

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

"TO HIM THAT OVERCOMES...": Nikaô IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION,  
ITS BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

© ERNEST P. JANZEN

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

1988

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OF REVELATION, ITS BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

BY

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the degree of

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Table of Contents

PREFACE.....iii

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS THESIS.....v

INTRODUCTION.....vi

Chapter

I. SETTING THE STAGE: REVELATION IN PREVIOUS STUDY.....1

Hermeneutical Studies in Revelation.....6

Exegetical Studies in Revelation.....11

The Need For A Theological Perspective.....29

THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION.....35

II. THE PAGAN THEOLOGY OF VICTORY IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD..49

The Greek Goddess Of Victory: Nike.....49

The Roman Goddess Of Victory: Victoria.....66

Summary.....79

Victoria.....81

Nike.....85

III. THE JEWISH CONTRIBUTION FOR A THEOLOGY OF VICTORY: THE  
MACCABEAN LITERATURE AND THE OLD TESTAMENT.....93

The Maccabean Literature.....93

1 Maccabees.....98

3 Maccabees.....100

2 Maccabees.....101

4 Maccabees.....105

Victory As Influenced By The Old Testament.....117

Syncretism: How Much?.....137

IV. VICTORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.....144

Semantical Considerations.....145

The Diversity Of The Nikaô Word Group: Josephus.....152

Nikaô In The New Testament.....155

Nikaô In The Epistles Of St. John.....157

Nikaô In Paul's Letters To The Romans.....159

Nikaô In Paul's First Letter To The Corinthians....161

Nikaô In The Gospels.....162

V. Nikaô IN REVELATION.....166

Persecution Of Christians In Revelation.....166

The Letters To The Seven Churches.....171

The Role Of Persecution In Revelation.....173



The Overcomer Of Revelation.....	179
Conquering Does Not Necessitate Martyrdom.....	181
The Importance Of Christ For The Conquerors.....	186
Christ As Conqueror.....	188
The Conqueror In 11:7 and 13:7.....	191
The Good News Of Revelation.....	193
Summary.....	197
VI.    APPLICATION OF CHAPTERS I-V TO REVELATION.....	199
The Victory Cults Of The Greco-Roman World.....	200
Similarities.....	200
1. The Seeking Of Gods For Victory.....	201
2. Possibility Of Defeat.....	201
3. Belief Despite Defeat.....	202
4. Growing Allegiance.....	202
5. Claims Of Superiority.....	202
6. The Nature Of The Victory.....	203
7. Perseverance Of Devotees.....	203
Differences.....	204
1. God As Supreme.....	204
2. Personification Of Victory.....	205
3. Range Of Effectiveness.....	206
4. Involvement Of Devotees For Victory.....	206
5. Deification As Reward.....	207
6. Proof Of Victory.....	207
7. Expendability Of Deities.....	208
Summary.....	209
Victory In The Maccabean Literature.....	212
Similarities.....	213
1. Persecution From The Ruling Powers.....	213
2. Persecution Is Allowed.....	213
3. Theology Of Suffering.....	214
4. Salvation In The Present.....	215
Differences.....	215
1. Extent Of The Victory.....	215
2. Source Of Strength.....	216
Summary.....	217
Victory In The Old Testament.....	220
Concluding Remarks.....	221
VII.   REVELATION'S ABSOLUTE CLAIM TO VICTORY.....	227
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	254

## PREFACE

This thesis arises from a course on the Revelation of St. John which I took at the University of Manitoba in 1985. At that time I wrote a short paper in which I examined the theological theme of victory in Revelation. During my research I discovered that scholarly attention was lacking with regard to Christ's overcoming, and His charge to His followers to be overcomers as well.

I then approached my advisor, Dr. Larry W. Hurtado, with the prospect of pursuing this topic in a M.A. thesis. After obtaining approval, I began to expand upon my earlier research, the result of which now lies in the reader's hand. Throughout my research, I have benefited tremendously from the advice and wisdom of my advisor, and I am very grateful to him. I am also thankful to Dr. Hurtado for the years I have been able to study under him in my B.A. Honours and Master's work. As I leave

the University of Manitoba, and begin doctoral work at the University of Toronto, I will take the insights that I have gained from his thorough research habits.

I am also thankful to Dr. Egil Grislis, Graduate chairman of the Department of Religion, who agreed to be a reader for my work. I also appreciate the contribution of my external reader, Dr. Rory B. Egan, chairman of the Department of Classics.

Gratitude is also in order to my parents, Jake and Pauline Janzen who taught me about "the conqueror" as a youth. I thank the rest of my family and my in-laws for all the support that I received over the years. However, my gratitude is most deserved by my wife, Carla M. Janzen, R.N., who shares my love for the One who has conquered, and who has supported me throughout my studies. Schatzie, may the Lord richly bless you. I dedicate this thesis to my wife.

Eucharistô.

Abbreviations Used In This Thesis

AGB

Arndt, William F. & Gingrich, F. Wilbur. A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature. (A Translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's "Griechisch-Deutsches Woerterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der uebrigen urchristlichen Literature") Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1979 rpr.

ANRW

Aufstieg und Niedergang der Roemischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung. Haase, Wolfgang, ed. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

IDB

The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible. Buttrick, George Arthur et al eds. Nashville: Abingdon.

NIDNTT

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology. Brown, Colin et al eds. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.

OCD

The Oxford Classical Dictionary. Hammond, Nicholas Geoffrey Lempriere & Scullard, Howard Hayes eds. Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1970.

PW

Pauly's Real Encyclopaedie der Classischen Altertums-wissenschaft. Wissowa, Georg ed. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung.

TDNT

Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament. Kittel, Gerhard ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

## INTRODUCTION

Christ's victory over death can be rightly understood as the single most important claim of the Christian faith. The New Testament also contains discussions pertaining to concerns such as ethical direction, church life, dogmatic standards, hermeneutics of the Old Testament Scriptures and the life of Christ. But it is Christ's resurrection alone that gives meaning to the claims of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

The last book of the New Testament canon, Revelation, is also better understood when read in the light of Christ's victory over death. Christ's victory over death plays a major role in Revelation and therefore, an understanding of its place within

---

<sup>1</sup> Without Christ's resurrection, Paul's entire work would have been meaningless. See for example 1 Cor. 15:12-19, which will also be discussed below in ch. IV.

Revelation is rewarded with insights to the nature of God and His workings in salvation-history.

However, the substantial portion of my efforts in this thesis will be directed at exploring theologies of victory that were contemporary with and prior to the one expressed in Revelation. The presupposition operative in this thesis is that the powerful image of victory seen throughout the New Testament, and particularly in Revelation, did not emerge out of a vacuum. As we shall see, the theology of victory in Revelation is antedated by several significant and influential victory theologies.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I highlight the recent history of Revelation in academic discussions. My conclusion is that the very core of Revelation's identity, its theological agenda, has been neglected in scholarly studies. Considerable attention has been directed to the apocalyptic garb wherein Revelation is clothed, but in the process scholars have failed to address the theological content conveyed through that apocalyptic genre. I suggest that the neglected theological concerns of Revelation should be illuminated with the tools of the Historical Critical method. Therefore, in order to address this shortcoming, I select a major theological theme from Revelation which at the same time is also a theme that has not found much scholarly attention. This theme is that of the overcomer, or the conqueror in Revelation. To close the first chapter I substantiate its place in Revelation as a major theological theme worthy of investigation.

The remaining chapters are directed at elucidating the theological theme of victory in Revelation with the use of the Historical Critical method. The logical starting point therefore to understanding Revelation's victory motif would be to examine those theologies of victory contemporary and prior to Revelation's.

Chapter two is constructed to try and understand victory in the mindset of Revelation's contemporaries, those in the Greco-Roman world. What we discover is that theologies of victory existed with the Greeks from approximately 700 BCE, and with the Romans from approximately 295 BCE. These pagan victory cults were widespread and extremely influential at the time when Revelation was written. Chapter two will trace the growth and development of these pagan victory cults, demonstrating how the recipients of Revelation living in Asia Minor were saturated with theologies of victory.

Chapter three recognizes another religious tradition of victory from which Revelation surely drew upon. The Jewish religious tradition examined in this thesis is represented by the Intertestamental literature and the Old Testament. With regard to the former, the Maccabean literature in particular will be examined, as it is also concerned with those who "conquer". Unique to their victories however, is that their victories are achieved through death, and thereby they constitute an early martyrdom tradition. Martyrdom, or the possibility thereof, plays a large role in Revelation as well, and as a result, the

Maccabean literature sheds valuable light on victory in Revelation.

With regard to the latter, the Old Testament Scriptures, we will see that the God of the Old Testament alone is understood as the giver of victory. While the Greco-Roman victory cults and the Maccabean literature make similar claims, the Old Testament is unparalleled in attributing to God the designation as the only source of victory. This is important to our understanding of victory in Revelation, because the Old Testament is found to be the greatest source of influence on Revelation's theology. Having reported on several "external" theologies of victory, chapter three concludes with a discussion of how much syncretism can be expected in Revelation.

In chapter four, we move to a discussion of victory as expressed in the contemporary texts of Josephus and the rest of the New Testament. Semantical considerations are examined, since the nature of this thesis is somewhat controlled by the parameters of a specific Greek word group. Also, as a precursor to the New Testament use of this Greek word group, a brief report is given on the wide range of contexts in which the conquering motif is found. The salient features of the New Testament picture of conquering then concludes the chapter.

We begin chapter five with a discussion of the religio-political Sitz im Leben of Revelation. More so than any other New Testament book, Revelation is occupied with a discussion of persecution, both present and expected. Therefore, persecution,



as conditioning the text, is a central concern within this fifth chapter. The remainder of this chapter carries on with this discussion by examining what "conquering" entails in the text of Revelation.

The sixth chapter concerns itself with a comparison and application of the preceding five chapters. Revelation is clearly not unique in espousing a theology of victory. However, the nature of the victory propounded in Revelation is unique, and asserts itself as superseding other victory claims, especially those of the pagan victory cults. Each of the previously examined theologies of victory are then compared and contrasted to the one found in Revelation. The uniqueness of Revelation's claim is therefore better understood by making these comparisons. The seventh chapter then expands upon our understanding of the absolute claim of victory as made in Revelation.

In this thesis, I have concentrated on the theologies of victory from the Jewish and the Greco-Roman traditions. In this historical context, Revelation expounds "another" theology of victory. It builds upon the Jewish tradition by integrating the Christ-event into a theology that understands God as the sole giver of victory. While this element is important, our understanding of victory in Revelation is heightened when examined in relation to the contemporary pagan victory cults.

The Christ of Revelation is not at odds with the Jewish tradition, and therefore no polemic is found against this tradition. However, the title of victor given to Christ in

Revelation is one that does not tolerate an acceptance of the claims of the pagan victory cults. Therefore, a polemic can be found against these pagan claims, and Revelation boldly states that there is no conqueror outside of Christ and those who follow Him alone.

A historical investigation of these pagan victory cults reveals that they were experiencing a tremendous surge of growth at precisely the time that Revelation was being written. Therefore, Revelation was written to Christians in Asia Minor who were immersed in a culture that was itself preoccupied with claims of victory.

Moreover, from at least the time of Augustus, emperor worship was taking on more and more importance, and the victory cults came to be inextricably associated with this worship. The Roman empire was very tolerant of other religious expressions, providing that emperor worship accompanied their beliefs. Christianity would not accept these pagan practices, and therefore a conflict ensued. By the time Revelation was written, the conflict between church and state was growing, and Christians were being persecuted because of their faith.

Revelation responds to this external threat by having the readers of the seven churches in Asia Minor focus on Christ. Moreover, I will seek to prove that Christ is consciously referred to as the conqueror in contradistinction to the surrounding pagan victory cults. Revelation's claim is that there is only one victory, the one found in Christ Jesus. Therefore,

the claims of the pagan victory cults, as much as 700 years prior to those of Revelation's, fall to the wayside as insignificant.

It is Revelation's absolute claim to victory, as embodied in the Christ-event, that brings the church into conflict with the state. Ironically, it is this same claim that proves to be the power that helps the would-be-conqueror to conquer in spite of the surrounding hostilities. I will seek to prove in the last chapter of this thesis that Revelation deliberately polemicizes the pagan victory cults.

The pagan emperor cult claimed to embody victory for the entire Roman empire. Revelation is clear in negating these claims while being well-aware of the consequences. The reason for this "obstinate" adherence to Christ is because of His unparalleled victory. For when the heavenly hosts finally gather in Revelation, Christ alone is found worthy to open the seals which in turn set in motion the final workings of God's salvation-history.

## CHAPTER I

### SETTING THE STAGE: REVELATION IN PREVIOUS STUDY

Unlike any other book in the Bible,<sup>1</sup> the Revelation of St. John<sup>2</sup> has been the basis for much perplexity, spurious exegesis and eisegesis. Its present day canonical status was not achieved without some protest, and it has continued to be the source of great divisions, disputes, and dogmatics to the point of even causing some of the great men of the past to refuse to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise, all references will be quoted from the following Bible: The Common Bible: The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version. Containing The Old And New Testaments With The Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books, Expanded Edition, An Ecumenical Edition, (New York: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1973 rpr.). Abbreviations of biblical texts will follow the use of the above mentioned Bible.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, the author of Revelation will be referred to as John. Questions pertaining to which John will not be addressed in this thesis, as they are not pertinent to the study.

write a commentary on it. Furthermore, entire religious traditions have been labelled as the seat of anti-Christ based on Revelation. To be sure, this was not John's intention for writing the book, but these have been some of the unfortunate results of its presence in the canon.

There have been those who have capitalized on the book's seemingly inexplicable mysteries by producing road-maps to the future which they claim not only explain the book's contents, but also explain the complex world in which we live. Itching ears have been tickled by those claiming to hold the key that unlocks those mysteries, to the extent that best selling books on Revelation resulted.

More scholarly studies have taken a less sensationalistic approach to Revelation by attempting to understand John's world, and then making suggestions for the book's present day contribution. Other works have chosen to deal only with its historical context, and thereby have avoided altogether any present day implications.<sup>3</sup>

Recently the suggestion was made that Revelation has not received proper academic attention. In Fiorenza's work on Revelation, she states that "serious critical scholarship" has

---

<sup>3</sup> It seems that this approach to the study of Scripture in general has been neglected to the point of endangering the credibility of academics in the field of Religion. An appeal to the scholars of Religious Studies to take this task more seriously was the nature of the exhortation given by Fiorenza in her presidential address at the (1987) SBL meeting in Boston. Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, "The Ethics of Interpretation: De-Centering Biblical Scholarship" JBL 107 (1, 1988): 3-17.

not addressed Revelation, especially in the period of 1945 to 1979.<sup>4</sup> When studies of Revelation have been undertaken, they have generally tended to be very selective in their methods of approach. Specific methodological studies have focused on singular aspects such as morphology, genre, literary questions and the History of Religions approach. Quite often one of these methods has been used to the point of exclusion of other methods, questions and concerns, hence leaving the reader with an unbalanced picture of Revelation.

The purpose of this chapter will be to cite briefly some of the many different methods and approaches used in the study and interpretation of Revelation, with the intent of discovering areas that have been neglected. This thesis is intended to highlight an area of neglect in scholarly study, and in doing so, will offer a small example of the fruit that can be gleaned from addressing neglected areas of Revelation.

The book of Revelation contains in its twenty-two chapters a spectrum of issues which are not as dominant in other New Testament texts. For example, the striking and sometimes mysterious symbolism that fills Revelation is unparalleled in the New Testament. Also, its content is portrayed with the related elements of apocalypse, eschatology and prophecy in a magnitude not present in other New Testament books. Unique

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<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 12. Her criticism is based on a comparison between work done on Revelation and work done on the fourth Gospel in this period.

elements such as these have received great scholarly attention, while the attention given to Revelation's theological contributions have been modest at best in comparison.

To be sure, John's gift to the New Testament was enclosed with apocalyptic, eschatological and prophetic wrappings, but the gift offered inside to his readers was a theological one. John wrote with pastoral concerns to fellow Christians and followers of the crucified and risen Christ, and he did so with images, symbols and mediums not common to New Testament books. Most studies have chosen to examine the wrappings to such an extent that the contents within have not been fully explored.

Furthermore, in keeping with what has been said above, an examination of the theological contents at the expense of the garb therewith enclosed would be equally erroneous. What is needed, it seems, is a marriage of the theological endeavour with that of the Historical-Critical method. A proper understanding of Revelation will not be attained if either is excluded.

In this thesis I will attempt to provide a working example of such an endeavour by locating a major theological theme within Revelation and by then utilizing Historical-Critical tools towards a better understanding of that theological theme. Before we begin with this task, we will try to highlight the approaches used in studying Revelation. In doing so we hope to accomplish two things. First, we wish to set the background for the stage upon which we now tread. Many interpretations have preceded

us, and more will follow, but an understanding of where we came from will lead to a greater appreciation of the depth and complexity of this book. Secondly, by looking from whence we came, we shall be able more accurately to set our sites on where we should go in times to come. If there have been areas of neglect where there should not have been, then these need to be addressed, and this is the primary intention of this thesis.

In the process of researching material for this chapter, it was noticed that works on Revelation basically consisted of two sorts of approaches. The first of these two approaches will be referred to as the hermeneutical, or the classical hermeneutical. This approach concerns itself chiefly with the study of canonized texts only, and in doing so, is concerned with the theological agendas of those texts. The second major approach noted will be referred to as the exegetical approach. This approach concerns itself with discovering what any ancient text meant, and in this way is not necessarily committed to theological endeavors. Of the two, it is the more critical, and could also be referred to as the Historical-Critical method.

Interpretations of Revelation have tended to concern themselves primarily with one or the other of these two methods, while a few studies have attempted to utilize both. In the pages that follow we will cite some of the major contributions made by these two methods, both positive and negative, and conclude with a suggestion for a model for further study on this enigmatic book of the New Testament. We will begin with a perusal of the



hermeneutical approach, and then move on to an examination of the exegetical approach.

### Hermeneutical Studies In Revelation

Due to the fact that Revelation contains diverse elements not found in other New Testament texts,<sup>5</sup> hermeneutical studies of the past have tried to assimilate these into a schema or matrix that accommodates a handling of the text in a sensible manner. Primarily, the issue of concern has been the attempt to answer the question of how Revelation as a sacred text is to be understood. More plainly stated, is Revelation a book written to first century CE Christians only, or does it speak to Christians of all ages? Or, does Revelation speak only to events "yet to come"?

The hermeneutical concern saw itself expressed chiefly through schemata which attempted to answer the question of how Revelation as Scripture should be approached. The four schemas which have "passed the test of time" are the Preterist, the

---

<sup>5</sup> While other New Testament texts do contain within their parameters elements common to those within Revelation, Revelation is unique in that it is constituted from beginning to end with elements of apocalyptic, eschatological hopes, prophetic utterances, bizarre and mysterious symbolism all used to explain the complexity of the outworking of God's salvation-history.

Continuous-Historical, the Futurist and, the Idealist (Spiritual/Symbolical).<sup>6</sup>

While most scholarly studies of Revelation make reference to these schemas of approach, those comments are usually limited to the ones made in the introductory sections of their commentaries. Perhaps the greatest reason for the lack of scholarly attention to these schemas is that these schemas were all too frequently used to propagate theological agendas which had been determined prior to an examination of the text.

For example, in 1851, Edward Bishop Elliott produced an incredible four-volume work on Revelation spanning some 2,391 pages. That he took seriously the matter of which schema to

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<sup>6</sup> Respectively: James J. Megivern, "Wrestling With Revelation" in Biblical Theology Bulletin 8, (1978), p. 150. George Eldon Ladd, A Commentary On The Revelation Of John, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983 rpr.), pp. 10ff. Robert H. Mounce. The Book Of Revelation, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 40 ff. Leon Morris, The Revelation Of St. John, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 16-18. Revere F. Weidner, Annotations On The Revelation Of St. John The Divine, "The Lutheran Commentary, Vol. 12", (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1898), pp. xiii ff. William Milligan, Lectures On The Apocalypse, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 126. Kepler suggested a "fifth category" which says that Revelation should be ignored. His reason for saying this is that since the work is an apocalyptic work, it applies to the time when apocalyptic was in vogue. Therefore, since it has no use or application for the present day, it should be ignored. Thomas S. Kepler, The Book of Revelation: A Commentary for Laymen, (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 23. Kepler cites Martin Luther as an example of someone who adopted this fifth category in regard to Revelation. Although Martin Luther believed Revelation to be Scripture, he ignored the work.

apply to Revelation is evidenced by the fact that he devoted over 350 pages to this very discussion.<sup>7</sup>

Elliott's theories are propounded with a zeal that makes reading his commentary an interesting and somewhat enjoyable experience. However, the conclusions that his efforts come to rest upon are unscholarly as well as unacceptable.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Bishop Elliott, Horae Apocalypticae; Or, A Commentary On The Apocalypse, Vols. 1-4, (London: Seeleys, 1851), Vol. 4, p. 527.

<sup>8</sup> Of the three schemas suggested by Elliott, he favours the Protestant-Historic "...which regards the prophecy as a prefiguration of the great events that were to happen in the Church, and world connected with it, from St. John's time to the consummation; including specially the establishment of the Poppedom, and reign of Papal Rome, as in some way or other the fulfillment of the types of the Apocalyptic Beast and Babylon." Elliott, Vol. 4, p. 529. This of course is based on his "...rigid comparison of the Papal history, seat, character, doctrine, and doings with those of the Antichrist of prophecy." Elliott, Vol. 4, p. 590. A little later he concludes: "...Papal Rome, the antitype, the only proper antitype, to the Apocalyptic Babylon." Elliott, Vol. 4, p. 633. Beckwith quickly dismisses this schema as a viable schema, and instead correctly identifies it as a motive in interpreting Revelation. This motive is one that finds its expression in the thirteenth century (CE) as a result of the then-dominant allegorical and mystical method of interpretation. Protestant groups such as the Wycliffites, Hussites, Waldenses and the Kathari all used this methodology to arrive at the conclusion that the papacy in Rome was the Antichrist foretold in Revelation. Isbon T. Beckwith, The Apocalypse Of John: Studies In Introduction With A Critical And Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 rpr.), pp. 334,335. For more on the inefficiency of this approach see Eduard Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), pp. 7,8. However, two direct results from this Historical-Protestant approach are noteworthy: 1. Rome responded by saying that their assailants were collectively the Antichrist. Robert Henry Charles, Studies In The Apocalypse, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915 rpr.), pp. 23-24. 2. The second result was that the Roman church now made efforts to discover the meaning of Revelation by trying to understand the facts and circumstances of the writer's own time. Beckwith, p. 331. This was headed by Jesuit scholars such as Hentenius, Ribeira, Salmeron, Pereyra, Alcasar and Juan Mariana. Charles,

To be sure, the use of these schemas did not always result in such unfortunate propaganda, but the results of this kind of an examination of Revelation were usually plagued with various pre-determined results. The hermeneutical endeavour sought to elucidate the theology of Revelation by passing the work through a matrix whose grids were immovable. The result was far too often a subjective reading of a text with unacceptable foregone conclusions.

More recently, scholars have sought to integrate these hermeneutical approaches by combining the four accepted schemas, and applying them to exegetical approaches to Revelation.<sup>9</sup> It became increasingly clear to those utilizing the hermeneutical schemas that one should start with the principles inherent in the Preterist schema, and to then move on from there.

Having said this, we note that it is precisely at this point that the hermeneutical and exegetical concerns intersect, for both desire to accurately represent the historical context of Revelation. The applications of the two approaches have been different, but their starting point was the same.<sup>10</sup>

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Studies, p. 33. This "anti-Catholic" approach had a long history preceeding even Elliott, commencing as early as the fourteenth century with Petrus Aureolus (1317) and Nicolaus of Lyra (1329). Charles, Studies, p. 26. The first reference we have to a Protestant breaking away from this anti-papal interpretation was the Dutchman Grotius (1644). Charles, Studies, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Charles, Studies, p. 34; Milligan, Lectures, p. 140; Beckwith, p. 335.

<sup>10</sup> Present day scholarship has witnessed the shift in emphasis from the hermeneutical to the exegetical (Historical-Critical), and then finally to a mixture containing the enduring

The discussion above has attempted to state the methodology by which the theological content of Revelation has largely been addressed. In what could be construed as a reaction to the results of the hermeneutical approach's dealing with Revelation's theology, the exegetical approach has focused on other facets of Revelation's content. The unfortunate result of the exegetical approach has been that the theological concerns of Revelation were often overlooked in addressing these other important facets. We will now turn to a more thorough examination of the efforts of the exegetical approach. In doing so we will notice that this approach has also been found to be lacking in dealing with the theological themes within Revelation. We will then conclude our examination with suggestions for change in scholarly work in Revelation.

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components of each methodology. These two methodologies have coexisted for centuries, but it is agreed that the hermeneutical antedates the Historical-Critical method. To try to date the advent of the Historical-Critical method is not an easy task. Even though Luther's sola scriptura gave the Scriptures, and not the church, the right to be the judge in theology, we cannot ascribe the Historical-Critical method's birth to that era. To be sure, we could even trace some of this method's roots to Origen who questioned the Pauline authorship of the book of Hebrews on the basis of stylistic criteria. But, when pressed to formalize a date for the inception of and use proper of the Historical-Critical method, the nineteenth century would be more realistic. Even though it prevailed from Origen and on, its entrenchment per se occurred much later. Krentz summarizes: "By the end of the Second World War historical criticism was firmly established, not to be dislodged by any attack." Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982 rpr.), p. 32. For a more complete picture of Krentz's discussion see pp. 6-32. The "classical" approaches to the interpretation of Revelation have to a large extent been replaced with the Historical-Critical method, but a combination of the two methodologies is viable.

## Exegetical Studies In Revelation

A significant figure in the study of Revelation is R.H. Charles. He acknowledged the presence and use of the hermeneutical approach, but his efforts were clearly channeled through exegetical tools. In his commentary on Revelation he lists what he believes to be the "standard" methods of exegetical interpretation. He suggests that there are nine such methods that have "...stood the test of experience and been found necessary for the interpretation of the Apocalypse."<sup>11</sup> The nine methods suggested by Charles are:

1. Contemporary-Historical
2. Eschatological<sup>12</sup>
3. Chiliastic
4. Philological
5. Literary-Critical<sup>13</sup>
6. Traditional-Historical
7. Religious-Historical
8. Philosophical
9. Psychological

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Henry Charles, A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Revelation Of St. John, Vols. I & II, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), Vol. I, p. clxxxiii. These nine methods are found on pp. clxxxiii-clxxxvii.

<sup>12</sup> Lilje finds in the eschatological method the key to the interpretation of Revelation. For him, the amount of truth revealed by the other methods is determined by their relation to the eschatological method. Hanns Lilje, The Last Book Of The Bible: The Meaning Of The Revelation Of St. John, Olive Wyon trans., (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957 rpr.), pp. 8,9. Kuyper shared this same outlook. Abraham Kuyper, The Revelation Of St. John, John Hendrik de Vries, trans., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963 rpr.), pp. 17-31.

<sup>13</sup> See also Charles, Studies, pp. 42-75.

To be sure, the above listed nine categories are important to this day, but new ground has been broken since Charles' work. For example, Fiorenza takes Charles' sixth methodology (Traditional-Historical) and further elucidates it by classifying under it a subtype: Ecclesiastical-Tradition-Historical. This methodology seeks to discover which John it was who wrote Revelation, and, whether or not Revelation belongs to the same school or circle as that of the fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles.<sup>14</sup>

Fiorenza also took Charles' first method (Contemporary-Historical) and again expanded it by creating an approach which she calls the Socio-Historical. This approach seeks to examine in greater detail matters such as the Roman presence, the Imperial cult, the mystery cults, the many private associations and other philosophical schools. Fiorenza says that an updated version of Ramsay's The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia (1904) is what is needed.<sup>15</sup>

Critical tools have developed over the years, and they, together with what has been discussed thus far, resulted in a

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<sup>14</sup> Fiorenza, Revelation, p. 18. Ford's commentary on Revelation is based on her conclusion that chapters 4-11 were from the school of John the Baptist; chapters 12-22 of a later date by disciples of the Baptist; chapters 1-3 and 22:16a, 20b and 21 added still later by a Jewish Christian disciple. J. Massyngberde Ford, Revelation, "The Anchor Bible, Vol. 38", (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), pp. 3ff.

