct dependence on the “Gospel accounts or the tradition behind them” (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:159). The more popular view is that both accounts stem from a common apocalyptic tradition. In this regard, the view of Lohmeyer is typical: “Die nahe Verwandtschaft beider Schemata ist aber nicht durch literarische Abhängigkeit der Apc 6 von Mc 13 par zu erklären, sondern durch Verwendung einer beiden gemeinsamen apokalyptischen Tradition [There is no literary dependency between the Apocalypse and the Gospels in this respect, but that similarity is due to the utilization of a common apocalyptic tradition]” (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 55-56). Vos sees a common Christian tradition of the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus in the background (*The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse*, 181-192). See also Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 129.

³⁰⁵Reddish, *Revelation*, 124. In addition, Osborne believed that the seals, under the influence of Daniel and Zechariah as mediated through the intertestamental apocalypses, revealed “the end-time scenario being recapitulated from common themes like the idea of the persecution of God’s people, divine judgment on the evildoers (first four seals), and cosmic judgment preceding the eschaton (final three)” (*Revelation*, 269-271). Cf. Hartman who suggested that Mark 13 was a midrash based on Daniel (*Prophecy Interpreted*, 207). For him, “the main part of the eschatological discourse [in Mark 13 and parallels] is based on a coherent exposition of or meditation on texts from Daniel 7-9; 11-12” (*ibid.*, 158). The chief passages relating to the “signs of the end” are as follows: 1 *En.* 80:2-7; 99:4, 5, 8; 100:1-10; *Jub.* 23.13-25; *Sib. Or.* 3:538-571; 633-701; 796-828; 5:512-531; *As. Mos.* 8:1; 10:5; *Apoc. Ab.* 28-29; 2 *Bar.* 25-27; 32:1; 48:32-44; 70:2-10; 2 *Esd.* 5:1-12, 50-55; 6:21-24.

discourse of Christ in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, which points to events signaling the imminence in the establishment of the final messianic kingdom. As time progresses through the seals, Johnson rightly noted that there seems to be intensification in the imminence of Judgment.³⁰⁶ This is in keeping with the tension that runs throughout the whole of Revelation, namely, as Rissi said, “an expectation of a speedy End, an expectation full of enormous passion. The time is near and the delay is short (6:11; 12:12).”³⁰⁷

Summary and Theological Implications

As the Lamb initiates the scene of Rev 6, divine sovereignty comes to the forefront through the repeated use of the divine passive ἐδόθη, it was given (6:2, 4, 8).³⁰⁸ Even if the seals divulge disastrous situations such as war, bloodshed, famine, plagues, and cosmic upheavals, everything still stays under God’s control.

³⁰⁶A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12: 472. Giblin presented this intensification diagrammatically as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 (*The Book of Revelation*, 80).

³⁰⁷Rissi, *Time and History*, 112. Throughout Revelation, near is the End that will not only soon bring about Christ’s coming (1:3, 3:3; 16:15; 22:7, 10, 17, 20), but will also establish the elect who have waited for yet just a little while (6:11).

³⁰⁸This suggests, as Schüssler-Fiorenza put it, “John’s theological conviction that these calamities do not happen without the knowledge and authorization of God” (*Revelation*, 63). See Osborne, who entered an important caveat, “God does not need to command evil to do his will but simply allows it to operate” throughout the seals (*Revelation*, 271). In addition, Sweet underscored the fact that “the biblical writers do not distinguish between what God directly wills and what he allows—e.g., the consequences of human freedom to sin. . . . Against any sort of ‘dualism’—belief in two ultimate powers behind good and evil—they stoutly maintain God’s responsibility for everything (cf. 1:2; Isa 45:7; Amos 3:6)” (*Revelation*, 144). For Fee, “although this may be nothing more than a way of indicating that the horsemen had power to conquer, it seems highly likely, in light of 13:2, that John assumes Satan to be the actual giver of power; yet it is expressed in passives because nothing lies outside God’s own eternal sovereignty” (*Revelation*, 93). For the use of the passive voice to avoid the reference to the divine name, see F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1961), 130 (1), 313, 342 (1). For those who view the implied actor as God, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 377; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 81; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:473; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 142; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 389; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 101; etc.

1. The display of horses reveals processes of an eschatological war set in motion by the Christ event. Theologically, in the words of R. D. Patterson, “horses figure in the prophecies of eschatological times when the Davidic king will ride on horse and chariot before an obedient and righteous people (Jer 17:25; 22:4).”³⁰⁹ The completion of the four horses’ mission covering all the four parts of the earth would raise great expectations for the imminent coming of the Lion/Lamb king on earth.

2. With regard to the first-century ruler cult polemic, Schüssler-Fiorenza noted that the four riders disclose the true nature of Roman imperial power in its inevitable collapse.³¹⁰ The riders depict the expansionist imperial rule which is responsible for all the sufferings depicted in the seals. They are, perhaps, the type of the endtime oppressors.

3. The issue of the target of seals plague is complex. At first sight, it may be associated with the earth dwellers alone in the context of a climax of evil. Here, the apocalyptic pessimistic perspective could explain a radical dichotomy established between the dead witnesses and inhabitants of the earth prior to the final judgment.

4. The covenant rupture language could also include God’s people in the punishment of the plagues. With the above-noted issue of complacency, this could refer to a divine polemic against his chosen one in the light of God’s readiness as the Lord of

³⁰⁹R. D. Patterson, “סוס,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 620. Regarding the general significance of the seals, see J. Massyngberde Ford who claimed that chap. 6 “may comprise the beginning of a holy, or rather eschatological war” (*Revelation*, 101). In connection with the preceding enthronement celebration Paulien observes that “the seals of chapter 6 have to do with the ongoing period in which God’s people are in the process of overcoming” (“Seven Seals,” 203).

³¹⁰Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 63. See also Lilje who, in the context of the polemic of the ruler cult, suggested that the background to the horsemen vision of Rev 6 could be found in the inauguration of the Emperor’s reign with colorful chariot races (*Last Book of the Bible*, 123-124).

the covenant to enter into judgment with his own people when their witness to the world grows dim, thus hindering the process of the last judgment.

5. Another possibility is to see with Pattemore a climactic situation of imminence where “the covenant punishments have taken on an eschatological dimension.”³¹¹ Yet, since the final judgment has not occurred until 6:10, it is possible to see vv. 6-8 as general judgments affecting both the people of God and the inhabitants of the earth. “They are a part, not so much of God's regular dealings with humanity, as of his ultimate sanction, and precursors of the eschaton.”³¹²

6. Zechariah 1 and 6 bring out a note of hope to the “How long?” query as it marks a turning point for the exile with themes of imminent reversal and restoration.³¹³ This background further enhances a sense of imminence for God’s deliverance and the hope for a positive eschatological dénouement for the fifth seal.³¹⁴

7. As the breaking of each seal progresses, the imminence of judgment and the expectations for inauguration of the *eschaton* intensify. The parallels with the little Apocalypse of Mark 13 indicate that Rev 6 displays the same imminent expectations as

³¹¹See Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 73.

³¹²Ibid. Mounce also asserted that the first four seals would then be “a series of preliminary judgments representing forces operative throughout history by means of which the redemptive and judicial purposes of God are being carried out prior to the end” (*Book of Revelation*, 139).

³¹³See John Court who stressed how the background text impacts essentially the fifth seal in those terms, “One feature of the first vision (Zech. 1.8-15) which is carried over into Revelation is applied, not to the pictures of the horsemen in the first four seals, but to the fifth seal and its vision of the martyr-souls. It is reasonable to conclude that the meaning of Zechariah's vision centres on the lamentation formula ‘how long?’ (1:12) and the direct response from Yahweh, the ‘gracious and comforting words’ of 1.13” (*Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, 58).

³¹⁴About this eschatological tension, Klaus Koch noted that Zechariah is “actualizing eschatology was also due to his mindfulness of the fact that Jeremiah’s prophecy of the seventy years of exile ‘had almost been completed,’ and that a new beginning was immediately imminent! (cf. Zech 1:12-15)” (*The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 2:165).

seen throughout the whole New Testament. Thus, “How long?” connects naturally with the expectation (*Naherwartung*) of the end and the final victory of the Lion/Lamb Messiah over evil. It relates essentially to a longing for the time of consummation.³¹⁵ One of the main responses to “How long...” is tantamount to saying: “wait and see what the Messiah would do”; namely, what is expected of God to do.

Conclusions

The tension occurs in the fifth seal because of expectations created by the doctrine of God through such images and his role as warrior, king, and judge. All this seems to prompt the appeal to his Sovereignty in the particular context of the challenge of an alternate ruler cult which oppresses his people. Underscoring his apartness from evil and his mercy, God’s featured attributes end up creating further dissonance in the text.

The theology of suffering also contributes to the tension in the expectation of the passage. As in the Hebrew Bible, “How long?” of the fifth seal expresses a context of unbearable evil, persecution, and continued suffering. The cause of suffering, as related

³¹⁵In harmony with the imminent character of Apocalyptic, the outcry would betray, as David Aune put it, “the intense longing for God to shorten the present evil days and quickly usher in the kingdom of God” (“Apocalyptic,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. W. A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], 1:124). What preoccupies the slaughtered witnesses is why God delays the consummation of his plan for history and the manifestation on earth of the lordship of Jesus Christ, which has already been proclaimed in heaven (5:9-10). With the expectations for judgment created by the introductory vision, the martyrs, as Seiss put it, “Why was it not at once carried to its consummation? They had sacrificed their lives to this particular testimony, and everything had appeared to them in the very article of the long-predicted fulfillment; how was it, then, that it now tarried? . . . It was not so much impatience that their blood was not avenged, as their perplexity about the hesitation which seemed to retard the ongoing of what they knew had commenced” (*The Apocalypse*, 1:368). See Wilfrid J. Harrington who placed the problem of the delay and its resolution in the correct perspective for Revelation: “The Apocalypse emphatically assures us that history does move to a climax. More than that, the Lamb who was slain has won his victory; the fierce assaults of Satan are the desperate paroxysm of one mortally wounded. The final issue is not in doubt. For Christians the problem is not the fact of the ultimate victory but the explanation of the delay of the Parousia. Christ has overcome the world—and yet the world goes its way, that implacable enemy of the church of Christ. How can this be, when will the end come? The Apocalypse does face the problem, and does, it seems, answer it” (*Understanding the Apocalypse*, 54).

to the dead witnesses' testimony to Jesus and the word of God, points to a context of innocent suffering that calls urgently for Yahweh's role as the Goel who is supposed to guarantee their ultimate vindication.

The theology of retribution from the covenant language of Deuteronomy adds to the tension of the fifth seal. The language of covenant rupture in the context of the preceding seals suggests, perhaps, God's judgment against his own people when they fail in their role of witness to the nations, but a reversal is expected when his children cry out to him. Two ideas appear to fuel the theodicy and its expectation for retributive justice. First, the blood of the innocent always cries out for justice and judgment because such acts of wanton pain and bloodshed were, in fact, directed against God himself. Second, in God's sovereignty, evil cannot go unpunished.

Tension originates also from God's depiction as the coming king/judge/warrior from the opening vision, coupled with the characteristic way in which God is historically known to answer the cries for help of his people. All this contributes to create the frame of the theodicy where the God of Exodus is on trial for failure to act or his delay to do so. In such a climax of the unchecked power of evil, the question inevitably arises about the righteousness of God who permits such evil to go unpunished or who delays his judgment.

Pressure also builds up around the fifth seal because of the theology of the expectation of the end. Like the preceding seals openings, this seal appears as the direct result of the exaltation of Jesus where the "How long?" relates naturally to the issue of the consummation of Christ's kingship on earth. Imminence is suggested by the fulfillment of the eschatological woes where the end is close, but does not meet that

expectation. Such cries of the righteous are directly related to the end in parallel apocalyptic literature. Hence, the perplexity and even impatience at the postponement of judgment are natural.

After finishing the examination of the delay question, one is left with God's response in Rev 6:11 to complete the assessment of the fifth seal in the light of the imminence/delay of the eschaton. The last section of this chapter evaluates the answer part and further explores the themes of imminence/delay in the text. Attention will be given to the actual beneficiaries of the delay, the fulfillment of the fifth seal, and the delay.

CHAPTER V

RESOLUTION TO THE DELAY QUERY

OF THE FIFTH SEAL

The answer to the theodicy crisis is characterized by a strong shift in paradigm. When viewed from the above, the earlier pessimistic impression changes completely. Hope is restored as God comes out of his silence to provide answers and extra meaning to the martyrs' crisis. The justification for the delay before the final judgment is expressed in cosmic and universal terms, but without disregard for the context of imminence.

God's Gift of the White Robes to the Witnesses

Interestingly for the theology of retribution, the twofold content is wrapped up by two verbs, ἐδόθη and ἐπρέθη, both in the passive voice. The passive voice suggests a theological passive where God is clearly the one doing the action.¹ As Bullinger suggested, this gift of "white robes" to the dead witnesses thus keeps up the

¹For the divine passive (*passivum divinum*), see Joachim Jeremias who coined the term in *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 13; cf. Christian Macholz, "Das 'Passivum divinum,' seine Anfänge im alten Testament und der 'Hofstil,'" *ZNW* 81 (1990): 247-253; Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 628. Maximillian Zerwick explained that a theological passive is a "name given to the passive used in order to avoid directly naming God as agent" (*Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples*, Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici 114, English ed. adapted from the 4th Latin ed., trans. Joseph Smith [Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 1963], 76).

Prosopopœia.² However, the significance of this action presents some difficulties because the στολή is of a common nature and comes with a wide range of possible meanings.³ How, then, does this divine gift of the white robe contribute to the resolution of the theodicy crisis?

Victory Argument

In the Hebrew Bible, white clothing (and hair) suggests purity (cf. Dan 11:35; 12:10; Isa 1:18; Ps 51:9), but the color “white” can also refer to victory as seen throughout Revelation.⁴ Significantly, the white robe imagery is, indeed, frequently connected with scenes of victory often in a jurisprudential setting in Revelation.

