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**The heavenly court scene of Revelation 4-5**

**Davis, R. Dean, Ph.D.**

**Andreas University, 1987**

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Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE HEAVENLY COURT SCENE OF REVELATION 4-5

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

by

R. Dean Davis

December, 1986

THE HEAVENLY COURT SCENE  
OF REVELATION 4-5

A dissertation  
presented in partial fulfillment  
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by

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**ABSTRACT**

**THE HEAVENLY COURT SCENE OF REVELATION 4-5**

**by**

**R. Dean Davis**

**Faculty adviser: Kenneth A. Strand.**

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH  
Dissertation

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE HEAVENLY COURT SCENE OF REVELATION 4-5

Name of researcher: R. Dean Davis

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Kenneth A. Strand, Ph.D.

Date completed: December, 1986

The purpose of this study is to interpret the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 through a thematic analysis of the passage. Little detailed study has been done to demonstrate the significance of the passage in its totality or its significance for the early chapters of Revelation. Scholars have noted parallels between Revelation and the Old Testament, but only recently have they begun to recognize the major impact of the Old Testament concept of covenant on Revelation.

The research approach for this study is thematic in nature, with exegesis as a necessary tool. Chapter 1 establishes Rev 4-5 as a literary and thematic unit, justifies its contextual limits, and provides an overview of the passage to isolate the following five themes: temple theology; ontological cosmic unity; judgment; covenant

and royal theology; and involvement of the Trinity in salvation. Chapter 2 provides a biblical overview of these themes to establish their biblical meanings. Chapter 3 examines the themes and motifs of Rev 1-3 which have particular contextual significance for the interpretation of Rev 4-5. Chapter 4 gives an analytical overview of the principal heavenly court scenes in the Old Testament which have parallels in the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of Rev 4-5 within the framework of the five themes. Chapter 6 provides a summary, principal conclusions, and the implications for the remainder of Revelation.

It is concluded that the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 is portrayed in terms of a cosmic temple that is based upon the temple of the Old Testament covenant. As a heavenly court scene, it describes a divine council in session that, through an investigative-type judgment, decides the worthiness of the Lamb to receive the covenant inheritance depicted through the imagery of the seven-sealed scroll. Through corporate solidarity with the Lamb, the righteous are also judged. The cultic Lamb is portrayed in terms of king and priest who elevates the righteous to the same status. With the Lamb, the Father and the Holy Spirit are united in the restoration of creation through the redemptive process of the covenant.

#### DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Vera, who with her constant love and inspiration has stood by my side and encouraged me through the years.

Also to Bob, Dolly, and Linda, my beloved children.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The heavenly court scene described in Rev 4-5 has received relatively little detailed and comprehensive study by scholars. Occasional studies of isolated elements have usually made no serious attempt to demonstrate the significance of those elements for the whole narrative. Therefore, there remains the important task of demonstrating the significance of this passage in its totality and also its importance in contributing to a proper understanding of the early chapters of the book of Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Research Proposal

This study is a thematic analysis of Rev 4-5 in light of its own specific context and the general perspective of the Old and New Testaments, demonstrating that this passage portrays (1) a temple setting within a covenant context, (2) a heavenly court scene involving a divine council, and (3) an investigative-type judgment of the Lamb (and the righteous through corporate solidarity with him).

#### Research Approach

The research approach employed in this study is thematic in nature, with exegesis as a necessary tool. The study is divided into

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<sup>1</sup>Specifically, for 1:1-8:1, as is delineated and explicated below.

six chapters. Chapter 1 (i) establishes Rev 4-5 as a literary and thematic unit within the parameters of 1:1-3:22 and 6:1-8:1 (2) justifies the contextual limits for Rev 4-5, and (3) provides an overview of Rev 4-5 in order to isolate the following five themes: (a) temple theology, (b) ontological cosmic unity, (c) judgment, (d) covenant and royal theology, and (e) involvement of the Trinity in salvation. Chapter 2 provides a biblical overview of these themes to establish their biblical meanings. Chapter 3 examines the themes and motifs of Rev 1-3 which have particular contextual significance for the interpretation of Rev 4-5. Chapter 4 gives an analytical overview of the principal heavenly court scenes in the Old Testament which have parallels in the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of Rev 4-5 within the framework of the five themes mentioned above, using 1:1-3:22 as the specific context. Chapter 6 gives a general summary, states the principal conclusions, and notes the significance of this study for the understanding of the remainder of Revelation.

Because the research proposal of this study is to examine the five themes of Rev 4-5, the central focus and concentration is on this passage and its accompanying literature. As a result, the material contained in chapters 2-4 of this study is designed to provide only a brief statement of the general biblical meaning of the five themes of Rev 4-5 rather than a scholarly study of the themes and the accompanying secondary literature.

#### Some Significant Recent Literature

Extensive literature, written over a broad historical period, exists on the book of Revelation. The greater portion of this

literature heavily reflects the presuppositions of the major schools of interpretation (e.g., preterist, historicist, futurist, etc.). A small amount of the available literature has been selected for comment here because it points in directions that are fruitful for a more adequate interpretation of Rev 4-5.

Scholars generally interpret Revelation against a rather specific background, often from the perspective of Graeco-Roman religion and/or Jewish apocalyptic. In her doctoral dissertation, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation, Adela Yarbro Collins argues that Revelation must be understood primarily against the background of the ancient Near East in which biblical writers often used existing imagery to deal with matters pertaining to Yahweh and his people. Collins adds that any other elements utilized from outside this background are "integrated into an overall pattern which owes most to the Semitic-Biblical tradition."<sup>2</sup> This use of the "Semitic-Biblical tradition" as the background of Revelation is methodologically significant for the interpretation of Rev 4-5 because it amplifies the chief background culturally, theologically, and chronologically, and also places the passage in the line of traditional biblical thought and imagery.

A significant new area of investigation has recently been opened with the pioneering work of William H. Shea, "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches."<sup>3</sup> Shea demonstrates that

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<sup>2</sup>Adela Yarbro Collins, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, no. 9 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>William H. Shea, "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches," Andrews University Seminary Studies 21 (1983):74-84.

the letters to the seven churches are in the form of the Old Testament covenant, which in turn were patterned after the Hittite suzerainty covenants. Shea's work has been expanded by Kenneth A. Strand, "A Further Note on the Covenantal Form in the Book of Revelation."<sup>4</sup> Strand convincingly shows that the entire book of Revelation is written in covenantal form, both in content and structure. The work of both Shea and Strand opens the way for a better understanding of the book of Revelation through an investigation of the influence of the Old Testament covenant on Revelation's structure, theology, and imagery.

An important element of the Old Testament covenant with ancient Israel was the temple, in all of its ramifications. James Valentine, in his doctoral dissertation, "Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation,"<sup>5</sup> has investigated the temple themes and motifs which enrich the imagery, definition, and concept of temple in the book of Revelation.

Another line of investigation which needs to be pursued as a subdivision of the covenant and the "Semitic-Biblical tradition" is the divine council. In The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature,<sup>6</sup> E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., has carefully examined

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<sup>4</sup>Kenneth A. Strand, "A Further Note on the Covenantal Form in the Book of Revelation," Andrews University Seminary Studies 21 (1983):251-264.

<sup>5</sup>James Valentine, "Theological Aspects of the Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 24 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980).

the composition and significant role of the divine council and its members. However, in the interpretation of Revelation, only brief references to the divine council have been made in the secondary literature, either recently or through the last several decades.<sup>7</sup>

### Nature of the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation has generally been classified as "apocalyptic" by scholars.<sup>8</sup> The varied views which scholars have held of the definition, origin, Sitz im Leben, and nature of apocalyptic have generally influenced their interpretation of Revelation. It seems imperative, therefore, that my position for the interpretation of the apocalyptic book of Revelation be stated, since it affects both the research method and conclusions reached.

### Revelation's Thought Forms Reflect the Hebrew Faith

The apocalyptic book of Revelation is strongly imbued with traditional biblical concepts, themes, forms, style, and mode of

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. William Barclay, The Revelation of John, 2 vols., rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Isbon T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse of John (New York: Macmillan, 1919; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979); R. H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of St. John, 2 vols., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920); Collins, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation; George Eldon Ladd, A Commentary on the Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972); H. P. Müller, "Die himmlische Ratsversammlung, Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1-5," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 54 (1963):254-267; and J. A. Seiss, The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation (n.p.: Charles C. Cook, 1900; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

<sup>8</sup>There are a few exceptions: e.g., James Kallas, "Apocalypse--An Apocalyptic Book?" Journal of Biblical Literature 86 (1967):69-80; and B. W. Jones, "More about the Apocalypse as Apocalyptic," Journal of Biblical Literature 87 (1968):325-327.

expression. Its thought forms come largely from the traditional Hebrew faith rather than Jewish apocalyptic.<sup>9</sup> Even though the traditional Hebrew faith often employed language and metaphors common to the ancient Near East, the message was not borrowed. The message was unique in the ancient world and was grounded in the traditional roots of covenant theology and historical events.<sup>10</sup>

Revelation Reflects  
Covenant Theology

In the book of Revelation, eschatology, apocalyptic, and covenant theology (with its fulfillment and rewards) are intertwined. In covenant theology, fidelity or infidelity to the covenant resulted in the recompense of either blessings or curses (Lev 26; Deut 28-30; etc.). The prophets wrote of the "Day of Yahweh" as the day of eschatological or apocalyptic recompense, stating that the recompense would come not only on Israel but also upon the other peoples of the world. Among the ancient Near Eastern peoples, the Hebrews developed the most advanced system of eschatology and apocalyptic. They believed that God was above history but acted within history, and he would eventually bring about a conclusion to earthly events through his intervention.

The faith of Yahweh, rooted as it was in divine revelation, was also oriented toward the future.<sup>11</sup> Within the covenant

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<sup>9</sup>See pp. 16-17 below for the significant number of Old Testament allusions found in Revelation.

<sup>10</sup>See G. E. Wright, God Who Acts (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952).

<sup>11</sup>See H. D. Preuss, Jahwehglaube und Zukunftserwartung (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968).

framework, promise led to fulfillment. In this way the future was seen as an extension of the past.<sup>12</sup> The promises of land, prosperity, and kingdom were to be fulfilled on the condition of fidelity. When the oft-repeated "Day of Yahweh" appeared in history, one discerns with clarity the awesome presence of Yahweh in the world in his ongoing activity of judgment or rescue.<sup>13</sup>

#### Revelation Is Not Pseudonymous

The conformity of the apocalyptic of Revelation to traditional biblical modes is further demonstrated by its lack of pseudonymity. The biblical writer had no necessity of augmenting his credibility, because he was known to his readers (1:9). He did not need to incorporate an abundance of vaticinia ex eventu from past and contemporary history into his writings to give the reader assurance that the revelations for the future could be relied upon,<sup>14</sup> because his message was from God (1:1-2).

#### Revelation Reflects the Apocalyptic Book of Daniel

Revelation heavily reflects the Old Testament book of Daniel. Both are apocalyptic in the sense that in the present historical age there is divine intervention, finally establishing the age to come. Both books use composite symbolism and a similar mode of expression

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<sup>12</sup>See A. J. Everson, "The Days of Yahweh," Journal of Biblical Literature 93 (1974):336.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. W. Schmithals, The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation, trans. J. E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 16-17.

(e.g., narrative interspersed with poetry). Both are written in times of crisis and are concerned with evil historical entities. Both are concerned with covenant fulfillment, the temple, and the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Both view history from an end-time perspective, more from God's point of view than from man's.

### Revelation Is Epistolary

The epistolary form of Revelation is unique among apocalypses and provides an envelope structure in which the Prologue (1:1-11) and Epilogue (22:6-21) frame the message of Revelation. The book is a type of apostolic circular letter. Its epistolary introduction, or prescript, seems to be a fully developed, stylized form, similar to the address of ancient letters. The salutation is similar to the Pauline form found in Romans and Galatians.<sup>15</sup> Its introduction is like that of Amos 1:1-2 in that it combines the literary elements of superscription (1:1-3) with a motto (1:7-8).<sup>16</sup> Between these two typical formal elements is the prescript, which is similar to the Pauline letters (1:4-6).<sup>17</sup>

The Epilogue gives the typical instructions, admonition, and blessings to the seven churches who are the epistolary recipients through John--their prophetic intermediary (22:16). At the close of

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<sup>15</sup>E. Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, 2d ed., Handbuch zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), p. 9; a contrary position is taken by W. Bousset, Die Offenbarung Johannis, 6th ed., (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), p. 184.

<sup>16</sup>See E. S. Fiorenza, Priester für Gott: Studien zum Herrschafts- und Priester-motiv in der Apokalypse, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, vol. 7 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), pp. 168-212.

<sup>17</sup>H. Kraft, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, vol. 16a (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1974), pp. 28-29.

the Epilogue, John adds his personal testimony to the divine message (22:20) and then provides a typical New Testament epistolary benediction followed by an Amen (22:21).

#### Revelation Is Parenetic

The traditional biblical nature of Revelation is further demonstrated by its strong parenetic element,<sup>18</sup> which is not only present in the Prologue, Epilogue, and messages to the seven churches, but is interspersed throughout the remaining apocalyptic sections as well. An analysis of the Olivet discourse of Mark 13 reveals a similar pattern of alternation between parenetic and apocalyptic sections.<sup>19</sup>

#### Revelation Is Prophetic

Revelation is like Daniel in its apocalyptic emphasis upon the endtime and God's transcendence, and also in its prophetic elements. The Bible writer states that he was "in the spirit" (1:10)<sup>20</sup> and bearing witness to the "word of God" (1:2). His words are a "prophecy" (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18-19) and parallel in the prophetic sense to the "word of Yahweh" of the Old Testament. Not only is Revelation prophecy in the sense of things which must shortly take place, but it is also prophecy in the traditional sense of spiritual exhortation that comes from the Lord in view of what is about to take

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<sup>18</sup>E. S. Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 39 (1977):357.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 357, n. 18.

<sup>20</sup>All direct biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

place.<sup>21</sup> Its form is largely that of traditional prophecy (e.g., parallelism, anthems, laments, oracles, etc.)<sup>22</sup> and often whole sections are patterned after Old Testament prophetic books. Its imagery also is extensively derived from such classical prophets as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, etc.

The writer of Revelation stands in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets because he casts himself in the role of a prophet through whom the Spirit speaks.<sup>23</sup> He affirms that Old Testament prophecies and covenant promises are being fulfilled in the events currently taking place.<sup>24</sup> Like the prophets of old, he encourages the churches by interpreting their situation in the light of the eschatological future.<sup>25</sup>

#### Revelation Reflects the New Testament Perspective

Revelation exhibits the incontestable influence of the New Testament in its imagery and themes. The starting point of Revelation is the saving action of God in Christ<sup>26</sup> (e.g., 1:1-2, 5-6, 12-18). The language used to identify Christ is varied and rich with traditional biblical imagery and concepts. He is the sacrificial

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<sup>21</sup>David Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John," New Testament Studies 18 (1972):404.

<sup>22</sup>Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure," p. 355.

<sup>23</sup>Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets," pp. 403, 414.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>25</sup>Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure," p. 355.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. W. Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament, trans. L. J. Mattill, Jr. (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 323.

lamb (5:6) stemming from cultic tradition of the tabernacle and temple and confirmed in the Gospels (Matt 27:45-46, 51; Mark 15:33-34, 37-38, 42; Luke 23:44-45, 54; John 1:29, 36; 19:31). He has redeemed his people through his blood (1:6; 5:10) as recorded in the passion story of the Gospels and amplified theologically by Paul (Rom 3:23-26). He is now the great priest/king (1:13-16; 5:5-14) who both rules (1:5) and mediates for his people (1:13).

#### Revelation Reflects Corporate Solidarity

The traditional biblical concept of the corporate solidarity between God and his people is evidenced in Revelation. Christ is among the seven churches (1:13, 20; 2:1) in the traditional sanctuary sense that God was among his people in the Old Testament relationship (Exod 25:8). He is their redeemer (1:5; 5:9), also in the traditional Old Testament sense (e.g., Lev 25:25; Job 19:25; Ps 19:14; Isa 41:14; Jer 50:34). Moreover, he is the preeminent martyr (1:5) whom his people follow into martyrdom (6:9); he has conquered (5:5), and they have conquered (6:9-11); he is the leader on Mount Zion, and they are his followers (14:1-5). In a marriage metaphor, the closeness of the relationship is further illustrated in that Christ's people are referred to as his bride (21:2-3).

#### Revelation Reflects Davidic Royal Theology

Christ is described in Revelation in terms of the Davidic king (5:5-6), as so aptly depicted in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>27</sup> He is

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<sup>27</sup>G. W. Barker, W. L. Lane, and J. R. Michaels, The New Testament Speaks (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 365.

the inheritor of the Davidic promise and the embodiment of its fulfillment (5:5). He establishes the messianic Davidic kingdom (1:6; 5:10; 11:15; 20:6; 21:1-22:5) foretold by Nathan (2 Sam 7:4-17; 1 Chr 17:3-15) and described in its progression in the books of Luke and Acts. Christ promises that the Christian community will be the recipient of the traditional covenant promises (Rev 2-3), which are ultimately and completely fulfilled in Rev 21-22. The close covenant relationship between Christ and his people is described in traditional temple imagery (1:13), as Christ and his people are perfectly united (21:22). The lordship of Christ is exercised over them (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) and over their future history (2:7, 10-11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). God through Christ is bringing in the eternal new order (21:1) described by Isaiah (65:17), in which the eternal messianic kingdom is completely established.

#### Revelation Reflects the Intimate Relationship of the Covenant

With the corporate solidarity which exists between Christ and his people, there is also a close and personal fellowship between them that is typical of the covenant relationship. He knows them so intimately (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15) that he has the true gnosis of Johannine thought. On this basis he exhorts them to turn from evil and remain faithful until the final rewards are dispensed. He also brings personal reassurance by commanding them to "fear not" (1:17), just as he had done for his disciples in the Gospels (Luke 5:10, 12:32; Matt 10:31). He is their "shepherd," guiding them to springs of water and wiping away their tears (7:17).

Revelation Reflects the Involvement  
of the Trinity in Salvation

The influence of the New Testament on the traditional biblical themes of the apocalyptic of Revelation is especially notable in the involvement of all three persons of the Trinity in bringing about the ultimate salvation. As the Father sits upon the throne in judgment (4:2), the Son appears in the imagery of the Lamb accompanied with the presence of the Holy Spirit (5:6). The Son has achieved victory over the forces of evil (5:5) and has gained the right to save the righteous (5:9). On the other hand, the wicked face the combined wrath of the Father and of the Lamb (6:17). The glorified Christ is the "son of man" (1:13) of Dan 7:13,<sup>28</sup> who is serving as the high priest of his people (1:13). As the "son of man," he is the incarnate bridge between man and God. Ultimately, he is "coming with the clouds" (1:7) to appear as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16). The Holy Spirit continues the earthly work of the glorified Christ (1:4; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 4:6; 5:6), as Jesus promised his disciples in John 14-16. The Spirit is an active agent in divine revelation (1:10; 14:13; 19:10; 21:10) and the one who gives the final divine invitation to come and possess the eschatological kingdom (22:17).

Revelation Reflects Jesus'  
Mode of Revelation

The superscription of the Prologue of Revelation states that the words of the book are a divine revelation given for the purpose

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<sup>28</sup>See Arthur J. Ferch, The Son of Man in Daniel 7, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, no. 6 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

of showing what would shortly take place. The method of imparting this revelation is indicated by the term ἐσήμανεν ("made it known," 1:1). This verb is often translated as "make known" or "signify."<sup>29</sup> In ancient Greece, it was a technical term employed for the response of an oracle which often answered an inquirer in symbolic or enigmatic language.<sup>30</sup> In the Gospel of John it is employed three times to signify the manner of death Jesus would die (John 12:33; 18:32; 21:19). The verb can also be translated as "indicate" in the sense of portraying or showing. M. C. Tenney states that it "can be interpreted as 'sign-i-fy,' or to convey truth by signs and symbols."<sup>31</sup> This means of conveying truth by signs and symbols may be the type of portrayal and language employed in Revelation to describe how the divine revelation is being made known to John.

Revelation Reflects the Old  
Testament Apocalyptic  
Mode of Expression

The language used in Revelation is different from most biblical prophecy in that it uses composite symbolism like the apocalyptic book of Daniel in the Old Testament. This composite symbolism appears to be especially linked with apocalyptic interest.

Much of the descriptive language used in Daniel and Revelation is mythopoeic in form, as is often the case for

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<sup>29</sup>Walter Bauer, "σημαίνω," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, trans. Walter F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 755.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Plutarch Moralia, 404E; Xenophon Memorabilia 1.1.19.

<sup>31</sup>M. C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 43.

apocalypses.<sup>32</sup> The ancient Near East, outside of the Hebrew faith, employed this language in a particular way of thinking and in a particular way of describing reality. It viewed the cosmos as a unit in which man was personally confronted with the gods, universe, and the forces of nature. Since man personally experienced divine acts and events, they served for him as the basis for authoritative truth.<sup>33</sup> Man could only escape historical realities by reenacting the cosmic dramas of the gods through ritual celebrations or by fleeing into the heavenly realm of timeless vision.<sup>34</sup>

The Hebrews did not think mythopoeically.<sup>35</sup> They denied the myths, even though they often employed mythopoeic language and metaphors. Their reasoning was based on history. Past, present, and anticipation of the future always influenced their thought.<sup>36</sup>

In the apocalyptic book of Revelation, mythopoeic language is used with the composite symbolism. However, because of the traditional Hebrew way of thinking, where fact cannot be separated from interpretation, the symbols are historicized.

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<sup>32</sup>See Philip Carrington, "Astral Mythology in the Revelation," Anglican Theology Review 13 (1931):289-305; Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure," p. 254; and R. Halver, Der Mythos im letzten Buch der Bibel: Eine Untersuchung der Bildersprache der Johannes-Apokalypse, Theologische Forschung, vol. 32 (Hamburg: Herbert Reich Evangelischer Verlag, 1964).

<sup>33</sup>Henri Frankfort et al., Before Philosophy (Chicago: University Press, 1946; reprint ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 11-36.

<sup>34</sup>Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure," p. 356.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>36</sup>G. E. Wright, The Old Testament Against Its Environment (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1950; reprint ed., London: SCM Press, 1968), pp. 26-29.

Revelation's Allusions  
to the Old Testament

Works of apocalyptic nature seldom contain quotations in a strict sense, and Revelation is no exception. It, like others, abounds in Old Testament allusions which are woven into the context with supreme skill. Although not containing a single true quotation, Revelation "is nevertheless interwoven with O.T. material to a greater extent than any other writing in the N.T."<sup>37</sup> This material, however, is freely adapted to suit the writer's own time and purpose.<sup>38</sup>

The great importance of the traditional biblical writings for the interpretation of Revelation is further emphasized by the pervasive appeal to the Old Testament for background imagery. H. B. Swete declares that of the 404 verses found in Revelation, 278 utilize Old Testament Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

A survey of the suggested number of Old Testament allusions found in Revelation reveals the following: M. C. Tenney suggests 348, J. M. Ford thinks there are over 400, and A. Vanhoye speaks of 518.<sup>40</sup> Tenney states that the actual number of different Old Testament

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<sup>37</sup> Krister Stendahl, The School of St. Matthew, and Its Use of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 158-59.

<sup>38</sup> Ferrel Jenkins, The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> H. B. Swete, The Apocalypse of St. John, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1911; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), p. cxl.

<sup>40</sup> Tenney, Revelation, p. 101; J. M. Ford, Revelation, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), p. 27; and A. Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezéchiel dans l'Apocalypse," Biblica 43 (1962):439.

passages alluded to is approximately 250, making an average of more than ten per chapter in Revelation.<sup>41</sup> Undoubtedly, all these estimates would be found to be far too conservative if an exhaustive and adequate study were done. An indication that these estimates are low is found in the research of Jon Paulien who has compiled some 2,000 allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation.<sup>42</sup>

#### Summary of the Nature of the Book of Revelation

The quality and pervasiveness in which Revelation is traditionally biblical in imagery, concepts, themes, form, style, and mode of expression are of supreme importance for the interpreter of Revelation. Any failure to recognize the crucial importance of these elements inevitably leads to a gross distortion in interpretation.

#### Revelation 4-5 as a Literary and Thematic Unit

Abundant evidence is available to consider Rev 4-5 as a thematic and literary unit for exegetical purposes and/or thematic study. First of all, one notes at the beginning of Rev 4 that the heptad series of the messages to the seven churches concludes in 3:22 with one of the standard formula endings ("He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches") and that the opening words of Rev 4 are: "After this I looked" (4:1). The "After this" is obviously a reference to the previous parenetic material for the seven churches and probably includes the vision description of

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<sup>41</sup>Tenney, Revelation, p. 101.

<sup>42</sup>Jon Paulien, "The Fifth Trumpet, Rev 9:1-11" (Unpublished manuscript, Andrews University, 1982), p. 12.

1:10-20. The "I looked" is a reference to something new being observed after the previous experience.

The declaration, "Lo, in heaven an open door" (4:1), also signals a change from the previous scene of the seven churches and their messages to a new scene which is stated to be occurring in heaven. The biblical writer speaks, as well, of a new visionary experience by declaring: "I was in the Spirit" (4:2)--an experience directly linked with what he describes as the scene of "in heaven an open door" (4:1). Thus, it becomes clear that Rev 4 begins both a new theme and a separate visionary experience from what is portrayed in Rev 1-3.

The new thematic development in Rev 4 has as the central point of its vision a "throne" and "one seated on the throne" (4:2). This throne and its occupant are discussed throughout the chapter. The description of the appearance of the occupant of the throne (4:3) is followed by detail concerning the entire scene--twenty-four elders surrounding the central throne (4:4); lightnings, voices, and thunders issuing forth from the throne (4:5); seven lamps of fire and a sea of glass before the throne (4:5a-6a); and four living creatures in the midst of, and around, the throne (4:6b-8a). The four living creatures render praise to the one sitting upon the throne (4:8b-9), and then the twenty-four elders follow with their praise and adoration to him (4:10-11).

From this progression of thought it is clear that Rev 4 is a thematic unit. Furthermore, the numerous occurrences of the connective καί ("and") throughout the passage, plus the lack of recurrence of εἶδον ("I saw"), adds support to this conclusion.

The question now arises as to the relationship of Rev 5 to Rev 4. Is Rev 5 a new thematic and linguistic unit or is it a continuation of the theme of Rev 4? The opening words are *καὶ εἶδον*, ("And I saw," 5:1), which could either introduce a new and separate thematic unit or a new aspect of the vision and theme of Rev 4.

Rev 5 and Rev 4 are linked by the reference in 5:1 to the "one sitting on the throne." A new element, however, is introduced into this setting by the mention of the seven-sealed scroll in the right hand of that person. Indeed, yet another element is introduced into the general theme with the repetition in 5:2 of *καὶ εἶδον* ("and I saw"): namely, the appearance of the strong angel who proclaims in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" The initial dilemma and the ultimate solution to the problem of the scroll are described in 5:3-5. Once again in 5:6, *καὶ εἶδον* ("I saw") brings in a new element, this time a Lamb who is worthy to break the seven seals and open the scroll (5:6b-7). When the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders burst forth in adoration (5:9-10). Then still another new element appears--again with the introductory phrase *καὶ εἶδον* ("Then I looked," 5:11); namely, the cosmic praise rendered to the Lamb and to the one sitting upon the throne (5:11-14). Thus, it is clear that Rev 5 provides a continuation of the theme of Rev 4, but adds new elements.

The textual evidence for considering Rev 4-5 as a literary and thematic unit may now be summarized as follows: (1) there is a clear thematic and literary break between Rev 3 and Rev 4, for the heptad series of the messages to the churches has ended; (2) an "I

saw" (4:1) introduces something new; (3) this "I saw" phrase is reinforced with the words "After this," a reference to the previous material of the heptad series; and finally, (4) the theme introduced in Rev 4 is a new unit, pertaining to the "one sitting upon the throne." This theme then continues in Rev 5, with the addition of several new elements, each introduced with "and I saw."

In addition to the foregoing evidence that Rev 4-5 is a new literary unit, we may note in the literary patterns of Rev 4 and Rev 5 a structural parallel which serves as an indicator of intentionally paired narratives:

| <u>Revelation 4</u>   | <u>Revelation 5</u>   |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Narrative Description | Narrative Description |
| Hymns                 | Hymns                 |

If Rev 4 begins a thematic and literary unit which continues through Rev 5, there remains the task of determining whether the central focus of this investigation should end with Rev 5.

Thematically, Rev 6 is a continuation of Rev 4-5. It describes both the opening and content of the first six seals of the seven-sealed scroll which the Lamb was judged worthy to take and to open. Rev 7 serves as an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals to depict who will be able to stand in the great day of wrath of the one seated on the throne and of the Lamb. Rev 8:1 thematically finalizes the unit with the opening of the seventh seal.

Because there is a partial thematic and literary break between Rev 4-5 and Rev 6:1-8:1, it is justifiable to exclude a detailed investigation of Rev 6 in this study. In Rev 4-5, the full heavenly court-scene setting has been described, and the praise to

the Lamb and to the one sitting upon the throne has been completed: now in 6:1-8:1, a new activity occurs--the actual opening of the seven seals. Thus, because 6:1-8:1 can be separated from the larger whole of 4:1-8:1, Rev 4-5 remains as a viable unit for exegesis and thematic study.

#### Contextual Limits for Revelation 4-5

The whole book of Revelation is naturally the broad context for Rev 4-5. However, to study in detail a context of such magnitude would go far beyond the reasonable limits of this present research endeavor. Therefore, I propose to deal only with a more limited and specific context for the exegesis of Rev 4-5, namely, with Rev 1-3, which unquestionably serves as the preceding context for Rev 4-5.

Relatively few elements directly link Rev 4-5 with its preceding context. The first overt link is the phrase, "After this" in 4:1, tying Rev 4-5 to Rev 1-3. The second such link is the expression, "the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet" (4:1). This "first voice" is obviously a reference to the voice of 1:10, which is the "loud voice like a trumpet." A third link appears in 4:5, where "before the throne burn seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God." Rev 1:4 mentions these seven spirits in the salutation as "the seven spirits who are before his throne" (1:4). The more subtle thematic links are considered in the treatment of Rev 4-5 in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

The after context of Rev 6:1-8:1 is, as already stated, clearly linked with Rev 4-5 through its content. In Rev 5 the Lamb takes the seven-sealed scroll from the right hand of the one seated on the throne (5:7) and is able to open it (5:9). In Rev 6:1-8:1

each of the seven seals are opened by the Lamb (6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). The ending of the treatment of the seven seals in 8:1 and the beginning of the preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets in 8:2 serves as a convenient contextual break to limit the contextual parameters of the immediate after context of Rev 4-5.

#### Principal Themes and Motifs of Revelation 4-5

Having established the feasibility of studying Rev 4-5 as a thematic unit, I now propose to isolate the principal themes of this unit that become evident through an overview of the passage.

#### Temple Theology

Temple theology pervades all of Rev 4-5. The "temple" as defined here functions to depict the reality of the divine presence through the imagery of the physical form of the ancient Hebrew tabernacle/temple and its cultic ritual. The tabernacle/temple was God's house or dwelling place. In traditional Hebrew imagery, this meant the presence of God united with his people Israel as they were encamped around the wilderness tabernacle, with the objects and entities of the tabernacle and encampment being in direct relationship to God himself. In the same manner, the objects and entities mentioned in Rev 4-5 are in direct relationship to the one seated upon the central throne.

In Rev 4, the colors associated with the throne serve as imagery for specific aspects of the encampment of Israel (cf. Exod 28:17-21; Gen 49; Ps 60:7). The twenty-four thrones occupied by elders reflect the organizational number of the temple priesthood and the role of the leaders of Israel who served in the temple/tabernacle

and the government of Israel (cf. 1 Chr 23-26). The fact that the elders surround the one seated on the central throne indicates that they are subordinate to him and serve him. These elders are clad in garments which reflect priestly service (cf. Rev 1:13; 3:4-5, 18; 7:10). The lightnings, voices, and thunders are reminiscent of when Yahweh dwelt at Mount Sinai at the time of the building of the tabernacle (cf. Exod 19:16).<sup>43</sup> The seven torches of fire are located in the traditional tabernacle position of the menorah before the ark, or symbolic throne of God (cf. Exod 25:31-40; 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4; 2 Chr 4:7). The sea of glass before the throne appears to be imagery based upon the laver of the tabernacle, or upon the molten sea of the temple (cf. 1 Kgs 7:23-26; 2 Chr 4:6). The four living creatures reflect the position of the tribes of Israel when they were camped around the tabernacle (cf. Ezek 1, 10; Num 2, 10; Gen 49, Deut 32). In Rev 5, the position of the Lamb reflects the role of the sacrificial lamb in the tabernacle/temple service (Exod 12:21-27). The adoration expressed in both Rev 4 and Rev 5 is antiphonal, as was that of the temple service on some occasions.

#### Ontological Cosmic Unity

An ontological cosmic unity is depicted in Rev 4-5. The term "ontological" as employed here means the state or nature of being/reality, as it is depicted in the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5. The term "cosmic" is used in the sense of heaven, earth, and sea--or in other words, all of creation, including both the heavenly

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<sup>43</sup>See Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus," Andrews University Seminary Studies 24 (1986):132-134 for parallels between Mount Sinai and the tabernacle.

and earthly realms. The central throne described in Rev 4-5 is in heaven. The heavenly realm of the cosmos is receiving primary emphasis over other cosmic realms, since this throne and the one sitting upon it dominate the passage. However, into this heavenly setting the writer injects elements connected with the tabernacle and the camp of Israel on earth. In Rev 4, these include the imagery of the colors associated with the throne, the twenty-four elders, articles of furniture connected with the tabernacle, and the four living creatures. In Rev 5 the proclamation of the angel results in a cosmic search for a "worthy" one. The Lamb, who is associated with both the central throne and entities connected with earth, is found to be worthy. When he takes the scroll from the one seated on the throne, there is a cosmic response of adoration from beings in heaven, on the earth, under the earth, and in the sea. Thus, the cosmos is depicted as ontologically united under the one seated upon the central throne.

### Judgment

The judgment theme of Rev 4-5 is less explicit than other major themes, yet just as pervasive. Initially, one perceives here a heavenly court scene, with a traditional divine council in session. By virtue of position, the one on the central throne presides over the council. The council members clearly include the twenty-four elders seated on thrones and may include others.

The cosmic search for one who is "worthy" to take the scroll and to break its seals is central to the judgment theme. Implicit to the heavenly council scene is the fact that the Lamb is found "worthy." In order to be considered worthy, he must have been judged

so by the council. The anthems of adoration in Rev 5 imply a cosmic acceptance of the Lamb's worthiness.

Hints of judgment also appear throughout the passage in other forms. In the first anthem of praise, the four living creatures proclaim that the one seated on the throne is "the coming one." The coming one is a royal term and may refer to coming in judgment, as when the king comes and thrones are placed for a judgment session (cf. Dan 7:9). The "lightnings, voices, and thunders" which proceed from the throne are usually indicators of judgment (cf. Rev 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).

Further evidence of the theme of judgment appears with the introductory words of the passage, in which the "first voice" was "like a trumpet" (4:1). This is the voice of "one like a son of man" (cf. 1:13), who is called, in covenant terminology, the "faithful and true witness" (3:14). The trumpet was the instrument for announcement/warning (Num 10:1-10). The message from the "one like a son of man" in Rev 2-3 serves as the announcement/warning for the seven churches before the judgment session of Rev 4-5.

#### Covenant and Royal Theology

In the first anthem of praise in Rev 5 the Lamb was declared worthy to take the scroll because of three accomplishments: (1) he was slain, (2) he ransomed some from all parts of the earth, and (3) he made the ransomed ones a kingdom and priests of God. The accomplishments of the Lamb are linked with covenant and royal theology.

Essential elements of the covenant include: kingdom, temple, and salvation. In the covenant, God made his people a kingdom of

priests (Exod 19:6). The heart of the covenant was the temple/tabernacle (Exod 25-30). Central to the service of the temple was the sacrifice which achieved atonement/ransom/salvation for the people. The sacrifice element comes into focus in 5:6 in the term "Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." In Rev 4, one seated upon the central throne, the colors of the throne, twenty-four elders on thrones, and four living creatures guarding the throne are all kingdom imagery. The Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, the seven horns of the Lamb, the kingdom established by the Lamb, and the praise which is appropriate for the ruler of the kingdom in Rev 5 continue this imagery.

Covenant theology includes temple theology, which has already been considered in the first major theme discussed above. However, it should be added that the salvation aspects of covenant theology closely link the temple with salvation. It was through the temple that salvation was effected. Therefore, the priestly role of the Lamb is very important in Revelation. This role is depicted in the image of the slain Lamb; the exalted position of the Lamb; the fact that the Lamb is in the temple; the seven eyes of the Lamb, which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the world; and the fact that the Lamb takes the scroll from the one seated upon the throne.

#### Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

Rev 4-5 depicts the involvement of the three persons of the Trinity in salvation. The person who is foremost in position and authority is seated on the central throne. All others are placed in relationship to him. He is called the "Lord God Almighty" and

described as the Creator. Before him--and thus at his command--are the seven spirits of God. The twenty-four elders cast their victory crowns before him, implying that he is responsible for their crowns.

The Lamb is the central figure of Rev 5. He is the redemptive figure who emerges after the cosmic search and is judged worthy to take the seven-sealed scroll from the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne and to break its seals. He is the Lion who conquered in warfare, the sacrificial lamb which makes atonement, and the royal son who establishes the righteous as a kingdom and priests. He is the one who restores the lost inheritance to God when those who are ransomed are ransomed "for God." Because of what he has done, he is the one to whom most of the adoration in Rev 5 is directed.

The Lamb, who represents the second person of the Trinity, has seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the world. It appears that the seven spirits of the Lamb are the same as the seven spirits before the throne, thereby linking the spirits with both the first and second persons of the Trinity. Thus, the one on the throne who is designated as the Creator, the seven spirits who are both before the throne and sent into all the earth, and the Lamb who is the redeemer are all linked in the same grand enterprise of salvation.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BIBLICAL OVERVIEW OF FIVE

#### MAJOR THEMES FROM REV 4-5

In the preceding chapter, five major themes in Rev 4-5 were identified and isolated: temple theology, ontological cosmic unity, judgment, covenant and royal theology, and involvement of the Trinity in salvation. These are traditional biblical themes and are not unique to the book of Revelation. In the present chapter a brief biblical overview of these five themes is given to provide a general context for understanding these themes in the specific context of Rev 4-5. To facilitate the development of thought in this overview, covenant and royal theology is removed from its fourth position in the sequence of themes from Rev 4-5 and considered first. The present overview focuses on primary evidence from Scripture, rather than on the scholarly literature available.<sup>1</sup> It is intended to be

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<sup>1</sup>For some helpful secondary literature on the themes of this chapter, see Niels-Erik Andreasen, "The Heavenly Sanctuary in the Old Testament," in The Sanctuary and the Atonement, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1981), pp. 87-114; L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 89-99; Walter Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Westminster Press, 1961, 1967), 2:15-68; Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote, and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 37-85; George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 135-192, 286-297; R. J. McKelvey, The New Temple (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); G. E. Menderhall, "Covenant," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 1:714-723; P. A. Riemann, "Covenant, Mosaic," The

representative rather than comprehensive.

### Covenant and Royal Theology

The fourth theme from Rev 4-5 listed in chapter 1, and here to be considered first because of its primary significance for the treatment of the other themes, is covenant and royal theology. It is a broad biblical theme of crucial importance for understanding Scripture in general and Revelation in particular.

### Covenant Elements

The idea of covenant was the general organizational and relational vehicle for Yahweh to describe and define the Hebrew religion and economy. It was a "suzerainty" type covenant in which the superior (suzerain) provided the conditions of the covenant and the inferior (vassal) either accepted or rejected it. G. E. Mendenhall has applied the six structural elements of Hittite suzerainty treaties isolated by V. Korošec to the divine covenant in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. He found that these elements could vary in both order and wording. Occasionally one element of the six might be missing.<sup>2</sup>

The Hittite suzerainty covenant elements were: preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, provision for deposit in the

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Interpreter's Dictionary of the of the Bible, Supplementary volume (1976), pp. 192-197; Rodríguez, "Sanctuary Theology in Exodus," pp. 127-145; and M. Weinfeld, "Covenant, Davidic," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary volume (1976), pp. 188-192. Other references may be found in the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup>G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," in The Biblical Archaeologist Reader, 3 vols., ed. E. F. Campbell, Jr., and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 3:25-53.

temple and periodic public reading, list of witnesses, and blessing/curse formula. The preamble identified the author of the covenant and listed his titles and attributes. The historical prologue provided a detailed summary of previous historical relations which normally were stated in the I-Thou form of address. The stipulations indicated what the covenant giver expected of the inferior. These stipulations included complete fidelity, loyalty, and occasional appearances before the covenant giver. The provision for deposit in the temple and periodic public reading demonstrated the importance of the covenant and the fact that the population had covenant obligations they must know. The list of witnesses served as a test of the legality of the covenant and as an enforcement guarantee. The blessing/curse formula indicated that the covenant stood completely within the realm of sacred law, for all the sanctions were religious. These blessings/curses were always the actions of the gods.<sup>3</sup>

When Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt, he established a covenant with them at Sinai (Exod 19-24). He made the covenant. Israel received it. The covenant was conditional (19:5): fulfillment of the divine covenant promises depended on the present and future acceptance by Israel of the covenant conditions. If Israel was faithful to the conditions of the covenant at the time of its execution, blessings would come. But if Israel were unfaithful, curses would occur (Lev 26; Deut 27-30). The fact that the divine covenant was conditional and curses could come did not mean the

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<sup>3</sup>Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms," 3:32-36.

ultimate fulfillment of the covenant would never occur. Rather, it meant the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant was unconditional even if delayed.<sup>4</sup> The Old Testament provides extensive documentation of Yahweh's covenant, its repeated renewal with Israel to different generations, and the extensive delays in the complete fulfillment of the promised blessings because of Israel's failure to observe the covenant.

