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**Revelation 4-5:
The Blueprint of the Accomplishment of God's Kingdom**

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Abstract

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By Jonggoo Lee

Revelation is not a timetable telling when future particular events will happen, nor is it full of bloody vengeance. These misunderstandings result from the book's puzzling structure, its mixed literary genres and its complex apocalyptic portion with many interludes (4-22). To get a better understanding of its structure and consistent message, I propose that chapters 4-5, as the blueprint of God's kingdom, connect the letter section (1-3) and the apocalyptic section (6-22) and that the relationship between the two-fold Christology and two-fold ecclesiology of "suffering and victory" affects its structure. Through "literary" and "historical-critical" exegesis, we come to know that God's holiness and the Lamb's victory in heaven depicted in 4-5 are intended to be contrasted with the unfaithful church on earth (1-3). Revelation pictures the three series of seven (6-20) as the process of bringing the eschatological presence of God's holiness and Jesus' victory from heaven (4-5) to earth (21-22). In addition, Revelation links "the Lamb's two-fold image of suffering and victory" in chapter 5 to its portrait of "the two-fold ecclesiology." To give encouragement and hope to the church on earth, Revelation connects in an apocalyptic way the earthly church, which suffers as a faithful witness, to the heavenly church, which has already triumphed and shares the Lamb's victory and God's glory. In God's kingdom, these two churches on earth and heaven become one whole holy church as the Lamb's bride (21:2-3; 9-27); the bride (ecclesiology) and the Lamb (Christology) then become one at the wedding. This two-fold Christology and ecclesiology, forming the tensional structure of Revelation, result from the unique Christian experience of the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Revelation admonishes its original readers and us to repent and to live as sacrificial witnesses "here and now" in the tension between the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom (3:3; 16:15). In this sense, chapters 4-5, as the blueprint of God's kingdom, play a key role.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
	A. Misunderstandings of Revelation	1
	B. The Problem of Structure	3
	C. A Brief Review of Studies on Structure	8
II.	Genre: Similarities and Differences between Apocalyptic Literature and Revelation	13
III.	The Seven Churches on Earth in 1-3	19
	A. The Political and Religious Situation and the Purpose of Writing	19
	B. The Seven Messages to the Churches in Asia	24
IV.	Holy Worship in Heaven: The Blueprint of God's Kingdom in 4-5 as Main Text	26
	A. God's Holy Throne	27
	B. Twenty-four Elders in Heaven	30
	C. The Lamb's Entrée	32
	D. Universal Praises for God's Holiness and the Lamb's Victory	38
	E. The Lamb's Suffering and Victory: the Two-fold Christology	39
V.	The Suffering Church and the Victorious Church: the Two-fold Ecclesiology	41
	A. 144,000 on Earth (7:1-8)	44
	B. A Great Multitude in Heaven (7:9-17)	45
	C. Two Witnesses on Earth (11:1-13)	46
	D. A Woman on Earth (12)	51
	E. 144,000 in Heaven (14:1-5)	55
	F. The Lamb's Bride in Heaven (19:7-9)	56
VI.	The Accomplishment of God's Kingdom in 21-22	57
	A. The Realization of God's Holiness and the Lamb's Victory	57
	B. The Unification of the Churches on Earth and in Heaven, and of the Lamb (Christology) and His Bride (Ecclesiology)	58
VII.	Conclusion	60
	*Bibliography	63

I. Introduction

A. Misunderstandings of Revelation

Revelation has been loved and misunderstood by enthusiasts and heretics throughout the Christian history. Today, it is also one of the most popular books in the Bible because those who are curious about their future tend to think of Revelation as a timetable showing when particular events are to take place at the end of the world. For this reason, even Christians have been interested in the odd beasts, terrifying wars, and catastrophes in Revelation, rather than in its consistent message.¹

Recently, the “2012 doomsday prophecy” has drawn attention because people have become nervous and curious about the date of the end due to a series of significant disasters: “9/11 Terror” and wars, “2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami,” “2010 Haiti Earthquake,” “2011 Eastern Japan Great Earthquake and Tsunami,” “2011 Japan Nuclear Disaster,” severe famine in Africa, and global warming caused by human beings. Using such disasters, mass media has succeeded in promoting misgivings about the doomsday.² Movies based on the three series of seven catastrophes in Revelation have been released, such as “Sunshine (2007)” and “2012 (2009).”

On top of that, ideologies based on Revelation have appeared and terrified ordinary people. For instance, nowadays in Korea, “Sin-chun-ji” (新_{new}天_{heaven}地_{earth}; A New Heaven and Earth) is making significant trouble. Its adherents interpret Revelation literally, and contend that existing churches are impure and spoiled; only they made up the “144,000” presented in Revelation and will enter God’s new heaven and earth. Their mission is to

¹ Brian K Blount, *Revelation; A commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 22.

² Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment. 2nd ed.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress: 1998), 1.

fulfill the number 144,000 by taking people out of existing churches. They dispatch their devoted members to existing large churches to destroy them and take away their members.

On the other hand, some educated people still do not respect Revelation as God's word because of the fanatical that "the blood of the martyrs will be avenged by the bloody destruction of their enemies" led by God. They think that this "blood for blood" attitude could not match Jesus' saying that one should love one's enemies.³

However, Revelation is not a timetable telling when future particular events will happen, nor is it full of bloody vengeance. Throughout the Bible, it is often said that no one knows about that day or hour of Jesus' second coming, but only God, so we have to stay awake and live as God's children now and here in the world (Matt. 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-37; Acts 1:7; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:2). Furthermore, Revelation itself warns us about that, saying "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (3:3); and "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him" (16:15).

Like other books of the New Testament, Revelation, based on the Christian experience of the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ,⁴ admonishes its original readers and us to repent and to be awake "here and now" in the tension between the "already" and "not yet". Through Christians' sacrificial but powerful witness (11: 1-13), God gives unbelievers chances to repent (11:11-14; 14:6-7; 16:9-11) and to take part in God's kingdom (21:24, 26; 22:2). God's salvation in Revelation is also open to gentiles

³ Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse: New Testament Message. Vol. 22* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), ix.

⁴ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament, 2nd ed.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 578; Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation, 2-4.*

(15:4).⁵ Nevertheless, we have still tried to find the day or hour in the jungle of difficult symbols and signs in Revelation, or regarded God as a bloody tyrant. In such a situation, I, as a pastor and theologian, have felt an obligation to help Christians understand the true message of Revelation.

B. The Problem of Structure

All these misunderstandings of Revelation result from its puzzling structure and distinctive literary form in which John in exile was able to convey his visions to his readers safely. There are some obstacles to understanding its structure.

First, one of the problems of structure is its complex literary genre, especially the relation between two major parts with different literary genres: chapters 1-3 have a “letter form,” and 4-22 have an “apocalyptic form.” Revelation has three literary genres: (1) apocalypse, (2) prophecy, and (3) letter.⁶ It is certain that John wants his readers to know that his book is a letter (1:4-5; 22:21). But the preface with “apocalypse” (1:1) and the major part (4:1-22:9) will make whoever tries to read it as a letter severely frustrated.⁷ On top of that, while John uses “apocalypse” just one time (1:1), he uses prophetic language many times throughout the book to describe his book. The noun “prophecy” is used seven times (1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), the verb “to prophesy” twice (10:11; 11:3), and the title “prophet” eight times (10:7; 11:10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6,9).⁸

Therefore, the problem of the mixed literary genre causes us to fail to understand the structure and consistent narrative of Revelation. In order to obtain its consistent message,

⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 139.

⁶ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 164-170.

⁷ Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, x.

⁸ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 582.

we first have to solve the relation between chapters 1-3 in “letter form,” and chapters 4-22 in “apocalyptic form.” From my experience, most preachers, if they preach on Revelation, chose their sermon texts only from Rev 1-3 or 20-22.

Secondly, one of the major problems in interpreting the apocalyptic part (Rev 4-22) has long been the determination of whether the seven seals (6:1-8:1), the seven trumpets (8:6-11:19), the seven bowls (15:5-16:21), and various interludes and digressions recapitulate earlier sections or whether John intends to present a chronological sequence of them.⁹ Furthermore, numerous interludes or doublets inserted between the three series of seven seem to interrupt the revelatory narrative: the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, the judgment of the world in 14:14-20 and 20:11-15, description of the heavenly Jerusalem in 21:1-8 and 21:9-27,¹⁰ the salvation of the martyrs in 7:9-17 and 21:3-8.¹¹

Though John uses the word “then” here and there in his account of his visionary experience (4:1; 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1), it is apparent that not all the visions are arranged in a chronological order.¹² For example, the vision of the woman, son, and dragon reaches back to the birth of Jesus.¹³ The seventh trumpet in 11:15-19 brings together heavenly hymns, a vision of redemption, and cosmic catastrophes just as does 21:3-8. For this reason, Bruce M. Metzger asserts that “Such features in Revelation should make us wary of turning Revelation into a kind of almanac or time chart of the last days based on the sequence of the visions that John experienced.”¹⁴

⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5: World Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 52A (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1997), xci.

¹⁰ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. by Howard C. Kee, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 463.

¹¹ Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, xii.

¹² Brian K. Blount, *Revelation; A commentary*, 21.

¹³ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 548.

¹⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 19.

Even though Revelation has a mixed literary form, it was a letter to Christians John already knew and for whom he felt a pastoral responsibility. This means that it was written to specific Christians in a specific place, time, and situation by the prophet John, who knew their particular situations and problems they faced, just as Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians to address their particular problems. In this sense, Revelation is a “public pastoral letter.”¹⁵ In addition, this letter was not written for private, silent reading as we know now, but was intended to be read aloud in the worship service of the churches in the province of Asia (1:3).¹⁶ According to Boring, John stands in the tradition of the Pauline churches and is influenced by the Pauline letter form and its use in worship.¹⁷ Many praises to God or the Lamb also show that Revelation was designed for worship (1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 19:1). In order to be read in worship, John must have used specific words, thoughts, symbols, and narrative framework which were all familiar and understandable to the original hearer-readers.¹⁸

For this reason, in order to make Revelation understandable for its use in worship (1:3), John used a narrative structure which was familiar to his hearer-readers.¹⁹ Since John shows his interest in “God’s kingdom”²⁰ by introducing himself as a participant in “the kingdom in Jesus” (1:9), Chapters 4-5 which show the heavenly realization of God’s Holiness (4) and the Lamb’s victory (5) function as the blueprint of the accomplishment of

¹⁵ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation : Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville : John Knox Press, 1989), 5. Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 166.

¹⁶ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 459; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 10.

¹⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 6.

¹⁸ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 550.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 549.

²⁰ According to John Bright, “the Kingdom of God” is “the total message of the Bible” from Genesis (Hebrew 11:10; cf. Gen. 12:1) to Revelation (Rev. 21:2) and was the central thing with which Jesus was concerned (Mark 1:14-5). He admits that this insight came from W. Eichrodt’s *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 7-17; Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 2.

God's kingdom (21-22).

In chapters 1-3 of the book, John addresses the seven churches on earth where God's kingdom had already begun because of Jesus' first coming, because they are wavering in their faith in Jesus due to hardships. In fact, God is present as the Spirit in the church which has experienced the salvation of Jesus. But the seven messages reveal that the seven churches are sinful in the sight of God, so that Jesus asks them to repent.

By contrast, in chapter 4-5, the stage changes from earth to heaven, where God's holiness and the Lamb's victory through death are fully praised by all the creatures "in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea" (5:13). This means that God's will is already done and God's kingdom is already accomplished in heaven. Revelation pictures the three series of seven (6-20) as the process of the eschatological presence of God's holiness and Jesus' victory from heaven to earth (21-22). The Lamb's leading of the series of seven and the language of "theophany" used for the manifestation of God's holiness (4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21)²¹ strongly support this idea. The immediate presence of God's holiness is an invitation to God's kingdom for those who repent through the church's sacrificial witness, or judgment for those who reject God's prophets, and stick to the worship of the beast. In this respect, chapters 4-5 function as the blueprint of God's kingdom as well as a bridge between the first part (1-3) and the latter part (6-22).