The overcomers in the Pergamean setting are promised two divine eschatological gifts which are both significantly connected to whiteness: τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου, the hidden manna and ψῆφον λευκὴν, a white stone. The items are indeed preceded by δώσω αὐτῷ, I will give to him, which repeatedly emphasizes the grace of the Revelator as

²Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 867. As a reminder, he defined the term as “a figure by which things are represented or spoken of as persons; or, by which we attribute intelligence, by words or actions, to inanimate objects or abstract ideas” (ibid., 861).

³Beckwith noted that “white robes” are too common a figure (cf. 3:18; 7:13-14; 22:14) to be interpreted so specifically without some further definition (*Apocalypse of John*, 527). From the usage in the LXX and in classical Greek, Ulrich Wilckens suggested that “στολή can mean ‘clothing’ of any kind, especially the ‘upper garment.’ However, the idea often prevails that the clothing denoted by στολή is not just an outward covering, but is something by which a man is essentially stamped in his current status” (“στολή,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976], 7:691).

⁴About the color aspect in the Apocalypse, Barr interestingly noted that colors “too have relatively constant meaning, and they are not the meanings usually attached to them in our culture. White signifies victory (not necessarily purity), black represents suffering (not evil), red stands for strife and war, and pale (a kind of yellowish grey) signals death” (*Tales of the End*, 9). For another overview of the usage of this color in Revelation and its association with victory, see Allo, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 59-61. For a terminological study of the color “white” in the OT, see Athalia Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series 21* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1982), 90, 93, 133.

the source of the gift. Obviously, the gifts refer to future heavenly rewards for endurance in faithful witness even in the face of persecution.

The first eschatological gift is the manna whose color is interestingly known to be white.⁵ This manna seems to be contrasted here with the food offered to idols referred to in 2:14. It is also said to be hidden (i.e. concealed from human eyes being laid up in heaven) but will be revealed to believers at the end of time.⁶ The Jews believed that the ark, where a jar of the manna that fell in the wilderness, was hidden in it (see Exod. 16:32–34; cf. Heb. 9:4). It has been suggested that it will stay there until the messianic age when God would again feed his people with it.⁷ As rightly pointed out by Ladd, the imagery amounts simply to an “admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).”⁸

Whiteness characterizes also the second eschatological reward depicted in the form of a white stone given to the overcomers. Two meanings appear convincing as regards to the symbolism. First, since white stones were pebbles used as an entrance ticket to public functions, many have seen here a symbolic representation of “entrance ticket into the promised land or paradise”⁹ or a pass admitting the victor to the heavenly

⁵Beale quotes the LXX of Num. 11:7 where this manna is compared to “the appearance of *rock crystal*.” And he adds that “*B. Yoma 75a* says that the manna was “round ... and white like a pearl” (*The Book of Revelation*, 252).

⁶See Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “μάννα;” and Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 252. For the interpretation of Manna as a portrayal of eschatological expectation in Jewish writings, Beale offers the following evidence, “*b. Hagigah* 12b; *2 Bar.* 29:8; *Sib. Or.* 7.149; *Midr. Rab. Eccl.* 1.9; cf. Exod. 16:32ff. with *2 Macc.* 2:4–7 (ibid.).

⁷Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 49; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 189; Swete, *Apocalypse of St John*, 38-39; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 55-56.

⁸Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 49.

⁹J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 399.

feast.¹⁰ Otherwise, those pebbles were also used to draw lots in a criminal case, the white stone was a favorable verdict (black was a guilty vote), the white stone symbolize Jesus' vote of acquittal of the believer in the face of his/her condemnation in the Roman law court.¹¹ Beale convincingly blends the two meanings acquittal and an invitation of Jesus' supper suggested by the whiteness in the following quote:

“The association of white with righteousness in direct connection with admission to a banquet is expressed in 19:8–9, where the “fine linen, bright and clean” represents “the righteous acts of the saints,” which is directly followed by the reference to being “invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (always elsewhere in the book “white” is metaphorical for righteousness [so 13 times]). Whiteness probably also connotes the victory won by the person who conquers through persevering faith and righteousness (cf. 6:2; 19:14).”¹²

As the ὄνομα καινὸν, new name, engraved on the white stone; it is difficult to determine whether it refers to the name of God and/or Christ himself¹³ or else, which is more likely, the new name the victorious person receiving the stone.¹⁴ However, whatever name is written on the stone given to the overcomer, it serves to enable that person to participate in the Messianic banquet. Walvoord associates this to the believer's eternal salvation and his share in the riches of Heaven.¹⁵ The eschatological significance

¹⁰Bauer, BDAG, s.v. λευκός; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 41-42; A. F. Johnson, *Revelation*, 12: 442; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 49; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 56; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 189; Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 201; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 52.

¹¹Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 189

¹²Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 253.

¹³Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 42; R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 66-67; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John* 40; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 190.

¹⁴Alford, “Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωαννου,” 4:572; A. F. Johnson, *Revelation*, 12: 442; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 110; Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 56; Leon Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 69.

¹⁵Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 71.

of the new name is well captured by Beale,

The “new name written” on the stone confirms further the idea of an end-time supper in which intimate fellowship occurs. 3:12 reveals that the name in 2:17 is a pregnant reference to “the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my [Christ’s] new name,” which is written on the believer. Separate meanings are not to be assigned to each of these names. They all refer to the intimate eschatological presence of God and Christ with his people, as expressed most clearly by 22:3–4: “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him; and *they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads*” (cf. 14:1–4) (emphasis his).¹⁶

In Rev 3:4, 5, the overcomers of Sardis receive the promise of white robes.¹⁷ The twenty-four elders around the throne of Rev 4:4 are displayed in white robes. It is significant to note that in Rev 5:10 and 20:6 the redeemed become the priests of God who are dressed typically in white robes too. Similarly, the great multitude of Rev 7:9 wears white robes as they participate in the liturgy of praise before the throne. In the victory scene of Rev 7:13, 14, those dressed in white are disclosed as survivors of the great tribulation who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Further, in later parts of Revelation, the messianic figure of Rev 19:11, who executes divine judgment and makes war, is shown as the one riding a “white horse” while “the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses” in v. 14. In Rev 19:8, even the church collectively, as the bride of Christ,

¹⁶Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 253-254.

¹⁷According to Heil, “The use of the motif of ‘white’ clothing as a future reward for the churches in the letters helps to illuminate the significance of the white robes in the fifth seal. That each of the souls is given a white robe means that they, like those in Sardis, have not ‘soiled their garments’ so that they are worthy to walk with Jesus in white (3:4). They begin to realize Jesus’ promise that the victor will be clothed in white garments, which means they will not be erased from the book of eternal life, nor found in ‘shameful nakedness’ (3:18), but will be acknowledged by Jesus in the judgment (3:5) for which they are praying” (“Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation,” 227-228).

is dressed in “fine linen, bright and clean,” which “stands for the righteous deeds of the saints.”

From the heavenly court point of view, God brings about a victorious denouement with the gift of the white robe by reversing the guilty verdict of the earthly court. Caird points out that the martyrs’ cry should be seen against the background of Hebrew jurisprudence in which a plaintiff must plead his own case: “The martyrs have been condemned in a human court, and that decision stands unless reversed by a higher court.”¹⁸ The parallel with the usage in 7:13 enlightens the meaning of the symbol, as Beasley-Murray put it, “The martyrs are here given the sign of their justification through Christ (in contrast to their condemnation by the world), which is itself a sign and a pledge of the final glory to be bestowed upon them (cf. Rom. 8:30).”¹⁹

This reversal is especially enhanced when viewed in the context of the polemic against the Roman symbols of military victory. Osborne referred to a victory scene taken from a local military application where “at a Roman triumph the conquering general would wear such a white robe.”²⁰ Instead of the Roman emperor, who is a type of the

¹⁸Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 85. According to Beale, this would be as “a heavenly declaration of the saints’ purity or righteousness and as an annulment of the guilty verdict rendered against them by the world” (*The Book of Revelation*, 394). For Beasley-Murray, “The martyrs are here given the sign of their justification through Christ (in contrast to their condemnation by the world), which is itself a sign and a pledge of the final glory to be bestowed upon them (cf. Rom. 8:30)” (*The Book of Revelation*, 136). For D. W. Hadorn, “Das weiße Kleid ist nicht etwa schon der neue Leib, sondern das Symbol der Unschuld, ein Pfand, daß Gott sie, die als Schuldige und Geschändete getötet worden waren, für unschuldig erklärt” (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 86). See also Bleek, *Dr. Friedrich Bleek’s Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 203; and Smalley, *Revelation to John*, 165.

¹⁹Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 136.

²⁰Osborne, *Revelation*, 288. See also Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 91; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:475; Lucien Cerfaux and Jules Cambier, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean lue aux Chrétiens Lectio Divina 17* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), 64; Boxall, *Revelation of Saint John*, 116. Allo noted Roman oracles where the color white is associated with the extension of Roman military victory in Asia from the 3rd book of the Sybillines (Ca 175-178): “Mais lorsque viendra le commencement d’un autre empire. *Blanc et à beaucoup de têtes*, de la mer occidentale, Qui dominera bien des pays, en fera trembler beaucoup, Et

endtime persecutor, it is their victims who wear the bright garment of victory.

Thus, the symbol amounts to a heavenly acknowledgment of the uprightness of the saints, where their innocence is proclaimed by this action which carries polemic overtones. In so doing, God validates both the faith of the martyrs and shows approval for the concern of their “How long?” query.²¹ The point at issue in the fifth seal then, as noted by Caird, is not so much “the relation of the martyrs with their accusers, but the validity of their faith.”²²

Resurrection Argument

Theologically, the other idea that stems out of the imagery is that of an elevated social status or honor.²³ Louw and Nida interpreted the expression *στολή* as a long, flowing robe whose cultural significance “would be high social status and dignified occupation or activity.”²⁴ Unfortunately, the symbol of the white robe has often been associated with the instant reward of individual glorification under the pressure of doctrinal presuppositions that are foreign to the text. In the light of extrabiblical evidence, R. H. Charles, Bousset, and others speculated on the white robe as a depiction of the gift of their glorified bodies handed in to the martyrs earlier than to the rest of the

excitera la crainte chez tous les rois, etc. [emphasis his]” [*L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 59-60].

²¹A central theme of the Apocalypse, God is indeed constantly seen elsewhere as vindicating those who lay down their lives as radical witness (2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21; 7:14; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 20:4).

²²Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 85.

²³Daniel 7:9 associates white clothing with glory or brightness in its description of the flaming throne (cf. Dan 7:9). In this connection, Goldingay insisted that “more likely חור has its more basic meaning of brightness and luminosity, thus nobility and splendor (cf. the related description in *1 Enoch* 14.20; the use of חור in connection with royal clothing in Esth 1:6; 8:15; also Dan 10:5-6; Ps 104:1-2; 2 Esd 2:39-40; Matt 28:3; Mark 9:3” (*Daniel*, 165).

²⁴Louw and Nida, L&N, s.v. “στολή.” See also Martin H. Manser, Alister E. McGrath, and J. I. Packer, eds., *Zondervan Dictionary of Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), s.v. “robe.”

departed saints who will receive theirs only after the final judgment.²⁵ The view of *στολή λευκή* as the condition of the souls in the intermediate state is unjustified.

It is important to note that the martyrs have not as yet received the promised white robes, which would then place them in a heavenly realm. Thus, based on the full significance of *ὑποκάτω*, there's no injustice in heaven or with God; the place for the perceived injustice is only restricted to the earthly realm. Interestingly, the Philonic view of the sanctuary — albeit allegorical — is doubly applicable here, since it also disallows completely the ensuing problem with “the intermediate state” of the dead.

However, referring to parallel passages from the very same context, Beale contended that “the image of robes can have this meaning elsewhere, but there is no mention of the robes being ‘white’ where this meaning is present (e.g., *1 En.* 62:16; *2 En.* 22:8; *Asc. Isa.* 4:16; 8:14; 9:9)”²⁶ Against such a link between the white robe and an intermediate body, Ladd argued that “if this were the meaning of the white robes, the

²⁵See R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:184-188; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 130, 271; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 64; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 85-86. For a variation of this view on the white robes, Alford suggested a “vestment of acknowledged and glorified righteousness in which the saints walk and reign with Christ” (“*Ἀποκαλυψις Ἰωαννου*,” 4:620); F. F. Bruce took it as a “token of blessedness” (“Revelation to John,” 644); Seiss spoke of the celestial stola emblem of their justification and blessed relationship with God even as their resurrection is delayed (*The Apocalypse*, 1:368-370). Nuancing this position, Walvoord saw only a temporary body, but not the final resurrection one (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 134-135); Dusterdieck opted for a “present blessedness and glorification” (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 231). For alternate interpretations of the white robe by early Christian Fathers, Victorinus saw the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (*In Apocalypsim* 6:9-11); Primasius applied it “to the inexpressible joy arising from the perfection of love poured out into the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit” (*Com. Super Apocalypsim* 2.6).

²⁶Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 394.

martyrs would have received them at death.”²⁷

Moreover, this view contradicts the clear teaching of Rev 20:4 which features the resurrection body only at the *parousia*. Regarding the link between 6:9 and 20:4, Pattemore noted four focal passages in Revelation which re-echo semantic components found initially in Rev 6:9-11.²⁸ He noted that 20:4 stands out among them because of particular features and patterns of hear/say which suggest an “inclusio of prospect and fulfillment.”²⁹ Significantly, the resolution of the inclusio is marked by the resurrection of the beheaded souls: “They came to life and they reigned (ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν).”³⁰

Some have tried to interpret the “come to life,” not in terms of physical, but of spiritual resurrection.³¹ However, as Schussler-Fiorenza convincingly argued,

the phrase ‘come to life again’ does not connote in Revelation a spiritual or a limited resurrection since it refers in 2:8 to the resurrection of Christ and in 13:14 to that of the beast’s heads. . . . Rather, this vision of the millennium speaks about the final

²⁷Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 106. For him the white robe was, instead, a “symbol of blessedness and rest, even though the state of final and perfected blessedness awaits the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body” (ibid.). Compare Thomas who reviewed the issue and concluded that “these robes do nothing to advance the theological opinion about an intermediate body granted to the saints between death and bodily resurrection” (*Revelation 1-7*, 447).