<sup>15</sup> Fiorenza, Revelation, pp. 19,20. This has of course appeared with C.J. Hemer's recent work: Colin J. Hemer, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

more indepth study of Revelation. Charles harnessed the use of critical tools in a way unparalleled before, and the use of these critical tools has continued to this day, with variation in degrees of application to be sure. A look at some of these tools will help us to understand the complete matrix in which studies of Revelation are to be found.

An in depth discussion of these tools/methods is not within the scope of this thesis. However, in recent years there has been considerable attention paid to the fact that Revelation belongs to the genre of apocalyptic writings. Further, incorporated in this discussion of Revelation's genre are elements and concerns common to many of those in the exegetical endeavour.

Therefore, a brief discussion of the apocalyptic elements of Revelation will afford us the possibility of touching base with the various tools involved in the exegetical endeavour, and at the same time, it will help to familiarize ourselves with the book to be dealt with throughout this thesis.<sup>16</sup>

That Revelation is an apocalypse is clear from the first words of the book, Rev. 1:1. That it is apocalyptic is another concern. The "genre of apocalyptic" is an issue that has

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<sup>16</sup> Support for such an endeavour is given by Fiorenza who says that the key to unlocking the mysteries of Revelation lie in "...understanding [its] apocalyptic language and form as the 'creative concretization flowing from historically unique constellations'". Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, "The Phenomenon of Early Christian Apocalyptic: Some Reflections on Method" in Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979. David Hellholm, ed. (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), p. 306.



recently received much attention. Two overt examples are the colloquiums that resulted in Semeia 14 and 36 as well as the major work of some 900 pages edited by David Hellholm and entitled Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East.

Most scholars agree that Revelation is of the apocalyptic genre, and those such as Klaus Koch, J.J. Collins and A.Y. Collins would say that a definition and understanding of that literary genre<sup>17</sup> is a must for anyone wishing to study Revelation.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, the following definition of Apocalypse was arrived at by the Semeia contributors in their 1979 gathering:

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.<sup>19</sup>

The bulk of this literature was produced within approxi-

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<sup>17</sup> "By 'literary genre' we mean a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing." John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards The Morphology Of A Genre" in Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, John J. Collins, ed. (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> J.J. Collins, Semeia 14, "Introduction", p. 4. Blevins (1980), maintains that the genre of Revelation remains elusive. He says that scholars find it difficult to pinpoint the literary genre of Revelation, and he suggests that the genre of Revelation is a syncretistic one, "...setting forth a prophetic message in the form of Greek tragic drama". James L. Blevins, "The Genre of Revelation" Review and Expositor, 77 (Summer 1980), p. 393. See also Mounce, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> J.J. Collins, Semeia 14, "Introduction", p. 9.

mately a three hundred year period.<sup>20</sup> While Revelation is among the only apocalyptic work in the entire canon (cf. Daniel and Mark 13), numerous extra-biblical examples exist, and are similar in content. Therefore, this Literary-Critical discussion enters as one of the exegetical questions concerning the text because of its apocalyptic genre.

The History of Religions school is another exegetical method that has contributed to our understanding of apocalyptic literature in that it has identified the specific symbols of Revelation which have been borrowed and/or adapted from other texts and religions.

With regard to the History of Religions school, Hermann Gunkel made a comparison between Gen. 1 and Rev. 12 and sought to show that the key images of these texts were not simple figures of speech or allegories created for that biblical context. Instead, "...such images, like the beast, are traditional symbols which have their origins in ancient Near Eastern myths."<sup>21</sup> Via these myths and their rich tradition and meaning, Revelation presents the reader with a graphic description of the hostility

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<sup>20</sup> 165 BCE - 135 CE according to David Noel Freedman, "The Flowering Of Apocalyptic" in Journal For Theology And The Church 6, (1969), p. 166. Cross puts the origins of apocalyptic as early as the sixth century BCE. Frank Moore Cross, "New Directions In The Study Of Apocalyptic" in JTC, p. 161. Later, he goes on to say that the source of mythic material informing Jewish apocalyptic was "old Canaanite mythic lore". Cross, p. 165, n. 23.

<sup>21</sup> As cited in A.Y. Collins, "Reading the Book of Revelation in the Twentieth Century." Interpretation 40 (No. 3, July 1986), p. 234.

between the Roman Empire and the universal kingship of God through Christ by means of the "beast".<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, the History of Religions approach has also been an area of concern for some scholars who see Christianity as "selling out" to foreign influences. Lilje says that a parallel is not the same thing as an explanation. True, the

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<sup>22</sup> A.Y. Collins, "Reading", pp. 234-235. Boll and Loisy agree with this when they say that John expresses the Christian hope with the use of borrowed symbols. As cited in Feuillet, pp. 43-44. "Most of his images are not metaphors created by an individual poetic mind in isolation, but are traditional images with a long history and a rich variety of connotations and associations. In order to understand these images, one must be aware of their traditional character and become familiar with the connotations they carry with them." A.Y. Collins, The Combat Myth In The Book Of Revelation, Caroline Bynum & George Rupp, eds., "Harvard Theological Review: Harvard Dissertations In Religion, Number 9" (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 57. Caird says that the readers of Revelation were well-versed with these images and symbols. "Whether they had formerly been Jews or pagans, they would read the language of myth as fluently as any modern reader of the daily papers reads the conventional symbols of a political cartoon." G.B. Caird, A Commentary On The Revelation Of St. John The Divine, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), p. 6. See also Laymon, p. 48 and Kepler, p. 25. The thesis of Farrar's work in his Rebirth Of Images is of course that Revelation is a rebirth of images which are all to be found in the Old Testament. We may find similarities between John's work and works such as 1 Enoch and the Twelve Testaments, but Farrar says that John's main source was the Old Testament: "It is all in the Old Testament. St. John used other writings and oral formulae, but always as a rule for the interpretation of Scripture, never as a substitute for it." He goes on to say that "...if an apocalyptic writing, previously unknown, were to be discovered tomorrow, and prove to have been largely followed by St. John as a canon of interpretation, we should be interested to observe the fact, but we should very likely add nothing material to our knowledge of what St. John did and meant. For, whether he interpreted by a guide, or without, he interpreted: he never copied out 'sources' or used undigested matter or stopped short of the grasp of the ancient scripture which was to be reborn through his inspiration." Austin Farrar, A Rebirth Of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse, (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), p. 19. See also pp. 311-316.

author may have drawn from this material, but his message "...may still be his own distinctive and original contribution."<sup>23</sup> To recover motifs and parallels does not mean that we have recovered the message itself.

Beasley-Murray acknowledges, with clarification, that there are similarities across religions. He says that without a doubt John was acquainted with such parallels, "...but if his eschatology was as Christ-determined as we believe it to have been, it will be more just to him to begin with Jesus rather than the dragon."<sup>24</sup>

In our opinion, Fiorenza sheds some very important light on the matter. Her suggestion is not original,<sup>25</sup> but in recent material we found very little that cautioned us in the same way. She recognizes that the fusion and interaction of cultural-religious traditions and influences are complex and inextricable, but at the same time she cautions scholars about attempts to isolate different traditions and backgrounds. What Fiorenza suggests is that scholars should consider "...that the author, consciously or not, drew on and fused together traditions,

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<sup>23</sup> Lilje, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, The Book Of Revelation, (London: Oliphants, 1978), pp. 40,41.

<sup>25</sup> H.B. Swete cautioned his readers in the same way already in 1907. Henry Barclay Swete, The Apocalypse Of St. John, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1907), p. ccxvii.

motives, and patterns at home in very different cultures and mythologies."<sup>26</sup>

Another exegetical question inherent in the discussion of Revelation's genre is that of Source-Criticism. To be sure, this exegetical tool is not far removed from the History of Religions approach, in that Source Criticism seeks out sources for the specific content of a book, whereas History of Religions seeks out sources for the elements/symbols that are embodied in the book. One of the most common sources quoted for Revelation is the Old Testament. Both Feuillet and Whealon cite the statistic that of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 (69%) allude to Old Testament material.<sup>27</sup>

The influence of the Old Testament is well-documented, and scholars have also identified elements from other sources. The most significant source next to the Old Testament is Judaism<sup>28</sup> at

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<sup>26</sup> Fiorenza, Revelation, pp. 17,18. Underlining mine.

<sup>27</sup> Andre Feuillet, The Apocalypse, Thomas E. Crane trans. (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), p. 78. John F. Whealon, "New Patches On An Old Garment: The Book of Revelation" Biblical Theology Bulletin, 11 (April 1981), p. 56. Perrin ties this fact with the apocalyptic genre of the book when he says "So an apocalyptic discourse is usually a mosaic of scriptural quotations and allusions, together perhaps with some reference to the experience of the writer and his community, generally couched in scriptural language." Norman Perrin, "Apocalyptic Christianity: The Synoptic Source 'Q', The Apocalyptic Discourses, The Book of Revelation" in Visionaries and their Apocalypses, Issues in Religion and Theology 4, Paul D. Hanson ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> Mathias Rissi, The Future Of The World: An Exegetical Study Of Revelation 19:11-22:15, "Studies In Biblical Theology, Second Series, 23" (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1972 rpr.), pp. 6-7.

large, from texts such as those which Harrington names: 1 & 2 Enoch, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Assumption of Moses, The Sibylline Oracles and The Psalms of Solomon.<sup>29</sup> McNamara cites the Targums, which share similar liturgical structures with Revelation.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Fiorenza adds those elements common to Near Eastern as well as Hellenistic mythologies.<sup>31</sup> In short, History of Religions and Source Criticism help to identify the religious texts and traditions that are part of Revelation's rich tradition.<sup>32</sup>

As early as 1832 there was an attempt to interpret Revelation in the light of similar texts. In spite of this early effort by Friedrich Luecke, a consensus could not be found at that time as to what was included in this "category" of apocalyp-

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<sup>29</sup> To this list we could of course include the Maccabean literature, but this will be addressed in greater detail in chapter III.

<sup>30</sup> McNamara as cited in Wilfrid J. Harrington, The Apocalypse Of St John: A Commentary, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), pp. 16-22. What McNamara suggests is that the same sources that eventually produced the Targums in the third century CE and later were also operative in the mind of John as he wrote Revelation. He says that John was of the "same bent" liturgically before he became a Christian, and that this accounts for the similarities between the liturgies in the Targums and Revelation.

<sup>31</sup> Fiorenza, Revelation, p. 17. See also Ernst Lohmeyer, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1970), pp. 195-97. Adella Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses" in Semeia 14: Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre, John J. Collins ed., (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> See A.Y. Collins, "Reading", pp. 236ff; and J.J. Collins, Semeia 14, "Introduction", pp. 18ff.

tic. This dilemma is also evidenced in more recent works as well.

For example, in 1960, Ernst Kaesemann published "Die Anfaenge christlicher Theologie" which was then translated and became the cornerstone for a discussion of apocalypticism in the 1969 issue of the Journal For Theology And The Church. At that time, his article caused an uproar, for in it he stated that "Apocalyptic--since the preaching of Jesus cannot really be described as theology--was the mother of all Christian theology".<sup>33</sup> In present-day scholarship, the term apocalyptic is found in contexts with eschatological and prophetic discussions, but not always in such a way as to equate all three.

Norman Perrin's definition of what is constituted in apocalyptic<sup>34</sup> serves to prove this in that apocalyptic carries with it a sense of despair about history. While prophetic and eschatological discussions may incorporate such pessimism, they by definition, need not. As a result, "definitions" of apocalyptic have tried to solidify what was contained in this designa-

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<sup>33</sup> Ernst Kaesemann, "The Beginnings Of Christian Theology" in JTC, p. 40. More germane to our discussion is the fact that for Kaesemann, the terms apocalyptic, prophetic and eschatology are treated as virtually synonymous. While the terms, and what they represent, are similar, they are not always treated as similar in all current discussions. This will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>34</sup> "These are the characteristics of apocalyptic: a sense of despair about history that bred the belief that it was rushing to a foreordained tragic climax; a hope in God that fostered the conviction that he would act in that climactic moment to change things utterly and forever; and a conviction that it would be possible to recognize the signs of the coming of that climactic moment". Perrin, "Apocalyptic", p. 122.

tion. These discussions also helped to show that a definition of apocalyptic will continue to remain elusive.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "The problems involved in defining 'apocalyptic' are notorious". Wayne A. Meeks, "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity" in Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. David Hellholm, ed. (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), p. 689. Similar comments are also made by Hans Dieter Betz, "On The Problem Of The Religio-Historical Understanding Of Apocalypticism" in JTC, p. 135. To be sure, the discussion of to what extent the three elements (prophetic, apocalyptic and eschatological) are related is an ongoing and unresolved one. An example of this is the 1969 issue of the JTC 6. Its contents, spanning more than 200 pages, are dedicated to a discussion of apocalypticism. The work is largely a reaction, as mentioned above, to Kaesemann's statement (1960) that apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology. Ernst Fuchs and Gerhard Ebeling in particular take Kaesemann to task for his remark. Quite central to their complaints are his close association of these three elements (for Kaesemann's position see "Beginnings", p. 34). To this Ebeling says that there is a "...profound difference between prophecy and apocalyptic" (Gerhard Ebeling, "The Ground Of Christian Theology", JTC, p. 54). Fuchs says that "Jesus' parables are eschatological, not apocalyptic utterances" (Ernst Fuchs, "On The Task Of A Christian Theology", JTC, p. 74. See also p. 76). In his 1962 response to Fuchs and Ebeling, Kaesemann says that apocalyptic is a term for the special kind of eschatology that seeks to speak to the end of history. It refers to the near expectation of the parousia as opposed to a distant expectation (Ernst Kaesemann, "On The Topic Of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic", JTC, p. 100. See also pp. 118, 119, 126, 129, 132). The other contributors to this journal are also divided on this concern. Kaesemann finds support in Funk who says: "Apocalyptic lay ready to hand as the means of embodying eschatological futurity" (Robert W. Funk, "Apocalyptic As An Historical And Theological Problem In Current New Testament Scholarship", JTC, p. 188. See also p. 191 where Funk indicates the relatedness of apocalyptic and eschatology). Freedman never says explicitly that apocalyptic and eschatology are different, but he draws attention to the fact that the birth of apocalyptic literature separates it from an eschatological mindset. That difference is, namely, that apocalyptic literature is born out of a crisis, it is "underground literature" and consolation for the persecuted (Freedman, "Flowering", p. 173). Betz is more pronounced in his statement that prophecy and apocalyptic are different (Betz, "Problem", pp. 136-137) and Cross tries to find a medium by saying that prophecy eventually became eschatology (Cross, "Directions", pp. 158, 159, 159 n. 3) then goes on to say that prophecy became apocalyptic (Cross, "Directions", pp. 161, 165). While Cross does



To be sure, even after the colloquium on apocalypticism in Uppsala, August 1979, agreement was not to be found. Each participant emphasized one or more particular aspects that others did not. For example, Lars Hartman supported the definition of Semeia 14, but added to it the importance of function. What he meant was that the apocalyptic genre was "...intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority."<sup>36</sup> E.P. Sanders proposed a return to an "essentialist" definition which doesn't ignore the heavenly aspect, yet emphasizes the socio-political dimension.<sup>37</sup> Adela Y. Collins summarizes by saying

The fundamental issue at stake in the various definitions is the determination of those texts which are most similar to the biblical apocalypses and therefore of the context in which they should be interpreted.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, despite varying definitions of apocalyptic, the consensus of scholars is that the genre of apocalyptic did

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recognize the continuum in prophecy to apocalyptic, he cautions that they should not be "intermingled" (Cross, "Directions", p. 159, n. 3). A caution for the study of apocalyptic literature, and its relation to the related, but distinct, elements in prophecy and eschatology is well-heeded. For as Kaesemann correctly said in 1962, the term apocalyptic "remains ambiguous" (Kaesemann, "Primitive", p. 100).

<sup>36</sup> Lars Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre" in Apocalypticism, Hellholm, ed., p. 339.

<sup>37</sup> E.P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses" in Apocalypticism, Hellholm, ed., pp. 456-458.

<sup>38</sup> A.Y. Collins, "Reading", p. 238. For more on this see also Rissi, p. 16; Charles M. Laymon, The Book Of Revelation: Its Message And Meaning, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 41ff; J.J. Collins, Semeia 14, "Introduction", pp. 18,19 and Ford, p. 4.

influence the writer of Revelation. Swete, in 1907, wrote that St. John drew from this common stock of apocalyptic imagery.<sup>39</sup> Further, this genre that we call apocalyptic is known to have existed for many years prior to Revelation, and that tradition, as expressed in Revelation, requires special attention:

As an apocalyptic writing, the Revelation to John must be interpreted in a particular fashion. It is important to realize this and face it from the very beginning. Not to do so would be fatal--as fatal as to attempt to read poetry as prose or legal documents as fiction. In either case the result would be hopelessly misleading.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, in order to do justice to Revelation and its unique apocalyptic form of expression, the use of another exegetical tool is employed, that being the Sitz im Leben of a text. A.Y. Collins says that "Responsible interpretation of a text from another time and place requires that the text be interpreted in terms of its original historical context."<sup>41</sup> She gives an example of Hal Lindsey, who neglects principles such as the importance of the historical context, leading him to treat two biblical texts, written hundreds of years apart (Daniel, Revelation) as one.

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<sup>39</sup> Swete, p. ccxvii.

<sup>40</sup> Laymon, p. 41. See also Kenneth A. Strand, Interpreting The Book Of Revelation. (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers, Inc., 1979 rpr.), p. 31. As a caution Laymon says that: "It was the moral and spiritual meaning that was central and not the package [apocalyptic] in which it was wrapped." Laymon, p. 50. Both the meaning and the content are important, and we concur with Fiorenza: "...literary criticism points out that the form of a work is not an instrumental, separable wrapping from the eschatological content." Fiorenza, "Phenomenon", p. 306.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, "Reading", p. 233.

The actual historicity of Revelation is, sadly, lost to methods which ignore the historical context of ancient texts. It is sad because it is a return to an interpretive mind-set that badly misused Revelation. This mind-set prevailed until the seventeenth century when Ribeira (1601) and Alcasar (1613) broke free and began to approach the book from the standpoint of the writer and his time. They felt that it was wrong to read into Revelation "...events or ideas of a widely different period."<sup>42</sup> Swete says that we need to realize that the book is written to answer the "crying needs" of the seven churches in Asia Minor, and once we have realized that, then erroneous interpretations will be easier recognized.<sup>43</sup>

Part of the problem arises in scholars' attempts to pigeon-hole Revelation. In our reading we found very few scholars who were willing to claim exclusivity of interpretation in regard to Revelation.<sup>44</sup> The very fact that Elliott and Kuyper are among the few who do make these assertions, leaves us with two alternatives. Either they are correct and thereby more insightful than most who seek to answer the queries found in Revelation, or, they are not justified in making these claims. When we consider the

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<sup>42</sup> Swete, p. ccxiv. See also Mounce, p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> Swete, p. ccxviii.

<sup>44</sup> Two that do "claim" exclusivity are Elliott and Kuyper. Kuyper, for example, prefaces or concludes his interpretations with the phrase "a right understanding of this removes all ambiguity...". Kuyper, p. 35. Elliott makes comments such as the "...self-evidence of the simplicity of truth.". Elliott, Vol. 1, p. 107.

fact that Elliott and Kuyper (who make the same claims of exclusivity) come to radically different interpretations, we see that the latter of the two alternatives becomes more likely.

As we have seen thus far, the very reason for the schemas in Revelation is because its content and genre are very different from that of other New Testament texts. It is precisely this fact that should serve as a warning flag to those, like Elliott and Kuyper, who think they have in fact pigeon-holed Revelation.<sup>45</sup> Kiddle wisely reminds us that even the original readers did not clearly understand every point in the entire book. The fact that John makes explanations within the text is evidence that some parts were not clear even to the original readers.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, virtually all scholars agree that the study of Revelation must begin with an attempt to discover what the Sitz im Leben of Revelation was.

For the understanding of the Revelation of John it is essential to put one's self as far as is possible, into the world of its author and of those to whom it was first addressed. Its meaning must be sought for in the light thrown upon it by the condition and circumstances of its readers, by the author's inspired purpose, and by those current beliefs and traditions that not only influenced the fashion which his visions themselves took, but also and especially determined the form of

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<sup>45</sup> We concur with Fiorenza who says that due to the dramatic and symbolic character of Revelation, it "...defies exact analysis and fixed interpretation." Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, "The Revelation To John" in Proclamation Commentaries: Hebrews; James; 1 and 2 Peter; Jude; Revelation, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977 rpr.), p. 101.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Kiddle, The Revelation Of St. John, (London: Hodder And Stoughton, 1940), p. xx. See also Farrar, p. 19.

this literary composition in which he has given a record of his visions.<sup>47</sup>

The result of work done with this tool is that issues pertinent to an understanding of the text are addressed. For example, the issue of Church/State relations arises out of such work, and is necessary for a proper understanding.<sup>48</sup> The prophetic aspects of the book were influenced by Synoptic and other early Christian traditions and are only a part of the overall theological and institutional developments of the Christian community which occurred at the end of the first century C.E. in Asia Minor.<sup>49</sup> Revelation is also an apocalyptic book, and the drama of this work has to be understood in order to get a sense of the impact that it had on its first readers.<sup>50</sup>

The incredibly eclectic nature of the book is best understood when illuminated with the light in which it was written.

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<sup>47</sup> Beckwith, p. v. See also Kiddle, p. xliv; Morris, Revelation, p. 18; Merrill Chapin Tenney, Interpreting Revelation, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976 (rpr.), pp. vii, 17. Lilje is unique in placing the key to interpretation with an eschatological understanding. He does however acknowledge that the Sitz im Leben is second to that. Lilje, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> William Barclay, "Great Themes of the New Testament: Revelation 13", The Expository Times 70, (June-July 1959), pp. 260-63, 296. This will be addressed in Chapter V.

<sup>49</sup> Fiorenza, Revelation, p. 12.

<sup>50</sup> John Philip McMurdo Sweet, Revelation, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1979), p. 13. See also Blevins, pp. 393ff. Also, S.L. Morris, The Drama Of Christianity: An Interpretation Of The Book Of Revelation, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982 rpr.). Meeks concurs: "...attempts to delineate apocalypticism should in every instance include careful attention to the social functions of the apocalyptic beliefs". Meeks, "Social", p. 703.

To this extent Caird writes: "If only we can learn to put ourselves in the place of those Asiatic Christians, we may expect to find that John has said exactly what he means and that he is his own best interpreter."<sup>51</sup>

From the above discussion we have seen that the literary genre of Revelation alone demands the use of certain exegetical tools. By utilizing these various tools, a deeper appreciation can be obtained as to the meaning of this text for its original recipients. Given that apocalyptic literature was used in different ways in circles outside of Christianity, caution must be exercised when using the term "apocalyptic".

Fiorenza makes this point repeatedly as she compares Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. Among the differences noted by her is the consistent paraenetical content of the Christian apocalyptic texts.<sup>52</sup> She says that the most significant difference is that the Christian apocalypses are not limited to the expectations of the future, but instead apply those expectations to the present and past of Christ and Christians.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Caird, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> "Although Jewish apocalypses also have a hortatory interest, the paraenetical element is explicit in the early Christian apocalyptic genre". Fiorenza, "Phenomenon", p. 302.

<sup>53</sup> "Christian interpretation of reality therefore does not, like Jewish or Gnostic apocalyptic literature, despair of world and history but understands the present as the time of salvation...Consequently, from a formal-structural point of view Christian apocalyptic texts are a part of Jewish apocalyptic but from an essential-theological point of view they differ substantively from Jewish apocalyptic speculation". Fiorenza, "Phenome-

It is precisely this element of apocalyptic literature that we wish to draw attention to in closing. The impact that Revelation, as apocalyptic literature, had on its readers was due to the theological message of the always-present Christ-event expressed through this genre. Apocalyptic literature may strike the modern reader as bizarre and non-sensical, but it served a very important purpose in Revelation.

That purpose will be discussed in more detail at a later point in this thesis, but at this point it should suffice to say that apocalypses were intended to reveal, not to obscure. "They are exposes par excellence, meaningful to their first readers, with messages subject to contextual controls..."<sup>54</sup>

The end result of the tools used in the exegetical endeavour should then logically be to help us understand the purpose and literary thrust of Revelation. Unfortunately, most scholarly work in Revelation has concerned itself with specific influences, tendencies, redactions and the like, with the result that the

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non", pp. 303-304. See also pp. 311-312; Betz, "Problem", p. 155. It is important to stress the fact, as Betz does, that apocalypticism is not an "inner-Jewish phenomenon". Rather, apocalypticism is a "...peculiar manifestation within the entire course of Hellenistic-oriental syncretism". Betz, "Problem", p. 138. Shiel incorrectly states that apocalyptic was foreign to the Greek mind. James Shiel, Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity, (London: The Chaucer Press Ltd., 1968), p. 49. For more on Greco-Roman apocalypses see J.J. Collins, "Introduction", pp. 18,19.

<sup>54</sup> Lowell J. Satre, "Interpreting the Book of Revelation", Word and World 4 (Winter 1984), p. 61. "...for all its surface strangeness, the Book of Revelation is not to be separated from the rest of the New Testament. The hope it represents is a fundamental feature of a major part of the New Testament." Perrin, "Apocalyptic", p. 140.

important theological emphases of the original author have been neglected.

The conclusion one comes to is that it seems that the author's intent is secondary to the work of the interpreter. This is to say that if the interpreter of Revelation is bent on finding only History of Religion influences, then that is exactly what he or she will find. The problem is that the author's original intent is lost for the sake of the interpreter's queries.

Lilje correctly challenges such an approach to say that in spite of the benefits derived from the Literary Critical method, John's purpose was a pastoral one, and not a literary one.<sup>55</sup> True, John's medium was literary, and contained elements of apocalypticism, prophecy and eschatology, but should his literary medium be the sole criterion of interpretation? The answering of this question is the subject for the final section of this first chapter.

#### The Need For A Theological Perspective

Due to its eclectic nature, Revelation requires these diverse tools of interpretation, probably more so than any other New Testament book. It is a book that has intimidated academics as well as non-academics. However, via the tools of

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<sup>55</sup> Lilje, pp. 4,5.



the Historical Critical method, Revelation has been shown to have meaning and purpose.<sup>56</sup>

While an examination of Revelation's apocalyptic genre is helpful, the scholarly work on this book has sometimes found itself restricted to that question alone. As we noted above, the literary aspect of the book is no doubt a very important factor in that everything is conveyed through that medium. Nevertheless, the medium has at times received more attention than the message itself. By and large, the theological aspects of Revelation have been given a back seat to questions of methodology, morphology and other critical questions. In this way, the writer's (theological) emphasis has been inappropriately ignored.