Historically, the blessing/curse formula of the covenant was fulfilled in the form of blessings during the reigns of David and Solomon. A notable demonstration of the curse came with the division of the kingdom after the reign of Solomon, the eventual devastation, and, finally, exile for both the northern and southern kingdoms.

The Gospels demonstrate the same blessing/curse pattern of the Old Testament covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was the new lawgiver on a mountain different from Sinai. The blessings of Matt 5:3-11 are for those entering the kingdom and accepting the covenant conditions. A parallel account of that sermon in Luke 6:20-26 lists blessings counterbalanced by an equal number of curses, in a manner similar to Lev 26 and Deut 27-30.

#### Covenant Relationship

Yahweh's covenant was instituted with the declaration that Israel would be a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). Further, Israel was to have a special relationship with Yahweh and an exalted position before him. She would be Yahweh's "own possession among all

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. P. A. Riemann, "Covenant, Mosaic," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary volume, (1976), p. 196.

peoples" (19:5). She would be "set high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor" (Deut 26:19).

In the Hebrew for "kingdom of priests," the construct state is used indicating that the phrase forms a single idea. The words, however, can be interpreted in different ways. Israel could be a kingdom whose subjects were priests, or a nation where the power belonged to priests. The term kingdom could mean that Israel is ruled by a king as the other nations of the world, or that Israel is sovereign over the other nations.<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew construct suggests that the two terms, "kingdom" and "priests," define the same relationship. Thus, either the kingdom is Israel ruled by God (in which the priesthood is one of worship), or Israel rules other nations (in which its priestly function is mediatorial).<sup>6</sup>

A third possibility is that both concepts are correct: "kingdom" and "priests" exist in a dual relationship to both Yahweh and the surrounding nations. This would mean that Israel shared in the rulership of Yahweh's kingdom as vassal kings. In this kingdom they would all be priests to God in the vassal relationship. At the same time they would have a special position and function before the nations as vassals of Yahweh. This third possibility means they were to participate in the rule of the whole earth and serve the peoples of the earth as priests. Isa 61:6 illustrates this concept with the statement: "but you shall be called the priests of the Lord, men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the

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<sup>5</sup>A. Gelston, "The Royal Priesthood," Evangelical Quarterly 31 (1959):153.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-154.

wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory." In this verse two ideas are developed. First, Israel was to serve as priests for the world. Second, Israel was to be maintained by the wealth of the nations, just as the priests were supported by the ordinary people of Israel. However, with this idea of priesthood there also appears to be a latent concept of royalty.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, I conclude the Hebrew of "kingdom of priests" in Exod 19:6 should be interpreted first as implying vertical relationship with Yahweh as vassals and priests; and second, the "kingdom of priests" implies an horizontal relationship to participation in the divine rule and priestly activity on earth. These concepts are referred to in my treatment of Rev 1:6 and the messages to the seven churches in Rev 2-3.

#### Davidic Covenant

A very important aspect of the ancient Israelite covenant theology was royal theology. This aspect appears in detail during the early period of the Hebrew monarchy. The broad scriptural lines of this royal theology are traced as they pertain to Jesus Christ and his sovereignty.

An important passage for Davidic, or royal, theology is the so-called Nathan prophecy in 2 Sam 7:1-17 and 1 Chr 17:1-15. In this prophecy, Yahweh promised to David that his dynasty would be established forever and a special "seed" would come forth after him. In both passages it is made clear that the "seed" includes a "son" (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 17:13). The son is obviously a royal son and heir in the Davidic line.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

It is evident from 1 Kgs 2:1-4, 6:11-12, and 9:4-9 that the Nathan prophecy was conditional upon fidelity to Yahweh. The statement that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom would break off from Israel was viewed as a temporary judgment. By implication it assumed that the future would bring a restoration of completeness to the Davidic dynasty. Later prophets made reference to this restoration.<sup>8</sup>

The establishment of the house of David and the coming of the "seed" is in line with the earlier covenant promises made to Abraham. Abraham was promised "seed" which would become a great nation (Gen 12:1-3) and "land" (Gen 15:18-21). The boundaries of this land are stated in Num 34:1-12.

When Abraham's descendant Jacob blessed his sons, the blessing on Judah (Gen 49:8-12) says that neither scepter nor ruling authority would depart from Judah until "he comes to whom it belongs, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (49:10). The Septuagint word for "scepter" (ῥαβδον) in Gen 49:10 is the same word used for Jesus Christ as "ruler" in Rev 1:5. In the Balaam cycle of prophecies, a "star shall come forth out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). In Rev 2:28 the "morning star" appears to be Jesus Christ, who received royal power from his Father.

#### Davidic Covenant in the Royal Psalms

Many messianic psalms exalt the Davidic figure as the essential element in the completion of Yahweh's saving acts. They

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<sup>8</sup>See pp. 37-39 below for references.

demonstrate a close union between David as king and the messianic figure. They portray many aspects of the "corporate" concept proposed by A. R. Johnson.<sup>9</sup> In this way, David and the messianic figure are both separate and one.

Ps 2 is considered a coronation psalm.<sup>10</sup> On coronation day, the Davidic figure became the son of David/Son of God (vs. 7). He would conquer the great coalition of evil nations in the eschatological war (vss. 8-9). Ps 18 also employs rich cosmic eschatological-war imagery to describe the certainty of deliverance by God for the Davidic king from this crisis. Pss 20 and 21 are both war psalms<sup>11</sup> that describe how the Davidic figure was upheld by God's power in conquering his enemies. Pss 18, 20, and 22 are also war psalms which depict the Davidic king conquering his enemies. In Ps 72 the royal son rules forever over all the earth in power and majesty.

Ps 89 is important for understanding the development of Davidic theology. The opening strophe (vss. 1-4) indicates the theme to be the Nathan prophecy. This is followed by a section describing the rule of Yahweh over the cosmos, which by implication was a comparison to the rule of the Davidic figure over the world (vss. 5-18). The messianic oracle (vss. 19-37) provides an expanded poetic form of the Nathan prophecy, emphasizing that the Davidic dynasty

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<sup>9</sup>See A. R. Johnson, The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1942).

<sup>10</sup>Mitchell Dahood, Psalms I: 1-50, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 127, 131.

would last forever. Next, the great theological problem posed by the exile and the fall of the house of David is treated (vss. 38-45). That exile and fall appeared to be a stunning reversal of Davidic and messianic theology about the eternity and power of the dynasty. Finally, the psalm concludes with a prayer for deliverance based on the Davidic covenant (vss. 46-52).

A priestly role is added in Ps 110 to the royal role already established in the parallel psalm of Ps 2. Ps 110 is a war psalm describing the messianic king conquering his enemies.<sup>12</sup> This psalm links the king to Melchizedek (vs. 4), an ancient Amorite priest-king of Jerusalem (Gen 14:17-20). It emphasizes the sacral kingship concept so prominent in exilic and post-exilic royal theology<sup>13</sup> and in the book of Hebrews. In Ps 110 the king is personally linked with righteousness and justice as well as responsible for it in the land. In contrast to Ps 2, Ps 110 contains an added emphasis on the priestly role of the king, who is the messianic figure.

Another messianic psalm, Ps 132, refers to the Nathan prophecy. In this psalm, David's act of preparing a place for the ark is invoked as a constant reason for protecting the dynasty (vss. 1-10). The fulfillment of the Nathan prophecy is conditional on keeping the covenant and testimonies (vs. 12). Under the covenant provisions, Zion is to be the eternal dwelling place for Yahweh (vss. 13-18).

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<sup>12</sup>Mitchel Dahood, Psalms III: 101-150, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), p. 112.

<sup>13</sup>A. R. Johnson, Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), pp. 35-53.

Davidic Covenant in the  
Classical Prophets

In addition to the royal psalms, the classical prophets of the pre-exilic and exilic periods portray the impending end of the present age and the beginning of the messianic kingdom ruled over by the Davidic king. In spite of the great disaster of the exile, a restoration would occur under the Davidic king.

Amos spoke of the restoration of the "fallen" booth of David (9:11-15). Mic 4:1-8 and 5:1-9 describe the restoration period of the "former dominion" of David (4:8). Isaiah referred to the son (9:6), who is by implication the same son as in the Nathan prophecy. Isa 9:5-7 implies the Davidic king himself, rather than his throne, would stand forever. Isa 11:1-16 says a "shoot" or "branch" from Jesse would come forth. This makes a direct identification of the Davidic king with some of the divine qualities of Yahweh. That is, this king seems to have intrinsically more-than-human power rather than a mere bestowal of godlike qualities.

The second half of Isaiah is permeated with messianic references, of which the "servant songs" and the passages dealing with the "anointed" one are notable. The "corporate" concept is strong in these "servant" passages. The "suffering servant" figure is nowhere explicitly identified with the king of the Davidic line. However, in Isa 61:1-3, which is generally conceded to have been spoken by the servant figure,<sup>14</sup> the servant has been "anointed" by Yahweh, thereby making the implication clear. Isa 42:1-7, 19-20,

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<sup>14</sup>Edward J. Young, The Book of Isaiah, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 3:458-459.

49:1-13; 50:4-10; 52:13-53:12; 54:11-55:5; 60:1-3, 10-14, 19-22; 61:1-7; 63:1-6; 65:17-25, and 66:22-23 are a representative list of promises of the redemption and restoration to come through the royal and/or priestly roles of the "servant" or "anointed" one.

Some passages in Jeremiah reflect the influence of the Nathan prophecy. In Jer 22:1-19, terrible curses are pronounced upon the sons of Josiah and the Davidic dynasty, yet allusion is also made to the Nathan prophecy and the possibility of saving the monarchy and restoring its power (22:4). In Jer 23:1-7, the exile is foretold; yet, a "righteous Branch" would be raised up to reign over Judah and, in a great exodus, return those who are in exile. In Jer 30:8, 9, 21, allusions are made to a restored monarchy, in which the house of David was to stand forever.

The prophet Ezekiel records the judgment of Yahweh upon Jerusalem and the temple, causing the people to go into exile and the temple to be destroyed. But the day would come for the restoration of the temple, when a "prince" would come who would protect the temple (Ezek 21:25-27; 44:1-3; 45:1-25; 46:16-18).

In the book of Daniel "one like a son of man" (7:13) was to go before the Ancient of Days and receive the kingdom. In Dan 9:25, an "anointed" one, or "prince," would come. In Dan 10:21, there is one who was called "your prince" who ultimately "stands up" (12:1) as a deliverer for his people and the protector of the temple. When "your prince" "stands up," it is the royal son assuming rulership of the kingdom in the Davidic covenant.

In Zech 3 and 6, Joshua represented, in the "corporate" sense, the coming priest-king (3:7) who is referred to as the

"branch" (3:8; 6:12) and who would restore the temple, conquer the nations, and establish the Davidic kingdom from sea to sea (9:10). However, in Zech 11 the messianic figure, here called the "shepherd," was to be rejected (11:4-14). He was to be "pierced," and there would be weeping over his death (as that of a "firstborn" [12:10]) by the house of David, the family of Nathan (12:12), and the house of Levi (12:13).

Thus, it is evident that Old Testament covenant and royal theology envisions the fulfillment of the Nathan prophecy in the messianic figure who would come in the Davidic line. In him would be united the royal and priestly elements of the kingdom. He would destroy the enemies, restore the temple and Jerusalem, and establish a universal, peaceful kingdom.

#### Davidic Covenant in the New Testament

Royal theology of the Davidic covenant is also strong in the New Testament. Although Nathan the prophet is not mentioned, Jesus as the royal son is prominent. He fulfills the double role of priest and king.

Jesus was designated the "son of David" by his genealogy (Matt 1:1; Luke 3:31). After he healed the blind and dumb demoniac, the people said, "Can this be the Son of David?" (Matt 12:23). The blind man (two blind men in Matthew) who approached Jesus for healing called him the "Son of David" (Matt 20:31; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:38). During Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the crowds cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt 21:9); and after the cleansing of the temple, the children who remained in the temple cried out

"Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt 21:15). In discussion with the Jewish leaders, Jesus designated himself the royal "son of David" (Matt 22:42) through the use of a royal psalm (Ps 110).

The "king" motif appears repeatedly throughout the life of Jesus. As an infant, the wise men sought him as the "king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2). Under duress, the chief priests and scribes informed Herod of the Messiah's birthplace and coming rulership (Matt 2:6). The devil tried to tempt Jesus by offering him the rulership of this world (Matt 4:8-10; Luke 4:5-8). When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask questions of Jesus, the answer included a quotation from Mal 3:1 of the coming messianic king (Matt 11:10; Luke 7:27). The crowning popular demonstration of Jesus' kingship came at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 10:1-10; Luke 19:28-38; John 12:12-15) in the royal style of Hebrew kings. In a discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus quoted Ps 110:1 to show his royal role would ultimately result in all his enemies being put under his feet (Matt 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44). As Jesus hung on the cross, Pilate placed above his head an inscription which included the words, "King of the Jews" (Matt 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

Major speeches in the book of Acts have the covenant as their immediate context (e.g., 2:14-36; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 7:2-53; 13:16-41). Peter even quoted Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 (2:25-28, 34-35) to demonstrate the royal role of Jesus in the Davidic covenant. Paul stated that from the posterity of David "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised" (13:23).

While the royal role of Jesus is particularly prominent in

Matthew,<sup>15</sup> his priestly role is emphasized in Hebrews along with his royal role. The author of Hebrews used quotations from the Psalms as the framework for much of his theological argument<sup>16</sup> in order to develop Christ's royal and priestly roles in both their earthly and heavenly phases. Among the royal psalms especially utilized in Hebrews are Pss 2 and 110.

In Heb 1, the "Son" of the Nathan prophecy is fulfilling his kingly role. Based on Ps 2, Hebrews declared that he is the "Son" who is "heir of all things" (1:2) and has "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). His throne is "for ever and ever" (1:8), as in Ps 45:6-7. He is the "anointed" one (1:9) of Isa 61:1-3 and the "first-born" whom even the angels worship (1:6).

In Heb 5:5-6, 8, 10, the "son" of Ps 2 has become a "high priest according to the order of Melchizedek" of Ps 110. In this way both the priestly and kingly roles are combined. As a high priest he has been "exalted above the heavens" (7:26). Thus, the "Son" (7:28) became a "high priest" (8:1) and "minister in the sanctuary" (8:2), as well as being "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" (8:1).

#### Summary of Covenant and Royal Theology

The Old Testament covenant established with Israel was a suzerainty type covenant in which Yahweh was the covenant maker

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<sup>15</sup>Barker, Lane, and Michaels, New Testament Speaks, pp. 272-273.

<sup>16</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 11.

(suzerain) and his people the covenant recipients (vassals). The covenant was conditional in the sense that fidelity to it would bring blessings and infidelity would bring curses.

A major component of the covenant was the fact that Yahweh had made the people of Israel a kingdom of priests. As kingdom, they participated in the royal rule on earth as vassals. As priests, they served in a vertical dimension to God, and in a horizontal dimension to mankind.

Royal theology exhibits a broad spectrum of thought, much of which was based upon the Nathan prophecy. Royal theology depicts the emergence of a messianic figure who would rule all nations on an eternal throne. He would be called a son, an anointed, a branch, a prince, a servant, a priest, a shepherd, and a king. Although he would have royal power, he would be rejected as a shepherd. He would be put to death, yet resurrected to minister and reign. The Gospels declare Jesus to be the messiah described in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews by reference to the Royal Psalms, designates him as the royal son who is also the high priest of his people.

### Temple Theology

The first theme we earlier isolated from Rev 4-5, and whose antecedent biblical backgrounds are now to be considered, is temple theology. The temple was the physical and theological center of the camp of Israel that was built after the "pattern"<sup>17</sup> shown to Moses

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<sup>17</sup>For the meaning of "pattern" and its correlation with the heavenly temple, see Richard M. Davidson, Typology in Scripture, Andrews University Dissertation Series, no. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

(Exod 25:9, 40) and served as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" (Heb 8:5). At the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant, Yahweh commanded that a sanctuary be built in order that he might "dwell" in the midst of his people (Exod 25:8). This concept of dwelling in the midst of his people is expressed by various expressions or terms and in various manners.

#### Temple as "House"

One of the principal ways to express this "dwelling" concept is to designate the sanctuary/temple as a *בַּיִת* ("house"). For this reason the dwelling place of the deity, or house of Yahweh in the Old Testament, was the temple.<sup>18</sup> This term was used for the sanctuary in the wilderness (Exod 23:19; 34:26), the sanctuary at Gilgal (Josh 6:24; 9:23), the sanctuary at Shiloh (Judg 18:31; 1 Sam 1:7, 24), the sanctuary at Jerusalem (2 Sam 12:20), Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:12, 40, 45, 51; Ezek 8:14, 16), and the eschatological temple (Ezek 41:17). In the Septuagint *οἶκος θεοῦ* ("house of God") was a fixed term for the sanctuary in the Old Testament.<sup>19</sup>

As in the Septuagint, the Gospels designate the temple as an *οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ*<sup>20</sup> ("house of God," Matt 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4). Jesus referred to the temple as "house" at both the first (John 2:16-17) and second cleansings of the temple (Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). When Jesus left the temple for the final time during

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<sup>18</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, "*בַּיִת*," Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (1975), 2:111 (hereafter abbreviated as TDOT).

<sup>19</sup> O. Michel, "*οἶκος*, et al.," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (1967), 5:120 (hereafter abbreviated as TDNT).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:121.

the passion week, he declared to the Jewish leaders that their "house" was left forsaken and desolate (Matt 23:38; Luke 13:35).

### Temple as "Temple/Palace"

Closely connected with the "house" concept is הֵיכָל ("temple/palace"). The double concept of temple/palace arose from the idea that the deity was a king and therefore was supposed to live in a palace.<sup>21</sup> This idea broadens the covenant idea of Yahweh dwelling among his people because he can be viewed as presiding in his temple as God or living in his palace as king. "Temple/palace" was often used interchangeably with "house." Because the temple was often considered to be the dwelling place of the god, "the distinction between palace and temple is only minor."<sup>22</sup>

Although the tabernacle constructed at Sinai is never referred to by the term "temple" in the narrative account of Israel in the wilderness, that term is later employed extensively for the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Sam 1:9; 3:3), Solomon's temple (2 Kgs 18:16; 23:4; Jer 7:4; 24:1), and the post-exilic temple (Ezra 3:10; Hag 2:18). In the accounts of the construction of Solomon's temple the term used is "holy place" rather than the "most holy place." This same limitation is true for Ezekiel's eschatological temple (Ezek 41), where the term "holy place" is used rather than "house," which is the whole temple complex.<sup>23</sup>

The New Testament term for the divine dwelling place among

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<sup>21</sup> Hoffner, "הֵיכָל," TDOT (1975), 2:111.

<sup>22</sup> M. Ottosson, "הֵיכָל," TDOT (1978), 3:383.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

men is generally ναός ("temple").<sup>24</sup> It emphasizes the inner part of the temple (holy and most holy places) in contrast to the whole temple complex, which was generally designated as ἱερόν, "temple." The term ναός is used in all four Gospels, Acts, some of the Pauline epistles, and Revelation.

#### Temple as "Throne"

Another term used to express Yahweh's dwelling among His people is כִּסֵּא ("throne"). This term is closely related to the house/temple/palace concept. Yahweh's throne could be the equivalent of Zion (Jer 14:21), Jerusalem (Jer 3:17), the temple (Ezek 43:7), or by implication the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the temple (Exod 25:22; 1 Kgs 6:19; 1 Kgs 8:27-29). In Isa 6:1, Yahweh's throne even reached from the earthly to the heavenly temple.

The imagery of Yahweh's throne has an important extended meaning in the covenant context. The throne is not only a symbol of his government (2 Sam 3:10; cf. Isa 14:13) but also of his judicial power<sup>25</sup> (Isa 6:1-3; Ezek 1:4-28; Dan 7:9-10), important for the redemption of his people.

In the New Testament, the Davidic throne of the covenant is to be occupied by the messianic king (Luke 1:32-33), whose throne is over "the house of Jacob for ever." This clearly places God in the midst of his people as the Davidic covenant reaches its definitive conclusion.

In the book of Hebrews God's throne is in the sanctuary in

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<sup>24</sup>O. Michel, "ναός," TDNT (1967), 4:882.

<sup>25</sup>O. Schmitz, "ἱερόνος," TDNT (1965), 3:162-163.

the heavens (8:1-2). It is the true tent that has been erected by God rather than man (8:2). It is here that Jesus Christ ministers in behalf of his people within the context of the covenant (8:2, 13; 9:1, 15).

#### Verbs Expressing the Temple Concept

Several verbs contribute to the concept that Yahweh dwells among His people. Directly linked to the idea of throne is the word מָלַךְ ("reigning"). Yahweh would reign from Mount Zion (Ps 47:8; Isa 24:23; Mic 4:7) over his people and over all the earth. In the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1-18), reference is made to Yahweh's planting his people in his "own mountain" (Sinai), where his "abode" and "sanctuary" are (15:17). From the mountain he would reign forever (15:18). This idea of reigning from the mountain employs the ancient Near Eastern imagery of the "cosmic mountain,"<sup>26</sup> where Yahweh and his people would be eternally united.

The verb שָׁבַט is generally translated "to dwell." Yahweh dwelt on Mount Zion (Ps 9:11; 68:16). At times the verb "to dwell" is also translated "to sit enthroned." This translation is often used in connection with the ark where Yahweh "sits enthroned" between the cherubim (2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 13:6; Ps 80:1; Isa 37:16).

Another verb which is closely linked to "house" and the concept of dwelling is שָׁכַן ("to dwell"). This verb is tightly linked to the close relationship between Yahweh and his people (Exod 25:8;

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<sup>26</sup> See R. J. Clifford, The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

29:45-46). Yahweh dwelt in the midst of the camp of Israel (Num 5:3), in the midst of the people (Num 35:34; 1 Kgs 6:13), in Jerusalem (Ps 135:21), and on Mount Zion (Ps 74:2; Isa 8:18). After the exile he would again dwell in Jerusalem and Mount Zion (Joel 3:17, 20; Zech 8:3) in the midst of his people forever (Ezek 43:7, 9).

Temple Furniture Expressing  
the Temple Concept

Other evidence for the significance of temple can be found in its furniture. The furniture supports the temple concept for Yahweh as Deity/King. In Exod 25:10-40, three articles of furniture are mentioned together: the ark with its lid, mercy seat, and attached cherubim; the golden table with its flagons and bowls on which the twelve loaves of bread and the wine were located; and the seven-branched lampstand, or menorah. The repeated mention of these three articles of furniture in the same sequence (Exod 30:26-27; 31:7-8; 35:12-14; 37:1-24; 39:35-37; 40:3-4, 20-25) leads to the conclusion they have something in common.

Since the temple is the dwelling place of Yahweh, then these three articles must reflect the dwelling aspect: the ark signifying the throne/seat of the Deity/King; the table for food and drink; and the lampstand for light.<sup>27</sup> The golden table had twelve loaves of bread upon it, called "the bread of the presence" (Exod 25:23-24, 30; 35:13; 39:36; Lev 24:5-6; 1 Sam 21:6; 1 Kgs 7:48; 2 Chr 4:19). This expression means the bread was placed before the person, or presence,

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<sup>27</sup> Menahem Haran, "The Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and the Cultic Institutions," Biblica 50 (1969):254-255, 257.

of Yahweh.<sup>28</sup> The number of loaves is apparently meant to signify that the twelve tribes of Israel were in the presence of God.

The altar of incense, although listed separately from the other articles of furniture because of its relationship to the ark (cf. Heb 9:4), should also be considered part of the furnishings and ritual for the ancient Near Eastern deity/king. The fragrance from the incense was apparently to please the deity/king in his temple/palace.

#### Geometrical Contributions to the Temple Concept

Dimensions and proportions of the literal temple contribute to understanding the temple as the place where Yahweh dwelt with his people. The inner room, or most holy place, was cubical (1 Kgs 6:20) and contained the ark of the covenant. The most holy place is the center of a geometrical square when the two compartments are considered in relationship to the western half of the surrounding enclosure.<sup>29</sup> The camp of Israel formed a hollow square as it surrounded the sanctuary (Num 2 and 10). The sanctuary became the center of the whole encampment. The eschatological temple and city of Ezekiel revealed the same symmetrical design of the previous encampment and temple of Israel. The most holy place and the court around it formed a square (Ezek 41:4; 42:15-20). The new city was also a square (Ezek 48:15-20) with twelve gates bearing the names of

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<sup>28</sup>J. P. Hyatt, Commentary on Exodus (London: Oliphants, 1971), pp. 269-270.

<sup>29</sup>Menahem Haran, "The Priestly Image of the Tabernacle," Hebrew Union College Annual 36 (1965):194-195.

the twelve tribes (Ezek 48:30-34). The city as described in Ezekiel was an ideological blending of the tribes, city, and sanctuary into one unit. The twelve gates identified the city with the encampment as described in Numbers.

The name given to this city was "The Lord is there" (Ezek 48:35). This name is significant in light of Ezekiel and the Old Testament in general. It is reminiscent of Exod 25:8 where Yahweh had a sanctuary built that he "might dwell among them." It is also significant because in Ezekiel's own time, the glory and presence of Yahweh had left the temple of Jerusalem because the people had rejected him and driven him away (Ezek 8:6). After the exile, a new temple was to be built and the glory of Yahweh would again return to dwell there (Ezek 43:1-5). Yahweh would then "dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever" (Ezek 43:7). Thus, when the shape of the most holy place, court, and city are considered together with the name of the city, there is a reinforcement of the connection between the temple and the divine presence dwelling in the midst of the people.

#### Temple as "Logos"

In the New Testament, the divine presence is personified by Jesus Christ dwelling among men. The incarnation account in the prologue to John says the Logos "dwelt among us" (John 1:14). This "dwelling," or "tabernacling," with men is the same concept as that which pertained to the Old Testament sanctuary (Exod 25:8). The Logos is God (John 1:1), incarnate (John 1:14). So God dwells with men in the person of Jesus Christ and Jesus can refer to himself as the "temple" because in him God dwells among mankind.

The account of the cleansing of the temple by Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry (John 2:13-22) illustrates this concept of the Logos as temple. At this cleansing of the temple, Jesus responded to those who were asking for a sign by saying, "'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:19-21).

A further account linking Jesus with the temple appears in the story of Stephen's arrest and trial. False witnesses were brought against him who testified "this man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place," namely, the literal temple (Acts 6:13-14). Stephen, in his defense before the Jewish council, demonstrated that the rejection of Jesus is the rejection of the temple in the broad sense, a rejection that would result in the destruction of both the literal temple and the people (Acts 7:44-53).

The rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the Jews resulted in their physical temple becoming "forsaken and desolate" (Matt 23:38). Still there remained the true fulfillment of the Nathan prophecy in which the "offspring," or "son," would build the temple (2 Sam 7:12-14; 1 Chron 17:11-14). The temple made without hands would now displace the temple made with hands. The words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria in John 4:20-26 reveal that worship at the traditional temple sites of Gerizim and Jerusalem was to be replaced with a worship centered in a person. When the woman made reference to the

coming messiah, Jesus stated: "I who speak to you am he." Thus, Jesus completes the point that as the messiah he is the temple.

Since Jesus himself had now become the temple, concepts previously associated with the temple were transferred to him. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus proclaimed that he was the "living water" (John 7:38-39). From him would flow rivers of living water, which may be compared with those mentioned in Ezekiel which would flow forth from the eschatological temple (47:1-12). The mention of the rivers of living water which would come forth from Jesus' heart (John 7:38) links the concept with his person at the crucifixion.

#### Universal Temple

The Gospel of John portrays the person of Jesus as "temple." It also depicts him in the Davidic-covenant sense as the builder of the temple. Through the use of Old Testament shepherd imagery, Jesus was the messianic "shepherd" who would lay down his life for his sheep (10:11-18). He would possess and gather in "other sheep, that are not of this fold" (10:16). Here the great ingathering of the Gentiles into Israel is referred to.

The book of Acts implies the early Christian devotion to the literal temple was a "transitional phenomenon."<sup>30</sup> The commissioning by Jesus of the early Christians as "my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) explains how Jerusalem as a center was gradually displaced by the infant church. The acceptance by the church of Jesus' statement that the temple would be destroyed (Matt 24:2) was a factor in the

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<sup>30</sup> McKelvey, Temple, p. 85.

persecution and death of Stephen (Acts 6:14). General persecution followed, soon resulting in the believers being scattered (8:1). The conversion of Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10) was instrumental in leading the early church to an acceptance of its mission to the Gentiles. The Jerusalem council was then faced with the problem of deciding on what basis the Gentiles would enter the church. In the decision made, James quoted Amos 9:11: "I will rebuild the dwelling of David" (Acts 15:16). The Old Testament context for this statement is the ingathering of the Gentiles, which reflects the theme that Israel would be restored so that her destiny to the nations might be fulfilled. Thus, Acts relates the story of how the early church was gradually set free from Jerusalem and the physical temple, with the redemptive significance of the temple now centered in Jesus and the church universal.

#### Church as "Temple/Building"

We have seen the temple concept broadened from a building in the midst of Israel's encampment to the person of Jesus and finally to the scattered Jewish and Gentile believers of the universal temple. In the Pauline epistles, ναός ("temple") depicts the church as those who were redeemed by Christ and constitute the temple of God through the indwelling and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. The church as temple was seen in both the traditional corporate sense (1 Cor 3:17; 2 Cor 6:16) and in the individual sense (1 Cor 6:19-20). The church was a temple because God, or his Spirit, was dwelling among the believers (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16), or, as defined in Col 1:27, it "is Christ in you."

Closely associated with the church as temple is

"building" (1 Cor 3:9; Eph 2:21). In Eph 2:21, the "building" is equated with the temple, and the context makes it obvious that this building, with its many components, is a metaphor for the Christian church. The foundation was comprised of apostles and prophets upon which the Gentile converts were laid (2:20-21). Christ was the cornerstone (2:20), which could have meant either the foundation stone<sup>31</sup> or the capstone.<sup>32</sup> He was the central component of the structure because he was the one "in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple" (2:21). The believers were "living stones" built into this "spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5).

#### Summary of Temple Theology

The foregoing overview of temple theology shows that the "temple," as representative of God's "dwelling" among his people, is expressed biblically in a variety of ways. Nouns expressing the idea of "house," "temple/palace," and "throne" are used. Verbs, as יָשַׁב and שָׁכַן ("to dwell") and מָלַךְ ("to rule"), complement the nouns. Articles of temple furniture, such as ark, golden table, menorah, and altar of incense, enhance the imagery of the nouns and verbs. The geometrical proportions of the sanctuary/temple structure and its relationship to the wilderness camp of Israel add further meaning to the concepts expressed by the nouns, verbs, and articles of furniture. The temple vision of Ezek 40-48 describes the

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<sup>31</sup>G. B. Ladner, "The Symbolism of the Biblical Corner Stone in the Medieval West," Medieval Studies 4 (1942):43-60.

<sup>32</sup>J. Jeremias, "Der Eckstein," Angelos 1 (1925):65-70; idem, "Eckstein-Schlußstein," Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 36 (1937):154-157.

eschatological temple and city, which have the same symmetrical design as the wilderness camp and the temple; the name given to this eschatological temple and city is "The Lord is there." This name harmonizes with the covenant meaning of temple as God dwelling among his people.

In the New Testament, God came to dwell in the midst of mankind in the person of the Logos, who is Jesus Christ. Thus, the Logos himself was the new temple. He came to build a universal temple as the dwelling place of God to include both Jews and Gentiles. The universal temple, known as the church, is described as a building with a foundation, wall stones, and a cornerstone or capstone. This cornerstone, or capstone, joining together the various components of the structure metaphorically depicts the union of Jesus with his people--or, put another way, the extension of Jesus into his people, the church. Even the believers on earth are united with the living God at the heavenly Jerusalem in festal gathering and assembly through Jesus Christ who is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 12:22-24). Thus, the basic meaning of temple is biblically expressed by the concept of God dwelling with his people wherever they might be located.

#### Ontological Cosmic Unity

The second main theme from Rev 4-5, as listed earlier, and now to be considered further, is ontological cosmic unity. The term "ontological" as defined here means the state or nature of being as it is depicted in reference to the temple. The term "cosmic" is used to include all of creation, including both the heavenly and earthly realms.

The ancients often made ontological descriptions of the relationship between God and man in a manner that would be considered metaphysically different for us today. They perceived a much closer relationship between the spheres of the cosmos than does modern western man. This section of the biblical overview of the five major themes of Rev 4-5 deals with the ontological cosmic unity as it was perceived in connection with the temple.

#### Temple at Mount Sinai

The tabernacle at Mount Sinai has been chosen as the starting point to illustrate the ontological cosmic unity which was often present in connection with descriptions of the tabernacle/temple. The Song of the Sea (Exod 15) is an epic poem describing the victory of Yahweh over the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus. In reference to what Yahweh would do for his people, it says: "Thou wilt bring them in, and plant them on thy own mountain, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thy abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established" (15:17).

The mountain referred to is Mount Sinai,<sup>33</sup> where Yahweh has his "abode/sanctuary" and where he would "plant" his people (15:17). The equivalent of Mount Sinai is Horeb, which was at times called the "mountain of God" (Exod 3:1; 1 Kgs 19:8) and often identified with events which took place at Sinai (Deut 4:10, 15; 5:2; 29:1; 1 Kgs 8:9; Ps 106:19, etc.).

In Exod 24, Mount Sinai is the place where Yahweh was seen on

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<sup>33</sup>Millard C. Lind, Yahweh Is a Warrior (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), p. 50.

a "pavement of sapphire stone" (24:10). From the contextual covenant setting, it would appear that this "pavement" represented the sanctuary of Yahweh. The fact that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders were called up into the mountain indicates that both the cultic and civil leaders had been summoned by Yahweh. Since they "ate and drank" (24:11), there was apparently a feast<sup>34</sup> of cultic significance. When one adds to the cultic feast the fact that at this mountain the "Lord will reign for ever and ever" (15:18), it demonstrates that the mountain is both temple and palace for Yahweh.

Ontologically, Yahweh is described as being united with his people at Mount Sinai when he revealed himself as both ruler and deity through the covenant made with Israel. He is also described as being united with his people as he plants them on his "own mountain." Perhaps Sinai here serves as an archetype for Mt. Zion, where Yahweh ultimately planted his people. Thus, Yahweh is ontologically depicted as dwelling in the realm of the earth with his people.

#### Temple as Depicted in the Psalms

Several psalms also describe the divine temple/palace in connection with the ontological relationship between Yahweh and the righteous. In Ps 9:7, 8, Yahweh "sits enthroned" and "has established his throne for judgment" as he judged the enemies of his oppressed people. His people were told to "sing praises to the Lord, who dwells in Zion" (vs. 11). Thus, this psalm indicates that Yahweh dwells on earth--"in Zion"--and from there judges the enemies of his people.

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<sup>34</sup>Clifford, Cosmic Mountain, p. 112.

In Ps 11, a different location of the divine throne is described. "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven" (vs. 4); and yet, "the upright shall behold his face" (11:7). This ontological description places the divine throne in heaven, but the righteous are still able to see his face.

In Ps 14, a twofold view of the location of the temple/palace is presented. "The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God" (vs. 2). Yet, the psalmist can also say, "O that deliverance for Israel would come out of Zion!" (vs. 7). In Ps 76, this same duality appears: "In Judah God is known, his name is great in Israel. His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion"; "From the heavens thou [God] didst utter judgment" (vss. 1, 2, 8).

#### Temple of Solomon

At the dedication of Solomon's temple the divine glory and presence of Yahweh, in the form of a cloud, filled the temple. Then Solomon said, "I have built thee an exalted house, a place for thee to dwell in for ever" (1 Kgs 8:13). In reference to the temple, Solomon also stated that God had said "My name shall be there" (8:29).<sup>35</sup> In the same dedicatory prayer, Solomon said, "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place" (8:30, 39, 43, 49). Thus, here, too, the divine temple/palace is depicted as being in both heaven and earth.

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<sup>35</sup>For details on "name" theology, see Roland de Vaux, "Le lieu que Yahvé a choisi pour y établir son nom," in Das Ferne und nahe Wort, Festschrift Leonhard Rost, ed. Fritz Maass (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967), pp. 219-228; and Edmond Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 82-85.

Possibility for God's People  
to Dwell in the Temple

The divine temple was of such a nature that metaphysically God's people could dwell in it. Ps 15:1, 2 states, "O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right." The relationship could be so intimate between Yahweh and the blameless one, that the blameless one could "never be moved" (vs. 5) from the divine tent on the holy hill.

In Ps 84:3-4, both temple and palace were combined: "At thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praises!" As one dwells in the temple/palace, it is even possible to look upon Yahweh and say, "So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory" (Ps 63:2). Thus, the righteous could ontologically be described as being on earth, yet at the same time be in the heavenly temple/palace.

The same concept also appears in the New Testament:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4-6)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

Thus, ontologically those on earth could enter into the heavenly temple in a manner similar to that depicted in the Psalms.

### Broad Horizontal Scope of the Earthly Temple

Several different words are employed in the Old Testament to express the idea of temple. These words are semantically different, yet each one essentially expresses the principal concept of the other. When one compares the different uses and contexts of these words, a broad horizontal scope emerges; the location of the temple may vary from specific localized places such as Sinai, Jerusalem, and the wilderness camp of Israel, to broad geographical areas occupied by Yahweh's people such as "Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his domain" (Ps 114:2).

### Vertical Dimension of the Temple

Heaven and earth are further linked together ontologically in both Old and New Testament passages, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" (Isa 66:1; and Acts 9:49-50, where the quotation varies slightly from the Old Testament statement). A similar concept appears in Isa 6:1, which depicts Yahweh "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple." Thus, the earthly and heavenly temples are the two ends of a cosmic dipole.<sup>36</sup>

### Summary of the Ontological Cosmic Unity of the Temple

The biblical examples have demonstrated that ontologically the temple/palace of God may be considered as being either on earth or in heaven. It also consists of a broad horizontal earthly scope

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Andreasen, "Heavenly Sanctuary," pp. 87-114.

and a vertical cosmic dimension embracing both heaven and earth. Thus, when a righteous person entered the temple in Jerusalem, he could contemplate the power of God and be with him in the heavenly temple. In short, the divine temple could be depicted as earthly or heavenly, or both together in a manner which illustrates an essential ontological unity between heaven and earth.

### Judgment

The next theme from Rev 4-5 we consider here is judgment. The theme of rewards resulting from divine judgment was an integral part of covenant theology. Rewards were inherent in the blessing/curse formula of the covenant. The Passover was one of the spring covenantal feasts. It contained a strong judgment element. Among the fall cluster of feasts, the strong judgment element was present in the Day of Atonement.

The Passover inaugurated the spring new year. It commemorated the positive judgment by Yahweh as he liberated his people from Egypt. Yet, the annual observance of this feast was an annual day of judgment like the original one celebrated in Egypt. Fifty days after the Passover came Pentecost, a celebration of the spring harvest as well as a time of post-judgment rejoicing.

The fall cluster of feasts began with the Feast of Trumpets. This feast served as the means to prepare the people for the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was the actual judgment. After the Day of Atonement came the Feast of Tabernacles, or the fall harvest festival commemorating Yahweh's provision for his people during their wilderness sojourn. The Feast of Tabernacles in the fall, like Pentecost, served as a time of rejoicing following judgment.

Biblical evidence exists for linking the imagery of the annual feasts with the divine judgment of the covenant. This judgment brought positive rewards for the righteous and punishment for the wicked, as the blessing/curse formula of the covenant indicated.

The classical prophets began to use the expression "Day of Yahweh" as a reference to divine judgment. R. E. Clements has shown that the threats of judgment on Israel in prophecy were parallel to the threats of curses in the covenant.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the prophetic "Day of Yahweh" was a time of covenantal judgment.

#### Judgment in Amos

The prophet Amos referred to the Day of Yahweh as a day in which the whole nation of Israel would come to an end (5:1-2; 8:1-2). The context clearly indicates that the judgment of the Day of Yahweh was coming within the framework of the covenant. The punishment was coming because Israel had rejected Yahweh's law and statutes (2:4) and profaned his holy name (2:7). The people of Israel had to prepare to meet their God (4:12), for he would pass through the midst of them (5:17). The Day of Yahweh would be a day of darkness and gloom (5:18, 20). Their cultic feasts and assemblies (5:21) would be despised, their offerings would not be accepted (5:22), and their cultic songs would not be listened to (5:23). Ultimately, their feasts would turn into mourning and their songs into lamentation (8:10). The judgment of the Day of Yahweh would begin at the

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<sup>37</sup>R. E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant, Studies in Biblical Theology (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), p. 40.

sanctuary altar, and then spread to all the people (9:1).

Clearly Amos links the judgment of the Day of Yahweh to punishment for breaking the divine covenant. The preparation to meet their God (4:12) echoes the usual preparation for cultic judgment. The passing of Yahweh through the midst of them (5:17) parallels the passing of Yahweh through the land at the time of the Passover (Exod 12:12-13, 23). From these passages it is clear the judgment of the Day of Yahweh corresponds to the judgment of the cultic feasts.

#### Judgment in Hosea

Hosea likewise used the framework of the covenant to depict judgment. The third child borne by Gomer, Hosea's wife, was named "Not my people" (1:9). This name reflected the divine judgment upon Israel and the repudiation of the covenant relationship (1:10). God brought a "covenant lawsuit" (Hos 4:1; 12:2) against his unfaithful people. In the covenant lawsuit God provided extensive evidence of their guilt that resulted in a negative judgment against them (Hos 4-13). Israel would be rejected from her position of being a priest to Yahweh (4:6). Judgment would come to the people (6:5) because they had transgressed the covenant (6:7). In light of the impending judgment, a trumpet must be set to their lips to warn of the impending destruction, because they had broken Yahweh's covenant and transgressed his law (8:1). As in the fall sequence of cultic feasts, when the Feast of Trumpets preceded the judgment of the Day of Atonement, so the trumpet announcement here precedes Yahweh's judgment.