²⁸Pattemore listed Rev 12:10-12; 16:5-7; 19:1-2; and 20:3-4 (*The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 92).

²⁹Ibid. However, he rightly noted that John actually sees the slain souls only in the last, at 20:4. “In the other three the connections to the martyrs’ prayer occur in what John *hears*. Thus, the initial and final passages form an inclusio of prospect and fulfilment [emphasis his]. Both references indeed describe martyrdom in violent language” (ibid.). For a diagram of this indisputable connection, see David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 52C (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 1085.

³⁰Bullinger asserted that “they could not reign till they were made alive, hence in 20:4, we read that ‘they lived’” (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 640). Taking the color white as a symbol of end-time joy, Roloff stated, “Certainly the white robe is not an image for the new resurrection corporeality with which the righteous are clothed (2 Cor. 5:1-5). The righteous and the martyrs are, according to Revelation, awakened to new life only at the Parousia (20:4); the notion that they receive the new corporeality in heaven beforehand is a foreign one” (*The Revelation of John*, 90). Schüssler-Fiorenza saw the robe as a sign of participation in the marriage feast of the Lamb (*Revelation*, 64). Said Reddish, “Since the martyrs do not participate in the first resurrection until later (20:4-5), however, the white robes are better understood as symbolic of the martyrs’ justification” (“The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 164). See also Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 149.

³¹E.g., Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1003-1017.

resurrection of those Christians who have died in their resistance to the imperial cult and have remained loyal to God and the Lamb.³²

The imagery of the victorious outcome in heaven cannot be divorced from the already-and-not-yet tension of the NT. It is said that the white robes are given to each (ἐκάστῳ) of them. The usage of ἐκάστῳ in the heavenly court verdict suggests that the honors of victory are already symbolically awarded on an individual basis but the actual enjoyment of the reward has to await the final general retribution at the time of the consummation.³³

The imagery symbolizes God's guarantee of future life in glory at the eschaton for the martyred saints instead of a depiction of life in the intermediate state. That the scene is symbolic in nature is confirmed by the fact that, as Bratcher and Hatton rightly noted, it is absurd to imagine the clothing as immaterial entities.³⁴ They added that "this is figurative language describing things seen in a vision, and the figurative language should be maintained rather literally."³⁵

This imagery could simply be inspired by Dan 12:1, which deals primarily with

³²Schussler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 108. She added that it is "because they have ratified their baptism with their life-praxis (1:6; 5:10), they assume the eschatological reign as priests" (ibid.). Cf. Beale, who defended the idea that the "coming to life" in 20:4 speaks not of physical resurrection, but of spiritual resurrection (*The Book of Revelation*, 1003-1017).

³³The explanation for the tension has been expressed in various ways. For Paulien, the imagery could suggest an action resulting from the investigative judgment (cf. 3:5); while "the execution of that judgment is still future ("Seven Seals," 236)." Cf. Heinz Giesen who asserted, "Die Märtyrer nehmen schon jetzt an der endzeitlichen Vollendung teil müssen aber noch warten, bis Gott sich endgültig gegen seine Feinde durchsetzt und die gesamte Heilsgemeinde rehabilitiert [The martyrs, who already took part in the eschatological consummation, yet must wait until God finally prevails over his enemies, and rehabilitates the entire Heilsgemeinde]" (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 185).

³⁴Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, 117.

³⁵Ibid. See also Ladd who observed that "apocalyptic pictures are not meant to be photographs of objective facts; they are often symbolic representations of almost unimaginable spiritual realities" (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 102).

the eschatological bodily resurrection of the dead witnesses.³⁶ About the parallel with Jesus, Wilckens referred to the white robe of the angel at the empty tomb (Mark 16:5, cf. Matt 28:3 and Luke 24:4) where “the one thus manifested is a heavenly being and that his message about the resurrection of Jesus (v. 6) is an eschatological revelation.”³⁷

Furthermore, this reading of the bestowal of the white robe as a guarantee of the future retribution and final justice coincides with some popular, fully developed eschatological response to theodicy in intertestamental Judaism.³⁸ For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to the final reward of the righteous as “the garment of honor in everlasting light” (IQS 4.8). In his study of the expectations of the messianic age regarding the rectification of all injustice, Crenshaw showed that later deuterocanonical works display “the belief in a FUTURE LIFE [that] provides a powerful answer to the question of theodicy [emphasis his].”³⁹ It is the bodily resurrection that makes this future life a hopeful concept.

Reviewing scriptural and related apocryphal background, Swete synthesized four main applications for the white apparel: (1) festivity (Eccl 9:8), (2) victory (2 Macc 11:8),

³⁶A thematic parallel might be suggested between the color white of Rev 6 and the glorious brightness of the everlasting stars of Dan 12.

³⁷Wilckens maintains that the same idea lies behind Rev 6:11 (“στολή,” 7:688).

³⁸For an example of an early Jewish theodicy that is resolved in terms of an other-worldly future retribution, see Wisdom 3:1-7: “But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble.” For further studies and many other references establishing the notion of a future retribution and final justice as a fully developed motif in intertestamental Judaism, see Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, 170-176; Cavallin, *Life After Death*, 211-214. Part I is devoted to the exploration of the Jewish Background.

³⁹Crenshaw, “Theodicy,” 896.

(3) purity (Apoc 7:9 ff.), and (4) the heavenly state, (Dan 7:9 Th).⁴⁰ He added that all “these associations meet here: the promise is that of a life free from pollution, bright with celestial gladness, crowned with final victory.”⁴¹ However, in view of a differed retribution for both the wicked and the righteous at Christ’s coming (Rev 22:12), those meanings would apply more naturally to the future life at the eschaton. With regard to the white robes, the weight of the answer lies not in denying the finality of death by wrongly emphasizing immediate glorification for the individual, but in the anticipation of resurrection.

Summary and Theological Implications

God’s initial response to the theodicy of the fifth seal comes through the form of the gift of a white robe. It expresses hope to the oppressed by affirming an end-time reversal in which the persecutors will be punished and the persecuted will be victors.

1. God is hereby depicted as the active agent who directly answers their prayer as he offers the reward of the robe in response to the martyrs’ cry for justice. In relation to the theodicy of the text, even if God allows certain things to occur, he is still the One here who stays in command of the reins of the universe and rewards his faithful ones even beyond death.

2. God is the One who has the final word as he rectifies injustice through the gift

⁴⁰Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 51. See also H. W. Günther who summed up three possible meanings for the metaphor of the white robe: “1. Die sittliche Existenz -soteriologisch begründet durch das Opfer Christi -des einzelnen in seinem Christenstande (Apk 3,4a.18; 16,15; 22,14); 2. Die Herrlichkeitsgestalt des Auferstehungsleibes (3,4b-5; 6,11; 7,9.13-14); 3. Die kollektive Vorstellung von dem Hochzeitskleid der Braut des Lamms (19,8).” *Der Nah-und End-erwartungshorizont in der Apokalypse des heiligen Johannes*, Forshung zur Bibel 41 (Würzburg, Germany: Echter, 1980), 92 (see the whole section on pp. 88-99).

⁴¹Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 51.

of white robes. The symbolic nature of the act harmonizes with the literary context of v. 11 and the non-literal nature of the text. He thereby both validates their faith and gives credence to the concern of their “How long?” query.

3. God not only validates the faith, but also vindicates, in the words of Resseguie, “their faithful testimony as the right way—indeed the only way—to conquer evil and injustices in this world.”⁴²

4. God duly confers the honors of victory on the dead witnesses, even though the actual enjoyment of the blessings is delayed until the time of the final and general retribution. In spite of their ignominious deaths and the fact that divine justice is delayed, the martyrs are already acknowledged by God as conquerors. The white robe here guarantees the bodily resurrection that will allow the martyrs to enjoy future life in glory at the eschaton.

5. God’s gift obviously appears as a direct consequence of the work of Christ that has already been magnified in the introductory vision. In relation to the strong realized eschatology from the opening vision, the martyrs in Christ already have an assured participation in his eschatological victory, even if the fullness of God’s salvation, which they have asked for, is still pending.

God’s Exhortation to Wait/Rest for a Little While

Verse 11b contains the second part of the divine response that somewhat counters the martyrs’ impatience for justice and judgment. To the cry of the souls under the altar, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you . . . avenge our blood?” God

⁴²Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 130-131.

responds by saying that “they should rest (ἀναπαύσονται) for a little while” (vv. 10-11).

Meaningfully, both the request and response sections contain temporal clauses hosted by the particle ἕως where a particular time extension needs to be accounted for. The idea of a delay is further reinforced through the use of the word χρόνος which usually implies the duration aspect of time.⁴³ Grammatically, the case of the phrase ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν used in connection with the verb refers to an accusative of extension of time.⁴⁴

The full significance of the exhortation to the souls under the altar has been confused because of the ambivalence of the verb ἀναπαύω which can mean cease or rest. In the New Testament, the verb ἀναπαύω, “to rest,” has twelve occurrences (two actually occur in Revelation) which can indeed either mean “rest”⁴⁵ or “to cease an activity.”⁴⁶

⁴³Louw and Nida suggested that the word χρόνος means “an indefinite unit of time (the actual extent of time being determined by the context)—‘time, period of time’” (L&N, s.v. “χρόνος”). Friberg, Friberg, and Miller translated “time” predominately in the sense of “a unit of time period of time, span, set time (Acts 1:21)” while in the accusative, “as measuring time for a time (Acts 13:18)”; or as “time taken or allowed for something respite, delay, opportunity” (Rev 2.21; 10.6) (ANLEX, s.v. “χρόνος”). Bauer further suggested that χρόνος also denotes “an indefinite period of time during which some activity or event takes place” or “a period during which something is delayed, respite, delay, time, period of time” (BDAG, s.v. “χρόνος”). See also Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 49-50.

⁴⁴See Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 344. Liddell and Scott noted that χρόνος in the accusative form translates “for a while, for a long or short time” (s.v. “χρόνος”).

⁴⁵Louw and Nida translated ἀναπαύομαι as “to remain in a place, with the implication of continuing to rest—‘to remain, to abide’ where ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν ‘continue to abide for yet a short time’ Rev 6:11” (L&N, s.v. “ἀναπαύομαι”). The ἀναπαύομαι; ἀνάπαυσις; εως *f*: is taken to mean “to become physically refreshed after ceasing activity or work—‘rest, to rest’” (L&N, s.v. “ἀναπαύομαι”).

⁴⁶See Matt 11:28, 26:45; Mark 6:31, 14:41; Luke 12:19; 1 Cor 16:18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 1:7, 20; 1 Pet 4:14; Rev 6:11, 14:13. Friberg, Friberg, and Miller translated the middle form of the verb in Rev 6:11 as “remaining quiet or restful, rest, be still” (ANLEX, s.v. “ἀναπαύω”). Louw and Nida viewed παύομαι in terms of “to cease from an activity in which one is engaged—‘to cease, to stop’” (L&N, s.v. “παύομαι”) Liddell and Scott suggested both clusters of meaning: “1. to make to cease, to stop or hinder from a thing, with gen. ἂν. τινά τινος, to give him rest or relief from a thing and 2. with acc. only, to stop, put an end to” (s.v. “ἀναπαύω”).

For the same context, two out of the five occurrences of the noun ἀνάπαυσις, “rest or respite,” are found in Revelation.⁴⁷

Rest/Sleep Argument

Based on the same dogmatic presuppositions as in the primary vision, the spoken word has unfortunately often been tied to the reward of immediate glorification.⁴⁸ The following section questions this notion and attempts a different understanding that better fits the context of eschatological delay and differed hopes. The use of the future middle form of the verb ἀναπαύω in the specific context of Rev 6:11, as convincingly argued by Otto Bauernfeind, denotes in itself the idea of tarrying at rest, to await.⁴⁹

In fact, the verb ἀναπαύω does occur in Dan 12:13 (LXX), where it clearly suggests the idea of remaining at rest. There the seer is told, “Go *your way* to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise *again* for your allotted portion at the end of the age.” This is a crucial breakthrough in the problem of theodicy and retribution where a transcendent eschatology reaffirms that the hope for salvation is found beyond death on the resurrection day. It suggests God’s promise that the dead witness will rise up later to

⁴⁷See Matt 11:29, 12:43; Luke 11:24; Rev 4:8 and Rev 14:11.

⁴⁸For those who see here an invitation “to rest in blessedness,” see for example, Ladd who thinks that the delay for the martyrs means “rest a little longer until the consummation of their blessedness; but in the meantime, they are in a state of rest” (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 106); Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 91; Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 230-231, R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:177-178; Plummer, “Revelation,” 188-189; Joseph Bonsirven, *L’Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (Paris: Beauchesne et ses Fils, 1951), 162; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 129; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 136; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 150; etc.

⁴⁹Otto Bauernfeind, “ἀναπαύω κτλ.,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1:350.

receive the reward of the blessed life.⁵⁰ In the fifth seal, the expression “for a little while” points to the tension that consummation is a delayed, but imminent reality.

Aune mentioned that the terms *ἀνάπαυσις* and *ἀναπαύειν* (and cognates, particularly *κατάπαυσις* and *καταπαύειν*) are used as metaphors for death in early Judaism (as are *κοίμησις*, “sleep,” and *κοίμασθαι*, “to sleep).” There, he noted that “the situation of the dead, particularly the righteous dead, is sometimes described as one of rest and repose.”⁵¹ In accordance with the biblical view of death as a sleep, it may be simpler to interpret the passage as a revelation that the martyrs would keep on resting in death until the time of the consummation of God’s victory on their behalf.