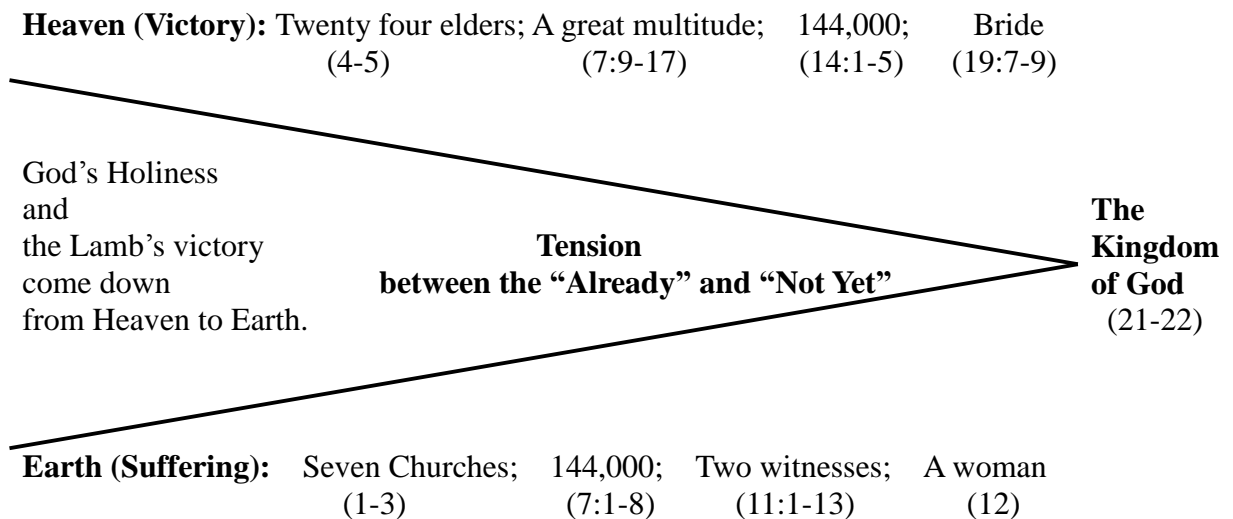
The structure of Revelation is made clearer by the relation between Christology and ecclesiology. Revelation links "the Lamb's two-fold image of suffering and victory" in chapter 5 to its portrait of a "two-fold ecclesiology": (1) God's people in heaven who have already triumphed, that is, the twenty-four elders (chaps. 4-5), a great multitude (7:9-17),

²¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 41-2; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 293-5; Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 545..

144,000 (14:1-5), and the bride (19:7-9); and (2) suffering believers as witnesses on earth, that is, the seven churches (chaps. 2-3), 144,000 (7:1-8), the two witnesses (11:1-13), and the woman in chapter 12. To give encouragement and hope to the church on earth, Revelation connects the earthly church which suffers as a faithful witness to the heavenly church which has already triumphed and shares the Lamb's victory and God's glory. In God's kingdom, two churches on earth and heaven become one whole holy church as the Lamb's bride (21:2-3; 9-27), which means the perfect and permanent unification of Jesus (Christology) and the whole church (ecclesiology).

In this way, the structure of Revelation has a "conic spiral,"²² intensified movement" toward the accomplishment of God's kingdom. This two-fold and conic spiral structure connected with the two-fold Christology and ecclesiology results from the unique Christian experience of the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of God's kingdom.²³

This diagram will help.



²² Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 5.

²³ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 578; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 215-243; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 33.

— **The Two-Fold and Conic Spiral Structure Based on the Two-Fold Christology and Ecclesiology** —

Therefore, the following would be the assertions of this paper:

- (1) Chapters 4-5, as the blueprint of God’s kingdom, play a key role in understanding the structure of Revelation.
- (2) This structure of Revelation is made clearer in light of the relation between two-fold Christology and two-fold ecclesiology.
- (3) This tensional structure connected with the two-fold Christology and ecclesiology results from the unique Christian experience of the tension between the “already” and the “not yet” of God’s kingdom.

C. A Brief Review of Studies on Structure

Many attempts have been made to solve the difficult problems caused by Revelation’s mixed genre and structure. There are two major methods. The first one is “source criticism.” More source-critical analyses of Revelation have been proposed than for any other New Testament composition. Most of them were made from 1875 to 1925 when scholars showed boundless self confidence in their ability to dissect biblical compositions into separate sources.²⁴ This approach lays emphasis on the disagreement of episodes and tries to find various written sources that were combined into the final form of Revelation. There are several major source-critical theories. 1) “Compilation theories,” which suppose that two or more originally separate apocalypses were joined together to form Revelation. 2) “Revision theories,” which assume that a single extensive apocalyptic composition was expanded by a later editor, or an original Christian apocalypse was revised and augmented

²⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cvi.

by a later editor or series of editors, perhaps by a single author. 3) “Fragmentary theories,” which presume that various units of texts were joined together by John into Revelation.²⁵

According to source criticism, the problems of the mixed genre (letter form in chaps 1-3, apocalyptic form in chaps 4-22) and the complicated apocalyptic part with many digressive interludes (4-22) all result from the combining, expansion, or revision of various written sources or fragments.²⁶ Therefore, the complex prehistory behind the final text should be studied “diachronically.” In fact, this approach works well for apocalyptic literature because much of this literature was characteristically copied, combined, revised, and expanded.²⁷ But it cannot give us exact information about the complex prehistory of Revelation, nor can help us to see Revelation as a whole. Werner G. Kümmel points out that “none of these hypotheses of source criticism can make clear why and how an author would have combined, added, or inserted.”²⁸ In addition, the “linguistic homogeneity” of Revelation found by recent analysis of language and style makes the validity of these hypotheses questionable, particularly “compilation theories.”²⁹

The second approach to structural problems in Revelation is “literary criticism.” Recognizing that Revelation has an overall unity of language and style, this method respects the final form of Revelation and tries to find one narrative within it.³⁰ In this method, Revelation’s mixed genre, complicated structure, and numerable interludes are the author’s elaborate literary devices. I will mention three important views on understanding the three series of seven and many interludes: 1) “recapitulation theory,” 2) “the series of

²⁵ Ibid., cvi- cxvii.

²⁶ Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 543.

²⁷ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxxii.

²⁸ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 464.

²⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cix.

³⁰ Ibid., cvi.

seven,” and 3) “intensification theory.”

“Recapitulation theory” assumes that the repetitions are used to describe the same future eschatological events.³¹ For example, the plagues of the seven trumpets are very similar to those of the seven bowls, and the salvation of the just is repeated (7:9-17). In this sense, the repetitions could be part of the design of the author.³² But Werner Kümmel points out that in fact, the text contains no sort of indication of an intentional repetition because the bowls clearly shows a movement beyond the trumpets.³³

“The series of seven” uses the important number “seven” to understand the complex structure. Actually, “seven,” which is commonly understood to signify completeness, is used 54 times in Revelation.³⁴ The important thing is that the author explicitly mentions four groups of seven to structure major parts of the story: ① seven churches (2:1-3:22), ② seven seals (6:1-8:1), ③ seven trumpets (8:2-11:18), and ④ seven bowls (15:1-16:21). Many scholars have tried to identify more parts based on the number seven. Yarbrow Collins proposed six groups of seven³⁵: ① the seven messages (1-3), ② the seven seals (6:1-8:5), ③ the seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), ④ seven unnumbered visions (12:1-15:4), ⑤ the seven bowls (15:1-16:20) with Babylon appendix (17:1-19:10), and ⑥ seven unnumbered visions (19:11-21:8) with Jerusalem appendix (21:9-22:5). According to Aune, the use of the designation “unnumbered” is somewhat unconvincing, because the author is perfectly able to use the number seven explicitly when he wishes to. On top of that, the two appendices in 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22:5 are extensive parts that Yarbrow Collins cannot integrate into

³¹ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 466.

³² Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, xii.

³³ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 466.

³⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xciii.

³⁵ Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, xii.-xiii.

Revelation's main structure.³⁶

“Intensification theory”³⁷ suggests that the three series of seven, the seven seals (5:1-8:1), the seven trumpets (8:2-11:18), and the seven bowls (15:1-16:21) exhibit a special structural relationship. The seventh seal (8:1), separated from the sixth seal by an interlude on the protection of the 144,000 (7:1-17), contains within itself all the plagues released by the seven trumpets and seven bowls that follow. Furthermore, the seventh trumpet, which is again separated from the sixth trumpet by interludes (10:1-11:13), includes within itself the plagues of the following seven bowls. The seventh bowl is not separated from the sixth bowl. Finally, with the series of divinely caused plagues inflicted on the people of the world, it ends with the decisive proclamation “It is done!” (16:17).³⁸ This view arises from a close observation on the text.

Boring contends that the structure of Revelation does not fit a neat scheme of recapitulation and it moves forward “bringing previous scenes before the imagination in new and intensified light, but never in some predictable way.”³⁹ However, the lack of neatness and predictability in the structure of Revelation is the result not only of John's psychology of communication but also his theological concern. John incorporated his twenty-one plagues into three sevens in familiar apocalyptic style for his hearer-readers' memory. And he sprinkled anticipatory announcements of the coming salvation throughout the woes because it is too much to ask for the suffering hearer-readers to wait until the coming disasters are all described before hearing a word of hope. This structure reinforces his theology that the future is in the sovereign hand of God and already affects the

³⁶ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xciv.

³⁷ I named it “intensification theory” because there has been no formal name of it.

³⁸ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xciv.

³⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 32.

present.⁴⁰

Therefore, this literary-critical approach gives weight to the final text of Revelation rather than the prehistory behind the text. So, while source criticism is a “diachronic method,” this literary criticism is a “synchronic method.” All these approaches demonstrate that the structure of Revelation is not simple.

In addition to theories about structure, I need to briefly mention four interpretations, concerning when and how the visions of 6:1-20:21 are fulfilled:⁴¹ (1) “Non-historical” or “idealist interpretation,” which supposes that the visions depict principles of spiritual war, not specific events. (2) “Church-historical” interpretation, which assumes that 6:1-18:24 offers a basically chronological outline of the course of church history from John’s time to the end of the world. (3) “End-historical,” “futurist,” “dispensationalist” interpretation, which supposes that the events will occur in the last few years of world history. (4) “Contemporary-historical,” “preterist,” or “historical-critical” interpretation, which attempts to determine the meaning of a text in its original historical context before finding its future meaning to readers.

Of these four interpretations, the “Church-historical” interpretation has been the most popular throughout the Christian history. But this interpretation is dangerous because it treats Revelation like a cosmic calendar giving clues to the end of the world. But the visions are not arranged in a chronological order.

In interpreting Revelation, we can use these interpretations except for the “Church-history” interpretation because the symbols and images in Revelation enjoy “multiple

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company: 2000), 27-37; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 47-51.

fulfillments.”⁴² Nevertheless, we have to put great emphasis on the “historical-critical” interpretation. Like Paul’s letters, Revelation was written as a pastoral letter to address concrete problems of its original hearer-readers in a given space and time. After finding what this book meant to the first readers, we can apply its true message to our time and space today. J. Kallas’ remark is helpful.⁴³

There is a futuristic thrust to the book as the author and the audience peers ahead to the close of the age. And certainly, there is a timeless quality to the book which transcends the immediate struggle of that past day. But those emphases and ideas are not the primary point of the book. This book, like all the books of the New Testament, was not written in a vacuum, independent of the circumstances of the writer and readers. All of the books of the New Testament find their first and most significant meaning in the lives of the first people to read them. Any approach to any of the New Testament books which does not recognize that fact will simply be totally incapable of comprehending the New Testament.

II. Genre: Similarities and Differences between Apocalyptic Literature and Revelation

As I mentioned, Revelation contains three literary genres: (1) apocalypse, (2) prophecy, and (3) letter; I have already referred to some features of Revelation as a letter and a prophecy. Now I will examine Revelation as an apocalyptic in detail because this book is closely associated with Jewish apocalyptic literature. This examination will be helpful in understanding the structure and message of Revelation. I begin with some features of Jewish apocalyptic literature.

⁴² Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 37.