In our reading, we covered a vast variety of approaches to Revelation. The approach that we encountered with the most frequency was a very technical, scientific one. An example of a scholar who took both hermeneutical and exegetical questions as important is Kiddle. His work is thorough and technical/scientific, but at the same time his concern is to carry over the meaning and purpose of the book. He realizes that there is a very real confusion involved with the study of this book, and then says that "...it is not unreasonable to attempt to design a commentary for the ordinary reader, because John undoubtedly

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<sup>56</sup> There was a time when people were hesitant to acknowledge the usefulness of Revelation within the Canon. However, over the years scholars have contributed to dispelling the somewhat myopic outlook towards the book to such an extent that today "...many exegetes have gone so far as to maintain that without the Apocalypse the New Testament would be incomplete." Feuillet, p. 77.

wrote his book for ordinary people."<sup>57</sup> It is a warning well taken, in that the technical aspects of the work usually take the position of front and center as the most important, when in actuality they are not.<sup>58</sup> Kiddle says that "Most of the difficulties are the legacy of time, not of the original writer's peculiar mind."<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, the starting point should be the writer's mind, intent and purpose. When John wrote to his fellow Christians he did so with a pastoral purpose. To be sure, he did so by utilizing the apocalyptic medium to serve that purpose throughout the entire book, for it was a medium that he and his audience knew well. More importantly though, John's purpose was to "...explain, not to obscure; to guide, not to perplex; to enlighten, not to darken."<sup>60</sup>

Kiddle suggests that we keep two things in mind as we approach this "obscure" text. First of all, he would have us remember that John's intention in Revelation is pastoral. A

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<sup>57</sup> Kiddle, p. xvii.

<sup>58</sup> "To be sure, all that past scholarship has accomplished is not to be rejected; but it is gratifying to see the attempts now being made toward grasping the spiritual significance of a book which altogether too often in the past has either been neglected as insolubly enigmatic or been forced by expositors into somewhat preconceived molds." Kenneth A. Strand, "The Book Of Revelation: A Review Article On Some Recent Literature", Andrews University Seminary Studies, 11 (1973), p. 181.

<sup>59</sup> Kiddle, p. xvii.

<sup>60</sup> Kiddle says of John's mindset that it was pastoral, "first and last". Kiddle, pp. xviii-xix. Lohse is in agreement with Kiddle on this, as cited in Feuillet, p. 17; as is Caird, p. 3.

practical exhortation that speaks to ordinary folk. His audience understood and even enjoyed the apocalyptic medium used by John, and this is the second point; namely, that Revelation actually was a revelation for those who first read it because "...they had the master key which unlocked its mysteries. We have lost that key."<sup>61</sup> In fact, Kiddle informs us that that "key" was lost very early, for about eighty years after Revelation was written, Irenaeus could at best only guess what John meant by the mark of the beast being 666.<sup>62</sup>

This is not to say that theological issues are not dealt with by scholars, but it is to suggest that at times the emphases of scholars and the emphasis of John are not concomitant.<sup>63</sup> Boecher, for example, concludes in his commentary that studies which focus on Revelation's theology are "relatively rare", and when they do surface, they deal with ecclesiological problems.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Kiddle, p. xx.

<sup>62</sup> Kiddle, pp. xx-xxi. Kiddle's suggestion therefore is that: "...we must attempt to get back into the mind of the writer, to appreciate his outlook, his reading of the times in which he lived, and his remedy for them. Only so can Revelation become a revelation to us, as it was to John and his fellow believers." Kiddle, p. xxii.

<sup>63</sup> R.H. Charles presents an example of this. In commenting on some of the hermeneutical approaches he says that "...some of these approaches are indispensable, others have made no contribution to the interpretation of the Apocalypse. They may be used, indeed, for purposes of edification, and can rightly be so used, but we must remember that in seeking to interpret the Apocalypse we are seeking to discover what the Apocalypse meant to its writer and its earliest readers, who were in touch with him." Charles, Studies, p. 56.

<sup>64</sup> As cited in Fiorenza, Revelation, p. 14.

It must also be said that any undertaking to uncover the theological elements of the text that does not implement the critical tools mentioned above also does Revelation an injustice. The "theological" and the "critical" need to operate with each other, not in absence of each other.<sup>65</sup> No doubt this separation is overt and conscious at times, but more often than not it is an act of omission.

John's work is a collage of many elements, all pieces of a wonderfully crafted mosaic. It is our contention that John's pastoral purpose was carried out through these avenues of apocalyptic expression, for a specific need, and a specific time and place, with a specific intent and purpose. We would concur with Harrington that in the end, John is "...concerned with the meaning of events rather than with the events themselves."<sup>66</sup>

The purpose of the text of Revelation, as stated in 1:1ff is to tell God's servants what must soon come to pass. The intent is clearly pastoral, and in keeping with the New Testament image of Christ as the shepherd who is concerned with His flock. Though the message is delivered in the wrappings of

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<sup>65</sup> For example, Swete's commentary is based on his presupposition that the best commentary is a syncretistic one. One that blends elements together. In this way, a bit is taken from each "...without identifying itself with any one of them as a whole." Swete, p. ccxviii. Lohse encourages us as well to realize the benefit awaiting us if we incorporate the critical tools available. Lohse, Offenbarung, pp. 7-9.

<sup>66</sup> Harrington, pp. 30,31. See also Milligan, Lectures, pp. 153-56.

elements such as eschatology, prophecy and apocalypticism, the contents thereof are theological.<sup>67</sup>

We shall hope to demonstrate that one of the purposes that John wishes to pass on is that Christ has overcome. The imminent doom that hangs over his readers is shattered by the proclamation that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has overcome, do not weep! (Rev.5:5)<sup>68</sup>

Our study will be concerned with utilizing Historical-Critical tools in order to demonstrate how John utilized terminology familiar to his readers from various sources. In particular, his use of the victory motif in Revelation to express a theological theme has a rich heritage, borrowing from the Greco-Roman world in which he lived, and from the rich Jewish tradition that preceded him and his readers. Even though he used and borrowed from the world in which he lived, his reason for doing so was to illuminate God's plan for His faithful.

We maintain that one of the main theological themes of Revelation is that of Christ as overcomer, and His words to His children on earth who too are encouraged to be overcomers. Before examining in some detail this theological theme it is to

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<sup>67</sup> Therefore, neither element can be neglected in a study of Revelation. For more on this, see the discussion in Fiorenza, "Phenomenon", pp. 304-307.

<sup>68</sup> "Despair and hope are the Siamese twins of apocalyptic theology. Pessimism about the events of this age is joined with a lively hope in the God who in Christ has conquered and will soon consummate his victory." Satre, p. 60.

our advantage first to substantiate its importance within the text as a main theological theme.<sup>69</sup>

#### THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

We have now suggested that one of the major theological themes in Revelation<sup>70</sup> was that of the overcomer.<sup>71</sup> However, is this theme of nikaô really a major one in Revelation? In order to answer that question, and to substantiate this thesis, we will give a brief perusal of the major theological themes within Revelation, and then see if the theme of nikaô enters into that matrix. The purpose of this inquiry will be to establish that nikaô is a major theological theme, and that it has been neglected as a theological theme in the study of Revelation.

As a precursor to our discussion of nikaô as a major theological theme, we can benefit from a short and succinct study

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<sup>69</sup> We concur with Tenney who says that "The correct interpretation of any book of the Bible depends chiefly upon a proper understanding of its main theme.". Tenney, Interpreting, p. 28.

<sup>70</sup> By "major theological theme" we mean a theological theme that occurs with frequency in the text. an example of a minor theological theme would be that of the Millenium. This does not mean that this theme is not important, but by nature of the amount of references to it in the text, it is clearly not as important as some other theological themes. Scholarly discussions are also an important criterion, and these will be examined as well.

<sup>71</sup> The Greek word group used to refer to this concept is nikaô. For the purposes of this thesis, all Greek transliterations will be based on the following guide: A.A. Leclercq, "A Note On The Transliteration Of New Testament Greek" in New Testament Studies 19 (1973), pp. 187-190.

of another major theological theme in Revelation, namely, that of the wrath of God. Our purposes for doing so are twofold, the first of which is to see how a major theological theme is expressed in this apocalyptic text.

Secondly, we will benefit our later study of the overcomer in Revelation in that a proper understanding of victory in Revelation is heightened by noting the treatment of God's reaction to the hostile forces that threaten Christianity. Not only are the faithful asked to be overcomers, but Jesus Christ was also subject to hostilities on earth, and He overcame (Rev. 3:21). So He sets the example, is the source for the ability to emulate the example, and is involved in the final and total elimination of the hostilities that crushed so many of His followers.

Through a combination of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven plagues, the earth and its inhabitants are subjected to much punishment from God. From the outset of the book, God warns that if repentance is not forthcoming, then His wrath is (2:5-6, 20-25; 3:3, 16-20).

6:1-11:19 and 15:1-16:21 describe to us the nature of the wrath of God. We note that God's wrath builds and builds, and as we progress through the seals to the trumpets to the bowls, the intensity increases. Each set of plagues comes in "sevens", and the first set are constituted by the seven seals. Of these seven

seals, 4 (and possibly 5)<sup>72</sup> are destructive in content. Seals 2,3,4 and 6 all have catastrophic results, whereas 5 recounts the martyrs being rewarded, and 7 records the silence and prayers in heaven.

The second set of "sevens" (the sounding of seven trumpets) is found in 8:6-11:19. Here we note that all but one of the trumpets brings calamities. The seventh trumpet records the worship of God in heaven, and in this sense parallels the seventh seal. It is interesting to note that after the release of the seven seals and the seven trumpets, we are told that those who are still alive on the earth do not repent (9:20,21).

The third set of "sevens" (the pouring out of the contents of seven bowls) is found in 15:1-16:21. Here we see that all seven bowls have catastrophic results. After seven seals, seven trumpets, and even four bowls of wrath, people are still unrepentant (16:9). After seven seals, seven trumpets and five bowls, again, no repentance (16:11). Finally, after seven seals, trumpets and bowls, the result is not that God is worshipped in heaven, as it was after the seven seals and the seven trumpets, but, instead, God is cursed on the earth (16:21).

If we plot the "sevens" out, we can then see how they progressively intensify as humankind continues to reject, and finally curse, God.

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<sup>72</sup> Interpretation of the first seal varies considerably. See Mounce, pp. 152-154; Ladd, Revelation, pp. 96-100.



SEVEN SEALS  
(6:1 - 8:5)

SEVEN TRUMPETS  
(8:6 - 11:19)

SEVEN BOWLS  
(15:1-16:21)

horse/conquer	1/3 earth burned	painful sores
war	1/3 sea destroyed	sea destroyed
financial ruin	1/3 water ruined	water "
some death	1/3 light removed	people burn
martyrs' cry	5 months torture	total darkness
cosmic chaos	1/3 mankind killed	spirits/demons
silence/prayer	God worshipped	destruction

The widespread use of numbers in Revelation has brought a plethora of interpretations. However, with regard to the number seven, it is widely held that the number seven denotes completeness. Reason for this is that God says with the outpouring of the seventh bowl, His wrath is complete (15:1).<sup>73</sup> Revela-

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<sup>73</sup> Lohse says that the whole book of Revelation is built on the completeness of the number seven: "Die Fuelle der Bilder wird von dem Ordnungsprinzip der Siebenzahl zusammengehalten, so dass man das ganze Buch in sieben Hauptabschnitte gliedern kann, die wiederum vielfach in sieben kleinere Stuecke aufgeteilt sind." He then proceeds to give his breakdown of this schema. Lohse, Offenbarung, pp. 8,9. Lohmeyer's work has the same Aufbau, but not the same Inhalt as Lohse. That is to say, Lohmeyer's structure is also seven within seven, but the actual content of those categories is different. See Lohmeyer, pp. 1-2. For more on the completeness of the number seven see M.H. Pope, "Seven, Seventh, Seventy" in The Interpreter's Dictionary Of The Bible, Vol. IV. George Arthur Buttrick et al eds. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981 rpr.), pp. 294-295. A.Y. Collins criticized this widely accepted position, and those who promote it. (The following is based on, Adela Yarbro Collins, "Numerical Symbolism in Jewish and Early Christian Apocalyptic Literature" in ANRW II, 21.2, pp. 1221-1287). While recognizing the use of numbers in apocalyptic literature (pp. 1233-1239), she states that Revelation is unique among apocalyptic literature because numbers permeate this text as in no other similar work (1272). However, she searches apocalyptic literature and other Greek literature and finds no overwhelming data that suggests seven to be symbolic of completion. In early Pythagoreanism, we find that "Seven is 'right time' or 'opportunity' (kairos). Seven neither begets nor is begotten...Ten is the perfect number, which comprehends the whole nature of number and determines the structure of the cosmos, and with it ends the symbolic interpretation of numbers." (1251). Other evidence is also given to show that ten was viewed as the complete number (1242-1246), and Philo

tion also informs us that God's wrath is severe in that Christ is spoken of as judging with a sword that comes out of His mouth (19:11-15,21), and we are told that the wine of God's fury is poured full strength. Those who worship the beast will be tormented with burning sulfur in God's presence forever (14:10-11). We read that some will be killed with the sword (19:19-21), and the beast and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of burning sulfur (19:20).

The severity of God's wrath is amplified when we read that fire comes down from heaven and consumes those who have gathered to fight against God's people (20:9). The devil is also thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where he and the beast and the false prophet and anyone whose name is not found in the book of life will be tormented day and night, for ever and ever (20:10-15).<sup>74</sup>

God's fury and wrath is compared to that of a winepress (14:20; 29:15), and He is praised as judging in justice (16:5;

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identifies the number six (!) as being the perfect number (1272). While some examples are given that substantiate seven being used to denote completeness or perfection, Collins' conclusion is that this commonly-held belief has gone unchallenged too long. She sees Revelation's use of the number seven principally for order, and especially to show that God is in control: "The frequent numbering of people, objects and events in Revelation makes the point by repetition that nothing is random or accidental. Everything is measured and counted. There is a divine plan, all is in God's control, and the outcome will be advantageous to those loyal to God's will as revealed in the book...The implication that all is counted and numbered must be very reassuring to those who count themselves among the innumerable multitude (chapter 7)." (1286).

<sup>74</sup> See also 21:8,27; 21:15 as well as 2 Thess. 1:6-9.

19:11). He punishes the great prostitute (17:1-18), and punishes Babylon doubly for what she has done to others (18:1-24).

In short, we are told that God's wrath has come, and has come to judge all those who have stood in opposition to Him (11:18). The completeness of God's subjugation of His enemies is evidenced by the fact that even death and Hades are eventually destroyed, to affect no one, any more (1:18; 20:13,14; 21:4). Finally, we are even informed that there will be no more tears, mourning, crying or pain, "...for the old order of things has passed away." (21:4).

From the above we can see that the wrath and anger of God is a dominant theological theme in the book of Revelation. God's patience has now come to an end, and therefore His wrath is made evident.<sup>75</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow us to demonstrate other major theological themes in the same way. We will simply report what scholars have determined to be major theological themes, and thereby determine if nikaô warrants further discussion on that basis.

Next to the judgement, wrath and fury of God,<sup>76</sup> we discovered three other major theological themes that received equal amounts of scholarly attention. The first of these is the

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. 2 Peter 3:8-11. We can refer the reader to some key works which discuss the wrath of God in general, such as Tasker and Dahlberg. As well, we can also make reference to a work dedicated to the exposition of the Lamb's wrath, as portrayed in Revelation: Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, The Wrath Of The Lamb, (London: S.P.C.K., 1957).

<sup>76</sup> Which we have treated above as the wrath of God.

"Majesty of God". This is the term most frequently used by scholars to describe the awesome power of God, so vividly displayed in Revelation. Incorporated under this title would be the visions in chapters 4 and 5 of the throne in heaven, and the hymns of praise offered to the One sitting on the throne.<sup>77</sup>

God is seen as the One who is worthy to be praised, but also as the One who will judge those who have refused to give Him the praise that is His due.<sup>78</sup> As we can see, God's majesty and His wrath go hand in hand, for if the majesty due Him is not received, then His wrath is made evident. It should be said, however, that God's majesty includes more than just His wrath; it also includes His redemptive plan throughout salvation-history. Within Revelation, the majesty of God is a major theological theme.<sup>79</sup>

Another major theological theme is the related theme of the majesty of Christ. Christ's role in Revelation is an important one. Christ's role in any book of the Bible was of paramount importance to the great Reformation theologian Martin

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<sup>77</sup> See Rev. 4:8-11 as an example of one of these hymns. Beasley-Murray sees the vision in Revelation 4 and 5 as the key towards an understanding of the rest of the book. Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp. 24-27.

<sup>78</sup> Caird sees all of the plagues and woes inflicted upon those on the earth not as punishment per se, but instead, as God's effort to "...penetrate the defences which the world has erected against the rule of God.". Caird, p. 300.

<sup>79</sup> So say: Charles, Commentary, pp. cix-cx; Kiddle, p. xlvi; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp. 25-27; Swete, p. clx; Caird, pp. 290-292; Lohmeyer, pp. 189,190; Ladd, Commentary, p. 14.

Luther who said that the validity (apostolicity) of a biblical text was not to be determined by a name; that is, John, Paul, Mark; rather, the question to be asked was whether or not the Biblical text on hand promoted Christ (was Christum treibt). His conclusion was that Revelation was an obscure book, and one that he did not trust due to that obscurity.<sup>80</sup> Christ, in Luther's eyes, was not presented clearly and purely in Revelation.<sup>81</sup> As a result of this, he adopted a hierarchical view of Scripture leading to his canon-within-a-canon.

On the other hand, there are many scholars who see the

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<sup>80</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life Of Martin Luther, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), p. 261.

<sup>81</sup> Note what he says in his (1522) preface to John's Revelation: "About this book of the Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own ideas, and would bind no man to my opinion or judgment; I say what I feel. I miss more than one thing in this book, and this makes me hold it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic. First and foremost, the Apostles do not deal with visions, but prophesy in clear plain words, as do Peter and Paul, and Christ in the Gospel. For it befits the apostolic office to speak of Christ and His deeds without figures and visions; but there is no prophet in the Old Testament, to say nothing of the New, who deals so out and out with visions and figures. And so I think of it almost as I do of the Fourth Book of Esdras, and can nohow detect that the Holy Spirit produced it....Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit gives him to think. My spirit cannot fit itself into this book. There is one sufficient reason for me not to think highly of it, -Christ is not taught or known in it; but to teach Christ is the thing which an apostle is bound, above all else, to do, as He says in Acts i, 'Ye shall be my witnesses'. Therefore I stick to the books which give me Christ, clearly and purely." Martin Luther, "Preface to the Revelation of Saint John--II (1522)" C.M. Jacobs, trans. in Works Of Martin Luther, With Introductions And Notes: The Philadelphia Edition, Volume Six, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1932), pp. 488,489. Compare this preface to Revelation with his preface of 1545. See pp. 479-488.

Christ figure as permeating the text.<sup>82</sup> Tenney says that "The person of Christ is the most important key to the Revelation."<sup>83</sup> As a matter of fact, many scholars have said that Revelation contains a high or exalted Christology, contra Luther.<sup>84</sup>

The above mentioned theological themes of the wrath of God, the majesty of God and the majesty of Christ are seen by most scholars as major theological themes in Revelation. On some other themes there is less agreement as to their importance. Some hold that the doctrine of hope is an important theme,<sup>85</sup> others that the pastoral concerns of the author were an important theme.<sup>86</sup> A few scholars even suggest that soteriology<sup>87</sup> and Church/State<sup>88</sup> relations are important themes too, but based on scholarly research we have reported on all the major theological themes within Revelation except one.

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<sup>82</sup> See for example: Sweet, Revelation, pp. 47,48; Swete, p. xcvi; Kiddle, p. xlvi; Charles, Commentary, pp. cx-cxiv.

<sup>83</sup> Tenney, Interpreting, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup> Edward Allison McDowell, The Meaning And Message Of The Book Of Revelation, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 26; Lohse, Offenbarung, p. 1; Lohmeyer, p. 190; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 24; Caird, pp. 290-292,296.

<sup>85</sup> Swete, p. xcvi; Charles, Commentary, p. cix; Lohse, Offenbarung, p. 1; Richard Charles Henry Lenski, The Interpretation of Sinat John's Revelation, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963 rpr.), p. 23; Sweet, Revelation, pp. 48,49.

<sup>86</sup> McDowell, p. 25; Caird, p. 289; Swete, pp. xciv,xcviii; Kiddle, p. xlvi.

<sup>87</sup> Caird, pp. 289-301; Ladd, Revelation, p. 14; Tenney, Interpreting, p. 31.

<sup>88</sup> Kiddle, pp. xliv-xlvi; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp. 31,32; Caird, p. 289.

The theme of victory is also one of the major theological themes of Revelation. "From its beginning to its end it is focused upon the end. This end is the eternal triumph of the kingdom, the foe being eliminated forever."<sup>89</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is not to delineate the role of victory in Revelation, but simply to substantiate its position of importance with reference to the opinion of scholars. Lenski's statement is not unique among scholars, for others take the same view. Caird, for example, contends that the whole thesis of his own commentary is that the one imminent event which John expected was persecution, and that Christians are asked to reign in the midst of their martyrdoms as Christ reigned from the cross.<sup>90</sup>

Martyrdom need not be the result, although that is always held up as the very real possibility for the near future.<sup>91</sup> An understanding of being victorious (nikaô) as a theological theme is crucial to an accurate treatment of Revelation. Whether or not martyrdom awaits the faithful as it did Christ, the faithful are encouraged and exhorted to stand firm, and in doing so they will be victorious.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lenski, p. 23.

<sup>90</sup> Caird, pp. 291-300.

<sup>91</sup> Kiddle, pp. xlvi-xlix; Sweet, Revelation, p. 48; Lohmeyer, pp. 190-192.

<sup>92</sup> McDowell, p. 32; Lohse, Offenbarung, p. 1; Swete, p. xcvi; Ladd, Revelation, p. 14.

This victory is of course made possible by Christ's victory (3:21; 5:50), and it is to be emulated by His followers. His followers are asked to overcome, to be victorious, to conquer (nikaô). Kiddle says that this is one of Revelation's greatest and most abiding contributions to religious thought; namely, "...John's superb confidence that victory would be won by the Church."<sup>93</sup>

Sweet says that the victory spoken of for Christians seems to be a part of the future that the book seems to be "intoxicated" with. However, he goes on to say that Revelation was written for Christians who were intoxicated with the present, and even though the ultimate victory is in the future, they share in it now.<sup>94</sup>

What we have delineated above is only a brief introduction to this important theological theme of victory in Revelation. Yet, in spite of this, we are discouraged to discover that studies of nikaô in Revelation are meager at best. This specific word group is used only 34 times in the New Testament, and of those uses, 17 are found in Revelation. Outside of two short studies, this theme has found itself abandoned as a theological orphan.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Kiddle, p. xlvi.

<sup>94</sup> Sweet, Revelation, p. 49.

<sup>95</sup> Only two 25 page studies were found, in our research, that were concerned with victory in Revelation. Ragnar Leivestad, in his book Christ the Conqueror (1954), addresses this topic, as it pertains to Revelation, for about 26 pages. Although he makes cursory remarks on nikaô in general, his focus



It is at this point in this thesis that we can begin to describe the pieces of the puzzle that we seek in order to complete the apocalyptic portrait given to us by John, for as we proceed, more and more pieces become available. The first piece of this puzzle was acquired when we noted that the theological themes within Revelation had largely been ignored in the past for the sake of pursuing other questions. Questions pertaining to theological themes were replaced with morphological and text-critical questions, which are, to be sure, important. However, John's theological concerns seem to be overlooked in order to study the means whereby those concerns were expressed, especially in regards to the genre of apocalyptic. What resulted was that the "wrappings" became more important than the actual "present".

The second piece of our puzzle was acquired by seeing what the major theological themes were in Revelation. We discovered

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is Christ the conqueror, as his book title suggests. In regard to this facet of the theological theme expressed by nikaō it is in fact a valuable resource tool. The second work is that of James E. Rosscup. In 1982 his 25 page article "The 'Overcomer' of the Apocalypse" was published. Even though the title would lead one to believe that his work deals with the overcomer of Revelation, a reading of his article proves otherwise. Rosscup's article is concerned in supporting a particular understanding of Johannine soteriology. His discussion of nikaō turns out to be a defense of the preservation of the saints; that is to say, whether or not people die a martyr's death, they are still overcomers. To be sure, we can benefit from both of these approaches and the insights they offer, but as we shall see, nikaō in Revelation includes so much more. Ragnar Leivestad, Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament, (London: S.P.C.K., 1954). Also, James E. Rosscup, "The 'Overcomer' of the Apocalypse" in Grace Theological Journal 3 (No. 2, Fall, 1982), pp. 261-286.

that scholars agreed to several such themes, such as the majesty of God, the majesty of Christ, God's wrath, and victory (nikaô).

The very next piece of our puzzle came as a result of the discovery that perhaps the theme of victory had not been addressed to the extent that it should have been. Since 50% of the usages of nikaô in the New Testament are found in Revelation, then it is clear that the term is important in Revelation and warrants closer scrutiny.<sup>96</sup> We cannot assume that victory for the Christian is not important, for as we shall see in the chapters that follow, victory was very important not only to first century CE Christians living in Asia Minor, but to the surrounding Greco-Roman world.

It is this piece of the puzzle which we wish to now discuss. Nikaô is an important word as representative of a theological theme within Revelation, and it is our goal to come to a better understanding of this word and how it was used not only by John, but by others as well.

It is the contention of this thesis that nikaô finds its greatest New Testament concentration in Revelation for several key reasons. First of all, Revelation is filled with a sense of urgency not present in other New Testament books. The end is nearer than ever before, and John's vision shows him the final events needed to complete God's purposes. Because God's

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<sup>96</sup> The use of nikaô in the rest of the New Testament is much more scattered by comparison. The entire Pauline corpus includes 7 references (app. 20%) as do the Johannine Epistles (7 references, app. 20%). Matthew, Luke and John each have 1 reference (app. 3% each).

purposes are in opposition to Satan's, a confrontation such as has never been seen before will take place. Satan will muster his forces for one last attempt to crush the Force that will eventually crush him in battle. Victory is of the essence. God's followers long for it as do Satan and his hosts.

Secondly, because the military imagery is so great in Revelation, the imagery of victory appropriately follows. For just as earthly armies need leaders to help them to defeat the enemy, so too does God's army. As a result, a significant part of the imagery of nikaô is associated with Jesus Christ, the Christian's example and leader in battle. It is because He overcame that He is now heralded as their example.

Lastly, victory was no stranger to the Greco-Roman world in which first century Christians found themselves. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, victory played an increasingly important role in Asia Minor at exactly the time when John would have written Revelation.

We will devote the next chapter to furthering our knowledge about that Greco-Roman world. More specifically, we will focus in on victory in the mind set of the Greek and the Roman. Perhaps the best route taken for this accomplishment is to examine how their thirst for victory was expressed. From our research, we found that their gods and goddesses of worship measured this thirst in a tangible way. As a result, chapter II will examine the Greeks' goddess of victory, Nike, and the Romans' goddess of victory, Victoria.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PAGAN VICTORY CULTS OF THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD: THE GREEK'S NIKE AND THE ROMAN'S VICTORIA

#### The Greek Goddess Of Victory: Nike

The earliest use of nikaô in a formalized, structured sense, is the Greek use of it to describe their goddess of victory, Nike.<sup>1</sup> The date given to this development is generally around 700 BCE. She is first mentioned by Hesiod in this Theogonia,<sup>2</sup> but she is not referred to by Homer. Therefore scholars assign a date of approximately 700 BCE to Nike's

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<sup>1</sup> "From Hom[er] on nikaô is frequently used in Greek literature and means to be victorious, both in military and legal combat.". W. Guenther, "nikaô" in NIDNTT, Volume 1. Colin Brown, et al eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980 rpr.), p. 650.

<sup>2</sup> George M.A. Haufmann & John Richard Thornhill Pollard, "Nike" in OCD, p. 735. "Hesiod's absolute date is now agreed to fall not far before or after 700 B.C.". Martin Lichfield West, "Hesiod" in OCD, pp. 510-511.