The intratextual connection with Rev 14:13 suggests that the exhortation to rest is probably meant to carry a positive force in 6:11. This text says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on . . . so that they may rest (*ἀναπαύσονται*) from their labors.” This rest is clearly predicated on the fact of God’s ultimate triumph. Hence, those who “die in the Lord” can relax in the assurance of salvation with the guarantee that they will not be forsaken. They will simply rest in the peace of the tomb while awaiting the rewards of the eschatological rest promised at the hour of the resurrection.⁵²

⁵⁰G. Boccaccini pertinently noted that the idea of resurrection in Middle Judaism “on the one hand solves a problem that had tormented the generations from Job to Sirach by removing God’s judgment from any possible human determination; on the other hand it painfully distances the hope of seeing merit compensated and guilt punished from the horizons of existence” (*Middle Judaism* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 160).

⁵¹Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 411.

⁵²This reward is assured also because the Spirit pledges that “their deeds follow them!” i.e., God takes note of their faithfulness and they will not be forgotten. The term “deeds” (*κόπος*) denotes hard work or labor to the point of weariness. See Louw and Nida, L&N, s.v. “κόπος”; Bauer, BDAG, s.v. “κόπος.” However, as Doukhan pointedly noted, the reference to “deeds” has no legalistic connotations: “Significantly, God’s people do not perform such deeds as a means to salvation. On the contrary, the deeds

Given the special presentation of the delay questioners, God's response would suggest a hopeful reversal in the dead martyrs' fate through the promise of resurrection. Nevertheless, the reward is expressed in terms of a transcendent eschatology where the resurrection, as the time at which complete blessedness commences, is delayed, but for just a little while more. Simply, this would mean that the dead saints continue to rest in the peace of the grave as they await the time of the consummation.

Rest/Wait Argument

In relation to the cry for justice, it is possible to interpret the verb as an admonition to the martyrs to abstain from their cry of vengeance.⁵³ In 6:11, Beckwith noted that the verb "denotes rest from toil, weariness, pain, etc.; here, as shown by the following words, the martyrs' rest from their present distressful yearning and crying for the coming judgment."⁵⁴ This view is supported by the usage of the cognate term in Rev 4:8 where it is said of the four living creatures that they do not stop (ἀνάπαυσιν) rendering endless tribute to the Lord.

The waiting before the end is modified by an important adjective μικρὸν in the expression "for a little while" (ἔτι μικρὸν χρόνον), which reappears later in the same

'follow.' We discover them only when the saint is not around anymore to exhibit them and promote himself or herself as a saint. The true 'deed,' the true *mitswah*, remains even after the believer's death. It survives beyond the boasts and the politics. The 'deed' is what remains in God's memory, not in humanity's" (*Secrets of Revelation*, 132). The eschatological significance of the rest is suggested by Rist, where it "probably includes far more than cessation of physical work and toil. More than likely, it signifies their final release from the sufferings, tortures, and death which they had undergone for their Lord" ("The Revelation of St. John the Divine," 12:473). The rest that the dead saints will enjoy is in stark contrast with the lack of rest imposed on those who worship the beast (14:11).

⁵³See for example Bleek, *Dr. Friedrich Bleek's Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 215; Holtzmann, *Evanvelium, Briefe und Offenbarung des Johannes*, 447; Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis*, 273; Lilje, *Last Book of the Bible*, 129-130; Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 238; Delorme and Donegani, *L'Apocalypse de Jean*, 192; etc.

⁵⁴Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 527.

exact form in 20:3.⁵⁵ Strangely, Bengel omitted the reading μικρόν in relation to χρόνον and denies the idea of a shortness of the delay in the fifth unsealing.⁵⁶ However, the foundation of Bengel's view is untenable because the inclusion of μικρόν has good textual support and its genuineness can be defended, as Bleek noted, by the fact that "omission by later transcribers is more easily explained than insertion."⁵⁷

Actually, the time expression ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν fits nicely within the overarching theme of imminence in the Apocalypse.⁵⁸ It connects, perhaps conceptually, with such words and phrases as ἀποκάλυψις, "revelation," ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, "what must happen shortly" (1:1, 22:6ff.), and ἔρχομαι ταχύ, "I come quickly" (3:11, 22:7, 12, 20).

⁵⁵The issue of how the two texts actually relate to each other has been a controversial subject. From a classical dispensationalist perspective, R. L. Thomas went as far as suggesting that "it makes sense that the two periods should coincide, because Satan in his wrath will take it out on those who will yet be martyred" (*Revelation 1-7*, 448). This, of course, is questionable from other millennialist views and suggests how much the resolution of the issue can be dependent upon one's presupposition about the millennium. For other more recent authors who take the little season of Rev 6:11 as coincident with that of Rev 20:3, making the millennium a symbol of delay and the vindication of the martyrs, see Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 108; followed by R. J. McKelvey, *The Millennium and the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1999), 81-84, and R. A. Campbell, "Triumph and Delay," 3-12.

⁵⁶Bengel and Steudel, "The Apocalypse," 5:228. He suggested such a thought was unjustifiably promoted to encourage those facing persecutions with a shallow consolation. Instead, he favored the idea that the χρόνος, the subject matter of Rev 6:11, ends by a long interval before the beginning of the little season discussed in Rev 20:3. Taking a *Chronus* as equal to $1111\frac{1}{9}$ years, he actually applied the little season to the period from A.D. 98 to A.D. 1209 "when to the *Martyrs* under *heathen Rome* were added those under the *Romish Papacy*" (original emphasis) (*ibid.*). The term μικρόν is actually omitted also by Griesbach, Tschendorf, according to B 36 cursive, Ar. Aeth, Areth.

⁵⁷AC Vulg. h, Cypr. See also Bleek, *Dr. Friedrich Bleek's Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 215.

⁵⁸A. F. Johnson insisted that "soonness" means imminency in eschatological terms. The church in every age has always lived with the expectancy of the consummation of all things in its day. Imminency describes an event possible any day, impossible no day" ("Revelation," 12:416-417). Aune saw that the insistence of Apocalyptic on "God's speedy intervention and victory made it possible to maintain hope in thoroughly adverse circumstances and encouraged God's people to conduct their lives in a manner worthy of the coming kingdom (2 Pet 3:11-13; Rev 21:5-8)" ("Apocalyptic," 124). Comparing this "little while" with Mark's notion of imminence/delay, Schüssler-Fiorenza rightly noted that John too "knows that the end and the coming of Christ is imminent, but he is also aware that until then only a short but definite time must elapse" (*Book of Revelation*, 46-47). For an attempt to structure the entire Apocalypse in terms of the "short time" before the end base on Mark 13, see Farrer who divided the end time into three periods of time which follow one another: The "day of waiting of the Saints" (chaps. 1-3; 4-7) is followed by the "day of the usurpation of the anti-christ" (chaps. 8-14), which in turn is followed by the "day of Christ" (chaps. 15-22) (*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 10).

The delay is over (10:6); the time has come for God to judge the dead and reward his servants (11:18); the devil “knows that his time is short” (12:12); the first of the three angels’ message expresses that “the hour of his judgment has come” (14:6); Satan is released only for a “short time” after the millennium (20:3).

In harmony with the findings from the OT background, the expression ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν also fits nicely with the reaffirmation of God’s sovereignty over history as expressed through temporal limits imposed on the progress of evil.⁵⁹ This is seen in time expressions such as: ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ ἡμισυ (11:9, 11), ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἑξήκοντα (11:3 and 12:6), μῆνας τεσσαράκοντα [καὶ] δύο (11:2 and 13:5), καιρὸν καὶ καιροῦς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ (12:14), and χίλια ἔτη (20:2-7 six times). The use of the different expressions of time is clearly derived from Daniel, where they correspond directly to the period of tribulation in which the people on God’s side are persecuted (cf. Dan 7:25 and 12:7).⁶⁰

By treating this clause as a direct response to the “How long?” outcry, the verb

⁵⁹An essential component of Revelation’s eschatology is its stress on the sovereignty of God. The issue that God is fully in control is reinforced explicitly in the introductory vision (Rev 4 and 5) and implicitly in the ὁ δεσπότης in the martyrs’ plea. Further, his self-disclosure in phases like Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Ἄλφα καὶ τὸ Ὠ (1:8, 21:6, 21:13), ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (1:8 and 4:8), and ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος (21:6 and 22:13) impact directly not only this sovereignty over time, but also God’s control over everything.

⁶⁰Thomas suggested, “The time periods are identical in length and have similarities to their usage in the book of Daniel. It might even be the case that John was reading and re-reading the second half of Daniel as he wrote this book” (*Revelation 1-7*, 93). See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 565-568; Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 132; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 77; Harrington, *Understanding the Apocalypse*, 152; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 129; 143-44; Hengstenberg, *Revelation of St. John*, 396; Hughes, *Book of Revelation*, 122; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 292-293; Leon Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 142-143; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 215; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 587. Stefanovic asserted that “the phrase exclusively refers to the period of the activities of the symbolic little horn in oppressing and persecuting the saints of God. . . . John takes over the prophecy from Daniel and develops it further in the symbolic Antichrist sea beast in Revelation 13:1-10, in which the forty-two months correspond to the time, times, and half a time of Daniel” (*Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 337-338).

can be taken to mean that the martyred saints are to cease their vengeance cry and to be patient. The thrust of the scene suggests that the impatience of the souls under the altar is tempered because the end is thereby reinterpreted. In connection to theodicy, the answer section also attempts to keep the evilness of the situation reflected in the martyrs' fate in a context of imminence by reminding one that the bad endures only for a season.⁶¹

Rest/Labors Argument

Another possibility could relate to a polemic against complacency. The aim of the text might go beyond just an admonition to patience in connection with the dead saints who, according to the biblical view of death, already have a situation of positive inaction.⁶² Pattemore may be right in maintaining that “the rhetorical force of this verse is not, therefore, an instruction to people who have died but a communication to people who still live.”⁶³ He added, “Thus the charge to rest continues the process begun in the

⁶¹In so doing, the Apocalypse mirrors indeed the reckoning of the end of evil in the Hebrew literature of the last centuries of the postexilic age as pointedly suggested by Beckwith, “The eager direction of thought toward the expected end . . . is not due to curious speculation about the future; it is born rather of the stress and perplexity of the times present. The bitter bondage of God's people to Gentile rulers, the trials of the godly among godless Israelites, the hardness and iniquity which the weaker must endure from the stronger, raised continually the problem of the rule of a righteous God, and faith was pointed on to a future when his ways would be justified to men, and all evil would end. Out of these experiences arose ever and anon the cry, Lord, how long? The answer, characteristic of eschatological literature of whatever date, is that the end is near” (*Apocalypse of John*, 77-78).

⁶²Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10, affirms, “For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate, and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. . . . Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.”

⁶³Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse*, 8. Brüttsch concurs, “Jean est sans doute moins préoccupé de donner des leçons de patience aux ‘âmes sous l’autel’ qu’à certains impatientes parmi les chrétiens de son époque [John is not worried about giving lessons of patience to the ‘souls under the altar’ as to some of the impatient Christian of his time]” (*La Clarté de l’Apocalypse*, 128). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* suggests that “the command is given to those who in prophetic vision were agitated over the seemingly long delay. In actual fact the martyrs have been at rest ever since they laid down their lives, and will continue to be at rest until the resurrection” (“Revelation,” 7:778). See also Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 241.

previous clause, that is, to turn attention back from the actors to the audience, from the martyrs to those who are not yet at rest.”

Many clues suggest indeed a critical slowing down of the “works” of witnesses in Revelation and this, for reasons not totally unrelated to the perception of an eschatological delay. The “works” could have been hindered by lukewarmness, cowardice, and even complacency.⁶⁴ The intratextual link between Rev 14:13 and 6:9-11 raises the distinct possibility that the term “labors” in the contrast labors/rest, as Stefanovic pointedly noted, could actually “refer to the devotion of God’s end-time saints to the gospel proclamation on behalf of which they suffered hardship and persecution to the point of death (cf. Rev. 12:11).”⁶⁵

With regard to “works” as the contrastive background to the notion of the reward of rest, John adds a call to faithfulness in 14:12 which echoes announcement of judgments upon those who worship the beast (13:10). Here, “works” is simply, as Roloff put it, the expression of devotion to Christ in total obedience, which proves true in endurance and suffering (cf. 2:13; 3:8, 15).⁶⁶ To avoid the torments of fire and

⁶⁴Loisy explained, “L’auteur polémise contre les chrétiens qui ne sont pas trop intransigeants, il voudrait les trouver tous dans la disposition du martyr, il finit même par ne plus voir dans les croyants que des martyrs, comme si la grande persécution qui s’annonce, ou qu’il annonce, devait les envoyer tous au ciel. On est presque tenté de se demander si son manifeste, qui paraît destiné surtout à encourager l’espérance, ne voudrait pas la raffermir, instruire une foi qui tend à s’affaiblir, à s’acclimater dans ce monde au lieu d’en attendre le bouleversement [The author enters into an argument against Christians who are too complacent; he would like to find them all sympathetic to martyrdom, but ends up even seeing all believers as martyrs, as if the great persecution that is coming or that he announces, would send them all to heaven. One is almost tempted to ask whether his manifesto, which seems mainly intended to encourage hope, does not want to strengthen this hope, educate faith that tends to weaken, to acclimate in this world instead of waiting for the upheaval]” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 45).

⁶⁵Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 455.

⁶⁶Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 177. He added, “By their works the faithful demonstrate that they have followed their Lord unconditionally wherever he led them (14:4) and that they have remained in communion with him to the end” (ibid.).

brimstone, Christians are called to endure in keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then they will not be subject to the second death.