⁴³ James Kallas, *Revelation: God & Satan in the Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), 29-30.

1. Apocalyptic literature contains many fantastic elements:⁴⁴ heavenly journey (1 Enoch 14-16; 46; 60:1-6; 71; 2 Enoch 20-1; Ap. Abr. 9-18),⁴⁵ heavenly interpreter (4 Ezra 10:38-54; 12:10-36; 13:21-56; 2 Bar. 56-74),⁴⁶ eschatological phenomena from heaven as a means of disclosure of otherworldly things, mythical material, fabulous beasts, significant numbers, and cosmic catastrophes. It is because it is an underground literature written in a secret code to comfort those experiencing persecution.⁴⁷
2. The real authors use a pseudonym such as Enoch, Abraham, or Ezra because they wish to claim the authority of an ancient prophetic tradition more than an authority of their own.⁴⁸
3. This literature rewrites the past history in a prophetic form as if the events were predicted a long time ago.⁴⁹ Daniel 7-12 is a good example.
4. The authors of this literature view the universe as divided into two camps: good and evil. These camps are engaged in a long, severe struggle. Behind the conflict are supernatural powers (God and Satan) at work among people and institutions.⁵⁰
5. History consists of two ages. This present age is occupied by the wicked and God seems to lose his control of this world. When evil is so overwhelming that there is no human hope, God intervenes and begins the new age. Since finally God conquers evil,

⁴⁴ John J. Collins, in a 1979 *Semeia* volume, offered the now-classic definition of apocalyptic literature: “ ‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 14.

⁴⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁷ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 50.

⁴⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 11.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 17-8.

dualism is overcome in Jewish monotheism.⁵¹

6. God's salvation and victory is depicted as an event to occur in the far future.

Therefore, this literature is not open to anybody but sealed until the end of the world (Dan 12:4, 9).

7. There is a sharp distinction between the children of light and darkness. To the children of darkness is not given any chance to repent. God's salvation is only open to God's children.

“Apocalyptic” is not firmly fixed literary genre,⁵² so not all the writings share all the features. Revelation also shares some, but not all, of these features: heavenly journey (Rev. 4-5), heavenly interpreter (17:7-18), mythical material (12), fabulous beasts (13, 18), significant numbers (for example, 3, 7, 10, 12), eschatological phenomena from heaven as a means of disclosure of otherworldly things, and cosmic catastrophes (plagues of the three sevens).

But there are also critical differences from Jewish apocalyptic literature. John introduces his writing, saying “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). The word “revelation” appears here just one time in the book. Even though Revelation uses apocalyptic symbols, Revelation is distinctive of the apocalyptic genre because of the Christian confession that Jesus was crucified, risen, and enthroned, and would return to us.⁵³ Especially, like other books in the New Testament, the unique Christian experience of the “already” and “not yet” of God's kingdom in Jesus makes significant difference between Revelation and Jewish

⁵¹ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 52.

⁵² Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 537.

⁵³ Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, trans. into Korean by Doowhan Park, (Seoul: Korea Theological Study Institute, 1997), 12-15.

apocalyptic literature.⁵⁴

1. Revelation does not offer the interpretation of the past. Instead, it tells about what is happening now in the churches in Asia and what will take place in the end of the world (1:1, 19; 4:1). In Jewish apocalypses, Messiah's coming and His kingdom are depicted as an event taken place in the far future. However, Christians with the experience of risen Christ confess that Jesus Christ, as the Messiah, already came and started God's kingdom among us, and that the kingdom will be accomplished by Jesus second coming in the future. Revelation proclaims that Jesus has already conquered (1:5; 4:21; 5:5; 17:14), and He is who is, who was, and who is to come (1:4). The triumph of God has already realized in Heaven (Rev. 4-5), and Jesus' resurrection is the pledge of God's cosmic victory over evil (19-20).⁵⁵ Therefore, Revelation shows a well-balanced theology between "realized eschatology" and "futuristic eschatology."⁵⁶
2. Unlike Jewish apocalypses, Revelation is not pseudonymous, but John writes in his own name (1:1, 4, 9, 22:8). Since he lives between Jesus' first coming and His second coming, his own authority is greater than that of his predecessors who lived before Jesus came to the world. In other words, he is experiencing the final eschatological fulfillment to which the whole prophetic tradition of the Old Testament had ultimately pointed. Of course, John's authority lies not in himself but in the revelation of Jesus Christ to which he bears prophetic witness (1:1-2).⁵⁷
3. This book of Revelation needs to be not sealed but open to everyone because God's kingdom has been started and will be accomplished in the near future by Jesus. While

⁵⁴ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 578.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 578.

⁵⁶ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 4.

⁵⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 11.

an angel tells Daniel: “Keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end” (Dan. 12: 4, 9), John’s angel says to him, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (22:10; cf. 1:3).

4. Revelation puts great emphasis on the total sovereignty of God and the Son. In Jewish apocalypses, God’s final victory and salvation will come at the end of the world, so that this present world is occupied by Satan. From this perspective, all the persecutions and difficulties God’s people undergo come from Satan not from God. On the other hand, Revelation has a totally different view. The sovereignty of God and the Son is not a future hope, but a present fact (1:8; 4:8; 11:15, 17; 16:5).⁵⁸ Jesus Christ is already the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5). He “has freed” us from our sins by his blood (1:5, 5:9); He “has made” us to be a kingdom and priests for God (1:6; 5:10). All nature is also under God’s control. The lamb leads all the plagues of the three sevens (6:1). In Revelation, Satan is not an independent being but under God’s control. Satan is allowed to attack on God’s people in a definite limited time: “42 months” (11:2), “1,260 days” (11:3), “1,260 days” (12:6), “a time, times and half a time” (12:14), “forty-two months” (13:5).⁵⁹ Therefore, all the difficulties and persecutions as well as all the natural disasters such as earthquakes, famines, and wars are under God’s and Jesus’ control.
5. Revelation does not have dualistic view. In this book, all that is unconditional is that God’s kingdom must be accomplished and God must recreate all the creation. But Revelation leaves room for human freedom, human response to God’s will.⁶⁰ Before

⁵⁸ Denis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 26.

⁵⁹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 136, 142.

⁶⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 149.

God judges the secular world, God reproveth the church: “You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp-stand from its place” (2:4-5), “Because you are neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (3:16). On the other hand, God’s salvation is open to gentiles. God gives unbelievers a chance to repent (11:11-14; 14:6-7; 15:4). What is important is whether or not we repent and obey God’s word “here and now” in the tension of God’s kingdom.

In order to make the church awake and clean and unbelievers come to God, the Lamb leads the three sevens and uses Satan and Rome as an instrument for God’s will:

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (3:19). This idea is rooted in prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. That is why John often calls his letter a prophecy (1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19).

Judging from the above, we can conclude that the body of Revelation is distinctive among Jewish apocalyptic literature, because of the Christian experience of the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom. W.G. Kümmel points out how Christology transformed Jewish apocalyptic literature.

What is new here in Revelation is a total recasting of the apocalyptic view of history out of the Jewish into the Christian mold. The apocalyptic view of history has received a new substructure through the historical appearance of Jesus. On this the entire weight of the structure rests. In distinction from Jewish apocalyptic there is lacking here any look back into the past and any forward view out of that fictional past into the present. For John, the point of departure for his eschatological hope is rather the belief in the saving act of God in Jesus, and in his redemptive work which signifies victory. In this event, which the first Christians have themselves experienced, the pivotal point of John’s confidence lies in the God who shapes history. Although little attention is devoted by Revelation to the earthly life of Jesus, his appearance — especially as characterized by his redemptive death (1:5; 7:14;

12:11) and his triumphant exaltation (1:7; 3:21; 5:5; 7:14) — is the eschatological turning point of history, the pledge of history's divine consummation. The idea of redemptive history (Heilsgeschichte), in which Jesus Christ stands in the center, lies at the base of the view of history in Revelation.⁶¹

III. The Seven Churches on Earth in 1-3

A. The Political and Religious Situation and the Purpose of Writing

Like all the books of the New Testament, this book was written as a public pastoral letter to address concrete difficulties of its original hearer-readers in a limited space and time. To understand this mysterious book, we have to use a historical-critical interpretation to find the political and religious situations the original hearer-readers faced.⁶²

According to the external evidence of Irenaeus (140-202 C.E.) that John witnessed the visions at the end of the reign of Domitian (81-96), Revelation is traditionally dated at 95 or 96 C.E.⁶³ But modern scholars have proposed a variety of other dates from the reign of Claudius (41-54) to the time of Trajan (98-117) have been proposed. Most scholars have decided for the time of Nero (56-68) or Domitian, with the great majority choosing for Domitian.⁶⁴ There is some decisive internal evidence in Revelation. John apparently used a piece of tradition derived from the destruction of Jerusalem temple (70 C.E.) in 11:1-2, but he, interpreting the temple and altar as the Christian community, added a new meaning to the temple tradition.⁶⁵ In addition, the name of Babylon for Rome (Rev. 17) was used in Jewish and Christian literature after the destruction of Jerusalem because Rome had

⁶¹ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 461-2.

⁶² Adela Y. Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 50.

⁶³ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation; A commentary*, 8.

⁶⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 10.

⁶⁵ Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 18.

besieged and destroyed Jerusalem just as Babylon had done before. This fact shows that Revelation was written after 70. This internal evidence of Revelation seems to fit the reign of Domitian.⁶⁶ For these reasons, no convincing reason exists to turn down Irenaeus' argument.

But modern scholars have raised a question whether a full-scale Christian persecution took place under Domitian as Christian tradition claims because the seven messages shows lack of emphasis on the imperial cult and the past incidents of persecution in it are explained as typical of the sporadic opposition experienced by Christians in the first two centuries.⁶⁷

In fact, prior to Domitian the state religion was not against the Christian faith. Nero's mad acts against Christians were limited to Rome and nothing to do with the imperial cult. Domitian tried to compel Christians to participate in emperor worship according to the eastern common idea that the king was divine. This idea was quite alien in the West.⁶⁸ Toward the end of Domitian's reign became overwhelmingly arrogant that he asked people to address him as "Our Lord and God" (*dominus et deus noster* in Latin). Especially, the provinces of the eastern part of the empire promoted imperial cult naturally and vied with one another for permission to build temples to the divine Caesar. Of Revelation's seven churches, at least three had temples for Caesar in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum.⁶⁹ Faithful Christians would not address any human beings as lord and god or take part in

⁶⁶ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 10.

⁶⁷ Adela Y. Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 69-77. Fiorenza contends that the full-scale Christian persecution concerning the imperial cult was possible. She says, "It may depend on what we mean by "persecution." Roman sources present the later years of Domitian as a reign of terror when informers and harassment were encouraged by the authorities. Yet the letters of Pliny document that the same harassment, practice of denunciation, suspicion of private associations, and possible execution still existed in Trajan's time. Apparently minor charges could be construed as treason and Christians were particularly vulnerable to such charges." Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 8-9.

⁶⁸ Eduard Lohse, *Umwelt des Neuen Testaments*, 254-260.

⁶⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 19.

offering incense to him in temples built in his honor. Therefore, Christians who refused to participate in emperor worship were regarded as unpatriotic, subversive, and enemies of the Roman Empire.⁷⁰ As a result, Christians in John's time and place were thus often subject to social and economic discrimination, constant persecution, and unofficial mob violence.

According to Revelation's own testimony, persecutions by officials are expected (Rev. 2:10), the blood of the martyrs has already flowed (2:13; 6:9), and a general persecution of Christians throughout the Roman Empire was expected to occur (3:10). In 17:6, John sees the harlot who is called Babylon drunk on the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses of Jesus (6:10; 16:6; 18:24; 19:2). In 20:4, participation in the thousand-year reign is promised to the martyrs who have been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and for God's words. They have not worshiped the beast and his image and have not accepted his mark on their foreheads or hands. They also have refused divine honors to the emperor (13:4, 12; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20).⁷¹ Christianity has collided with the state and with the state religion, the Christ cult with the imperial cult. In the interest of faith, Revelation raises passionate objections to Rome and the imperial cult. John nowhere points directly to Domitian as the reigning emperor, but the temporal scene which Revelation describes fits the time of the persecution under Domitian.