### Judgment in Ezekiel

The dated prophecies of Ezekiel provide further correlation of divine judgment with the covenant and cultic feasts. Ezekiel had delivered the warning message of impending judgment which resulted in exile for Judah (Ezek 1-24). In time, judgment would also come upon the surrounding evil nations (Ezek 25-32). Ultimately, Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt and the cultic services restored (Ezek 33-48). After the completion of the rebuilt temple, the glory and presence of Yahweh would return to the temple (43:2-5). William H. Shea has demonstrated through the precise dating of the prophecy of Ezek 40-48 that the return of the glory of Yahweh would be on the Day of Atonement.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Yahweh's acceptance of his people by acceptance of the new temple building as a dwelling place occurred at the normal judgment time of the Day of Atonement.

### Judgment in Joel

The Day of Yahweh is prominent in the book of Joel. It was announced as near (1:15). Therefore the trumpet must be blown in Zion (2:1). It would be a day of darkness and gloom (2:2). Yahweh would utter his voice before his army (2:11). The Day of Yahweh would be great and very terrible (2:11). The trumpet must be blown in Zion, and a solemn assembly must be called with fasting in preparation for this day (2:15). On this day Yahweh would reiterate the covenant (2:27) as he executed judgment. The nations would also

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<sup>38</sup>William H. Shea, "The Investigative Judgment of Judah, Ezekiel 1-10," in The Sanctuary and the Atonement, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshar (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1981), p. 291.

be judged by Yahweh when he gathered them together at the valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2). At this location Yahweh would sit in judgment (3:12), which was described in festal and agricultural terms of the harvest (3:13). Thus, the Day of Yahweh would occur within the covenant context. Once again, the judgment would be preceded by the trumpet warning (2:1, 15), which appears to be the equivalent of the voice of Yahweh (2:11). The actual judgment would occur at Zion (2:1, 15; 3:16, 21) where Yahweh's people would be rewarded (2:23, 32; 3:16, 21) and the wicked nations would be punished (3:2, 12, 21).

#### Judgment in Zephaniah

In Zephaniah, the Day of Yahweh is frequently mentioned. On this day Yahweh would punish those who had been unfaithful to him. The sound of the Day of Yahweh would be bitter because it was a day of wrath (1:14-15). As part of Yahweh's appeal to his people, it is stated that the day would be one of trumpet blast and battle cry (1:16). The people were counseled to "Come together and hold assembly" (2:1) so as to avoid the punishment which would otherwise come upon them.

#### Judgment in Zechariah

The prophet Zechariah links the sound of the trumpet with the Day of Yahweh (9:14). In the context of Zechariah, Yahweh would save his people and destroy their enemies (9:16). Those who survived the destruction of the judgment were to go to Jerusalem and join in the celebration of the Feast of Booths (14:16) or Tabernacles. Thus, the sound of the trumpet accompanies the Day of Yahweh, and the Feast of Booths follows it.

### Summary of Judgment

Covenant execution included the dispensing of rewards as outlined in the blessing/curse formula. These rewards were an integral part of the spring and fall festal sequences and had to be preceded by judgment. Thus, the spring festal sequence contained the judgment of the Feast of Passover which was followed by the Feast of Pentecost. The fall festal sequence included the Day of Atonement, which was followed by the Feast of Tabernacles.

The threats of judgment found in Old Testament prophecy parallel the threats of the covenant. Often included in these threats/appeals was imagery of the Feasts of Passover, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. The trumpet was the means of announcing the coming judgment. It did not matter whether the announcement was a verbal threat/appeal or in the form of military action. After the announcement of judgment, the "Day of Yahweh," or the actual judgment, would occur. The judgment was either negative or positive for the recipients in the model of the covenant.

### Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

The fifth theme from Rev 4-5 considered here is the involvement of the Trinity in salvation. The divine covenant required the involvement of all three persons of the Trinity. They would act in unison for the salvation of man. Each had a role to play as the covenant was developed and executed.

### Involvement of the Trinity in the Old Testament

The concept of Trinity in the Old Testament is not developed in the same manner as in the New Testament. However, an overview of

the Old Testament provides evidence that the three persons of the Trinity were involved with man and his salvation. The God of the Old Testament was most frequently known by the titles of Yahweh, Elohim, El, and Elyon. In Abram's conversation with the king of Sodom after the rescue of Lot, he said that he had sworn by Yahweh El Elyon (Gen 14:22), thus linking the three titles to the same deity.

All the earth knew that God was sovereign over all nature and over all peoples (Ps 148:7-13). He was the "living" God (1 Kgs 17:1; Ezek 17:19; 33:11), who was eternal (Ps 90:2; 102:27; Isa 41:4; 48:12; Hab 1:12). He was the creator, who made the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1; Exod 20:11; Isa 40:28) by the power of his word (Ps 33:6, 9; 148:5). He created man to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26-28). When he fixed the bounds of the peoples, Israel became his inheritance (Deut 32:8-9).

God was also the covenant giver. With Israel he established his covenant (Exod 19:5) so that he was their God and they were his people. Through the covenant God made his people a kingdom in which they would serve him as priests (Exod 19:6). As the God of Israel, he established his presence with them by means of the sanctuary (Exod 25:8).

God was Israel's father (Deut 32:6; Isa 63:16), Israel was his son (Jer 3:19) and firstborn (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:9). As father, he was like the potter, and the people were his clay who became the work of his hands (Isa 64:8). He was their redeemer (Isa 63:16), who had brought them forth from Egypt (Exod 19:1).

God presided over the divine council (Ps 82:1). There he held judgment (Ps 82:1-8). He was the defender of those who were his

followers (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). He brought judgment upon those that erred (Ezek 6:13; 7:27; 11:10) in order that he might restore them. His ultimate judgment in the divine council would be in favor of his people (Dan 7:27).

Old Testament references to the second member of the Trinity are often heavily disputed by scholars. The evidence which is often cited particularly associates him with the earth and emphasizes his humanity. In the Davidic covenant, he was the royal "son" who would build the earthly temple (2 Sam 7:12-14). He was the "suffering servant" who became an "offering for sin" that would result in many being "accounted righteous" (Isa 52:13-53:12). He was also described as the "shepherd" (Zech 11:4, 7) who was rejected and killed and whose death resulted in weeping as over a "firstborn" (Zech 12:10).

The "anointed one" was to be the liberator of his people (Isa 61:1). He was the "prince" (Dan 9:25-27) who would deliver his people (Dan 12:1). He was so closely identified with man that he would be called the "son of man" (Dan 7:13). At the same time he is clearly a heavenly son of man whose divinity is emphasized. With his people, he would go before the Ancient of Days and receive the kingdom (Dan 7:13-14; 7:27). Thus, the heavenly "son of man" or "prince" would secure righteousness, redemption, and the kingdom for his people on the earth.

The Spirit is generally associated with the divine activity on the earth. He participated with God in the creation of the world (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30). He was the divine agency to work through men who were skilled craftsmen (Exod 31:3; 35:31). He was the means whereby the judges ruled over Israel (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25;

14:19; 15:14). He stirred the people to rebuild the temple after the exile (Hag 1:14). He provided the power to fulfill God's will (Zech 4:6).

The Spirit is also the agent for divine communication (Ezek 2:2; 3:12, 14, 24; 8:3; 11:5, 24; 37:1; 43:5). He caused men to prophesy (Num 11:25, 29; 24:2; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 19:20; 19:23; Neh 9:30; Joel 2:28; Zech 7:12) and speak for God to others (2 Sam 23:2; 2 Chr 15:1; 20:14; 24:20; Isa 61:1).

The Spirit is the means whereby the divine presence dwells with men (Ps 51:11; 139:7). He instructed (Neh 9:20), led (Ps 143:10), provided rest (Isa 63:14), and brought blessing (Isa 44:3). His presence with men was viewed as an anointing (1 Sam 16:13; Isa 61:1). He could cause wisdom and understanding in man (Isa 11:2). He could cause men to bring forth justice (Isa 42:1) and walk in the divine statutes (Ezek 36:27). While the presence of the Spirit could bring life (Ezek 37:14), yet men could rebel against him and grieve him (Isa 63:10).

#### Involvement of the Trinity in the New Testament

In the New Testament the three persons of the Trinity are mentioned extensively. Even though they generally fulfill their separate roles, together they are engaged in the salvation of man. As in the Old Testament, God is the living God (Matt 16:16), the Creator (1 Pet 4:19), and the covenant giver (2 Cor 6:18; Heb 1:5).

The first person of the Trinity was the Father in both the sense of relationship to his people (Matt 5:16; 5:45; Luke 12:30; Rom 8:15) and provider of divine gifts (Matt 6:1, 32; Luke 6:36; Rom 1:7;

Gal 1:3; Phil 1:2). He was Father in relationship to his Son Jesus Christ (Matt 7:21; 11:25; 18:35; Mark 14:36; Luke 2:49; John 2:16). Soteriologically, he sent his only Son to the earth (Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4) so that those who believe in him might have eternal life (John 3:16). The Son, in turn, was to gain the kingdom and deliver it to his Father (1 Cor 15:24).

God the Son was the preexistent Logos (John 1:1), who became incarnate (John 1:14). His glory was as the only Son from the Father (John 1:14). As the earthly Son of Man, he sowed the good seed (Matt 13:37), possessed authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10; Matt 9:6; Luke 5:24), and came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). He must suffer (Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22), be delivered into the hands of men (Mark 9:31; Matt 17:22; Luke 9:44), be condemned to death and crucified, and be raised on the third day (Matt 20:18-19; Mark 10:33-34). He came to do the Father's will (John 6:38), speak his words (John 14:10), and reveal the Father to men (Matt 11:27).

The Son, as the leader of the earthly kingdom, would acknowledge before the Father the names of those who acknowledged him before men (Matt 10:32; Luke 12:8). He would be the advocate of the righteous in the judgment of the divine council (1 John 2:1). He would be the heavenly high priest after the Melchizedekian order, interceding for the righteous before the Father (Heb 7:25). At the same time, he would be the royal Son, who would come in his Father's glory (Mark 8:38; Matt 16:27) and sit on his throne (Matt 19:28).

God the Spirit would be sent from the Father to those on earth (John 14:16, 26). He would descend upon man (John 1:32), dwell with man, and be in man (John 14:17; Rom 8:9). Thus, his principal

sphere of action would be on earth among men.

The power of the Spirit affected people. The Spirit caused Mary to conceive (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). He was the power by which Jesus proclaimed justice to the Gentiles (Matt 12:18). He was the power by which demons were cast out (Matt 12:28). He gave life (John 6:63; Rom 8:11). He caused men to speak in other tongues (Acts 2:4). He would lead (Matt 4:1; Rom 8:14), seal (Eph 1:13), and teach (Luke 12:12; John 14:26). He would guide men into all truth (John 16:13). He would inform (Acts 11:12) and reveal (John 16:13; Eph 3:5).

Jesus called the Spirit "another" Paraclete (John 14:16) which is another of the same kind.<sup>39</sup> Thus, he would continue the work of Jesus on earth as he helped and instructed his disciples. For the wicked, the Spirit would also continue the work of Jesus, but would serve as the prosecuting advocate to convince the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).<sup>40</sup>

#### Summary of the Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

God is the sovereign God, who was both the Creator and covenant giver. He was the father of Israel, the father of mankind, and the father of Jesus Christ in particular. He presided over the divine council. He sent both his Son and his Spirit to earth to fulfill his will and provide salvation for mankind.

The role of the Son is primarily on earth. He was the Old

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<sup>39</sup>Richard Chenevix Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (London: n.p., 1880; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 357.

<sup>40</sup>Ladd, Theology, p. 293.

Testament messianic figure who was known by various titles such as the "anointed one," "prince," and "son of man." He became incarnate, lived and ministered on earth, died, and was resurrected. He would fulfill both priestly and royal roles by being an advocate for mankind before the Father and by receiving rulership of the earthly kingdom.

The Spirit serves as the active agent in divine communication with men. He was to carry on the work of Jesus with both the righteous and the wicked. He was to be the enabling power to execute the divine covenant and provide ultimate salvation for mankind.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE THEMATIC CONTRIBUTION OF REV 1-3 FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF REV 4-5

Crucial to the exegesis of Rev 4-5 is the previous context in the Apocalypse itself. Since I accept the majority view of the unity of Revelation,<sup>1</sup> Rev 1-3 is important for understanding the biblical author's frame of reference in Rev 4-5. Rev 1-3 introduces elements of the five principal themes of Rev 4-5 which were isolated in chapter 1 and elaborated upon in their biblical overview in chapter 2. The purpose of the present chapter is to isolate and develop the thematic elements of Rev 1-3 in order to provide a foundation for the thematic study that follows. To facilitate the development of thought in this chapter, covenant and royal theology is again (as in chapter 2) removed from its fourth position in the sequence of themes from Rev 4-5 and considered first. The focus of this chapter, as in the preceding one, is on the primary evidence from Scripture, rather than on secondary literature.

#### Covenant and Royal Theology

Several aspects of covenant and royal theology are represented in Rev 1-3, including elements of the covenant structure

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<sup>1</sup>For an important contrary view in which Rev 1-3 is placed after Rev 22 and attributed to a later Jewish-Christian redactor, see Ford, Revelation.

and underlying theological themes and motifs.

### Covenant Structure

The book of Revelation contains within its epistolary framework the six usual structural components of a suzerainty covenant.<sup>2</sup> These components are divided into two parts, with one-half occurring in the Prologue and the other half in the Epilogue. This forms a covenant ellipsis (ABC . . . DEF) which frames the body of Revelation. The three covenantal elements found in the Prologue (represented by ABC above) are the preamble, historical prologue, and the public reading of the covenant. The preamble identifies the covenant giver and his attributes as "him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings on earth" (1:4-5a). The historical prologue summarizes the history of the relationship between the covenant giver and the covenant recipients with "him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:5b-6a). The public reading of the covenant corresponds to the public reader before the congregation (1:3).

The three covenantal elements found in the Epilogue (represented by DEF above) are the covenant stipulations, witnesses, and the blessing/curse formula. The covenant stipulations are "Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy" (22:10), and

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<sup>2</sup>See Strand, "Covenantal Form in Revelation," pp. 251-264.

"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come.' And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price" (22:17). The covenant witnesses who give both authority and authenticity to the covenant are the angel of "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets" (22:6) and the angel of "Jesus" (22:16). The covenant blessing/curse formula has the promised blessings of "the right to the tree of life" (22:7) and the privilege of entering the "city by the gates" (22:14), and the promised curses of "plagues" and the taking away of one's share "in the tree of life and in the holy city" to anyone who "adds" or "takes away" from the covenant (22:18-19).

The messages to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) are also each given in the form of an individual covenant.<sup>3</sup> This covenantal structure can be set forth as follows:

|              | <u>Preamble</u> | <u>Historical<br/>Prologue</u> | <u>Stipu-<br/>lations</u> | <u>Witness</u> | <u>Public<br/>Reading</u> | <u>Blessings<br/>and Curses</u> |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ephesus      | 2:1             | 2:2-4, 6                       | 2:5                       | 2:7            | 2:7                       | 2:5, 7                          |
| Smyrna       | 2:8             | 2:9                            | 2:10                      | 2:11           | 2:11                      | 2:11                            |
| Pergamum     | 2:12            | 2:13-15                        | 2:16                      | 2:17           | 2:17                      | 2:16-18                         |
| Thyatira     | 2:18            | 2:19-21                        | 2:25                      | 2:29           | 2:29                      | 2:22-23,<br>26-28               |
| Sardis       | 3:1             | 3:1                            | 3:2-3                     | 3:6            | 3:6                       | 3:3-4                           |
| Philadelphia | 3:7             | 3:8-10                         | 3:11                      | 3:13           | 3:13                      | 3:9-10,<br>12                   |
| Laodicea     | 3:14            | 3:15-17                        | 3:18-19                   | 3:22           | 3:22                      | 3:20-21                         |

The content of the preamble is taken from the description of the "one like a son of man" (1:12-20). The historical prologue is always an assessment of the spiritual condition of each church. When evil is present, a warning threat or curse is given that will be

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<sup>3</sup>Shea, "Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches," pp. 71-84.

executed if the situation persists. The direct "I-Thou" form of address is always utilized to emphasize the reality of the situation and the covenant relationship. There is some mingling between the stipulations and the blessing/curse formula. This is because the blessing/curse formula always implies an appearance before the covenant giver and a resulting judgment.

#### Jesus Christ as Priest/King

A priestly and royal role is an inherent part of covenant and royal theology. In Rev 1-3 the priestly and royal role of Jesus Christ is introduced through a series of Greek nominatives (1:5a) that set forth this role in a sequence which follows a temporal order. The "faithful witness" aspect, or priestly role, led to his death and resurrection. In this way he became prominent as the "firstborn of the dead" and finally the "ruler of the kings of the earth," which clearly emphasizes his royal role.

The description of Jesus Christ in 1:5a caused the biblical writer to burst forth in a doxology. This doxology (1:5b, 6) not only reveals what Jesus Christ has done in his double role of priest/king for the Christian community of seven churches, but it also stresses his personal relationship with them through this priest/king role. The participles "who loves us" and "has freed us" are followed by the finite verb "made us." By making this last verb finite instead of participial, the writer elevated this third statement above the preceding participial verb forms.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1943), p. 45.

participles contain the two basic elements for bringing into being the relationship expressed by the finite verb "made us." The direct object of "made" is "us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father."

The priestly and royal role of Jesus Christ is further enhanced by numerous other references. In the inaugural vision of Revelation he is "in the midst of the lampstands" as "one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast" (1:13). The "son of man" reflects his royal role in Dan 7:13-14. His long robe with a golden girdle probably reflects both a priestly and royal role. The fact that he is in the midst of the seven lampstands suggests that the primary emphasis is more priestly than royal.

In the messages to the seven churches (Rev 2-3), each covenant preamble is taken from the inaugural vision (1:10-20). Collectively, they reflect many aspects of his role as priest and king. By holding the "seven stars in his right hand" (2:1; 3:1) he displays his royal power. As king/general he will "war against them with the sword" (2:12, 16) and appear with "eyes like a flame of fire" and feet "like burnished bronze" (2:18). After having "conquered" in a military fashion he "sat down" with his "Father on his throne" (3:21) and has the royal "key of David" (3:7). Because of Jesus Christ's priestly and royal role he is able as the traditional covenant suzerain to elevate the Christian community of seven churches to a vassal role of "kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:6). Thus, the primary emphasis of each preamble in the messages to the churches appears to be the royal role of Jesus Christ in relationship to the Christian community of seven churches.

Kingdom

In addition to the clearly covenantal structure of Rev 1-3, there are numerous references to the covenant in conjunction with royal theology. The Christian community of seven churches has been made a "kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (1:6). This is clearly a reference to "a kingdom of priests" in Exod 19:6 when the Sinai covenant was established. The context in Revelation is the doxology for Jesus Christ in 1:5-6 which contains two notable and very significant parallels with Exod 19. First, in Revelation, the doxology speaks of those who were "loosed" or "redeemed" (aorist tense) from sin by Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> This parallels the redemption or loosing of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exod 19:4) so that the covenant could be established (Exod 19:5). Second, these redeemed ones have been made a "kingdom, priests to his God and Father." This parallels the same relationship which Yahweh had with Israel through the covenant (Exod 19:6).<sup>6</sup>

Within Revelation, βασιλεία ("kingdom") can mean "kingdom" in which a physical kingdom is emphasized, or it can mean "royal rule" or "royal power," in which sovereignty is emphasized as in 17:17-18.<sup>7</sup> The parallel expression of "kingdom and priests" in Rev 5:10 is also part of a doxology in which worship is given to the Lamb who has made the ransomed ones a "kingdom and priests" who "shall reign on the

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<sup>5</sup> Cyril Eastwood, The Royal Priesthood of the Faithful (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Gelston, "Royal Priesthood," p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Bauer, "βασιλεία," Greek-English Lexicon (1957), pp. 134-135.

earth" (5:10). This suggests that in both 1:6 and 5:10 the Christian community of seven churches has become a "kingdom" in the sense of royal rule as vassals of their suzerain, Jesus Christ. When the opposing powers have been destroyed, however, the churches will have dominion over the whole earth in the form of a physical kingdom. In 20:6 the future has become a reality in covenant execution as the "priests of God and of Christ" begin to "reign with him" over the whole earth. This suggests that "kingdom" in 1:6 should be understood more in the context of the Sinai covenant of "royal rule," while "will reign" should be understood more in the sense of dominion connected with a physical kingdom which covers the whole earth. The "kingdom" is a reality in Revelation because the Christian community of seven churches and the author of Revelation (1:9) share in the royal rule of the suzerain as vassals--because Jesus Christ is "the ruler of the kings on earth" (1:5) and he made them a "kingdom" (1:6). They are a kingdom, not just because they are under a king, but because they fulfill a kingly function of participating in the messianic reign of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

The messages to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) depict several aspects of royal theology. To each of the seven churches, a covenant promise of blessing is made to the "conqueror" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). It is made in a military fashion, as coming from the king/general. The conquering one will receive royal "power over the nations" (2:26) and will "rule them with a rod of iron" (2:27), as was promised to the royal son in Ps 2:8-9. The conquering one is

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<sup>8</sup>Ladd, Revelation, p. 27.

placed before an "open door" (3:8), comparable to the door of the Davidic palace in the imagery of Isa 22:15-25; and through that door he can enter and become a permanent "pillar in the temple" (3:12) and have written on him the "name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name" (3:12). Finally, the one who conquers will "sit" with Jesus Christ on his throne as he "sat down" with his "Father on his throne" (3:21). These covenant promises of royal theology are thus fulfilled at the time of covenant execution after one has conquered. The conquering gives each Christian believer the right to royal rule in the dominion of the whole earth, but this only occurs because Jesus Christ has first conquered and sat down with his Father on his throne.

### Priests

As discussed in the previous chapter, Yahweh's people at Sinai became a kingdom "of priests" (Exod 19:6), a priestly role which had both horizontal and vertical elements. The horizontal element included a strong witness motif, a motif that also appears in Rev 1-3. The Prologue states in Revelation that in his presentation John "bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2). Moreover, John's earlier apostolic and prophetic witness had caused him to be exiled to Patmos (1:9). This same sort of horizontal witness is reflected in the messages to the seven churches when they are called "seven lampstands" (1:20), for lampstands provide light/witness to those about them. The strongest example of human witness mentioned in the messages to the seven churches is probably that of Antipas, who witnessed to the ultimate

by his martyrdom (2:13). He followed in the path of Christ, who was the faithful and true "witness" (1:5; 3:14). Those in the seven churches, together with the author of Revelation (1:9), also endure the tribulation caused by their witness (2:2-3, 9, 13, 19; 3:8, 10). They too must be willing to be "faithful unto death" (2:10).

The vertical element of the priestly role is clearly present in 1:6 when the Christian community of seven churches is linked to God through the use of the dative case: τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ ("to his God and Father"). This means that the Christian community in its priestly role is "immediate to God."<sup>9</sup> The messages to the seven churches reflect this vertical priestly role before God. They must have "white garments" (3:5), yet at Sardis there were only a "few names" who had not "soiled their garments" and who would be able to walk with Christ in his priestly role clothed "in white" (3:4). To the one who conquers is promised the covenant blessing of being clothed in "white garments" (3:5). Like the church in Sardis, the Laodiceans needed to remedy their spiritual nudity by buying "white garments" (3:18).

#### Summary of Covenant and Royal Theology

In the book of Revelation, when the Prologue (1:1-6) and Epilogue (22:6-22) are considered together, a covenant structure is apparent which is similar to the suzerainty type covenant made with Israel. Also, each individual message to the seven churches is in covenant form containing all six covenant elements (Rev 2-3).

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<sup>9</sup>See G. Schrenk, "ἱερός, et. al.," TDNT (1965), 3:250.

In Rev 1-3 Jesus Christ is, in the covenant sense, the "royal son" who made the Christian community of seven churches a "kingdom, priests" (1:5). He is the "priest/king" who is also the "faithful and true witness" (3:14). His royal and priestly role is further enhanced by both his outward appearance and by what he does for the seven churches. He has made this Christian community a "kingdom, priests to his God and Father," similar to Israel in the Sinai covenant. They share in his royal rule as vassal kings and they are engaged in a warfare in which they can become "conquerors." They share in his priestly status, wearing "white garments" and walking with Christ "in white." In their priestly function, they serve not only in a horizontal role of "faithful witnesses" before men, but they also serve in a vertical capacity in their immediacy to God.

#### Temple Theology

In Rev 1-3, the theme of temple theology is designed to strengthen the Christian community to remain faithful during tribulation. It also serves as a means of describing the recompenses which the faithful can expect to receive at the time when all of the covenant promises are finally fulfilled.

#### Temple Furniture Expressing the Temple Concept

As indicated in the previous chapter, the temple furniture expresses the temple concept. In Rev 1-3 the second part of the covenant preamble for the book of Revelation introduces temple furniture imagery with reference to "the seven spirits who are before his throne" (1:4). A parallel description is found in 4:5 where the seven spirits are called "seven torches of fire" and burn "before the

throne." "Before" the throne is the traditional position of the golden lampstand of the holy place. This lampstand is located in front of, or "before," the most holy place--the shrine where the throne is. According to C. L. Meyers, the golden lampstand symbolized for the Hebrews the invisible presence of the Deity instead of the usual idol-image of the deity of the Near East.<sup>10</sup>

In the first vision of Revelation, the Christian community of seven churches is depicted through the imagery of the "seven golden lampstands" (1:12, 20). These are patterned after the individual lampstands of the Solomonic temple (2 Chr 4:7), not the seven-branched menorah of the tabernacle. The temple concept is expressed through the lampstand imagery as "one like a son of man" who is "in the midst of" (1:13) and "walks among" (2:1) the seven churches.

A second aspect of the temple furniture is that the lampstand was designed to provide light for the temple/palace. In the context of Revelation, this light means both the divine presence and a Christian witness (cf. John 8:12 and Matt 5:14). If this witness ceases, then the lampstand must be removed (2:5) because of its lack of utility. The fact that the seven churches are each individually a lampstand and seven in number may suggest that the seven spirits (1:4), which are "seven torches of fire" (4:5) and "sent out into all the earth" (5:6), are to be linked with them. Therefore, the fact that the seven churches are termed "lampstands" rather than lights may suggest that the seven spirits sent into all the earth are the

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<sup>10</sup>C. L. Meyers, The Tabernacle Menorah (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 174.

actual light of the lampstands. If this interpretation is correct, the presence of God (seven spirits) with his people (seven churches) is an allusion to the temple concept in both a collective (seven churches) and individual sense (each church).

#### Temple as "Temple"/"Palace"

Temple theology in Rev 1-3 is expanded further with the concept of the temple being also the royal palace. In the message to the church at Philadelphia (3:7-13) an "open door" (3:8) is set before the members of this church. The historical background of the words "who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (3:7) is the oracle against Shebna (Isa 22:15-25), Hezekiah's major-domo who was expelled for placing his self-interest above duty, and replaced by Eliakim, who would faithfully perform the duties of his position. In light of this historical background, the "open door" (3:8) is the entrance to the royal palace where responsibility and service and also dignity and honor await. Thus, the Christian community at Philadelphia has the opportunity to enter the open door of the messianic Davidic palace to be in the divine presence and faithfully perform the functions of this position of honor. The one who offers the opportunity of the open door is the one like a son of man "who has the key of David" (3:7).

The "conqueror" in Philadelphia is promised that he will become a "pillar" in the temple (3:12), a symbol of permanence. The combination of "open door" and "pillar" demonstrates that the traditional concept of temple and palace is being used here in an obviously metaphorical sense.

### "Name" Theology

The promise to "the overcomer" in Philadelphia (3:12) contains a further facet of temple theology in the form of "name" theology. In the Old Testament, name theology expressed how Yahweh, who was transcendent and infinite, could dwell in an earthly finite tabernacle/temple.<sup>11</sup> "Name" theology was especially prominent in Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, where it was linked with the temple and the covenant. Solomon's dedicatory prayer for the temple raised the query, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kgs 8:27; cf. 2 Chr 6:18). Solomon's response was that God had promised that his "name" would dwell in this earthly house constructed for him (1 Kgs 6:29; 2 Chr 6:20).

The divine presence in the form of "name" is also mentioned in connection with the Sinai covenant (Exod 20:24). However, it is specifically designated with a particular place in Deut 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11; and 26:2 where it "verges closely upon a hypostasis."<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy does not call it the local sanctuary or temple, but the "place" where the "name" was located and dwelt. Jerusalem was also called the city in which Yahweh dwelt (1 Kgs 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4, 7).

Since 3:12 promises that the "name" of God and the "name" of the "city of my God" would be written on the believer, we have a new

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jacob, Theology, pp. 82-85.

<sup>12</sup> Gerhard von Rad, Studies in Deuteronomy, trans. David Stalker, Studies in Biblical Theology (Chicago: Hevery Regnery, 1953), p. 38.

development in "name" theology. The "name" is now localized on the believer. It includes not only God's name and Christ's new name but also the place where the divine presence is, namely, the city or new Jerusalem. This results in making the believer(s) the "temple" in which the divine presence dwells, and collectively constitutes them as the temple/city or new Jerusalem,<sup>13</sup> as in Ezek 40-48.

The names of the Father, New Jerusalem, and Christ's new name (3:12) are clearly the expression of the divine presence from the New Testament perspective. They denote the eschatological messianic era alluded to in Isa 62:2, where it is promised that Jerusalem and Mount Zion would be "called by a new name." Thus, traditional temple and covenant theology is expressed through the placing of the names of the Father, New Jerusalem, and Christ's new name on the "conqueror."

#### Summary of "Temple" Theology

In Rev 1-3, Jesus Christ is the traditional royal "son" who builds the temple by making the seven churches the place where the divine presence dwells. The temple concept is set forth through use of temple-furniture imagery: the menorah, the "seven spirits" before the throne, and the "seven golden lampstands" as symbolic of the seven churches. The combination of temple and palace is portrayed through the imagery of the "open door" of the Davidic palace, where the "conqueror" is promised a permanent place inside the "temple" as a "pillar." By means of "name" theology, the divine presence is depicted as being with the believer, who has the name of the Father,

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Valentine, "Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation," pp. 207-262.

the New Jerusalem, and the Son written upon him.

### Ontological Cosmic Unity

The ontological reflections of the temple in Rev 1-3 give evidence of the ancient Near Eastern (and Old Testament) view in which a close relationship existed between heaven and earth. In Rev 1-3, these ontological reflections serve as a means to enhance the parenetical message to the Christian community of seven churches.

In the inaugural vision (1:10-20), "one like a son of man" (1:13) reminiscent of the heavenly "son of man" of Dan 7:13, "walks" (2:1) among the "seven golden lampstands," which are defined as the seven churches. Ontologically, the son of man and the lampstands are depicted together. Collectively, the churches participate in the son of man's royal rule and priestly service (1:5-6).

Ontological unity of the son of man with the seven churches is portrayed in more detail in several of the covenantal promises to the seven churches. The conqueror in Sardis will walk with Christ in "white" (3:4) and be clothed in "white garments" (3:5) like a priest. The conqueror in Philadelphia will enter permanently into the divine palace (3:7) and become a "pillar" in the temple (3:12), while his enemies will come to bow in subjection before him (3:9). The conqueror in Thyatira will have power to rule the nations (2:26) and the conqueror in Laodicea will sit with Christ on his throne as he is sitting with the Father on his throne (3:21).

### Summary of Ontological Cosmic Unity

The "one like a son of man," who is a heavenly being, is ontologically depicted as being in the midst of the "seven golden

lampstands," which are the earthly churches. The promised covenant blessings to four of the seven churches emphasize either royal or priestly aspects of the temple concept in which both heavenly and earthly beings are ontologically described together.

### Judgment

Rev 1-3 contains many examples of a judgment motif. These reflect and utilize both covenant and temple imagery, such as "the coming one," "trumpet," and the appearance of the "son of man."

### The "Coming" One

Intermingled with the beginning of the covenant structure of Revelation is the announcement of judgment. In the preamble the first person mentioned is called the  $\acute{o} \epsilon\rho\chi\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$  ("coming one" 1:4). This participle can be used grammatically in either a present or a future sense. Many interpreters understand it to mean the future eternity of the Father. However, Lenski states that it "is not a substitute for the 'the One Who Shall Be,' either linguistically or otherwise."<sup>14</sup> And J. D. Robb argues that the participle should be translated as "who is coming."<sup>15</sup> The change of the verbal root from  $\epsilon\iota\mu\acute{\iota}$  ("I am") to  $\epsilon\rho\chi\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$  ("I come") provides further evidence for this alternative translation.

The same participle also occurs in 1:8, but "the Almighty" has been added to indicate the great power of the "coming one." In 2:5 the same verb occurs in the indicative form to express a clear

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<sup>14</sup>Lenski, Revelation, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup>J. D. Robb, "ho erchomenos ('Who Is to Come' -- N.E.B.)," Expository Times 73 (1962):338-339.

judgment motif, as the covenant giver threatens he will come to remove the lampstand of the church of Ephesus. In the Old Testament the "coming one" is used sparingly, but a unique reference appears in the Septuagint of Ps 117[118]:26 which is later employed by all four evangelists. It states: εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου ("blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord"). The context is one of judgment as the psalmist awaits for deliverance over his enemies (117:10-14, 25). Therefore, it is concluded that the "coming one" should be interpreted as a judgment motif.

This "coming" motif is represented also in Rev 1:7, as Jesus Christ is depicted as "coming with the clouds." Again, the evidence indicates that the context is one of judgment, since "every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." Moreover, the "coming with the clouds" (1:7) and the "son of man" (1:13) images are drawn from Dan 7:13 which is clearly in a judgment context.

The "coming" of Jesus Christ in judgment continues in the individual messages to the seven churches. He will "come" in negative judgment to those in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Sardis if they do not "repent" (2:5, 16; 3:3). But to the faithful ones in Thyatira and Philadelphia he will "come" in a positive sense if they will "hold fast" what they have (2:26; 3:11).

### "Trumpet"

In the first vision the biblical writer describes that he heard a voice as a "trumpet" speaking (1:10). The trumpet was used in the camp of Israel and in the cult as an instrument for announcements. In several of the Old Testament prophetic books, the

"trumpet" was the instrument used to announce the judgment of the "Day of Yahweh." This leads to the probability that the use of "trumpet" in 1:10 is appropriate biblical imagery to announce the coming judgment of the covenant. This judgment is necessary for covenant execution when the promised rewards are dispensed.

### "Son of Man"

The appearance of the "son of man" strengthens the judgment motif of the first vision. His "head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow" (1:14), similar to the hair of the "Ancient of days" who was sitting in judgment (Dan 7:9). The fact that his eyes resemble a "flame of fire" (1:14) provides an impression of judgment, since fire was often associated with judgment. Also, his feet appear like "burnished bronze" (1:15), and although the translation of the word for "burnished bronze" is not entirely certain, the imagery appears to be similar to the "bronze" man of Ezek 40:3 where a "bronze" man with a "measuring reed" (40:5) showed Ezekiel the restored temple and its measurements as part of the preparation for the return of Yahweh and his "glory" (43:2-5) to the rebuilt and restored temple on the traditional judgment Day of Atonement.<sup>16</sup> In the Revelation vision, the voice of the one like a "son of man" is like the "sound of many waters" (1:15) in that it is awesome and powerful. In his right hand of power he holds "seven stars" (1:16) which, like Old Testament "stars," (Job 38:7) participate in the divine council and serve as messengers (1:20) to convey the divine message of judgment to the covenant recipients.

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<sup>16</sup> Shea, "Investigative Judgment," p. 291.

Next, the source, strength, and instrument of judgment are described. "From his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword" (1:16). This is clearly a verbal pronouncement of judgment that is enhanced by the most powerful instrument of personal combat, the "two-edged" sword (cf. Heb 4:12). Added to the judgmental power of his mouth is the appearance of his face, which "was like the sun shining in full strength" (1:16). In times of judgment, one must stand before the face of the judge. In cases of positive judgment this was a desirable position, but in cases of negative judgment it was dreadful. The final words of the description state that the son of man has the "keys of Death and Hades" (1:18). This positively demonstrates that the passage has a judgment theme, because the one "like a son of man" possesses power over one's final destiny when the covenant is executed.

Moreover, the description of the one "like a son of man" is almost identical with that of the man "clothed in linen" of Dan 10:5-6 whose "loins were girded with gold of Uphaz." In Revelation, he is "clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast" (1:13). The man "clothed in linen" in Daniel's description was wearing the same priestly clothing used by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:4) and the one "clothed in linen" in Ezekiel (Eze 9:2-3, 11; 10:2, 6-7),<sup>17</sup> who serves in a high priestly role connected with the cleansing of the temple. In Revelation the "son of man" is clearly in a temple setting with clothing which is apparently appropriate for the high priest.

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<sup>17</sup>Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, The Book of Daniel, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), p. 63.

### "Faithful Witness"

Before the description of the "son of man" is given (1:13-18), Jesus Christ is called the "faithful witness" (1:5). Also, in the message to the church of Laodicea he is called the "faithful and true witness" (3:14). A "witness" implies not only transmission of a message but also a judicial setting.

### Judgment Terminology in the Seven Letters

In several of the covenant messages to the seven churches the description of the covenant giver ("son of man") definitely implies a coming judgment for the covenant recipients. To Ephesus, he is the one "who holds the seven stars in his right hand" (2:1). These stars are apparently the divine council witnesses to the seven churches. To Smyrna, the covenant giver is the "first and the last" (2:8). Like Yahweh in Isaiah, he will complete the covenant which he initiated. To Pergamum, he has a "sharp two-edged sword" (2:12) and will "come" and "war against them with the sword of my mouth" (2:18). He has "eyes like a flame of fire" and his "feet are like burnished bronze" (2:16) to Thyatira. Collectively, the images provide a strong judgmental tone.

### Rectification at Judgment

Judges and judgment were traditionally viewed in a double light--one for the wicked and one for the righteous. A positive judgment for the righteous was often a negative judgment for the wicked. This was because judgment for the righteous was the means to defend or vindicate their person and character, which had often been

wronged by evil ones.<sup>18</sup> Thus, for the righteous the judge was their defender and judgment was their defense.

The messages to the seven churches reflect the oppression by the wicked and the anticipation of rectification through judgment for the righteous. The covenant giver knows the "toil" and "patient endurance" of the church of Ephesus, how they "cannot bear evil men" (2:2) and "have not grown weary" (2:3). He knows the "tribulation," "poverty," and "slander" of Smyrna, and the fact that some will be thrown into "prison," "tested," and suffer "death" (2:9-10).

The message to Pergamum acknowledges that the righteous dwell "where Satan's throne is" and that Antipas was "killed" there (2:13). Thyatira and Philadelphia are commended, like Ephesus, for their "patient endurance" (2:19; 3:10).

Because of the conflict with the evil ones, the righteous can anticipate a time of rectification when they will be "conquerors" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). The covenant structure of the messages to the seven churches guarantees that judgment will occur. Each message contains the blessing/curse formula (2:5, 7; 2:11; 2:16-17; 2:22-23, 26-28; 3:3-4; 3:9-10, 12; 3:20-21) which will result in the dispensing of the appropriate recompense when the covenant is executed.

#### Summary of Judgment

The use of the "coming one" is an indication that God is coming to execute judgment. The judgment message is announced by the

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<sup>18</sup>For a detailed consideration of this concept, see George E. Mendenhall, The Tenth Generation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). pp. 69-104.

"trumpet" motif. The appearance and description of "one like a son of man" clearly reinforces the judgment theme to the seven churches. Both John and the seven churches suffer persecution and tribulation in their conflict with the evil ones. Yet ultimately they expect rectification when they are declared conquerors at the time of the judgment when the recompense of blessings is dispensed in the covenant execution.

#### Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

All three persons of the Trinity are involved in the salvation of the community of seven churches. Each has a particular role to perform and a specific contribution to make, yet there is a degree of overlapping among them. The combined position, work, and effort of all three make salvation both a promise and a reality for the Christian believers.

#### Introduction of the Trinity

The traditional covenant preamble and the epistolary form of the book of Revelation combine to introduce the Trinity to the Christian community of seven churches (1:4-5). Together these two elements state who is sending the epistle and who is making the covenant with the churches. They personalize the message and provide authority for it.

The Trinity sends the traditional Christian greeting of "grace to you and peace" (1:4). The Trinity members introduce themselves in the order of the Father, Holy Spirit, and the Son (1:4-5). They primarily use descriptive phrases rather than titles to identify themselves.

### God the Father

God the Father is referred to as ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ("who is and who was and who is to come," 1:4, 8). There are, obviously, grammatical anomalies in this expression. First, a series of nominatives follows ἀπὸ ("from" 1:4), where one would normally expect genitives. However, if the nominatives were replaced with genitives, an awkward and exaggerated string of genitives would result.<sup>19</sup> Theologically, the undeclined form of these words contributes to the parallel concepts of the eternity and existence of God.<sup>20</sup>

The second grammatical irregularity is the use of the imperfect indicative ἦν ("was") between two present participles. This grammatical unevenness apparently results from the structural incapability of Greek verbal forms to express the eternal past in participial form.<sup>21</sup>

The third verbal form ("who is to come") probably refers to the judgment theme of the "coming one" and the idea of future existence. Thus, the three verbal forms together echo the Old Testament concept that God is both a living God and eternal.

God the Father, as the initiator of revelation (1:1), occupies the chief position among the Godhead. Because he is eternally self-existent and head of the Deity, he is called the "Alpha and the Omega" and the "Almighty" (1:8). He is the most

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<sup>19</sup>Lenski, Revelation, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 37-38.

powerful in the cosmos, able not only to initiate things but also to bring them to their conclusion. Since he is called the "Alpha and the Omega" immediately after the covenant preamble, as the giver of the covenant he must be bringing the covenant to final execution. Being the "Almighty," he has the power to do it.

God the Father is king. He grants Jesus Christ royal power to rule over the nations (2:27). As king he also grants Christ the position of coregent with him (3:21). Thus, he is the royal head of the cosmos.