"birth".<sup>3</sup> If we look at the evidence from art, then a date in the late seventh century BCE at the earliest is the result.<sup>4</sup>

The ancient sources say that her inception as a goddess came about as a result of the battle of the gods against the Titans. She is referred to as the sister of Zelos, Kratos and Bia (Rivalry, Strength, Force), and together with them she was honoured by Zeus because she fought with the gods against the Titans.<sup>5</sup>

The abstract idea of victory was taken by the Greeks and personified in the form of a goddess, and her name was fit-

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<sup>3</sup> Eugen Oberhummer et al, "Nike" in PW, Vol. XVII, p. 285. Much of our discussion will be based on this work, therefore we will at times cite the (German) terms that Oberhummer uses in his essay. Cecil Maurice Bowra, "Homer" in OCD, pp. 524-526. Karl-Heinz Roloff, "Nike" in Lexikon der Alten Welt, Carl Andresen et al eds., (Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag, 1965), p. 2088. Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. West, pp. 510-511. Guenther, p. 650. Also: H. Bulle, "Nike" in Ausführliches Lexikon der Griechischen und Römischen Mythologie, Dritter Band, W.H. Roscher, et al eds., (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B.G. Teubner, 1908), p. 305. Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis: A Study Of The Social Origins Of Greek Religion, (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1974), p. 73. J. Rufus Fears, "The Theology of Victory at Rome: Approaches and Problems" in ANRW II, 17.2, p. 768.

<sup>4</sup> Bulle, pp. 318-320. Michael Blech, Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen, "Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten, Band 38", Walter Burkert und Carsten Colpe, eds. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), p. 177. Karl Lehmann, Samo-thrace: A Guide to the Excavations And The Museum, (New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1960), p. 92. Cornelius C. Vermeule III, Greek Sculpture And Roman Task: The Purpose and Setting of Graeco-Roman Art in Italy and the Greek Imperial East, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1977), p. 105. G.M.A. Richter, Korai: Archaic Greek Maidens, (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1968), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Eckart Peterich, Goetter und Helden der Griechen: Kleine Mythologie, (Frankfurt: Fischer Buecherei, 1964 rpr.), p. 16. See also Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735.

tingly, Nike.<sup>6</sup> She is an abstraction of the concept of victory that was created by a developed and civilized people. In the battle between the gods and the Titans there was a need for victory, and so when Zeus summoned the gods, Nike, the goddess of victory became part of the entourage.<sup>7</sup> "She is here an abstraction or symbol of decisive victory for the gods."<sup>8</sup>

In her genesis, she was a goddess of victory in war.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis Richard Farnell, The Cults Of The Greek States, Vols. I-III, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1896), Vol. I., p. 339. Alexander Liberman, Greece Gods and Art, (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 43; Bulle, p. 305.

<sup>7</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 285,286,294.

<sup>8</sup> Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. See also, Michael Avi Yonah and Israel Shatzman "Nike" in Illustrated Encyclopedia Of The Classical World, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), p. 315. Edward Tripp "Nike" in Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), p. 397. "...the Greeks worshipped their gods as the shapes of very real pressures and powers, not only as the abiding energies but the reiterative forms of those energies...". Curtis Bennett, God As Form: Essays in Greek Theology with special reference to Christianity and the contemporary theological predicament, (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 1976), p. 9. Erika Simon, Die Griechischen Vasen, (Muenchen: Hirmer Verlag, 1976), p. 152. Eckart Peterich, Goettinnen im Spiegel der Kunst, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlages Otto Walter Olten, 1954 rpr.), p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine B. Avery ed., "Nike" in The New Century Classical Handbook, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962), p. 752. Due to the fact that wars were at times fought with a naval fleet, we find numerous depictions of Nike as riding on the prow of a ship. The most famous of these depictions being the Nike of Samothrace, of which more will be said below. See for example, G.F. Hill, Historical Greek Coins, (Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1975 rpr.), pp. 103-105, 117-18. Charles Seltman, Greek Coins: A History of Metallic Currency and Coinage Down to the Fall of the Hellenistic Kingdoms, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1960 rpr.), p. 221. Otto Morkholm and Nancy M. Waggoner, eds., Greek

However, victory in the Olympic games was something that the Greeks sought for with just as much fervor, and Nike became the goddess that was called upon for both of these pressing concerns.

"Es [Nike] bedeutet Sieg sowohl im ernstesten Kampf wie im friedlichen Wettstreit. Somit ist auch die Goettin Symbol in gleicher Weise fuer den Sieg im Kriege wie im Agon."<sup>10</sup> She was the expression of an age of contests, and she came to symbolize the striving for efficiency, which was rewarded by the gods above. She became the expression of a new area of experience, which in turn bound the participants to the gods of the Olympiad. "Ueberall dort, wo friedliche oder kriegerische Agone stattfanden, war auch Nike..."<sup>11</sup>

It was the Persian Wars (500-450 BCE) that contributed to her great popularity.<sup>12</sup> This is evidenced by the increased references to and about her by the Greek poets and artists who depicted her in vivid terms. Bacchylides (app. 500 BCE) shows her standing next to Zeus on Olympus and giving the award for

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Numismatics and Archaeology: Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson, (Belgium: Wetteren, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Oberhummer, p. 286. This relationship is found as early as 500 BCE. Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. See also Yonah and Shatzman, p. 315.

<sup>11</sup> Blech, p. 177. See also Bulle, p. 306; Fears, p. 754.

<sup>12</sup> Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. See also Piero Treves & Andrew Robert Burn, "Persian Wars" in OCD, pp. 804,805.

areta to men and to gods.<sup>13</sup> Pindar (518-438 BCE) refers us to the victorious athlete who sinks into Nike's arms, and she is invoked by Aristophanes' (450-385 BCE) chorus.<sup>14</sup>

In approximately 450 BCE, plans for the temple of Athena-Nike were drawn up, but work on the project did not begin until 427 which was when the Peloponnesian War began. The building of the temple of Athena-Nike was indicative of the Greek mindset of victory, for its construction

...expressed the desire of Athenians for victory in their new martial venture, just as they had obtained victory over the Persians in the past. They wished to show once again that their patron goddess was the goddess of victory.<sup>15</sup>

She is also seen as a messenger of the gods, and for this reason she was endowed with wings as attributes by the end of the sixth century BCE.<sup>16</sup> Just as Hermes and Iris the mes-

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<sup>13</sup> Cecil Maurice Bowra, "Bacchylides" OCD, p. 158. On "areta", Stephen G. Miller says that it is a word "...for which we have no simple equivalent in English. Areta includes the concepts of excellence, goodness, manliness, valor, nobility, and virtue. It existed, to some degree, in every ancient Greek and was, at the same time a goal to be sought and reached for by every Greek." Stephen G. Miller, Arete: Ancient Writers, Papyri And Inscriptions On The History And Ideals of Greek Athletes and Games, (Chicago: Ares Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735.

<sup>15</sup> Angelo Procopion, Athens: City of the Gods, from prehistory to 338 B.C., (London: Elek Books, 1964), p. 166. Approximately 20 years later (408), a small protective parapet was built around the temple to prevent the temple from being damaged. In keeping with the tone of victory manifesting from the temple, the parapet had many Nikes depicted as performing various tasks.

<sup>16</sup> Blech, p. 178.



sengers had wings, so too it was seen as necessary to bestow this vital attribute on Nike who delivered news of great importance. "Nach diesem Vorbild [Hermes und Iris] wurden auch die N[ike] Fluegel zuteil, als der windschnellen Boten, welche in dem einen entscheidenden Augenblick die herrliche Gabe von den Olympiern herabbringt."<sup>17</sup>

In this context it is crucial to note that she is not the goddess responsible for the victory, but she is the goddess through whom the gods deliver the victory to the warriors and athletes.

N[ike] selbst ist niemals die Verleiherin des Sieges; als solche koennte sie als kaempfernde Goettin gedacht werden. Vielmehr ist sie nur die Vermittlerin des Sieges, die von der Macht, die den Sieg zu verleihen imstande ist, den Sieg an die Kaempfer ueberbringt.<sup>18</sup>

It is Zeus and not Nike who decides matters such as this. Originally, it was Zeus who was treated as the god of victory, and this can be seen in the Homeric poems.<sup>19</sup> The goddess

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<sup>17</sup> Oberhummer, p.289. See also pp. 297-302. Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. She is almost always depicted with wings, see Liberman, p. 43. Since other gods and goddesses were also winged, there are times when historians cannot state with assurance whether or not a certain goddess is Nike. See for example, Simon, pp. 125-127. To alleviate this problem in this thesis, we will only make references to depictions known to be Nike. We can also mention as a point of interest that the God of the Old Testament also had His messengers. Unlike the Greek goddesses that were carried by the wind, we are told in Psalm 104:4 that His messengers are the wind.

<sup>18</sup> Oberhummer, p. 287.

<sup>19</sup> Farnell, pp. 60-62. For victory did "exist" for the Greeks before Nike's birth. As a result, Nike's birth shortly after Homer indicates the rapid growth and demand of a theology of victory among the Greeks. Her birth is evidence of a need too great to be given to Zeus alone.

Athena shares with Zeus the "...power of dispensing victory."<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that Zeus was a war-god, for he was not, but, he is the god of victory and of victorious peace. Zeus had Nike "for his constant ministrant", but it is he who dispenses victory and he who holds the balance of the battle.<sup>21</sup> "Denn ueberall da, wo sie erscheint, ist der Kampf zu Ende..."<sup>22</sup> She is depicted as sitting at the side of the great Zeus, always ready to deliver his decision to the mortals below.<sup>23</sup>

It was realized that "...victory cannot be an achievement of mortals; only divine power can bring it about. A god alone conquers, is unconquered and unconquerable."<sup>24</sup> As a result of

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<sup>20</sup> Farnell, p. 311.

<sup>21</sup> Farnell, p. 60. This relationship of Zeus as the source of victory and Nike as the deliverer thereof is captured by the Greek poet Bacchylides when he wrote: "The giver of sweet gifts who on gold-gleaming Olympos at Zeus' side determines for gods and men success in noble endeavours.". Arianna Stassinopoulos and Roloff Beny, The Gods Of Greece, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1983), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Oberhummer, p. 287.

<sup>23</sup> "Nike is not the bestower of victory, but instead she is the deliverer of victory.". Bulle, p. 306, (translation mine). See also Oberhummer, p. 290. Nevertheless, by the second half of the fourth century BCE, a shift can be discerned. Now Nike finds a much wider representation, and her functions are expanded to actually being involved in the victory. Oberhummer, p. 306.

<sup>24</sup> O. Bauernfeind, "nikaō" in TDNT, p. 942. The gods were given the credit for all victories in battle, and in 480 BCE, after the Greeks defeated the Persians at Salamis and Plataiai, Themistokles declared: "It is not we who have done this, but the gods and heroes.". Martin Persson Nilsson, Greek Piety, Herbert Jennings Rose, trans. (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 66.

this, Nike is depicted as having many functions in regard to her relationship with the mortals on earth. She is depicted as helping the warrior put his armor and his helmet on;<sup>25</sup> she is depicted as bringing a Zither to a man on his way to a musical competition; she assists in offerings; she follows the warriors with a victory headband, and does the same for those on their way to any other kind of competition.<sup>26</sup>

Victory is seen as a gift from the gods, but is also understood as an aspect of the gods. Nike is depicted in this context in one of two ways: either as a warrior herself (Mitkaempferin), or else as a charioteer for the gods (Wagenlenkerin der Gigantomachie).<sup>27</sup> She is involved wherever any kind of competition takes place, be it one of physical battle in war, or a friendly musical competition.

In regard to her appearances with warriors, she is seen as preceding the warrior into battle, or at other times she follows. Whether she precedes or follows, she is depicted as holding a wreath or palm branch indicating victory. She is also depicted as being with the warrior in the very thick of

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<sup>25</sup> See Hill, p. 110 and Seltman, Greek, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> Oberhummer, p. 293. It is interesting to note that Nike is even present at the birth of a child. Simon, plates 226, 227.

<sup>27</sup> Blech, p. 179. For more on Nike as a warrior see Hill, p. 167. As charioteer see Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 101 and Seltman, Greek, p. 248.

the battle as well.<sup>28</sup> At times she does not have anything in her hands, for just her presence is enough to symbolize the victory.<sup>29</sup> "In allen diesen Faellen deutet sie proleptisch den zukuenftigen Sieg schon an."<sup>30</sup>

Nike's primary function was in serving Zeus and Athena.<sup>31</sup> Usually, if Nike is pictured with a god, it would be one of these two deities. Even though Nike is counted as being among the "immortals" of which Zeus and Athena were also members,<sup>32</sup> the superiority of Zeus and Athena over Nike is marked by the way these gods are depicted when together. In regard to Zeus, there is a coin that shows Zeus as holding Nike in the palm of his right hand.<sup>33</sup> Quite often Nike is seen

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<sup>28</sup> Simon, p. 133. John Boardman, The Parthenon And Its Sculptures, (Austin: University Of Texas Press, 1985), p. 232.

<sup>29</sup> Blech, p. 178.

<sup>30</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 293,303. See also Bulle, p. 307; Harrison, pp. 80-81; Seltman, Greek, p. 204. She is also depicted as crowning women of victorious beauty or craftsmen of extraordinary skill. Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735.

<sup>31</sup> "Besonders eng verbunden ist sie aber mit Zeus and mit Athena." Bulle, p. 306.

<sup>32</sup> Seltman, Greek, p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Hill, pp. 156-157. There are two ways in which Nike is depicted with Zeus: 1. The goddess is either facing him with a garland in her hand, or offering him a libation. 2. She stands in the hollow of his hand looking away from him, and holding out a crown to the worshippers. Farnell, pp. 113-114, and pp. 132-133. See also p. 422a, plates 3,8,10,16.

crowning Zeus,<sup>34</sup> and because victory belongs to Zeus, Nike is "always" at his side.<sup>35</sup>

Nike is a constant companion to Athena as well, and Farnell suggests that Nike is in all probability "an emanation from her [Athena]".<sup>36</sup> Nike is also found holding a wreath on the famous shield of Athena,<sup>37</sup> and Nike was also depicted as being Athena's charioteer.<sup>38</sup> Nike also crowns Athena,<sup>39</sup> or else as one who raises a garland towards Athena as an emblem of Athena's triumph.<sup>40</sup> As with Zeus, Nike is also depicted on coins, statues and art as standing in the hand of Athena.<sup>41</sup> When she is with Athena, Nike either looks at Athena, or at the "successful athlete" who was brought to the statue in order to receive his crown.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Blech, pp. 179,180.

<sup>35</sup> Farnell, pp. 128,129. Also, Peterich, Goetter, pp. 16,17.

<sup>36</sup> Farnell, p. 311. See also p. 339. Nike is given special status in relation to Athena, and is spoken of as "...die ihr eigene Dienerin.". Oberhummer, p. 299.

<sup>37</sup> Blech, p. 438.

<sup>38</sup> Boardman, p. 230.

<sup>39</sup> Bulle, p. 361. Morkholm and Waggoner, p. 1. Phyllis Williams Lehmann, Samothrace: The Hieron, Texts I-III, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1969), Text I, pp. 382-84.

<sup>40</sup> Farnell, p. 367. Mark P.O. Morford & Robert J. Lenardon, Classical Mythology, (New York: Longman, 1985 rpr.), p. 109, n. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Boardman, p. 246. Also, Hill, pp. 121-123.

<sup>42</sup> Farnell, pp. 366-367. See also Simon, p. 152.

Even though her primary function was in serving Zeus and Athena, she also served gods from other cities such as Terina, Taras, Aetolia, Smyrna and Aradus.<sup>43</sup> Her role as a servant of the gods had ramifications for the people on earth as well, and it must be noted in this context that it is only later in her development that she becomes involved with mortals.<sup>44</sup> She brings sacrifices of thankfulness on behalf of those who have conquered, and as a result, she becomes an angel/mediator of sacrifice (Opfergenius) for the mortals on earth.<sup>45</sup> As a result, by the end of the fifth century BCE, her attributes and duties were that she was part of the entourage of the gods, she was a messenger of/for victory, and she was a sacrificial deity.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 291-293. Nike is seen with any god or goddess whose immediate concerns have something to do with victory. Oberhummer, p. 302. Nike is depicted as also crowning the god of the Games (Agon) as he drives a chariot. Another coin minted in the same year (415 BCE) replaces Agon with the goddess Persephone. Nike flies over the team of horses to crown her as well. Charles Seltman, Masterpieces Of Greek Coinage, (Chicago: Obol International Div. Unigraphics Inc., 1980), pp. 76,77. See also Blech, pp. 431-437.

<sup>44</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 302,303.

<sup>45</sup> See for example Ariane Ruskin and Michael Batterberry, Greek & Roman Art, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968), p. 99; Bulle, p. 309 and Farnell, p. 339.

<sup>46</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 291-293. See also Hill, p. 136 and Blech, pp. 111-112. It must be clearly understood that Nike is not a servant of the mortals on earth who do battle. She offers sacrifices on behalf of the warriors, and she delivers the decisions of the gods to the warriors, but she is not a servant of mortals. Oberhummer, p. 303.

One of Nike's original functions was as a symbol of Siegestuechtigkeit. Her symbol of the efficiency of victory crossed all borders, and she is even seen as symbolizing the victory to be found in physical appearance.<sup>47</sup> The most common motif as found on coins is that of Nike as standing at the finish line of a race, ready to decorate the winner.<sup>48</sup> The dominant method is crowning, either with a wreath, or some kind of laurel. She is almost always depicted as carrying some kind of crown,<sup>49</sup> and is even depicted herself as being crowned.<sup>50</sup> Other than the athlete, Nike is seen crowning artists,<sup>51</sup> mortal charioteers,<sup>52</sup> and even as crowning a trophy; that is a suit of armor.<sup>53</sup> She is also seen crowning Artemis and Theseus,<sup>54</sup> as well as many other gods and goddesses.<sup>55</sup> Not

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<sup>47</sup> Oberhummer, p. 303.

<sup>48</sup> Oberhummer, p. 305. See as well, Farnell, p. 339.

<sup>49</sup> Hill, p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> Farnell, pp. 128, 361-367.

<sup>51</sup> Blech, p. 181.

<sup>52</sup> Seltman, Masterpieces, pp. 82-86, 100-101. See also Blech, p. 437 and Hill, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Robert E.A. Palmer, Roman Religion and Roman Empire: Five Essays, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), p. 202. See also Hill, p. 119; Ruskin and Batterberry, p. 99.

<sup>54</sup> Blech, pp. 430, 431.

<sup>55</sup> Seltman, Masterpieces, pp. 76, 77 as well as Farnell, p. 339.

surprisingly, she is seen crowning Alexander the Great,<sup>56</sup> and in one rare coin, she is seen standing in Athena's hand while at the time crowning the king's name.<sup>57</sup> The Greeks also realized that in many cases it was the swiftness of the horses that helped to bring about the victory, and so there are also numerous depictions of Nike crowning these animals.<sup>58</sup>

A major contribution to the Nike Gestalt was the famous Nike of Samothrace.<sup>59</sup> Bulle dates this statue to 300 BCE,<sup>60</sup> but the date has been debated as being anywhere from the late fourth to the first century BCE.<sup>61</sup> From the fourth century BCE and on, Samothrace was a strategic naval base and stronghold used by the second Athenian League, by king Lysimachos of Thrace, and by the Ptolemies, Seleucids, and Macedonians in turn.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Seltman, Greek, p. 213.

<sup>57</sup> Hill, pp. 121-123. This coin was minted sometime between 306-281 BCE and after this, the motif of crowning a "name" became more popular. See also pp. 145-148.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Blech, pp. 178-437; Hill, pp. 30,37; Seltman, Masterpieces, pp. 46-47,92-92; Seltman, Greek, pp. 47(n.5), 73.

<sup>59</sup> For a reconstructed view of this marvellous work of art see Phyllis Willams Lehmann and Karl Lehmann, Samothracian Reflections, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 188, fig. 5. For some other remarks on the beauty of this statue see p. 86, n. 134.

<sup>60</sup> Bulle, pp. 348-349.

<sup>61</sup> Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 183. See also Seltman, Greek, pp. 253-254.

<sup>62</sup> Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 15.



It was one of the centers of Greek religious life, and after the Romans conquered Greece they continued to show interest in Samothrace. From the end of the second century BCE and onwards, there was an "...ever increasing stream of Roman pilgrims [coming] to Samothrace."<sup>63</sup> The importance of this statue will be noted later, in the meantime we can say that this statue stood, and was prominent until at least 200 CE.<sup>64</sup> In a world where naval matters such as trade and war played a decisive role in a nation's well-being, Nike found herself playing an equally important role.

In fact, the direct result of the increasing demands upon and for Nike resulted in her "Vervielfaeltigung". This was done for two reasons. First of all, as mentioned above, there was an increasing demand for Nike in regard to matters of military, the Olympic games, beauty contests, musical contests, even legal matters. The second reason that she was "duplicated" is because she was never understood to be a specific individual with an individuality (Eigenpersoenlichkeit). Instead, she was understood as being a conceptual reality (begriffliches Wesen), and as a result, there was no problem

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<sup>63</sup> Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 16. A note that should be drawn to our attention, and was made mention of only by Lewis is that the famous Nike monument of Samothrace "...is not mentioned by any extant ancient author." Naphtali Lewis, Samothrace: The Ancient Literary Sources, Vol. I, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1958), p. 116.

<sup>64</sup> Phyllis Lehmann, p. 122 n. 154. See also Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 16. Some scholars have even suggested a date in the reign of Flavius Petrus Sabbatius Justinianus, who lived 482-565 CE. Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 182.

perceived in her duplication.<sup>65</sup> "Nike ist wie Eros der Vervielfaeltigung faehig ohne das ihr Wesen dabei eine Differenzierung erfuehre...".<sup>66</sup>

Even though there are many Nikes depicted around soldiers and athletes, no one ever thought to refer to one of those Nikes as their own Nike. She may have been "multiplied", but that did not give license to individual claims of ownership. She was a living idea, not a personal goddess for any mortal.<sup>67</sup>

In spite of her popularity, there is considerable debate as to whether or not Nike had a cult of her own.<sup>68</sup> Nike "...wird fast immer mit einer Gottheit zusammen verehrt."<sup>69</sup> As a result of this, her identity was one of association, and not of individuality. In terms of cultic activity she is most closely associated with Athena, and together with Athena

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<sup>65</sup> Oberhummer, p. 294. On numerous Nikes depicted in art see pp. 300,301. See as well, Vermeule, pp. 90-91; Ruskin and Batterberry, p. 99; Liberman, pp. 29-30,43; Blech, pp. 178-91 and Angelos Delivorrias, Attische Giebelskulpturen und Akrotäre des fünften Jahrhunderts, (Tuebingen: Verlag Ernst Wasmuth, 1974), pp. 57-59,124.

<sup>66</sup> Bulle, p. 308.

<sup>67</sup> Bulle, p. 309. See also Blech, p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> Blech is inclined to say that she did have her own cult. Blech, p. 409. See also the very convincing argument for Nike's own cult in Fears, pp. 772,773.

<sup>69</sup> Oberhummer, p. 295. "Many prayed for Nike. Eur[ipides] and Menand[er] did so at the conclusions of their dramas. But no one ever prayed seriously to her." Bauernfeind, p. 943. We will shortly see that Nike did not have her own cult per se as did the Roman equivalent, Victoria. See Bulle, p. 312.

(Athena-Nike) she most certainly did have a cult.<sup>70</sup> In this association with Athena, Nike was worshipped at Erythrae, the Acropolis of Megara, and the Acropolis of Athens.<sup>71</sup> In conjunction with other gods she also had cults in Ilium and Tralles, and after the birth of Christ these cults involving Nike took on a much more widespread acceptance.<sup>72</sup>

This motif of victory continues to develop, and brings with it new ideas. Epicurus (341-270 BCE) refers to the warrior as someone who is unconquerable (anikêsos). He cannot be caused to deviate from the right path by glory, abuse, praise or death: dunatai tauta panta nikêsai. The interesting development we see is in the visible results of the battle, for Epicurus goes on to say that the warrior's victoriousness is quite independent of public success. "He can be victorious even though externally he marches from defeat to

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<sup>70</sup> Bulle, pp. 310,311. Our concern in this thesis does not include taking a position in the debate as to whether or not Nike had her "own" cult. Therefore, throughout this discussion, we will speak of Nike's cult, but in doing so we do not intend to support either side of the debate.

<sup>71</sup> Farnell, p. 313. It was on the Acropolis of Athens that we find the cult statue of Athena Parthenos. This incredible statue is significant for our purposes because Athena is depicted holding a Nike in her hand. Boardman, p. 246.

<sup>72</sup> Oberhummer, p. 297. One of the sources that we have for this information is from Dionysius Halicarnassensis and his work "De Isocrate". Dionysius himself "...lived and taught at Rome for many years from 30 B.C.". (Donald Andrew Frank Moore Russell, "Dionysius [7]" in OCD, p. 351) This would put this information in very near proximity to the date of the writing of Revelation. What this establishes then, whether or not she had her own cult, is that Nike was playing a significant role in the Greco-Roman world in the first century CE.

defeat. True victory can thus be a hidden victory".<sup>73</sup> Here we find the reference to the fact that someone can be victorious even though the outward appearance would suggest defeat.<sup>74</sup> As we will see, this Greek idea is adapted in a Jewish context and helped to bring about the idea that one can be a victorious overcomer even through death. The martyrologies of the Maccabean literature, which will be discussed later, affirm just this kind of a theology.

Of course, the ultimate victory sought after by humankind was the victory over death:

As befits a race fond of competition the Greeks invoked Nike in most flattering terms...She enjoyed

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<sup>73</sup> As cited in Bauernfeind, p. 942. Already from the time of Homer, death on the battlefield was desired over an inglorious old age. Robert Garland, The Greek Way of Death, (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 123. In this sense we can see the genesis of an ideology that says that one can be victorious in death and apparent defeat. The importance of this development will be noted in later chapters as we examine how doctrines pertaining to martyrologies entrenched such beliefs.

<sup>74</sup> We refer to Nicolaus' speech which is reported by Diodorus Siculus in the late first century BCE, for it adds to what can be known about "victory" in the mind of a Greek. The old man Nicolaus says to the men of Syracuse that they should be lenient with their Athenian captives. Nicolaus refers them to the fact that Cyrus became king of all Asia "by his considerate treatment of the conquered". Nicolaus appeals to his countrymen to go beyond the Athenians not only in feats of arms, but also in humanity. "Twice he uses the verb to 'overcome' (nikaō) the Athenians in philanthropy or with kindness. Like Thucydides there is a note of 'overcoming the enemy' with kindness." Klassen goes on to say that Diodorus is not to be trusted as a historian, "...but as one who expressed his own values with respect to how enemies are to be treated if one is to prevent one war from leading to another, he is an important source." William Klassen, Love Of Enemies: The Way To Peace, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 21.

favour with Hellenistic rulers and as Victoria was worshipped by the Romans. As symbol of victory over death Nike was a favourite motif of Roman allegorical art.<sup>75</sup>

The theology of victory for the Greeks as expressed through Nike was a long and enduring one. Over the centuries her Gestalt continued to be refined, and at the same time, expanded.

We now turn to a similar examination of the birth and growth of Victoria, who constituted the Romans' expression of victory. After our report on Victoria's development, we will assimilate the information on Nike and Victoria to show that the recipients, and author, of Revelation were influenced by these pagan theologies of victory.