What I want to point out here is the relation between Christians and Jews in the context of the seven churches in Revelation. Since in Asia, the Jewish community with a strong sense of community self-identity was known as an old and stable element in the empire and in its local communities, they were earlier granted immunity from religious

⁷⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 16.

⁷¹ Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 467-8.

requirements which could violate their faith.⁷² Instead, they acknowledged Caesar as king not as god, and promised to pray for the emperor but not to him. However, Christians did not use the title “king,” “lord,” and “God” for the emperor except for Jesus Christ, so that they could not help being regarded as hostile enemies of the empire. At first the Roman authorities regarded Christians as a sect within Judaism so that Christians were protected by the synagogue. But toward the end of the first century it became apparent that Jews expelled Christians from the synagogue not only because by John’s time Christianity was already predominantly a gentile religion, but also because Jews could not get along with Christians who were regarded as dangerous traitors of the empire. What was worse, it was assumed the Roman authorities were being pressed by certain representatives of the local Jewish community to take action against Christians.⁷³ That is why John calls the Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia “synagogues of Satan” (2:9; 3:9).

Through the official letters between Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, and the Emperor Trajan, we can picture the kind of event which we may well guess was already happening at the end of Domitian’s reign: A Christian or group of Christians was accused by Jews or gentiles of participating in illegal cultic practices and was brought before the Roman court. Both judge and accuser understood little about Christianity. The Christians were asked to prove their loyalty by offering wine and incense before the images of the Roman gods including Caesar. They were also required to make the two-word acknowledgement of Roman sovereignty, “*Kurios Kaisaros*” (“Caesar is Lord”), which is an exact counterpart to the basic Christian confession “Jesus is Lord.” In addition, they were asked to curse Christ. At last, those who complied were given some kind of certification (Rev. 13:16-18). On the

⁷² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 12.

⁷³ Adela Y. Collins, *Crisis & Catharsis*, 85.

other hand, those who did not comply could be tortured or executed as public enemies of the Roman Empire.⁷⁴

In such situations, some Christians who had experienced Jesus became doubtful about their faith in Jesus Christ, or were tempted to comply with the imperial worship. Some Jewish Christians were also threatened to give up their faith in Jesus and go back to Judaism for a stable life. They took their plight of persecution as evidence of God's inferiority, of God's inability to protect and save the church, as proof of the supremacy of the Roman Empire. The following could be their questions: "Who is our real King in the world, the Emperor or Jesus Christ?", "Who is in charge of this world, the Emperor or Jesus?", "Where is God and what is God doing in the midst of these troubling circumstances?",⁷⁵ "When will God's salvation and kingdom come upon us?", "Why does God allow these horrible difficulties to happen to God's people?", "How do we interpret these terrible persecutions?" But all these questions can be put in a nutshell: "Who is the King who is in charge of the world?"

To answer these questions, the prophet John must write not only a pastoral letter of encouragement and comfort, but he must interpret their agonies to them in such a way that they could see that their suffering were not the evidence of God's impotence but a sign of God's power. The trials and troubles they faced did not prove that God was helpless to intercede and deliver them, but rather those difficulties and trials came from God (2:22-23), designed to make them purified and perfect as God's people (3:19).⁷⁶ In other words, the suffering experienced by Christians and the great persecution were not a meaningless

⁷⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 13-8.

⁷⁵ Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 21.

⁷⁶ James Kallas, *Revelation*, 57.

tragedy but part of God's plan for God's kingdom. So John encourages Christians to remain faithful in the crisis, even to the point of dying (2:10)⁷⁷ according to the life and death of Jesus Christ (5:9, 12).

B. The Seven Messages to the Churches in Asia

Whether or not we understand the messages to the seven churches in Asia (chapters 2-3) are of critical importance in getting a sound understanding of Revelation. Unlike Jewish apocalyptic literature, the author and the hearer-readers of Revelation are identified. The author is John (1:1, 4, 9, 22:8), and he is imprisoned on the rocky fortress island of Patmos (1:9), just off the Asian coast.⁷⁸ In 1:4, John tells us about his hearer-readers to whom he writes, "the seven churches that are in Asia," the churches in the mainland church undergoing the same persecution which has pushed him into exile on Patmos. The seven churches are located in Ephesus (2:1), Smyrna (2:8), Pergamum (2:12), Thyatira (2:18), Sardis (3:1), Philadelphia (3:7) and Laodicea (3:14). Each "letter" reflects the particular cultural, geographical, and religious situation of the city to which each church belongs to.⁷⁹

One of the misunderstandings of Revelation is that it is written to give encouragement and hope to believers and to curse, punish, and judge unbelievers and the evil world. On the contrary, in Revelation, before the Lamb starts to open the seals, God first offers the seven churches not only consolation and encouragement, but also severe warnings and calls to repent, depending on their situations.

Richard Bauckham also says,⁸⁰ "The fact that John explicitly and carefully contextualizes his prophetic message in seven specific contexts makes it possible for us to

⁷⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 26.

⁷⁸ James Kallas, *Revelation*, 66.

⁷⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 85.

⁸⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 15.

resist a common generalization about Revelation: that it is a book written for the consolation and encouragement of Christians suffering persecution, in order to assure them that their oppressors will be judged and they will be vindicated in the end. The common, uncritical acceptance of this generalization probably has to do with the fact that it is a generalization often made about apocalyptic literature as a whole. In the case of Revelation it is quite clear from the seven messages that encouragement in the face of oppression was only one of the needs of the seven churches.”

Now I will mention the contents of the seven messages briefly. The seven letters contains some praise and some rebuke. As we move through the seven messages, it is clearer the church is in need of a purifying punishment of God which will wash away their evil. The first message contains more praise than rebuke, while the last letter contains only rebuke and condemnation.⁸¹ Nevertheless, at the end of each message, God gives us encouragement and eschatological promises to victors (2:7, 10, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21), which are related to the Christophany of 1:9-20⁸² as well as to God’s kingdom (21-22).

We have to notice the one verse at the end of the seven letters which defines the character of them: “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (3:18). Because God loves the church, God gives them chances to repent. The real problem is not with God, but with them. Why are they suffering? John asserts that it is not because God is impotent or inferior to Satan or the Roman Emperor, but because the churches including the seven churches are sinful in the sight of God and in need of reproof, purgation, and punishment for cleansing. Therefore, the suffering and persecution they face comes from God not from Satan because God loves them and wants to purify them to be

⁸¹ James Kallas, *Revelation*, 71.

⁸² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 89.

clean as the Lamb's bride. So we can say that the series of the three sevens led by the Lamb is a process of purifying and preparing God's people as sacrificial prophets as well as giving unbelievers chances to repent and judging evil.

In conclusion, the seven messages show that even though it is natural and just that the churches which have experienced the salvation of Jesus should praise God and the Son, obey God's word, and endure any persecution, they fail to do so. That is, God's holy will should be realized and done on earth through the church which has been freed from their sin by Jesus' blood (1:5), but rather God is not fully praised and worshipped by the church and they are sinful in the sight of God. By contrast, the stage changes from earth to heaven, where God's holy will is done completely.

IV. Holy Worship in Heaven: The Blueprint of the God's Kingdom in 4-5 as Main Text

In study of Revelation, the importance of chapters 4-5 has been neglected. But this part functions as a bridge connecting the seven messages to the churches on earth (2-3) with the rest of the apocalyptic part (6-22). Chapters 4-5 show who is in charge of the universe, how holy and powerful God is, how God's kingdom will be accomplished, who Jesus Christ is, what he has done, and how the Christians following Jesus who was crucified and risen for them should live in the world.

In contrast with the church on earth, God's holy will and the Lamb's victory are praised in heaven by "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea" (5:13). In contrast with the church on earth, John beholds God's throne on heaven where God and the Son are fully worshipped. Through this contrast, John wants the hearer-readers to know that their sinfulness blocks up God's holy presence among them and to realize

Christian responsibility to live as “a nation and priests for the holy God” in this world (1:6; 5:10).

We have to pay attention to the relation between the seven messages (chapters 2-3) and the vision of God’s throne in heaven (4-5). Concerning this relation, there is a crucial clue in the eschatological promise to victors given to Laodicea:⁸³ “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”(3:21). This verse functions as a connector between the two. That is, if the church overcomes all the persecution and trials God gives them to purify and prepare them for sacrificial prophets, they will be offered the right to sit with Jesus Christ just as He overcame and sat down with God. Chapters 4-5 show us the scene of God’s throne in heaven Jesus has promised to victors in 3:21. In this literary device, the two parts are closely related to each other.

In Chapters 21-22, God’s holy throne will come down from heaven to earth (21:5; 22:1, 22:3), and God’s holiness and the Lamb’s victory will be realized on earth (21:2-4). In addition, the victors will share God’s holiness and the Lamb’s victory (22:3-5). In this respect, chapters 4-5 is the blueprint of God’s kingdom and connect the first letter part (1-3) and the apocalyptic part (6-22).

A. God’s Holy Throne

John is led into God’s throne in heaven, where he beholds God seated on it. Around God’s throne are twenty-four elders dressed on twenty-four thrones (4:4), four living creatures covered with eyes (4:6), and seven blazing lamps identified as the seven spirits of God (4:5). Day and night, each of the four living creatures never stop saying, “Holy,

⁸³ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 173.

holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (4:8). Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to God on the throne, the twenty-four elders fall down before God and praise God laying down their crowns before God’s throne (4:11).

This vision of God’s throne and heavenly worship are significantly meaningful because it can be the answer to the questions John’s hearer-readers have raised. Actually, since there are cultic and political imageries in it,⁸⁴ this vision can be understood in two ways: theologically and politically.

First of all, this vision of the heavenly worship of God theologically expresses God’s total sovereignty over the universe because God is the Creator: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (4:11). In heaven, John sees God, as the Creator, fully worshipped by the four living creatures (representative of the creation) and the twenty-four elders (representative of faithful Christians). This scene contrasts well with the seven churches on earth. Although the responsibility of the church which has experienced God’s salvation in Jesus is to praise God and to live as a witness to the world, they are not faithful but wavering due to persecution and suffering. This heavenly worship of God corrects their wavering because God is worshipped as the creator of “this world” not “other world.” In this sense, Revelation rejects “dualism,” but affirms that God alone is in charge of the whole universe.

The fact that “From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder” (4:5) bolsters God’s total sovereignty. This is the language of “theophany,” used by Israel to portray the manifestation of God’s holiness (Exod. 19:16; Job 36: 30-32; Ps.

⁸⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 34.

77:17-18; Ezek. 1:4, 13, 14, 24).⁸⁵ This formula used in 4:5 is repeated at the opening of the seventh seal (8:5), the sounding of the seventh trumpets (11:19), and the pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:18-21):⁸⁶

4: 5: “flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder”

8:5: “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake”

11:19: “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunders, an earthquake, and heavy hail”

16:18-21: “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake...
and huge hailstones”

This progressive expansion of the formula corresponds to the progressive intensification of the three series of judgment. It indicates that the presence of God’s holiness is the judgment on evil, and the three sevens of judgment come from God’s throne not from Satan. This formula also turns down “dualism” because God alone is in charge of the whole universe, and it corrects the reader’s wrong idea that persecution and suffering come from Satan. This is very important in understanding Revelation.

Secondly, this vision contains a political meaning as well. The vision of God’s throne is directly against the imperial cult, and affirms that the Roman Emperor is not a god, but only God on the throne in heaven is the true sovereign of the universe. It is certain that John intended to contrast God’s throne in Heaven with the Roman Emperor’s throne on earth because this word “throne” already is used in 2:13: “I know where you live, where Satan has his throne.” As stated in the political background, it is assumed that at least three of Revelation’s seven churches had temples for Caesar in Ephesus, Smyrna, and

⁸⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 41-2; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 293-5; Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, 545.