God the Father is also the first person of the Godhead. He dwells in his temple (3:12), where Jesus Christ serves as a priest/intercessor before him in behalf of the righteous (3:5). Because he is God and cannot be limited, his "name," through the concept of name theology, can be placed upon the righteous by Jesus Christ (3:12).

#### God the Holy Spirit

In the covenant preamble the Spirit is referred to as "the seven spirits" (1:4), placed here sequentially between God the Father and God the Son. The sequence seems to associate them in position and function with both the Father and the Son--especially so since they are also said to be "before" the throne of the Father (1:4) and are specifically noted in connection with the Son in reference to his being the one "who has the seven spirits of God" (3:1).

The seven spirits are clearly linked with service:<sup>22</sup> first,

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<sup>22</sup>P. Joüon, "Apocalypse 1,4," Recherches de science religieuse 21 (1931):486-487.

they are before the throne (1:4); second, they are connected with the seven stars (3:1), who are the angels/messengers to the seven churches (1:20); and third, they serve as the covenant witnesses to each of the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Their "witness" function is on earth, but in fulfilling that function they serve both the Father and the Son.

The fact that they are seven in number conveys completeness and perfection, as is the case in all the heptad series of Revelation. The number seven, however, does not appear to refer primarily to the sevenfold manifestation of the Spirit of Isa 11:2 or to the seven throne angels found in Tobit 12:15 and the book of Enoch.<sup>23</sup>

#### God the Son

God the Son is the last person of the Trinity mentioned in the covenantal preamble of Revelation. The fact that he is mentioned last and that more space is devoted to him in the preamble than to the others suggests the centrality of his role in Rev 1-3.

As there were three appositional elements in the nominative case to identify and describe God the Father (1:4), so there are also three appositional elements in the nominative case to identify and describe the Son (1:5a). This trilogy constitutes a covenantal preamble and is paralleled by a second trilogy that is a "historical prologue" (1:5b-6a), expressing what Jesus Christ has done for his covenant recipients, the Christian community of seven churches.

Strand has demonstrated not only the parallels between these

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<sup>23</sup> A. Skrinjar, "Les sept Esprits," Biblica 16 (1935):127-130.

two trilogies but also their sequential development and interconnection. The two trilogies are:

| <u>What Christ Is</u>      | <u>What Christ Has Done</u>                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Faithful Witness        | 1. Loves Us                                 |
| 2. First-born of the Dead  | 2. Has Freed Us from Our Sins <sup>24</sup> |
| 3. Ruler of Kings on Earth | 3. Made Us a Kingdom, Priests <sup>24</sup> |

The trilogy of the preamble sequentially establishes how Jesus Christ came to be what he is. First, he was the "faithful witness" who gave his life for mankind, and this resulted in his becoming Lord and Savior to the Christian community. After his death he was resurrected and became the "first-born of the dead." Because of the victories accomplished in his death and resurrection, he was exalted to the position of "ruler of kings on earth."

The trilogy of the historical prologue sequentially establishes what Jesus Christ has done for the Christian community of seven churches. Because he continually "loves us" (as is especially indicated by the supreme demonstration of his love on the cross, cf. John 3:14-16; 13:1; 15:13), he "has freed us from our sins by his blood" (a direct result of his love) and then exalted us by making us "a kingdom, priests to his God and Father."

The similarities between the two trilogies reveal a striking interconnection. Both "faithful witness" and "loves us" point directly to Jesus Christ's death on the cross. "First-born of the dead" emphasizes Christ's resurrection and serves as the basis for the statement "has freed us from our sins." As "ruler of kings on earth," he had authority to make us "a kingdom, priests to his God."

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<sup>24</sup>Strand, "Covenantal Form," pp. 257-263.

The trilogy of the covenantal preamble contains the principal themes about Jesus Christ found in Rev 1-3. As is often the case in Revelation, each element may serve as a symbol which calls up nuances that provide richness, but makes exegesis difficult.<sup>25</sup>

A more detailed consideration is now given to the individual elements of the trilogy of the covenantal preamble. The first states that Jesus Christ is "the faithful witness." The placing of the article with the adjective indicates that both the substantive and adjective are being emphasized.<sup>26</sup> Internal evidence from Rev 1-3 supports the view that "faithful witness" has multiple nuances. The closest contextual link to this expression is found in 1:2 where John "bore witnesses to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:2). The context of this verse demonstrates that "Jesus Christ" is a subjective genitive,<sup>27</sup> indicating that the word came from God to Jesus Christ and was then transmitted as testimony by him to his "angel" (1:2). It links the "testimony" to the contents of Revelation. Therefore, Jesus Christ is the "faithful witness" because he faithfully transmits God's covenantal revelation to his people in a manner similar to the Gospel of John (especially John 8:39-47), where he is placed in sharp contrast to those who were false witnesses.

The second nuance of "the faithful witness" has already been

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<sup>25</sup>P. S. Minear, "Ontology and Ecclesiology in the Apocalypse," New Testament Studies 12 (1966):89-105.

<sup>26</sup>A. T. Overtson, A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 776.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Ladd, Revelation, p. 23.

briefly referred to in connection with Antipas (2:13), who became a martyr. Jesus is not a witness simply because he was killed, but is a faithful witness ("martyr") in the full sense of being genuine and enduringly faithful, even unto death.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, Jesus Christ is the archetypal "witness" for all witnesses who suffer persecution and/or martyrdom (1:9; 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 19; 3:10), because he gave his "blood" (1:5b).

The third nuance of "faithful witness" is connected with Christ's legal covenant "witness." The fidelity of the covenant is assured by the legal covenant witnesses in the same way that two legal witnesses were required for condemnation (Deut 17:6; 19:15; Matt 26:60; 2 Cor 13:1; Heb 10:28) or for defense (John 5:31-37). Thus, Jesus Christ serves as one of the two covenant witnesses in the covenantal structure of the message of Revelation (22:16-19),<sup>29</sup> while the Father serves as the other.

The second element descriptive of Jesus Christ in the preamble to the Christian community of seven churches is "the first-born of the dead" (1:5). This same title also appears in Col 1:18, where Christ is sovereign over his church by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. J. B. Lightfoot states that priority and sovereignty are the two main ideas found both in this passage and in messianic passages which use first-born terminology.<sup>30</sup>

This reference to the "first-born" apparently alludes to the

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<sup>28</sup>H. Strathmann, "μαρτυρ, et. al.," TDNT (1967), 4:495.

<sup>29</sup>Lenski, Revelation, pp. 655-674.

<sup>30</sup>J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon (London: Macmillan, 1904), pp. 144-148, 155-156.

messianic oracle in Ps 89:19-37. This royal psalm makes reference to the Davidic covenant by rehearsing the glorious promises made to David through the Nathan prophecy.<sup>31</sup> Verse 27 (89:28 in the Massoretic text and 88:28 in the Septuagint) speaks of the establishment of the "first-born" as the most exalted of the kings of the earth. This establishes the preeminence and sovereignty of the messianic figure over all the earth.

The "first-born" is also important in connection with the fact that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. Among the Hebrews, the "first-born" was the preeminent figure at the time of the distribution of the inheritance. Naturally then, the "first-born" would be associated with the first place in the inheritance and sovereignty of God's kingdom. As "first-born of the dead," Jesus Christ occupies a victorious position over death by virtue of his resurrection. Therefore, he can impart life to the martyred because he has pioneered the path of resurrection and glory.<sup>32</sup> This message provides strength and hope to the "witnesses" of the Christian community who face persecution and martyrdom.

The "first-born of the dead" carries the double connotation of life and exaltation. Except for the fact that Jesus Christ died, the life theme is similar to the living or eternal attribute of the Father. Jesus Christ is the "first and the last" (1:17; 2:8), "the living one" who "died" but is "alive for evermore" (1:18). For the

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<sup>31</sup> Mitchell Dahood, Psalms II: 51-100, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed., The Book of Revelation, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1974), pp. 56-57.

Christian community the life theme appears in expressions like "freed us from our sins" (1:5) and the promise that they will "not be hurt by the second death" (2:11).

The third element of the preamble which describes Christ states that he is "the ruler of kings on earth" (1:5). This develops the idea of exaltation and sovereignty begun with the reference to the "first-born." It completes the thought begun in Ps 89:27a of the oracle of the messianic figure who became the "first-born."

#### Summary of Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

All three persons of the Trinity are introduced to the Christian community of seven churches through the covenant preamble and epistolary form. The covenant serves as the verbal and conceptual framework for presenting the divine plan of salvation to the seven churches. In the individual covenant messages to the seven churches, however, Jesus Christ is so closely associated with his people that he is the sole covenant giver.

God the Father is the revelator who gives his covenant message of Revelation to Jesus Christ. He is the eternal and almighty one who as God/King grants his Son the honor to be coregent with himself. Because of his transcendence as God/King, his "name" is placed upon the people who are faithful to him. He receives the priestly ministry both of his Son and his Son's followers. He is "coming" in judgment to execute his covenant.

God the Holy Spirit is identified as "seven spirits," which are mentioned in the preamble between references to the Father and to the Son. The "seven spirits" are located "before" the throne of the

Father. However, they are also associated with the Son because he "has" them. Their position before the throne associates them with service and links them with the seven stars who are messengers to the seven churches. They serve as legal covenant witnesses in each of the individual covenants of the seven churches.

God the Son is designated as "Jesus Christ" and "son of man." He is depicted as having the central role in relationship to the seven churches. He receives the covenant message of Revelation and as a "faithful witness" transmits it to the seven churches, for which he had suffered martyrdom. This martyrdom resulted in victory, for it was the means whereby he conquered. A second aspect of this victory is that it made him the "first-born of the dead." He was resurrected to life and therefore can give life to his people who are martyred because of his corporate solidarity with them as the "son of man" who experienced what they experience.

As the "first-born" he receives the rightful inheritance of the first-born, which has placed him on the throne as coregent with his Father. It made him the "ruler of kings on earth," who has the right to receive praise. As king, he is the covenant maker and the covenant executor. Therefore, he is "coming" in judgment to dispense the appropriate rewards for fidelity and infidelity.

As the priest/king he walks among his people in fellowship and priestly ministry. He freed them from their sins and will confess their names before the Father and his angels. He has given the Christian community of seven churches a royal status by making them a "kingdom, priests to his God and Father." In covenant terminology, he is the suzerain and they are the vassal kings.

His love is constant for them and manifested in all that he has done and will do for them. He loves them so much that he even chastens and counsels them. At the same time he provides opportunities to repent and to receive special blessings. He is so identified with them in his own experience and leadership role among them that it can truly be said that there is corporate solidarity between them.

## CHAPTER 4

### AN OVERVIEW OF SOME OLD TESTAMENT

#### HEAVENLY COURT SCENES

The principal patterns and components of the major heavenly court scenes in the Old Testament need to be examined briefly to provide background for the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5. Four Old Testament passages which have particular relevancy for Rev 4-5 are 1 Kgs 22, Isa 6, Ezek 1-11, and Dan 7. Of these, only Ezek 1-11 does not transpire in a heavenly setting, yet its numerous and strong parallels with Rev 4-5 make it significant.<sup>1</sup>

#### Micaiah's Vision (1 Kgs 22)

When Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, met with Ahab, king of Israel (1 Kgs 22), the latter suggested that they unite militarily against Syria to recapture Ramath-gilead, which had formerly been part of their territory. Jehoshaphat agreed (22:1-4).

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<sup>1</sup>For some helpful secondary literature on this chapter, see John Gray, I & II Kings (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964); Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Identity of 'the Saints of the Most High' in Daniel 7," Biblica 56 (1975):173-192; Otto Kaiser, Isaiah 1-12, 2nd ed., trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983); J. A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927); Mullen, Divine Council; Shea, "Investigative Judgment;" P. W. Whybry, The Heavenly Counsellor in Isa xl 13-14, (Cambridge: University Press, 1971); and Walter Zimmerli, A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapter 1-12, trans. Ronald E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). Other references may be found in the bibliography.

Before accepting the plan completely, however, Jehoshaphat wanted a message from the Lord. Ahab consulted his 400 prophets, who encouraged him to go into battle, but Jehoshaphat asked if there was not yet a prophet of Yahweh to consult. Ahab responded that there was Micaiah, the son of Imlah, whose prophecies were always against him.

The setting was at the threshing floor at the entrance gate of Samaria where the two kings were sitting in their royal robes and the 400 prophets were prophesying. The prophet Zedekiah, who had made horns of iron, appeared on the scene with a message purporting to be from Yahweh. He stated that "with these you shall push the Syrians until they are destroyed." The rest of Ahab's prophets concurred with this (22:5-12).

A messenger summoned Micaiah and recommended that his message be favorable to the king. Micaiah answered that he would only speak what the Lord told him. When Micaiah appeared before Ahab, he was asked whether the combined armies should attack Ramath-gilead or not. Micaiah answered, "Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it into the hand of the King." Micaiah's tone must have been sarcastic, for the king responded, "How many times shall I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" Micaiah then replied, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd; and the Lord said, 'These have no master; let each return to his home in peace.'" Ahab then turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?" (22:13-18).

At this point, Micaiah added a description of a heavenly

court scene. He said he saw "the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left" (22:19). In this scene, the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramath-gilead?" (22:20). A discussion ensued among what appears contextually to be the "host of heaven" as "one said one thing, and another said another" (22:20). Finally a "spirit" came forward and stood before the Lord saying, "I will entice him" (22:21). The Lord asked, "By what means?" The "spirit" answered the Lord, "I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets." The Lord responded, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go forth and do so" (22:22). Then Micaiah interpreted the scene by saying that "the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has spoken evil concerning you" (22:23). The course of events soon revealed the accuracy of Micaiah's prophetic warning, as Ahab was killed in battle (22:29-38).

#### Analysis of Micaiah's Vision

An analysis of Micaiah's vision reveals several significant elements: (1) The Lord was sitting on his throne surrounded by all the host of heaven, who were his courtiers and council members; (2) a discussion ensued among the members of the host as the earthly situation was considered in a democratic manner; (3) a messenger volunteered, who in turn was chosen and commissioned to execute the decision of the heavenly court; (4) the prophet served as the earthly messenger to communicate the warning message of the heavenly court before the execution of divine justice; and (5) the heavenly court deliberation culminated in a final judgment decision against Ahab.

### Isaiah's Vision (Isa 6)

In the year of the death of Uzziah, king of Judah, Isaiah saw the Lord "sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple" (6:1). Above him stood the "seraphim" with their six wings (6:2). Two wings covered their faces, two covered their feet, and two were used for flying. Apparently these seraphim called to one another antiphonally as they declared, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3). The foundations of the temple shook at the voice of him who called, and the temple was filled with smoke (6:4).

Isaiah responded, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (6:5). Then a seraph flew to Isaiah with a burning coal taken from the altar and touched the prophet's mouth, saying, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" (6:7). Isaiah heard the Lord say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (6:8); and he answered, "Here am I! Send me" (6:8).

After Isaiah volunteered as a messenger, the Lord commissioned him with a message of warning to his people that destruction and desolation would come upon the land. They would be exiled. Only a remnant would finally remain and serve as the seed for new life and growth (6:9-13).

### Analysis of Isaiah's Vision

An analysis of Isaiah's vision reveals several pertinent components: (1) The setting for the presentation of the heavenly

court scene was the temple in Jerusalem, but the scene itself reached from that earthly temple into heaven; (2) in heaven, "high and lifted up," the Lord was sitting upon a throne, surrounded by his courtiers, the seraphim; (3) antiphonal praise was rendered to the Lord; (4) Isaiah, who apparently served as the corporate figure for his people, was forgiven, as his "unclean lips" were purified by a "burning coal" from the altar; (5) Isaiah was commissioned by the Lord as the messenger of the heavenly court when he volunteered in response to the question from the Lord, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"; and (6) the divine-court session culminated with a judgment message of warning that destruction and captivity were coming and only a small remnant would be saved.

#### Ezekiel's Vision (Ezek 1-11)

Ezekiel's initial vision occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem while he was with the exiles in Babylon (1:1). In the vision a great storm cloud came out of the north with brightness around it and fire flashing from it (1:4). From the cloud emerged the features of four living creatures similar to those of Rev 4 in that the four resembled men, but were composite in form (1:5-11). Each of the creatures had four faces which resembled a man in front, a lion on the right, an ox on the left, and an eagle in the rear. Each had two wings to cover his body and two which touched those of another. The sole of each creature's foot resembled a calf's. Each creature appeared to have human hands.

Wherever the spirit went, the four creatures went (1:12). In the midst of these creatures there was something that resembled burning coals of fire similar to moving torches (1:13).

In 1:15-21, each living creature is depicted as a wheel gleaming like chrysolite. Each wheel was like a wheel within a wheel, with rims and spokes. The rims appeared to be full of eyes. As the creatures and wheels traveled, sometimes they were on the earth and sometimes in the air.

A platform, throne, and a throne occupant are described in 1:22-28. The platform was like a firmament over the heads of the living creatures and supported by their wings. Above the platform was a throne the color of sapphire. Seated on the throne was a human form whose appearance was like the glory of God.

Thus, God is depicted on a throne borne by four living creatures which serve as a celestial chariot. It is evident that the throne moved from the north to the south and stopped at the temple in Jerusalem, for in Ezek 9-10 God left the temple after having taken up residence there for fourteen months.<sup>2</sup>

In Ezek 2-3 the prophet is commissioned as a prophetic messenger with an indictment for sin and a warning of the judgment which was to come upon his people, who had transgressed against their God by not keeping his statutes and ordinances (5:6). The prophecies of judgment were given through acted parables which depicted siege, famine, decimation, desolation of the land, and exile (4:1-5:5).

In the new vision in Ezek 8, which builds upon the previous one, Ezekiel was transported from the Babylonian exiles to the temple in Jerusalem. At the temple an investigation was made which revealed prevalent idolatry and abominations of every sort, which resulted in

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<sup>2</sup>See Shea, "Investigative Judgment," pp. 283, 286.

driving the Lord from his own temple (8:6).

The vision continues in Ezek 9 with a voice which called six executioners to Jerusalem. With these executioners was one clothed in linen with an inkhorn at his side. Together they entered the temple and stood beside the bronze altar. At this juncture the glory of the Lord had departed from the temple, together with the four living creatures, who are now termed cherubim. Then the Lord called the one clothed in linen to go through Jerusalem and place a tau upon the foreheads of those who sighed and groaned over the abominations in it.<sup>3</sup> Since tau was the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, it designated the faithful ones as the remnant.<sup>4</sup> Next, the executioners were commanded to destroy the evil ones who did not possess the mark (9:5-6). Then Jerusalem was to be destroyed by the coals from among the four living ones (1:13), which the one clothed in linen would cast over the city (10:2).

Even though Jerusalem would be destroyed after the investigative judgment determined who was the righteous remnant and who was wicked, the temple and the city would be restored at a future time. According to Shea, the vision concerning the cleansed and restored temple (40:1), to which the Lord returned with the glory of his presence, occurred on the traditional cultic feast of the Day of Atonement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>For a recent review of the significance of the mark tau, see J. Finegan, "Crosses in the Dead Sea Scrolls," Biblical Archaeology Review 5 (1979):41-49.

<sup>4</sup>Shea, "Investigative Judgment," p. 287.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 291.

The one who sat upon the throne resting upon the war chariot (cf. Ps 68:17-18) in Ezek 1 commanded the one clothed in linen to take the coals from among the cherubim ("living ones" in Ezek 1) and scatter them over Jerusalem. A cherub handed the burning coals to the one clothed in linen, and the glory of the Lord went up from the threshold of the temple and stood above the cherubim. Together they traveled to the door of the east gate, then to the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. A promise was made by the Lord that he would purify and restore a remnant from exile who would return to Jerusalem. Finally, Ezekiel was returned in vision to the exiles in Babylonia (Ezek 10-11).

#### Analysis of Ezekiel's Vision

An analysis of Ezekiel's vision reveals the following components: (1) The setting for Ezekiel's divine council session was the temple in Jerusalem; (2) the Lord was sitting upon his throne above a war chariot borne by his courtiers, the four living creatures who are later termed "cherubim"; (3) the Lord and his courtiers, or council members, went to Jerusalem and the temple for an investigative judgment of the people in Judah; (4) Ezekiel was commissioned by the Lord as the prophetic messenger of the divine court; (5) the Lord's own people drove him out of his earthly temple through their abominations; (6) the divine court session culminated with a message of judgment which indicated destruction and exile for the wicked and salvation for only a remnant from Judah; and (7) an identifying mark was placed upon the righteous remnant who were to be saved in the coming destruction.

Daniel's Vision (Dan 7)

The heavenly court scene of Dan 7 was part of a larger vision, or dream, given to Daniel in the first year of Belshazzar. This was, of course, during the Babylonian exile, at a time when the faithful of Judah believed that an apostate world power instead of divine rulership was exercising royal authority over them.

Daniel relates in 7:2-8 that he saw the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea. From it emerged four different beasts. The first was like a lion with eagles' wings which were eventually plucked off. It rose up and stood on two feet like a man, and a mind of a man was given to it. The second beast was like a bear which rose up on one side with three ribs between its teeth. It was told, "Arise, devour much flesh" (7:5). The third beast appeared to be like a leopard and had four heads and four wings. The fourth was described as terrible, dreadful, and very powerful. It possessed great iron teeth with which it devoured, broke into pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet. On its head were ten horns, among them a little horn which arose to uproot three of the others. It possessed eyes like those of a man and had a mouth which spoke "great things" (7:8).

The four beasts were each an earthly rival to the divine kingdom. The little horn was bolder than the beasts in that it introduced a vertical dimension of speaking "great words against the Most High" (7:25). Thus, the little horn not only persecuted the saints on earth but also attempted to rise against the Most High in heaven (7:25).

Daniel's description of the heavenly court scene begins at

this point. Thrones were placed and one who is described as "ancient of days" took his seat. His garments were white as snow, and the hair of his head appeared like pure wool. His throne is described as similar to fiery flames with wheels of burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him. Then this court sat in judgment, as the books were opened (7:9-10).

A narrative interlude (7:11-12) bisects the poetic passage describing this heavenly court scene (7:9-14). The insertion of narrative at this juncture suggests that the little horn's persecution of the saints and blasphemous words against the Most High produced a great need for the judgment process of the heavenly court. The judgment taking place in the scene results in the beast's being slain and its body being burned. The dominion of the other beasts was also taken away, even though their lives were prolonged for "a season and a time" (7:11-12).

The second half of the poetic passage refers to "one like a son of man," seen coming with the clouds of heaven to the ancient of days. He was presented to the ancient of days, who in turn granted him dominion, glory, and the kingdom--an everlasting and universal rulership of all peoples, nations, and languages (7:13-14).

Because of Daniel's inquiry, "one of those who stood there" (7:16) proceeded to explain the vision. Daniel saw the little horn as it made "war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the ancient of days came, and the judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom" (7:21-22). In further explanation, Daniel was told that the court would sit in judgment and that the dominion of the little horn

would be taken away and destroyed (7:26), and also that the kingdom and dominion would be given to the saints of the Most High (7:27). Thus, the heavenly court scene culminates in judgment against the little horn and in favor of the saints.

#### Analysis of Daniel's Vision

An analysis of Daniel's vision reveals several noteworthy elements: (1) The ancient of days took his seat on the throne and was surrounded by his courtiers (a thousand thousand serving him, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before him); (2) "thrones were placed," suggesting that others, such as angelic beings (7:10), were involved in the heavenly court judgment session with the ancient of days;<sup>6</sup> (3) books were opened, suggesting that an investigation was made of their contents; (4) the narrative interlude occurred revealing that the little horn was speaking blasphemous "great words" on earth that necessitated the heavenly court action; (5) the narrative interlude prefaced the coming of one like a son of man to receive kingship and dominion, an indication that the issue before the heavenly court was dominion of the earth; (6) the session of the heavenly court culminated in judgment against the beast with the little horn and in favor of the one like a son of man and the "people of the saints of the Most High" (7:27); (7) this judgment was apparently made on the basis of what was found in an investigation of

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hartman and Di Lella, Daniel, p. 217; Montgomery, Daniel, pp. 296-297; Robert H. Charles, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1929), p. 181; Otto Plöger, Das Buch Daniel, Kommentar zum Alten Testament, vol. 18 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1965), p. 104; Matthias Delcor, Le livre de Daniel (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1971), p. 150; and André Lacocque, Le livre de Daniel (Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1976), p. 108.

the books; (8) the saints of the Most High received judgment with the one like a son of man because of their corporate solidarity with him, even though he is distinct and separate from them;<sup>7</sup> and (9) the judgment session in the heavenly court resulted in permanent dominion of the earth.

### The Divine Council

#### Terms for the Divine Council

Some discussion of the terms used, location, members, functions, and decisions of the Old Testament divine council is necessary before I make a comparative analysis of the Old Testament heavenly court scenes described above.

The nouns employed for this divine council are *דִּבְרָה*, *עֲדָה*, and *קָהָל*, the most frequent being *דִּבְרָה*. Other titles are used with them in the Hebrew construct chain, such as the "council of El" (Job 15:8), the "council of Eloah" (Ps 82:1), the "council of Yahweh" (Jer 23:18), and the "council of the holy ones" (Ps 89:5[6], 7[8]). Some passages allude to the divine council without employing any of the terms meaning "council" (e.g., Exod 24:9-10; Isa 14:13; Job 1:6; 2:1; Matt 19:28; Rev 20:4, 11-15).

#### Location of the Divine Council

In Old Testament depictions, the divine council may be either in heaven or on earth. In Isa 14:13, "mount of the assembly" is described as being in heaven, whereas in Ps 48:2 it is depicted as

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Ferch, Son of Man, pp. 145-192; Frederick M. Wilson, "The Jewish Son of Man in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," Studia biblica et theologica 8 (1978):28-52; and Hasel, "Saints of the Most High," p. 191.

being on the earth. The major divine court descriptions already cited (1 Kgs 22, Isa 6, Ezek 1, 10, Dan 7) vary in being located in heaven, earth, or a combination of both.

Since the divine council is linked with the dwelling place of God, it can either be on a mountain or at the temple. Ezek 28:14, 16, for instance, refers to the "mountain of God" in heaven, with allusions to the earthly paradise of Eden. In contrast, the law and the word of the Lord go forth (Isa 2:3) from the "mountain of the house of the Lord" on earth (Isa 2:2-3, and Mic 4:1). The Lord's temple, an integral part of the covenant, was at Mount Sinai and Mount Zion, the two traditional earthly places where the Lord dwells. Both gods and kings traditionally dwelt on mountains. Sinai is significant because the Lord not only gave his covenant to Israel there but also reigned from there in the days of the theocracy. Zion is significant because the Davidic covenant for earthly kings was established there. It is also linked with the "tent" of the tabernacle (Isa 33:20), where the Lord sits as judge and king (Isa 33:22). The location of the Old Testament divine council centers at the divine "mountain," the site of God's tabernacle or temple, whether on heaven or earth.

#### Members of the Divine Council

A variety of expressions is used for the members of the divine council: the "holy ones" (Deut 33:2; Job 5:1), the "sons of God" (Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 29:1), the "gods" (Ps 82:1), "seraphim" (Isa 6:2-3, 6), "cherubim" (Ezek 10:1-22), "spirit" (1 Kgs 22:21), "messengers" (Isa 44:26), "angels" (Ps 103:20; 148:2), "stars" (Job 38:7), "host" (Ps 148:2), and "thousand" (Job 33:23; Dan 7:10). The

head of the council is referred to as El, Elohîm, Eloah, or Yahweh.<sup>8</sup> He declares the final decision, or in the royal sense, the decree.<sup>9</sup> The other members participate in discussions but never declare the final decision or verdict. After a decision has been made, a member of the council either serves as a messenger to announce it, or as an agent to execute it.<sup>10</sup>

Yahweh by any of his titles is clearly the supreme God. He is viewed as the king (Exod 15:18, Deut 33:5; Ps 24:7-10; 68:24[25]; 93:2[3]; 99:1; Isa 43:15; Jer 46:18; 48:15; 51:57) whose kingship is eternal (Ps 9:7[8]; 10:16; 29:10; 93:2; 145:13; Jer 10:10). He is superior to all other gods (Exod 15:11; Deut 3:24; 10:17; 1 Kgs 8:23; Ps 89:6-7[7-8]; 96:4; 135:5; 136:2; Jer 10:6; Dan 11:36) and is even the "king above all gods" (Ps 95:3).

Members of the divine council appear to be involved with earthly affairs, as even the terms used to identify them sometimes reflect. Deut 32:8 states that the Most High fixed the bounds of the peoples and the nations according to the "sons of God,"<sup>11</sup> but Yahweh's portion was Jacob (Israel). This seems to indicate that the other nations were governed by the "sons of God." Deut 29:26[25]

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<sup>8</sup>One observes in the Hebrew parallelism and in the comparison of different texts that these names apparently can be used interchangeably (Num 24:16; Ps 18:13[14]; Gen 14:22; Ps 47:2[3]).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Mullen, Divine Council, pp. 205, 207-209.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>11</sup>For this reading of the Qumran fragment, see P. W. Skehan, "A Fragment of the 'Song of Moses' (Deut. 32) from Qumran," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 136 (1954). The more correct reading "sons of God" rather than the "sons of Israel" of the Massoretic text is supported by the Septuagint and Qumran 4Q.

declares that Israel served "other gods" whom "he (Yahweh) had not allotted to them." According to Ps 82, the evil done on earth appears to be at least partially the responsibility of the "gods" who judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked (Ps 82:1-2; cf. Isa 24:21). For this reason they shall "die" like a man and "fall like a prince" (Ps 82:7). The correctness of this interpretation is seen in the final words of the psalm, "Arise, O God, judge the earth; for to thee belong all the nations!" (v. 8). God is supreme in the divine council and judges both its members and those on the earth.

The "sons of God" are apparently responsible for what takes place in the nations outside of Israel in Dan 4 as well. There the term employed is "watcher." Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as a tree which is to be cut down because a "watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven" (Dan 4:13[10], 23[20]), and "the sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones" (Dan 4:17[14]).

Another term for members of the divine council is "hosts" from the title "Yahweh of hosts." Yahweh is a warrior (Exod 15:3, Ps 24:8) who fights the battles for Israel. The members of his army not only comprise the "hosts" but also serve as divine council members.<sup>12</sup> Joel 3[4]:11 calls for Yahweh to bring down his "warriors" or mighty men. In Isa 13:4-5, Yahweh of hosts musters a "host" for battle from "a distant land, from the end of the heavens." These warriors are also called "my consecrated ones." (Isa 13:3). In a heavenly setting, Ps 89:5-8[6-9] equates the "holy ones" with the "sons of

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<sup>12</sup>For a detailed consideration of this subject, see Mullen, Divine Council, pp. 184, 186-190.

God" (Massoretic text of v. 6[7]) in the divine council ("assembly of the holy ones"). They, in turn, are both associated with the might of Yahweh, who is the Lord God of "hosts." The "holy ones" are also referred to as warriors in the divine army in Deut 33:2 and Ps 68:17[18]. Since Yahweh is a "warrior" who has "warriors" called "hosts" and these hosts are equated with the "consecrated ones" or "holy ones" (who are in turn equated with the "sons of God"), then the warriors are also members of the divine council.

Another image for the heavenly "host" is "stars." In the battle against Sisera, the "stars" fought "from their courses" (Judg 5:20). Because the "stars" are equated with the "hosts" and the "sons of God" in the Hebrew parallelism of Job 38:7, they are also members of the divine council.<sup>13</sup> Because the "stars" were all part of God's creation, the Israelites were prohibited from worshipping the "sun and the moon and the stars" and "all the host of heaven" (Deut 4:19). Therefore, any worship of the celestial bodies constituted the worship of "other gods" (Deut 17:3).

Other members of the divine council are mentioned by name or title. Job 1:6 and 2:1, for instance, mention "Satan" as being with the "sons of God" when they "came to present themselves before the Lord." In Zech 3:1, "Satan" is depicted as standing at the right hand of Joshua, the high priest, to accuse him before the angel of Yahweh. In both Job and Zechariah, "Satan" appears to be more of a title than a proper name, inasmuch as the individual so designated is

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Mullen, Divine Council, pp. 194-197. See pp. 194-195 for a more detailed consideration of the Hebrew parallelism in Judg 5:20 and Job 38:7.

in the role of the accuser in the divine council.

The council members with specific titles or names perform special roles or tasks. Gabriel (Dan 8:15; 9:21) serves as the interpreter of the divine revelations to Daniel. He is summoned by "one having the appearance of a man" (Dan 8:16), who may be the same as the one "like a Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13).

Michael is also specifically mentioned (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; Rev 12:7). In the book of Revelation, he appears as the leader of the angels against the dragon (12:7) and should probably be identified with the one designated in Dan 8:11 as the "prince of the host," and in Dan 8:25 as the "Prince of princes." In Daniel, he is also declared to be "one of the chief princes" (10:13), "your prince" (10:21), and the "great prince" (12:1). (The significance of the term "prince" becomes more clear in connection with Dan 7 in the comparative analysis of Old Testament heavenly court scenes which follows).

In a sense, the prophet is also considered a member of the divine council, serving as the messenger of that council.<sup>14</sup> Inasmuch as he functions as "the herald and courier of the council,"<sup>15</sup> he is more than a messenger. The common pattern is for the proceedings of the divine council to climax with the intervention of one of the members (1 Kgs 22:20-22; Job 1:7-11; 2:2-5; Isa 6:3-8; 40:1-6; Zech 1:9-12; 3:2-5; 6:4-8). In Isa 6:3-8, for instance, it is clear that the prophet participated in the council proceedings, volunteering to

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 209-226.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

be the messenger and being accepted by Yahweh as such. Ultimately, Yahweh commissioned him with the message and he went with the authority of both Yahweh and the council.

However, in the Old Testament setting, the very term "prophet" (one who is called) seems to imply the background of the divine council, for the prophet conceives of himself as standing in the council of Yahweh (Jer 23:18).<sup>16</sup> It is clear that Yahweh has messengers (Job 4:18; 33:23; Ps 103:20; 104:4; 148:2; Isa 44:26) that he "sends" (Gen 24:7; Exod 23:20; Num 20:16). The verb *šālaḥ* ("to send") is used for both divine messengers and prophets (Exod 3:10, 15; 7:16; Deut 34:11; Josh 24:5; 1 Sam 15:1; 2 Sam 12:1, 25; Ps 105:26; Isa 6:8-9; Jer 1:7; 7:25; 19:14; Ezek 2:3-4; Mic 6:4; Hag 1:12; Mal 4:5[3:23]). For this reason, the prophet is called the "messenger" of Yahweh (Hag 1:13; Mal 3:1). Moreover, the importance of these messengers is shown by the fact that Yahweh performs their "counsel" (Isa 44:26).

An indication that the message comes from the divine council, even though it may often be transmitted by a single celestial or human messenger, is the use of the first and second person plural forms of address (Judg 5:3, 23; Isa 35:3-4; 40:1-8; 48:20-21; 52:7-10; 57:14; 62:10-12; Zech 3:4). When the prophet delivers the message of the divine council, it is normally transmitted with a message formula of "thus says the Lord" or "the word of the Lord." R. E. Clements has shown that the frequent introductory forms of

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<sup>16</sup>The context of Jer 23:18 indicates that Jeremiah is disputing with the false prophets over the legitimacy of their prophetic role. He makes their participation in the divine council, or lack of it, the deciding factor of their prophetic legitimacy.

speech employed by the prophets were common speech forms used by a messenger carrying out the commission of his master.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the prophet carries the authority and authenticity of both the divine council and Yahweh himself.

An examination of the activities of the members of the divine council reveals that they fulfill several different functions, including some specific individual roles. They surround the head of the council as attendants (1 Kgs 22:19; Ezek 1:12-14, 20-21; Dan 7:10). They support the divine throne for the head of the council (2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:10[11]; 80:1[2]; Ezek 1:26; 10:1). They praise and adore the head of the council (Job 38:7; Ps 29:1-2; 89:5[6]; 103:20; 148:2, 5; Isa 6:3). They are warriors who fight the battles for Yahweh (Gen 32:2; Deut 33:2; Judg 5:20; Isa 13:3-5; Joel 3:11[4:11]; Zech 14:5). They participate in the council proceedings (1 Kgs 22:20; Isa 6:8) and give counsel (Isa 44:26). They are to promote justice among peoples (Ps 82:2-4) and serve as guardians or watchers (Dan 4:13[10], 17[14], 23[20]). After the council decision has been made and announced, they serve as messengers (Exod 14:19; Num 22:31; 1 Kgs 22:21-22; Ps 103:20; 148:2; Isa 6:8-9). Individually, Gabriel appears to be a specially named messenger (Dan 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26), while Satan takes the role of the accuser against the faithful ones (Job 1:6; 2:1-2; Zech 3:1; Rev 12:10).

A special role appears to be taken by one who is an "intercessor," "witness," or "advocate" for the faithful on earth before the head of the council (Job 9:33-35; 16:19-21; 19:25;

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<sup>17</sup> Clements, Prophecy and Covenant, p. 24.

33:23-24; Ps 89:37[38]; Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1). In Dan 7:13-14, the "one like a son of man" appears to serve as the witness or intercessor in behalf of the "saints of the Most High" and "the people of the saints of the Most High" (Dan 7:25, 27).

#### Decisions of the Divine Council

Theodore Mullen affirms: "In all our traditions of the divine council its major function is to decree the fate or destiny of a group or an individual."<sup>18</sup> In Hebrew thought, Yahweh functions as both prosecutor and judge when a negative judgment is rendered in the frequent Old Testament divine לִפְנֵי ("lawsuit").<sup>19</sup> When favorable judgments are made there is evidence of a heavenly "witness" (Job 16:19), "guarantor" (Job 16:19), "vindicator" (Job 19:25), "mediator" (Job 33:23-24), "intercessor" (Isa 53:11-12; Heb 7:25), and "advocate" (1 Jn 2:1) before God (Dan 7:13, 27).

A brief survey of divine council decisions shows they are concerned with either life/death/fate (1 Kgs 22:17; Job 1:6-12; Ps 82:1-7; Isa 6:11-13; Ezek 1-11; Dan 7:9-14, 23-27) or kingship and/or inheritance (Deut 32:8-9; Dan 7:13-14, 27; Zech 3:7).<sup>20</sup>

#### Comparative Analysis of Four Old Testament Heavenly Court Scenes

##### Divine Council

All four of the Old Testament heavenly court scenes examined

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<sup>18</sup>Mullen, Divine Council, p. 228.

<sup>19</sup>See Kirsten Nielsen, Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, 9 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Mullen, Divine Council, pp. 227-228.

(1 Kgs 22; Isa 6; Ezek 1-11; Dan 7) refer to a session of the divine council. They all describe the head of the divine council as one "seated upon a throne" and surrounded by his courtiers, who are his council members. These council members are identified as the "host of heaven" or "spirit" (1 Kgs 22); "seraphim" and "Isaiah" the prophet (Isa 6); "living creatures" or "cherubim" (Ezek 1-11); "a thousand thousands," "ten thousand times ten thousand," and "one like a son of man" (Dan 7).

#### Temple Setting

Although all four passages depict the head of the divine council as seated upon a "throne," both Isaiah and Ezekiel add that the throne is located in the temple. Ezek 1 and Dan 7 imply that the head of the council has just arrived at the time of the council session. In Ezek 1, he had just arrived on his war chariot at the temple. In Dan 7, preparations were apparently made when "thrones were placed" and then "one that was ancient of days took his seat" (7:9). Three of the four passages either state or imply that the throne was movable. Thus the reference to the arrival of the head of the divine council is an indication that a new council session is beginning.

#### Head of the Divine Council Is God/King/Judge

The fact that the head of the divine council is seated upon a throne in all four court scenes that are temple scenes, is an indication that he is God/King as well. Because all four court scenes deal with judgment, it is clear that the head of the council is also the supreme judge.

### Democratic Council Process and a Chosen Messenger

During the divine council session there is apparently democratic discussion within the council regarding the subject under consideration (1 Kgs 22:20). In Dan 7:10, books are opened. This implies an investigation before a decision/verdict is reached. Once the divine council has reached a decision, it needs a chosen and commissioned messenger who will go forth to deliver to the appropriate audience the decision of the council. In 1 Kgs 22:22, a "spirit" volunteers and is commissioned, while in Isa 6:8-9, the prophet volunteers and is commissioned. In Ezek 2:3, the prophet is commissioned without mention that he volunteered. In all four passages considered, a typical "message formula" is employed as a prefix to the actual message from Yahweh.

### Role of Council Members

The role of divine council members in the four passages examined conforms to the broader Hebrew concept of an oriental ruler. In all these passages, council members serve as attendants to the one on the throne. Since Yahweh is referred to as the Lord of hosts in 1 Kgs 22 and Isa 6:3, 5, these messengers must also be considered the "warriors" of the divine army. In Isa 6, they praise and exalt the one on the throne. In Dan 7, the "one like a Son of Man" serves as the intercessor for the "saints of the Most High." The council members probably also function as witnesses (Dan 7:10).

### Decision-making Body

It is significant that in all four passages, the council is consistently pictured as convening before divine actions are taken,

suggesting that its chief function is executive/judicial decision-making. The council passes judgment and on the basis of the verdict the actions are taken.

#### Corporate Solidarity with the Leading Figure

A corporate figure appears in each of the court scenes of Isa 6 and Dan 7. In Isa 6, the prophet Isaiah is the corporate figure representing his people's spiritual condition. His cleansed lips and change of clothing are images employed for the cleansing and purification of his people. In Dan 7, the judgment of the one like a son of man served as a corporate judgment for the saints of the Most High in spite of the fact that he was also a separate and distinct figure from his people.<sup>21</sup> Since he appears to be identified as "Michael" (10:13, 21; 12:1), "prince of the host" (8:11), "Prince of princes" (8:25), "your prince" (10:21), and "great prince" (12:1), he not only fulfills the role of the witness or intercessor on behalf of the saints of the Most High but also is their royal prince who becomes the eternal ruler of the earth. Thus, the saints of the Most High receive the everlasting earthly dominion through their corporate solidarity with the one like a son of man.