Significantly, the verbal form “have not grown weary” (κεκοπίακες) is associated with endurance (ὑπομονή) in Rev 2:3, which depicts a confessing community that has not fainted under the assault. Endurance, as the characteristic virtue of the persecuted in Revelation, relates to radical love and non-compromising faithful witness as part of the process of conquering (1:9; 2:2, 3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12; cf. Luke 8:15; 21:19; Rom 2:7; 1 Cor 13:7; Col 1:11). In 1:9, the word of God and the loyalty to it are also closely connected to endurance (ὑπομονή) in time of tribulation (θλίψις). For Charles, endurance was “the spiritual alchemy which transmutes those who share in the θλίψις into members of the βασιλεία.”⁶⁷ To be at rest is to endure courageously.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the assurance of salvation is indeed supposed to keep believers strong in times of persecution (see Mark 13:13; 2 Tim 4:5; Heb 3:6, 14). As Beale put it, “The *assurance* that God will unquestionably punish the evil world becomes a motivation for Christians to persevere in their witness through suffering on earth, knowing that they are key players in helping establish the kingdom in the same ironic fashion as their Lord.”⁶⁸ Only those who are at rest with this assurance can actually lay claim to this eschatological rest beyond resurrection.

Based on the labor/rest contrast, the exhortation to rest could be a polemic against complacent witnesses in an attempt to reconcile them with the endtime radical mission. The aim of this appeal in the light of the second beatitude of Rev 14:13 is to admonish,

⁶⁷R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:21.

⁶⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 394.

comfort, and strengthen those who are struggling to face the prospect of dying as martyrs because of witnessing to the only true Lord. The news about God's ultimate triumph and the full capacities of bliss brought in by the resurrection is meant to encourage them to remain faithful through every trial and persecution, even unto death.

Summary and Theological Implications

An exhortation to rest/wait turns out to be the second aspect of God's response to the tension, impatience, or unrest at the beginning of the fifth seal. The invitation is meant to stimulate hope and encouragement for oppressed Christians of the time, to direct them to the nearness of the Lord's second coming to earth, and, by the same token, to reemphasize the imminence of the execution of the Lord's judgment.

1. The verb *ἀναπαύσονται* comes with a double meaning which can suggest either that the dead witnesses need simply to rest in the peace of the grave or to cease their vengeance cry as they patiently await the consummation of God's victory on their behalf.

2. From a rhetorical and contrastive perspective, since blessedness comes as the benefit of the eschatological work of Christ at the end of the faithful "works" of the radical witnesses (14:13), the invitation to rest for the dead saints could actually be an indirect stimulation for complacent-living Christians to endure until the end in order to join in the eschatological blessing later.

3. The verb used in the invitation speaks to the confidence that God's justice will soon prevail and that he will indeed be seen to redress all the present inequities towards the oppressed Christians. It stands as a witness "to the faith regarding the time (6:11; cf.

Dan 12:13) and the manner of the culmination (14:13; cf., e.g., 4 Ezra 7:95f.).”⁶⁹

4. God’s response suggests that the time was not yet ripe: he thereby reveals that the final judgment, which also implies the full vindication, is postponed.⁷⁰ An interval before the *parousia* is presupposed, but the sense of imminence is, however, not abandoned. The expression ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν, “they should rest for a little while,” points perhaps to the reality of a delay needed for some deeper purpose to be fulfilled before the consummation.

5. By referring the resolution of the fifth unsealing right to the “short time” before the end, God reaffirms himself as the One who presides over the time in which all of history is enacted. The response to the theodicy thus expresses God’s sovereignty over history as he puts temporal boundaries to the progress of evil and promises that the bad would last only for a season.⁷¹

God’s Justification for the Delay

God provides the reason for the delay before the end in v. 11b. The theme of fulfillment comes with the verb πληρώω which, according to Gerhard Delling, means “to fulfill a norm, a measure, a promise,” or “to complete or achieve” something, where in he

⁶⁹P. Fieldler, “ἀναπαύω κτλ,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:87.

⁷⁰In this connection, Anthony Hoekema rightly pointed out that the undeniable theological message of this special seal is to show that “the martyrdom of the saints is controlled by Christ Jesus and that the world avails nothing unless the Lord wills it; since only when Jesus opens the seal that the slaying begins” (*Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 220). Thus, Davidson maintained, “Despite the trials and tribulation of God’s people and the seeming divine delay in vindication of the persecuted and martyred (6:9, 10), yet according to Revelation 4, God is in control. As in Psalm 2:4 and Habakkuk 2:20, God Lord Almighty, the Creator, sits serenely on His throne, the One who was, and is, and *about to come* to set things” (“Sanctuary Typology,” 116-117).

⁷¹This message echoes throughout Revelation, as Osborne put it, “God is seen in process of bringing the world to an end in his own time yet promising that this time will be short” (*Revelation*, 289).

non-literal sense the idea of “totality” or “fullness” is decisive.⁷² Its tense, the aorist subjunctive passive form of the verb, implies that something needs be completed.⁷³

πληρώω and the Cosmic Argument

As noted above, the “How long?” query suggested the issue of when the delayed judgment will end and God’s salvation will be fulfilled. Delling insisted that whenever πληρώω is linked to the term χρόνος in particular, the verb conveys a temporal sense of completion which refers inevitably to the issue of the *terminus ad quem* of the delay.⁷⁴

The fulfillment of v. 11b may be related to the issue of fullness with regard to the problem of evil raised by this theodicy. As Caird said, John is advising prospective martyrs that their deaths constitute an essential part of God’s plan to conquer evil “and

⁷²Gerhard Delling, “πλήρης, πληρώω, κτλ.,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 6:290.

⁷³To complicate matters further, Rev 6:11 comes with four variants of the verb πληρώω where only two of them are relatively well supported: πληρωθῶσιν (the aorist passive subjunctive) or πληρώσωσιν (the aorist active).

Summarizing the textual criticism issues around the variants for the verb πληρώω, Osborne wrote, “There are four different readings of this term. The two indicative readings (πληρώσουσιν and πληρώσονται) have very weak support (a few late [12th to the 16th centuries] minuscules and Arethas, a 10th-century church father).

The active subjunctive πληρώσωσιν has much better support, with 8 P 046 1 1006 1854 et al. If this were the reading, John would not be discussing the completion of the number of martyrs but the completion of their life of faithful witness.

Of slightly stronger manuscript strength is the preferred reading, πληρωθῶσιν, found in A C 2344 it^{sig.61} vg et al. This would involve a rare intransitive use of πληρώω, but on this see BAGD 672 §5. Most believe that πληρώσωσιν arose as a transcriptional sight or hearing error” (*Revelation*, 300).

⁷⁴Delling, “πλήρης, πληρώω, κτλ.,” 6:297.

only total victory can bring about the consummation of God's purpose."⁷⁵ More than this, in view of the complete eradication of evil, the delayed fulfillment means that "tribulation cannot be brought to an end until the iniquity which produces it is full. . . . The states of the good and of the evil must be fulfilled together."⁷⁶ The eschaton can come only when the full measure of sins has been filled up. Here the experience of persecution and martyrdom would be part of the process of fulfilling the measure of sins.

The first level of God's response to the martyrs' outcry comes with the sixth seal which displays the End in cosmic terms.⁷⁷ After the fifth seal has raised the issue of the delayed end, the sixth goes on to give details about the end itself. The end in the sixth seal introduces the theme of the wrath of God where "the wrath of the Lamb" joins in later and the language used here comes from the Holy War and Day of Yahweh imagery.⁷⁸ This wraps up, in fact, the theme of undoing creation that prepares for the

⁷⁵Caird, *Revelation of John the Divine*, 87. However, he actually followed martyrdom as a line of investigation and concluded that John's idea of imminent crisis pointed not to the *parousia*, but to the persecution of the Church. He believed that the particular purpose of this seal "is to assure us that the martyrdom of the saints is an element in the progress of the kingdom of Christ" (*ibid.*; see also p. 12). Following Caird closely, Minear concluded that "John was not speculating about the general future of the world; he was describing the struggle which pervaded the doxologies, prayers, and daily ordeal of the church of Asia" (*I Saw a New Earth*, 261-269). Also Reddish, "The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation," 123-212.

⁷⁶W. Bruce, *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 148.

⁷⁷Thomas surveyed the prayers in Revelation and concluded, "It becomes very impressive that whatever the other factors may be, to some extent God's future outpouring of wrath upon a rejecting world will come in answer to heavenly petitions offered by His saints" ("Imprecatory Prayers in the Apocalypse," 127-129). The sixth seal as God's reply to the prayer of the fifth seal has been largely recognized; see Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 138-139; George Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 1435; Heil, "Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation," 230; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 150; Sweet, *Revelation*, 143; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 179; Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 96; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 92; Krodel, *Revelation*, 179; etc.

⁷⁸As a final comment on Rev 6:12, Aune asserted, "It is obvious that the author of Revelation intends the readers to think that the Day of the Lord is ushered in with the sixth trumpet [*sic*]" (*Revelation 6-16*, 414). Also Heil, "The traditional cry of the martyrs' blood is answered in a traditional picture of the Day of the Lord. . . . This scene is an anticipatory glimpse of that moment of truth" ("Fifth Seal (Rev 6:9-

inauguration of God's new one. About this climactic event that leads to the dissolution of the cosmos, Sweet noted that "human pride and refusal to acknowledge the Creator bring chaos back: therefore men must be made to recognize God before a new order is possible, and his appearance or 'coming' is the climax of the picture."⁷⁹

Scholarly opinion is divided on the eschatological significance of the sixth seal.⁸⁰

Although located right after the fifth, the delay before the end is not negated because the events of the two seals do not necessarily follow on the heels of each other in time. Even

11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation," 230). He adds that "the language is the traditional language of theophany, used to picture the day of wrath of God's final appearance" (ibid.). In the Hebrew Bible, the Day of the Lord judgments are targeted towards all the nations including Israel. The idea of the wrath of God has been difficult to accept for some but this is a fundamental theme in the New Testament as both a present reality (Rom 1:18) and an eschatological event (Rev 19:15). Contra A. T. Hanson (*The Wrath of the Lamb*, 159-180), Mounce suggests that "it is neither personal vindictiveness nor an impersonal process of retribution that works itself out in the course of history . . . [but] the response of [God's] holiness to persistent and impenitent wickedness" (*Book of Revelation*, 152). Reacting against those who see a problem of congruence when assigning the concept to a slain lamb, he added, "This overly sensitive concept of divine anger against sin, however, fails to understand the hideous nature of sin and the divine reaction against all that has worked against the best interests of both God and the human race" (ibid.). Caird referred to "the wrath of the Lamb" as "a deliberate paradox, by which John intends to goad his readers into theological alertness" (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 90).

⁷⁹Sweet, *Revelation*, 143.

⁸⁰Many have proposed that this is only a proleptic description of the final battle or the end of the world. E.g., R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:179-183; Beckwith, *Apocalypse of John*, 527-528; Moffat, "Revelation of St. John the Divine," 392; A. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 114. Less strictly, Walvoord suggested that "while this is not the final breakup of the world as described later in Revelation . . . it does seem that beginning with the sixth seal God is undertaking a direct intervention into the affairs of the world to punish an evil world" (*Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 136). Lohmeyer saw the events of the sixth seal as simply heralding the inauguration of the eschatological struggle which precedes the end of the age (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 62). Ladd asserted that "the sixth seal brings us to the threshold of the end; and then John stands back, as it were, to tell the story of the end in greater detail" (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 109). For Allo, the sixth seal vision anticipates the final consequences of seals judgment that will occur in the future after the opening of the seventh seal (*L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 106). In response to those who reject the sixth seal as the last judgment because the seventh seal is yet to come, Beale argued that "the seventh seal is another description of the end-time judgment, the conclusion of the judgment introduced in the sixth seal" (*The Book of Revelation*, 404); Roloff also supported the interpretation of this seal as the inauguration of the last judgment (*The Revelation of John*, 95). However, it is best to see, with Schüssler-Fiorenza, an allusion to the Last Judgment itself; for example, "The portents in the heavens are so terrible that they can only be understood in apocalyptic terms to mean the final dissolution of the whole world" (*Revelation*, 64); see also, Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 239-240; Krodell, *Revelation* 179, Osborne, *Revelation*, 273, Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 414; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 243-245; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 138-139; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 209.

if the coming of the eschaton is depicted here, the actual vindication of the martyrs does occur much later in the book. In harmony with a well-recognized feature of narrational style in Semitic literature, the fifth and sixth seals depict, in the words of Gundry, a “sweeping summary of a complex of events with later regressions to add more detail.”⁸¹

That the eschatological climax is indeed reached in the sixth seal is confirmed by καὶ σεισμὸς μέγας ἐγένετο, “and a great earthquake occurred.” Earthquakes are frequently used in Scripture as one of the great events marking the end of the age.⁸² They are found in several places in Revelation (8:5; 11:13; 16:18) at the climax of each septet. Bauckham called them “one of Revelation’s dominant images of the end.”⁸³ Dealing with the topic of the eschatological earthquake in Revelation, he noted that Rev 6:12-17 is an explicit passage “in which the earthquake accompanies the theophany of God the Judge.”⁸⁴ He continued, “The vision of the sixth seal may then be intended already to point forward as far as the Last Judgment.”⁸⁵

At the opening of the seventh seal comes a period of silence into which is intercalated the launch of a further series of plagues. It is a climax and not a transition to the next septet. As Paulien put it, “The silence functions like a calm after the storm of

⁸¹Robert H. Gundry, *Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 75.

⁸²See Isa 13:13, 29:6; Joel 2:10; Ezek 38:19; Amos 8:8 ; Ezek 38:19; Hag 2:6; Mark 13:8, cf. *As. Mos.* 10:4; 4 Ezra 5:8, 9:3, 6:14-16; 2 *Bar.* 70:8.

⁸³Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, xv.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 209. Here, it must be noted that Bauckham distinguished between an earthquake as a sign of the approaching end (cf. Mark 13:8), an earthquake as an accompaniment of the coming of God as king and Judge, and an earthquake which itself forms part of the final judgment.

destruction occasioned by Christ's second coming."⁸⁶ The interpretation of this silence in heaven is an open debate;⁸⁷ it is, however, plausible to find here "a reference to the end-time work of God's new creation."⁸⁸ This would fit well as a resolution to the first set of seal judgments which is dominated by the theme of the undoing of creation. This silence may also be, as suggested by Stefanovic, a symbolic anticipation of the absolute rest of the millennium (Rev 20).⁸⁹

To the possible numerous interpretations/explanations of the "silence" in heaven, otherwise filled with laudation by angels, one may add that the residents of heaven must have been astounded, awed again when they finally come to terms with what the Lord has

⁸⁶Paulien suggested that "the silence is an announcement that the justice of God has been fully executed (Ps 50:3-6; Isa 65:6-7)" ("Seven Seals," 237). Referring to Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13, Doukhan applied the text to the silence that accompanies the coming of God, the *parousia*, and the start of a new creation since "only silence may express the infinite God" (*Secrets of Revelation*, 73). For the interpretation of the silence as a moment of theophany, see Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 184-185.