Pergamum.⁸⁷ “Throne,” like “kingdom,” is an explicitly political term. And the repeated “You are worthy” (4:11; 5:9, 12) directed to God and the Lamb reflects the praise used to greet the emperor during his triumphal entrance. The title “Lord and God” (4:8) is the same as the title Domitian wanted to be called. In addition, the word “elder” is a political term. The fact that the twenty-four “elders” remove their crowns and lay them before God’s throne (4:10) means that their authority, as created beings, is wholly derived from God’s.⁸⁸ This political imagery connected with the imperial cult shows that the all earthly claims to sovereignty are only imitations of God.⁸⁹

In conclusion, the vision of heavenly worship shows not only how fully the holy God is worshipped in heaven in contrast with the sinful churches on earth, but also that the true sovereign of the universe is only the Lord God Almighty not the Roman Emperor. God’s holy throne will come down from heaven to earth in God’s kingdom (21:522:1, 3).

B. Twenty-four Elders in Heaven

In this vision, twenty-four elders appear. God’s throne is in the middle of the throne-room. But there are twenty-four other thrones around God’s throne, which belong to the twenty-four elders. They are seated on their own thrones and dressed in white, and they have crowns of gold on their heads (4:4). The twenty-four elders fall down before God and praise God laying down their crowns before God’s throne (4:11). After chapter 4, they often appear (7:11, 13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). They have harps and censers full of incense that are said to represent the prayers of Christians (5:8). Individual elders make comments to John (5:5; 7:13). If the statement in 20:4 refers to the twenty-four elders, then they also have an

⁸⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 19.

⁸⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 34.

⁸⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 103.

explicitly judicial function.⁹⁰

We cannot help being curious about their identity because they are seated on their own thrones near God's throne and have a judicial function. Attempts to identify them have given rise to many different proposals, some of which can be combined;⁹¹ (1) The heavenly counterparts of the leaders of the twenty-four priestly courses of the second temple period described in 1 Chr. 23:6; 24:7-18; (2) The twenty-four divisions of musicians, descendants of Levi, who prophesied with lyres, harps, and cymbals in 1 Chr. 25:1-31; (3) Heavenly representatives of Israel and the church, i.e., twenty-four as the sum of the twelve sons of Israel and the Twelve Apostles; (4) Individual Christians who had sealed their faith through martyrdom, now glorified and participating in an exalted heavenly life; (5) Angelic members of the heavenly court, or an angelic order, which surround the throne of God. (6) Figures from astral mythology, such as the twenty-four Babylonian star-gods of the zodiac, grouped around the polar star and divided over the north and south as judges of the living and the dead.

I agree with the third and fourth proposals, contending that the twenty-four elders are representatives of God's people of Israel and the church who have already overcome and kept their faith to death. Here are my reasons for this position.

First, their throne, crowns, white dress, and authority to participate in God's ruling correspond all to Jesus' promises to victors in the seven messages:⁹² "To those who overcome, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3:21); "Those who overcomes will be dressed in

⁹⁰ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 288.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 288-292; Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 90.

⁹² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 106.

white” (3:4)⁹³; “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life (2:10); “To those who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations....just as I have received authority from my father” (2:26-7).

In addition, “God has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God our Father” (1:6) and “to reign on the earth” (5:10). So we are qualified to serve God as priests and reign on earth as well as in heaven. Therefore, the twenty-four elders who serve God as priests and reign with God are representatives of Christians who have obeyed God’s word to death.

Furthermore, the number “twelve” means the sum of the twelve sons of Israel and the Twelve Apostles because in the New Jerusalem (21:12), there are gates on which the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written, and twelve foundations on which the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are written (21:14).

Therefore, the twenty-four elders are not angelic beings, but representatives of God’s people of Israel and the church who have already overcome and kept their faith to death. This fact can give us encouragement and hope because we can also serve God and participate in God’s reign both on earth and in heaven, just as the twelve-four elders do in heaven and the two witnesses do on earth (chapter 11). God shares the throne not only with Christ, but also with those who overcome (3:21).

C. The Lamb’s Entrée

God, as the Creator, is worshipped in chapter 4, while Jesus the Lamb, as the Savior, is praised in chapter 5, just as Jesus shares God’s throne (3:21). The Christian conviction that Jesus Christ, as the Savior, in his death and resurrection, has already achieved his decisive

⁹³ Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 90.

victory over evil is fundamental to Revelation's whole understanding of the way in which Jesus establishes God's kingdom on earth.⁹⁴ Therefore, we have to pay attention to Christology presented in chapter 5: Jesus' person (who is He?) and work (what has He done for us?).

In the throne-room scene, John sees a scroll⁹⁵ with writing on both sides sealed with seven seals in the right hand of God's throne (5:1). And he sees an angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" Because there is no one who is worthy to open the scroll, John weeps. But suddenly John hears that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed and can open the scroll and its seven seals (5:5). But against his expectation, John sees a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne. And the Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). As soon as the Lamb takes the scroll from God's throne, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down and sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (5:7-9). Then the circle expands and the myriads of angels join the worship (5:12) clearly parallel to that offered to God (4:11). Finally, the circle expands to include the whole of creation in a praise addressed to God and the Lamb together (5:13).

This is the first occurrence of "Lamb" (*αρνιον*) in Revelation. This title for Christ appears in chapter 5 for the first time and occurs 28 (7x4)⁹⁶ times in the entire book (5:6, 8,

⁹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 73.

⁹⁵ A close examination of it will be made later when the "two witnesses" is mentioned.

⁹⁶ Like seven, four is the symbolic number most consistently and commonly used in Revelation. Seven is the number of Completeness, while four is the number of the world (with its four corners (7:1; 20:8) or four

12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). This word is used once to describe a beast (13:11). In other books of the New Testament, it is used just one time in John 21:15.⁹⁷ Judging from the fact that this title “Lamb” is absent from all the Christological language and imagery in the opening chapters, John has reserved it intentionally for its dramatic appearance.⁹⁸

When John is weeping to see that there is no one who is worthy to open the scroll, he hears that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” has triumphed and can open the scroll and its seven seals (5:5). So it is inferred from this situation that John must have expected to see a spectacular and magnificent lion, as king of animals. On the contrary, he sees just a Lamb, which is regarded as one of the weak and meek animals. On top of that, the Lamb seems to have slaughtered. There is a great contrast between what is heard and what is seen, the strongest and the weakest. Since this paradoxical contrast between “lion” and “lamb” is the most important key to understanding Revelation, a close examination is needed.

The expressions “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David” sum up Messianic thoughts of the Old Testament.⁹⁹ The violent, magnificent image of the lion had been used for the Messiah, from the earliest days of Israel’s proto-eschatological hopes (Gen. 49:98-12) into the first century¹⁰⁰. When Israel bestowed a final blessing on his sons, he compared Judah with a lion and predicted a permanent royal dynasty from Judah’s line

divisions (5:13; 14:7)). The first four judgments in each of the three sevens affect the whole world (6:8; 8:7-12; 16:2-9). Therefore, the 7x4 occurrences of the Lamb indicate the worldwide scope of Jesus Christ’s complete victory. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 66.

⁹⁷ Frederick w. Danker ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 133.

⁹⁸ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 108.

⁹⁹ G. E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 83.

¹⁰⁰ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 108.

(Gen. 49:8-12).¹⁰¹ The Testament of Judah 24:5 interpreted the lion of Genesis 49:10 to be the Messiah. II Esdras 12:31-33, which was almost contemporary with Revelation, says that “the lion...is the Messiah.”¹⁰²

The “Root of David” is derived from such texts as Isaiah 11:1, 10. When God selected David as king of Israel in place of the Benjamite Saul, Israel’s prophecy began to be realized. Although the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon would make it seem that David’s dynasty had been cut off, like a tree sawn down leaving only root and stump, Isaiah foresaw a fresh shoot from the stump of David’s father Jesse, a fruitful branch spring from a root that seemed lifeless and hopeless (Isa. 11:1, 10).¹⁰³ This Isaiah prophecy was understood in the first century to promise a “David-like warrior Messiah” who will fight God’s battles and wreak vengeance on God’s enemies.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, both Gen. 49:9 (“lion of Judah”) and Isa. 11:1, 10 (“root of Jesse”) were important messianic texts not only for Jews who had been waiting for a David-like warrior Messiah for a long time, but also for early Christians who were persecuted by the Roman Empire.¹⁰⁵ Actually, what they really wanted in such a situation was a powerful and splendid Messiah like a roaring lion, full of righteous indignation and God’s unlimited power, to punish the oppressors and establish justice on the earth.

It is certain that John, hearing such a Messianic expression, might have expected to see the Lion who had triumphed. But what he saw is a slaughtered Lamb. This vision shows in dramatic form the significant paradox and mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

¹⁰¹ Denis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing Company, 2001), 105.

¹⁰² M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 108.

¹⁰³ Denis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 105.

¹⁰⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 350.

God triumphed and delivered God's people, not through military and political power, but through the weakness of crucifixion.¹⁰⁶ This paradoxical vision makes a correction of the Jewish Messianic idea that the Messiah, a David-like warrior, will punish enemies and make Israel free through military and political power (cf. 1QSb 5:20-9).

According to H. Kraft, this Messiah as a slaughtered Lamb had nothing to do with the political Messiah for whom Jews had been waiting. Connecting the Messiah to the suffering servant (Isa. 53:7) and to the Passover lamb was done by the early Christian church after the day of Pentecost.¹⁰⁷ Paul very early understood the death of Jesus as the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. 1 Pet. 1:19). And this notion achieves central significance in the theology of the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is expressly designated "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). The Fourth Evangelist even alters the chronology of Passion week so that Jesus is crucified precisely when the Passover lambs are slaughtered in the temple on 14 Nisan (John 19:14).¹⁰⁸ The word "ἀρνίον" John uses for "lamb" is concerned with a sacrificial victim, just as "ἀμνος" is used in John's Gospel (, John 1:29, 36). In LXX, both words depict lambs as sacrificial victims.¹⁰⁹ Isaiah connects the suffering servant to "a lamb (ἀμνος) that is led to slaughter" (Isa. 53:7; cf. Acts 8:32; 1 Peter 1:19). Jeremiah offers a parallel, "I was like a gentle lamb (ἀρνίον) led to the slaughter" (Jer. 11:19).¹¹⁰

In this manner, the paradoxical experience of the death and resurrection of the Lamb totally transformed the Jewish Messianic idea. Paul explains this Christian paradox like this: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to

¹⁰⁶ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 178.

¹⁰⁸ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 353.

¹⁰⁹ In LXX, this word "ἀρνίον" are used just four times (Psalm 114:4, 6; Jer. 11:19; 50:45).

¹¹⁰ Denis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 106.

those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-4). G. B. Caird, in his commentary, summarizes this paradox very well.¹¹¹

Wherever the Old Testament says “Lion”, read “Lamb.” Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.

This slaughtered Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Because the horn symbolizes power or honor (Dan. 7:7-8, 11-12; Psalm 132:17; 18:1-3; 75:10; Jer. 48:25), the seven horns stand for divine omnipotence. And the seven eyes represent divine omniscience (Zech. 4:10).¹¹² This shows that the Lamb is working through the omnipotent and omniscient Holy Spirit between the heavenly exaltation of Christ following his death and resurrection and the final inauguration of the eternal reign. For this reason, Jesus has the perfect knowledge of the spiritual situations of the seven churches and says to them through the Holy Spirit: “I know your deeds” (2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1; 8; 15); “Those who have an ear, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). According to R. Bauckham, the seven Spirits are sent out into all the earth to make the Lamb’s triumph effective throughout the world. While the Lamb, victorious through his death on earth, now shares his Father’s throne in heaven, the seven Spirits are the presence and power of God on earth, bring about God’s kingdom by carrying out the Lamb’s victory throughout the world.¹¹³

Because of the image of the powerful judging Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes,

¹¹¹ G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 75.

¹¹² David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 353.

¹¹³ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 112-3.

some scholars assert that the powerful Lamb of Revelation is simply another version of the violent Messiah expected in Jewish apocalyptic, where the Messiah is symbolized as a young ram or warrior sheep (Test. Jos. 19:8; I Enoch 89:46; 90:19; cf. Test. Benja. 3;8).¹¹⁴ However, this interpretation neglects John's intention that he contrasts the Jewish violent Messiah to the Messiah as a sacrificial Lamb. Unlike the Jewish Messiah, the triumph of the Lamb through his sacrificial death is emphasized in the following praises (5:9-10, 12).