#### Divine Council Decisions

There are broad areas in which the divine council passes judgment on either an individual or a group. In all of the four passages here considered, the judgment involves life/death/fate. Some persons or groups receive a negative judgment (1 Kgs 22 [Ahab];

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<sup>21</sup> See Ferch, Son of Man, pp. 177-180, 184.

Isa 6 [wicked of Judah]; Ezek 1-11 [wicked of Judah]; Dan 7 [little horn and beast]), while others receive a positive decision (Isa 6 [holy seed]; Ezek 1-11 [those with a tau on their foreheads]; Dan 7 [one like a son of man and saints]). There is also an example of judgment which results in deliverance/kingdom/dominion (Dan 7). The judgment made by the divine council, which is apparently within the covenant context, is extremely important for the future of those being judged.

### Jewish Apocalyptic Heavenly Court Scenes

I have examined the apocalyptic Jewish heavenly court scenes from 1 Enoch in order to determine their significance for the interpretation of Rev 4-5. Some of these references are extensive descriptions, while others are mere allusions. My examination of this 1 Enoch material has led me to conclude that the heavenly court scenes depicted therein are essentially based upon the Old Testament book of Daniel (as is evidenced both thematically and by terminology such as "Watchers," "Head of Days," "Son of Man," etc.), and that very likely these heavenly court scenes have not had as significant an influence upon the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 as has been held by such interpreters as R. H. Charles.<sup>22</sup> This conclusion is supported by the recognizably strong and pervasive use of the Old Testament as a source of imagery for Revelation.<sup>23</sup> In view of the

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Charles, Revelation, pp. lxxv, 106-107, 109, 111, 113, 115, 118-120, 122-123, 125-126, 128, 130-131, 133-134, 138, 141, 143, 148-150.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. pp. 16-17 above; and cf. G. K. Beale, The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

probable lack of relevance of these scenes in 1 Enoch to this study, I have placed my description and analysis of them in an excursus, rather than including treatment of them here.

#### EXCURSUS

##### Heavenly Court Scenes of 1 Enoch

Enoch describes how the sons of men had increased and had beautiful daughters born to them. Some of the angels, or sons of heaven, saw them and desired them, taking an oath to come to earth and choose wives from these beautiful daughters. These unions resulted in the birth of giants who did evil on the earth. The earth and its inhabitants complained about these lawless ones who had caused so much bloodshed and evil (6.1-8,4).

Enoch, the scribe of righteousness, was commissioned to inform the evil angels, or Watchers of heaven, of the judgment which would come upon them. After delivering the warning, the Watchers requested him to write out a petition for their forgiveness to be presented to the Lord in heaven. Once the petition was written out, Enoch fell asleep and had a dream. He saw a vision of wrath for the Watchers, which indicated that they would not be granted forgiveness, but judgment (12.4-14, 7).

The account of this vision of judgment includes a heavenly court scene. Enoch was lifted into heaven, where he came to a wall of hail-stones and a tongue of fire. He entered and came to a large house built of hailstones with floor of snow and a roof like the paths of the stars and flashes of lightening. In the midst of all this were fiery Cherubim. When Enoch entered the house he fell on

his face trembling. He also saw a second, larger house, built of a tongue of fire with open doors and an interior similar to the first house. Inside was a high throne with the appearance of ice when it is surrounded by the brilliance of the sun. The sound of Cherubim was heard. Rivers of burning fire flowed forth from beneath the high throne where "He who is great in glory" sat. His raiment was brighter than the sun and whiter than snow. A sea of fire surrounded the throne. Ten thousand times ten thousand were before him both night and day. Yet, he needed no holy counsel (14.8-23).

Within this context Enoch was summoned to the one on the throne to hear an account of the history of the Watchers and their offspring. Because of their evil deeds, both their place of destruction and judgment were declared.

A second vision of Enoch contains three parables. The first describes the dwelling place of the righteous. Then a thousand thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand were seen standing before the Lord. On the four sides of the Lord were four figures singing praises who were different from those standing before him. The first voice blessed the Lord. The second voice blessed both the Chosen One and the chosen. The third voice petitioned on behalf of those who were dwelling on the earth and supplicating the Lord. The fourth voice drove away the satans, not allowing them to accuse before the Lord the faithful who dwell upon the earth. These four voices were four angels. The first was the holy Michael, the merciful and long-suffering one; the second was Raphael, who is in charge of all the diseases and wounds of the sons of men; the third was the holy Gabriel who is in charge of all the powers; and the

fourth was Phanuel who is in charge of repentance which leads to the hope of those who will inherit eternal life (40.1-10).

The judgment implications of the previous scene were revealed to Enoch when he saw the kingdom divided and the deeds of men weighed in the balance (41.1). He then saw how the sinners were to be dragged away from the place where the chosen and holy ones dwell (41.2).

In the second parable, after it had been stated that the Chosen One would sit on the throne of glory (45.3), there was seen the Head of Days whose head was white like wool. With him was the Son of Man whose face had the appearance of a man. He would stir up the kings and cast them from their thrones and break the teeth of sinners because they did not exalt the Lord of Spirits. They would be driven from the faithful who depend on the Lord of Spirits (46.1-8) and would be martyred by the righteous (47.1-2).

The Head of Days sat down on the throne and the books of the living were opened before him and before all of the standing host dwelling in the heavens who comprise his council (47.3). The Son of Man was then named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits who is also called the Head of Days (48.2-3). Then the Son of Man sat on his throne while wisdom flowed from his mouth and prosperity went forth to his righteous which he had chosen and saved (51.1-5).

The court scene of 47.3 resulted not only in the placing of the Chosen One on the throne but also in positive judgment for the righteous (51.1-2) and negative judgment for the wicked (48.9) who were to be placed in a deep valley and burned (53.1; 54.1-6; 56.3).

In the third parable Enoch saw heaven shaken violently while

the host of the Most High, which is composed of a thousand thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand angels, became extremely disturbed. The Head of Days was sitting on the throne of his glory while the angels and the righteous were standing around him in a scene which involves a positive judgment for the righteous and a negative judgment for the wicked (58.1; 60.1-2, 6).

A further description states that the Lord of Spirits, who had placed the Chosen One on the throne of his glory, would judge all the works of the holy ones in heaven. These would speak with one voice as they praised the name of the Lord of Spirits. He would call all the host of the heavens, all the holy ones above, the host of the Lord, the Cherubim, the Seraphim, the Ophannim, all the angels of power and all of the angels of principalities, the Chosen One, and the other host which is on the dry ground and over the water, who would with one voice bless the Lord of Spirits for ever and ever (61.8-13). When the mighty kings and those who possess the earth would see the Son of Man sitting on his throne of glory, they would exalt him and entreat him for mercy which would not be given to them (62.8-12). Thus, the righteous would receive a positive judgment while the wicked would receive a negative one (60.6; 62.11-16).

A later passage describes how Enoch was carried off into the heavens, where he saw sons of the holy angels wearing white garments treading upon flames of fire. In the highest heaven he saw in the midst of the light something built of crystal stones. In the midst of these stones were tongues of fire, while a circle of fire surrounded this house and rivers of living fire issued from the four sides. Around it were the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Ophannim who kept

watch over the throne. Numberless angels, a thousand thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand, surrounded the house. Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel, and the holy angels went in and out of the house. When they came out they were accompanied by the Head of Days, whose head was white like pure wool and whose garments were indescribable. Then an angel appeared who declared Enoch righteous and stated that the Head of Days had proclaimed peace for him (71.1-15).

Summary of Heavenly Court  
Scenes in 1 Enoch

A comparison of the heavenly court scenes of 1 Enoch reveals considerable similarity among them. These heavenly court scenes occur in the first vision and in each of the three parables of the second vision. All of them depict the "Lord of Spirits" or "Head of Days" as sitting upon a throne, except the first parable of the second vision which definitely implies a throne. All of the descriptions have numerous courtiers surrounding the throne. These are divided into many different categories with many group titles and individual names. In some scenes numerous categories represent a wide range of cosmic representation.

That these courtiers are members of the divine council is implied by the observation in the first vision that the Lord of Spirits "needed no counsel" and by the mention that "'books' were opened" in the second parable of the second vision. All of the heavenly court scenes resulted in some form of judgment involving life/death/fate or kingship. The "Watchers" and wicked receive a negative judgment and the righteous or holy ones a positive judgment.

The "Chosen One" receives kingship resulting in rewards for his righteous followers.

As in the Old Testament heavenly court scenes, the third parable of the second vision introduces an angel messenger for the divine council. Like Isaiah, Enoch is summoned before the presence of the one sitting upon the throne, presumably to participate as a member of the divine council. Enoch also serves in the first vision as the advocate for the "Watchers" in the same manner as the "Chosen One" performs this role for the righteous. Thus, 1 Enoch follows the Old Testament pattern of specific beings performing special roles either within or on behalf of the council.

Although in general the heavenly court scenes of 1 Enoch are very similar to those in the Old Testament in both content and language, some aspects are different. In 1 Enoch the categories of courtiers are often far more numerous than in the biblical literature. There is also a much more extensive angelology, in which numerous individually named angels serve specific roles. This reflects a general trend of the Jewish literature of the period, wherein many different titles and ranks are attributed to angels (1 Enoch 9.1; 20.1-8) who often serve as mediators before God (1 Enoch 99.3; Testament of Levi 3.5). Another development is the use of the term "holy Ones" to refer to both men and angels, rather than just to celestial beings who served as members of Yahweh's council in the Old Testament (1 QH 3.21-22; 11.11-12; 1 Enoch 104.6). Thus, the principal difference between the Old Testament literature and 1 Enoch is in the area of angelology.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE HEAVENLY COURT SCENE OF REV 4-5

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an interpretation of the five principal themes of Rev 4-5 identified earlier. I continue here to use basically a biblical perspective to form the discussion and interpretations of these themes, for the scholarly interpretation of Rev 4-5 has varied widely in both method of research and interpretational stance.<sup>1</sup> In scholarly treatments, occasionally an exaggerated emphasis has been given to one theme above all others.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, some commentators have interpreted Rev 4-5 only in very general terms--the power, authority, and majesty of God,<sup>3</sup> whereas others have clearly seen Rev 4-5 as a

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., the form-critical study of H.-P. Müller, "Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Apc 4f" (Doctoral dissertation, Heidelberg, 1962), which has contributed very limited results for the meaning of the passage; the source-critical interpretation of Ford, Revelation, in which Rev 1-3 is placed at the end of the book of Revelation, and Rev 4-5 begins it; and the pre-tribulation rapture of J. R. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), and Louis T. Talbot, The Revelation of Jesus Christ: An Exposition on the Book of Revelation, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>E.g., to some degree the liturgical elements of worship in P. S. Minear, I Saw a New Earth (Washington, DC: Corpus Books, 1968), pp. 67-69.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Ladd, Revelation, p. 70; and R. H. Mounce, The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 131.

heavenly court scene, but have denied that it is also a divine judgment scene.<sup>4</sup>

Because interpretations of Rev 4-5 have been diverse, restrictive, and generally inadequate, there is a need for a comprehensive study to provide an adequate interpretation of this passage based on Scripture. As mentioned, the five themes of Rev 4-5 serve as the structural basis for this thematic study. More specifically, the present chapter on interpretation of the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 explores the following theses:

1. The passage has a temple setting in which all of the principal elements are described in terms of their position, role, function, and meaning in the temple (i.e., the divine presence dwelling among God's people).
2. The passage envisages an ontological cosmic unity related to the temple and portraying God's presence in both heaven and earth.
3. The passage describes a heavenly court scene in the temple--i.e., a divine council session in which judgment of the Lamb takes place.
4. The broad themes of covenant and royal theology (in which, again, the temple was a central element) permeate the passage.
5. In this passage, all three persons of the Godhead are involved in the salvation of the righteous.

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<sup>4</sup>E.g., G. Bornkamm, "πρόσβυς," TDNT (1968), 6:668; Collins, Combat Myth in Revelation, p. 24; and Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 113.

### Temple Theology

As noted in chapter 2, temple imagery is the backdrop for the message of Rev 4-5. To understand this imagery, we must consider the various temple elements and their interrelationships.<sup>5</sup>

#### Introduction to Rev 4-5

Rev 4-5 begins the second vision in the Apocalypse, a point that we have noted in chapter 1. In this vision John is commanded by "the first voice" that was "like a trumpet" (4:1) to ascend into heaven. Most interpreters identify this "first voice" as the same one which oriented John in the first vision (1:10-20). Such an identity would seem to give the second vision a temple setting like the first (1:10-20). The "trumpet" voice in the second vision would again, as in the first vision, provide a link with the temple, since the trumpet was traditionally used for calling either the whole congregation or just the leaders of Israel to the sanctuary/temple for solemn assemblies and annual cultic feasts (Num 10:2-3, 10).

But the second vision has further links with the temple which deserve notice. These include furniture, personnel, and even color and number imagery.

#### Throne

John saw a central throne "upon" (ἐπὶ) which a figure was seated (4:2-3, 9-10; 5:1, 7, 13). In the Old Testament earthly

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<sup>5</sup> Any interpretation which moves in this direction is strongly opposed by Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 112, "To discuss whether the heaven which John describes is conceived of in terms of a palace or temple, and the position of the throne, in relation to other features of the building, is pointless." Beasley-Murray has, in this case, missed an important point in this passage.

temple, the place for the throne of God was in the Most Holy Place in particular, and in the temple itself, more generally speaking. It was from the temple that Yahweh dwelt, ruled, judged, and presided over the divine council.<sup>6</sup>

#### Jasper, Carnelian, and Emerald

The appearance of the one sitting upon the throne was similar to jasper and carnelian in color, and a halo/radiance/rainbow with the appearance of emerald was around the throne. The color of jasper cannot be determined with certainty,<sup>7</sup> but this description of the colors used for God on his throne is probably only a slight variation from the fiery appearance of the one sitting on the throne surrounded by a brightness similar to the rainbow found in Ezek 1:26-28.

These colors have a specific meaning in Rev 4-5. As noted by Ford, these colors were part of the high priest's breastplate (Exod 28:17-21).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, when the sequence of these breastplate colors are compared with the order of the twelve sons of Jacob in the patriarchal blessing (Gen 49), they represent Benjamin (jasper), Reuben (carnelian), and Judah (emerald). These three sons (which eventually became tribes) represent the youngest (Gen 49:27; 43:29, 33-34) and oldest (Gen 49:3) sons of Jacob, and the son from whom the messianic king would come (Gen 49:10; Ps 60:7).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For further details, see pp. 42-49 above.

<sup>7</sup>Bauer, "ἵασπις," Greek English Lexicon (1957), p. 369.

<sup>8</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 71.

<sup>9</sup>This same concept appears to be reflected in the sealing of the 144,000 (Rev 7:4-8) where the tribes of Judah, Reuben, and Benjamin are listed first, second, and last.

From a strict comparison of the colors of the stones on the high priest's breastplate (which represented the twelve tribes of Israel, Exod 28:17-21), the colors of the stones of Eden (covering the guardian cherub for the divine throne on the holy mountain of God, Ezek 28:13-14), and the colors for the foundations of the New Jerusalem (corresponding to the twelve apostles, Rev 21:11, 19-20), it appears that these are all the same. This color imagery, together with the fact that the stones are linked to God's people, makes it reasonable to conclude that the author of Revelation employed these colors as imagery to identify the one seated upon the throne in his closeness to his people. Such a conclusion is in harmony with the general biblical evidence that the broad meaning of "temple" is the presence of God in the midst of his people.

### Rainbow

Around the throne was a "rainbow," in appearance "like an emerald" (4:3). The position of this rainbow is similar to the one over the head of the mighty angel with the little scroll in his hand (10:1). It was also like the brightness around the one seated on the throne in Ezekiel's vision (1:28). Since no interpretation of the rainbow is given in these passages, it is necessary to turn to the Genesis flood narrative (Gen 9:13-16) for possible clues to its meaning. In Gen 9, the term for rainbow is literally a "war bow."<sup>10</sup> When Yahweh established the Noahaic covenant after the flood, the war bow appeared in the form of a rainbow in the clouds as a guarantee that a flood of this nature would never again occur. Thus, the

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<sup>10</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 71.

rainbow was a sign that Yahweh would never use his war bow against them in this manner again. By analogy, it seems reasonable to conclude with M. H. Franzmann<sup>11</sup> that the imagery of the rainbow around the throne in Eze 1:28 and Rev 4:3 depicts divine fidelity to his covenant, as well as mercy to his people.

Based upon the analogy of Gen 9, the rainbow and the emerald color have special significance in the context of Rev 4-5. One of the principal themes of Rev 4-5 is the covenant, of which mercy is an integral part. The emerald color of the rainbow is imagery for the tribe of Judah from which the Messiah came, and in Rev 4-5 the Messiah is depicted as the sacrificial lamb (5:6). Thus, the rainbow and its emerald color serve as imagery to express God's mercy and salvation for his people in the covenantal setting of the passage. This setting is also, therefore, a temple setting, with theological concern of mercy and salvation for God's people. This fact is important, for, as we have noted previously, the Old Testament sanctuary was central to the covenantal relationship. It was the place where God met with his people and where mercy was dispensed. It is logical to conclude then, that the emerald-like rainbow in Rev 4:3 is a symbol employed to enhance the imagery of a temple setting, and that it does so to emphasize the covenant of mercy.

### Elders

In Rev 4-5, we find twenty-four elders seated on twenty-four thrones "around" (κυκλόθεν) the figure on the central throne. They

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<sup>11</sup>M. H. Franzmann, The Revelation of John (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), pp. 53-54.

are clothed in white garments and have golden crowns upon their heads (4:4). The fact that they are called "elders" denotes their traditional administrative and judicial role in Israel and the temple.<sup>12</sup> Their position upon the sub-thrones and the "golden" quality of their crowns would suggest their participation in both the royal rule of the central figure on the central throne<sup>13</sup> and in the judicial process of the court scene.<sup>14</sup> The fact that they are clothed in "white garments" places them also in a priestly role in this temple/palace setting. This is consistent with the traditional priest-king role already observed in Revelation (1:6; 2:26-28; 3:4-5, 12, 21).

Scholarly interpretation of these twenty-four elders has ranged generally from their being angels/angelic order in heaven<sup>15</sup> to men<sup>16</sup> or to some symbolic representation related to one or the other. Their significance lies not, however, in their identity, but

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<sup>12</sup>Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 1:152-153.

<sup>13</sup>Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 498.

<sup>14</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 105.

<sup>15</sup>E.g., E. Allo, Saint Jean: L'Apocalypse, Etudes Bibliques, 3rd ed. (Paris: Gibalda, 1933), who interprets them as angels who have charge of the world committed to them; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, who interprets them as an exalted angelic order; Charles, Revelation, who interprets them as angelic representations of the whole body of the faithful in their twofold aspects of priests and kings; Ladd, Revelation of John, who interprets them as angelic counterparts to the elders in Israel; and N. B. Stonehouse, Paul before the Areopagus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

<sup>16</sup>E.g., A. Feuillet, "Les vingt-quatre vieillards de l'Apocalypse," Revue biblique 65 (1958):5-32, who offers the most comprehensive article that the elders are not angels, but men; Seiss, Apocalypse, who interprets them as redeemed men; and Walvoord, Revelation, who views the elders as a representation of the raptured.

in their role and function within the context.

### Twenty-four

The number of elders is significant in that it helps to confirm Rev 4-5 as a temple setting. In 1 Chr 23-26, the arrangements were made for the temple and its services. From among the Levites, 24,000 were chosen to perform the levitical duties (23:24-32). From among these Levites were chosen twenty-four sons (24:20-30) by lot (24:31). The priestly ministry at the temple was divided into twenty-four rotating courses of priests each organized under one head also chosen by lot (24:1-19; cf. Luke 1:8-9). Lots were also cast for the twenty-four principal men who would serve as musicians in the temple (25:9-31). From among the Korahites (26:1) lots were cast by father's houses (26:13-19) to choose those who would be the chief gatekeepers that would be "ministering in the house of the Lord" (26:12). The repeated use of "twenty-four" in connection with these leaders of the temple confirms the fact that twenty-four was the organizational number for the temple. It is reasonable to conclude that Rev 4-5 is drawing upon this particular imagery for the elders<sup>17</sup> to establish the temple motif.

### Lightnings, Voices, and Thunders

"From" (ἐκ) the central throne went forth "flashes of lightnings, and voices and peals of thunder" (4:5). Reference to these phenomena are usually in connection with theophanies and divine judgment. They occurred when Yahweh descended from Sinai (Exod

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 114; Ford, Revelation, pp. 72-73; Ladd, Revelation, p. 75; and Walvoord, Revelation, p. 106.

19:16-24; 20:18) (his temple/throne prior to the construction of the wilderness sanctuary) and revealed his law. The theophany and judgment in Ezekiel had similar manifestations (1:4, 13) described in terms of temple imagery. In the heavenly court scene of Daniel the divine throne is connected with "fiery flames" (7:9) and a "stream of fire" issues from it (7:10).

In Revelation there are three other references to this grouping of manifestations connected with the temple (8:5; 11:19; 16:18). As the occurrences progress, more phenomena are added. In 8:5, an earthquake is added; in 11:19, an earthquake and hail are added; in 16:18, 21, an earthquake and hail are again included, but with a description of their great severity. The reason for this progression appears to be that these are negative judgments on the wicked and that such judgments become progressively more severe.

#### Seven Torches of Fire

The series of prepositions ("on" [ἐπὶ, 4:2], "around" [κυκλόθεν, 4:3], "around" [κυκλόθεν, 4:4], "from" [ἐκ, 4:5]) which are used to describe beings and things in relationship to the central throne continues with the mention of the "seven torches of fire" burning "before" (ἐνώπιον) the throne. These are interpreted in the text to be the "seven spirits of God" (4:5). In the salutation in Rev 1:4, the "seven spirits" are also mentioned as being "before" (ἐνώπιον) the throne (1:4), as we have already noted.<sup>18</sup> Their location "before the throne" is the traditional position which the menorah or lampstands had before the throne of Yahweh in the

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. pp. 95-96 above.

sanctuary/temple (Exod 25:31-38; 2 Chr 4:7).<sup>19</sup>

When one adds to the positioning the fact that both the "torches"/"spirits" and the "lampstands" are "seven" in number and are "burning" (present linear tense), it becomes more evident that sanctuary/temple imagery is being employed. Thus, the imagery of the "seven torches" ("seven lamps" in some translations) further substantiates the conclusion that Rev 4-5 depicts a temple setting.

### Sea of Glass, Like Crystal

The term "before" (ἐνώπιον) also describes what appeared to be "as a sea of glass, like crystal" (4:6) in its relationship to the central throne. Interpreters either understand this "sea" to be an enhancement of the splendor of the divine throne scene<sup>20</sup> or they attribute some sort of a spiritual meaning to it.<sup>21</sup> It appears, however, that its interpretation becomes more significant when it is viewed from a temple perspective.

In 15:2, those who had conquered the "beast and its image" were standing upon a "sea of glass" playing their harps of gold and

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<sup>19</sup> Even though the throne was considered to be in the Most Holy Place of the temple, the location of the menorah on the left side of the Holy Place qualifies as being "before" the throne. This is because all the furniture of the Holy Place and even the altar and laver of the court stand before the throne--that is, in the presence of--by virtue of the fact that it is connected with the temple.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Beckwith, Apocalypse, pp. 499-500; Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 103; and Swete, Revelation, p. 70.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Barclay, Revelation, 1:156; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 116; G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 68-69; Adela Yarbro Collins, The Apocalypse (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1979), p. 36; Ladd, Revelation, pp. 76-77; and Swete, Revelation, p. 70.

singing the victorious song of Moses and the Lamb. This links their position upon the "sea of glass" with their victory as conquerors.

W. F. Albright has demonstrated that the "molten sea" of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:23-26) had cosmic significance and was similar in function and meaning to the smaller portable lavers.<sup>22</sup> The practical function of that sea and of the lavers was the purification, respectively, of the priests and of the "things to be used for the burnt offerings" (2 Chr 4:6). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon stood on a "bronze platform" (קַיִסָּה) to pray (2 Chr 6:13). As Albright has pointed out, the term is the same one as is generally used for a portable laver in the tabernacle and temple.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, if the correlation is correct between the molten sea, portable laver, and bronze platform of the Old Testament temple, the position of those who had conquered the "beast and its image and the number of its name" (15:2) is identical with that of Solomon when he stood upon the bronze platform to offer his prayer of dedication at the time of the inauguration of the temple. This makes the "sea of glass" the equivalent of the temple furniture represented by the molten sea, portable laver, and bronze platform. This "sea of glass" in Rev 4 is, thus, appropriately located "before" (ἐνώπιον) the divine throne in this temple setting.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>W. F. Albright, Archaeology and the Religion of Israel (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), pp. 148-150.

<sup>23</sup>Albright, Archaeology and Religion, pp. 152-154.

<sup>24</sup>Even though the molten sea and the laver were in the temple court, they, like the menorah, may be considered "before" the throne because they are both literally in front of the throne and in its proximity. The court was also part of the temple, both physically and theologically.

### Four Living Creatures

Another group of beings called the "living creatures" (ζῶα) are described as being in the "midst" (ἐν μέσῳ) and "around" (κύκλῳ) the central throne (4:6). Although there is much similarity in the description of these "living creatures" with those of Eze 1 and 10, most scholars reject the idea that the "living creatures" of Rev 4 are positioned under the throne as throne bearers. Robert Mounce<sup>25</sup> and William Hendriksen<sup>26</sup> place them either in the "immediate vicinity" or around the central throne. Beckwith<sup>27</sup> places one at the middle of each of the four sides of the central throne; but he believes, as does Ford,<sup>28</sup> that the imagery is derived from the Greek amphitheater, as proposed by R. R. Brewer.<sup>29</sup> Before a valid proposal can be made for the location of the "living creatures," however, it is necessary to examine their role and identity. First, it should be noted that they are strikingly similar to Ezekiel's "living creatures." Hendriksen has observed that

In both cases these beings are called "living ones." Cf. Ezek. 1:5; Rev 4:6.

In both cases the symbolic number is the same, namely, four. Cf. Ezek. 1:5; Rev. 4:6.

In both cases the appearance of their faces is compared to that of man, lion, ox and eagle. Cf. Ezek. 1:10; Rev. 4:7.

In both cases they are closely associated with the throne. Cf. Ezek. 1:26; Rev. 4:6.

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<sup>25</sup>Mounce, Revelation, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup>William Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1949), p. 102.

<sup>27</sup>Beckwith, Apocalypse, pp. 501-502.

<sup>28</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 74.

<sup>29</sup>R. R. Brewer, "The Influence of Greek Drama on the Apocalypse of John," Anglican Theological Review 18 (1936):74-92.

In both cases fire moves to and fro among the "living ones." Cf. Ezek. 1:13; Rev. 4:5. "Out of the fire went lightning."

In both cases these "living ones" are said to be studded all over with eyes. Cf. Ezek. 1:18; cf. 1:21; 10:12; Rev. 4:8.

In both cases a rainbow encircles The Throne with which the "living ones" are associated. Cf. Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3.<sup>30</sup>

Charles,<sup>31</sup> however, has made note of several differences. In Revelation, the "living creatures" have only one face rather than four (Ezek 1:6). They possess six wings like the seraphim (Isa 6:2), rather than four (Ezek 1:6). They do not bear the throne (Ezek 1:22, 26). There is no mention of wheels (Ezek 1:15-16). They sing a song like the seraphim (Isa 6:3). They themselves are full of eyes in contrast to the eyes in the rims of the wheels (Ezek 1:18). They move about freely and act as intermediaries between God and man (Rev 15:7), rather than being restricted to the throne as in Ezekiel.

It is clear that Rev 4 draws on Isa 6, as well as on Ezek 1 and 10 for some of its details. At the same time, it should be observed that the variations in the number of faces and the position of the eyes can be accounted for by the fact that in Ezekiel the throne is traveling, while in Revelation it is stationary. In order for the throne to move in all directions, it is logical for the "living creatures" who bear it to have faces in all directions.<sup>32</sup> For this same reason, there are no wheels mentioned in connection with the stationary throne in Rev 4-5. The fact that the "living creatures" in Revelation have eyes is not really different from the fact that the rims of the wheels in Ezekiel have eyes, these wheels

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<sup>30</sup> Hendriksen, Conquerors, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Charles, Revelation, 1:119.

<sup>32</sup> Hendriksen, Conquerors, p. 267.

being a part of the four "living creatures."

The "living creatures" of Ezek 1 are ultimately identified as "cherubim" (Ezek 9:3; 10:2-22). The concept of Yahweh enthroned upon the cherubim is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament literature (e.g., 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Ps 80:1[2]; 99:1; Isa 37:16). Ezekiel's description of Yahweh as enthroned upon the cherubim and riding upon them is paralleled too in other Old Testament passages (2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:10[11]). The cherub also had the function of serving as guardian (Gen 3:24). This role is especially noted in connection with the ark in the sanctuary (Exod 25:19) and with the cherubim on the walls of the Most Holy Place (1 Kgs 6:29, 32).<sup>33</sup> This role and function of the cherubim as guardians for the throne is most significant for the understanding of Rev 4-5.

A number of scholars<sup>34</sup> have understood these "living creatures" to be the orders of angels which at the time of Revelation were extensively categorized. Ford, however, observes, "The impressive thing is that the author has eliminated all technical names for the creatures, such as cherubim, seraphim, watchers. He does not even call them angels, so that he only presents to us spirits and living forces."<sup>35</sup> Ford's observation is significant for the interpretation of Rev 4-5, for it points to a deeper significance for the cherubim than just the concept of angelic orders.

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<sup>33</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:120.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 501; Collins, Apocalypse, p. 36; Charles, Revelation, 1:119; Ford, Revelation, p. 74; Hendriksen, Conquerors, p. 106; and Mounce, Revelation, p. 137.

<sup>35</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 75.

The deeper significance of the cherubim becomes more apparent through a consideration of their role. In the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary/temple, the wings of the two cherubim touched each other and extended to the walls as they guarded the ark/throne (Exod 25:20; 1 Kgs 6:27). The walls of the room also contained carved figures of cherubim (1 Kgs 6:29). In these descriptions the cherubim are depicted as guardians of the divine throne. Solomon also had guardians for his throne, and these possessed similarities with the "living creatures" of Rev 4. At the back of his throne there was a "calf's head," and positioned on either side of the throne and in front of it were "lions" (1 Kgs 10:19-20). This concept of guardians and supporters for the royal throne was a common ancient Near Eastern motif.<sup>36</sup> It can be concluded on the basis of the Old Testament backgrounds just noted that the "guardian" motif is an important aspect of the role and function of the "living creatures" in Rev 4-5.

Besides being guardian of the throne/temple, the "living creatures" participate in the adoration and praise in Revelation. Together with the twenty-four elders, they sing both to the one seated on the throne (4:8-9) and to the Lamb (5:9). Together with the great multitude, angels, and the twenty-four elders, they bow down in worship to the one on the throne and give him their praise. Homage and adoration is again repeated in 19:4: the "multitude" praise the one on the throne; and the living creatures, together with the twenty-four elders, bow down in praise and say "Amen."

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<sup>36</sup>W. F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" in The Biblical Archaeologist Reader, ed. G. E. Wright and D. N. Freedman (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 1:95-96.

hallelujah!" One further aspect of their praise is depicted in the statement in 5:8 that they and the twenty-four elders have harps as they worship the Lamb.

Apparently based on the covenant concept of a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod 19:6; Rev 1:6), the "living creatures" in Revelation function in a priestly role. In the temple setting of Rev 4-5 they, like the ancient Levites, apparently render both vocal (4:8-9; 5:9-10) and instrumental adoration (5:8). The living creatures are directly involved with the ritual ministry of the temple as well, since they have "golden bowls full of incense" that are offered in behalf of the "saints" (5:8). One of the living creatures delivers to the seven messenger angels "seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God" (15:7).

The four living creatures function in a royal/executive role before the one seated upon the central throne. As each of the first four seals is opened by the Lamb (6:1-8), each one of the four living creatures gives the order to "come" (ἔρχου, 6:1, 3, 5, 7, may also be translated "go") and the appropriate action is taken by the recipient of the command.

Thus, in the temple/palace setting of Rev 4-5, the four "living creatures" perform the priestly/royal function of guardians to the one sitting on the throne as they render homage and praise to him with harp and song. Their participation in the ritual ministry involving the incense in the golden bowls suggests that they are functioning as priests. Their involvement with the opening of the seals demonstrates that they are also invested with royal/executive authority.

### Role of the Living Creatures

A related matter to explore is the role of the living creatures in the light of their function and position. Since it is clear that Rev 4-5 is a temple/palace setting, it is appropriate to seek an interpretation of the position of these living creatures within the traditional imagery of the temple/palace.

The traditional role for cherubim has been guardians and priestly/royal attendants to the throne. As guardians, they can also function as throne bearers. However, in Rev 4-5 the throne is stationary. Therefore, the closest temple-related model would be that of the Most Holy Place, where the cherubim served in a stationary position as the "covering cherubim" and guardians of the ark/throne (1 Kgs 6:23-29). They were positioned so that their wings extended over the ark. For this reason, Rev 4:6 states that they are literally "in the midst of" (ἐν μέσῳ) the throne. At the same time, cherubim were also located on the walls of the room. This corresponds to the "around the throne" (κύκλῳ) position given in Rev 4:6. Therefore, the position of "in the midst of the throne and around the throne" is reasonable and proper within the traditional role and function of the cherubim, or living creatures. This eliminates the enigmatic nature of "in the midst of" and "around."<sup>37</sup>

### Eyes of the Living Creatures

The four "living creatures" are filled with eyes "in front" (ἐμπροσθεν) and "behind" (ὀπισθεν) (4:6). Their six wings are also

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<sup>37</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:118, not recognizing this double positioning, considered the expression to be a gloss.

full of eyes "around and within" (κυκλόθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν) (4:8). If one follows Beckwith<sup>38</sup> in taking the more distant noun as subject, the "four living creatures" are full of eyes "around and within." Either translation is possible, but the first one is the simplest.

The significance of the "eyes" has been almost universally interpreted as intelligence. However, S. Bartina,<sup>39</sup> Ford,<sup>40</sup> and the The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary<sup>41</sup> suggest that the "eyes" as used in Old Testament literature can in some cases mean a "sparkling," "shining," or "brilliance." This latter interpretation, in which the "living creatures" are shining, is possible; but if one interprets the living creatures as guardians, the eyes have a greater significance. They provide the vigilance necessary for guarding the throne. The position of the eyes ("around and within") corresponds, moreover, to the position of the living creatures, who are declared to be "in the midst of" and "around" the throne.

#### Identity of the Living Creatures

Now that the function, position, and role of the living creatures have been described, an attempt is made to provide a possible interpretation of their identity within traditional temple imagery. In the Old Testament, the fundamental purpose of the

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<sup>38</sup>Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 502.

<sup>39</sup>S. Bartina, "El toro apocalíptico lleno de 'ojos,' (Ap 4, 6-8; Ct 4,9), Estudios Bíblicos 21 (1962):329-336.

<sup>40</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 75.

<sup>41</sup>"Full of eyes" [Rev 4:6], The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953-57), 7:768.

wilderness sanctuary was to enable Yahweh to dwell among his people (Exod 25:8). According to Num 2 and 10, Yahweh's people were organized in military fashion by tribes around Yahweh's tabernacle, where his throne was. Each tribe comprised a military unit with its own insignia that led the way when the unit marched. These twelve tribes were organized in a perfect hollow square around the central sanctuary, where the divine throne was located. From the three tribes on each side of the square, the center one was chosen as the chief tribe and military unit. Therefore, this tribe with its insignia became the standard-bearer for the whole side. The result was four chief insignias and four standard-bearer tribes for the whole encampment, located around the central sanctuary at the four cardinal points of the compass. In this way, Yahweh truly dwelt in the midst of his people.

The four faces of each of the living creatures in Ezek 1 and 10 and the description of each of the four living creatures in Rev 4:6-7 apparently correspond to the four cardinal insignias of the four chief tribes of Israel.<sup>42</sup> J. D. Eisenstein, citing the Midrash (Num. R. 11.), states that each tribe had its own emblem on its flag and the color of each flag corresponded to the equivalent tribal stone on the breastplate of the high priest. He also cites the Targum Yerushalmi, which indicates that the flag of Judah had a roaring lion.<sup>43</sup>

The description of the camp of Israel in Numbers locates the

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<sup>42</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 106.

<sup>43</sup>J. D. Eisenstein, "Flag," The Jewish Encyclopedia (1903), 5:405.

four chief tribes in the following positions: Judah on the east (2:3), Reuben on the south (2:10), Ephraim on the west (2:18), and Dan on the north (2:25). The insignias for these tribes were: Judah, lion; Reuben, man; Ephraim, ox; and Dan, eagle.<sup>44</sup> Scholars who link these insignias with the forces of nature<sup>45</sup> are probably at least partially correct. The insignias of lion, man, ox, and eagle represent the general categories (wild animals, man, domesticated animals, and birds) of all the animal kingdom (including birds); therefore they may serve, in a broad sense, as throne guardians for the entire earth. In this sense, the whole earth (all of God's creation) would be his sanctuary/temple.

The principal evidence from Rev 4-5 that linking the insignias with the tribes is correct comes from the designation of the Lamb as the "lion from the tribe of Judah" (5:5). The three colors used in relationship with the central throne, corresponding to the colors on the breastplate of the high priest, provide further evidence for linking the living creatures with the chief tribes of Israel. It is also noteworthy that the blessings of Jacob for his sons in Gen 49 and the blessings by Moses for the tribes in Deut 32 generally correlate with the insignias of these four leading tribes. Thus, the four living creatures serve first as throne/temple guardians and second as guardians of God's people (standard-bearers

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<sup>44</sup>"Flag," Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (1870), 3:586-587; cf. Eisenstein, "Flag," p. 405, who has a snake for Dan which seems to correspond better with the blessing in Gen 49:16-17.

<sup>45</sup>E.g., Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 117; Ford, Revelation, p. 75; and Swete, Revelation, pp. 71-73.

for each of the four sides of Israel's encampment)).<sup>46</sup> The presence of God with his people makes the two together a sanctuary/temple.

### Introduction to Rev 5

At this point it is helpful to give a brief overview of Rev 5 before specific items in this chapter are examined. As noted previously,<sup>47</sup> Rev 5 is a continuation of the scene of Rev 4 wherein temple/palace imagery is employed to describe the heavenly court. In the continuation of the scene, the one seated on the central throne holds in his right hand a seven-sealed scroll written "within" and on the "back" (5:1). A "strong angel" cries out, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (5:2). Initially no one is found "in heaven or on earth or under the earth" who is able to open the scroll (5:3). Because of his great concern, John declares that he "wept much," until one of the twenty-four elders stated that "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (5:4-5).

### Lamb

In the midst of (ἐν μέσῳ) the throne and the four living creatures, and in the midst of (ἐν μέσῳ) the twenty-four elders, a lamb, described "as" (ὡς) slain (5:6), was then seen to be standing. Two interpretations have generally emerged with respect to the

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<sup>46</sup>I reject fanciful interpretations of the living creatures as the four Gospels proposed by Irenaeus, 111.11.8, and the four signs of the Zodiac proposed by Austin M. Farrer, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), because they are completely outside the theme and context of Rev 4-5.

<sup>47</sup>See pp. 19-20 above.

position of the Lamb. Either the Lamb was standing between the throne and the living creatures (on the one hand) and the elders (on the other hand), or else he was in the center with all the others around him. T. F. Glasson has proposed a third view: he suggests that the Lamb is "in the very middle of the throne" by imagining "a dais with more than one occupant."<sup>48</sup> Seiss, on the other hand, has indicated that the position of the Lamb must be understood in terms of a limited omnipresence within the stated bounds--similar to the presence of the four "living creatures" which were seen everywhere within the bounds of the throne from center to circumference, "as being the life and being of it, present in every part."<sup>49</sup>

The fact that the Lamb appears in a temple setting suggests that his position in relationship to the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders must be determined by his role in the temple in the same manner that the other elements of the heavenly court scene utilize temple imagery. The role and function of the Lamb (Messiah) in covenant, temple, and royal theology are expressed in Rev 5 through the categories of sacrifice, priest, and king.

In Revelation, the term "Lamb" (ἀρνίον) occurs twenty-eight times in Revelation for the resurrected and victorious Christ. It is a diminutive form of ἀρνῦν, which either does not carry diminutive force in the New Testament<sup>50</sup> or is employed here because of a need

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<sup>48</sup>T. F. Glasson, ed., The Revelation of St. John, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), pp. 43-44.

<sup>49</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 115.

<sup>50</sup>Bauer, "ἀρνίον," Greek-English Lexicon (1957), p. 107.

for oblique case endings not possessed by *ἀμνός* ("lamb"), a term used elsewhere in the New Testament in referring to Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

### Sacrificial Role of the Lamb

The first role and function of the Lamb to be considered is that which relates to sacrifice and atonement for sin. This follows the traditional role of the lamb in the passover ceremony (Exod 12:21-27). It is also linked with the Old Testament messianic motifs of the "suffering servant" (Isa 52:13-53:12), the cutting off of the "anointed one" (Dan 9:26), and the rejection of the "shepherd" (Zech 11:4-14) who was "pierced" (Zech 12:10) and mourned by both the royal and priestly lines (Zech 12:12-13). One may note also the New Testament parallel use of lamb imagery (*ἀμνός*, John 1:29; 1 Pet 1:19), the destruction of the "temple" or body of Jesus (John 2:20-21), and the "shepherd" who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:15). Through the term "Lamb," the temple imagery of the altar, sacrifice, and atonement are depicted. It seems reasonable, therefore, that the position of the Lamb, as given in Rev 5, should correlate with these concepts.

John observes that the Lamb had been slain (5:6). As pointed out by Ford, although the verb *σφάζω* ("to slaughter") "may be used in the sense of an animal sacrifice ritual, the more usual meaning is 'to kill a person with violence'; cf. II Kings 10:7; Jer 52:10 (Septuagint)."<sup>52</sup> Within Revelation this verb is used for slaughtering (6:4; 13:3) and martyrdom (6:9; 18:24). Ford adds:

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<sup>51</sup>Lenski, Revelation, p. 198.