⁸⁷Some see here a continuation of the day of the Lord imagery, e.g., Richard Fredericks, who pointed to Hab 2:20, Zeph 1:7, Zech 2:13, and consequently understood the silence as a symbol of the "day of the Lord" ("A Sequential Study of Revelation 1-14 Emphasizing the Judgment Motif: With Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Apocalyptic Pedagogy" [PhD dissertation, Andrews University, 1987], 185-187); also Charlier, *Comprendre l'Apocalypse*, 1:194-195. Mounce saw "a dramatic pause that makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth" (*Book of Revelation*, 170). Swete took it as the temporary cessation of revelation (*Apocalypse of St. John*, 106-107). Sweet associated the silence with the time of prayer "in the ritual of daily sacrifice in the Jewish temple" (*Revelation*, 159); he was followed by Peter Wick: "There Was Silence in Heaven (Revelation 8:1): An Annotation to Israel's Kohl's 'Between Voice and Silence,'" *JBL* 117 (1998): 512-514; Ladd referred to the silence of dreadful anticipation of the events that are about to ensue, now that the end has come (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 123); R. H. Charles explained the silence as one imposed upon the hosts of heaven, an arrest of their praises, in order that the prayers of the suffering saints on earth may be heard before him (*Studies in the Apocalypse*, 154). See also R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:123-124. He was followed closely by Bauckham, who argued that "at the climax of history, heaven is silent so that the prayers of the saints can be heard and the final judgment occurs in response to them (v 5)" (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 71).

⁸⁸Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 101-102. Cf. Mathias Rissi who referred to 2 Bar. 3:7; 4 Ezra 6:2; 7:29-30 and affirmed that "according to the apocalyptic rule that the primeval time would be a prototype of the End time, it is expected from a part of the Jewish apocalyptic that the world will again sink back into primeval silence and a new world will arise out of the chaos" (*Time and History*, 4). For a prophetic time application of the half hour to the week of creation, see Doukhan who argued that the week of the end echoes indeed the first week of silence of the beginning (*Secrets of Revelation*, 73).

⁸⁹See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 247.

done through Christ, the slaughtered lamb. In this connection, Tonstad suggests that silence here serves as the reflective corollary of praise⁹⁰ and Ernest Beet beautifully describes this as a ‘rapturous amaze.’⁹¹

The verb πληρώω suggests that the fullness of salvation awaits a cosmic climax when God acts in response to the deep intent of the martyrs’ prayer. The first level of this response in the sixth seal displays the coming of the end through images of holy war, wrath, judgment, and cosmological disturbances before the renewal of God’s creation. The climax of this renewal in the seals septet comes with an image of the total silence which is quite significant “after the shrieks of war, the roars of wild beasts, the moaning of men and women, the chaos of natural disasters.”⁹²

πληρώω and the Numerical Argument

Verse 11b directly ties the “souls under altar” to others referred to as οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν, “their fellow servants and their brethren.” Some have unduly tried to divide them into two classes, but the following participial clause, οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτείνεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοί, disallows such a distinction since they all share in the same fate.⁹³ The oppressed Christians are hereby led to accept the death of their

⁹⁰Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 141.

⁹¹W. Ernest Beet, “Silence in Heaven,” *ExpT* 46 (1932), 76.

⁹²Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 73.

⁹³Swete suggested that “Οἱ σύνδουλοι αὐτῶν are the rest of the saints (cf. Mt. 18:28 ff., Col. 1:7, 4:7, Apoc. 19:10, 22:9); οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν is limited by the participial clause which follows to the rest of the martyrs; καὶ . . . καὶ, both the saints in general, and the martyrs in particular” (*Apocalypse of St. John*, 90). See also Zahn, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 2:362; Ulfgard, *Feast and Future*, 56; cf. Osborne who noted that the καὶ . . . καὶ construction points to the fact that the two groups should be taken as a unit where the second καὶ is probably exegetical (*Revelation*, 289). Bratcher and Hatton concurred that this does not mean two different groups, but the same people viewed, perhaps, in two different ways (*A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 117). Thomas added, “They are in the same category as those already martyred (v. 9) and those yet to be martyred, according to the rest of the statement. . . . The participial clause *hoi mellontes*

fellow servants and their brethren as part of God’s wider redemptive plan for his creation.⁹⁴ According to a general consensus, the word “number” has to be supplied as the implied subject of the verb to make sense of the whole sentence.⁹⁵ Pre-Christian Judaism held indeed a popular view that the end of the world would arise when the roll of the martyrs was complete like for instance in *1 Enoch* 47:4; *4 Ezra* 4:35-36; *2 Baruch* 23:4-5a; cf. 30:2; 75:6 (cf. Rom 11:25; I Clement 2:4; 58:2). According to R. H. Charles, “The thought is highly characteristic of later Judaism, which held that everything was carried out in the divine government of the world according to a certain predestined number, time or measure.”⁹⁶

The statement “the number . . . should be completed” entails that, as Bratcher and Hatton put it, “God has decided that there will be more persecution, and that a certain

apoktennesthai (‘who were about to be killed’) modifies both groups and puts them into a single class” (*Revelation* 1-7, 449). For Bullinger, the redefinition offered in the second part is a sort of *hendiadys*—2 words employed but only one thing, or idea, is intended (*Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 657). “Their fellow slaves” is made more specific by “even their brothers.” Cf. Bengel and Steudel who differentiate among the three classes of martyrs where “the first martyrs were mostly of Israel; their fellow-servants were, in following times, from the heathen, their *brethren* outside of Israel” (“The Apocalypse,” 5:231).

⁹⁴As Aune pointedly noted, “The implication of the divine response to the petition from the martyrs indicates the necessity of suffering in the plan of God, for more Christians must yet die before the eschaton can be inaugurated. Christian suffering does not hinder the fulfillment of the eschaton but rather inevitably leads to its inauguration. It is also evident that the prayer of the martyrs cannot alter the predetermined plan of God (see Luke 18:6-8, which is quite different)” (*Revelation* 6-16, 411).

⁹⁵See among others, R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:177; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 394; Krodell, *Revelation*, 178; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 89; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 91; Loisy, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 152, Osborne, *Revelation*, 289; Aune, *Revelation* 6-16, 411-413; etc.

⁹⁶R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:178. Compare Osborne, *Revelation*, 289; Aune noted that the notion that a predestined number of martyrs must die before God will avenge their deaths is found both in early Judaism and early Christianity (*Revelation* 6-16, 411-413). Beckwith saw in the completion of the number of fellow martyrs “a modification of the familiar belief that the coming of the end was conditioned on the filling up of a predestined number of the elect” (*Apocalypse of John*, 527). Cf. Ladd who reacted against the theological problem raised by this view in the following terms: “This statement is surely not to be understood in any mathematical way, as though God had decreed that there must be a certain number of martyrs, and when this number was slain, the end will come. It does indicate that John knows the end is not immediately to come, but that there is to ensue a time when the church would experience further martyrdom” (*Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 106).

number of Christians will be put to death.”⁹⁷ Thus, the condition for the fulfillment of the delay is predicated on the divine sovereignty based on the apocalyptic notion that a certain number of righteous must be martyred before God can bring the eschaton. Typically, Hendriksen taught that the exact number “has been fixed from eternity in His decree. Until that number has been realized on earth the day of final judgment cannot come.”⁹⁸

The verb πληρώω in v. 11b has been associated with the prediction of further persecutions. Commenting on the verb, R. H. Charles, for example, inferred the anticipation of “a final and universal persecution under Domitian which would follow ‘in a little time.’ In this persecution he [John] expects the number of the martyrs to be completed. Then would ensue the end.”⁹⁹ The universal aspect of the eschatological persecution and martyrdom has been proven to be quite exaggerated,¹⁰⁰ but John’s encouragement to witness for one’s faith to the point of dying is utterly realistic in view

⁹⁷Bratcher and Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, 117. For F. F. Bruce, it is “the persecution, launched in A.D. 64 that must run its course, but when the full tale of the martyrs is made up, the prayers of the saints on the altar fall in judgment on the earth” (“Revelation to John,” 644). Thus, Osborne understood v. 11 to be an “announcement to the believers that this persecution will continue until the appointed time” (*Revelation*, 290). Loisy, “De nouvelles persécutions sont en perspective. Le nombre providentiel des saints et des martyrs n’est pas réalisé encore” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 152).

⁹⁸Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 106. See also Heinz Giesen, “Kirche in der Endzeit. Ekklesiologie und Eschatologie in der Johannesapokalypse,” *SNTSU* 19 (1994): 5-43; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 185.

⁹⁹R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:177. Elsewhere, he asserted that at the end time, all the saints will die a martyrs’ death (*ibid.*, 1:361). In fact, this is an important emphasis of his commentary where the Apocalypse is viewed as a prophecy for the encouragement of the faithful in the face of impending universal martyrdom prior to the *parousia* (*ibid.*, 1:368-370, 2:113).

¹⁰⁰For a view of Revelation as a summons to martyrdom rather than a prophecy of universal martyrdom, see Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 157, 178, 182, 202. Contra the one-sidedness of the theory: see L. Brun, “Übriggebliebene und Märtyrer in der Apk.,” *ThStKr* 102 (1930): 215-231. For a direct challenge to Charles’s view of a universal martyrdom before the *parousia*, see I. H. Marshall, “Martyrdom and the Parousia in the Revelation of John,” in *Studia Evangelica*, ed. F. L. Cross (Berlin: Akademie, 1968), 4:333-339.

of the importance of the coming eschaton.¹⁰¹

Taking the holy war as the background to Revelation, Yarbro Collins stated that “the elect are not purely passive because the deaths suffered by members of the community are thought to play a role in bringing about the turning point, the eschatological battle.”¹⁰² For her, the distinctive feature of Rev 6:9-11 is the blend of the idea of prayer for or expectation of vengeance for the blood of innocent righteous and the notion of a fixed number of persons who must die for their faith before the end can arrive. “From this point of view, the role of the saints is not purely passive; rather there is the possibility of a kind of synergism. Each death for the faith brings the end closer.”¹⁰³

Between the sixth and the seventh seals, the resolution is delayed by an interlude (Rev 7) which keeps John’s audience in suspense and further highlights the significance of the number in 6:11.¹⁰⁴ The seventh seal is not opened until the audition of the 144,000

¹⁰¹On a practical note, J. L. Blevins noted that “this section of Revelation lends itself to dealing with martyr theology in the church today. Because of the abuse of that kind of theology in the early church, we seldom hear it mentioned in the modern church. Yet there is a positive message to be heard in terms of staking your life on what you believe. John did not have in mind for the Christians to go out and seek death but rather not to allow death to stand in the way of their Christian witness” (*Revelation*, Knox Preaching Guides [Atlanta: John Knox, 1984], 37).

¹⁰²A. Yarbro Collins, “Political Perspective of the Revelation of John,” 255-256.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 249. See also A. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 113. For an opposing view, cf. Cameron Charles Afzal, who defended the idea that “there is nothing in Revelation that implies that the believer can hasten the Parousia, other than with prayer (which is how the book concludes). That God establishes a number *does not* imply that the timing of any event is fluid and tied to the completion of the number. It is simply another way of saying God is in control, similar to Jesus’ counsel in Q, “even the hair on your head is numbered, so be not afraid . . . [emphasis his]” (“Time Revealed: The Eschatology of the Book of Revelation Chapters 6-7” [PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1994], 134).

¹⁰⁴Many have associated the double vision of chap. 7 with the sixth seal, because they see in Rev 7 a development of its contents. E.g., Giblin rejected the term “interlude” and chooses the term “enlargement of the sixth seal” containing two portions (*The Book of Revelation*, 90). Also, Corsini, *The Apocalypse*, 155-158; Wayne Kempson, “Theology in the Revelation of John,” (PhD dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 97-99, 101; Denis Lombard, “Préparation de la rencontre des groupes Sémiotique et Bible, Brest 27-31 Août 1990,” *Sémiotique et Bible* 58 (1990): 50, 52; Andrew E. Steinmann, “The Tripartite Structure of the Sixth Seal, the Sixth Trumpet, and the Sixth Bowl of John’s Apocalypse (Rev 6:12-7:17; 9:13-11:14; 16:12-16),” *JETS* 35 (1992): 71-72, 76-79; Ulfsgard, *Feast and Future*, 32-34.