D. Universal Praises for God's Holiness and the Lamb's Victory

We have to pay attention to the song of praise (5:8-14) because it, as a blueprint of the accomplishment of God's kingdom, shows how the Lamb will accomplish the kingdom. The four living creatures and the twenty-four priests start to praise the Lamb: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (5:9-10). A choir of countless angels encircles the Lamb's throne and the living creatures and the elders, joining the praise: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (5:12). Furthermore, every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea joins the praise for both God and the Lamb: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!" (5:13).

These significant praises show us how God will deliver numerous people from every nation, how he will accomplish God's kingdom, and what God's kingdom is like. According to the praises, the Lamb's redemption extended not only to Israel, but to "every

¹¹⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 109-110.

tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9). This is the fulfillment the Abrahamic promise of blessing for all nations (21:24-27; 7:9-17; Gen. 13:3; 22:18; Isa. 60:1-5). They become a kingdom and priests. The unique status that was given to Israel (Exodus 19:5-6) and Christians (Rev. 1:6) now extends to all the believers in all nations.¹¹⁵ In God’s kingdom, every creature as well as delivered people will be restored and participate in the kingdom. The only method for conquering evil and accomplishing God’s kingdom is sacrificial death.

The vision of heavenly worship is contrasted to the seven churches on earth. While in heaven God and the Lamb are fully worship by every creature, on earth the seven churches do not worship God and the Son fully. The Lamb invites the churches to participate in conquering this world by being faithful witnesses in the world according to his triumph by sacrificial. In this sense, the two-fold Christology of “suffering and victory” brings about a two-fold ecclesiology: the suffering church as a witness on earth and the victorious church in heaven.

E. The Lamb’s Suffering and Victory: the Two-fold Christology

The two-fold Christology of “suffering and victory” is very important for the understanding of the rest of Revelation (chaps. 6-22). Using the dramatic contrast between “lion” and “lamb,” John asserts that the slaughtered Lamb is the victorious Messiah who will open the seals of the scroll and accomplish God’s kingdom. The messianic hopes presented in 5:5 are not rejected: Jesus really is the expected Messiah of David (22:16). But insofar as the latter was associated with military violence and narrow nationalism, it is

¹¹⁵ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 111.

reinterpreted by the image of the slaughtered Lamb.¹¹⁶ Jesus' true triumph is only based on his death on the cross (5:9, 12). Since Jesus was first crucified on the cross, he was resurrected and exalted later. Jesus could not triumph without the sacrificial death on the cross. After Jesus humbled himself and obeyed God's word to death on the cross, God exalted him to the highest place and made every knee bow before Jesus (Phil. 2:5-11). Therefore, the Lamb's two-fold theology sets forth the "irony of kingship through crucifixion."¹¹⁷

In John's day, the Roman Emperor demanded people that worship him, claiming on his ultimate sovereignty over the world. He threatened people with his dreadful political, economical power. In this situation, Jews had been waiting for their Messiah as conqueror of the world, destroying their enemies (cf. 1QSb 5:20-9).¹¹⁸ But God's method of salvation is totally different from them. God triumphed and delivered God's people, not through military and political power, but through the weakness of crucifixion.¹¹⁹ Christ's sacrificial death becomes the way God rules the world.¹²⁰ The Lamb's sacrificial ruling is totally contrasted to the Roman and Jewish ways. In other words, Christ Jesus' life and death is not for himself but "for others," the whole world. This Sacrificial ruling way is also applied to Christians following the life and death of Jesus Christ. The church has to live "for others" and fight its spiritual battles, not with military or political strength, but with endurance, purity, and faithfulness to Christ, even to the point of death. Even though martyrdom looks like defeat to the world, it seals the Christians' triumph because it appropriates the final

¹¹⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 74.

¹¹⁷ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 352.

¹¹⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 74.

¹¹⁹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 109.

¹²⁰ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 64.

victory of Christ in his death and resurrection.¹²¹ “They overcame him (Satan) by the bloody of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (12:11; cf. 11:11-12; 20:4). It is clear that the weapon with which Christians conquers Satan is nothing but “the blood of the Lamb” and “the word of their testimony.” In this sense, the argument that God of Revelation is a tyranny,¹²² the book advocates a “theology of resentment,” and it is full of eschatological awful woes is one of the misunderstandings.

The Lamb’s two-fold Christology of “suffering and victory” gives encouragement and hope because Jesus shares God’s throne in heaven (“transcendence”), but through the Holy Spirit, he is always with the church who suffers for God (“immanence”). Therefore, the church on earth, as a faithful witness, can triumph just as Jesus did (3:21).

V. The Suffering Church and the Victorious Church: the Two-fold Ecclesiology

In Revelation, “Christology” has great influence on “ecclesiology,” because the church, as an “eschatological community,”¹²³ has to follow the Lamb in the tension between his first coming and second coming, between the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom. The Lamb, who lived and died “for others,” invites his followers to live as sacrificial witnesses “for others” in the world and to participate in accomplishing God’s kingdom. In this respect, the church exists for others. Through the faithful and sacrificial witness of the church (11:3-13; 14:4, 12; 16:6; 18:14; 19:2; 20:4), God has a grand plan of salvation to deliver numerous people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9-10;

¹²¹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 110.

¹²² Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 9.

¹²³ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, 237.

11:15; 14:6; 15:3-4;19:6). Therefore, Revelation regards the church as a “prophetic community.”¹²⁴ The church has to fight its spiritual battles by giving true witness to the world.

To take part in God’s plan of salvation, the church, as a prophetic community, has to be awake, holy, faithful, and pure, just as God is holy (chaps. 4-5). However, in fact, the seven churches (chaps. 2-3) are unfaithful and sinful in the sight of God and in need of reproof, purification, and punishment for cleansing. For this reason, Jesus Christ, who knows everything through the seven spirits sent out into all the earth (5:6), discloses the stern reality of the church and rebukes them in the seven messages (2-3). Nevertheless, God, loving the church, wants the church to be a holy faithful prophetic community, so he is willing to give them chances to repent: “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (3:18). If the church forgets the reason why it exists for others not for itself, it could not help losing its dynamic power, vitality, and purity. In this sense, God wants to awaken the church and remind it of its mission to live as true prophets for others. Through the sacrificial, faithful witness of the church, numerous people in the world will receive the witness, come back to God, and take part in God’s kingdom (11:13; 14:12; 15:3-4; 18:4; 20:4; 21:24, 26). In contrast, those who do not receive the church’s true witness but stick to the beast’s false witness (14: 9; 16:2, 6) will not be able to enter God’s kingdom (19:20; 21:8; 22:15). Therefore, the series of the three sevens led by the Lamb should be understood to be a process of purifying and preparing the church for sacrificial witnesses as well as giving unbelievers chances to repent and judging evil (6-22).

For this reason, the persecution and suffering which the seven churches have to go

¹²⁴ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 583.

thorough is part of God's plan, not the work of Satan. To give consolation and encouragement to the church repenting their sins and understanding God's plan, Revelation has a special structure by linking the Lamb's two-fold Christology, "suffering and victory," to its ecclesiology. John connects the "particular church" suffering as a witness in a particular time and space on earth to the "universal church" in heaven which transcends time and space. He also relates the "visible church" suffering for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 19:10; 20:4) to the "invisible church" which has already triumphed in heaven. He couples the "immanent church" living on earth in accordance with the life and death of incarnated Christ (11:4) to the "transcendent church" sharing Christ's victory in heaven. In this manner, the two-fold Christology of "suffering and victory" brings about "the two-fold ecclesiology": the suffering and fighting church ("ecclesia militans") as a witness on earth, and the victorious church ("ecclesia triumphans") in heaven.¹²⁵ The church on earth is not alone because the church in heaven has already triumphed and cheers God's people on earth to victory.

Therefore, the visions regarding the church in Revelation can be divided into two: suffering believers as witnesses on earth; God's people in heaven who have already triumphed. What we have to pay attention to is how God makes the church on earth participate in the process of accomplishing God's kingdom. In fact, the process of accomplishing God's kingdom is the process of God's holiness descending from heaven to earth. All the plagues of the seven seals (6:1), the seven trumpets (8:6), and the seven bowls (16:1) led by the Lamb are all derived from God's throne. The formula "from the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder" is decisive. This formula

¹²⁵ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 139.

used in 4:5 is repeated at the opening of the seventh seal (8:5), the sounding of the seventh trumpets (11:19), and the pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:18-21).¹²⁶ This theophany formula indicates that the presence of God's holiness itself is judgment on evil, and that all the natural disasters related with the three sevens are strong evidence of the presence of God's holiness.

Revelation identifies the rejection of God's presence with the rejection of Christians' faithful, sacrificial witness. Those who turn down the church's true witness and kill them are identical to those who reject God's presence and worship the beast. Thus, those who reject the saint's sacrificial witness, kill them, and do not repent increase the intensity of judgment (6:15- 17; 9:20-21). Finally, the faithful, sacrificial witness of the church leads to the repentance and faith of all the nations. On the contrary, John describes the unrepentant world which does not receive both the church's witness and God's presence, but adheres to the beast as necessarily subject to final judgment.¹²⁷ This is the way God accomplishes the kingdom through the church.

I will closely examine the interludes depicting churches on earth and in heaven in light of the whole structure of Revelation.

A. 144,000 on Earth (7:1-8)

Chapter 7 is the interlude just before the breaking of the seventh seals. There are two groups here: 144,000 and a great multitude. The clearest distinction is that the 144,000 are specifically numbered and operate on earth, while the multitude is not numbered and

¹²⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41-2; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5: World Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 52A (Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1997), 293-5.

¹²⁷ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 103.

located in heaven.¹²⁸ 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel symbolize the new Israel, the Christian church. John regards the church as the continuation of Israel, and speaks with scorn of “those who say they are Jews but are not” (2:9; 3:9), that is, Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.¹²⁹ Each person is marked on the forehead with a seal. The seal is a sign that they belong to God and were under the power and protection of God. This protection is not physical but spiritual because the two witnesses in chapter 11 are killed by the beast (11:7).¹³⁰ In this scene, they are depicted as a military camp. But the true “conquering” is the power of loving self-sacrifice as presented in the Lamb.¹³¹

The explicit number 144,000 (12x12x1000) symbolizes completeness. The double use of 12 signifies both the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of Jesus. In chapter 11, John makes clear this inclusive reading of the two twelves in his description of the new Jerusalem (21:12-14). The city has a great wall with 12 gates. On each gate is inscribed the name of one of the 12 tribes. The great wall also has 12 foundations, on which are inscribed the names of the 12 apostles.¹³²

Therefore, 144,000 signify the suffering and fighting church on earth. But God will protect and help them be faithful witnesses even to death.

B. A Great Multitude in Heaven (7:9-17)

In the second scene, John sees a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language. They are standing before the throne and in front of the

¹²⁸ Brian K Blount, *Revelation; A commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 145.

¹²⁹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation : Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville : John Knox Press, 1989), 129-130.

¹³⁰ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 60-1.

¹³¹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation : Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville : John Knox Press, 1989), 129.

¹³² Brian K Blount, *Revelation; A commentary*, 145-6.

Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches. Unlike 144,000, this incalculable people come from every nation and before God's throne on heaven. The 144,000 on earth are about to enter a period of secular opposition, while the second vision is to bring consolation to Christians on earth by revealing what awaits them in heaven.¹³³ It will not be Christians alone that will be God's people with who he dwells. As a result of the church's witness to the world, all the peoples will be God's peoples.¹³⁴

C. Two Witnesses on Earth (11:1-13)

Just as there was an interlude before the breaking of the seventh seals, there is another very important interlude before the sounding of the seventh trumpets (10:1-11:14).¹³⁵ This interlude is designed to unreservedly show the way God delivers numerous people from all nations through the church's sacrificial witness.