#### The Roman Goddess Of Victory: Victoria

We concluded the above discussion by saying that the Romans sought victory as much as the Greeks did. It comes as no surprise to see then that several hundred years later, the Romans also gave birth to their own goddess of victory, and her

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<sup>75</sup> Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735. Other goddesses were also symbolic of victory over death. For example, Demeter (goddess of soil and farming) was revered in that spring's annual triumph over the death of winter became symbolic of the human hope for victory over death. "The human hope for immortality that is expressed each spring in the rebirth of nature could be fulfilled only by participating in the nature of the god. The search for this immortality was directed, not toward the gods on Olympus, but towards gods or goddesses who, like Demeter, were thought to have conquered death." Ronald H. Nash, Christianity and the Hellenistic World, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), pp. 133-134.

name was Victoria. Coming several centuries after Nike, Victoria was an emulation of Nike, and served to personify victory for the Roman world.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, even though Victoria was not as old as Nike, the Romans placed equal importance on her role within their Empire: "Die Roemer betrachteten sie [Victoria] als eine ihren aeltesten Nationalgottheiten."<sup>77</sup>

Victoria was a later development than Nike, and as well, a development from Nike. At times the affinities between Nike and Victoria are so close that it is hard to tell the two goddesses apart.<sup>78</sup> Such is the case with the gods and goddesses depicted on terrace-roof-gardens in the city of Minturnae

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<sup>76</sup> St. Weinstock, "Victoria" in PW, Vol. VIII A2, p. 2501. I am indebted to Weinstock's thorough work on Victoria, and will occasionally cite the (German) terms used in his essay. See also Herbert Jennings Rose, "Victoria" OCD, p. 1120. As with Nike, Victoria was understood as a personification of an abstract idea. Franz Altheim, A History of Roman Religion, Harold Mattingly, trans., (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1938), pp. 295,296. Cicero (106-43 BCE) explained one of the features of Roman religion this way: "Things like wealth, security, concord, freedom, or victory are associated with such power that they must needs be ruled by a god, and it was because of this that they had been given divine status." J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, Continuity And Change In Roman Religion, (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 177.

<sup>77</sup> H. LeBouniec, "Victoria" in Lexikon der Alten Welt, Carl Andresen, et al, eds., (Stuttgart: Artemis Verlag 1965), p. 3226. See also Felix Guirand, ed., "Victoria" in Larousse Encyclopedia Of Mythology, Richard Aldington and Delano Ames trans., (London: Batchworth Press Limited, 1959), p. 227.

<sup>78</sup> In fact, with the passing of time, the names of the two deities are often used interchangeably to refer to the personification of victory. On Victoria's development from Nike, see Fears, p. 774.

as well as on the nearby temple in Marica.<sup>79</sup> However, these two examples are the exceptions and not the rule. Granted, Nike did play an important role in the creation of Victoria, and this can be seen in the way Victoria was depicted in art and in minted coins, "...aber sie [Nike] war und blieb von [Victoria] verschieden."<sup>80</sup>

Weinstock responds to suggestions that Victoria and Nike were identical by saying that it is not possible because "...eine griechische Goettin haette zu jener Zeit keinen Temple auf dem Palatium erhalten. Sie muss also als eine einheimische Goettin gegolten haben." He goes on to say that "Der Unterschied zwischen [Victoria] and Nike ist gross."<sup>81</sup>

Whereas Nike dates back to approximately 700 BCE, Victoria's "birth" is approximated to the fourth century BCE, with her temple in Rome dating back to 294-293 BCE.<sup>82</sup> The date of

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<sup>79</sup> Weinstock, p. 2503.

<sup>80</sup> Weinstock, pp. 2502, 2503. Peterich said that Victoria's inception was a direct result of Nike's influence. Peterich, Goettinnen, p. 38.

<sup>81</sup> Weinstock, p. 2507. "Wenn sie [Victoria] also auf roemischen Muenzen und Weihgaben erscheint, mag sie wie Nike aussehen, muss aber ihre Stellung in der roemischen Welt sehr verschieden gewesen sei." Weinstock, p. 2507.

<sup>82</sup> Avery, p. 1142. It is interesting to note that the year 294-293 BCE is also the year that we have the first record of the Romans using a thoroughly Greek custom. This was the first year that the Romans wore laurel wreaths and awarded the winners of the Games with palmbranches. Weinstock, p. 2505. The date of 294-293 BCE for Victoria's temple is attested to by other scholars as well. Cyril Bailey, Phases In The Religion Of Ancient Rome, "Sather Classical Lectures, Volume 10", (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 135. Also, Harold L. Axtell, The Deification Of Abstract Ideas in

Victoria's inception is not agreed upon, and even though this fourth century BCE date is attested to,<sup>83</sup> there are those like Altheim who maintain a date already in the fifth century BCE.<sup>84</sup>

The issue at hand in dating Victoria is her relationship to the earlier deity Vica Pota. The dating of Victoria's emergence is in direct relation to her association, or lack thereof, with Vica Pota. Earlier works suggest that Vica Pota and Victoria are not related,<sup>85</sup> but in more recent times the relationship between the two has been seen as more pronounced.

Palmer draws our attention to the fact that towards the beginning of the Christian era there were several religious buildings or centers of import that stood on the Velian Hill in Rome. There were three major temples which had lesser deities such as Vica Pota on them.<sup>86</sup> He goes on to say that the

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Roman Literature And Inscriptions (Ph.D. Dissertation; Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1907), p. 15. Fears, pp. 773-775. On the other hand, Dumezil says that Victoria did not have her own temple until the beginning of the second century BCE. Georges Dumezil, Archaic Roman Religion: With An Appendix On The Religion Of The Etruscans, Vols. I-II, Phillip Krapp, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970 rpr.), Vol I., p. 241. Altheim, based on the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, claims that the temple excavated on the Palatine dated to the beginning of the fifth century BCE is the temple of Victoria. Altheim, p. 235.

<sup>83</sup> See for example Bulle, p. 311 and Avery, p. 1142.

<sup>84</sup> Altheim, p. 235.

<sup>85</sup> Herbert Jennings Rose, "Vica Pota" in OCD, p. 1119. For more on this see Palmer, pp. 201-202, 275 n. 90.

<sup>86</sup> Palmer, p. 198.



Temple of Vica Pota of the Velia was in fact one of the temples of Victoria.<sup>87</sup>

The original relationship between Vica Pota and Victoria is maintained to be a derivative one in that first there was Vica Pota, and out of Vica Pota came Victoria. If Victoria is in fact a derivative of Vica Pota, then a date of approximately 500 BCE (509) is given to Victoria.<sup>88</sup> Traditionally, Vica Pota has been understood as being what later came to be called Victoria,<sup>89</sup> or as being the forerunner to Victoria.<sup>90</sup>

Whatever the relationship was between Vica Pota and Victoria, the fact remains that Victoria was a younger goddess than Nike. However, even though Victoria came later than Nike, Victoria was honoured in a way that Nike never was. Victoria, from her inception, had her own cult whereas Nike did not. The fact that Victoria immediately gained her own status was also accompanied by the reality that Victoria was not seen in roles of serving other gods and goddesses, as was Nike. Victoria had her own temple, cult, and specific day of celebration (August 1), and people prayed directly to her: "Es wird ausdruecklich bezeugt, dass man zu ihr betete."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Palmer, pp. 201-203.

<sup>88</sup> Axtell, pp. 15-18.

<sup>89</sup> Axtell, pp. 47-48.

<sup>90</sup> Bulle, p. 312.

<sup>91</sup> Weinstock, p. 2507. In this context see also R.O. Fink "Victoria Parthica And Kindred Victoria" in Yale Classical Studies, Volume Eight, Austin M. Harmon & Alfred R. Bellinger

The invincibility of the Roman army was closely associated with their goddess Victoria. In fact, Victoria was understood at her inception as a goddess of victory in warfare. Again, unlike Nike, she was not a generic goddess of victory, but instead she was a goddess for a specific kind of victory, for victory in battle.<sup>92</sup>

Axtell informs us that for a "general notion of victory", gods such as Jupiter (Iovis), Mars, Venus, Hercules, Diana, Fortuna, Minerva and Lar would be consulted for assistance. However, in regard to military battle, it was Victoria that was besought. In fact, Axtell goes on to say that "Victoria was apparently never worshipped outside the sphere of military conquest."<sup>93</sup>

The goddess Victoria, like Nike, was introduced to meet a need, and in the case of Victoria that need was also a specific

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eds., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), p. 88, n. 33. With regard to prayers offered to Victoria, it is interesting to note that during battles, the Roman commander on the battlefield would send, via messengers, updates to the Senate on how the battle was going. The Senate in response would then offer the appropriate supplications. Weinstock, p. 2509. Hence the relationship between prayer and effectiveness on the battlefield is established at this time already. Just as the Romans directed their battle concerns to the Senate, the Hebrews of the Old Testament directed theirs to their temple. See 2 Chron. 6:34,35.

<sup>92</sup> Fears, p. 742; Bulle, p. 313.

<sup>93</sup> Axtell, pp. 17,18. In making this statement, Axtell is not in agreement with most scholars who see Victoria's role as extending in other areas of Roman life, as we shall see below. See also Palmer, p. 204 and J.M.C. Toynbee, The Art Of The Romans, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1965), p. 66.

one.<sup>94</sup> The Roman worshipper appealed to the deity that had the appropriate capacity. A general in battle would pray to the giver of military battles, Victoria, and not to Iuno who was prayed to in regard to childbirth.<sup>95</sup>

It was no coincidence that shortly after the erection of Victoria's temple in 294-293 BCE, Pyrrhus (319-272 BCE) wrote of the invincibility of the Romans. This air of invincibility was definitely present in the Roman mindset, even if that included an occasional defeat. The fact that this statement comes from Pyrrhus is significant exactly for this reason, for in 280 he defeated the Romans at Asculum, and did so again in 279. However, none of his victories were lasting ones, they were only temporary. Nevertheless, even though he was a "brilliant tactician and adroit opportunist",<sup>96</sup> he realized that he could not bring down the invincible Romans.<sup>97</sup>

The Punic Wars effected this invincible outlook to a certain degree, especially in the context of the second Punic War (218-201 BCE). While struggling at the hands of Hannibal,

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<sup>94</sup> Liebeschuetz, p. 178.

<sup>95</sup> Bailey, p. 135. It is important to state at this point that this was the picture of Victoria at her inception. Later, as we shall see below, she does come to play a role in the two other equally important facets of Roman life: the Games, and the unavoidable death. Suffice it to say for the moment that Victoria's glory was at first given to her due to the victories she gave to mortals in military battles.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholas Geoffrey Lempriere Hammond, "Pyrrhus" in OCD, p. 903.

<sup>97</sup> "Im Laufe der Zeit wurde diese Unbesiegbarkeit immer haeufiger betont.". Weinstock, p. 2511.

Rome refused to admit defeat.<sup>98</sup> Instead, Rome increased their dependence on the gods for victories in battles as they had done before.

For example, after Hannibal defeated the Roman armies at Trasimene in 217, King Hieron II of Syracuse, an ally to Rome, sent a gold statue of Nike to Rome and the Romans placed the statue in their Jupiter Temple as a harbinger of the anticipated victory. A similar gesture from those in Tarentum resulted in a second statue of Nike in 209. The eventual victory of the Romans in the Punic Wars in 146 was accompanied with, and seen by the Romans as a direct result of, the many prayers to Nike and Victoria.<sup>99</sup>

Another important development in the Greco-Roman world which will help us to understand nikaô in Revelation, was the use of Victoria and victory in close association with prominent figures. This was the case from quite early on,<sup>100</sup> and we note

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<sup>98</sup> Weinstock, pp. 2511,2512. See also Howard Hayes Scullard, "Punic Wars" in OCD, pp. 900-901.

<sup>99</sup> Weinstock, pp. 2511,2512. In all fairness to the data, it must be stated that prayers to Victoria did not guarantee a victory in battle. Defeat was experienced even by the mighty Roman armies, and in this sense there is room to say that the gods had failed. Jesse Benedict Carter, The Religious Life Of Ancient Rome: A Study In The Development Of Religious Consciousness From The Foundation Of The City Until The Death Of Gregory The Great, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), p. 153.

<sup>100</sup> During one of Ptolemy II's (308-246 BCE) parades celebrating a victory, Alexander was placed on a golden elephant wagon with Athena and Nike surrounding him, and driven around. The exact date for the inception of such a practice is not known: "Irgendwann fing man auch im roemischen Herre an, solche Prozessionen mit der V[ictoria] zu halten." Weinstock,

Augustus who saw to it that the victory in Actium was interpreted as the turning point in regard to the Roman Empire. "Victoria Augusti" came to represent the victory of Augustus, whether or not he was actually responsible for the victory: "Alle Siege wurden damals seine Siege".<sup>101</sup>

Patriotism and religion went hand in hand to make a stronger Roman empire. The goddess Victoria was one of the objects of worship that "filled men with a new enthusiasm".<sup>102</sup> The Roman people, says Carter, were filled with a patriotic zeal, and they were possessed with an ethnic religion. "Emperor-worship is a masterpiece of the politician's art of employing religion towards the upbuilding of the State, and it contributed to keeping the Empire together."<sup>103</sup>

The importance of victory over death was also made manifest via Emperor worship.<sup>104</sup> If death was to be understood as the ultimate crushing fate awaiting all mortals, then

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p. 2528.

<sup>101</sup> Weinstock, p. 2520

<sup>102</sup> Carter, p. 34.

<sup>103</sup> Nilsson, p. 178.

<sup>104</sup> This began most clearly with Augustus, and was fiercely attacked by the Christians in the first century CE. "Wenige Kulte sind von den Heiden im Kampfe mit dem Christentum so hartnaekig verteidigt worden wie der des kaiserlichen Sieges." Peterich, Goettinnen, p. 38. Augustus' use of Victoria in Emperor worship was an idea that he carried over from the reign of Caesar: "Caesar hatte mit seiner Propaganda der V[ictoria] Caesaris die Grundlage gelegt, und Augustus organisierte nach seinen Anregungen den Kult des Heeres und wies hierbei auch der V[ictoria] ihren Platz an." Weinstock, p. 2530.

all was in vain. As a result, Victoria was brought into this final "battle-field", and shown to be, once again, the conqueror. For example, on the east and west attics of the Arch of Constantine in Rome, a frieze on the Column has survived from Trajan's reign (97-117 CE). Scenes of war are depicted on this frieze, and the most significant aspect of this frieze is that "The triumph of the emperor on this frieze is not terrestrial only, but also celestial--his victory over death by apotheosis."<sup>105</sup> With the help of Victoria, inextricably associated with the emperor since at least the reign of Augustus, even death had now been defeated.

Victoria Augusta had become a religious and legal symbol of the Roman Empire.<sup>106</sup> The symbol represented "...das siegreiche roemische Reich und alles, was es innerhalb seiner

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<sup>105</sup> Toynbee, pp. 60-61. See also Fears, p. 819.

<sup>106</sup> Fink believes that the "official conception" of the many Victoriae was that "They were looked upon as divine personifications of victories won over foreign enemies, and were honored with individual cults." p. 92. He goes on to explain that these gods were meant to personify the actual military success, and not the divine powers that granted those victories (p. 100). He believes that these cults were not practiced in order to secure divine help in winning victories, but instead they were used for "...commemorative and propagandistic ends." (p. 92; See also pp. 94, 98-100). He concludes by saying that the gods of victory "...had a secure position in official religion, and were deliberately fostered with some success, by the imperial government as a strengthening element in the political and military fabric of the Empire." (p. 101). Peterich also understands Victoria's role to be one that encompasses both political and religious facets, and that she was used for political ends. Peterich, Goettinnen, p. 38. The debate as to whether the devotion shown to Victoria and the other Victoriae was motivated by politics or piety is not important to our discussion. The fact that victory was deified as a goddess is.

Grenzen bieten konnte: Sicherheit, Frieden, Milde, Wohlfahrt."<sup>107</sup>

The never-satiated need for victory is evidenced by the Roman Zwoelfgoettergruppe referred to by Trajan in 101 CE. Of these twelve main gods, we find that three have "victor" as part of their name: Iovis Victor, Mars Victor and Hercules Victor. Add to these three the goddess Victoria and we see that four of the twelve gods are associated with victory.<sup>108</sup> We are informed that the precise date and origin of this Zwoelfgoettergruppe is not known, but what we do know is that by the end of the first century CE it is firmly established. The motif of victory is dominant, in fact so much so that part of the prayers to the gods includes saying incolumen reducem victoremque twice.<sup>109</sup>

We reiterate now, as we did at the conclusion to the Nike section above, that the ultimate victory to be won was the one over death. After Augustus died, it was resolved by the

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<sup>107</sup> Weinstock, p. 2520. "Auf zahlreichen Muenzen und Monumenten erscheint V[ictoria] als eine der Schirmgottheiten der Kaiser und des Reichs." LeBouniec, p. 3226.

<sup>108</sup> Victoria, like Nike, experienced a "Vervielfaeltigung". As with Nike, there was no perceived problem with this expansion of sorts, in fact, it was more likely the case that the efficiency of the goddess would be increased by it. For more on this "duplication" of Victoria see Vermeule, pp. 37-38; Axtell, p. 18; Toynbee, pp. 72, 75-76, 85, 100, 121, 144.

<sup>109</sup> Weinstock, p. 2537. Fink reminds us that Victoria was only one of many gods that were prayed to for victory. Fink, p. 84. On the other hand, Weinstock would place much more direct emphasis on Victoria as the sole representative of the victorious Roman Empire. Weinstock, pp. 2537, 2538.

Senate that the statue of Victoria should be taken from the Senate House and placed at the head of Augustus' funeral procession. This, together with the history of the Nikes that adorned Alexander's catafalque, worked to finally and officially bring victory into this third major area of "battle". Prior to this, Nike and Victoria were mainly understood with regard to the victories needed in war, and in the Olympic games.

Es gab aber noch einen dritten Kampf, den "Lebenskampf" und V[ictoria] wurde unter Einfluss griechischer Philosophie und orientalischen Glaubens Goettin auch solcher "Siege". Es wurde denen, die sich im Lebenskampfe bewaehrt hatten, Unsterblichkeit als "Siegespreis" [sic] in Aussicht gestellt.<sup>110</sup>

Christians were involved in the struggle to have the statue of Victoria removed from the Senate House.<sup>111</sup> Their concern was that whenever a senator entered the Curia, he would have to burn incense and offer a libation of wine to the head of the image of Victoria there.<sup>112</sup> Weinstock says that the

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<sup>110</sup> Weinstock, p. 2539. Should read "Siegespreis".

<sup>111</sup> In 29 BCE, the new Senate House which was begun by Julius Caesar was completed by Augustus, and he dedicated an altar to Victoria in the Senate. "This became the centre of the last struggle of the pagans against the Christians when Gratian ordered its removal. Symmachus appealed for its restoration, but, except for a short restoration, it disappeared from the Senate." Yonah and Shatzman, p. 477.

<sup>112</sup> J. J. Pollitt, The Art Of Rome: 753 BC - AD 337, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 rpr.), p. 198.



battle was not one over Victoria per se, but was instead directed more against the State itself.<sup>113</sup>

Die Sitzung des Senats fand meistens in der Curia statt, und man plegte dort vor jeder Sitzung seit der augusteischen Zeit ein Opfer an V[ictoria] darzubringen. Dieses Opfer lebte dank der starken Tradition (die durch die heidnischen Kreise Roms bewusst gepflegt wurde) in der christlichen Zeit fort, so dass ein Ende des Opfers in den Augen der Christen ein Ende des Heidentums bedeuten mochte.<sup>114</sup>

Christians were opposed to offerings to Victoria especially in regard to emperor worship, and yet, on the other hand, there was a growing measure of tolerance and even appreciation of Victoria as the years passed. For example, Christian artists in the Diocletian era (fourth century CE) did not find the Victoria statues as offensive, or as a cause for stumbling.<sup>115</sup> Victoria holding a shield is even found decorating both Christian and pagan sarcophaguses.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> A note should be made on behalf of those Romans who did not want to see Victoria removed from the Senate House. In particular, from 382 to 391 CE, four attempts were made (in vain) to have Victoria restored to her place. The logic given was that it had been with the aid of the "old gods" that Rome had attained her fame and glory, and thus it would be wrong to dispose of them. Carter, pp. 152-153.

<sup>114</sup> Weinstock, p. 2541. It should be stated that the offerings made to Victoria "...gradually acquired the colorlessness of a stereotypical form." Carter, p. 152.

<sup>115</sup> To be sure, there were some Christians in this time period that did find this to be a stumbling block, and as being a position of compromise. See Carter, p. 152.

<sup>116</sup> Weinstock, pp. 2540, 2541. "V[ictoria] erscheint dann oft auf christlichen Denkmälern: sie bekraenzt einen Gladiator auf einem Bleibecker von Tunis; zwei schwebende V[ictoria]ae mit kraenzen auf der Stirnwand des Grabes eines Wagenlenkers...V[ictoria] bekraenzt christliche Kaiser." Weinstock, p. 2541.

We have outlined the growth and development of the Greco-Roman victory cults. Although their origin was approximately 700 and 295 BCE, their influence increased as time passed. At a later point in this thesis we will examine more closely the heightened worship in these pagan cults at the time of Christ. For the present, we need to summarize this discussion of the pagan victory cults and, we need to substantiate their coexistence with Christians in Asia Minor in the first century CE.

#### Summary

We have now seen the role that Nike and Victoria played with regard to the development of a theology of victory in Greeks and Romans. Perhaps the most important fact to keep in mind throughout this summary of the pagan victory cults is that an abstract idea (victory) was deified (Nike, Victoria). What this indicates is that victory was more than just a fleeting concern in the Greco-Roman world. Instead, it was of primary importance from 700 BCE and on.

As we shall see, the popularity of these pagan theologies continued on even into the fifth century CE, thereby spanning some 1200 years. We will also seek to substantiate the coexistence of Christianity with these pagan victory cults. For within the grids of this matrix of the development of these pagan victory cults, we find the newly founded Christian faith

of the first century CE. Its growth experienced roadblocks, and in particular, religious persecution.

Within our text of concern, Revelation, the possibility of persecution for one's faith is a real one, and the discussion of concerns such as these are expressed in military language.<sup>117</sup> A battle is being fought, and as in most battles, a victor emerges. Revelation is no exception, and as this thesis seeks to prove, the theological motif of victory is a major one in this last book of the New Testament just as it was a major part of pagan worship in the contemporary Greco-Roman world.

Yet, the question that still remains unanswered is the nature of the relationship of Nike and Victoria to the Christians living in Asia Minor in the first century CE. Unless substantial evidence can be found to verify that these pagan theologies of victory were well known to these Christians, then the previous chapter has been informative at best, and irrelevant at worst.

However, we will now highlight some of the historical facts to demonstrate that these theologies of victory were indeed known by Christians, and that they played a significant role towards the understanding of victory as a theological theme in Revelation.<sup>118</sup> John took a familiar theology of victory from the pagan world, which was very active in the

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<sup>117</sup> See Chapter IV, p. 164, n. 49.

<sup>118</sup> We will only highlight this connection at this point. The final chapter of this thesis will take this subject up in greater detail.

first century CE, and used it to encourage Christians even in the face of death. We shall begin with an examination of Victoria, for of the two personifications discussed, she was the furthest removed from the Christians in Asia Minor, geographically speaking.

### Victoria

During the Hellenistic period (323-30 BCE),<sup>119</sup> Asia Minor was stranded from the heart of the Roman Empire in a geographical sense. Before the Hellenistic period, the great cities of Asia Minor had little Greek artistic history, regardless of their mythological claims. However, with the rise and domination of the Roman Empire came the growth of such artistic activity. Vermeule states it this way: "More visibly, the urge toward major public statues and reliefs [in Asia Minor] came with peace and prosperity under the Roman emperors."<sup>120</sup>

We discussed earlier the date of Victoria's "birth" and noted that there was considerable debate on this matter. We noted that a date of 509 BCE was plausible, but not certain.

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<sup>119</sup> The Hellenistic period begins with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, and ends with the Roman conquest of the last major vestige of Alexander's empire, the Egypt of Cleopatra, in 30 BCE. Nash, pp. 18-19.

<sup>120</sup> Vermeule, p. 105. "While Rome achieved military and political supremacy throughout the Mediterranean world, it adopted the culture of the Hellenistic world that preceded its rise to power. Thus, while political control of the Mediterranean belongs to Rome, the culture continued to be Hellenistic." Nash, p. 19.

For the purposes of this thesis it is not important whether her birth was in 509 BCE or in 295 BCE. What is important is that an abstract concept, victory, was deified in the goddess Victoria.

What can be known with certainty is that many temples and cultic activities were devoted to her from at least 295 BCE, and her popularity grew from that point on. A somewhat significant development can already be seen by the second century BCE. For it was at this time that many commemorative structures (with *Victoriae*) were built throughout the Roman Empire celebrating military victories.<sup>121</sup> When we couple this fact together with the previous one, we can see that most certainly Asia Minor had its share of edifices such as these.

When we add to the above fact that the cult of Victoria experienced a tremendous peak of growth during the time of Augustus<sup>122</sup> (27 BCE - 14 CE), we begin to see that the Sitz im Leben of a first generation Christian in Asia Minor was one that was saturated with a pagan theology of victory. Nor was this peak of Victoria's glory short-lived.

The coins carried around by those in the Greco-Roman world were filled with depictions of Victoria and other victory-like deities. From Augustus on, coins were continually minted with

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<sup>121</sup> Palmer, p. 204.

<sup>122</sup> Weinstock, p. 2530.

depictions of Victoria. With these coins, allusions were made to the felicity and abundance of the imperial state.<sup>123</sup>

Bulle confirms the popularity of Victoria in this era, and says that even throughout Nero's reign Victoria was a popular motif for the obverse or reverse side, and sometimes even both sides of coins.<sup>124</sup> The trend continues, and we can see that from Vespasian to Trajan (69-117 CE) an abundance of coins were minted with Victoria on them.<sup>125</sup>

The depictions of victory were not limited to coins, but were also prominent in art forms, such as statues or vases. Domitian was fond of victory motifs in art, especially in architecture. The following quote shows that the Greco-Roman world of the first century CE was indeed saturated with the motif of victory due to Domitian's building of arches of triumph:

Domitian's megalomania impelled him to build so many ponderous ianos arcusque in several urban regions that someone wrote on an arch the punning Greek word "enough" (arki).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 208 n. 49.

<sup>124</sup> Bulle, pp. 314-315.

<sup>125</sup> Bulle, p. 357. Therefore, whether Revelation describes the reign of Nero or Domitian is not a concern, for Victoria's minted exposure was carried through both of their reigns.

<sup>126</sup> Palmer, p. 204. See also p. 276 n. 103. "He [Domitian] suffered no statues to be set up in his honour in the Capital, except of gold and silver and of a fixed weight. He erected so many and such huge vaulted passage-ways and arches in the various regions of the city, adorned with chariots and triumphal emblems, that on one of them someone wrote in Greek: 'It is enough'." C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background:

Victoria's popularity as a goddess of victory continued well into the fifth century CE. As we noted earlier, we have evidence from the minting of Honorius (395-423 CE) and Romulus Augustulus (475-76 CE) that Victoria was depicted on their coinage.<sup>127</sup>

The last vestige of Victoria, for the purpose of worship, was done away with in 382 CE. It was in this year that Gratian, by Imperial edict, removed the altar of Victory from the Senate House at Rome. The response to this action by some was less than favourable, as is indicated by Symmachus (340-402 CE) who said: "...to end the cult of the goddess Victoria might deprive Roman arms of victory in the field."<sup>128</sup>

We can summarize by saying that Victoria lived a full long life. We can also say with assurance that she was well-known to those living in Asia Minor. More to our concerns, it is interesting to note that her popularity was especially widespread precisely at the time in which Revelation was written, and the main political figures of Revelation (be it Nero or Domitian) are both found to be promoting the use of Victoria in great detail and quantity in art, architecture and in their currency.

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Selected Documents, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961 rpr.), p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> Bulle, p. 358.

<sup>128</sup> Liebeschuetz, p. 177. See also p. 301. For more on Symmachus' involvement in this affair see Alexander Souter and Frederick James Edward Raby, "Symmachus" OCD, pp. 1027-1028.