<sup>52</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 90.

"Therefore, the slaughter of the Lamb and the function of his blood must be seen against the background of battle and/or martyrdom."<sup>53</sup> The martyrdom of the Lamb was the means by which he "conquered" (5:5) and also the means whereby the saints are said to conquer in the fifth seal (6:9). In the conflict between Satan and the "brethren" (12:1), it was the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony that enabled the "brethren" to conquer (12:11).

Norman Hillyer concludes that the Lamb in Rev 5 should be linked more with the paschal lamb than with the lamb of daily sacrifice.<sup>54</sup> This harmonizes with other New Testament references, such as 1 Cor 5:7 and 1 Pet 1:19. Besides the atonement significance of the Exodus paschal lamb, there is also a liberation/victory motif similar to that found in Rev 5:9 and 15:3.

As noted above, the Lamb is cast in a sacrificial role in relationship to the temple and ancient Israel. His position in the midst of the elders (who function in an administrative, judicial, and priestly role in connection with the temple) is an appropriate position in relationship to the temple, inasmuch as a sacrificed lamb would be in the midst of those who serve for Israel at the temple.

#### Priestly Role of the Lamb

The second aspect to be considered with respect to the Lamb's role and function is that of priest. By means of his sacrifice, he "ransomed" those from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation"

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Norman Hillyer, "'The Lamb' in the Apocalypse," Evangelical Quarterly 39 (1967):230.

(5:9). The sacrifice alone was not sufficient to complete what needed to be accomplished, and therefore a priestly role was necessary in order to complete their ransom "for God" (5:9). This places the Lamb as the priestly intermediary between the people and their God. Christ, the Lamb, is very closely linked with his people in Revelation. He walks among the seven lampstands which represent the seven churches (1:13; 2:1). He walks in "white" and promises the conqueror that he too will be clothed in "white garments" and "walk" with him (3:4-5). The walking appears to be the walking in connection with the priestly ministry in the temple.

The Lamb had seven eyes which are interpreted to be the seven spirits of God which had been sent into all the earth (5:6). Although these seven eyes are clearly linked to the previously mentioned seven spirits of God (1:4; 4:5; cf. Zech 4:10), they are at the same time also linked with the Lamb and furnish evidence of his priestly ministry on earth through the seven spirits (4:5) for his "saints" (5:8).<sup>55</sup>

The fact that the Lamb is "worthy" to take the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne is further evidence of his priestly role and function. The temple setting of the passage in which the one sitting upon the throne is the supreme God requires that the access to God be limited to those who are qualified. Normally, only those occupying a priestly role would have this access, as is abundantly clear from the Old Testament.

In summary, the Lamb has a priestly role in Rev 4-5. His

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<sup>55</sup>Cf. Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 510; Caird, Revelation, p. 75; and Swete, Revelation, p. 79.

position in the midst of the elders is the appropriate location for his priestly role in connection with the temple. This position places him both in the midst of the people, as represented by the elders, and in the temple where the cultic rituals were normally carried on.

#### Royal Role of the Lamb

The third role of the Lamb in Rev 5 is a royal one. The Lamb, in military terminology, "has conquered" (5:5). The verb ἐνίκησεν is used here without an object, "proving his victory to be unlimited and absolute."<sup>56</sup> The means by which the Lamb has conquered is through his having "been slain" (5:6).

The Lamb is described as "the lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David" (5:5). As already noted above, the "lion" was the insignia for the tribe of Judah, and the tribe of Judah was a military unit in the ancient Israelite camp. Since the lion is not a domesticated animal, it adds boldness and power to the conflict theme. The "root of David" is a reference to the messianic prophecy (Isa 11:10) of the one who would come from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1) and restore the faithful remnant. Therefore he is clearly of the royal line of David, as was promised in the blessing to Judah (Gen 49:10). Because he has conquered, he is a warrior and therefore the royal military leader who restores the faithful remnant (cf. Isa 11:5, 11-16).

Some exegetes have proposed that ἀρνίον ("Lamb") should be

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<sup>56</sup>Mathias Rissi, "The Kerygma of the Revelation to John," Interpretation 22 (1968):7.

translated "ram."<sup>57</sup> The reasons provided for this translation are: "1) the reference to wrath, 2) the horns, 3) the sign of the ram in the zodiac, 4) the similarity to Dan 8:3 and I Enoch 90:9, 37."<sup>58</sup> The strength of the argument for the "ram" translation centers in the animal's horns and actions (e.g., "wrath of the Lamb," 6:16) and the parallels of the apocalyptic ram.<sup>59</sup>

Linguistically, the evidence is against this translation, for all of the biblical occurrences of the word outside Revelation (John 21:25, and the references in the Septuagint: Jer 11:19; 27[50]:45; Ps 93[94]:4, 6; Isa 40:11 [Aquila]) have the meaning of "lamb," not "ram." Therefore, I reject, along with most exegetes, the "ram" translation for Rev 5. Perhaps some aspects of the Lamb are seemingly contradictory because, as frequently occurs with other aspects of the person of Christ, there are contrasting attributes (e.g., justice and mercy) which manifest themselves simultaneously.

The fact that the Lamb had "seven horns" (5:6) indicates that the passive and gentle Lamb which could be slain, could at the same time be an authority figure who takes the initiative (cf. the lamb-like beast of 13:11-13). "Horn" was an Old Testament symbol of strength and power (Num 23:22; Deut 33:17; Ps 18:2; 75:4, 11; 89:17;

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<sup>57</sup> See Otto Bucher, Die Johannesapokalypse, Erträge Der Forschung, vol. 41 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1975), p. 47; and Charles, Revelation, 1:141.

<sup>58</sup> Ford, Revelation, p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. e.g., J. Coert Rylaarsdam, The Book of Exodus, The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 1:918-919, who interprets the passover lamb to be literally "the son of a year" (Exod 12:5) which traditionally has been held to mean a lamb in its first year, but which many more recent interpreters, with the backing of the Septuagint, identify as a lamb from the previous year's crop.

112:9; 148:14); and in apocalyptic literature "horn" denotes royal and military power (Dan 7:7, 20; 8:3; 1 Enoch 90:9).<sup>60</sup> The fact that the Lamb made those whom he had ransomed into a kingdom (5:10) also implies that he possessed royal power. The second anthem to the Lamb (5:12) confirms the Lamb's royal status because he is "worthy" to "receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." The final anthem (5:13) reinforces this concept by placing the Lamb together with the one sitting upon the throne and by rendering praise to him which is appropriate only for God/King. The adoration by the living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:14) confirms the previous response of all creation.

The Lamb goes to the central throne and takes the scroll from the one sitting upon the throne (5:7) because he is "worthy" to open the scroll and break its seals (5:2). The anthems resulting from this act confirm the Lamb's worthiness (cf. 5:9, 12). Some scholars, however, interpret Rev 5 as an enthronement scene which reflects ancient Near Eastern ritual.<sup>61</sup> They state that this rite consisted of three acts: "1) the elevation; 2) the presentation; and 3) the actual accession to the throne."<sup>62</sup> Van Unnik, however, disputes this interpretation, finding no evidence in this passage of an elevation

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Margit L. Süring, Horn Motifs in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, no. 4 (Berrien Springs, MI, 1982).

<sup>61</sup> Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, p. 54; and T. Holtz, Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), p. 27.

<sup>62</sup> W. C. van Unnik, "'Worthy Is the Lamb': The Background of Apoc. 5," in Mélanges bibliques en hommage an R. P. Bédé Rigaux, ed. A. Descamps, and W. de Halleux (Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), p. 447.

of the Lamb or an actual accession to the throne.<sup>63</sup> The minority voice of van Unnik, which appears to me to be the correct one, puts the primary emphasis of the passage on the "worthiness" of the Lamb--the "worthiness" that enables the Lamb to take the scroll and to open it.<sup>64</sup>

The minority view does not eliminate the royal status of the Lamb, however, for the Lamb has already been called the "ruler of kings on earth" (1:5) and the "son of man" (1:13; cf. Dan 7:13-14). He has already received royal power (2:27) and has sat down with the Father on his throne (3:21). The seven horns of the Lamb (5:6) and the anthems of adoration to him (5:9-10, 12-13) confirm his royal status. Moreover, if the worthiness of the Lamb to "receive" power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing at this time (5:12) implies that he has just been elevated to kingship, as many insist, then in the same way must the worthiness of the one sitting on the throne to "receive" glory and honor and power imply that he has just been elevated to the status of Creator (4:11).

In summary, the Lamb has a royal role in the temple setting of Rev 4-5. This royal role does not result in his enthronement in Rev 5. On the contrary, his combined royal, priestly, and sacrificial roles account for his worthiness to take the scroll from the one sitting upon the throne. Thus, the Lamb's position in the midst of the throne and in the midst of the four living creatures (which is one and the same position) is the appropriate position for

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<sup>63</sup>For a criticism of van Unnik's position, see Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 110.

<sup>64</sup>van Unnik, "Worthy Is the Lamb," pp. 447-448.

his royal role in the temple setting of Rev 4-5.

#### Golden Bowls with Incense

The reference to the "golden bowls full of incense" (5:8) further enhances the concept of a temple setting for Rev 4-5. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders are clearly serving in a priestly capacity when each has golden temple bowls used in connection with the ritual ministry of the altar of incense. When the Lamb took the scroll from the one seated upon the central throne, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before him with the golden bowls filled with incense. As the Lamb is in a temple setting, the imagery of bowls used in connection with the altar of incense is appropriately utilized (cf. Exod 30:1-10, 34-38; Rev 15:5-8). The imagery employed is that of the incense offering, which serves as a sweet fragrance before God (Exod 30:7, 36).

#### Adoration

The cultic adoration by the different cosmic entities that is found in Rev 4-5 is grounded in the temple adoration of the Old Testament. The lyre used by each of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:8) was, in Hebrew worship, the traditional instrument used for the accompaniment of the congregation in the singing of psalms (Ps 33:2; 98:5; 147:7). It is referred to on two other occasions in Revelation (14:2; 15:2) that are also temple settings.<sup>65</sup>

The initial anthem of praise in Rev 4 is rendered by the

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<sup>65</sup>Ladd, Revelation, p. 89.

throne guardians or "living creatures" (4:8). Because they are literally "in the midst of" and "around" the throne, they are nearest to the one sitting upon the throne. Therefore they render praise first. Their initial words of praise are the famous trisagion, identical with the initial words of praise of the seraphim of Isa 6. This anthem emphasizes one of the most important aspects of the divine character--his holiness, a theme especially appropriate in the opening anthem within a temple setting.

The response of the twenty-four elders to the anthem of praise rendered by the four living creatures is to fall down and worship the one sitting upon the throne (4:10). They respond antiphonally with their own anthem of praise (4:11).

When the Lamb takes the scroll from the hand of the one sitting upon the throne (5:8), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders burst forth in the third anthem of praise which emphasizes both the character and deeds of the Lamb (5:9-10). This anthem is immediately followed by the fourth anthem, which is sung by "many angels, numbering myriads of myriads" again extolling the worthiness of the Lamb (5:11-12). The fifth and final anthem expands cosmically the number of those who render praise to include now "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein" (5:13). The praise of this vast throng is directed to both the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb. Finally, the four living creatures respond antiphonally by saying "amen," and the elders in turn "fell down and worshiped" (5:14).

Each successive anthem of Rev 4-5 is sung by a larger group until all creation is included in one grand finale. There is, to

some degree, also a crescendo in the recipients of the adoration. The first two anthems are directed to the Father, while the next two are directed to the Son, and finally the fifth is directed to both of them together. A chart on the arrangement of hymns demonstrates the structural parallels between Rev 4 and Rev 5, the antiphonal nature of the praise, and finally, the crescendo of the adoration.

Arrangement of Hymns in Rev 4-5

| <u>Rev 4</u>           | <u>Rev 5</u>                                             |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| NARRATIVE              | NARRATIVE                                                |
| <u>Hymn #1</u>         | <u>Hymn #1</u>                                           |
| To: Father             | To: Son                                                  |
| By: 4 Living Creatures | By: 4 Living Creatures<br>and 24 Elders                  |
| <u>Hymn #2</u>         | <u>Hymn #2</u>                                           |
| To: Father             | To: Son                                                  |
| By: 24 Elders          | By: Many Angels,<br>4 Living Creatures,<br>and 24 Elders |
|                        | <u>Hymn #3</u>                                           |
|                        | To: Father and Son                                       |
|                        | By: Every Creature in Cosmos                             |

This antiphonal style of praise, which often included crescendos, is in harmony with the cultic praise of the sanctuary/temple. When David brought the ark to Jerusalem, parts of three psalms (Ps 105:1-15; 96:1-13; 106:47-48) were sung (1 Chr 16:7-36).<sup>66</sup> At the dedication of the first temple there was antiphonal praise (2 Chr 7:6). When the rebuilding of the temple was begun after the exile, there was antiphonal singing (Ezra 3:11). Antiphonal musical groups were organized among the Levites (Neh

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<sup>66</sup> 1 Chr 16:7-36 may have been composed first and later dispensed into portions of the three psalms.

12:24) and performed at the dedication of the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem (Neh 12:27-43). Thus, the antiphonal pattern of the adoration of Rev 4-5 is in harmony with the traditional pattern of Israel's sanctuary/temple.

#### Poetic Analysis of Rev 4-5

A poetic analysis which attempts to demonstrate the principal poetic elements of the anthems in Rev 4-5 is shown in fig. 1. These elements are evaluated for their contribution to the temple setting.

The poetic analysis reveals that the five anthems of praise possess several elements in common with Hebrew poetry. The meter is generally regular and similar to Hebrew poetry. The predominating Hebrew poetic form of bicola also predominates in these five anthems. Even though the five anthems are all separated from one another by narrative sections, it appears reasonable to conclude that the tricola of the first and last anthems structurally form an inclusion for the other three. The presence of five verbs in the second person singular is typical of the repeated use of the second person singular for Yahweh. The qualitative adjectives "holy" and "worthy" each occur three times in the anthems. This repeated occurrence demonstrates the thematic emphasis placed upon the divine qualities, as would be expected in a temple setting. The presence of Hebrew poetical forms together with the second person singular and the qualitative adjectives contribute to the surety that the setting of Rev 4-5 is a temple.

| CRESCENDO                                                                           | POETIC FORM | SYLLABLES<br>WORDS<br>ACCENT | PARALLELISM | BIBLICAL REFERENCE | ANTHEM RECIPIENT             | ANTHEM NUMBER | GREEK TEXT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Tricolon    | 3 3 9<br>3 5 11<br>3 8 11    | Synthetic   | 4:8                | One sitting upon throne      | I             | ὁ ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος<br>κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ<br>ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                     | Bicolon     | 4 8 14<br>4 8 14             | Synthetic   | 4:11               | One upon throne              | II            | ἀέλιος εἴ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν<br>λαβεῖν τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν,<br>ὅτι οὐ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα,<br>καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν.                                                                                                                      |
|                                                                                     | Bicolon     | 4 5 9<br>4 8 15              | Repetitive  |                    |                              |               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                     | Bicolon     | 4 5 10<br>2 5 11             | Synthetic   | 5:9                | Lamb                         | III           | ἀέλιος εἴ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον<br>καὶ ἀνοίξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ,<br>ὅτι ἐσθλαίης<br>καὶ ἡγόρασας τὴν θέσιν ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου<br>ἐκ πώσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους,<br>καὶ ἐκτίσθης αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλεῖαν καὶ ἱερεῖς,<br>καὶ βασιλευσούσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. |
|                                                                                     | Tricolon    | 2 2 5<br>3 8 14<br>5 9 14    | Synthetic   |                    |                              |               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                     | Bicolon     | 5 9 20<br>3 5 10             | Synthetic   | 5:10               |                              |               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                                                                                     | Bicolon     | 4 6 14<br>8 15 27            | Synthetic   | 5:12               | Lamb                         | IV            | ἀέλιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσθλαμένον<br>λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλεόνειν καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχύον<br>καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                     | Tricolon    | 4 8 15<br>4 11 17<br>3 5 9   | Synthetic   | 5:13               | One upon throne and the Lamb | V             | τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ<br>ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος<br>εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, τῶν αἰῶνων.                                                                                                                                                   |

Fig. 1. Poetic analysis of Rev 4-5

### Summary of Temple Motifs in Rev 4-5

A summary of the preceding section reveals extensive evidence that the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 is described in temple imagery. This means that the position, role, function, and meaning of each component of the description must be understood in the light of the broad meaning of the Old Testament sanctuary/temple.

The "trumpet" was the instrument used to call one to the temple for cultic feasts. The description of the "one sitting upon the throne" correlates with the ark in the Most Holy Place where Yahweh was enthroned as God/King in his temple/palace. The colors given in connection with the "one sitting upon the throne" are colors which correspond with the colors of the tribes of Israel and with the "temple" in its broad meaning. The "rainbow" around the throne is connected with both the divine covenant and the Messiah. The facts that the "twenty-four elders" are clothed with "white garments" and possess "golden crowns," and that each has a "harp" and "golden bowls" place them in a priestly/royal role. Since they are twenty-four in number, they represent the traditional numerical organization of the temple. The lightnings, voices, and thunders which come forth "out of" the throne are the traditional phenomena which accompany the appearance of Yahweh on his throne. The "seven torches" which are "before" the throne correspond to the menorah. The "sea of glass" which is "before" the throne correlates with the molten sea/laver. The "living creatures," while representing the twelve tribes of Israel, correspond to the cherubim which guarded the ark or throne of Yahweh. Their position "in the midst of" and "around" the throne, together with the fact that they have eyes,

places them in the role of vigilance. When the position of the "Lamb" "in the midst of" the throne and the four living creatures and "in the midst of" the twenty-four elders is taken together with the description of a slain but living lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, one has a portrayal of the Messiah in his temple roles of sacrifice, priest, and king.

The anthems of adoration to the one sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb contain meter and poetic structure which are similar to Hebrew poetry. The antiphonal nature of the adoration parallels much of the traditional adoration at the temple. Since the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders function in a priestly role, their participation in praise to both the one sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb correlates to the praise of the priestly singers at the temple.

#### Ontological Cosmic Unity

The ontological description of Rev 4-5 has not been seriously considered by scholars. Caird has attempted to describe the ontological reality of this passage by using the analogy of a military control room at army headquarters, which has battle maps with little flags representing military units on the battlefield. These flags on the maps either represent descriptive symbolism of what already exists or determinative symbolism of what will take place. In this manner, Caird considers Rev 4-5 as a "pictorial counterpart of earthly realities."<sup>67</sup> This, he states elsewhere, "is not to be confused with the Platonic doctrine that earthly things are

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<sup>67</sup>Caird, Revelation, p. 61.

the imperfect shadows of the perfect realities in heaven."<sup>68</sup> That Platonic doctrine holds that the true realities exist only in heaven, while the earthly counterparts are merely a poor, evil, transitory shadow which must be left behind and eliminated. As we shall see, the evidence from Rev 4-5 does not appear to correspond to either Caird's concept or the Platonic doctrine which Caird rejects. However, before a conclusion can be reached on the ontological relationships of Rev 4-5, an effort must first be made to isolate and study the individual elements needed for an overall conclusion.

#### An Open Door

The ontological description of Rev 4-5 begins with a door having been opened (perfect tense) "in" (ἐν) heaven, and John is summoned to heaven by means of the "spirit" (4:1-2). His continued presence there is attested by 5:4-5.<sup>69</sup>

Scholars are divided as to whether the door is opened into heaven or the door is opened in heaven. The command to John to "come up hither" (4:1) favors a door into heaven, while "a throne stood in heaven" (4:2) favors a door opened in heaven. If the door is opened into heaven, then it also follows contextually that John is admitted into the throne room of the temple. Therefore, ontologically speaking, the scene occurs in heaven in a temple setting irrespective of the position that one takes concerning the location of the "door."

Scholars accept this explicit heavenly setting for the throne

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<sup>68</sup>G. B. Caird, "On Deciphering the Book of Revelation: I. Heaven and Earth." Expository Times 74 (1962):13.

<sup>69</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:109.

scene, but some add qualifying remarks which either emphasize the heavenly setting more strongly or infuse an earthly dimension. Seiss, while opposing the concept of the scene's occurring in an earthly temple, states: "The whole scene is heavenly, and relates only to what is heavenly. It belongs to a realm above earth and above all the sanctuaries of the earth."<sup>70</sup> Walvoord, a dispensationalist, interprets "in the spirit" (4:2) as the rapture of John, who stands for the rapture of all Christians to heaven--this without any explicit evidence from the passage.<sup>71</sup>

Lenski adds an earthly element when he states:

We also lose too much when we think of this scene as having taken place in heaven. The throne is the power, rule, dominion over the universe, and all the actors in the vision are seen in relation to this throne, which, of course, is pictured as being in the heaven (4:1,2), the seat of God, yet all these agents of the Lamb in the execution of the Lamb's triumph<sup>72</sup> do their work here on earth in their relation to the throne.

Lenski has perceived the presence of an earthly element in Rev 4-5 because the ontology is derived from the earthly "temple" and therefore reflects its role, function, and meaning.

#### Jasper and Carnelian

The ontological description of the heavenly scene depicts the divine throne as appearing like jasper and carnelian (4:3), which represent the colors for the earthly tribes of Benjamin and Reuben.<sup>73</sup> These colors add a new dimension to the one sitting upon the throne

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<sup>70</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 99.

<sup>71</sup>Walvoord, Revelation, p. 103.

<sup>72</sup>Lenski, Revelation, p. 202.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. pp. 137-138 above.

by linking Israel--or in the context of Revelation, the Christian community of seven churches--with the one ruling in heaven. No reference is made to the elevation of Israel to heaven or the descent of the divine throne to the earth. Thus, these colors directly link the one sitting upon the heavenly throne with the earth.

#### Rainbow and Emerald

Around the heavenly throne was an emerald-colored rainbow (4:3) which, as mentioned earlier, represents both the earthly tribe of Judah and the mercy of the divine covenant.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the references to both the rainbow and the emerald color strengthen the concept of cosmic unity between heaven and earth.

#### Twenty-four Thrones and Elders

Attention is next partially diverted from the central throne to the twenty-four thrones occupied by twenty-four elders (4:4), who represent the earthly elders of the twelve tribes of Israel. The number twenty-four reflects the organizational number of the temple attendants.<sup>75</sup>

The fact that they sit upon thrones is an indication of their co-rulership<sup>76</sup> or covenant vassal-kingship with the one sitting upon the central throne of heaven. Since they wear white garments, they are functioning in a priestly role. Their golden crowns depict their victorious state as conquerors on earth. Thus, the thrones, white

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<sup>74</sup>Cf. pp. 138-139 above.

<sup>75</sup>Cf. p. 141 above.

<sup>76</sup>Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 498.

garments, and golden crowns add a royal, priestly, and victorious dimension. These new dimensions enhance rather than diminish the increasing relational ties of the one sitting on the heavenly throne with the earthly temple and Israel. It also strengthens the concept of ontological cosmic unity between heaven and earth.

#### Lightnings, Voices, and Thunders

The "flashes of lightning, and voices and peals of thunder" (4:5) parallel the Old and New Testament references to heavenly and earthly phenomena (Exod 19, 24; Ezek 1; Dan 7; Heb 12) which often accompany theophanies. Whether the flashes of lightning, the voices, and the peals of thunder appear in a heavenly or earthly setting, they tend to unite heavenly and earthly elements.

#### Seven Torches of Fire

The seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are interpreted to be the seven spirits of God (4:5). When these seven spirits are viewed alone, they do not provide any explicit new ontological dimension; but when they are linked with the "seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6), they take on both heavenly and earthly aspects.

#### Sea of Glass

That which appeared as a "sea of glass, like crystal" (4:6) before the heavenly throne adds a new dimension to the ontology of the passage. This sea, as imagery drawn from the molten sea, from the portable lavers of the temple, or from both,<sup>77</sup> symbolizes the

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<sup>77</sup>See p. 144 above.

water of purification for the priests who served in the temple. As noted in 15:3, where the conquerors stand upon the sea of glass and the song of Moses and the Lamb is sung, the imagery derives from the Exodus crossing of the sea, which experientially served as purifying water through which the Israelites had to pass in order to defeat the pursuing Egyptians.<sup>78</sup> Thus, even though the sea is in heaven before the throne, it still remains linked with the earth.

#### Four Living Creatures

A consideration of the "four living creatures" (4:6), who serve as throne guardians in the temple/palace,<sup>79</sup> brings us to an impressive link between the one sitting upon the throne and the twelve tribes of Israel. Because each of the four chief tribes, or throne guardians, of the encampment of Israel were actually each representing one-fourth of the twelve tribes of Israel,<sup>80</sup> these four collectively served as imagery for all of the twelve tribes. They also represented "temple" in the broad sense of the presence of God with his people. As previously noted, the four faces of the four living creatures not only represent the insignias of the four chief tribes but probably also represent a particular realm of nature in the area of the animal kingdom, since animals are the traditional throne guardians.<sup>81</sup> Thus, they not only broaden the definition and

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<sup>78</sup>J. W. Bowman, "Sea of Glass, Glassy Sea," The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (1962), 4:254. (See also the apostle Paul's statement in 1 Cor 10:2.)

<sup>79</sup>Cf. p. 148 above.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. pp. 152-153 above.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. p. 153 above.

context of "temple," but also strengthen the emphasis of both heaven and earth as being depicted in an ontological cosmic unity.

By virtue of their guardian position and priestly role, the four living creatures give continuous praise to the one sitting upon the throne (4:8). Their verbal praise is in a temple setting similar to that in Isa 6, wherein both the heavenly and earthly temples are united. Their praise results in the cultic prostration and adoration of the twenty-four elders who cast their crowns of victory before the throne and render verbal adoration. Thus, both the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, through their position and activity, are described as being very close to the one sitting upon the throne in heaven, but with earthly ties also evident.

#### Primary Emphasis on Heaven

An ontological overview of Rev 4 clearly indicates that the scene begins in heaven in a temple setting. John ascends there "in spirit" (4:1-2), and there the one sitting upon the throne is the constant central figure to whom all other figures and things are subordinate. One must recognize the primacy of this central figure to avoid losing the heavenly perspective and impact of the message.

#### Cosmic Search for a "Worthy" One

Since Rev 5 is a continuation of Rev 4 and is found in the same heavenly temple setting, one expects that the center of attention and activity will continue to be in the heavenly realm. This conclusion is substantiated by the fact that it is the one sitting upon the central throne who holds a scroll in his right hand (5:1). A strong angel/messenger appears and cries in a loud voice

(4:2).<sup>82</sup> The use of the adjectives "strong" and "loud" are significant to the context because they help portray the cosmic impact of the angel. The cry of the angel is: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" (5:2). The immediate effect of this strong and loud proclaimer is to determine that no one is able (worthy) in heaven or the earth or under the earth to open the scroll, to break its seals, and to read it (5:3). One must conclude from this that the voice of the strong angel was heard throughout the whole tripartate cosmos (cf. Exod 20:4; Phil 2:10), and that no one in the entire cosmos was qualified to respond.<sup>83</sup> When this is considered from an ontological viewpoint, it indicates an expansion of the activity in heaven to the whole cosmos. At the same time, however, it must be noted that the central focus continues to be in the realm of heaven, where the central figure is sitting upon the throne and the strong angel gives his loud cry.

After the intense weeping by John, one of the elders states that "the lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David" had conquered and could open the scroll (5:5). By the description given, this figure is clearly from the earth, as is the "Lamb," whom John next sees, and who resembles a cultic lamb in outward appearance. However, the Lamb's position here is in heaven "between (literally, "in the midst of") the throne and the four living creatures and among

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<sup>82</sup>Literally, "to announce as a herald" as noted by J. B. Smith, A Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation. ed. J. O. Yoder, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961), p. 112.

<sup>83</sup>This does not mean that one after another the three regions declined the challenge so that hope gradually vanishes as is suggested by Swete, Revelation, p. 76.

(literally, "in the midst of") the elders" (5:6). In Rev 5, the Lamb is one of the two central figures in the heavenly temple scene being described. Yet, the mention of his "seven eyes" as "the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6) demonstrate that earthly roots still remain.

After the Lamb approaches the one sitting upon the throne and takes the scroll from his right hand, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before the Lamb in adoration. Besides having a harp for adoration, they have golden bowls filled with incense, which is interpreted to be "the prayers of the saints" (5:8). These praying saints are on earth when the living creatures and elders serve as their priestly intermediaries before the one sitting on the throne. Thus, the cultic ministry before the throne provides a further link between the heavenly and earthly realms.

#### Cosmic Adoration

After the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders begin to praise him for his worthiness. His worthiness includes the fact that he has redeemed to God some "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9). Also they praise him because he "made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth" (5:10). The secondary theme of these verses is the saints who are on earth and will reign there. Thus, the Lamb, who is before the heavenly throne, is linked with earthly activity involving the saints.

A new group now joins the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders around the throne in another anthem of adoration to the Lamb. It is the "voice of many angels, numbering myriads of

myriads<sup>84</sup> and thousands of thousands" (5:11; cf. Dan 7:10 where the angelic order is inverted). This host of angels adds what appears to be the whole heavenly creation into the scene.<sup>85</sup> Since they surround the throne with the living creatures and elders,<sup>86</sup> they are part of the ever-expanding groups of created beings that form the concentric circles of praise around the throne.<sup>87</sup>

The praise of the angels is followed by the cosmic anthem of adoration of "every creature," antiphonally responded to by the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. The location of "every creature" includes those "in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein" (5:13). This statement combines the areas mentioned in Exod 20:4 and Phil 2:10 with those of Exod 20:11 and Ps 146:6 into one of the most extensive descriptions of the cosmos found in Scripture. Thus, even though the one sitting upon the throne and the Lamb are the central focus of this verse, the whole cosmos, with all of its created beings, are included. Ontologically, the cosmos is depicted as one grand whole.

#### Summary of Ontological Cosmic Unity

As the vision of Rev 4-5 begins for John, a door opens in heaven and he is summoned to go from earth to heaven. A throne is

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<sup>84</sup>Myriads was the highest number known according to Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 128, and Lenski, Revelation, p. 210.

<sup>85</sup>According to Lenski, Revelation, p. 209, the "many angels" does not include the twenty-four elders and four living creatures.

<sup>86</sup>For significant parallels between the adoration of Rev 5 and 19, see William H. Shea, "Revelation 5 and 19 as Literary Reciprocals," Andrews University Seminary Studies 22 (1984):249-257.

<sup>87</sup>Hendriksen, Conquerors, pp. 102, 112.

there, with earthly elements such as imagery of the earthly tribes of Israel, the elders of Israel, a rainbow with allusions to the earthly covenant, imagery of the temple laver, imagery of the throne guardians, and imagery of the cultic lamb, bowls, and harps.

The central throne in heaven with one sitting upon it and the Lamb (also in heaven) serve as the central ontological point for the scene depicted. The remainder of the cosmos is connected with this center and is part of the "whole." This includes heaven with its myriads of angels, the earth with its inhabitants, and the sea with all of its creatures.

In light of the evidence found in Rev 4-5, I reject Caird's view that the passage presents "strange and complex symbols of John's vision" which are "the pictorial counterpart of earthly realities."<sup>88</sup> At the same time, I agree with Caird in rejecting the "Platonic doctrine" that earthly things are the imperfect shadows of the perfect realities in heaven. Both of these views distort the ontological description because cosmologically heaven and earth belong inseparably together in the book of Revelation.<sup>89</sup> The earthly arena is not a mere shadow of the heavenly, it is a part of the larger whole. At the same time, the earthly is not the basic reality of which the heavenly is merely a pictorial counterpart.

A combined heaven and earth forms a complete whole. In this heaven-earth dipole, heaven is central. Thus, the Old Testament ontological view expressed in the words of Yahweh about his temple

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>89</sup>Minear, "Ontology and Ecclesiology," pp. 89-105.

that "heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool" (Isa 66:1; cf. Acts 7:49) is maintained in Rev 4-5. This is why the earthly tribes of Israel (representing the Christian community of seven churches in Revelation), the four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and other earthly elements can be depicted in temple imagery in close proximity to the one sitting upon the central throne in heaven. Dichotomy in this respect would be a distorted view of the Hebrew mind and of biblical thought in general.

### Judgment

It is the thesis of this section that Rev 4-5 describes a divine council session in which judgment takes place. Since it has been demonstrated above that Rev 4-5 has a temple setting, it is appropriate that the judgment of the divine council session be described in traditional Hebrew temple terms.

### The Divine Council

Most scholars interpret Rev 4-5 as a heavenly court scene depicting the authority, majesty, and rule of God. A few, however, have discerned that the passage describes a divine council.<sup>90</sup> Lenski, on the other hand, believes that the idea of a heavenly council introduces a foreign concept into Rev 4-5.<sup>91</sup> No one, to my knowledge, has interpreted Rev 4-5 as a judgment session of the

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<sup>90</sup>E.g., Barclay, Revelation, 1:153; Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 498; Caird, Revelation, p. 63; Charles, Revelation, 1:128; Collins, Apocalypse, pp. 34-35, 39; Ladd, Revelation, p. 75; Müller, "Himmlische Ratsversammlung, Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1-5," pp. 254-267; and Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 105.

<sup>91</sup>Lenski, Revelation, p. 191.

divine council, and some have even asserted that it is not. For example, Beasley-Murray states in regard to Rev 4 that "John's portrayal of heaven, however, is not a judgment scene,"<sup>92</sup> and Collins likewise declares that "there is no indication that Ch. 4 of the Apocalypse describes a judicial session."<sup>93</sup> Concerning Rev 5, Beasley-Murray emphatically declares that "it is not a judgment scene."<sup>94</sup> Also, Collins again concurs by saying that "there is no internal evidence that Rev 4-5 is a judgment scene,"<sup>95</sup> and that "Revelation 4-5 differs from Daniel 7 in that the former is not described as a judgment scene."<sup>96</sup> The position taken in this dissertation is that Rev 4-5 does describe a divine council session in which an investigative-type judgment takes place, for reasons elucidated below.

#### Head of the Divine Council

From the material presented in chapter 4 of this dissertation, it is evident that the concept of a divine council is well established in the Old Testament and in Jewish-apocalyptic literature. In the four Old Testament divine council passages specifically considered, the presiding member of the divine council is God "sitting" upon his throne. Revelation also states that a throne "stood" in heaven and that there was "one seated" upon it

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<sup>92</sup>Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 113.

<sup>93</sup>Collins, Apocalypse, p. 35.

<sup>94</sup>Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 113.

<sup>95</sup>Collins, Combat Myth, p. 23.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

(4:2). Mounce remarks that "this symbol [throne] occurs more than forty times in Revelation."<sup>97</sup> It is so dominant as a theme that Charles states: "In every chapter in our Apocalypse the throne of God is referred to except in ii., ix.-x., where there is no occasion of its mention, and in xv. 5-8, where the vision is that of the Temple in heaven."<sup>98</sup> Mention of the one "sitting" upon the throne is made in at least seven chapters of the book (Rev 4, 5, 6, 7, 19, 20, 21). At least half of these references are found in Rev 4-5 (4:2, 3, 9-10; 5:1, 7, 13). Thus, the theme of the divine "throne" and the "one sitting" upon it is a very prominent one throughout the book of Revelation in general and within Rev 4-5 in particular.

The one sitting upon the throne is depicted in the characteristic Old Testament manner: that is, without a description of his physical form. This type of portrayal avoids what Swete calls "anthropomorphic details."<sup>99</sup> God is described here only in terms of light and color, as is common in the Old Testament (Ezek 1:26-28; Dan 7:9; Ps 104:2; Exod 24:10) and in 1 Enoch 14. This lack of a physical description aids in exalting God above all other beings.

The actual titles for the one presiding over the divine council are found only in the two hymns of praise of Rev 4. In the second colon of the first hymn (which parallels the famous trisagion of the first colon), one finds three titles (4:8), all of which are Greek equivalents of Old Testament titles. The first two of these

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<sup>97</sup>Mounce, Revelation, p. 134

<sup>98</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:111.

<sup>99</sup>Swete, Revelation, p. 67.

titles are repeated in the first colon of the second hymn. In these titles, "Lord God" (κύριος ὁ θεός) is the equivalent of the Hebrew "Lord God" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ), and "Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) is the normal Septuagint rendering for the Hebrew Lord of "hosts" (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) of the prophets, except in Isaiah.<sup>100</sup> "Lord" (κύριος) is the title which expresses relationship of a superior to an inferior in both the Greek and the general Hebrew equivalent (יְהוָה) that is used for the personal God of the covenant. "God" (θεός) is the general title for God in Greek and serves as the general equivalent of אֱלֹהִים, אֱלֹהֵינוּ, and אֱלֹהֵיכֶם in the Old Testament.<sup>101</sup> "Almighty" (παντοκράτωρ) as יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת emphasizes the divine power, especially in warfare. Thus, this being can be the chief warrior or head of the divine army, who is always capable of overcoming and destroying his enemies. These three titles taken together clearly emphasize the tremendous authority, exaltation, and power of the one who presides at the divine council. There is no conceivable authority or power which could rival him or his position. In this sense he is undisputed.

In the book of Revelation, every passage except one that contains the combined titles of "Lord God Almighty" has either an implicit or explicit judgment theme (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7). In two other passages where only the two titles of "God the Almighty" occur (16:14; 19:15), there is a strong judgment theme present.

The third colon of the first hymn of adoration (4:8) has a twofold meaning. The first meaning of "who was and is and is to

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<sup>100</sup> Charles, Revelation, 1:127.

<sup>101</sup> G. Quell, "θεός, et. al.," TDNT (1965), 3:79.

come" (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος) is to express existence in the past, present, and future--the Hebrew equivalent of the verb "to be" (הָיָה). This parallels the divine name in Exod 3:14 and the Old Testament concept of the "living" God who is superior to all other gods.

The second meaning found in the phrase "who was and is and is to come" is judgment. As previously noted, "the coming one" can express imminent judgment.<sup>102</sup> When this phrase is taken with the previous phrase, "Lord God Almighty," the judgment theme becomes even more prominent. Thus, the "coming one" expresses both the future existence of the eternal one and imminent judgment.

The trisagion of the first colon of the first hymn (4:8) helps to provide the basis for this judgment by stating that God is "holy" (ἅγιος). This term, besides providing a quality of his character, especially emphasizes the exalted position or "apartness from all created beings"<sup>103</sup> of the one who presides over the divine council--very similar to Isaiah's vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne "high and lifted up" (6:1).

The description of what John saw in Rev 4 concerning the heavenly temple/palace enhances the exalted position and significance of the head of the divine council. Prepositions are employed to express the relationship of beings and things to his throne. A bow was "round" the throne (4:3). Twenty-four elders on twenty-four thrones were "round" the throne (4:4). Lightnings, voices, and

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<sup>102</sup> See pp. 86-88 above.

<sup>103</sup> de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 1:152-153.

thunders went forth "from" the throne (4:5). Seven lamps were burning "before" the throne (4:5). "Before" the throne was the glassy sea (4:6). "In the midst of" (RSV, "round") and "around" (RSV, "on each side of") the throne were four living creatures (4:6). The elders fell down "before" the one sitting upon the throne and cast their crowns "before" the throne (4:10). "In the midst of" (RSV, "between") the throne stood the Lamb (5:6) who took the scroll "from" the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne (5:7). The four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down "before" the throne (5:8). Many angels were seen and heard "around" the throne (5:11).

The fact that the one sitting upon the throne is worshiped is a further indication that he presides over the divine council. First, he is worshiped by the four living creatures who continually praise him (4:8) and are a direct parallel to the seraphim who were members of the divine council in Isa 6:3. Second, he is worshiped by the twenty-four elders who fall before the throne in adoration (4:10). Third, he is worshiped in the final hymn of praise rendered jointly to both the one sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb by the whole cosmos (5:13).

Even the Lamb, who is the joint recipient of adoration in the final anthem of praise, appears in some respects to be in a subordinate role to the one sitting upon the throne. His position is described in relationship to the central throne (5:6). He has to go to the one sitting upon the throne and take the scroll from his right hand of power (5:7).

In Rev 4:5, it states that "from the throne issue flashes of

lightning, and voices and peals of thunder." The Old Testament divine council passages of Ezek 1 and Isa 6 have similar elements. Because there is such close similarity in the phenomena associated with the throne in all three of these divine council sessions, it is logical to conclude that the one sitting upon the throne in Rev 4-5 is presiding over a divine council session. He parallels the one like a "human form" in Ezek 1:26 (identified as the "God of Israel" [Ezek 10:20] and the "Lord" [Isa 6:1]).

Thus, the exalted position, titles and attributes, acceptance of adoration, and the subordination of the Lamb indicate that the one sitting upon the throne is the head of the divine council. The phenomena associated with his throne appear in other Old Testament divine council sessions and suggest a judgment context for the session.

#### Twenty-four Elders

The divine council members most often cited as evidence that Rev 4-5 is a divine council scene are the twenty-four elders.<sup>104</sup> This is because they are called elders and sit upon thrones around the central throne (4:4). They appear to be functioning in the capacity of representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel in a manner similar to the description of cosmic judgment in Isa 24, which ends with Yahweh of hosts reigning on Mount Zion and manifesting his glory before the elders (24:23).

Traditionally, the elders, or heads of families, were the

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<sup>104</sup>Cf. Barclay, Revelation, 1:152-153; Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 498; Charles, Revelation, 1:128; Collins, Apocalypse, p. 35; Ladd, Revelation, p. 75; and Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 105.

leading citizens who dealt with community affairs in council sessions and served as judges for the people.<sup>105</sup> In Jehoshaphat's reform of 2 Chr 19:4-11, there was appointed at Jerusalem "a court of priests, Levites, and the heads of Israelite families, who were to act as a court of first instance for the inhabitants of Jerusalem (according to the Greek) and as a court of appeal for cases referred to them from other towns."<sup>106</sup> Valentine calls this temple court "a supreme court as compared to local courts (Deut. 17:8ff.)"<sup>107</sup> In 2 Chr 19, as well as other passages in the Old Testament, priestly and civil functions are often performed by the same individual.<sup>108</sup> This doubling of roles accounts for the fact that in Rev 4-5 the elders fulfill both priestly and judicial functions.