Now, we have to focus on "an open little scroll" (βιβλαριδιον, 10:2), "the scroll" (το βιβλιον, 10:8), and "the little scroll" (το βιβλαριδιον, 10:9, 10). There are different opinions regarding whether this scroll is the same as the scroll (το βιβλιον) in chap. 5.¹³⁶ Actually, even though the sealed scroll occurred several times (5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9), the contents of the scroll is unknown to us so far. For following reasons, this scroll in chap.10 refers to the scroll in chap. 5. First of all, the fact that John uses "βιβλαριδιον" (diminutive) and "βιβλιον" interchangeably to refer to one scroll suggests that John treats the two words as though they are synonymous.¹³⁷ Moreover, another "mighty angel" who brings the scroll down from heaven to earth (10:1-2) reminds us of the first "mighty angel" introducing the

¹³³ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 61-2.

¹³⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 104.

¹³⁵ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 67.

¹³⁶ Aune offers various opinions on this relationship and the contents of the scroll in chap.10. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 571-2.

¹³⁷ Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 190, 198.

sealed scroll in the right hand of God (5:2).¹³⁸ In addition, it is certain that John's description of the scroll in the hand of God (5:1) and the scroll in chap.10 is modeled after Ezekiel's similar description (Ezek. 2:8-3:4).¹³⁹ In Ezekiel's case, God himself opens the scroll (2:10) and gives it to Ezekiel with the order to eat it (3:1-2). In Revelation, the scroll must be opened by the Lamb, so it is taken from the hand of God by the Lamb (5:7), who opens it (6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). Then it is taken from heaven to earth by an angel (10:1-2), who gives it to John to eat (10:8-10). The sequence of revelation, from God through Jesus to the prophet John, corresponds exactly to Rev. 1:1, which says that the revelation of Jesus Christ comes from God through Jesus Christ to his servants. All things considered, the scrolls in chapters 5, 10 are identical, but there is a sharp contrast between "sealed" and "open."¹⁴⁰

What we have to keep in mind is that when the Lamb opens the seals, one by one (6:1-8:1), the events that occur at the opening of each seal are not the contents of the scroll but accompany the opening of the seals.¹⁴¹ At last, in chap. 10, the scroll appears open. Now, John is told to "take it, and eat", which means "read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest with eagerness."¹⁴² It tastes as sweet as honey in his mouth, but when he has eaten it, his stomach turned sour (10:9-10). In addition, he was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings" (10:11). Even though the author provides no clear literary indications that help us know the contents of the open scroll,¹⁴³ it is apparent that the scroll is all about the way God delivers numerous people from all nations through

¹³⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 81.

¹³⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16: World Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 571.

¹⁴⁰ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 140.

¹⁴¹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 80.

¹⁴² Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 68.

¹⁴³ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 571.

the church's sacrificial witness like two witnesses (11:3-13). That's why the scroll tastes sweet because God protects his people (11:1-2, 11-12), but it tastes sour because the church have to be sacrificial but powerful prophets even to death in order to lead countless people from all nations to God (11:3-13).¹⁴⁴ In this respect, John regards the whole church as "the eschatological prophetic People of God"; he affirms the "prophethood of all believers."¹⁴⁵

Chapter 11 shows in a visionary way how all Christians have to live as true prophets in the world, and how God rules over this world through the church. Gentiles tread down the holy city for 42 months and the worshippers in the temple of God are "measured" (3:1-2). This temple does not refer to the temple of Jerusalem or a literal building. The temple is the Christian community who worship God. Jesus promises victors to be part of God's temple (3:12), and chapters 21-22 also describe the Holy City without a temple building, where God makes his dwelling in the community of redeemed saints.¹⁴⁶ The "measuring" of the temple is to mark for protection. This "marking" is another image for the "sealing" of the church in 7:1-8.

During 1260 days (the same period as 42 months), the two witnesses, representing the church, exercise their prophetic ministry (11:3-13). As prophets, their ministry is martyrdom in that "witness" (μαρτυς, 11:3; cf. "testimony" (μαρτυρια, 11:7) means both "martyr" and "witness" in Greek. In John's context, martyrdom is not something secondary but inherent in the prophetic role itself (11:7-10). In the Old Testament, some prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah suffer as an integral part of their prophetic vocation. Furthermore, true prophet must suffer as the badge of his authenticity.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, these two witnesses

¹⁴⁴ Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 125.

¹⁴⁵ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 142.

¹⁴⁶ Adela Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, 65-66; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 143.

¹⁴⁷ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 144.

have divinely given miraculous power to make havoc of their enemies, just as Moses and Elijah did (11:5-6).

After finishing their testimony, they are killed, just as Jesus Christ was crucified (11:7-8). People from “every people, tribe, language and nation” celebrate because these two prophets have tormented those who live on the earth (11: 9-10). But God raises them and calls them up to heaven in the sight of the people (11:11-12). This narrative reminds us of the “suffering servant” in Isa. 53 and the Philippian Christological hymn (Phil. 2:5-11). It seemed to be familiar to the original reader-hearers because the seven churches in Asia were Pauline churches.

The holy city will be trod down and the two witnesses will prophesy for 42 months (1260 days). This period is a symbolic apocalyptic number, derived from Dan 7:25; 12:7.¹⁴⁸ One-half of seven years means a very short limited time.¹⁴⁹ John uses this period when describing the tribulation endured by the people of faith (cf. 12:6, 14)¹⁵⁰ This symbolic period also means the entire period between Jesus first and second coming.¹⁵¹ It gives the suffering church on earth great encouragement because the period of suffering and persecution is very short and God protects God’s people between Jesus first and second coming. Therefore, the work of the two witnesses must be carried out until Jesus second coming.

The two witnesses, representing the church, give their true testimony in a humble and sacrificial way. But only this way enables people to repent and come to God (11:13-17). In this respect, this sacrificial way is more powerful than any other one. Therefore, this

¹⁴⁸ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 609.

¹⁴⁹ Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Brian K Blount, *Revelation; A commentary*, 205.

¹⁵¹ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, 136.

humble and sacrificial way is the only way God accomplishes God's kingdom. This interlude shows well the true meaning of "God has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God and reign on the earth with the Lamb" (1:6; 5:10; 11:15). We have to be careful not to misunderstand what the word "reign" means in Revelation. By being true and sacrificial witnesses, Christians should reign on earth between Jesus' first and second coming.

There is an important thing I want to point out. That is, the atmosphere of Revelation is changed before and after this interlude where the scroll appears open and it is eaten and understood by John. The seven seals and six trumpets before the scroll appears open are not the contents of the scroll but just strictly limited judgments. In other words, they are not active but passive judgments which occur when God's holy will come down from God's throne to earth; they are just warning judgments designed to bring humanity to repentance. In 9:20-1, immediately before this interlude, it is clearly announced that in fact, they do not have this effect. Those who survive the judgments do not repent and come to God. It is significantly implied that judgments alone could not produce repentance and faith.¹⁵² This is why one more series, the seven thunders, is apparently proposed only to be revoked (10:3-4). So the seven seals affecting a quarter of the earth (6:8) and the six trumpets affecting a third of the earth (8:7-12; 19:15, 18) are not followed by a series affecting half the earth as we might expect. For this reason, God gives John the open scroll which contains the only way to lead people to repentance. Only through the church's sacrificial and faithful witness like the two witnesses (11:1-13) can people come to repentance. Surprisingly, after the sacrificial witness, countless people from all nations will come to

¹⁵² Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 82.

God and God will be their God (11:13, 15-17; 14:6-7).

But there is now to be only the final judgment, the seventh trumpet (10:7). The seven bowls (15:1) included in the seventh trumpet are total, not limited, judgments, accomplishing the final annihilation of the unrepentant as well as Satan and the beast (16:1-20:15): “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues, because with them God’s wrath is completed” (15:1). Finally, God will judge those who worship the beast and wickedly reject many precious chances to repent, offered through the church’s sacrificial witness. It is indicated that God is really angry when he sees his lovely servants killed and their sacrificial witness turned down. So it is meaningful that the golden bowls full of saint’s prayers is connected with the seven bowls of God’s wrath because both use the same word “bowls” (φιάλας).

In this regard, the church’s sacrificial witness like the two witnesses, revealed as the content of the open scroll, is one of the most important themes throughout Revelation.

D. A Woman on Earth (chap. 12)

In 11:15-19, the seventh angel has already sounded the seventh trumpet which contains total, not limited, judgments (the seven bowls, cf. 15:1) on unrepentant people who wickedly reject both the church’s sacrificial witness and the presence of holy God. In fact, the seven bowls start in chap. 16. In chaps 12-15, many interludes are inserted. These visions explain not only why there are many people who reject both the church’s witness and God’s invitation to the kingdom, but also why the world hates and kills God’s people giving their testimony to the world (John 15:18, 19). Through these visions, John reveals the fundamental and spiritual fact that there is the dragon, representing Satan, behind the

unrepentant world, especially the Roman Empire.¹⁵³ It is Satan the real enemy who hates the church.¹⁵⁴ In fact, John mentions Satan several times in the seven messages to the churches (chaps. 2-3): “a synagogue of Satan” (2:9); “I know where you live where Satan has his throne” (2:13); “you have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets” (2:24); “the synagogue of Satan” (3:9). But John has reserved Satan for the dramatic appearance in chap. 12. This usage of the word “Satan” is the author’s literary devise. John knows well that ultimately, the church’s conflict is with Satan as was the case with Jesus (Rev. 2:9, 13, 14; 3:9; 12:9, 12; 20:2, 7, 10; cf. John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2, 27).¹⁵⁵ In other words, Satan who hated and killed Jesus Christ hates and kills the church by using the Roman Empire.

After chap. 12, the dragon (12:3), the beast from the sea (13:1), and the beast from the earth (13:12) appear one by one. The dragon, representing Satan, is the counterpart of God, the first beast, symbolizing the Roman Empire, is the counterpart of the Lamb, and the second beast called the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), representing local officials who are eager to execute the imperial cult in Asia, is the counterpart of the Spirit.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the great harlot (17:1) called Babylon (14:8) or the great city (17:18), symbolizing Roman worshippers of the beast, is a contrast image to the woman (12:1) as well as to the bride of the Lamb (19:7), the New Jerusalem (21:10), the holy city (11:2; 22:19).¹⁵⁷

According to chap.12, Satan has already been defeated and expelled from heaven to earth by the blood of the Lamb and the word of saints’ testimony (12:8-12). Therefore,

¹⁵³ Since John and the churches in Asia stand on the Pauline tradition, they might be familiar with this passage: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

¹⁵⁴ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 167.

¹⁵⁵ Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 580.

¹⁵⁶ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 16-22.

¹⁵⁷ Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

Satan and the beast have a limited power and time under the control of God, the sovereign of the universe: “For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled” (17:17). Since Satan knows that his time is short, he does his best to deceive people from all nations and to separate them from God (12:9; 20:8). For this reason, John shows that Satan stands behind the worshippers of the beast who do not repent in spite of the church’s sacrificial witness. Through the final unlimited judgments of the seven bowls (15:1), God accomplishes the final annihilation of unrepentant worshippers of the beast (Babylon, the great harlot, or the great city, chaps 16-18), the two beasts (19:11-21), and the dragon (20:7-10) in the converse order of their appearance. In this respect, it is certain that the judgments of the three sevens are intensified from the seals affecting a fourth of the earth through the trumpets affecting a third of it to the final bowls affecting all of it and the spiritual world. Moreover, the range of the judgments are expanded and intensified from people (the seven seals and trumpets) to the spiritual power (the seven bowls), Satan. In addition, the degree of suffering the church as faithful witnesses has to go through is also intensified (6:9-11; 11:1-13; 12:15-17; 13:7-10; 15:18; 18:24).

All things considered, even though chaps 12-15 seem to interrupt the whole narrative at a glance, they give us a significant help to see the more fundamental and intensified spiritual reality and to understand how the intensified final judgments will affect both the physical and spiritual worlds. Therefore, the structure of Revelation has a “conic spiral intensified” toward God’s kingdom.