## Nike

Nike played a large role in Asia Minor, as she came to be seen and used as a favourite art motif in that area. Already from 338 BCE and on, she had become a favourite motif for minted coins. Alexander the Great was particularly pleased in having himself on one side of the coin, and Nike crowning him on the other side.<sup>129</sup>

The popularity of Nike in Greek art and religion is demonstrated by the fact that "...the favourite subject for archaic and classical akroteria alike is the winged goddess Nike, whether the building is a temple or a stoa."<sup>130</sup> The Hieron in Samothrace for example had four such Nikes on the akroteria.<sup>131</sup> These akroterial Nikes were dated as produced in the first century BCE, or possibly even in first century CE.<sup>132</sup>

The popularity of the Nike figure, based on that of the one in Samothrace, can be seen even as far away as Rome. In the city of Ostia, a few miles to the south-west of Rome,

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<sup>129</sup> Seltman, Greek, p. 213.

<sup>130</sup> P.E. Easterling & J.V. Muir eds., Greek Religion and Society, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 174.

<sup>131</sup> Lehmann, Samothrace, pp. 65, 92-93. There is even a possibility that there were more than four akroterial Nikes on the Hieron in Samothrace. See Lehmann, I, p. 386 for this. For more on akroterial Nikes in general see I, pp. 364-387; II, pp. 113-123; III, plates ciii-cv, cvii-cx.

<sup>132</sup> Lehmann, II, p. 122 n. 154.



similar edifices were found. These edifices were on the city's main street, and are evidence of their popularity throughout the Roman Empire well into the third century CE.<sup>133</sup>

We now begin to see that the island of Samothrace is fairly important in terms of the widespread propagation of Nike.<sup>134</sup> Even as far away as Ostia, one could find a likeness of the Nike from Samothrace. The interesting thing is that

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<sup>133</sup> In fact, we are informed that the Nike figurine, based on that of Samothrace, was mass-produced. Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 203. One thing that has to be kept in mind as we note the widespread use of this motif of the Nike statue. It was not understood in the "decorative" sense. Lehmann says that "...modern interpretation of Roman and late antique art reveals increasingly that almost every living form in that age had a specific meaning, and that changes in form and style imply a recasting of ideas inherent in traditional types." Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 206. For example, the statue of Victoria was not moved or even adjusted, for "Eine Wendung ihrer Statue konnte eine Wendung im Kriegsglueck andeuten...". Weinstock, p. 2511. As a further example of how important subtle changes in the statue were, whenever Nike is depicted in a subserviant role to the gods, such as being a cupbearer, then her attire is more humble and simple than when she brings victory to a battlefield. Oberhummer, p. 302. For a recent article discussing this topic in more detail see: Luca Giuliani, "Die verwandelte Nike: Paralipomena zum Berliner Atropos-Spiegel" in Antike Kunst 29 (Jahrgang 1986, Heft I), pp. 43-51.

<sup>134</sup> The Nike on Samothrace is "...one of the best-known sculptures of antiquity.". Evi Melas, ed., Temples and Sanctuaries of Ancient Greece, (London: Thames And Hudson, 1973 rpr.), p. 196. Richter says that the Nike on Samothrace is one of the "magnificent creations of the Hellenistic age.". Richter, p. 110. The Rhodians, allies of Rome, gained two great naval victories against Antiochus (app. 191 BCE). It was probably the commemoration of these victories that resulted in the setting up of the most honoured sanctuary of the sailors: the Cabeirion at Samothrace, the statue of Nike. Seltman, Greek, p. 253-254.

while Samothrace was approximately 1,000 miles<sup>135</sup> from Rome (Ostia), it was only about 100 miles away from Pergamum, and 200 miles away from the island of Patmos.

That her presence could have a magnetic effect on Rome from such a great distance is important, especially in that she attracted more than just a few people, for the Nike of Samothrace was

...in a conspicuous place that attracted masses of Roman visitors in the second and first centuries before the Christian era, at the time when Rome built her empire and took it upon herself to carry on vigorously the Greek cultural and artistic tradition.<sup>136</sup>

Nor was Samothrace's glory one of ten or twenty years. She continued to be an important religious center in the Roman Empire, and it also continued to be a natural stopping point on the shipping lanes that led from western Asia Minor and the Black Sea to northern Greece.

St. Paul stayed there on his way to Neapolis (Kavalla), and it is possible that an early Christian church built centuries later at the edge of the ancient harbor and discovered in 1938 commemorated that event.<sup>137</sup>

It would be naive at best to think that those in Asia Minor would not be attracted "in masses" to this popular island as the Romans were. Her influence was just as great in

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<sup>135</sup> These references are calculated from a map based on linear miles. Therefore, the actual miles in travel would exceed these figures given.

<sup>136</sup> Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 199.

<sup>137</sup> Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 16. See also Melas, p. 198.

Asia Minor as it was in Rome, if not in fact greater. In this context it is important for us to understand the widespread travelling that did occur in the first century CE. While Samothrace was in relatively close proximity to those living in Asia Minor, we might assume that travel from Rome must have seemed elusive due to the great distance between it and Asia Minor. That assumption is proven false by Meeks when he says: "The Merchant whose tombstone attests that he had been to Rome from Phrygia seventy-two times was not unique."<sup>138</sup>

According to Ronald Hock, the apostle Paul's travels as calculated from the book of Acts alone would have covered approximately 10,000 miles. It is precisely this kind of travelling that was not uncommon in the first century Greco-Roman world, and it has significance for our study in that religion was largely propagated by missionaries through such activity. Even though most travelling was for the purposes of trade or business, ideologies and beliefs found a medium through which to grow. "It is not surprising that the spread of foreign cults followed the spread of trade, or that Christianity repeated this already established pattern."<sup>139</sup>

From this we can suggest that victory cults found themselves propagated even to those who did not travel that

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<sup>138</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 17. Emphasis mine.

<sup>139</sup> Meeks, Urban, p. 18. Also, Hock, as quoted in Meeks, Urban, p. 16.

extensively by those who did. Due to factors such as these, the victory cults continued to grow and find more and more adherents. Nike herself (apart from Samothrace) continued to be popular during Nero's reign, as was Victoria, and her statues were found decorating<sup>140</sup> Nero's garden.<sup>141</sup> She continued to be minted on the coins of Nero and Vespasian, and the manner of her depiction was mostly found as riding on the prow of a ship, this being evidence of a direct relationship and probable influence from the Nike of Samothrace.<sup>142</sup>

Nike's popularity in relation to the island of Samothrace continued at least up until 200 CE. Here it is important to note<sup>143</sup> that the acroterial Nikes from the demolished Hieron on Samothrace were found "...carefully buried along the western foundation of the Hieron."<sup>144</sup> What this indicates is that even early into the third century CE, when this burial would have taken place, Nike was still highly revered.

Much of the remains in Samothrace were left in shambles, but Nike alone received a glorified burial. That burial

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<sup>140</sup> Keeping in mind how "decorating" was explained above in footnote #133.

<sup>141</sup> Lehmann and Lehmann, pp. 202-203.

<sup>142</sup> Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 208 n. 49.

<sup>143</sup> Following the date of 200 CE for the earthquake that brought destruction to Samothrace. Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 16. Lehmann also presents less-convincing data that this earthquake could have occurred as late as the reign of Justinian (482-565 CE). Lehmann and Lehmann, p. 182.

<sup>144</sup> Lehmann, Samothrace, p. 92.

however did not mark the end of Nike per se, for we have noted that in the fourth and fifth centuries CE, Christians demolished many Nike statues in Asia Minor.<sup>145</sup>

What we have seen as a result is that Nike enjoyed tremendous popularity for many centuries. Her "range" of worship extended west of Rome and south of Samothrace. She was a favourite motif, and it would not be an overstatement to say that she contributed in a large measure to the saturation of a theology of victory in Asia Minor. We have also established specific Christian contact with the island with St. Paul,<sup>146</sup> and it would be naive at best to assume that no other Christians from Asia Minor ever saw this magnificent statue, or heard about the cult associated with Nike.

In closing, we draw attention to how Nike was depicted in the various coins and art. We have noted the various functions that she performs, but it is to our advantage to note the means by which she performs them, for we find a parallel in Revela-

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<sup>145</sup> Bulle, p. 358. The fact that they eventually were (physically) destroyed is significant, but more significant than that is the fact that the Siegesgoettin were among the final goddesses that were truly believed in in the Greco-Roman world. To be sure, the worship of these goddesses eventually ceased, but their form lived on: "Die gefluegelte Gestalt der Siegesgoettin lebt in den christlichen Darstellungen der Engel bis auf den heutigen Tag fort." Peterich, Goettinnen, p. 38. See also Weinstock, p. 2541 and Oberhammer, p. 306. A somewhat more optimistic approach is taken by the twentieth century Greek poet Cavafy (Kafavis) when he said: "Albeit we smashed their images, albeit we drove them from their temples, the gods live on." Melas, p. 27.

<sup>146</sup> Note also that confirmation can be given to a cult worshipping Victoria in Corinth. Weinstock, p. 2531. See also Hill, p. 103 and 191 plate 58.

tion. We have noted her attribute of wings, and to this we now turn again. For together with her association with victory, her speed and efficiency are stressed as well: "Siegeszeichen und ihre eilende Bewegung gehoeren zu ihrer Gestalt."<sup>147</sup>

Almost inevitably, the depictions of her are those of being in motion. She is either going somewhere, or performing some cultic activity; in short: she is always active.<sup>148</sup> At the temple of Zeus she was perched on the top of a thirty foot pillar. "The form of the goddess was portrayed in flight, with long outstretched wings, hovering between heaven and earth."<sup>149</sup> Not only was Nike a widely worshipped goddess of victory, but her Gestalt was such that she was actively involved in the mediation of that victory.<sup>150</sup>

As we will see in the chapters to follow, this active mediatory action was important to Christians who looked to God as they faced persecution. These Christians needed to be reas-

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<sup>147</sup> Blech, p. 179. See also p. 438.

<sup>148</sup> Bulle, pp. 340-344; Seltman, Greek p. 96, n. 1. Not only was Nike depicted as an active goddess, but the Greek artists took pleasure in depicting her with "fire and enthusiasm". Haufmann and Pollard, p. 735. That her "being" elicited such responses from the artists no doubt contributed to her widespread worship.

<sup>149</sup> Ruskin and Batterberry, p. 100.

<sup>150</sup> The image of God throughout the Old and New Testament is that of a God who acts. The idea of God or gods in action is ancient among the Greeks, and as we can see, it is an important facet of their religion: "The great forms of Greek intellectual exploration are derived from its poetry, which, from Homer to Euripides, from the proem [sic] of the Iliad to the epilogue of The Bacchae, is specifically the articulation of divinity in action." Bennett, pp. 2-3.

sured that not only does their God care about them, but that He acts for them, on their behalf. Further, the text of Revelation is clear in depicting God's action as swift and severe once it is enacted.<sup>151</sup>

Before addressing the similarities with Revelation, it is essential to paint a more complete background in order to better understand a first-century CE Christian theology of victory. To be sure, the Greco-Roman influences were important,<sup>152</sup> but there were at least two other main sources of influence that were equally, if not more important. The Jewish martyrdom tradition as depicted in the Intertestamental texts of 1-4 Maccabees is one such source, and the Old Testament Scriptures is the other. We will begin by looking at the Intertestamental texts of the Maccabean literature, and then proceed to a discussion of the Old Testament contribution.

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<sup>151</sup> As highlighted in Chapter I.

<sup>152</sup> At the closing of this section on worship in the Greco-Roman world, it is essential to once again emphasize the extent to which this worship had permeated all life. "Ancient life, both social and individual, was permeated by religion to an extent the modern pagan can scarcely understand." Shiel, p. 18. See also pp. 22,23.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE JEWISH CONTRIBUTION FOR A THEOLOGY OF VICTORY: THE MACCABEAN LITERATURE AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

##### The Maccabean Literature

We have seen the Greco-Roman world in which a pagan theology of victory was born and developed. We also noted that, by the time John wrote Revelation, this theology of victory had thoroughly permeated that Greco-Roman world. As a result, ancient Christians reading Revelation were able to appreciate a depth and breadth entailed in claims to victory in a way that is largely removed from moderns.

Even though the theology of victory was powerfully represented in the Greco-Roman world, there were other sources which can be proven to have influenced early Christianity. In the context of our discussion, the literature of the Second Temple period is one of these sources. There are several texts upon



which we can draw that were familiar to early Christianity and which expressed victory in a context similar to that of Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

In order to facilitate the discussion of victory in the Jewish texts of the Second Temple period, and of the Old Testament, we need to emphasize the crucial difference between these expressions of victory and those of the Greco-Roman world. Whereas first-century CE Christians would have been aware (and influenced) by the pagan cults of victory, those Christians would not have drawn upon these sources in the same way as they would from the Jewish texts.

The pagan victory cults were important in terms of influence to be sure, but the Jewish texts were part of and helped to form the Christians' piety, whereas the pagan cults were not understood in the same way. In fact, as we will see, early Christianity took these Jewish traditions and claimed them as part of their own tradition. The Jewish martyrs of the Maccabean literature were adopted by Christians as being their own, and even said to have been Christian, not Jewish mar-

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<sup>1</sup> But for reasons to be discussed below, we will limit ourselves to the Maccabean literature. The victory which is referred to as the one similar to Revelation will be referred to as a theological victory throughout this discussion. This is to say that it is a specific kind of victory, in which all responsibility for that victory is given to the source thereof, God. To be sure, the pagan victory cults also had their theological victories. However, the victory spoken of in Revelation is not understood as being a continuation of that theology. The victory in Revelation is understood as a derivative from the Maccabean literature and its theological victories, and not as being derived from the pagan victory cults of the Greco-Roman world.

tyrs.<sup>2</sup> Victory as portrayed in the Jewish texts therefore became victories with God, as opposed to being victories with the pagan goddesses Nike and Victoria.

The Maccabean literature (1,2,3,4 Maccabees) is one of the more important sources in Second Temple Judaism for this concept of a theological victory. Entailed within this literature are martyrdom stories, particularly those of Eleazar, the mother, and her seven sons.<sup>3</sup> These specific stories are found in 2 Macc. 6,7 and 4 Macc. 4-18. We will examine these stories and their contribution to first-century Christians who in all likelihood faced a similar present and/or future.

Of all Jewish literature, including the Old Testament, this Maccabean literature is the best source for a theology of

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<sup>2</sup> In referring to the deaths of the pious Jews in the Maccabean literature as "martyrdoms", some clarification is required. The designation of these deaths in these texts are not referred to as "martyrdoms", but by virtue of later interpretations of these events, "martyrdom" is an acceptable title. With regard to these Maccabean struggles, Barrett says that "...martyrdoms took place, perhaps for the first time in religious history." Barrett, p. 224. The Greek term martus was used in this literature, as well as in Revelation. But even at the time of Revelation it had not acquired the pregnant meaning of martyr. Allison A. Trites, "Martus and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse; a Semantic Study" in Novem Testamentum 15 (1, 1973): 72-80.

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth we will refer to "the woman" as "Hannah" for that was the name given to her in an early sixteenth century edition of the tenth century Book of Jossipon. Moshe Pearlman, The Maccabees, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), p. 61. We are also aware of a tenth "martyr", Razis, but will not refer to him in our discussion. His "martyrdom", if it can be called that, is referred to only in one text (2 Macc. 14:37-46), and thus, we will not deal with it, as we have more than enough material to deal with at present.

victory through, or in spite of death.<sup>4</sup> The victory portrayed in this literature encompasses all of the three major uses of victory noted in the Greco-Roman theology; namely, victory in battle, over death, and in the Olympic games. With regard to athletic victory there is admittedly only one reference in the Maccabean literature, and that in 4 Macc. 17:11-20. Nevertheless, since this small section can be seen as the capstone of the whole work (4 Macc.), it is important in spite of its brevity. In regard to the Maccabean literature's use of

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<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the Maccabean literature is not unique in propounding such a theology within Judaism, but it is most significant due to the great length to which the Maccabean authors went in order to propagate this. Some other Jewish texts of approximately the same era that contain similar expressions of piety in the face of religious persecution are Daniel, Testament of Moses 9 and Jubilees 23. In Daniel 3:8-30 we find a similar story of three "martyrs" who are to be executed for the same reason as those in the Maccabean literature: obedience to their Law in contradistinction to that of the king's law. From 3:16-18 we can assert that the three men, ready to face death, would not have seen themselves defeated if they would have perished. The story of Taxo in the Testament of Moses also has martyrological and possible efficacious overtones inherent in the text. Nickelsburg suggests that as a result of Taxo's "martyrdom" in chapter 9, God's judgement ensues in chapter 10. George W.E. Nickelsburg Jr., Resurrection, Immortality, And Eternal Life In Intertestamental Judaism, "Harvard Theological Studies, XXVI" (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 44, n. 14. Lastly, we make mention of Jubilees 23:16-31 which refers to two distinct groups of Jews: those who forsake the Law, and those who remain true to the Law. This same struggle is also at the heart of the Maccabean literature. While the accounts in Daniel, Testament of Moses and Jubilees do contribute to our understanding, we will benefit from a closer examination of the Maccabean literature. In terms of trying to understand the backdrop to the victory-through-death theology found in Revelation, a discussion of thirteen chapters in 4 Maccabees will be more helpful than the three verses ascribed to Taxo in the Testament of Moses.

victory in battle and over death, a closer examination is in order, and to that we now turn.

Victory permeates the thought of the Maccabean literature. Within this body of literature we find the word group nikaō used no less than 29 times.<sup>5</sup> The victories spoken of are often the victories experienced in military battles. However, to try to ascribe theological agendas for texts such as 2 Macc. 3:5; 8:6; and 3 Macc. 1:4; 3:20 would be misleading at best. It would be erroneous to suggest that every occurrence of nikaō should be interpreted as a theological victory, for nikaō was the word used to describe any victory. However, just as the Greeks and Romans said that Nike or Victoria were needed for victory, so too the God of Israel was seen as the source and the reason for the victory. In instances such as these, it can be suggested that nikaō is used to forward the theological agenda of God as the giver of these military conquests. For example, in 1 Macc. 3:19 we read that victory in military battles depends upon Heaven (God), and we find this same emphasis of dependence on God for victory in 2 Macc. 10:28,38; 13:15; 15:8,21.

Each of the four books of the Maccabean literature contains specific emphases, differing at times to be sure. Nevertheless, the common thread of victory over an oppressive

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Maccabees = 1 reference  
2 Maccabees = 7 references  
3 Maccabees = 2 references  
4 Maccabees = 19 references

force is clear. As a result we will briefly look at the four texts that make up the Maccabean literature and note their particular emphasis towards a better understanding of victory within those texts. Central to our discussion are the martyrdom stories found in 2 and 4 Maccabees. To begin this discussion a cursory look at 1 and 3 Maccabees will also be beneficial. We will conclude by demonstrating the importance that these martyrdom stories had for Christians in the first century.

#### 1 Maccabees<sup>6</sup>

The Maccabean literature is primarily occupied with the confrontations that took place in the second century BCE between the Jews and the heathen powers that wished to suppress the Jewish religion. In the book of 1 Maccabees the king announces that everyone in his kingdom, including the Jews, are to give up their own customs and adopt the king's religion

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<sup>6</sup> The concern for the date of 1 Maccabees is not crucial for this thesis, however we can list a few scholars' suggestions: Oesterley places it from 90-70 BCE. W.O.E. Oesterley, An Introduction To The Books Of The Apocrypha (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1935), p. 301. Leonhard Rost is committed to a date of 103-62 BCE for 1 Maccabees. Leonhard Rost, Einleitung in die alttestamentlichen Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen einschliesslich der grossen Qumran-Handschriften, (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1971), p. 58. Hengel says it was written "towards 100 BC". Martin Hengel, Judaism And Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period, Volumes One and Two, John Bowden, trans., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981 rpr.), Vol. I., p. 292. For the purpose of this thesis, we will work with a date of the early first century BCE.

(1:41-50). However there are some Jews who will not desert the Law and its ordinances, and they are even willing to die for their beliefs. It is heralded throughout the text that it is better to die fighting than to stand by and see their religion destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

Mattathias encourages his sons to show zeal for the law and to be ready to give their lives for the covenant of their forefathers (2:50). Throughout the text we read that those who put their trust in God (Heaven) will not lack strength.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, we can also see in this text the idea that a zealous religious act in defence of religious purity is in fact rewarded (6:43-47; 15:9).

The emphasis in 1 Maccabees is clearly a pro-Hasmonean one, in that no matter what the followers of Mattathias do, they prosper. In this text the "glory" seems to go more to the Jewish guerilla forces than it does to God, although as we have seen above, He is recognized as the source of their strength. As part of our introduction to the martyrdom stories in 2 and 4 Maccabees, 1 Maccabees is important. This is so because it finds itself on a continuum with the Old Testament, where there is only one source of victory, the God of heaven.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Macc. 1:62-64; 2:19-22,37,40,50; 3:59; 9:10; 13:4; 14:26,29.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Macc. 2:61; 3:19,55; 4:35,55; 9:46; 12:15.

### 3 Maccabees<sup>9</sup>

3 Maccabees is much shorter than 1 Maccabees, and 3 Macc. does not report the adventures of the Hasmonean family as 1 Macc. does. Nevertheless, the agenda is much the same in that here again, the king says that the inhabitants of his kingdom are to deny their faith or else they are to die (2:28-30; 4:14). Once again, there are Jews who are ready to die and/or fight to their deaths in order to maintain their ancestral Law.<sup>10</sup>

The Jews cry out to God to give them aid,<sup>11</sup> and God does intervene to make a difference.<sup>12</sup> Here, much more so than in Revelation, the pious escape death in the present because they cry out to God.<sup>13</sup> The book concludes with a note of victory saying that there is a reward for those who hold fast to God even though it may cost them their lives (7:16).

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<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, we will adopt the date for the writing of 3 Maccabees given by Hadas as 25-24 BCE. Moses Hadas, The Third And Fourth Books Of Maccabees, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> 3 Macc. 1:23,29; 2:32,33; 3:18,19.

<sup>11</sup> 3 Macc. 1:16,27; 2:1-20; 5:7-9,25,35,48-51; 6:1-15.

<sup>12</sup> 3 Macc. 2:21-23; 4:21; 5:11-12,27-32; 6:18-29,36; 7:9,22.

<sup>13</sup> There is a "guarantee" of life given in 3 Macc. not present in Revelation: "Since we have come to realize that the God of heaven surely defends the Jews, always taking their part as a father does for his children..." (3 Macc. 7:6b).

## 2 Maccabees<sup>14</sup>

2 Maccabees is similar in content to 1 Maccabees, although it is clear from the text itself that it is not following 1 Maccabees but that it is an epitome of Jason of Cyrene's five-volume description of the events (2:19-32). From the outset we can see that this work addresses God's role in the suffering of humanity in a more thorough fashion than do 1 and 3 Maccabees.

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<sup>14</sup> Since our examination of the Maccabean literature is geared more towards 2 and 4 Maccabees, we will devote a bit more space to the dating of the texts, for the subject matter has direct bearing on our concerns for nikaō in Revelation. To that end we will summarize some of the dates that scholars have suggested for these texts. As to 2 Maccabees, a very wide range of dates has been suggested, from 161 BCE to 70 CE. To summarize, Gowan places it at 50 BCE. Donald E. Gowan, Bridge Between The Testaments: A Reappraisal of Judaism from the Exile to the Birth of Christianity, (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1976), pp. 369-370. Doran places it at around 125 BCE. Robert Doran, Temple Propaganda: The Purpose And Character Of 2 Maccabees, "The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, Vol. 12" (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), pp. 111-113. Rost stands alone in his firm date of 100 BCE. Rost, p. 60. Frend suggests a date of approximately 120 BCE. W.H.C. Frend Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church from the Maccabees to Donatus, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 44. Attridge is content with a date in the area of 163-125 BCE. H.W. Attridge, "Historiography" in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period, Michael E. Stone, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 177. R. H. Charles placed it from 161 BCE and on. Robert Henry Charles, The Apocrypha And Pseudepigrapha Of The Old Testament, Vol. I., (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1973 rpr.), pp. 128, 129. Niese (1900) tried to forward a date earlier than 1 Maccabees, "...an attempt which has failed to carry conviction.". Charles, Apocrypha, p. 125. We could also mention C. Habicht, who renounces the attempt to date 2 Maccabees. As cited in Doran, Temple, p. 111. For the purposes of this thesis, we will adopt the date suggested by Doran, Frend and Attridge, thereby placing it from 125-120 BCE.



In 1:5 we read that the author of 2 Macc. wishes for his readers that God may hear their prayers, be reconciled to them, and that He would not forsake them in the time of evil. It is interesting to see the author of 2 Macc. positing the possibility of "defeat" to his readers, and it is a position that he maintains throughout his work. The work is clear on the fact that it is God and God alone who decides the outcome in a battle,<sup>15</sup> and therefore the logical strategy in battle would be to have God on one's side. This is of course precisely the Jewish battle-plan, and accordingly God is called upon whenever a crisis arises, for He is the power to be sought.<sup>16</sup>

Since God is understood to be merciful (5:19; 15:7), His interventions are experienced by the Jews in the present.<sup>17</sup> However, in 2 Macc. 6-7 we find some examples where God does not intervene in the present. As a result, it is this passage, together with the previously mentioned verse 1:5, that points us to a theology of suffering within 2 Macc.

Those who are being persecuted because of their faith understand this persecution as being permitted by God, who alone is in control. This persecution of the Jews is under-

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Maccabees 1:25; 2:17,18; 7:37; 8:18,23,24,35,36; 10:1,7,16,28,38; 11:13; 12:11,15-16,28; 13:13-17; 15:8,21.

<sup>16</sup> 2 Macc. 3:14-22; 8:14; 10:4,16,25-26; 11:6; 12:6,15,28,36-37; 13:10-12; 14:15,34-36; 15:12,21-24,27.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Macc. 3:24-39; 9:4-9; 10:29-30; 11:8-10; 12:11,16,22; 13:4; 15:34.

stood by the Jews as an act of discipline from God, and not as an act of God intent on destroying them. Nor is it an indication that the pagan powers are superior to God (6:12-16; 7:16,18,32-33; 8:5; 10:4). Antiochus IV Epiphanes wants the Jews to recant their faith. If they are not willing to comply with his wishes, then he makes it clear that he will kill them (5:27; 6:1,2,6,8-11). The Jews, having the aforementioned understanding of this persecution as being permitted, are able to face death valiantly (6:30; 7:6).

Eleazar is held up as an example of someone who would rather welcome death with honour than life with pollution (6:18-19,28). He is not willing to forsake his religion (6:24) or offer any pretence thereto (6:21-26), but instead he announces that one's life on earth matters, and matters eternally (6:26).<sup>18</sup> In similar fashion, the story of Hannah and her seven sons is recorded. Eleazar, Hannah and her seven sons, and other Jews would sooner die than transgress the Law (7:2,30; 8:21; 11:24; 14:38). The theology of suffering portrayed in 2 Macc. is that God rewards those who persevere in this kind of action (7:9,11,14,23,36; 12:45; 14:46).

2 Macc. thus presents us with two kinds of victories related to faith in God. There are the pious Jews who die victoriously for their faith (2 Macc. 6-7), and there are those

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<sup>18</sup> Revelation promotes this same kind of theology, as Caird puts it: "John never allows his readers to forget that earthly conduct matters and matters eternally." Caird, Revelation, p. 297.

pious Jews who are continuously victorious in military battles because of their faith (see above). In 15:21 we read that it is the Lord who decides who will win in battle, and He gives that victory to those who deserve it.<sup>19</sup> Again, as in 1 and 3 Maccabees, God's favour is with the Hasmoneans. But it is also emphasized more in 2 Macc. that it is God who wins the battles, as opposed to the pro-Hasmonean bias in 1 Macc.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, 2 Macc. also reveals as 1 and 3 Maccabees do not, that God's victory can also be accomplished in a very clear way through the death of His pious ones. In texts such as 7:37-38; 8:5 we can see that the wrath of God is actually appeased by the death of His faithful ones, and that through these martyrdoms, His work is furthered. We now enter into a discussion of 4 Macc., where the theology of victory in or through death is expounded in even greater detail.