Traditionally, the elder also served in a servant role before the king.<sup>109</sup> In a divine council setting before the heavenly king, a council member could speak out on council matters as demonstrated, for example, by the discussion among the "spirits" in 1 Kgs 22:20-21. The servant role enabled "one of the elders" in Rev 4-5 to inform John as to who would be able to open the scroll in the hand of the one sitting upon the throne (5:5).

As noted above, the temple was the place for the highest court of judgment. In Ps 122:5 it is stated that in the temple,

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<sup>105</sup> de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 1:152-153.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1:153-154.

<sup>107</sup> Valentine, "Temple Motif in the Old Testament and Revelation," p. 110.

<sup>108</sup> de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 1:152-155.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1:69.

"thrones for judgment were set, the thrones for the house of David." These words harmonize with those of Jesus to his disciples that they would "sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28). Inasmuch as Rev 4-5 is a temple setting, it is appropriate that an important role of the twenty-four elders who sit on twenty-four thrones is judiciary, as divine council members.

#### Other Members of the Divine Council

Scholars generally appear hesitant in Rev 4-5 to mention divine council members other than the twenty-four elders. Some, however, in their discussion of the divine council refer to various celestial beings as council members.<sup>110</sup> In the four divine council passages considered, all contained references to beings that were present besides the head of the divine council. Even though only the elders are seated on thrones around the central throne in Rev 4-5, many other beings are also present in the description of the council and are specifically involved in the divine council session. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that other beings mentioned in Rev 4-5 are council members.

Seven Spirits of God. According to their position and imagery, the seven spirits of God (4:5) are depicted in a service role before the one sitting upon the throne. They are presented as seven torches and represent the "light" motif<sup>111</sup> which is significant

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<sup>110</sup> E.g., Caird, Revelation, p. 64; Charles, Revelation, 1:128; and Ladd, Revelation, p. 75.

<sup>111</sup> Meyers, Tabernacle Menorah, p. 185.

in the Johannine literature. Because they collectively represent the temple menorah, they serve as imagery for the invisible presence of the Deity.<sup>112</sup> They represent light and divine presence in an active sense and depict, in the broad sense, a "life theme"<sup>113</sup> that harmonizes with the emphasis on the Creator in the second anthem of praise. No further details are provided in respect to their role or activities until 5:6, where they are described as sent out into all the earth. Thus, the primary emphasis in Rev 4 is their servant position before the one sitting upon the throne. This servant position in Zech 4 included the intense activity of the Lord among men through his Spirit in the restoration process of Jerusalem and the temple.

In Rev 2-3, the Spirit is the witness to convey the divine message to each of the seven churches and to be the legal covenant witness. In a judgment session of the divine council it appears appropriate to have the Spirit present to communicate the divine message to men and to serve as a legal witness in a judicial process that results in life or death for the covenanters.

Four Living Creatures. The four living creatures (4:6), as already noted, represent the four chief tribes of Israel as throne guardians.<sup>114</sup> Through the imagery of the creatures, Israel is represented in both a congregational and military sense. Because the four living creatures serve as throne guardians, or cherubim, they

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., pp. 177-178.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>114</sup>See pp. 152-153 above.

are members of the divine council.<sup>115</sup> Their participation in worship before the celestial throne with the twenty-four elders and other beings (4:8-10; 5:8-14), who appear to be the equivalent of the Old Testament "host of heaven" (1 Kgs 22:19) and "seraphim" (Isa 6:2), further substantiates their role as members of the divine council.

John. John is summoned to the divine council in heaven (4:1) and participates in the session (5:4). He is a member of the divine council because of his "in the spirit" experiences (1:10; 4:2) which make him the equivalent of the Old Testament prophet. The prophet, although a human living on earth, was a member of the divine council (cf. Isa 6:3-8; Jer 23:18; Amos 3:7; et al.).<sup>116</sup> In the divine council session of Dan 7 the prophet even approaches one of the celestial beings standing in the divine council session to ask for an interpretation of what was happening (7:16). Traditionally, the prophet served as the earthly messenger for Yahweh (cf. Hag 1:13; Mal 3:1; et al.) and the divine council (cf. Isa 6:8, et al.).

A Strong Angel. Besides the earthly messengers, there can also be cosmic messengers for the divine council. In 5:2, a "strong angel" (messenger) heralds through the whole cosmos in search of one who is worthy to open the scroll in the hand of the one sitting upon the throne. From the Old Testament, it is clear that Yahweh has messengers (Job 4:18; 33:23; Ps 103:20; 104:4; 148:2; Isa 44:26) that he "sends" (Gen 24:7, 10; Exod 23:20; Num 20:16) to the earth as

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<sup>115</sup>Mullen, Divine Council, p. 208, fn. 8.

<sup>116</sup>Cf. Mullen, Divine Council, pp. 209-226.

messengers of the divine council even though they may be heavenly beings (1 Kgs 22:21-23). In Revelation these cosmic messengers are often heralds of judgment (cf. 8:5; 14:6-20, et al.).

Lamb. The Lamb functions in a special role in Rev 5. He is the one who ransoms to God some "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (5:9). This redemption (ἡγόρσας) is the "buying" or "ransoming" performed by the "nearest of kin" who functions as "redeemer" of those he is responsible for.<sup>117</sup> In the divine council he is called "witness" (Job 16:19; Ps 89:37[38]), "guarantor" ("witness," Job 16:19, RSV), "mediator" (Job 33:23-24), one who makes "intercession" (Isa 53:11-12; Heb 7:25), "vindicator/redeemer" (Job 19:25), and "advocate" (1 John 2:1).

The "redeemer" (בֹּרֵא) restored property and inheritances (Lev 25:25). He bought freedom for those in slavery (Lev 25:48). He defended the one whose blood was shed (Deut 19:6-12; 2 Sam 14:11). In the broad sense he ransomed widows (Ruth 4:5) and orphans (Prov 23:10-11). Thus, in the divine council the Lamb is described in terms of his special redeemer role in behalf of those who have been bought by his blood.

Many Angels. Around the central throne are "many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (5:11). Their number is similar to the divine council members mentioned in Dan 7:10. In the Old Testament these angels are known by several different terms: "messengers" (Isa 44:26); "consecrated ones" (Isa

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<sup>117</sup>William L. Holladay, ed., "בֹּרֵא," A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (1971), p. 52.

13:3); "holy ones" (Deut 33:2; Job 5:1); "sons of God" (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; "heavenly beings," (Ps 29:1, RSV); "spirit" (1 Kgs 22:21); "host" (Isa 13:4); "warriors," (Joel 3:11[4:11], RSV); and "stars" (Job 38:7). The term "host" denotes a large number, but the pattern for Rev 5:11 appears to be Dan 7:10, where the "thousands" and "myriads" ("ten thousands," RSV) of the divine council are reversed in order.

The role of these Old Testament heavenly beings is varied. They serve as messengers, warriors, witnesses, and beings rendering adoration and praise to God.

Every Creature in the Cosmos. The divine council session is now expanded to include "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein" (5:13). This group includes the whole cosmos, thus making the divine council universal.

The position taken here on the number of members, spheres of representation, and universality of the divine council may appear to be out of character with the traditional divine council. Yet the magnitude of the situation is an indication of the extraordinary matter being dealt with by the divine council.<sup>118</sup>

#### Issue Before the Divine Council

Since the divine council members are so vast in number and universal in scope, the issue facing the divine council must be of extreme importance. The "strong" angel's proclamation indicates that the key issue facing the divine council is "Who is worthy to open the

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<sup>118</sup>Cf. pp. 116-119.

scroll and break its seals?" (5:2). This means that the divine council has either determined or accepted the fact that someone must be "worthy" to qualify as the opener of the scroll. Thus, the task before the divine council is to find someone who is "able" to take/receive the scroll and open its seals. The divine council through an investigative-type judgment determines this being's "worthiness" for such a task. Naturally, the words "able" and "worthy" do not describe two independent and sequential steps, but are identical,<sup>119</sup> for the "worthiness" (5:2) is what gives one the "ability" (5:3) to take the scroll and open its seals.

#### Worthiness of the Lamb

The first reason the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open its seals is that he had "conquered" (5:5). This indicates that the divine council is faced with a larger problem, as Collins has clearly discerned:

In the context of the Apocalypse as a whole, it is clear that the problem facing the divine council is the rebellion of Satan which is paralleled by rebellion on earth. Chapter five presupposes the old story of Satan's rebellion against God which leads to the fall of creation. This old story is retold in the Apocalypse to express the feeling that the world had gone astray, that all creation was deeply alienated from the source of its being. Human relations had become unjust and the injustice had corrupted the natural world as well. The tears of the prophet express the desire of the faithful to have this situation rectified.<sup>120</sup>

Further evidence for why the Lamb is worthy is given in an amplification of "conquered." In the first anthem to the Lamb three steps of how and why the Lamb conquered are stated. The first step

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<sup>119</sup>Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 508.

<sup>120</sup>Collins, Apocalypse, p. 39.

is indicated by the fact that he was "slain" (5:9). The fact that the verb σφάζω ("to slay") may be employed not only in the sense of an animal sacrifice but also with the meaning of "to kill a person with violence"<sup>121</sup> is an indication that "conquered" is employed in the context of Satan's rebellion and warfare.

The second step in the Lamb's conquering is stated in the fact that he "didst ransom" to God through his blood some from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (5:9). This is the redeemer role of the nearest of kin.

The third step in the Lamb's conquering is given in the fact that he made these ransomed ones a kingdom and priests to God who will reign on earth (5:10). This is a clear indication that the Lamb has established an earthly kingdom comprised of the ransomed ones who will rule on earth.

As noted previously, the Lamb's establishment of an earthly kingdom is not an indication that there is an enthronement described here.<sup>122</sup> The "Lamb" has already taken his place on the throne (3:21) and is ascribed honor and blessing here along with the one sitting upon the throne (5:14).

The three steps in the Lamb's conquering establish his worthiness. Yet, his worthiness is indicated further by his corporate bond of solidarity with his people. As the Lamb was slain, so are his people slain (2:10; 6:9). As the Lamb redeemed his people, so are they his redeemed. As the Lamb conquered, so do his

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<sup>121</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 90; cf. pp. 156-157 above.

<sup>122</sup>See pp. 161-162 above.

people conquer (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) by becoming a kingdom and reigning on earth (5:10). Thus, the bond of solidarity between the Lamb and the saints in martyrdom, redemption, and rulership demonstrates that he is worthy to take the scroll.

The great issue before the divine council is resolved by the time the Lamb goes to the one seated upon the throne and takes the scroll from his right hand (5:7). The cosmic search for the worthy one is ended. Yet, by implication, the council has to do more than just search for a worthy one. It has to determine the worthiness of the candidate who will take the scroll and break its seals. This worthiness is apparently established through an investigative-type judgment of the Lamb's deeds. Inasmuch as the Lamb's deeds are found to be acceptable, the Lamb is judged worthy. Therefore, the divine council has completed its work of judgment.

### Scroll

The scroll the Lamb took has a particular form and, judging by the actions of the divine council members, apparently great significance. Ford states that the word for "scroll/book" (βιβλίον) occurs twenty-three times in Revelation and is used in a variety of senses: (1) the book sent to the seven churches in Asia (1:11), which is an account of what was seen in vision; (2) the book which is sealed with seven seals (5:1-5, 8-9); (3) the book of life (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27); (4) the books of judgment which are distinguished from the book of life (20:15); (5) Revelation itself (22:7, 9-10, 18-19); and (6) both βιβλίον ("scroll," 10:8) and βιβλαρίδιον ("little scroll," 10:2, 9-10), which are used interchangeably in the vision in which John is to take the book from

the angel and eat it.<sup>123</sup> Obviously, all of these "books" or "scrolls" are not identical, but some of them may be.

The form of the "book" (βιβλίον) is almost universally accepted as a scroll rather than a codex.<sup>124</sup> The textual reading that the scroll was written "within" (ἔσωθεν) and on the "back" (ὀπισθεν) has been preferred in modern times over other variants such as: ἔξωθεν καὶ ἔσωθεν ("outside and inside"); ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν ("in front and on the back"); ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν ("within and outside and on the back"); ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν καὶ ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ὀπισθεν ("within and outside and in front and on the back"). The preferred reading apparently makes the scroll an opisthograph.<sup>125</sup>

#### Form of the Seven-Sealed Scroll

The manner in which the scroll was sealed has left scholars divided. This stems in part from differences of opinion on the nature of the document. Some view it as following the model of the Roman will, which by law was sealed with seven seals that covered the knots holding the roll together. The Roman testament was either the noncupative testament or the praetorian testament, which was written on two tablets closed one upon the other with the seals of the seven witnesses. Nothing was written on the exterior except the name of the testator and perhaps the witnesses. According to a lawyer in

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<sup>123</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 84.

<sup>124</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:136, cites only Grotius, Zahn, and Nestle who interpret it as a codex.

<sup>125</sup>Barclay, Revelation, 1:166; Charles, Revelation, 1:137; and Ladd, Revelation, p. 82.

Nero's time, there were quittances and other probative acts which had to be written on the interior and exterior of two tablets of wax joined like a codex and sealed. However, at this time there were neither seven witnesses used nor seven seals.<sup>126</sup> Thus, it appears that neither of these types is the appropriate physical model.

Yigael Yadin has found on the Judean desert a scroll sealed with seven seals. This scroll had seven threads which were each attached to the name of a witness. The seals were all on the outside. This scroll was a deed dating from the end of the first century A.D., thus substantiating the practice of sealing a scroll with seven seals.<sup>127</sup>

There is an Old Testament document mentioned by many scholars often referred to as the "doubly inscribed contract deed."<sup>128</sup> The deed was generally written on the top part of a page, which was folded and sealed with seven seals. The same contract statement was then repeated on the lower half of the page and served as an open unsealed copy. The document was generally stored in a small jar. This process and document is illustrated by the account of Jeremiah's purchase of a field (Jer 32:9-25).<sup>129</sup>

The interpretation of the scroll of Rev 5 as a doubly

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<sup>126</sup> See Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation, trans. George W. Schreiner (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 270-271.

<sup>127</sup> See Ford, Revelation, p. 92.

<sup>128</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 120; cf. Emmet Russell, "A Roman Law Parallel to Revelation Five," Bibliotheca Sacra 115 (1958): 258-264.

<sup>129</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 121.

inscribed contract was, according to G. Bornkamm, originally suggested by A. Deissmann and argued in detail by K. Staritz.<sup>130</sup> One of the more extensive studies on the scroll has been done by Otto Roller, who investigated the history and nature of this kind of doubly inscribed contract.<sup>131</sup> He has shown that this type of document was used for about every type of legal document, except a will or testament, which was always kept secret. He emphatically states that no example of a testament in the form of a doubly inscribed contract has come to light in ancient Middle East studies.<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately, the principal proponents of this interpretation of the scroll in Rev 5 base their evidence on what is considered by textual critics to be an inferior variant ἔσωθεν καὶ ἔξωθεν ("inside and outside").<sup>133</sup> Thus, there is no conclusive evidence for the scroll's physical form other than that it was sealed with seven seals and written on the obverse and the reverse.

#### Interpretations of the Scroll

Many varied interpretations have been made of this scroll. Ford, who has noted that βύβλον ("scroll") is used in three

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<sup>130</sup> See the discussions by G. Bornkamm, "Die Komposition der apokalyptischen Visionen in der Offenbarung Johannes," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 36 (1937):132-133; reprinted in Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 2 vols., Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie, 28 (Munich: Kaiser, 1959), 2:204-205 (cited hereafter as "Komposition").

<sup>131</sup> O. Roller, "Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln," Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 26 (1937):98-113.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>133</sup> See Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 737.

different passages of Scripture with a qualitative genitive ("of divorce")<sup>134</sup> proposes that the scroll is a bill of divorce by which the Lamb puts away his unfaithful betrothed Jerusalem and marries the New Jerusalem.<sup>135</sup> In harmony with this interpretation, she proposes that the physical form of the scroll was a get mekushshar which was folded and tied once for each witness and often used as a bill of divorce.<sup>136</sup> Contextual evidence, however, does not support this thesis.

Roller, whose study on the physical form of the scroll was mentioned above, has proposed that it should be understood as a certificate of debt or guilt (Schuldkunde).<sup>137</sup> However, there is insufficient internal evidence to support this view.<sup>138</sup>

Collins, who has emphasized various types of heavenly books, correlates the scroll with tablets of destiny which were associated from antiquity with kingship. For her, the scroll is a book of destiny in which future events are recorded.<sup>139</sup> Most modern exegetes follow a line of interpretation which is similar to that of Collins by viewing the scroll as dealing with the destiny or future of the

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<sup>134</sup> Ford, Revelation, p. 84. The passages she refers to are Deut 24:1, 3, Mark 10:4, and Matt 19:7.

<sup>135</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, "The Divorce Bill of the Lamb and the Scroll of the Suspected Adulteress. A Note on Apoc. 5,1 and 10,8-11," Journal for the Study of Judaism 2 (1971):136-139.

<sup>136</sup> Ford, Revelation, pp. 92-93.

<sup>137</sup> Roller, "Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln," pp. 107-108.

<sup>138</sup> See Bornkamm's criticism in "Komposition," pp. 221-222.

<sup>139</sup> Collins, Combat Myth, p. 24; and Collins, Apocalypse, p. 39.

world. Variations of this basic view sometimes state what the exact contents of the scroll are. Ladd says it is chaps. 7-22 of Revelation,<sup>140</sup> while others say it includes the whole book.<sup>141</sup>

The prevalent understanding of the scroll in ancient times beginning with Hippolytus onward was that it was the Old Testament.<sup>142</sup> This is based on the concept that Jesus went into the synagogue at Nazareth, where, after reading the Isaiah scroll, he declared that "scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Thus, Christ was the one who was able to bring the entire Old Testament into one comprehensive fulfillment. This view has essentially been abandoned in modern times by exegetes. Caird criticizes it on the basis that it overlooks John's dependence on Ezek 2:9, 3:3 (where Ezekiel's scroll is a forecast of coming events) and that it does not explain why the death of Christ should be the indispensable qualification for the opening of the scroll.<sup>143</sup>

Another view of the scroll noted by some scholars is that it is the book of life.<sup>144</sup> D. T. Niles, F. Nötscher, and W. Sattler

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<sup>140</sup>Ladd, Revelation, p. 81.

<sup>141</sup>E.g., Caird, Revelation, p. 71.

<sup>142</sup>Cf. Swete, Revelation, pp. 75-76.

<sup>143</sup>Caird, Revelation, p. 72.

<sup>144</sup>E.g., Caird, Revelation, p. 70; Ellul, Apocalypse, p. 145; Ladd, Revelation, pp. 80-81; Mounce, Revelation, p. 142; D. T. Niles, As Seeing the Invisible. A Study of the Book of Revelation (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 55-56; F. Nötscher, "Himmliche Bücher und Schicksalsglaube in Qumran," Revue de Qumran 1 (1959):405-411; W. Sattler, "Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 21 (1922):51; and C. van der Waal, Oudtestamentische priesterlijke Motieven in de Apocalypse (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1956), p. 30.

defend this interpretation, but Caird declares that "the arguments against this theory are overwhelming."<sup>145</sup> He, along with Ellul and Ladd, criticizes this view because the events connected with the seals do not correspond to a list of names that would make up the Lamb's book of life.<sup>146</sup> Caird further criticizes this view because in the context of Rev 5 the episode of the scroll is introduced by the herald angel who challenges all comers with the task of opening the scroll. In principle, he points out, any of God's creatures could qualify; moreover, if the Lamb were the author of the scroll, he would have the authority to open it without having had to win this right through his death. Caird argues still further that there is no suggestion in Revelation that John's purpose was to reveal the identity of the redeemed.<sup>147</sup>

Caird's arguments against linking the scroll with the book of life appear to be based upon controversial presuppositions. In his first criticism, he presupposes that the contents of the seven seals are identical with the scroll. Scholars are divided on this issue, their opinions often being influenced by their interpretation of the scroll. Caird's second criticism is based on the assumption that the "Lamb's book of life" means that the Lamb himself wrote the book. It also presupposes that authorship would be a sufficient basis in the context of Rev 4-5 to allow the Lamb to take the scroll and open it. The third criticism by Caird may be correct or faulty, depending upon

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<sup>145</sup> Caird, Revelation, pp. 70-71.

<sup>146</sup> Caird, Revelation, pp. 71, 82; Ellul, Apocalypse, p. 145; and Ladd, Revelation, p. 81.

<sup>147</sup> Caird, Revelation, p. 71.

what he means. If he means that John did not have the purpose of revealing the names individually of the redeemed, he is correct. However, if he means that John did not have the purpose of revealing the identity of the redeemed in a broad general sense, he is incorrect, for in this sense the redeemed are clearly identified in the Apocalypse (e.g., 144,000, great multitude, New Jerusalem, etc.).

### Seven Seals

Any sound interpretation of the scroll must take into consideration the significance of the seven seals. The word used in 7:2 for the "seal" of the living God is the same word used for each of the seven seals of the scroll. This suggests a possible link between the two, a matter that may be significant for the interpretation of the seals.

The motif of sealing was used in a variety of ways in the ancient Near East and in Scripture. A seal made a document legally valid. It protected a document against inappropriate and premature disclosure.<sup>148</sup> Gottfried Fitzer states: "Mixed in it are the motifs of power and authorization, of legal validity and reliability, of the inviolate, closed and secret, of the costly and the valuable."<sup>149</sup>

It is clear that the seven seals of the scroll are linked with legal validity. The sealing of the 144,000 upon their foreheads (7:3) appears also to carry this same motif. How then are these two related within the context? The answer to this is found in the nature of the seals.

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<sup>148</sup>G. Fitzer, "σφραγίς," TDNT (1971), 7:945.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 946.

Seven Seals Parallel Christ's  
Eschatological Discourse

As Charles and C. Mervyn Maxwell have noted and briefly outlined,<sup>150</sup> and as most of modern scholars have agreed, there is a close parallel between the seven seals of Rev 6 and the eschatological discourse of Christ found in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. The parallel is so close that most events are present in all four accounts, and their sequence of these events is almost identical in each account. The only variation of significance is the linking of earthquakes with famines in the Gospels, whereas in Revelation famine is connected with the fourth seal and possibly the third, and earthquake is placed in the sixth seal. Beasley-Murray states that this is done to preserve earthquake "as one of the signs which immediately herald the conclusion of this age (cf. 11:19; 16:18ff)."<sup>151</sup> The comparative chart in fig. 2 illustrates the parallels. As can be noted in the comparative chart, the sequence of events in both Rev 6 and the accounts of the eschatological discourse indicate a worsening situation. In Rev 6, this climaxes in the fifth seal with the slain martyrs under the altar (6:9). In the eschatological discourse it climaxes with the righteous being delivered up and suffering the "desolating sacrilege" in Matt 24:15 and Mark 13:14, and being "trodden down by the Gentiles" in Luke 21:24. Immediately following this situation comes the sequence of heavenly signs which, in the eschatological discourse, results in the

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<sup>150</sup> Charles, Revelation, 2:158; and C. Mervyn Maxwell, God Cares, 2 vols. (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1981-85), 2:181.

<sup>151</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 130.

| Rev. 6                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Mat. 24                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Mark 13                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Luke 21                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First Seal</b><br>v.2 white horse, rider had a bow, crown given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | v.6 wars and rumors of war                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | v.7 wars and rumors of war                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | v.9 wars and tumults                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Second Seal</b><br>v.4 red horse, rider took peace from earth, war, they ate one another, rider given a great sword.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | v.7 nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom                                                                                                                                                                             | v.8 nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom                                                                                                                                                                                                | v.10 nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Third Seal</b><br>v.5 black horse, rider had balance in his hand<br>v.6 voice saying: a quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, but do not hurt the oil and the wine.                                                                                                                                                                     | v.7 famines and earthquakes                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | v.8 earthquakes and famines                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | v.11 great earthquakes and famines                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Fourth Seal</b><br>v.8 pale horse, rider is death and Hades followed, they were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts.                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | v.11 pestilences, terrors and great signs in the heavens                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Fifth Seal</b><br>v.9 souls under the altar who had been slain for the word of God and for their witness.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | v.9 will deliver you to tribulation, put you to death, hated by nations for my sake<br>v.15 devastating scourings standing in holy place<br>v.21 great tribulation such as never was<br>v.22 if days not shortened, no human would be saved | v.9 will deliver you to councils, beaten in synagogues, stand before governors and kings to bear testimony<br>v.12 brother will deliver brother to death and father his child and children against parents to have them put to death will be hated for my sake | v.12 will lay hands on you and persecute, delivering you to synagogues, prisons, brought before kings and governors for my sake<br>v.16 delivered up by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends and men will be put to death<br>v.17 hated for my name<br>v.20 when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies<br>v.23 great distress on earth and wrath on people<br>v.24 will fall by sword, be led captive, Jerusalem will be trodden by Gentiles |
| <b>Sixth Seal</b><br>v.12 earthquake, sun darkened, moon became blood<br>v.13 stars fell<br>v.14 any vanished and every mountain and island moved<br>v.15 all hide in caves and among rocks of mountains<br>v.16 they cry for rocks and mountains to fall on them to hide from face of one on throne and the Lamb<br>v.17 great day of their wrath has come and who can stand? | v.29 sun darkened and moon will not give light, stars fall, powers of heaven are shaken                                                                                                                                                     | v.24 sun darkened, moon did not give light<br>v.25 stars fall, powers of heaven are shaken                                                                                                                                                                     | v.25 signs in sun, moon and stars, distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves<br>v.26 men with fear and foreboding of what is coming on world, powers of heavens are shaken                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Seventh Seal</b><br>8:1 silence in heaven                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | v.30 sign of Son of man appears in heaven, tribes of earth mourn, they will see the Son of man coming in power and great glory                                                                                                              | v.26 they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with power and glory                                                                                                                                                                                        | v.27 they will see the Son of man coming in clouds and with power and great glory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

Fig. 2. Comparative chart showing parallels in Rev. 6, Mat. 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21

appearance of the Son of Man and redemption for the righteous.

Because of the close parallel between the seven seals and the eschatological discourse of Christ, it is clear that the events of the seals precede the final establishment of the messianic kingdom. It is also clear that the righteous must go through and suffer the events given in the eschatological discourse. In the seals they also must be martyred--the equivalent of the desolating sacrilege in the eschatological discourse. This may be significant for the interpretation of the term "seal" as it is used in connection with the seven seals. In the words of Fitzer, the seal provides "legal validity."<sup>152</sup> In 7:2, the seal of the living God provides legal validity to the 144,000. By the same mode, the seven seals should provide legal validity for the righteous who must go through these events and suffer martyrdom before they can become citizens of the final messianic kingdom. In a direct parallel with the Lamb, who is judged worthy because of his deeds, the righteous are worthy because of their deeds. Therefore, the seals demonstrate and legally validate the worthiness of the righteous.

Further minor evidence that the seals legally validate the righteous in judgment may be present in the relationship of John to the first four seals. In each of these seals the imperative "come"<sup>153</sup> appears (6:1, 3, 5, 7). It is not clearly indicated whether this "come" relates to the rider of each horse or to John. In the first and second seals, the same verb is used with a prefixed

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<sup>152</sup>Fitzer, "σφραγίς," IDNT (1971), 7:945.

<sup>153</sup>This Greek imperative can also be translated as "go."

preposition and relates to the going forth of the horse and rider (6:2, 4). In the fourth seal, the same is implied by the fact that Hades is following Death. In the third seal, however, there is no forward movement mentioned and "come," if it relates to the rider and/or the horse, could only mean "to appear on the scene."

Manuscript variants suggest that some copyists understood the "come" to be a command to John. Support for this interpretation derives from the fact that John is referred to immediately before and after this command by a living creature. If "come" refers to John, it would add further evidence to the legal nature of these seals because of his membership in the divine council. As a council member, John would be a legal witness who is being summoned to observe what is taking place in a manner similar to 4:1 where he is summoned to heaven as a member and witness of the divine council.

Internal evidence from the first four seals suggests that it is the righteous who suffer these negative events culminating in the martyrdom of the fifth seal. These events are apparently caused by the wicked and directed against the righteous. In the first seal, a white horse (denoting victory) with his warrior rider begins to conquer in warfare (6:2). In the second seal, a red horse (denoting bloodshed) with his warrior rider slays with a great sword (6:3-4). In the third seal, a black horse (denoting bleak conditions) carries a rider with a balance in his hand because of the scarcity of food and inflated prices caused by war (6:5-6). In the fourth seal, a pale horse (denoting death) carries a warrior rider called Death. Hades follows Death and together they kill with sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts (6:7-8). The fifth seal indicates that

the slain, or martyred ones, are righteous because they are "slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne" (6:9). In the fifth seal, the martyred righteous cry to God to "avenge" their blood "on those who dwell upon the earth" (6:10). It is the wicked earth dwellers who martyr the righteous and should therefore receive the divine judgment when the blood of the righteous is avenged. In the sixth seal, the signs of the divine judgment appear and the wicked earth dwellers try to flee from the divine wrath (6:12-16).

As the divine wrath approaches (6:17), it is only the 144,000 who have the seal of the living God and are able to stand (7:2-8). In the seventh seal, there is "silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1). This silence is apparently connected with the necessary judgment accompanying the coming of the one like a son of man. In the context of the sixth seal, and the sequence of events about to occur (6:17), the silence in heaven must be the imagery used for the divine wrath. As pointed out by Valentine, "In the Old Testament this silence occurred when Yahweh in his temple was about to bring his judgments on the wicked (Isa. 41:1; Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13)."<sup>154</sup> Thus, the coming of the Son of man (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27) and the silence in heaven (8:1) appear to be two aspects of the same event since the wicked in the sixth seal want to be hid from the "face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16) when the "great day of their wrath" (6:17) comes.

Further evidence that it is the righteous who suffer at the

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<sup>154</sup> Valentine, "Temple Motif," p. 110.

hands of the wicked is found in the third seal where the war causes famine and inflates the price of the spring grain harvest (6:5-6). In Revelation, the grain represents the righteous (14:14-16) and is paralleled elsewhere in Scripture by the same imagery (Joel 3:13a; Matt 13:39; John 4:35-36). The olive (for oil) and grape harvest (6:6) came in the fall. In Revelation (14:17-20; 19:15) and elsewhere in Scripture (Isa 63:2-6; Joel 3:13b), the grapes serve as imagery to represent the wicked. Therefore, since the grain price is inflated, it is the righteous who suffer persecution. The wicked, on the other hand, are not affected, because the "oil and the wine" are not harmed (6:6).

Because a scroll sealed with seven seals is a legal document, it is necessary to identify the witnesses who place their seal upon the document to legally validate it. The seven seals serve this validating purpose, and the content of each seal identifies the witness. This may explain why the scroll is an opisthograph, with the witnesses written on the outside and the contents of the document written inside.

#### Evidence That the Scroll Is the Lamb's Book of Life

There are several lines of evidence which suggest that the scroll is the book of life. First, two of the six references to the book of life in Revelation, 13:8 and 21:27, add the possessive genitive τοῦ ἀρνίου ("of the Lamb" or "Lamb's"). In its identification of the Lamb, Rev 13:8 adds the descriptive genitive term "slain," a form of the same verb used in Rev 5, and thus clearly identifies the Lamb of 13:8 with the slain Lamb of Rev 5. The only

relationship revealed between the Lamb and the scroll in Rev 5, however, is that the Lamb took/received the scroll from the one sitting upon the throne (5:7-8) and was worthy (5:9, 12) to open it. Thus, the genitive "of the Lamb" used in identifying the scroll appears to stem from the fact that the Lamb received possession of the scroll from the one on the throne--an action which, in the context of the book of Revelation, seems to be the most adequate way to explain why the book of life belongs to the "Lamb."

A second line of evidence for the scroll as the book of life is the attitude or reaction of those mentioned in the context, who appear to have a definite stake in the contents of the scroll if it is the book of life. When the Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders burst forth in singing (5:8-9), with each possessing a lyre and golden bowls full of incense which are the "prayers of the saints" (5:8). It is important to observe that the "prayers of the saints" are mentioned at the very time the Lamb receives the scroll, suggesting that the prayers of the saints have a direct relationship with the taking of the scroll.

The "prayers of the saints" (5:8)<sup>155</sup> are probably closely linked with the cry of the martyrs under the altar in the fifth seal (6:9). Because the seals on the outside of the scroll have a direct bearing on the righteous, it is probable that the content of the scroll does also. Thus, the contents of the scroll are very important to the persecuted saints.

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<sup>155</sup> Beckwith considers this phrase to be a gloss, Apocalypse, p. 512.

John, who is deeply concerned with the scroll and its contents, begins to weep profusely when no one is found worthy to take the scroll and open it. The verb "to weep" (κλαίω) is frequently used to mean professional mourning for the dead, and in the New Testament it always occurs in this connection,<sup>156</sup> thus supporting the view that John is weeping for people--those whose names are written in the book of life. His weeping is for deeper reasons than just the fact that future happenings would not be revealed to him, as some suggest.<sup>157</sup> He is weeping for the righteous saints, concerned about the future of both them and himself.<sup>158</sup>

A third line of evidence for the scroll as the book of life may possibly be found in the concept of corporate solidarity, or close relationship, between the Lamb and the saints in the context of Rev 4-5--a significant matter to which attention was given earlier.<sup>159</sup> In the very first vision of Revelation, Christ appears as the slain one who has conquered death and is alive forever (1:18), a fact with which he gives comfort to his loyal followers (cf.

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<sup>156</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 85.

<sup>157</sup>E.g., Barclay, Revelation, 1:169; Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 508; Lenski, Revelation, p. 196; and Morris, Revelation, p. 95.

<sup>158</sup>Cf. Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 114.

<sup>159</sup>Above, pp. 194-195. The threefold expression of the Lamb's work mentioned there is also set forth, of course, as early as in the doxology of the salutation, where Jesus is referred to as the one who "loves us," has "freed us from our sins by his blood," and made us a "kingdom, priests to his God" (1:5-6). Closely related is the covenant concept, illustrated in the first vision by the presence of the "son of man" in the midst of the seven lampstands, or seven churches (1:13), and by his absolute personal knowledge of the needs and future rewards of each church (Rev 2-3). Cf. pp. 3-4 and 73-75, above, including the references given there to works by Shea and by Strand.

2:8-11). It is reasonable to see the second vision of the book as carrying this same thought further in Rev 4-8:1 through the imagery of a "scroll of life." In both visions there is an obvious solidarity, between Redeemer and redeemed with respect to the ultimacy of everlasting life as the crown of victory (cf. 2:10, "crown of life"), resulting from the Lamb's successful conquest of death. It is especially interesting to notice that the very term "book of life" is used within the first vision of Revelation (in the message to Sardis; see 3:5), thus enhancing the likelihood of an intentional "book-of-life" conceptualization also in conjunction with the solidarity concept underlying the description in Rev 5.

A possible fourth line of evidence that the scroll of Rev 5 is the book of life comes from a comparison of Rev 4-5 with the major Old Testament heavenly court scenes involving the divine council. This is closely related to the third line of evidence just given above from the context of Rev 4-5 itself, inasmuch as the central theme is again the concept of corporate solidarity.

As noted previously, these Old Testament heavenly court scenes (1 Kgs 22; Isa 6; Ezek 1-10; Dan 7) all involve judgment.<sup>160</sup> Among these various scenes already considered, only Dan 7 qualifies as a parallel to Rev 4-5 in depicting in detail a cosmic eschatological heavenly court scene involving a divine council judgment session.<sup>161</sup> In Dan 7, as in Rev 4-5, there is, of course, no specific mention of the "book of life" (except later in Dan 12:1).

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<sup>160</sup>Cf. pp. 126-127 above.

<sup>161</sup>Cf. Charles, Revelation, pp. 128, 147, 149; Collins, Apocalypse, p. 35; and Collins, Combat Myth, pp. 213-215.

but reference is made to "books" that are opened (7:10). However, in Dan 12:1, the "book of life" is specifically mentioned in the context of deliverance of the saints. Is the similar reference in Rev 13:8 to a deliverance of the saints (several chapters subsequent to Rev 4-8:1): a conscious use of the same pattern found in Daniel's specific reference to "book of life" several chapters after depicting the judgment scene in Dan 7? In Rev 20:12, moreover, there is once again a reference to the "book of life," within a judgment scene drawing imagery from Dan 7.

With respect to Dan 7:9-14 as compared with Rev 4-5, there are significant differences, however,<sup>162</sup> including the fact that both negative and positive judgments seem to occur in the same judgment scene in the former, but not in the latter. In Daniel, negative judgment is rendered against the fourth beast and the little horn (7:11, 26), while a positive judgment is made for the "one like a son of man" (7:13-14) and for the "people of the saints of the Most High" (7:27). The amount of paralleling imagery is striking, but precisely the same judgment setting is evidently not in view, as has been aptly shown by Maxwell.<sup>163</sup> Imagery from Dan 7 is actually dispersed into two distinct judgment scenes in Revelation (Rev 4-5 and 20:11-15), but the exact twofold-judgment that parallels Dan 7 is not itself described in Revelation; rather, it is brought to attention through other references in the book, such as 6:9-11 (the cry for vindication by the martyred "souls" under the altar) and 18:6-7 (judgment on

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<sup>162</sup>See Maxwell, God Cares, 2:170-171.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

Babylon on the basis of the Old Testament "law of malicious witness").<sup>164</sup>

The point here, however, is that there is a most important parallel between Dan 7 and Rev 5 in the corporate solidarity of the "people of the saints of the Most High" (7:27) with the "one like a son of man" (7:13),<sup>165</sup> and that this close relationship between Redeemer and redeemed in both visions augments the possibility mentioned above that the scroll of Rev 5 is the book of life. In Daniel's divine council session, the "ancient of days" presides over a divine-council judgment session which involves other "thrones" (7:9), as in Rev 4:4. The council members, as in Rev 5:11, are a "thousand thousands" and "ten thousand times ten thousand" (7:10). To the ancient of days "one like a son of man" comes "with the clouds of heaven" (7:13; cf. Rev 1:7). He, as in Rev 5:6-14, goes before the ancient of days in the judgment session of the divine council (7:13) and the resulting judgment is recorded in 7:14: "And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom, one that shall

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<sup>164</sup> Joel Musvosvi in current research (a doctoral dissertation still in progress at Andrews University at the time of this writing) has demonstrated that the cry for vindication in 6:10 anticipates a future heavenly "supreme court" session that is pre-advent. Since this cry arises under the breaking of the fifth seal, both the cry itself and the judgment of vindication for the martyrs must be later in time than the judgment of Rev 4-5--the judgment that acclaims the Lamb's worthiness to break the seals and to open the scroll. Regarding the significance of Rev 18:6-7, see Kenneth A. Strand, "Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment in Revelation 18," Andrews University Seminary Studies 20 (1982):53-60.

<sup>165</sup> Ferch, Son of Man, p. 180.

not be destroyed."<sup>166</sup> By way of comparison, the judgment of the Lamb in Rev 5, the Lamb is found "worthy" by the divine council to receive the scroll and open its seals, and the scroll itself contains the names of the saints who collectively make up the kingdom which the Lamb forms. Thus they too will reign (like the Lamb) on the earth (Rev 5:10), because of their corporate solidarity with the Lamb. The deliverance of the saints in Dan 12:1 from the persecuting evil power by the "great prince who has charge of his people" is for "every one whose name shall be found written in the book." It is significant to note here that "book" is singular--paralleling the singular scroll of Rev 5. Thus, the close corporate-solidarity parallel between Redeemer and redeemed in Dan 7 and Rev 4-5 gives added force to the suggestion that the scroll of Rev 5 is the book of life.

#### Summary of Judgment

A divine council is described in Rev 4-5 presided over by the one sitting upon the central throne. His right to preside over the council is demonstrated by the adjectives, titles, and descriptive phrases used. The numerous prepositions used in relationship to him, and the worship rendered him, all contribute evidence that he presides over the divine council.

The divine council members listed in Rev 4-5 are numerous and reflect a diversity of roles. The twenty-four elders sit on

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<sup>166</sup> In the further elaboration of the divine council judgment (7:23-27), it is stated in 7:27: "And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominions shall serve and obey them."

twenty-four thrones. The seven spirits are before the throne. The four living creatures are the guardian cherubim. John is the divine council's earthly messenger. A strong angel is the council's cosmic herald. The Lamb is the Redeemer who is being judged by the council. A multitude of angels surround the throne. Every creature in the cosmos renders praise. Collectively, the divine council is cosmic in scope.

The divine council is investigating the worthiness of the Lamb to take the scroll and to open it. The investigation results in a declaration by all the members of the cosmos of the Lamb's worthiness to take and open the seven-sealed scroll. His worthiness is based upon the fact that he conquered, which in the broad context of Revelation means he conquered over the forces of evil. He conquered because he was "slain," "didst ransom" some from every part of the earth, and made them a kingdom of priests who will reign on earth.

There is a corporate solidarity between the Lamb and the righteous saints. As the Lamb was slain (became a martyr), so also do many of the saints become martyrs. The Lamb is the "redeemer" (בֹּרֵא) of the Old Testament--i.e., the nearest of kin.

In the right hand of the one sitting on the central throne is a seven-sealed scroll. It is a legal document, as demonstrated by its seals. The contents of these seals (Rev 6) closely parallel the events found in the eschatological discourse of Christ in Matt 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 concerning what must occur before the final messianic kingdom is established. The same word used for the seven seals is used for the seal placed upon the 144,000. Since a seal was

the means of establishing legal validity, the seven seals legally validate the righteous.

The interpretation that the scroll is the book of life is supported by several lines of evidence. First, the book of life is called the Lamb's book of life in some passages of Revelation, and the scene in Rev 5 appears to give the basis for the terminology. Second, there is a reaction and interest of those mentioned in the Rev 4-5 who appear to have a definite stake in the scroll's contents--a stake which relates to their eternal inheritance. Third, there is a close relationship between the Lamb and the saints in the book of Revelation, and a key concept in this relationship is that both Redeemer and redeemed are conquerors over death. Finally, the parallel eschatological divine council session of Dan 7, which depicts the judgment of one like a son of man as also being a positive judgment of the saints, enhances the concept of "book of life" in Rev 4-5, since the "book of life" evidently figures into the portrayal in Daniel in much the same way that the seven-sealed scroll does in Revelation--as a scroll of deliverance or destiny for the saints.