I will refer to a woman briefly. John sees “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” (12:1). She is about to give

birth to a child. But an enormous red dragon stands in front of the woman in order to devour her child. She gives birth to a son, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. So, this son is Jesus Christ, who is snatched up to God and to his throne (12:5), which means that the dragon's attempt to kill the son (crucifixion) instead leads to inaugurating the son's reign (resurrection).¹⁵⁸ The woman flees into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. In 12:9, the dragon turns to be Satan, who has already been defeated and expelled from heaven to earth by the Lamb's blood. Satan persecutes the woman and the rest of her offspring holding Jesus' testimony on earth (12:17). But the woman is taken care of in the desert by God for a time, times and half a time (12:14). It reminds us of Elijah, who is fed and protected in the desert by God.¹⁵⁹

The woman has been variously interpreted as the Virgin Mary, as the Christian church, or as the Jewish people. But because of the statement that her offspring holds Jesus' testimony (12:17), the Mary is rejected.¹⁶⁰ This woman refers to God's faithful people including Israel and the church.¹⁶¹ Considering that the great harlot (17:1) is a counterpart of this woman, we can know without difficulty who she is. The harlot refers to all the Roman followers of the beast, while the woman symbolizes God's people holding Jesus' testimony (12:17). Satan, who tried to devour Jesus, hates and kills Jesus' followers. But the period of persecution will be short (42 months),¹⁶² and God protects God's people between Jesus first and second coming.

¹⁵⁸ Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 238.

¹⁵⁹ Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 260.

¹⁶⁰ Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137.

¹⁶¹ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 152.

¹⁶² Brian K Blount, *Revelation*, 232.

E. 144, 000 in Heaven (14:1-5)

The symbolic number “144,000” reappears here. The 144, 000 on earth (7: 1-8) are about to enter a period of secular opposition, while this 144, 000 in heaven have already triumphed. So it is apparent that the number 144,000 represents all faithful people from all nations, who came to God through the church’s sacrificial witness.

The 144,000, standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb, are closely related to the previous chapters (12-13). Through their patient endurance and faithfulness (13:10), they have triumphed over all the political and economical temptations (13:16-18) and persecutions (13:7-10, 15) derived from the dragon (Satan) and the beast (the Roman Empire). They have such wisdom and insight that they did not receive the number of the beast on their right hand or on their fore head (13:16-18). Instead, they have the Lamb’s name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. It is in contrast with those who receive a mark on their right hand or on their forehead (13:16-18).

An explanation is added: “It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins” (14:4). At first glance, this means that only people who have never had sexual intercourse can “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” However, since the rest of the Bible sanctions and commends marriage, one should be careful not to understand this as a condemnation of marriage or a demand for celibacy. Rather, John appears to adopt the imagery found frequently in the Old Testament where any contact with pagan worship was called “adultery.” Thus the 144,000 are those who have not defiled themselves by participating in the imperial worship.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 61-2.

In this way, the 144,000's victory is mentioned more specifically and concretely than before because the previous chapters 12-13 reveal that Satan, using the imperial cult, tries to prevent people of all nations from repenting and coming to God.

F. The Lamb's Bride in Heaven (19:7-9)

Given that the great prostitute is a counterpart of The Lamb's bride, we can easily understand the bride; the great prostitute (17:1) is called Babylon (14:8) or the great city (17:18). The corruptions of the great harlot contrast with the purity of the Lamb's bride (19:7-9). The harlot symbolizes all the worshipers of the beast while, the bride represents the worshipers of the true God. Just as Satan, the first beast, and the second beast (the false prophet) form a counterfeit Trinity, the prostitute is a counterfeit church.¹⁶⁴ The great prostitute, dressed in purple and scarlet and decorated with all kinds of jewels (17:4), seduces the kings and the inhabitants of the earth into committing adultery with her (17:2; 18:3) and into giving their allegiance to the counterfeit Trinity. Moreover, she is drunk with her blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus (17:6; 18:24; 19:2). She is totally judged (chaps 16-18).

On the contrary, the Lamb's bride in fine linen, representing the righteous acts of the saints, has been ready for the wedding of the Lamb (19:7-8). This wedding imagery indicates the intimacy, love, and joy between Christ and his people.¹⁶⁵ Like the Old Testament (Hos. 2:14-20; Isa. 62:5; Jer. 2:2), the Gospels (Mark 2:19; John 3:29), and the

¹⁶⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

Pauline tradition in which John stands (II Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-32), John pictures God and Christ as the bridegroom and God's people, Israel and the church, as the bride.¹⁶⁶

What is important is that the angel says to John, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb'" (19:9). This wedding does not happen yet, and God's people on earth are invited to this wedding. When the church on earth meets with the church in heaven, the wedding will happen (21:2, 9). The Lamb's wedding contrasts with the horrific feast of 19:17-18, 21, in which the birds consume the corpses of the wicked. Therefore, everyone will participate in one or the other feast.¹⁶⁷ In this way, the interludes about the church also show that the structure of Revelation has a "conic spiral intensified" toward God's kingdom.

VI. The Accomplishment of God's Kingdom in 21-22

A. The Realization of God's Holiness and the Lamb's Victory on Earth

At last, after Jesus Christ's second coming (19:11-21), God's kingdom is accomplished. This means that God's holiness and the Lamb's victory in 4-5 have come down from heaven to earth completely, according to the "Lord's Prayer": "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9-10). Now, God's holy throne is located on earth among God's people (21:3, 5, 22:3). God's holy people who have overcome share God's Holiness and glory as well as the Lamb's victory (21:7), as Jesus promised before (2:7, 10, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21). They become the Holy City, the new Jerusalem where God is fully present.

¹⁶⁶ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, 193.

¹⁶⁷ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 171.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (21:3-4).

This passage depicts the accomplishment of God’s kingdom. All the prophecies and promises in the Old and New Testaments are fulfilled. Holy God dwelt with human beings in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7, 16; 3:8), in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8; 40:34), in the temple (1 Kings 8), and above all in Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 2:19-21). Jesus sends the Holy Spirit in order that the church (1 Cor. 3:16) and its members (1 Cor. 6:19) may be dwellings of God. This new Jerusalem is the consummation of all of these.¹⁶⁸

In fact, God is present as the slaughtered Lamb. God is also present as the Spirit in the faithful witness of the Lamb’s followers who follow God to death. But before chapter 21, Revelation confines the presence of God to his throne in heaven, not because God does not want to come to the earth, but because God’s holiness could not be compatible with the sinfulness of the world. Thus, when God’s holiness comes down from heaven to earth, its effect on earth is nothing but the destructive judgment of evil (6-20). Only when all evil has been destroyed and God’s kingdom comes, will God’s throne be on earth (21:3, 5, 22:3).¹⁶⁹

In this way, when the God’s holiness and the Lamb’s victory in heaven, presented in 4-5, are fully realized on earth, God’s kingdom is accomplished.

B. The Unification of the Churches on Earth and in Heaven, and of the Lamb (Christology) and His Bride (Ecclesiology)

In God’s kingdom, the two churches on earth and in heaven become one church as the Lamb’s bride, and the unified church and the Lamb is also unified. John sees the Holy City,

¹⁶⁸ Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King*, 186.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 130.

the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven to earth. He is told that the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, is the Lamb's bride (21:9-10). If we consider the contrast between the great harlot (17:1) and the Lamb's bride, we can get a better understanding of it.¹⁷⁰ The great harlot (17:1), symbolizing all the worshipers of the beast, is called "the great city" (17:18) or "Babylon" (14:8), whereas the Lamb's bride, representing all the holy people of God, is also named "the Holy City" or "the new Jerusalem."

Actually, the Lamb's wedding is already ready (19), but it is delayed because God's people who hold to the testimony of Jesus on earth are invited to this wedding (19:7-10). This wedding happens when the church on earth meets with the church in heaven. In God's kingdom, the suffering church on earth and the victorious church in heaven become one church as the Lamb's holy bride (21:2; 9-27). This one church includes all the people from all nations who have received the church's sacrificial witness (21:24; 24). This is the unification between the "particular church" on earth and the "universal church" in heaven, between the "visible church" on earth and the "invisible church" in heaven, between the "immanent church" on earth and the "transcendent church" in heaven, and between the "suffering and fighting church" as a witness on earth and the "victorious church" in heaven.

In addition, the Lamb and his church also become one at the wedding, which means that "Christology" and "ecclesiology" are unified. There is no more separation not only between the churches on earth and in heaven, but also between Christ and the church. This is the climax of the whole Bible as well as Revelation.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 130.

VII. Conclusion

Revelation is not a timetable telling when future particular events will happen, nor is it full of bloody vengeance. These misunderstandings result from the book's puzzling structure, its mixed literary genres and its complex apocalyptic portion with many interludes (4-22). To get a better understanding of its structure and consistent message, I propose that chapters 4-5, as the blueprint of God's kingdom, connect the letter section (1-3) and the apocalyptic section (6-22) and that the relationship between the two-fold Christology and two-fold ecclesiology of "suffering and victory" affects its structure.

Through "literary" and "historical-critical" exegesis, we come to know that God's holiness and the Lamb's victory in heaven depicted in 4-5 are intended to be contrasted with the unfaithful church on earth (1-3). Revelation pictures the three series of seven (6-20) as the process of bringing the eschatological presence of God's holiness and Jesus' victory from heaven (4-5) to earth (21-22). In addition, Revelation links "the Lamb's two-fold image of suffering and victory" in chapter 5 to its portrait of "the two-fold ecclesiology." To give encouragement and hope to the church on earth, Revelation connects in an apocalyptic way the earthly church, which suffers as a faithful witness, to the heavenly church, which has already triumphed and shares the Lamb's victory and God's glory. In God's kingdom, these two churches on earth and heaven become one whole holy church as the Lamb's bride (21:2-3; 9-27); the bride (ecclesiology) and the Lamb (Christology) then become one at the wedding. This two-fold Christology and ecclesiology, forming the tensional structure of Revelation, result from the unique Christian experience of the "already" and "not yet" of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Revelation admonishes its original readers and us to repent and to live as sacrificial witnesses "here

and now” in the tension between the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom (3:3; 16:15). In this sense, chapters 4-5, as the blueprint of God’s kingdom, play a key role.

Now, we can apply its consistent message to us, because we still live in the tension between the “already” and “not yet” of God’s kingdom. Revelation tells us about the certainty of the accomplishment of God’s kingdom in the future, but it never tells about the day or hour of Jesus’ second coming. Instead, Revelation admonishes its original readers and us to repent and to live as sacrificial witnesses “here and now” between Jesus’ first and second coming (3:3; 16:15). In other words, Revelation has more interest in “here and now” than “there and then.” It encourages us to participate in the process of the accomplishment of God’s kingdom by living as sacrificial witnesses just as Jesus did. Revelation informs us that through the church’s sacrificial but powerful witness (11: 1-10), God has a grand plan of salvation to lead people from all nations to repent (11:11-14; 14:6-7; 16:9-11) and to take part in God’s kingdom. In this sense, the church exists and suffers “for others,” just as Jesus was “the man for others.”

However, today, the church seems to have forsaken its first love (2:4). In other words, it does not love the rugged cross of the Lamb, where he triumphed and saved us, but loves the glory of the powerful Lion which Jews and the early suffering Christians sought for (chapter 5). We tend to regard Jesus Christ as “Genie in Aladdin lamp” who resolves this-worldly economic and political problems with military or political strength. Without knowing the fact that God wants us to live as God’s true prophets in order to lead all nations to God’s kingdom (21:24, 26), we would only focus on our individual salvation as well as this-worldly blessings.

If the church forgets that it exists “for others” not for itself, it could not help losing its

dynamic power, vitality, and purity, and God will rebuke the church like the seven churches: “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent” (3:18). In this respect, Revelation still awakens and reminds the church of its mission to live as a true witness for others.

Lastly, I propose that “Christian pacifist traditions” (nonviolence) could be studied in light of the Lamb’s victory through suffering in Revelation. Like the Lamb, the strongest weapon with which the church fights its spiritual battles in this world is God’s word and its sacrificial and true witness (12:11; 19:15), not military or political power. This sacrificial witness is not passive but powerful and aggressive (11:5, 10). Only the church’s sacrificial witness could overcome evil (12:11), and lead all nations to God’s kingdom as well as true repentance (11:13; 21:24, 26).

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