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<sup>19</sup> As an aside we can note that when some Jews do fall in battle, a rare occurrence, it is discovered upon closer examination that they were wearing sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which Jewish Law forbids. Then the text goes on to say that this was why these men had fallen (12:29-42).

<sup>20</sup> This is most succinctly stated in 2 Macc. 13:15-17 where the successes in military battles are seen as derivative of God's hand: "He [Judas] gave his men the watchword, 'God's victory', and with a picked force of the bravest young men, he attacked the king's pavillion at night and slew as many as two thousand men in the camp. He stabbed the leading elephant and its rider. In the end they filled the camp with terror and confusion and withdrew in triumph. This happened, just as day was dawning, because the Lord's help protected him."

#### 4 Maccabees<sup>21</sup>

In 4 Macc. we find a very specific agenda stated clearly in the opening verse: "The subject that I am about to discuss is most philosophical, that is, whether devout reason is sovereign over the emotions." (1:1a). The author of 4 Macc. decides that the best way to prove his point is not through a philosophical discussion alone, but instead, he uses a "real life" situation that proves what he claims to be true.

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<sup>21</sup> The range of dates for 4 Macc. is from 25 BCE to 135 CE. As with 2 Macc., we will note which scholars suggest which dates. We can begin with McNamara who presents a range from 20-135 CE, Martin McNamara, Intertestamental Literature, "Old Testament Message, Volume 23", (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1983), p.237. Hadas (pp. 96,115) places the book at approximately 40 CE. Williams find himself in agreement with a date between 18 and 55 CE, and refers to J. Jeremias who puts it at "around 35 AD" and Lohse who says the first half of the first century CE, and J. Oberman who is quoted as saying "about 35 AD". As cited in Sam K. Williams, Jesus' Death As Saving Event: The Background And Origin Of A Concept, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 201-202, n. 78. Van Henten suggests a date within the range of 70-100 CE. "Datierung Und Herkunft Des Vierten Makkabaeerbuches" in Tradition And Re-Interpretation In Jewish And Early Christian Literature: Essays In Honour Of Juergen C. H. Lebram, Jan Willem van Henten et al eds., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), pp. 144-149. For Bickerman, the range is placed a bit earlier, from 18-54 CE. As quoted in van Henten, pp. 138-141. Urs Breitenstein presents linguistic and rhetorical data to suggest a date between 100-135 CE, and Nickelsburg places it around 40 CE. As cited in George W.E. Nickelsburg Jr., Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 226 and p. 226, ns. 41,42. Bammel dates this book as being written shortly before 70 CE. Ernst Bammel, Judaica: Kleine Schriften I, "Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 37", (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1986), p.82. Lastly, we can refer to Gowan (p. 375) who presents us with a range from 25 BCE to 30 CE. For purposes of this thesis, we will adopt the date suggested by Hadas, Williams, Jeremias, Obermann, Gowan and Nickelsburg, 35-40 CE.

Further, he can think of no better proof than the one found in the lives and example of Eleazar, Hannah and her seven sons (1:7,8).

4 Macc. is consistent with 1,2 and 3 Maccabees in that the king has decreed that anyone who does not abandon the Jewish religion to follow his, will die (4:23; 5:2,3; 8:5-11; 12:3-5). The king's orders are made known publicly, but there are Jews who disobey the king's decree, knowing full well that it means death. They would sooner die than disobey the Law and God.<sup>22</sup> These Jews say that it is the Law that teaches them how to endure suffering willingly (5:22-24; 11:12), and as a result, they are not afraid of death (14:4-8; 18:14). Even though they die, they do not see themselves as defeated (11:20).

As in the other Maccabean texts, the people do cry out to God, but with reduced frequency, and God's interventions in the present seem to be limited to that of 4:9-13. Nevertheless, these Jews are willing to die for the Law, which they zealously keep.<sup>23</sup> In fact, in 3:20 we read that the Jews are understood

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<sup>22</sup> 4 Macc. 4:24,25; 5:16,25-38; 6:18-21,27-30; 7:3; 9:1-2,7,15,24,29,30; 10:20; 11:15-16,20; 12:14; 13:9,12-13,27; 14:3; 15:2-3,9-10,12-14; 16:13,16-17,19,24; 17:7; 18:3.

<sup>23</sup> They also die for the sake of virtue (1:8; 7:22; 9:8, 18,31; 10:9; 11:2; 12:14), nobility (1:10), goodness (1:10), and for piety (5:18,31; 6:18; 7:16; 9:6; 10:15; 13:10; 18:1). These "other" reasons are never cited in exclusion of the Law, but as a part of and resulting from the Law. One can not have virtue, nobility, goodness and piety without the Law.

to be prospering and at peace ("enjoying profound peace") because of their observance to the Law.

One of the greatest contributions of 4 Macc. is in its taking the theme of victory and applying it to the spiritual realm, especially in regard to death. The deaths of Eleazar, Hannah and her seven sons depicted to us in 2 and 4 Macc. are not typical deaths. Instead, they are martyrologies of the faith, and as such, their impact is far-reaching, as we will see later (see pp. 112-116).

Particularly in 4 Macc. we see a picture being painted of people who are suffering persecution for no reason other than religious.<sup>24</sup> Their earthly king says "commit act x", and their heavenly King (God), they claim, says "do not commit act x". From that point on it is a battle between what the king wills, and what their God wills. In 4 Macc. we see that the cost for following God's will in contradistinction to the will of the earthly king is a brutal and sadistic death. The king's perspective on the matter is that if obedience is not achieved, then his logical action must be to purge this rebellious people from his kingdom, or else this dissention might spread.<sup>25</sup> The Jews are given a choice: they can obey their Laws and remain

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<sup>24</sup> "The controversy in Jerusalem after 175 BC, which reached its climax in 167 and 164 BC, was a struggle over the law." Hengel, Vol. I., p. 305.

<sup>25</sup> This persecution of the Jews for religio-political reasons is "...without parallel in antiquity." Hengel, Vol. I., p. 287. For an interesting parallel, see Esther 1:10-22.

in their "stupidity"<sup>26</sup> and die (10:13; 12:3), or, they can yield to the king and there find a reward in him (12:5; see also 15:2-3, 26-28).

Common sense, which the king cites (5:13; 8:22), would tell them that this act of eating pork would be forgivable by their God. Also, why die when you don't have to? What could be more absurd? The reason that attempts were made to talk the martyrs out of their decisions<sup>27</sup> was that their decisions spelled defeat in the eyes of the pagans. What could be clearer? If you die; that is, if someone kills you, then you have been defeated. As a result, the Jews were encouraged not to die when they need not die.<sup>28</sup>

However, this is precisely the genius of 4 Macc., for even though these Jews die and make "foolish" choices, they do not see themselves as defeated (11:20). As a matter of fact, in

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<sup>26</sup> "...for the reformers in Jerusalem, it [the Torah] was the embodiment of superstition and folly...". Hengel, Vol. I., p. 312.

<sup>27</sup> 4 Macc. 6:14,15; 9:16,27; 10:1,13; 11:13; 12:2-5.

<sup>28</sup> The persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes was simply the result of his attempt to unite his cities, for as Hengel states, Antiochus was indifferent to religion. "Possibly he had the ideal of a syncretistic 'imperial cult' which would unite the worship of the Semitic-Iranian God of heaven and the Greek Zeus, but he did not advance this consistently, nor did he achieve a success comparable to Ptolemy I and the introduction of the cult of Serapis." Hengel, Vol. I., p. 286. "Antiochus IV was probably interested very generally in a 'Hellenization' of his oriental subjects, but not in the concrete details, the alteration of religious customs and laws." Hengel, Vol. I., p. 294. In other words, as far as the pagans were concerned, it would be silly to die deaths on account of their religious beliefs.

6:10 we are told that Eleazar, while being beaten, "...was victorious over his torturers" and the king by not eating the pork. The second son tells the king that the "...arrogant design of [his] tyranny [is] being defeated by our endurance for the sake of religion." (9:30). The sixth son says in 11:24: "We six boys have paralyzed your tyranny!". Hannah is heralded in 16:14 as having "...conquered even a tyrant.". The combined extent of their effect is proclaimed in 17:2: "O mother, who with your seven sons nullified the violence of the tyrant...".

Lastly, we can mention two more passages that play an important role in 4 Macc. In the introduction to his work (1:11), the author of 4 Macc. says that the courage and endurance of Eleazar, Hannah and her seven sons conquered the tyrant. Within the capstone passage of 17:11-24 we read that because of these nine martyrs, the "...enemies did not rule over [the Jewish] nation."

As a result, we see that the martyrs do not understand themselves as having been defeated by Antiochus. Conversely, they see their deaths as defeating Antiochus. They clearly see their deaths as having a tremendous impact and effect on life in the here and now. In 4 Macc., it seems that God uses the deaths of the martyrs. To be sure, the hope of a reward after death is evidenced by the text,<sup>29</sup> but their deaths contain a lot more than just the needed ingredients for post-mortem

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<sup>29</sup> 4 Macc. 7:3,18,19; 9:8; 13:17; 16:25; 17:5,12; 18:3,23.



vindication. Vindication takes place in the here and now because of their deaths.

In several passages<sup>30</sup> we note that there is an understanding that the nation of Israel were not completely reconciled to God. God was not entirely pleased with His people, and as a result this action of Antiochus was allowed to occur. However, through the deaths of the martyrs, God's intervention is seen. Perhaps 12:14a sums this up best: "Surely they by dying fulfilled their service to God..." for the text suggests that because of their deaths, God took action. Not only did God take action, but the text suggests that had the martyrs not conquered, God's actions would not have followed.

It is also important for our purposes to take note again of the nature of the victory that is described in 4 Macc. As we have seen, victory is usually spoken of in relation to military battles, but in 4 Macc. victory finds a different emphasis. Unlike 1, 2 and 3 Macc., 4 Macc. does not make reference to the military battles between the Jews and the heathen powers. Instead, the only battle that takes place is a battle as to whether God will be obeyed, or whether the heathen powers will be obeyed.

The format for relating this battle is philosophical, but the agenda is theological. By this we mean that the text would seem to be promoting the view that reason can conquer even the

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<sup>30</sup> 4 Macc. 1:11; 6:28-29; 9:23-24; 12:14,18; 17:9-10,20-22; 18:4-6.

strongest emotions such as pain. As a result, the martyrs suffer horrible deaths, yet no complaint is found on their lips because reason is able to conquer, and this was plainly stated at the outset of 4 Macc. in 1:1-6. We can rewrite the first sentence of this paragraph in another way. What 4 Macc. is saying is expressed through the Greek format (philosophy), but the end which it strives for is Jewish (to hold fast to the Law, no matter what the cost).

Proof for this statement can be found upon a closer examination of the Greek text. When this is done, we see that the Greek of "pious reason" is used only 17.2% of the time, and plain "reason" is used 81.25% of the time.<sup>31</sup> Reason (not pious reason) is cited throughout the text 52 times out of a possible 64. On the other hand, it is clear from within the text, as we have seen above, that victory is accomplished only by and because of God. From this we can see that there is a weaving of Law, reason and pious reason throughout the text. The writer takes the "reason" of the Greek way of life, empowers it with the God of the Jews, and uses this "reason" as the explanation of the ability of martyrs to obey the Law, no matter what may befall them.

What we discover through this weaving of Law, reason and pious reason is that we are reading an author who uses Greek

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<sup>31</sup> The Greek that is being translated into "pious reason" is ho eusebês logismos. Attridge, "Historiography", p. 183. Also, Hadas, p. 91. There is also one occurrence (5:35) of "philosophic reason", and this accounts for the remaining 1.55%.

terms and motifs in his writing in order to emphasize the importance of the Jewish Law. Even though 4 Macc. presents the victors as accomplishing their task via reason/pious reason, the end of all their actions is the keeping of the Law.

The victory stressed in 4 Macc. is a victory over evil forces that manifest themselves in people like Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The victory stressed in 4 Macc. is a paradoxical one, in that in the eyes of the viewers, the martyrs' deaths spell defeat, but in the eyes of the martyrs, their death spells victory for themselves, and for God.

The martyrologies of 2 and 4 Macc. do not give the reader the impression that death is synonymous with defeat. Conversely, the opposite is true, for the martyrs of the Maccabean literature are heralded as paradigmatic figures in the generations that follow them. As a result we believe that it is in the interest of the present study to note the influence of 2 and 4 Macc. on later martyrologies, especially those in Christendom.

Schlatter, in his 1915 publication Die Maertyrer in den Anfaengen der Kirche sought to prove that the accounts of persecution in Christian literature were dependent upon and influenced by the Maccabean literature.<sup>32</sup> Since that time, there have been many more such studies.

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<sup>32</sup> As quoted in Donald W. Riddle, The Martyrs: A Study In Social Control, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 138.

With the possible exception of Gilbert and Frend,<sup>33</sup> scholars agree that Christianity was indebted to the martyr stories in the Maccabean literature.<sup>34</sup> Beck says that the accounts in 2 and 4 Macc. "...bear witness to a growing tradition, of which the late stages may be traced in rabbinical literature and the martyrologies of the Church."<sup>35</sup>

Bammel says that a Jewish martyr cult was in existence immediately after the destruction of the Temple. Therefore, by

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<sup>33</sup> M. Gilbert, "Wisdom Literature" in Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period, Michael E. Stone ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 319. Frend as quoted in D.F. Winslow, "Maccabean Martyrs; Early Christian Attitudes", Judaism 23, (1974), p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that the early church claimed the Maccabean martyrs as their own. In fact, the Christians in Antioch even went so far as to appropriate the graves of these martyrs and raise a church on that site. Victor C. Pfitzner, "Martyr and Hero: The Origin and Development of a Tradition in the Early Christian Martyr-Acts", Luthern Theological Journal, 15, (My-Ag, 1981), p. 15. The Maccabean martyrs were even included in the calendar of Christian saints. E. Mary Smallwood, The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), p. 508. The Maccabean martyrs were canonized by early Christianity as well, Charles, Apocrypha, p. 131, n.2. See also Winslow, "Maccabean", pp. 78,83 and William Horbury, "Suffering and Messianism in Yose ben Yose" in Suffering And Martyrdom In The New Testament: Studies presented to G.M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar, William Horbury & Brian McNeil eds., (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 155. Bammel echoes the words of Strathmann when he says that these great stories of the faith were open to various interpretations. He goes on to say: "Fasst man dies Problem ins Auge, so erhaelt die Verehrung der sieben makkabaeischen Maertyrer besondere Bedeutung, weil sie, vielleicht neben einem anderen, der Christen uebernommen wurde.". Bammel, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Brian E. Beck, "'Imitatio Christi' and the Lucan Passion Narrative" in Suffering, Horbury & McNeil eds., p. 30.

the middle of the second half of the first century CE the following is true:

Es ergibt sich daraus nicht nur die Existenz eines juedischen Maertyrerkults in dieser Zeit, sondern auch eine Wertschaetzung, die vom aufkommenden Rabbinat noch nicht angefochten zu sein scheint.<sup>36</sup>

This martyr cult is all part of a larger development within Judaism that occurred in the years 100 BCE - 100 CE; namely, the development of ideas about death and the grave. With respect to this martyr cult, this much can be said: "Vor allem: der Tote wird, wenigstens teilweise, von dem Verdikt der Unreinheit befreit und so seine Aufnahme in den gottesdienstlichen Raum vorbereitet."<sup>37</sup> Bammel's conclusion is that the development of the Christian martyrologies is directly and specifically effected by the Maccabean martyr stories.<sup>38</sup>

Lampe concurs when he says that the Christians' doctrine of martyrdom was "...indeed, largely derived and developed out of the response of the orthodox Jewish resistance movement to the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes...".<sup>39</sup> Further, Christians living in the first century CE would have known the

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<sup>36</sup> Bammel, p. 82. See also p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Bammel, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup> Bammel, p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, "Martyrdom and Inspiration" in Horbury & McNeil Suffering, p. 118.

Maccabean literature because "...these were read among the Christians...".<sup>40</sup>

From this Maccabean revolt there arose three main developments which would later influence the Christians' attitude to Rome. The first was the idea of martyrdom.<sup>41</sup> It was established in a very clear way that people were prepared to make a stand as a personal witness to the truth of the Law even to the point of suffering and/or death. The second development was the hope of a personal resurrection involving punishment not only for the persecuting powers, but also for all the apostates. Thirdly, there was a transfer of this struggle to a cosmic level, in that the opposition experienced by the Jews was viewed more as representative of demonic powers as opposed to merely human persecutors. From this point on, "...all the tendencies towards righteous suffering, ultimate salvation and judgement on the enemies of Israel became accentuated and personalized as the struggle proceeded."<sup>42</sup>

So close is the association between these Jewish texts and Christianity that Bickermann says had Antiochus IV Epiphanes

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<sup>40</sup> Dibelius makes this comment in regard to the martyr-ology of Jesus Christ and says that Jesus would be understood by Christians as martyr precisely because they were familiar with this literature. Martin Dibelius, From Tradition To Gospel, Bertram Lee Woolf, trans. (Tuebingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), p. 201. The aforementioned appropriation of the graves of the Maccabean martyrs by Christians is also significant in that this again involved the Christians in Asia Minor. Antioch was only a little better than 100 miles east of Laodicea.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Barrett, p. 224.

<sup>42</sup> Frend, Martyrdom, p. 44.

been successful in his attempt to completely destroy Judaism, the rise of Christianity would have been impossible.<sup>43</sup> Winslow suggests that it was not the "Jewishness" of the Maccabean martyrs that informed early Christianity, but it was simply their martyrdom. For martyrdom knows no "religious boundaries". Winslow quotes Townshend who states, as Bickermann did, that had Judaism been defeated by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, then "...the seed-bed of Christianity would have been lacking; and thus the blood of the Maccabean martyrs, who saved Jerusalem, ultimately became the seed of the Church."<sup>44</sup>

While the Maccabean literature and its martyrdom accounts play an important role in early Christianity, the Old Testament Scriptures played even a larger role. In the next section we will see that especially in Revelation does the thought of the Old Testament find expression. An important facet of the Old Testament Scriptures is their portrayal of God as the unsurpassed giver of victory, a theme pertinent to nikaô in Revelation.

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<sup>43</sup> Elias Bickerman, The God Of The Maccabees: Studies on the Meaning and Origin of the Maccabean Revolt, Horst R. Moehring trans., (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> Winslow, p. 79. See also p. 86. Other scholars that share this outlook are Henry R. Moeller, The Legacy of Zion: Intertestamental Texts Related To The New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 22. We can also add to the Bickermann data, Bickermann, p. 92. See also Hengel, Vol. I., p. 309.

### Victory As Influenced By The Old Testament

To be sure, the Maccabean literature was an important influence on early Christianity, but the extent of the influence that the Old Testament had on both the writer and the reader of Revelation was even greater. In support of this we cite scholarly research which states there are, in Revelation, some 518 allusions to Old Testament texts.<sup>45</sup> To be sure, this number is speculative due to the fact that John need not have been referring to the Old Testament with all of those references. The actual number may be smaller, perhaps it is even greater. What is important is that John does show extensive familiarity with the Old Testament, and, as a source for the concept of nikaô within Revelation, the Old Testament did play a significant role. At times the language differs considerably between the Old Testament and Revelation, but the theological thrust of victory in Revelation is concomitant with that found in the Old Testament where God alone is the giver of all victories.

The text of the Old Testament is rich with the language of battles, wars, dominations and defeat. At times, the graphic-

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<sup>45</sup> "...its 404 verses contain 518 quotations from the Old Testament, 88 from Daniel alone...". P.C. Sands, Literary Genius Of The New Testament, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970 rpr.), p. 185.



ness of the violence in the Old Testament is even startling.<sup>46</sup> Particularly in regard to warfare in the Old Testament we see that there are many battles fought, and the nation that is usually one of the contenders in those battles is the nation of Israel.

In complete harmony with what we have seen so far, the nation of Israel also had their "god of war". The Greeks had Nike, the Romans called on Victoria, and so too the Israelites called on their deity for victory in battle. Of course, the god called upon by the Israelites was not just any god, but their claim was that this god was the God, the God of gods!<sup>47</sup> This can also be substantiated from Num. 22:1-24:25 which contains the story of Balaam and Balak, in which Balak tries to employ the reputed power of Balaam in order to defeat the Israelites in battle (22:4-6). The key concept that this story relates is that God is without a doubt the God of gods when it comes to military battles.

Balak makes his request of Balaam only to find out that Balaam's god (God) does not give the kind of response desired, in fact, according to Balaam, the victory will go to Israel and

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<sup>46</sup> See for example texts such as: Josh. 6:21; Ps. 21:12; 58:10; 68:22-23; 137:8,9; 140:9-11; Is. 13:15-16,18; 14:21; Jer. 46:10; Ezek. 21:9-16,18-32; 32:4-6.

<sup>47</sup> The Psalms of the Old Testament reiterate time and time again that the God of Israel is the God, and there is no god anywhere that even approaches His greatness. See for example: Ps. 77:13; 81:6-12; 89:5-13; 95:3; 96:4-6; 97:7,9; 135:5; 136:2. See as well: Is. 43:10-13, 44:6; 45:14; 46:9; Jeremiah 10:10-16; 14:22; 16:21; Dan. 2:47; 11:36.

not to the Moabites. Balak's solution to the unfavourable prophecy is to move Balaam to a new geographical location. With this move, Balak hopes to find favour with the god of that region. Balak does this more than once (22:41; 23:13,27), and each time he does it, Balaam gives Balak the same information: the Moabites will not conquer the Israelites.

The Old Testament makes it clear that geographical locations do not have a bearing on the outcome in battle. In Deut. 4:7 we read: "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?" The Old Testament states emphatically that unless God is with the armies, they will not win regardless of what geographical location they are in.<sup>48</sup>

Another example can be drawn from 1 Kings 20:23-30. Here the Syrians come to the conclusion that the gods of the Israelites are gods of the hills, and because their last battle was in the hills, they were defeated by the Israelites. From this they erroneously deduce that a battle on the plains would be to their (Syrians') advantage, since the gods of the Israelites were understood to be gods of the hills.

And a man of God came near and said to the king of Israel, Thus says the Lord, "Because of Syrians have said, 'The Lord is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore I will

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<sup>48</sup> That God's "range of effectiveness" extends beyond the perception of many is also demonstrated in texts such as Ps. 30:3; 103:4; 139:7-12; Jonah 1:3-16.

give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord."<sup>49</sup>

This particular text concludes with the two nations at battle on the plain and the result was that "...the people of Israel smote of the Syrians a hundred thousand foot soldiers in one day" (20:29).

The Old Testament portrays God as abhorring reliance on anyone or anything other than Himself.<sup>50</sup> The ten commandments begin with a stark reminder of this:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.<sup>51</sup>

In the delineation of the kings of Israel (northern kingdom), reference is continually made to the person responsible for the genesis of the sin that eventually led to Israel's

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<sup>49</sup> 1 Kings 20:28. See also Jer. 23:23-24.

<sup>50</sup> In 2 Kings 10:27 we have an interesting example of what God thinks about other gods. When Baal worship was destroyed by king Jehu, the temple and sacred stone of Baal were taken and destroyed, and then used as a latrine. Further, we can also make a comment about God as a jealous God. We read in Ex. 34:14 that God says that His name is "jealous". We are also told that God is a jealous God and a consuming fire in Deut. 4:24. See also the parallel of Ex. 20:5 in Deut. 5:9.

<sup>51</sup> Exodus 20:2-7.

deportation into exile.<sup>52</sup> That person was Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and his sin was that he was the one who introduced foreign gods for the northern kingdom to worship, so that he would not lose his people to the southern kingdom.<sup>53</sup>

From this we can see that reliance upon other gods is not acceptable according to the Old Testament. A further example of God's disdain for those who turn to other gods can be found in king Ahaz. We read of him that he made images for the Baals (2 Chron. 28:2), he burned incense in the valley of Hinnom (28:3), he burned his sons according to the practices of the pagans whose actions were abominable to the Lord (28:3), and he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree (28:4). As a result of this disobedience to God, God delivered him in battle to the Syrians and the northern kingdom (Israel).

Instead of turning to God for help, Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria for military help. As a result, God took Tilgath-Pilneser the king of Assyria and used him to punish Ahaz (28:16-21). Then the text informs us that Ahaz became even more faithless in that he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus. Ahaz's logic was that since it had been those gods that were responsible for his defeat, they were the ones to be reconciled with. His hope was that these gods would help him, but the text informs us that his decision was the worst poss-

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<sup>52</sup> 1 Kings 13:33,34; 2 Kings 17:21,22; 23:15.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Kings 12:25-33.

ible one for his reliance on other gods became "...the ruin of him, and of all Israel." (28:23).

Turning to other gods is of no avail according to the Old Testament. Victory in battle is determined by God, and by no one else. It is God who gives the Israelites victory in battle, but it is also this same God that gives other nations victory in battle. For example, it is God who gave Naaman of Syria victory in battle (2 Kings 5:1), it is God who delivered Ebedmelech the Ethiopian (Jer. 39:15-18), it is God who gave Moab over to their enemies (Ezek. 24:8-11), it is God who gave the king of Egypt (Pharaoh Hophra) into the hands of his enemies (Jer. 44:30; Ezek. 29:19; 30:24-26), and it is God who brought military punishment upon Amon of Thebes (Jer. 46:25-26). It is also because of this same God that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was so great (Dan. 2:37-38; 5:18; Jer. 27:6-8), and God even used the Medes to destroy the Babylonians (Isaiah 13:17-22; Jer. 51:11).

Furthermore, any success or prosperity is due to the favour of this one God, over and above and in exclusion of other gods. Prosperity and success in finding the proper wife, or in a good agricultural harvest, in wise decisions, or in the governing of a people all have their source in this same God.<sup>54</sup> Jeremiah 10:21 says: "For the shepherds are stupid,

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<sup>54</sup> See for example. Gen. 24:12,40,42,56; 27:20; 39:2-5,23; Deut. 28:8; 29:9; 30:9,10; Josh. 1:7; Judges 17:13; 18:5; 1 Sam. 18:14; 2 Sam. 23:5; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 18:7; 1 Chron. 22:11,13; 2 Chron. 31:21; Neh. 1:11; 2:20; Ps. 1:1-3; 118:25; Prov. 16:20; 19:14; Eccles. 6:2; Is. 66:12; Jer. 5:24;

and do not inquire of the Lord; therefore they have not prospered and all their flock is scattered.". Even the success or failure of a shepherd's work is determined by God, and this is the God spoken of in the Old Testament, the God who is the source of all success.

However, the picture of God as the source for victory and success comes through with increased clarity with reference to the actual battlefield. We have touched upon it above briefly, but now we want to examine the Old Testaments texts in closer detail. When we do so, we realize that it is clearly God who is depicted as responsible for the outcome of every battle. Usually the outcome is in favour of the nation of Israel, but at times it is not. An army that is not protected will be defeated, and God is shown to be the one who protects or does not protect any given army.

We can look at the example of Joshua who charges the Israelites to be confident that they can conquer those living in the land of Canaan. Even though a report had come that those living in the land at present were men of great stature (Num. 13:31-33), Joshua and Caleb were confident that they could be victorious. Why? Simply because the men of great stature were unprotected. Joshua said: "Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for

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33:6; Hos. 2:8; 9:2; Amos 4:9; Micah 6:14-16; Hag. 1:10,11; 2:9,15; Zech. 1:17; 8:12; 10:1; 14:17,18; Mal. 3:11.

they are bread to us; their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them." (Num. 14:9).