(7:1-8) and the vision of the unnumbered multitude (7:9-17). Essentially, this large two-part scene seems to offer a prophetic preview of the eschatological people of God before and after the last day.¹⁰⁵ In so doing, the interlude actually displays the beneficiaries of

Given the fact that the chapter does not mention any breaking of a seal explicitly; that the chronology could be broken when the perspective of the scene is transposed from earth to heaven (cf. Beale who noted “time in heaven . . . may be reckoned differently than time on earth” [*The Book of Revelation*, 395]), and that the two sections seem to be clearly separated in time as a “before-and-after” of the events of the sixth seal, the widely accepted idea of an interlude fits better with the description of the events of Rev 7. That the time frame for the first preview can be assigned to a situation prior to the Last Day (sixth seal) is supported by the fact that the four horses in Rev 6:1-8 and “the four winds of heaven” of Rev 7: 1 are closely connected in their common background passage of Zech 6:5. Leon Morris, *Revelation of St. John*, 110; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 142; for Mounce, “Rev 7:1-3 would be retrospective and relate to the earlier events” (*Book of Revelation*, 155, n. 3). Because of the affinities of the first section with the sixth seal, Hahn regarded 6:1-7:8 as the sixth seal, whereas 7:9-17 contained the prospect of the consummation (“Zum Aufbau der Johannesoffenbarung,” 153). In addition, Charlier took Rev 6:12-7:8 as the sixth seal consisting of a pessimistic part (6:12-17) and an encouraging section (7:1-8) (*Comprendre l'Apocalypse*, 1:180-181). Like Hahn, he associated the rest to the time of consummation. However, as Strand put the term “interlude” in its correct perspective: “Although the term ‘interlude’ frequently suggests an interruption of or hiatus within, the flow of thought, what these third blocs of material do in visions 11-VII of the Apocalypse is to enhance or intensify the thrust of the immediately preceding material” (“The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation,” 111). Scholarly support for Rev 7 as an interlude includes A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 33-34; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 96; Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 95; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 67, 83; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 16; M. Hopkins, “The Historical Perspective of Apocalypse 1-11,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 46; Ladd, *Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 110-111, Lohse, *Märtyrer Und Gottesknecht*, 50, 61; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Book of Revelation*, 171; Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 65; A. F. Johnson, “Revelation,” 12:477; Mounce, *Book of Revelation*, 154; M. D. Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 353; Prigent, *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 214; Fee, *Revelation*, 104; Boring, *Revelation*, 120-121, 127; Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 169; Osborne, *Revelation*, 300; Krodel, *Revelation*, 180; Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation*, 51; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 120; etc.

¹⁰⁵See Krodel, *Revelation*, 180-188. About the first part, he suggested that “John made use of an earlier Jewish prophetic tradition in which the end signals the gathering of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Ezekiel 47-48)” (*ibid.*, 180). For Roloff, this interlude defines the fate of the community of salvation in the end-time events: “The first part of the scene (vv. 1-8) deals with a present event: the end-time Israel, the salvation community, is sealed and thus subject to God’s right of possession. This is not to be understood in the sense of external preservation and exemption from affliction (cf. 6:9-11). Rather, it refers to the promise of being spared God’s judgment, which penetrates to a humanity alienated from God. The second part of the scene (vv. 9-17) is closely related to the closing vision of the city of God (21:1-22:5) in particular motifs (v. 15a = 22:3; v. 15c = 21:3; v. 17 = 21:4) as well as in its outlook as a whole. It sees the future completion of God’s people in their heavenly glory” (*The Revelation of John*, 95-96). Schüssler-Fiorenza puts it differently where the first part “appears to respond to the question of who can survive the wrath of the God and the Lamb, whereas the second vision and its interpretation point to those who have endured to the end and therefore participate in eschatological salvation” (*Revelation*, 66). Hahn spoke of “ein Ausblick auf die eschatologische Vollendung” (“Zum Aufbau der Johannesoffenbarung,” 150); about the great multitude of the second vision, Sweet thinks that this is “not a different group from the hundred and forty four thousand but Israel of God seen in its ultimate inclusiveness and fulfillment” (*Revelation*, 7).

the delay from two different perspectives: the elect from the twelve tribes of Israel and the elect from the nations in countless number.¹⁰⁶

The blessing of the eschatological age is not meant to be enjoyed individually; it awaits the totality of the eschatological people of God. The social argument hereby emphasizes God's great hopes for the salvation of man and reacts against the overblown individualistic concept of salvation so often noted in the reading of the fifth seal. No fullness can be reached unless all of the eschatological people are there. Then God will take the proper action. Notably, the interlude explodes the numerical concept by showing this eschatological people not only as a perfect figure, but also as a countless multitude.

πληρώω and the Missionary Argument

In Rev 6:11b, God provides a missing element that puts the delay in a more positive perspective that involves his witnesses in a more active way. Delling explained that the significance of πληρώω is associated with the idea of “‘to finish’ or ‘to execute’ of a commanded action; decisively it is almost always God's commission which is to be fulfilled, with particular reference to the ministry of the individual or total community.”¹⁰⁷

The prolongation of time seems to be allowed for the completion of the radical witnessing that has been suggested in the introductory imagery (cf. also Rev 2:3; 3:10). Obviously, this is not easily comprehensible from the martyrs' (human) limited viewpoint from vv. 9-10. “For salvation to be effective, everyone must be present, a concept based

¹⁰⁶Considering the role of the fifth seal as a trigger text, it would be interesting to study how the interludes generally act as prophetic previews offering explanations for the delay raised by the fifth seal from a heavenly perspective.

¹⁰⁷Delling, “πλήρης, πληρώω, κτλ,” 6:297.

on the biblical principle of totality. God does not save one without the other.”¹⁰⁸

Further, the verb πληρώω is closely associated with τελειόω, which means “to consummate or complete to advance to the highest state of happiness, reward, perfection or glory.”¹⁰⁹ This particular meaning shifts the responsibility for the condition to the end more on human responsibility where the *terminus* coincides with the time when the fellow servants and brethren have reached perfection in the matter of their Christian calling.¹¹⁰ According to the fifth seal, the essence of this calling is the proclamation of the word of God through radical witnessing.

Many have emphasized the importance of mission in this text. Brighton noted that the verb “refers to the completion of the mission of their fellow Christians, that is, until the mission of their fellow Christians on earth is fulfilled and completed by their martyrdom.”¹¹¹ Blount also tied in the fulfillment of this mission to radical witnessing:

That broader use of the term fits quite nicely with the way John uses the term in 3:2, the only other time he deploys it. There, it is works that are fulfilled. The Lord is angry because the works of the believers have not been “accomplished” in the Lord's sight. All this would suggest that when John uses the verb “fulfill” in 6:11, particularly in connection with rest (from works . . .) and time, he is speaking about the works of the surviving colleagues of the slaughtered souls. . . . The spotlight falls

¹⁰⁸Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 66. About the heroes of faith, Heb 11:39, 40 reminds us that “all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”

¹⁰⁹M. Stuart offered Col 4:12 as an example of where the two verbs are used almost synonymously (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 1:102). For the range of meaning for τελειόω in connection with the concept of fulfillment, see Gerhard Delling, “τελειόω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 8:80.

¹¹⁰See Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh*, 230; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus-Christ*, 248. In addition, A. F. Johnson suggested that πληρώω may mean “until their fellow servants complete their course,” or “fulfill their Christian calling,” which will involve also martyrdom (“Revelation,” 12:475). To Lilje, the essence of Christian discipleship in John’s eyes was that “every believer in Christ ought to be prepared for martyrdom; for Christians . . . cannot express their priestly communion with their Lord more perfectly than when they accept the suffering and the glory of martyrdom” (*Last Book of the Bible*, 130).

¹¹¹Brighton, *Revelation*, 171.

on that ongoing work of defiant, provocative witness, which must still be accomplished, in whatever manner it is to be done.¹¹²

Caird concurred that the aim of the martyrdom of the followers of the Lamb is the ultimate repentance and conversion of the nations.¹¹³ Bauckham added that

martyrdom is not merely the church's deliverance from the world, but the culmination of the church's witness to the world. Where judgments alone have failed to bring the nations to repentance, the church's suffering witness, along with judgments, will be effective to this end. Thus God's kingdom will come, not simply by the deliverance of the church and the judgment of the nations, but primarily by the repentance of the nations as a result of the church's witness.¹¹⁴

In harmony with other texts from the New Testament, the delay is motivated by the need for the church to fulfill her essential vocation, that is, her witnessing function. In Matt 24:14, time is allowed for that very reason: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come." The missionary task of the church is set here in a vital eschatological perspective. In this soteriological argument for the delay, the emphasis lies in God's patience and forbearance (cf. 2 Pet 3:15; Rev 2:21): He delays the time of the final judgment to provide time for the inhabitants of the world to repent. Throughout the later chapters of Revelation, as Bauckham ably showed, God is in fact unceasingly seen to offer chances for conversion to the nations.¹¹⁵

¹¹²Blount, *Revelation*, 137.

¹¹³For Caird, "where retributive intervention had failed to bring men to repentance, the death of the martyrs would succeed" (*Revelation of John the Divine*, 140). He inferred that "John is writing mainly for martyrs" (ibid., 229). This leads to his defense of the idea of a universal conversion of nations which is probably exaggerated: "The redemption of men from every tribe, tongue, people, and race is far from being the whole story of Christ's work of atonement as John understands it. For he hears the choirs of heaven joined by the voices of the whole creation in a final outburst of praise. . . . Such is his confidence in the universality of Christ's achievement that his vision cannot stop short of universal response" (ibid., 77).

¹¹⁴Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 258.

¹¹⁵See Bauckham, "The Conversion of the Nations," chap. in *The Climax of Prophecy*, 333-337.

Lenski noted how striking and exceptional in every way is the fact “that God delays the final judgment until the world has killed off so many martyrs.” However, he quickly referred to a parallel with Matt 24:9 and noted in advance on that text:

Elsewhere we are told that the end will come when the full number of the Gentiles has come to faith, or when the gospel has been preached as a testimony to all nations, or when the antichrist has run his course. All these statements point to the same terminus.¹¹⁶

Rather than more martyrdom for mere suffering’s sake, the delay here is a sign of God’s patience and forbearance while awaiting the fullness of the proclamation of truth before bringing in the eschaton.

The fullness relates to the end of the Church’s mission through the same radical witnessing as in v. 9. In the missionary argument, the negative aspect of the delay is altered, as Delorme and Donegi put it, in such a way that “the time of injustice which, viewed from the earth (inside out) does not cease to prolong itself, becomes, when viewed from heaven (right way out), the positive time of service and witnessing.”¹¹⁷

Summary and Theological Implications

Revelation 6:11b contains an important verb πληρώω that raises the issue of the eschatological measure. The resolution ends with the notion of an unqualified fullness which marks the *terminus ad quem* of the delay.

He established that “John’s central prophetic conviction about the coming of God’s kingdom on earth [is] that the sacrificial death of the Lamb and the prophetic witness of his followers are God’s strategy for winning all the nations of the world from the dominion of the beast to his own kingdom” (ibid., 336-337).

¹¹⁶Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 239.

¹¹⁷Delorme and Donegani noted that “le temps de l’injustice qui, vu de la terre (à l’envers) n’en finit pas de se prolonger, devient, quand il est vu du ciel (à l’endroit), le temps positif du service et du témoignage” (*L’Apocalypse de Jean*, 192).

1. God's reply justifies the delay before the final judgment by suggesting that the eschatological fullness is still a future reality. If this concept is pre-established in God's absolute omniscience and sovereignty, then the perception of a "delay" as raised by the martyrs' query would, thereby, be automatically nullified. Even this apparent "delay" would, in fact, be part and parcel of God's sovereign plan.

2. The eschatological fullness could be understood as a quantitative concept based on the apocalyptic notion of a pre-established number of the martyrs. The numerical argument presupposes that as long as the number of martyrs or elect has not been reached, there would be no eschatological fullness. The fullness of the final salvation of the individual cannot be divorced from the totality of the eschatological people of God.

3. Otherwise, the text could be introducing an element of contingency in the resolution to allow for some specific purposes of God's total plan to occur. The eschatological fullness could be dependent on the full achievement of the church's mission. If this is the case, God would be involving men in unraveling the final events through their missionary work. In some sense, their witnessing or lack thereof has the ability to hasten or delay this fullness.

4. Rather than a predetermined number of the saved, another way of looking at the contingency is the apocalyptic idea related to the active role of the death of martyrs upon the coming of the eschaton. Here the death of the innocent is seen as inducing divine action. Yarbrow Collins suggested that martyrdom in Revelation directly impacts the eschatological process where "the deaths of the martyrs bring the end nearer."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸Yarbrow Collins, "Political Perspective of the Revelation of John," 255.

5. In the resolution, God's response suggests that the fullness of the martyrs' longings is met in cosmic terms through the coming of God and the renewal of his creation as seen in the conclusion of the seals septet. Here, Doukhan rightly noted, "salvation of the individual necessarily entails the salvation of the universe. Salvation is cosmic or it is not at all."¹¹⁹

Conclusions

The outcome is different from the earthly verdict in the heavenly courtroom where God is seen to be vindicating the martyred saints. Through the gift of the white robe, the death of the saints in v. 9 is reinterpreted as a victory that will lead to the blessings of the future life in glory. The actual enjoyment of this victory seems to be referred until after the eschaton. Future hope would then be offered here as a solution to the theodicy in the fifth seal where the righteous are guaranteed of their reward, even if its execution has to await the time of consummation at the eschaton.

The resolution section is characterized by a strong theme of reversal. White robes are given as symbols of vindication in the higher court of heaven and the pronouncement of the martyrs' future admission in glory. Instead of intense anxiety of the question section, the dead saints are invited to enjoy rest in the peace of the grave for a little while more as they await the consummation of God's victory on their behalf. With the "white robe," the resolution of the theodicy displays God's goodness toward his faithful ones through the reward of a special dignity and honor in his coming kingdom.

Concerning the gift of the white robe, no idea of an interim resurrection body can

¹¹⁹Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 73.

be sustained by such a brief passage. The symbolism suggests that the reward for the righteous dead expresses simply God's pledge of their justification and a special dignity and honor in his forthcoming triumph. Although the reward is guaranteed, the dead saints have to rest patiently until the time of consummation at the eschaton before their resurrection that would allow them to enjoy the eschatological blessings. The goodness of God toward his beloved who witnessed for him unto death is thus safeguarded as he guarantees the recompense of a special dignity and honor in his coming kingdom.

The resolution answers the theodicy by predicting the end of evil in an eschatological perspective: The dead saints are reminded that the bad lasts only for a short while. In spite of appearances, the resolution reaffirms God's sovereignty over time insomuch as even the delay stays within the control of a divine plan. The fact of God's ultimate triumph appears to be an encouragement to faltering believers to remain steadfast in their faith through every trial and persecution.