#### Covenant and Royal Theology

One of the major themes of Rev 4-5 is covenant and royal theology. This theme provides many of the reasons for the divine council judgment session and elucidates many of the issues connected with the judgment. It also brings to light the positive results that come from the divine council judgment.

### Covenant Context of Rev 4-5

Rev 4-5 appears in the covenant context of Revelation<sup>167</sup> and follows after the seven individual covenants of the seven churches (Rev 2-3). The heart of the divine covenant was the temple, and Rev 4-5 has a temple setting rich in temple imagery. The covenant theme, utilizing the suzerainty-type model, describes the appearance of the covenant King/God (suzerain) who is sitting upon a throne (4:2). He is in the midst of his people (vassals), who are identified through the covenant imagery of Israel (4:4-8).

### Rainbow and Covenant

The rainbow around the throne (4:3) is also linked to covenant and Israel. As already stated, the emerald color represents the tribe of Judah, from whence the Messiah would come who would rule the nations (Gen 49:10).<sup>168</sup> The Messiah would be the central figure of covenant salvation who would redeem his people. In the covenant context of Noah, the rainbow represented mercy and served as a visible sign of the divine covenant (Gen 9:12). It was a guarantee of the divine covenant forever. Around Ezekiel's chariot throne (Ezek 1:28) a rainbow also was seen with apparently the same significance as in Rev 4. Its imagery communicated the surety of God's covenant with his people<sup>169</sup> and gave evidence of his mercy.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. pp. 71-73 above.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. pp. 137-138 above.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 497, who finds no reference here at all to God's covenant.

<sup>170</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 113; and Caird, Revelation, p. 63.

### Kingdom

A significant element of the divine covenant with Israel was the designation of the covenant people as a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6). The one sitting upon the throne appears jasper and carnelian in color (4:3)--representing the youngest and oldest sons of Jacob and all Israel as a kingdom in a covenant relationship.<sup>171</sup>

Imagery of specific elements of ancient Israel are also described. Around the central throne are twenty-four elders, who traditionally exercised rulership and authority. The twenty-four elders, however, through the act of casting their crowns before the one sitting upon the throne, recognize that their authority is a delegated authority.<sup>172</sup> The golden nature of their crowns emphasizes their royal rule as vassals.

Anciently, the elders were authority figures who, in one sense, were extensions of the national ruler in many civil and religious matters. They discussed and decided important local and national issues. Judicially, they resolved cases presented to them. In many respects, they were the executive branch of the government. Therefore, just the use of the terms "elders" and "thrones" implies the kingdom theme.<sup>173</sup>

Around the throne and on each side of the throne were four living creatures. As concluded previously, these four living

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<sup>171</sup>Cf. p. 137 above.

<sup>172</sup>Mounce, Revelation, p. 139.

<sup>173</sup>Cf. Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 498, who interprets the twenty-four elders as "angelic kings, a rank in the heavenly hierarchy."

creatures represent the four chief tribes of Israel whose primary role is to serve as guardian cherubim for the throne.<sup>174</sup>

Collectively, they represent all Israel,<sup>175</sup> since the leaders represent the whole.<sup>176</sup>

### Priests

The covenant recipients not only constitute a kingdom collectively but also serve as priests individually ("kingdom of priests," Exod 19:6). Therefore the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures serve not only in a royal role but in a priestly one as well. Each one has a lyre and golden bowls full of incense (5:9) used traditionally by those in priestly service. The fact that the incense in the golden bowls represents the prayers of the saints (5:9) further demonstrates the priestly role of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures.

### Royal Son

Into the divine council session of Rev 4, the figure of the Lamb appears (Rev 5). An important element of the covenant was "seed." In the Davidic covenant the principal seed was the royal "son" who would build the temple for God to dwell with his people. The Lamb is the royal son, being from the "Root of David" (5:5).

The Lamb has seven horns (5:6), symbols of power, royalty,

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<sup>174</sup>Cf. pp. 148-154 above.

<sup>175</sup>Cf. Ford, Revelation, p. 80, who interprets them as representing all Israel, but not in a covenant sense or as throne guardians.

<sup>176</sup>Most scholars reject this view on the basis that the four living creatures are angelic beings.

and rulership.<sup>177</sup> The combination of "horn" and "seven" is an indication that the Lamb is the all-powerful warrior and king.<sup>178</sup> A normal part of oriental rulership and power was warfare. Therefore, the declaration that the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered" (5:5) harmonizes with the royal theme being emphasized in the passage. The monarchs or their sons were the military commanders, who usually gained and retained their thrones through military conquest. Therefore, "conquered" implies an antagonist who is part of the old story of Satan's rebellion against God in which the rebellious one must be defeated.<sup>179</sup>

#### Royal Son as Sacrifice

The death of the Lamb is seen "as the first stage of his victory over the rebel. It is his sacrificial death which makes him worthy."<sup>180</sup> Collins declares that in a theology of sacrifice

. . . it is assumed that God chooses to remove the sin of a human being who offers an appropriate sacrifice to God in a worthy manner. With regard to the death of Jesus, the claim is that God has chosen to look upon his death as a fitting sacrifice which removes the sin of many from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.<sup>181</sup>

#### Royal Son as Priest

The second stage of the Lamb's victory over the rebel comes as he exercises his priestly role and ransoms some "from every tribe

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<sup>177</sup> See Süring, Horn-Motifs.

<sup>178</sup> Charles, Revelation, 2:141.

<sup>179</sup> Collins, Apocalypse, pp. 39-40.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

and tongue and people and nation" (5:9). As a priest, the Lamb both offers sacrifice and makes atonement. The temple imagery of Rev 4-5 enhances this priestly role.

The Lamb has seven eyes (5:6), which are interpreted as the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth (5:6). As previously noted, the "eyes" and "spirits" are linked with service.<sup>182</sup> As the eyes of the four living creatures were for seeing, so the eyes of the Lamb are for seeing. As scholars have generally noted, the seven "eyes" and "seven spirits" are based on Zech 4:2-10, where the eyes see all that is happening on earth as part of the divine priestly activity among men. In this way the seven eyes represent the priestly role of the Lamb among men.

#### Kingdom of the Royal Son

The third stage of the Lamb's victory over the rebel is the establishment of the ransomed ones as a "kingdom and priests to our God" (5:10). This is clearly a covenant fulfillment (cf. Exod 19:6). According to 1:6, this is already an accomplished fact and reflects the reality of the then present kingdom of God referred to in the Gospels. It is the equivalent of the breaking in of the kingdom of God into the contemporary age, as Ladd has clearly described.<sup>183</sup>

The preferred textual reading of the future tense in "they shall reign on the earth" (5:10) over the present tense "they reign on the earth" is a new element in the royal theme of Rev 5. It is a

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<sup>182</sup>Cf. pp. 95-96 above.

<sup>183</sup>See George E. Ladd, The Presence of the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

reference to the final eschatological fulfillment of covenant and royal theology and thus goes beyond the temporal setting of the first half of the verse (5:10), which has already been partially fulfilled. It looks forward to the time of covenant execution when the eschatological rewards are given and the kingdom is established.

### Covenant Inheritance

Inherent in Rev 5 is an element closely linked to the eschatological reign of the redeemed: namely, that the scroll, which has been interpreted above as the book of life,<sup>184</sup> is the heart of covenant fulfillment. The scroll in the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne can be taken and opened only by one who is found worthy. The Lamb is worthy because he has conquered and ransomed by his blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (5:9). This reveals that the primary emphasis of the passage is redemption.<sup>185</sup>

The concept of redemption used here is derived from the traditional Old Testament covenant idea that generally whatever or whoever is lost or alienated remains so for only a limited time. Thus, the Jubilee was the time for the restoration of slaves to their families and property to its former owner or lawful representative. It was also the right and obligation of the nearest relative or redeemer (בִּקְיָא) to step in, when able to do so, to redeem the lost relative and/or his inheritance.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup>Cf. pp. 208-214 above.

<sup>185</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 110.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid. p. 111.

The Lamb is judged and praised on the basis of his redeemer role for those who were lost and alienated. Through his blood he actually purchased/ransomed (ἡγόρασας) to God some from all parts of the earth (5:9). Ford states:

The term in vs 9 translated by "purchased" is the ordinary Greek word for "buying" agorazein, but is used with reference to redemption; cf. I Cor 6:20. The OT speaks of "buying" effected by Yahweh; through the mediation of the Sinai Covenant the people of Israel became the property or special possession of Yahweh, "the people that Yahweh acquired for Himself," or more exactly, "a most precious thing," Heb., segullah.<sup>187</sup>

As noted earlier, the need for a redeemer, the restoration of the alienated inheritance, and the need for covenant fulfillment of the covenant relationship all stem from Satan's rebellion against God (12:7-12) and the fall and alienation of creation (Gen 3).<sup>188</sup> The fact that the Lamb was "slain" as a martyr (5:9) is, as shown before,<sup>189</sup> clear evidence of this conflict with the rebel; and the fact that the Lamb "conquered" (5:5) in this conflict indicates that the way was opened for redemption and restoration. That which became Satan's possession for a limited time must be redeemed.<sup>190</sup>

Whenever redemption was made of a lost inheritance, a legal document was needed to indicate right of ownership. The "doubly inscribed" document, which was referred to previously,<sup>191</sup> serves as

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<sup>187</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 94.

<sup>188</sup>Collins, Apocalypse, p. 39.

<sup>189</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 90.

<sup>190</sup>Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 112.

<sup>191</sup>Cf. pp. 197-198 above. The parallel is not exact, however, because Revelation has perhaps blended in other symbolic backgrounds as well.

an illustration of how this was handled. Everyone knew what was written in the sealed portion because of the attached open copy as illustrated by Jer 32:7-14. The scroll was signed by witnesses, sealed, and placed in a jar awaiting the time when the property would be possessed. At the time of possession, the seals of the scroll must be broken for the redemption to become legally complete.

Another indication that the redemption of the righteous is part of the covenant inheritance is found in the twice-mentioned statement that the names in "the Lamb's book of life" were "written at the foundation (beginning) of the world" (13:8; 17:8). This shows that it took time and a redeemer to restore what had been lost. It also links together the creation-redemption motif of Rev 4-5. In the hymn of praise to the one on the throne there is adoration which emphasizes God as the Creator (4:11).<sup>192</sup> On the other hand, the praise to the Lamb emphasizes that he is the Redeemer (5:9).<sup>193</sup>

Besides the strong emphasis on redemption in Rev 5 and the eschatological reign of the redeemed, there is the covenant motif of eschatological judgment and rewards. As part of the covenant, blessings came from following the divine covenant and curses came from disobeying them. These blessings are promised individually to the seven churches in Rev 2-3. In 1 Kgs 22, Isa 6, Ezek 1-10, and Dan 7 there was judgment before any rewards. The judgment decided which type of reward would be given. In Ezek 1-10 and Dan 7 both blessings and curses were meted out.

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<sup>192</sup> Barclay, Revelation, 1:164.

<sup>193</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 128.

Summary of Covenant  
and Royal Theology

Rev 4-5 has a covenant context, which includes the general context (structure of the book), the preceding context (Rev 2-3), and the temple setting of Rev 4-5 itself. Covenant imagery is expressed by "a kingdom and priests to our God." In the covenant relationship the one sitting upon the central throne is God/King (suzerain), while the twenty-four elders and four living creatures are corulers (vassals). Yet, the twenty-four elders and four living creatures also fulfill a priestly role with their lyres and golden bowls of incense.

The rainbow around the throne further enhances the royal theme with its emerald color representing the tribe of Judah from whence the Messiah came. When the emerald color and the rainbow imagery are combined, a strong mercy theme appears, which is linked with the priestly motif of the covenant.

The entrance of the Lamb to the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 strengthens the theme of royal theology. The Lamb is from the royal line of David and possesses, through the imagery of seven horns, complete kingship and power. The Lamb is also the Lion, who, as the chief military leader, has conquered in the struggle with Satan for earthly rulership. He is the royal son who makes the ransomed ones a kingdom of priests who will reign on earth. He establishes the covenant kingdom in which he is the ruler (suzerain) and the ransomed ones are his corulers (vassals).

The Lamb has conquered because he became a sacrifice and was slain. Through his sacrifice, he fulfills a priestly role by

ransoming to God some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. The Lamb has seven eyes which are equated with the seven spirits sent into all the earth in divine service. Thus, his priestly role is not only vertical to God but also horizontal, in that it reaches out in priestly service to man.

Covenant theology requires judgment to occur before covenant execution takes place. The positive judgment in behalf of the Lamb is based upon what he has done in his victorious struggle with his rebel rival. As the nearest of kin or redeemer, he judicially restores the lost inheritance when he is judged worthy to take the scroll (Lamb's book of life) which contains the names of the ransomed saints that comprise his kingdom.

#### Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

The three persons of the Deity are involved in the salvation of mankind. Their individual roles contribute to salvation that, ultimately, is the result of their combined effort.

#### Creation-Redemption Theme

The theme of salvation in Rev 4-5 has a double emphasis centered primarily in the hymnic material of each chapter. Rev 4 emphasizes that the one sitting upon the throne is the Creator (4:11), while Rev 5 emphasizes the Lamb as the Redeemer (5:9).<sup>194</sup> This dual emphasis is an indication of the involvement of the Trinity in salvation and of the unity between them and their activities.

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<sup>194</sup>Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp. 108-109; Caird, Revelation, pp. 68-69; Charles, Revelation, 1:151; Morris, Revelation, p. 92; Mounce, Revelation, p. 147; Seiss, Apocalypse, p. 118; and Walvoord, Revelation, pp. 111, 118.

The One Sitting upon the Throne

Although the one sitting upon the throne is the Creator, he is described as presiding over the divine council where judgment takes place. This judgment theme, however, is part of the larger creation-redemption theme.

The decisions of the divine council generally fall into the following categories: creation (Gen 1:21); life, death, or fate (1 Kgs 22:17; Job 1:6-12; Ps 82:1-7; Isa 6:11-13; Ezek 1-11; Dan 7:9-14, 23-27); kingship and/or inheritance (Deut 32:8-9; Dan 7:13-14; Zech 3:7); and forgiveness (Isa 6:7; Zech 3:1-5).<sup>195</sup> The two broad areas in which these decisions may be grouped are creation and redemption.

The one sitting upon the throne is interpreted by exegetes to be God the Father. He presides over the divine council members who themselves reflect the creation theme. The one sitting upon the throne created "all things" (4:11) and chief among his creation were people (Gen 1:26-27). After sin entered the world God ultimately chose a special people he redeemed from bondage and formed into the kingdom of Israel as part of his covenant promises. The Old Testament is replete with this double theme of creation-redemption in connection with the divine covenant (e.g., Exod 20:11; Deut 4:20; 5:15; Ps 136:5-25; Isa 41:14, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:9-19; 47:4).

As previously noted,<sup>196</sup> Rev 4-5 uses the covenant imagery for Israel and its organization as a kingdom. The twenty-four elders and four living creatures reflect the organization of Israel and probably

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. p. 123 above.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. pp. 218-219 above.

also creation in general.<sup>197</sup> The Christian community of seven churches, like covenant Israel, came into existence through divine redemption (5:9). The heavenly creation is reflected in the myriads of angels (5:11). The broad dimension of creation appears with the praise of all creation (5:13). Thus, the creation-redemption theme is present in the delineation of the divine council members.

The person of the one sitting upon the throne is described in the two hymns of praise (4:8, 11) rendered to him by the twenty-four elders and four living creatures. These hymns--through the use of adjectives, titles, and verbs--attribute qualities to him. The triple "holy" (4:8) by its repetition emphasizes that the one on the throne is indescribably holy.<sup>198</sup> The term "holy" provides the innermost description of God's nature and essence which separates and exalts him above the creaturely world.<sup>199</sup> The titles of "Lord," "God," and "Almighty" all express the exalted nature and position of the one sitting upon the throne in relationship to the created ones. The "Almighty" is the Greek equivalent for הַיְהוָה ("Yahweh of Hosts");<sup>200</sup> or הַיְהוָה ("God of the Mountains"),<sup>201</sup> which in the context of Rev 4-5 is primarily the faithful members of the divine council if Yahweh of Hosts is the Hebrew equivalent. The eternity of the one

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<sup>197</sup> Cf. pp. 139-140, 152-154 above.

<sup>198</sup> Bauer, "ἅγιος," Greek-English Lexicon, p. 9; and Norman Walker, "The Origin of the 'Thrice-Holy,'" New Testament Studies 5 (1958-59):132-133.

<sup>199</sup> O. Procksch, "ἅγιος," TDNT (1964), 1:100-101

<sup>200</sup> W. Michaelis, "παντοκράτωρ" TDNT (1965), 3:914; and Procksch, "ἅγιος" TDNT (1964), 1:101.

<sup>201</sup> Michaelis, "παντοκράτωρ" TDNT (1965), 3:914.

sitting upon the throne is expressed by the one "who was and is and is to come" and parallels the Old Testament concept of the "living God" who is exalted above all other gods.

"Almighty" and "who is to come" provide a judgment motif which is very important for the creation-redemption theme. The Creator (4:11) who is the Almighty One (4:8) or Lord of hosts is coming in judgment. This means deliverance and vindication for the righteous saints (5:8-10; 6:9-10), and vengeance and destruction for their enemies. In this manner the creator brings about redemption and restoration.

After the description of the divine council session, praise is rendered to the one presiding over it. This praise attributes to him the quality of worthiness to receive "glory and honor and power" (4:11). As described in the passage, the glory, honor, and power correlate with his position as God/King/Judge. His worthiness is based upon the fact that he is the Creator of all things. In the context, his role as Creator provides the basis for him to preside over the council and render judgment that affects redemption. This suggests that the judgment of the Lamb in Rev 5 extends far beyond the Lamb to include the righteous saints who need redemption.

Several scholars have made reference to a problem in the words of praise of the second hymn: "for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created" (4:11). They believe these words suggest that all things existed before they were created.<sup>202</sup> Some manuscripts try to solve the problem by

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<sup>202</sup>Charles, Revelation, 1:134; Ford, Revelation, pp. 75-56; Mounce, Revelation, p. 140; and Swete, Revelation, p. 75.

substituting εἰσὶν ("are") for ἦσαν ("were")<sup>203</sup> or placing οὐχ ("not") before ἦσαν ("were").<sup>204</sup> The real solution, however, appears to be one of the following: (1) Hebrew parallelism is present here;<sup>205</sup> (2) the καὶ ("and") is epexegetical;<sup>206</sup> or (3) the two clauses are a hysteron proteron<sup>207</sup> in which there is inversion of the logical sequence. Beckwith has demonstrated that this inversion is a common feature of Revelation.<sup>208</sup>

### Seven Spirits of God

Closely connected with the one sitting upon the throne are the seven spirits of God (4:5) called, in temple imagery, seven torches of fire burning continually before the throne. In 1:4 the seven spirits are one of the three persons of the Godhead who greet the seven churches with "grace to you and peace" (1:4). In Rev 4 the seven spirits are placed in a subordinate position to the one sitting upon the throne, as cultic "lamps" or "torches." Elsewhere in Revelation they fulfill a witness role for each covenant of the seven churches (Rev 2-3), and as one of the two who extend the divine invitation for salvation to man (22:17).

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<sup>203</sup> According to the twenty-fifth edition of Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece this is textually supported by P 1 al.

<sup>204</sup> According to the twenty-fifth edition of the Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece this is textually supported by 046 2020 pc.

<sup>205</sup> J. J. O'Rourke, "The Hymns of the Apocalypse," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 30 (1968):400.

<sup>206</sup> Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 504.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., pp. 243-244.

In Rev 4 the seven spirits serve in the role of light for the divine temple (God in the midst of his people). This places them before the one seated upon the throne and therefore also in the midst of the temple. The menorah carried a thematic connotation of life<sup>209</sup> as well as light. This means that the seven spirits serve the one sitting upon the throne by being his means of bringing both the life and light of the divine presence to man. Thus, the seven spirits are the means whereby the one sitting upon the throne ministers to the needs of his covenant people. As shown below,<sup>210</sup> they are paralleled by the "seven eyes" (interpreted as "seven spirits") which minister in all the earth.

#### The Lamb

As shown before,<sup>211</sup> the cosmic search by the divine council for a "worthy" one (5:2, 4) resulted in finding the Lamb who had been slain, and had thus ransomed to God by his blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Further, this Lamb made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on earth (5:9-10).

As pointed out above,<sup>212</sup> the redemption was achieved in a climate of opposition and conflict, as noted by words such as "lion" and "conquered" (5:5), and "slain" and "by thy blood" (5:9). In light of this conflict, redemption is necessary, for it is evident from the covenant context of Revelation that (1) the creation had

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<sup>209</sup>Meyers, Tabernacle Menorah, p. 174.

<sup>210</sup>See pp. 234-235.

<sup>211</sup>Cf. pp. 193-195 above.

<sup>212</sup>Cf. pp. 155-163, 220 above.

gone astray, (2) the kingdom had been lost, and (3) the temple had been desecrated. For the redemption and restoration of creation to occur, and for the covenant promises to be fulfilled, the Lamb must be found "worthy" in the divine council judgment session.

The Lamb is positioned "between (literally, "in the midst of") the throne and among (not in Greek) the four living creatures and among (literally, "in the midst of") the elders" (5:6). This position is very important for salvation. It places the Lamb together with the one sitting upon the throne--implying a union and cooperation between the two in regards to redemption. The Lamb is also positioned in the midst of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. This places the Lamb directly with his people. According to covenant imagery, he is pictured as not only being with the leaders of his people (represented by the twenty-four elders) but also with his people (represented by the four living creatures).<sup>213</sup>

Because the Lamb is in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders (5:6), it may appear that he has more than one position. In reality he has only one. He is in the midst of the temple, where God has united himself with his people by dwelling with them. Thus, by being with the one sitting upon the throne, the Lamb is with his people, or by being with his people the Lamb is with the one sitting upon the throne. In this way he fulfills his triple salvific role of sacrifice, priest, and king.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup>Cf. pp. 154-163 above.

<sup>214</sup>Cf. pp. 162-163 above.

The Lamb's temple role as sacrifice is evident with "slain" and by his "blood" (5:9). In the Old Testament, blood was the means to seal or reaffirm the divine covenant.<sup>215</sup> The Lamb is the paschal lamb of the Passover and the atoning lamb of the daily sacrifice.

The imagery of Rev 5 goes an important step beyond the atoning martyrdom of the Lamb. The slain Lamb is "standing" (5:6). He is alive. He has life. This is extremely important for an interpretation of Revelation where martyrdom of the righteous saints is such a significant theme (e.g., 2:13; 6:9, etc.). Because of the corporate solidarity of the righteous with the Lamb, they also will have life. The imagery of the resurrected slain Lamb serves as the great archetype for the resurrection of the slain righteous saints.

The second role of the Lamb in the temple is that of a priest. He intercedes, or ministers, in the midst of his people as their Redeemer (בִּלְיָא). He avenges their blood (6:10). As the priest or mediator between man and the one seated upon the throne, the Lamb ransoms his people to God through his blood (5:9). He is closely identified with them and is the solution to all their needs (cf. Rev 2-3).

An important aspect of the priestly role of the Lamb is being the "faithful witness" (1:5). He receives the divine "revelation" (1:1) and gives his "testimony" (1:2) of what is to come (1:1). In 4:1 the "first voice" is the same voice of the first vision (1:10-20), namely, that of "one like a son of man" (1:13) who is portrayed as the Lamb in Rev 5. As noted by Beckwith, this makes

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<sup>215</sup>Ford, Revelation, pp. 94-95.

Christ "the agent showing a vision (δεῖξω) of which he himself forms a part."<sup>216</sup> Yet, this is consistent with his priestly role as intermediary between God and man and his priestly redemptive role among men.

Closely connected with the priestly role of the Lamb is the important descriptive detail that the Lamb has "seven eyes" (5:6). These eyes "are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6). This statement clearly links the person and work of the Spirit with the person and role of the Lamb. It also positively links the seven spirits associated with the Lamb with the seven spirits who are before the one sitting upon the throne (4:5). These in turn are identical with the "seven spirits" (1:4) who with the other two persons of the Trinity greet the seven churches of Asia (1:4-5).

Since the "eyes" are "spirits," it is assumed that the work of the seven spirits has something to do with seeing. As generally understood by scholars, the background for the seven eyes as seven spirits sent into all the earth comes from Zech 4. In this passage a gold lampstand is seen with seven lamps (4:2) which are interpreted as "the eyes of the Lord which range through the whole earth" (4:10).

The context of Zech 4 indicates a theme of restoration of the temple and the people of Yahweh after the exile (Zech 1-3). Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple and his hands would complete it (4:9). In this context, the seven lamps are the seven eyes of the Lord that are used to see what is in the earth, and the

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<sup>216</sup> Beckwith, Apocalypse, p. 495.

Spirit is the means by which Yahweh works to bring restoration (4:6). In Zech 5, judgment takes place as the wicked are eliminated from Israel. Thus, Zechariah uses the eyes and lamps in the context of redemption, restoration, and judgment.

Although the seven eyes and spirits of Rev 5 are cast into a divine council judgment session, they closely parallel Zech 4 thematically in redemption and restoration. As the seven eyes, or seven spirits, were the divine agents to fulfill the divine will and covenant after the exile, so also the seven eyes of the Lamb demonstrate how redemption is achieved as he operates through the agency of the "spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (5:6).

The third role of the Lamb is that of a king, as the lion imagery (5:5) establishes. A lion is a royal motif substantiated by the description of Solomon's throne, which had "two lions" standing beside the arm rests (2 Chr 9:18) and "twelve lions" standing on the six steps leading to the throne (2 Chr 9:19). The Lamb is also from the "tribe of Judah" (5:5) on which the patriarchal blessing was given: "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he come to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen 49:10). The Lion is from the root of David (5:5), part of the eternal dynasty as noted in the Nathan covenant prophecy (2 Sam 7:4-17). He is the "shoot from the stump of Jesse", the "branch" which shall grow "out of his roots" (Isa 11:1). Traditionally the Lion, by virtue of his royal role, would be the chief of the armies of the kingdom.<sup>217</sup> The fact that he

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<sup>217</sup>Ford, Revelation, p. 77.

"conquered" (5:5) further substantiates his royal status.

Only one with royal authority could take those he has ransomed and make them a kingdom and then ultimately cause them to reign upon the earth (5:9-10). The "seven horns" of the Lamb demonstrate the extent of his royal role (5:6). Since "horns" have already been linked with royal power and authority,<sup>218</sup> it is evident that the linking of the number "seven" with horns is a means to express the complete and universal kingship of the Lamb. There will be no other rival kingdom because it states that "they shall reign upon the earth" (5:10).

Another of the Lamb's royal roles is to build the temple mentioned in the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Sam 7:13). Since temple means that God is dwelling with his people, the fact that the Lamb ransomed "for God" (5:9) restores the lost relationship between God and his people. The fact that the Lamb made them a kingdom and restored the lost covenant relationship would presuppose that he also builds the ultimate eschatological temple promised in the Davidic covenant. In the kingdom, the Lamb makes the ransomed "priests to our God" (5:10). Since the temple has already been described and emphasized,<sup>219</sup> it can now be stressed that the ransomed are all to serve in a priestly role as the Lamb.

In the creation-redemption theme of Rev 4-5 the Lamb is the pivotal creature. By being the "redeemer," he is the traditional "next of kin" whose relationship is the closest possible between

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<sup>218</sup>Cf. p. 219-220 above.

<sup>219</sup>Cf. pp. 136-169 above.

persons. He is the archetype for redemption and restoration as he fulfills the triple role of sacrifice, priest, and king which results in redemption, restoration, and life. Although the righteous saints are not mentioned as martyrs (sacrifice) in Rev 4-5, the after context makes the point clear (6:10) and the "prayers of the saints" (5:8) may suggest it. Thus they receive life through sacrifice in the same way as the Lamb who was slain but is now "standing" (5:6) or resurrected.

As the Lamb plays a priestly role, so must the righteous saints be "priests to our God" through the agency of the Lamb. As the Lamb has a royal role, so do the righteous saints as a "kingdom" where "they will reign on the earth." As the Lamb is judged worthy for what he has done for them, so they are judged worthy for what they have done and are. When the Lamb receives the scroll from the right hand of the one presiding over the divine council in the final act of the judgment session, the climax for redemption has occurred. The redemption provided by the Lamb has enabled the restoration of creation which is really the restoration of the temple and kingdom.

When the Lamb receives the scroll from the right hand of the one sitting upon the throne, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders burst forth in a "new song" of praise to the Lamb (5:9). The fact that the song is "new" is important to the context. A new song was a common expression in the Psalms "relating to songs sung on festal occasions and celebrating new mercies from God, especially his deliverances from distress"<sup>220</sup> (e.g., Ps 33:3; 40:3;

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<sup>220</sup> Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp. 126-127.

98:1; 144:9; 149:1). These "new" songs in the Psalms have a redemption or judgment theme. In Isa 42:10 a "new" song is sung as the Creator (42:6; 43:1) is about to declare "new things" (42:9). He will redeem his people (43:1, 14) and deliver them (43:2). Thus, in the context of Rev 4-5, a "new song is raised in thanksgiving for the accomplishment of the promised redemption and the advent of the new age."<sup>221</sup> It is a "new" song because of the new development accomplished by the Lamb in the creation-redemption process.

#### Summary of the Involvement of the Trinity in Salvation

The salvation theme of Rev 4-5 has the dual emphasis of creation-redemption. The one sitting upon the throne is praised as the Creator and the Lamb is praised as the Redeemer.

The one sitting upon the throne is presiding over the divine council which traditionally decides issues relating to both creation and redemption. Many of the council members mentioned in Rev 4 reflect the imagery of God's covenant people and therefore the creation-redemption theme. This same theme continues in Rev 5 with the mention of divine council members of the cosmic creation and the redemption of the earthly kingdom. The titles, attributes, and adoration of the one on the throne demonstrate his worthiness to be both Creator and the one presiding over the divine council.

The seven spirits are depicted in a double role. First, they are before the central throne as torches--reflecting their servant role before the throne as agents of the divine presence. Second,

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<sup>221</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

they are the Lamb's eyes which are interpreted to be the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Thus, they are collectively the Spirit agent of the other two persons of the Trinity to do the work on earth connected with the creation-redemption theme.

The Lamb appears in the divine council session when a cosmic search is made for one who is worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the one sitting upon the throne and open its seven seals. The Lamb fulfills a sacrificial role because he has been slain, yet because he is pictured as standing, he has come back to life. He fulfills a priestly role because he is in the midst of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures and has ransomed some from earth to God who will reign on earth. The Lamb fulfills a royal role because he is in the midst of the throne and called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (5:5). As a lion, he engaged in conflict and conquered over his rival. His seven horns indicate his complete rulership of the earth. As the royal son of the Davidic covenant, the Lamb establishes the earthly kingdom and builds the temple so that God can dwell with his people.

The Lamb is the traditional nearest of kin who has an intimate relationship with his people. He makes possible the fulfillment of the covenant promises. He is the Redeemer of the alienated and lost creation. The one sitting upon the throne has, through the judgment of the divine council, accepted the Lamb as worthy to take the seven-sealed scroll and thereby restore the lost inheritance and relationship between God and his people. Thus, the Trinity accomplishes through individual roles and united effort the restoration of creation through the redemption process.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation I have isolated and discussed five principal themes in Rev 4-5: "temple theology," "ontological cosmic unity," "judgment," "covenant and royal theology," and "involvement of the Trinity in salvation." Although herein treated separately for the sake of clarity, they must be recognized as interlocking elements, each contributing its part to a unified whole. Imagery discussed for one theme must often be repeated because of its significance for other themes. In some of the preceding chapters I have surveyed these themes in the Old Testament and in Rev 1-3 in order to ascertain both their broader biblical framework and their preceding context in the book of Revelation itself. The following summary assumes this background in focusing specifically on Rev 4-5.

The temple imagery in Rev 4-5 can be rightly understood only when due consideration is given to the position, role, function, and meaning of each temple element in the general context of ancient Israelite temple theology. Central to this theology is the concept of God dwelling in the midst of his people. Israel's wilderness camp depicted this with the portable tabernacle, later replaced by the Jerusalem temple/palace of God as Deity and King.

Themes from this Israelite temple context are present in both the setting and imagery of the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5. That

scene begins with God seated upon his throne in the temple. The throne corresponds to the ark in the most holy place of the temple. Its jasper, carnelian, and emerald were the colors of the stones on the breastplate of the high priest, which represented the tribes of Benjamin (youngest son of Jacob), Reuben (oldest son of Jacob), and Judah (from whence the Messiah came) in the camp of ancient Israel.

Around the central throne are twenty-four elders who traditionally served in a royal, priestly, and judicial capacity. They are clothed in the white garments of the temple priests, and their being twenty-four in number reflects the organization of the levitical priests at the temple. The seven torches of fire correspond to the temple menorah, and the crystal-like sea of glass is the equivalent of the temple laver/molten sea. The four living creatures are the cherubim or throne guardians which were located above the ark and on the surrounding temple walls. These living creatures also reflect the camp of Israel in the wilderness in that their faces correspond to the emblems on the standards of the four chief tribes which surrounded the sanctuary in the positions of the four cardinal points of the compass.

The Lamb is an image of the sacrificial, priestly, and royal roles of Jesus Christ in the temple/palace. He is the sacrificial lamb that was slain. He is the priest who has ransomed the righteous to God by his blood, and through the imagery of his eyes he ministers to men on earth. His royal role is depicted by his seven horns and by the imagery of the conquering Lion from the tribe of Judah, and is further implied by his ability to take the scroll from the hand of the one sitting upon the throne.

The ancient temple services are reflected in the priestly role of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders who have golden bowls full of incense, interpreted to be the prayers of the saints. Temple adoration is depicted in the anthems of praise to the Lamb and the one sitting upon the throne.

An ontological cosmic unity is inherent in the temple vision of Rev 4-5. This feature of the vision is in harmony with the general conceptualization in both the Old and New Testaments, wherein heaven is referred to as God's throne and the earth as his footstool (Isa 66:1; Acts 9:49-50). Indeed, in Rev 4-5 a combined heaven, earth, and sea form the larger whole.

The description of the heavenly court scene begins in Rev 4 with a door opened in heaven and a command to John to ascend from earth into the heavenly realm. There he sees around the central throne the colors of jasper and carnelian which reflect the earthly camp of Israel, whose four cardinal tribes are also represented, as we have just observed, in the four cherubim. The emerald color of the rainbow is emblematic for the tribe of Judah. Twenty-four thrones surround the central throne, and these are occupied by twenty-four elders, who correspond to the earthly elders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Cosmic unity is prominent in Rev 5. A loud cry from a strong angel results in a cosmic search for a worthy one able to open the scroll in the hand of the one sitting upon the central throne. Once the Lamb is found who can open the scroll, beings from the realms of heaven, earth, and sea join in cosmic adoration. When the ontological parameters of the temple description of Rev 4-5 are

considered in their entirety, there emerges a cosmic temple embracing heaven, earth, and sea. The Christian believer, while on earth, would be able to sit with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:4-6) and assemble in festal gathering in the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22).

In Rev 5 the portrayal is that of a traditional divine council in session in this cosmic temple, presided over by the one sitting upon the central throne. The issue before this divine council is, Who will be able to open the seven-sealed scroll in the hand of the one sitting upon the throne? For the council to make its decision, an investigative-type judgment must first determine the worthiness of the candidate--the Lamb--to open the scroll. A positive judgment of the Lamb is rendered on the evidence that he: (1) conquered, (2) was slain, (3) ransomed men to God through his blood, and (4) made the ransomed a kingdom and priests to God.

There is a corporate solidarity between the Lamb and his redeemed ones, so that the judgment of the Lamb also extends to the righteous in a corporate sense. A subsequent heavenly "supreme-court" pre-advent judgment vindicates the righteous individually, on the basis of their being indeed genuine followers of the Lamb to the very end--or, as indicated in Rev 18:4-6, on the basis of their having heeded God's call to "come out of Babylon." That later judgment has, as the reverse side of the favorable verdict in behalf of God's people, a negative verdict against Babylon, the oppressor (Rev 18:6-7, 20).

In Rev 5 the scroll which the Lamb takes from the one sitting upon the throne is sealed with seven seals. In harmony with ancient custom, each of these seals contains the identification of the legal

witness represented through the seal, so that seven seals provide legal validity to the contents of the scroll. The events of the seven seals parallel the events of the eschatological discourse of Christ (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) and strongly suggest that the seals are the events which the righteous saints pass through while they wait for the final messianic kingdom to be established.

Contrary to the views of most modern interpreters, there is evidence for interpreting the seven-sealed scroll as the Lamb's book of life. The evidence includes: (1) the occurrences of the phrase (or equivalent) "Lamb's book of life" (13:8; 20:12), (2) the reaction of those who have a definite stake in the contents of the scroll, (3) the corporate solidarity between the Lamb as Redeemer and the righteous saints as the redeemed, and (4) the parallel passage of Dan 7, which describes the same corporate solidarity between the saints of the Most High and one like a son of man who receives the saints of the Most High as his covenant inheritance. If the correlation between the scroll and the Lamb's book of life is correct, the scroll contains the names of the righteous saints who will be citizens of the final messianic kingdom of the Lamb.

The temple, its services, and judgments were all part of the larger context of covenant and royal theology of ancient Israel. One basic biblical covenant model is that of the suzerainty treaty, with God being the supreme king (suzerain) and his people being corulers (vassals). Revelation echoes the structure and imagery of this covenant in its messages to the Christian community of seven churches--a community, which, like Israel in its covenant with Yahweh, is a kingdom whose citizens serve as priests.

In Rev 4-5, the jasper and carnelian colors are symbolic reminders of the ancient covenant kingdom of Israel. As stated earlier, the twenty-four elders are the traditional ruling figures of the twelve tribes of Israel, who in this setting fulfill a priestly role with lyres and golden bowls of incense; and the four living creatures, representing the four chief tribes of Israel, are the traditional throne guardians. The rainbow around the throne reflects the divine mercy and surety of the covenant promises.

The Lamb is the royal son in the line of David who, through the imagery of seven horns, has complete rulership and power. He is the Lion who, as chief military leader, has conquered and made his ransomed ones a kingdom of priests who will rule with him on earth. As we have also noted above, the Lamb fulfills, as well, the sacrificial and priestly temple roles. He is the sacrificial lamb who was martyred and resurrected, and he is a priest who, through the imagery of seven eyes, ministers through his Spirit to those on earth.

The positive judgment of worthiness rendered the Lamb by the divine council results in his being able to take the scroll from the one sitting upon the throne and to open its seals. This activity portrays his right to receive the lost inheritance, the righteous saints. Because the divine covenant is conditional for the followers of the Lamb, a close relationship must be maintained with the covenant giver and a correct response made to the covenant stipulations. The judgment of the righteous through the Lamb as their corporate leader is necessary before the final covenant rewards can be dispensed and covenant fulfillment completed. It forms the

basis both for judicial vindication of the righteous and for bestowal of their eternal rewards.

In Rev 4-5, all three members of the Godhead are involved in the scene depicted. The one sitting upon the central throne presides over the divine-council judgment session and receives the adoration of council members for his role as Creator. The Lamb appears as another central figure, and the adoration rendered to him emphasizes his redeemer role as the next of kin to the righteous. The Holy Spirit is symbolized by the "seven spirits" who function in two stated roles: first, they serve the one sitting on the throne; and second, they are the "eyes" of the Lamb sent out into all the earth to minister. The involvement of the Trinity in salvation for humanity results in the twofold thematic emphasis of creation and redemption. That which was lost after creation is restored through the covenant process of redemption.

The covenant structure/format of Revelation implies the need for covenant fulfillment, and the book's messages depict the same. The sovereign God establishes his covenant with the Christian community of seven churches, who are his earthly temple and kingdom. Through the faithful covenant witness of Jesus Christ the seven churches receive covenant stipulations that are necessary before the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promises. The earthly experiences and struggles of Christ's covenant people with the evil forces depicted in Revelation constitute the arena in which Christ's true followers are made manifest and in which their covenant relationship with their Lord is demonstrably validated.

Thus, the preparation of the righteous for covenant rewards

occurs within a climate of fierce hostility and conflict between the forces of good and evil. If they continue as faithful covenant corulers with their Suzerain in this struggle, they will indeed be victorious "overcomers" and will ultimately receive the covenant blessings and promises.

In short, then, the heavenly court scene of Rev 4-5 with its divine-council judgment session is significant within Revelation as a key element in that book's portrayal of an extended process of divine judgment and covenant fulfillment. That judgment session of Rev 4-5 depicts the initial phase of this extended process: namely, the Lamb's being determined worthy to redeem his righteous followers who are in covenant relationship and corporate solidarity with him.

The process continues thereafter for the righteous saints themselves as their faithfulness in their lives, witness, and deeds is displayed in the midst of fierce hostility, and this faithfulness becomes legal evidence in their favor, witnessing for them in heaven's pre-advent "supreme-court" session in which they receive their judicial vindication over against the false charges and unjust verdicts of their oppressors. This "conflict-and-judgment" motif is undoubtedly a major reason why the book of Revelation repeatedly demonstrates so vividly the righteous character of the saints and the evil character of the wicked.

Once the judicial or "investigatory" process of judgment has been completed, covenant execution occurs in the dispensing of the final covenant rewards of blessings and curses. The wicked are destroyed by the second death (20:12-15), and the righteous receive eternal life in the "new Jerusalem" and "new earth" (21:1-22:5)

wherein God himself will dwell with his people (21:3; 22:3) and where there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, nor pain, inasmuch as the "former things have passed away" and the one seated upon the throne has made "all things new" (21:4-5). The covenant has now reached full fruition as the eternal messianic kingdom is fully established.

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