The length of the "short while" and the coming of the final judgment are contingent upon the active will of the Church for radical witnessing. One finds here the real Christian reason for the prolonged extension of the "last days" between the Resurrection of Christ and his glorious Second Coming. The *terminus ad quem* of the delay comes when the totality of the mature fellow servants, brothers, and sisters have completed the mission of the Church that entails the same radical witnessing as in the introductory section.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study set out to read the fifth seal of Rev 6 as a theodicy related to a persecution in the context of a perceived delay of the eschaton. The burden of the research was, therefore, not only to establish the theodicy within its proper context of imminence, but also to explore the justifying arguments in the resolution section of the text.

After the questions of introduction, chapter 1 dealt with a diachronic survey of literature on the interpretation of the fifth seal to investigate how its eschatological function has been treated over time. A history of interpretation appeared necessary since, despite its importance as a trigger passage for Revelation, the text has never been fully surveyed. Further, the range of differing elucidations of the fifth seal and its complex symbolism revealed serious difficulties in understanding this passage that begged to be revisited on its own terms.

Throughout the history of interpretation, much has been said about the text, but the connections with the problem of the eschatological delay have been, overall, generally ignored. Part of the problem was traced to the earliest patristic interpretations (Origen, Tyconius and followers) which had a long-lasting impact in shifting the meaning of the fifth seal away from its apocalyptic context. Among the contributing factors, this

study identified the early struggles with Gnosticism, the transformation that the text underwent from its usage in the early martyrology literature, the spiritualizing tendencies of later church fathers, and the overdependence on a framework of ideas derived from outside sources.

Yet, the “dying of the righteous” motif as a crucial eschatological signal at the beginning and end of the fifth seal does provide not only two terminal points, but also a delay to account for. The idea that seems to be driving this eschatological theodicy is related to the fact that the end of the individual within the context of an end time persecution failed to coincide with the cosmic end. Behind all this lies indeed the perception that the *parousia* was long overdue.

Despite the importance of the problem of delay for apocalypses in general, I have been unable, after perusing the literature, to find any major article or monograph dealing with the question of theodicy and its relation to the problem of the eschatological delay in the fifth seal. Further, the difficulty arising from the conflicting historical applications of the text called for the supplementation of a theological method to augment the understanding of the text.

Chapter 2 looked at the stage-setting for delay query and other issues around the causes of the martyrs’ death in the preamble section of the fifth seal. The exegetical analysis revealed the dramatic aspect of the theodicy as the delay query is set from a postmortem standpoint. Not only the polluting effect of spilling innocent blood on the earth, but also the climactic upsurge of evil through the slaying of God’s faithful witnesses was seriously endangering the survival of God’s cause. The context suggests a

theodicy problem of such cosmic proportions that nothing less than the final judgment upon the world itself can resolve it.

The cause of death, according to the preamble section, was linked to the faithful's upholding and proclaiming the gospel truth. Further, the word study on the μαρτυρία concept confirmed that the missionary and verbal witness, instead of a mere blood witness mandate, broadened the significance of the passage as regards the functions of believers living in a context of imminence. There, the term μαρτυρία was shown to blend in together rich connotations of radical witness, suffering, death, and judgment. In a context of imminence, the elimination of God's faithful witnesses seriously endangers the very continued existence of the world.

At the heart of the fifth seal, the martyrs' query also betrays a dissonance stemming from the difficulty of reconciling belief in a just, true, and benevolent God and his failure or delay to take action while his faithful ones are victimized. The outcry could be expressing the thought of the early Christians who were wondering when their King, the only Sovereign and holy One, would come to vindicate them and put an end to evil.¹ Given the context of imminence, the perceived delay turns the issue of the pointless violence against the martyrs into a grave matter of eschatological theodicy.

The third chapter explored the issue of the delayed expectation in the question unit and how this relates to the problem of the eschatological delay. Part of the tension

¹About persecution and the delayed *parousia*, Lilje wrote, "When he refers to it, he is answering one of the most difficult questions for the primitive church, which has never ceased to concern later Christian generations, and is still a problem for us at the present day. Two painful experiences were pressing on the heart and mind of the church: the severity of the first persecutions, on the one hand, and the disquieting fact of the delay of the Lord's return, on the other. Out of this pressure the difficult problem arose of the relation between the fulfilment of the individual, and the fulfilment of the world." Lilje, *Last Book of the Bible*, 128.

was traced back to the hopes created by a strong doctrine of God where his sovereign power is portrayed through such images and roles as warrior, king, and judge. We found that the appeal to God's sovereignty had provocative connotations with regard to the challenge of an alternate ruler cult that acted oppressively against the saints. The seriousness of the issue became even worse from the standpoint of the introductory vision background of the victorious enthronement of Jesus as the King of the universe.

A particular theology of suffering contributes also to the tension in the expectation of the passage. At issue are God's character that sets him apart from evil, his absolute holiness, and his role as the avenger of innocent blood. The "how long?" of the fifth seal seems to refer to a situation of unbearable evil, persecution, and continued suffering as in the Hebrew Bible. The cause of suffering, as related to the dead witnesses' testimony to Jesus and the word of God, points to a context of innocent suffering that calls urgently for Yahweh to fulfill his traditional role as the *Go'el* who guarantees final vindication in such circumstances.

A theology of retribution from the covenant language of Deut 32 adds to the crisis around the fifth seal. Ultimately, two ideas appear to fuel the theodicy and its expectation for retributive justice. First, the blood of the righteous always cries out for justice and judgment because such acts of wanton pain and bloodshed impact the covenant God directly. Second, in God's sovereignty, evil cannot go unpunished.

To add up to the tension of the text, we also noted an allusion to the typical way in which the God of the Exodus responded historically to the cries for help of his people. In the opening vision, God is depicted as the coming king/judge/warrior in a language that recalls the Exodus and the Conquest. The OT antecedents suggest that the God of

Exodus would be on trial here for failure to act or his delay to do so. At the climax of unrestrained evil as in the fifth seal, the phrase “how long?” inevitably raises questions about the righteousness of God who has a long and well-established reputation as a great deliverer, but yet he now permits such evil to go unpunished or delays his judgment.

The theology of expectation of the end creates a further strain on the crisis around the fifth seal. Like the preceding seals openings, this seal comes as the direct result of Christ’s exaltation where the “how long?” outcry connects naturally to the issue of the extension and consummation of this inaugurated heavenly kingship on earth. Such cries of the righteous are known to be traditionally related to the end in parallel apocalyptic literature. Imminence is clearly affirmed as the seals are depicted in terms of fulfillment of the eschatological woes. The end is close, but does not yet meet that expectation: hence the perplexity at the postponement of judgment in the outcry.

Finally, the fourth chapter focused on the resolution of the theodicy which raises the issue of *terminus ad quem* of the delay in terms of the eschatological fullness. In contrast to the earthly verdict, God is seen as vindicating his faithful ones in the heavenly courtroom. This victory in the higher court of heaven comes initially through the gift of white robes offered as a token of the martyrs’ future admission in glory and eternal life. However, the white robe of victory does not, in and of itself, quite strictly fulfill the intent of the prayer of the dead saints right away since the vengeance and final judgment is still delayed.

Nevertheless, in spite of the delay, the goodness of God toward those who bore witness to him unto death is safeguarded as he is seen guaranteeing their recompense in his coming kingdom. Therefore, the dead saints are exhorted to rest patiently until the

coming of the resurrection day that would allow them to live again to enjoy the eschatological blessings. From the perspective of a transcendent eschatology, hope for salvation beyond death on the resurrection day is hereby reaffirmed as a breakthrough in this theodicy. In so doing, God somehow validates the faith of the dead witnesses.

The positive force of the exhortation to rest patiently was noted by the intratextual connection with Rev 14:13 where rest is clearly predicated upon the fact of God's final triumph. The dead saints can rest because God is working on their behalf. From a rhetorical and contrastive perspective, since blessedness comes as the benefit of the eschatological work of Christ rewarding the faithful "works" of the radical witnesses, the call to rest could well be an indirect invitation to complacent and faltering Christians among the audience of Revelation to endure until the end. God's ultimate triumph would be encouragement for them to stand firm through every tribulation in order to join as well in the later eschatological blessing.

However, the delay before the coming of the final judgment will last only for a little while. An interval is hereby anticipated, but the sense of imminence is not forsaken. The answer to the "how long?" query places the call for patience within a context of imminence. The end of evil is set in an eschatological light: The dead saints are told that the bad last only for a short while. Thus, the waiting is just temporary; it will not be long before their vengeance call will be granted. God's sovereignty over time is hereby confirmed inasmuch as both the End and even the delay stays within the control of his unalterable will. His sovereignty is thus established by the way he imposes temporal boundaries to the progress of evil.

The justification for the delay is that God's final victory has to await the surviving

colleagues of the dead saints who have to be included in the totality of the eschatological people of God. It is revealed that the eschatological fullness would come only after the dead saints are joined in by many more who are about to bear witness to the point of suffering and death, as well. The blessing of the eschatological age is not meant to be enjoyed individually; it awaits the totality of the eschatological people of God. The social argument hereby stresses God's great hopes for human's redemption over against the endorsement of an individualist salvation so often noted in the interpretation of the fifth seal. No fullness can be reached unless all of the eschatological people of God are there.

Even if the eschatological fullness is predetermined according to the wise decrees of God, human cooperation need not be totally excluded in the process. The verb *πληρόω* can mean fulfilling God's commission with particular reference to a total community. The text suggests that the fullness of time occurs when the totality of the fellow servants, brothers, and sisters have reached their perfection in the matter of Christian calling which entails not letting death stand in the way of the same radical witness as in the introductory verse. In synergy with God, the surviving colleagues were to keep witnessing until their "work," too, is complete. According to this particular understanding, the length of the "short while" and the coming of the final judgment is in some ways contingent upon the active will of the Church for radical witnessing.

The resolution's emphasis on totality puts the significance of the sacrificial witness of Christ and his radical followers in a new light. It is clear from the text that the initial suffering resulted not only from a radical faith in Scripture as a whole, but also in Christ's claims as the Word of God incarnate who overcame the evil one by his sacrificial

death. In God's fullness, all prospective martyrs are led to accept the fact that sacrificial witnessing is an essential part of God's plan to conquer evil and only total victory would bring about the consummation of God's purpose.

The End is finally described in the sixth seal with the convulsion of the cosmos which completes the theme of the undoing of creation before its renewal. According to the cosmic argument, God's response suggests that the fullness of salvation is inseparable from the transformation of the earth. The salvation of the individual is not complete as long as cosmic salvation is suspended. This salvation is suspended because the time was not yet mature for the cosmic end.

The beneficiaries of the delay are introduced in the interlude between the penultimate and the last seal. Chapter 7, indeed, describes the eschatological people of God from two standpoints: the elect from the twelve tribes of Israel and the elect from the nations in countless number. In so doing, the interlude amplifies the brief picture of 6:11 and explodes any restrictive aspect that could be ascribed to the numerical argument by insisting, instead, on the completeness of this eschatological people not only as a perfect figure, but also as a countless multitude.

As far as the unfolding of Revelation goes, the time of consummation is delayed until 11:18, which is actually a synopsis of the last chapters of the book where scenes of the final judgment fulfilling the martyrs' prayer are found. Revelation 10:6 had indeed announced earlier, "There will be delay no longer!" The background of Dan 12 behind Rev 10:1-7 has been widely recognized, but, in contrast, no more extension of time precedes the end. The time of the final judgment and salvation has advanced to an imminent reality. Delayed until now, the extension of Christ's kingship is fulfilled in that

“the kingdom of this world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign for ever and ever” (11:15).

The resolution of the problem of evil climaxes in Christ’s ultimate vindication of the elect (19:11-21), God’s judgment of all according to their works (2:23; 18:6; 20:12-13), the reward that coincides with Jesus’ coming (22:12), and the final rest of the redeemed in a restored creation (21:1-22:15). The final rewarding of the righteous (21:1-4; 22:3-5) is associated with two other events: the judgment of the dead (20:11-15) and the final destruction of the destroyers of the earth (19:2, 11; 20:10). Thus, both God’s judgments and rewards are put squarely in the future. In the resolution of the theodicy in Revelation, God seems to be actually justified as he applies a just retribution to both the righteous and the wicked at the eschaton (Rev 22:6) according to his timing.

Conclusions

This study has shown that the primary concerns of the text are not anthropological but eschatological as intimated by the immediate context. In addition, everything from the depiction of the souls under the altar, the cause of their death, the way God is addressed in the content of the outcry, and to the resolution points clearly to an eschatological theodicy of persecution. The fifth seal is clearly presented as the persecution of the last days where the eschatological climax has been established in and around the fifth seal. It made sense to relate the text to a situation of delay/imminence tension related from the problem of the delay of the *parousia* and to probe the justifying arguments and their repercussions for theodicy.

Regarding the timing of the eschatological fullness and perspective, there is no delay in strict terms from a theocentric perspective. Everything, even the delay, stays

within God's control and he is not subjected to our time perception. He controls human history and it is up to him, according to his benevolent purposes, to establish the time of the end. However, God's answer does suggest that the End coincides with (1) the totality of the eschatological people of God as determined by the wisdom of God's purposes, (2) the fullness of God's missionary program through radical sacrificial witness, (3) the fullness of the measure of iniquity, (4) the general resurrection of dead witnesses, and (5) the transformation of the cosmos. Intratextual connections confirmed those themes as they were further developed throughout the rest of the book.

However, before God finally grants the dead saints' request of vengeance by bringing the final judgment, preliminary judgment scenes are pictured that still offer chances for salvation. In harmony with Rev 6:9-11, the redemptive aspect to the judgment is reiterated several times through statements that, in spite of the severity of the judgments, men "repented not" (9:20, 21). Therefore the purpose of the earlier judgments is not solely punitive, but is primarily to bring men to repentance. By delaying the final judgment, the theodicy in the fifth seal appears to be founded in the mercy of God in favor of the inhabitants of the world. Therefore, in God's program, the theological meaning of the interval is that time is allowed to save the inhabitants of the earth and the fifth seal is an invitation not to let death stand in the way of a radical witness to accomplish that purpose.

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