It is interesting to note that in this same chapter some of the Israelites want to go and fight against the Amalekites and Canaanites. But Moses instructs them not to because "the Lord is not among you." (14:42). The people do not listen and go to war in spite of Moses' warning, and this group of Israelites are defeated in battle (14:45).<sup>55</sup>

There are other texts that confirm the suggestion that when God's protection is on an army they can not be defeated, and when His protection is withdrawn that army loses in battle. When God is "for" someone, then victory is the result, but when He is not, then the result is defeat.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the clearest representation of this fact can be seen in the battles that the Israelites fight in order to secure the promised land for themselves. For example, the Old Testament states that it is God who gives the promised land to the Israelites. The fact that the land was already occupied with others makes it that much more clear that God's hand was

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<sup>55</sup> The Old Testament uses strong language in stating that the people are not to trust in their own strength. See for example, Hos. 10:13,14; Micah 3:11,12.

<sup>56</sup> See for example: Num. 14:9,42,43; 31:3; Deut. 1:42; 1 Sam. 7:13; 14:45; 23:14; 2 Sam. 17:14; 1 Kings 22:7ff; 2 Chron. 24:20; 25:7; Job 5:20; Ps. 41:2; 44:9-12; 47:9; 60:9-12; 71:11; 78:9,10; 89:38-45; 108:11; 124:1-8; 140:7; Prov. 2:7,8; Is. 10:25-26; 31:1-3; 34:1-4; Jer. 1:8;19; 15:3,4; 21:2,10,13; 27:5,6; 30:10,11; 32:24-25,28; 33:6-9; 45:5; 49:11; 51:25; Lam. 2:3,7-8; Ezek. 23:9,28; 26:3-14; 28:7; 29:8; 32:12; Daniel 2:21; 4:17,32.

in the victory. Again, the Old Testament has numerous references stating that God gives them the land:

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what deeds thou didst perform in their days, in the days of old; thou with thy own hand didst drive out the nations, but them thou didst plant; thou didst afflict the peoples, but them thou didst set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm give them victory; but thy right hand, and thy arm, and the light of thy countenance; for thou didst delight in them. Thou art my King and my God, who ordainest victories for Jacob.<sup>57</sup>

In order to gain the land, the peoples in the land would have to be subdued. If the land was a land flowing with milk and honey (Num. 13:27), then the inhabitants of that land could not be expected to leave of their own accord. In other words, no one would be foolish enough to leave a land like this unless they absolutely had to. Further, if the occupants of the land were of great stature, then what could this wandering nation of people possibly hope to accomplish in terms of warfare?

The new Testament statement that God's strength is manifested in man's weaknesses finds its birth in just this

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<sup>57</sup> Psalm 44:1-4. See also: Gen. 15:7,18; Num. 14:8-9; 32:7,29; Deut. 4:37,38; 7:22; 30:5; Josh. 5:6; 6:2; 14:12; 22:4; 24:8; Judg. 11:21; 18:10; 1 Chron. 22:18; Neh. 9:22-25; Psalms 105:44; 111:6; 135:12; 136:21,22; Is. 26:15; Jer. 32:21-22; Ezek. 11:17; 28:25-26; Hos. 1:4; Amos 2:13-16; 9:11-15; Obad. 1:4; Micah 2:3,4; 6:4; Nahum 2:13; Hag. 2:22; Zech. 2:7-9; 9:4,8; 10:5,10-12; 12:1-9; Mal. 1:4,5. The work of conquering the land is God's work. Joshua and Israel are God's instruments, nothing more. God "...is the only hero, and the only one to receive full praise and credit." G. Ernest Wright, "The Conquest Theme in the Bible" in A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies In Honor Of Jacob M. Myers, Howard N. Bream, Ralph D. Heim, Carey A. Moore eds., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), p. 511.



predicament of the nation of Israel. The Old Testament resolves that problem by saying: "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord."<sup>58</sup> The armies of the earth can be mustered to incredible proportions, but God is the one who decides the outcome of any battle.

In 2 Chron. 32:1-8 we read of the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, coming against Judah in war. With Sennacherib came a "horde" that could justly cause concern among those in Judah. However, once again, the upper hand of God over any efforts of humankind is displayed when Hezekiah says:

Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.<sup>59</sup>

Again, there are numerous references that show that it is God who delivers the enemies into Israel's hands, and that He is the source of victory.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Proverbs 21:31.

<sup>59</sup> 2 Chron. 32:7,8. cf. 1 John 4:4.

<sup>60</sup> See for example: Gen. 14:20; Ex. 15:6-18; Lev. 26:7; Num. 10:9; 14:9; Deut. 2:15,33; 7:2,23-24; 20:1-4; 21:10; 28:7; Josh. 8:7,18; 10:8,25,42; 11:6; 23:9; 24:8; Judg. 1:4,5,10,17; 11:21,32,36; 20:28; 1 Sam. 17:46,47; 19:5; 26:8; 2 Sam. 5:19; 8:1-6,14; 16:8; 22:1-4; 23:10,12; 2 Kings 13:17; 1 Chron. 5:20-22; 11:14; 14:10; 18:1-6,13; 22:18; 2 Chron. 13:10-15,18; 14:11; 20:15,20; 26:5-8; Neh. 9:24; Ps. 18:29-50; 20:6-9; 33:16-21; 44:3,4; 47:2,3; 48:10; 54:7; 55:16-19; 56:9; 60:5,12; 62:11; 76:6; 83:1-18; 98:1-3; 108:10-13; 118:6-16,25; 124:1-8; 135:8-12; 136:24; 144:1,2,10; 146:3; 149:6-9; Is. 41:2-4; 10-13; 43:10-13; Jer. 20:11; 51:14; 20-23; Ezek. 25:14; 28:25,26; Joel 3:11; Zeph. 3:14-20; Zech. 10:5,12; 12:5,7.

Somewhat related to God's protection in battle is God's hand of sustenance once the battle has been won. The world of the Old Testament was a continuous battlefield, and to have rest from that continual warfare was something that was much sought after. God said that He could provide such security, and again, the Old Testament claim is that only He could provide that security:

And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will remove evil beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through the land.<sup>61</sup>

This same complete sovereignty of God is displayed in other texts such as Isaiah 41:10-13. Here the nation is instructed not to fear, because those who strive against them are "as nothing". The reason? "For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'." (41:13).<sup>62</sup>

Appropriately then, if God's hand of protection is removed and if He no longer helps the Israelites, then they will fall in battle. The nation of Israel was warned that if they continued to prostitute themselves to other gods, then the God would show His anger by removing His hand of protection.

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<sup>61</sup> Lev. 26:6.

<sup>62</sup> Some other texts that have the same reassurance for His people are: Lev. 25:18,19; 26:6-8; Josh. 1:9; 10:8,25; 22:4; 23:9; 1 Sam. 7:13; 2 Sam. 7:1; 1 Kings 5:4; 1 Chron. 16:19-22; 17:10; 22:18; 2 Chron. 14:6,7; 17:10; 24:10; 32:22; Ps. 29:11; 105:12-15; 144:2; Is. 14:3; 26:12,13; 27:3-5; 32:17-20; 54:17; Jer. 39:17,18; 46:27-28; Ezek. 28:25-26; 34:25-31; Hos. 2:18; Amos 9:15; Micah 4:4; 5:4,5; Nahum 2:2; Zeph. 2:7; 3:14-20; Haggai 2:4,5,9; Zech. 9:10; 14:11,12.

As we noted above, victory was God's, and He was in a position to give it wherever He saw fit. In fact, He could even give it to Israel's enemies in order to chastise His erring people. As much as God is depicted as a God of mercy and longsuffering in the Old Testament, He could only allow so much disobedience and then He did give the Israelites into the hands of their enemies:

Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against thee and cast thy law behind their back and killed thy prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to thee, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore thou didst give them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer; and in the time of their suffering they cried to thee and thou didst hear them from heaven; and according to thy great mercies thou didst give them saviours who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before thee, and thou didst abandon them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; yet when they turned and cried to thee thou didst hear from heaven, and many times thou didst deliver them according to thy mercies. And thou didst warn them in order to turn them back to thy law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey thy commandments, but sinned against thy ordinances, by the observance of which a man shall live, and turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and should not obey. Many years thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by thy Spirit through thy prophets; yet they would not give ear. Therefore thou didst give them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Nehemiah 9:26-30. See also: Deut. 28:15,25,48-52; Judg. 3:12-14; 1 Sam. 4:2,3,10; 28:10; 1 Kings 8:33,34; 2 Kings 10:32; 2 Chron. 6:24,25; 28:5,19; 35:21; Ps. 78:56-64; Isaiah 10:5-19; Jeremiah 1:14-16; 8:10; 15:3,4; 18:21-23; 19:7; 20:4-6; 21:1-14; 22:8; 24:10; 25:8-38; 27:5-7; 29:17-19; 34:2,20-22; 38:3; Lam. 1:5; Ezek. 7:9,21-28; 11:9-12; 16:35-43; 17:11-21; 21:18-32; Dan. 1:1-2; Hos. 10:9-15; Mic. 1:2-16; 6:14; Hab. 1:6.

The result of the continual disobedience of the Israelites to God was the exile.<sup>64</sup> The many sources as stated in footnotes 63 above and 69 below show how God used "pagan" armies to carry out His work against His own people.<sup>65</sup>

In all of this we have seen a picture of God as responsible for victory. He was to be understood as the sole source of victory, in battle as well as in economic factors (Job 1:9,10). In fact, God's role in military battle takes on such dynamic proportions that He is even referred to as a warrior Himself: "Who is the King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!" (Ps. 24:8). His presence in battle with His people is so great that it seems to be almost visible presence:

But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten (Jer. 20:11).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and I hid my face from them." Ezek. 39:23-24.

<sup>65</sup> It is interesting to see in Jer. 29:14 that God says even though the Babylonians appear to have taken the Israelites into exile, it was His doing and not theirs.

<sup>66</sup> See Josh. 5:13-15 where reference is made to an angel who is the "commander of the army of the Lord".

Again, there are numerous passages that portray God as a warrior, as though He were actually in battle.<sup>67</sup>

To summarize this discussion, we would like to cite a few more examples that show the complete sovereignty of God in regards to victory. We have seen that matters such as military battles, economic success as well as agricultural harvests are all controlled by God. Important as these may be, there is yet another area where God's intervention is displayed, and that in the area of "fate" or "luck". Yes, even here, God is depicted as being in control.

For example, in 1 Kings 22:5-40 we have the story of Ahab being told by the prophet Micaiah that he (Ahab) would die in battle (22:28). Even though Ahab says he does not believe this prophecy, he still takes precautionary measures to avoid his foretold death. He dresses someone else in his kingly robes, and then disguises himself. It is to no avail, for "...a certain man drew his bow at a venture, and struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate." (22:34).

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<sup>67</sup> See for example: Ex. 14:3; 17:16; Deut. 3:22; 31:3; Josh. 10:25,42; 11:6; Judg. 20:35; 1 Sam. 18:17; 25:28; 2 Sam. 5:20; 22:15; 1 Chron. 14:11; 2 Chron. 14:12,13; 20:15,17; Ps. 18:14; 35:1-5; 45:3-5; 46:8,9; 48:4-7; 58:6-11; 59:5; 60:12; 64:7-9; 68:1,7-17; 76:1-3; 78:65,66; 83:9,13,14; 108:13; 110:5,6; 135:8-11; 135:10-20; Is. 10:26,33-34; 13:1-5,19; 14:21-27; 17:13,14; 24:1-3; 25:10-12; 26:14; 27:1; 30:30-32; 31:8,9; 34:5,6; 41:1-4; 51:9,10; 59:16-19; 63:3-6; 66:15-16; Jer. 9:15,16; 12:12,13; 21:5,6; 29:18; 44:13; 46:15; 47:6; 49:35-38; Lam. 2:4,21; 3:12,13; Ezek. 5:2,16-17; 6:3; 12:14; 21:1-17; 32:10,15; Hos. 1:7; Joel 2:2-11,20; Amos 7:9; 9:1-3; Micah 5:10; Hab. 3:8-16; Zeph. 2:11,12; 3:17; Haggai 2:22; Zech. 9:1-17; 10:3-5; 12:8,9; 13:7-9; 14:3-9.

This same kind of control over apparently random events is seen in Ezek. 21:21-23, and in the following text as well where we read: "The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly from the Lord." (Prov. 16:33). Let there be no mistake says the Old Testament, even matters of "luck" are controlled by God.

In a small way we have tried to show the complete and total domination of God in regard to victory. His hand in victory is so powerful that we find these exaggerative statements: "One man of you [Israelites] puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, as he promised you." (Josh. 23:10).<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, God's reputation precedes Him and His nation. We read in 1 Sam. 4:7-9 that the Philistine's understood the Exodus as a direct result of the gods being with the Israelites.

In Josh. 2:9-14 we read the account of Rahab in the city of Jericho. She relates to the two spies that the whole city of Jericho had heard about how the Lord had worked marvelously throughout the Exodus, and that the Lord had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites. In 2:11 Rahab says that the God of the Israelites is God. It is stated that she, and the city of

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<sup>68</sup> See also Psalm 18:29 "Yea, by thee I can crush a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall".

Jericho know that because God is with the Israelites, victory for the Israelites is assured.<sup>69</sup>

The theme of victory is well developed in the Old Testament, as we have seen above. The purpose in delineating a small portion of the references to victory in the Old Testament has been to try and complete the background needed for an understanding of victory in Revelation. The combined picture that we obtain when we take into consideration the very real influences of Nike, Victoria, the Maccabean literature and the Old Testament, is a very powerful one.

Victory is seen as important to many peoples, and the ways of expressing this victory are in essence quite common. In terms of influence though, John's dependence on the Old Testament has to be seen as the major influence. To be sure, even the ideas of victory offered to him in the contemporary

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<sup>69</sup> Even though this is true, we must recognize that the text also makes it clear that breaches with God have a direct effect on victory in war. The account of Achan in Josh. 7:1-26 is a good example, where the Israelites experience defeat because of a breach in the agreement between God and the Israelites. Frank Moore Cross directs us to other examples of the result of a breach of holy war, such as "...Saul forfeited the kingship, for himself and his house, by his breach of old law, namely by attempts (in one way or another) to manipulate the fixed forms of holy war in his own interest (1 Sam. 13:5-14 and 15:1-31)". Frank Moore Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 221. See also his further example of Ahab, p. 225. Another facet of holy war is that God's agents of wrath and discipline are not necessarily good and holy just because they are His agents. God works through human agents in spite of their righteousness or lack thereof. This is how the special institution of holy war is to be understood; namely, that God used Israel, as well as the Arameans, Assyrians and Babylonians as His instruments. Wright, p. 516.

pagan Greco-Roman world in the form of Nike and Victoria contributed to the richness of the concept of victory. Furthermore, a familiarity with the Maccabean literature can safely be assumed, and this tradition of reward-for-piety no matter how great the cost was shown to have been instrumental as well.

Important as these sources may be, it is the Old Testament that was the most familiar to John and to his readers.<sup>70</sup> For it is in the Old Testament that the God that John and his readers are most familiar with is described. John used the Old Testament extensively, but never does he quote it directly: "Nahezu in jedem Satz braucht er biblische Wendungen, nirgendwo aber fuehrt er ein Zitat ausdruecklich als solches ein."<sup>71</sup> Delling points out that both the reader and the writer of the Revelation were steeped in the Old Testament.

...es ist nicht unmoeglich, dass die Gemeinde des Apokalyptikers stark im Alten Testament lebten, ist aber vielleicht zunaechst einmal fuer ihn selbst wahrscheinlicher (natuerlich ist es auch denkbar,

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<sup>70</sup> D. Moody Smith, Jr., "The Use Of The Old Testament In The New" in The Use Of The Old Testament In The New And Other Essays: Studies In Honor Of William Franklin Stinespring, James M. Efird, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), p. 63.

<sup>71</sup> Eduard Lohse, Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments: Exegetische Studien zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments, (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), p. 330. Compare this quote with Sands' on p. 117 n. 45 above and we see that John does not "quote" the Old Testament, but rather that he alludes to the Old Testament. See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), p. 5. Also, Smith Jr., pp. 59-61.



dass der Gottesdienst dieser Gemeinden vom Apokalyptiker beeinflusst war).<sup>72</sup>

For the writer of the book of Revelation, the Old Testament was the primary source.<sup>73</sup> John particularly draws from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, as this next quote shows:

Er ist vielmehr in den Schriften der Propheten so tief verwurzelt, dass er sich staendig ihrer Worte bedient, sie aus dem Hebraeischen woertlich in sein Griechisch uebertraegt und auf diese Weise geradezu einen "heiligen Stil" entwickelt.<sup>74</sup>

So strong is the reliance of Revelation on the Old Testament that Smith says: "Thus the document itself is, literally, quite inconceivable apart from the Old Testament".<sup>75</sup>

In the heavenly worship scene in Rev. 4,5 we find the Old Testament God wonderfully magnified and praised. Furthermore, as we have suggested above, the theme of victory is one of the major theological themes of Revelation, and, as we

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<sup>72</sup> Gerhard Delling, Studien zum Neuen Testament und zum hellenistischen Judentum: Gesammelte Aufsaezte 1950-1968, Ferdinand Hahn, et al eds., (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 450.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Rowland, Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism (London: S.P.C.K., 1985), p. 50. Also: Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, The New Testament Interpretation of Scripture, (London: S.P.C.K., 1980), p. 4. See also Delling, p. 430.

<sup>74</sup> Lohse, Einheit, p. 330.

<sup>75</sup> Smith Jr., p. 62. "Although the early Christian appropriation of the Old Testament cannot be explained solely on the basis of documents of contemporary Judaism, indispensable light is shed upon the New Testament by them." Smith Jr., p. 20.

have seen in this chapter, the Old Testament is a rich resource with which to formulate such a theology.

For as we saw, the Old Testament presents God as the only source for victory. The reason that the Israelites can take the land and conquer the inhabitants is because God the warrior fights with and for them.<sup>76</sup> The Old Testament states that God is the God of gods, and that He alone is to be worshipped. If He is not given His due, then He removes His hand of protection and the result is defeat in battle.

Unlike other gods, God's effectiveness in determining victory is not affected by geographical limitations. Further, it is He who grants security to warring nations, and He alone who keeps these nations from attacking and warring against His people. His sovereignty over victory, success and prosperity is so all-encompassing, that even random matters of chance are in His control. Whatever the concern is, success and victory come from one source, God.

The Old Testament is the source to which Revelation refers. It is this Old Testament picture of God that Revelation draws upon; and due to God's complete sovereignty, Revelation lauds praise upon Him in 4:8-11. More importantly though, it is this great God of victory who addresses the seven churches in Asia Minor' and exhorts them to be victorious, to

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<sup>76</sup> Victory, no matter what context it is in has to be understood in terms of its source. True, the specific individual is tangably involved, but, "In the last resort it is just as much divine gift as mortal achievement." Bauernfeind, p. 944.

conquer, to be overcomers. The genius of John's use of nikaô in Revelation is that it is a theological theme that does not appear ex nihilo, but arises from a rich and full history which is then used to point the reader to this all-powerful God.

At the same time, John's use of nikaô is not just a regurgitation of past victory statements, but is a brilliant new application and reinterpretation. John draws upon the backgrounds we referred to in order to paint the portrait of the overcomer in Revelation. This overcomer is similar to the one depicted in Greek, Roman, Maccabean and Old Testament sources in that his victory hinges upon the deity to which he calls.<sup>77</sup>

More to the point is the fact that this overcomer is faced with the biggest hurdle that one can face - death. As we saw in the Greco-Roman and Maccabean sources, death was one of the greatest battles that one had to face. The Maccabean literature showed that victory could be accomplished through death, and it is precisely this concept that we find reemphasized in Revelation. Death for the Christian in Revelation is a very real likelihood but John makes it clear that even death can not

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<sup>77</sup> In particular, it is the contributions of the Maccabean literature and the Old Testament that is posited as being the two sources most likely to have given impetus to the victory spoken of in New Testament texts. "The people's victory does not primarily depend upon the strength of their soldiers but upon whether God has delivered the enemy into the hands of the Israelite armies (Jdg. 7; 1 Macc. 3:19). For this reason the rallying cry for the 'Holy War' in Maccabean times was 'Victory with God!' (2 Macc. 13:15)." Guenther, p. 650. "The victory of Israel (2 Macc. 10:38) or the prophet (Ez. 3:8) is victory because it is God's victory. The watchword is: Theou nikên". Bauernfeind, p. 943. For more on how Judaism played a role in early Christianity, see Hanson, p. 31.

nullify the work of the overcomer. As we will see in the chapters to follow, the answer to the apparent paradox of victory in death is found in the Christ of Revelation.

### Syncretism: How Much?

We have now devoted 3 chapters to delineating the Sitz im Leben of Revelation especially with regard to understanding the theological theme of victory. Our claim has been that these sources did in fact influence the writer and the reader of Revelation. Before embarking on our study of victory in Revelation, we would like to briefly address the issue latent in the preceding chapters. Did Christianity really incorporate these different "sources"? Furthermore, to what extent were these sources syncretized into the Christian faith? Is it correct to assume that John's reference to nikaô would elicit the sources mentioned in the chapters above, or is this wild speculation? It is questions such as these that we wish to now briefly address.

The extent to which the Bible has been examined for its use of sources has caused some concern. Central to this discussion is the debate as to how conscious these biblical authors were of their role in eventually forming the canonical Scriptures. The two extremes of this debate establish the parameters for the extent of this syncretism. Therefore, the

"accepted level of syncretism" is proportional to one's position on the above question.

To help resolve this wide-ranging debate, Nash discusses two categories in order to assist in our understanding of the range of influence: strong dependence and weak dependence. That Christianity was influenced by other faiths, texts and cultures is not denied. However, the extent to which this has occurred has been debated. Nash recognizes that Christianity did not find itself expanding in a vacuum, but instead it was surrounded with and by many influences. The degree to which the Christian writings were dependent on these sources is another question. Nash answers the question by presenting varieties of dependence which he refers to as "strong" and "weak".

By strong dependence, Nash means that condition "B" could not be understood or seen apart from condition "A". To use Nash's example, one might assert that Paul's view of Jesus as a dying and rising saviour-god ("B") would never have occurred to Paul had he not first been aware of similar notions in the pagan mystery religions of his day ("A"). Another way to state this would be to say that Paul came to believe that Jesus was the dying and rising saviour-god because of the ideas that he had absorbed.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Nash, pp. 16-17. Even though he uses the example, Nash does not agree with what is being said. Nor does Frend: "The Savior whom Paul preached was not a savior god of current pagan myth but a historical figure invested with deity." W.H.C. Frend, The Rise of Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

By weak dependence, Nash means that condition "A" forms a part of a background on which condition "B" is painted. It is not necessary to use condition "A", but it is helpful. He refers to the book of Hebrews and says that the writer did not borrow from his non-Christian surroundings (strong dependence), but he did use

...concepts and language familiar to him before his conversion, because they could help him communicate better with an audience also familiar with these ideas and terminology.<sup>79</sup>

Whether one subscribes to a weak or a strong dependence, it is important to recognize the effect that extra-biblical material had on the Bible. Adela Yarbro Collins points out the strengths and weaknesses of this scholarly effort:

The search for a common pattern in religious phenomena as an aid in understanding individual texts and their relationships to other texts is one of the fundamental options of interpretation: the search for similarities. The weaknesses of this approach are tendencies to oversimplification, over-emphasis on similarities so that the significant differences are overlooked, and the fallacy that similarity always implies dependence or influence.<sup>80</sup>

For example, in regard to the Greek background, Bennett does not suggest that the New Testament writers actually read Pindar or Plato. They may have, but what is important is that somehow they were aware of the concepts and themes in this material. His conclusion is that Christianity is inconceivable

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1984), p. 110.

<sup>79</sup> Nash, p. 18.

<sup>80</sup> Collins, Combat, p. 207.

apart from its Greek background.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, important as the ancient Greek sources may be, the contemporary Hellenistic milieu can not be ignored either, for it is precisely in and through that milieu that the Old Testament was read by Christians.<sup>82</sup>

As important as the Greek contribution may have been, it was the influence of Judaism, especially via the Old Testament, that would have touched those first Christians the most:

When due account is taken of the historic novelty or uniqueness of the New Testament message and the extent of its orientation toward the Hellenistic world, one must still reckon with its deep indebtedness to Judaism and the Old Testament, both with respect to its theological language and conceptuality and with respect to its prophetic-historical consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

What we discover then is a definite incorporation of "other" ideas into the Christian message. The synthesis that occurred in early Christianity however was monitored. Dodd maintains that when the church felt that the distinctive truths

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<sup>81</sup> "I profess to see in one instance that the basic Christian formulation is clearly Hellenic, that Christian myth at its earliest inception, the account of the life of Christ and his significance, is a late variation of Greek myth, inconceivable without it, and to be understood in relation to it." Bennett, p. 264.

<sup>82</sup> Smith Jr., p. 64. Cf. with Barr's statement: "...a reinterpretation of the New Testament in terms of its setting in the Hebraic mind, rather than in terms of its Hellenic affinities, becomes essential." Barr, p.6.

<sup>83</sup> Smith Jr., p. 63. Christianity was not embarking on a new venture by "syncretizing" pagan elements into itself: "Modern study of the NT interpretation of Scripture will not take us outside of Judaism; but the Judaism within which it took its origin already had a syncretistic element in it." Hanson, p. 6. See also Rowland, Origins, p. 55.

of Christianity were being "swamped in alien speculations", as with the Gnostics, then the process of synthesis was brought to a halt.<sup>84</sup>

Wayne A. Meeks offered an observation recently with reference to early Christian ethics that can most aptly be applied to this discussion. He stated that "The 'essence' of Christianity is not some residue that remains after we have boiled away everything they 'borrowed' from the impure world around them."<sup>85</sup>

What is true is that early Christians did "borrow" from the world around them, and if we take the time to study the world in which they lived and from which they "borrowed", then the biblical texts become that much more clear.<sup>86</sup> Of the writer of Revelation, Collins says:

Most of his images are not metaphors created by an individual poetic mind in isolation, but are traditional images with a long history and a rich variety of connotations and associations. In order to understand these images, one must be aware of

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<sup>84</sup> C.H. Dodd, The Bible And The Greeks, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1964 rpr.), p. 248. Nash's conclusion goes beyond this when he posits: "Was early Christianity a syncretistic faith? Did it borrow any of its essential beliefs and practices either from Hellenistic philosophy or religion or from Gnosticism? The evidence requires that this question be answered in the negative." Nash, p. 270.

<sup>85</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, "Understanding Early Christian Ethics" in Journal of Biblical Literature, 105 (No. 1, March 1986), p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> It has to be remembered, as stated earlier in this thesis, that Revelation was written for people in John's day, addressing a problem/crisis that they faced, all lodged of course in concrete historical events. W. Harrington, p. 22.



their traditional character and become familiar with the connotations they carry with them.<sup>87</sup>

The underlying question to this discussion is, what were the sources that influenced and helped to make Revelation's background? The primary source would be the Old Testament, but the Greco-Roman as well as the Intertestamental literature would also have to be considered. We conclude with Sands who says of John, "So this writer picks up precious stones that he finds lying in company with inferior ones, polishes and resets them and makes a fine new circlet."<sup>88</sup> Meeks reiterates this by saying:

What was Christian about...those early communities we will discover not by abstraction but by confronting their involvement in the culture of their time and place and seeking to trace the new patterns they made of old forms, to hear the new songs they composed from old melodies.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Collins, Combat, p. 57. "The first readers were almost certainly well versed in the sort of symbolic language and imagery in which the book is written. Whether they had formerly been Jews or pagans, they would read the language of myth as fluently as any modern reader of the daily papers reads the conventional symbols of a political cartoon." Caird, p. 6. Further, "It must be realized, as well, that whenever there is evidence of cultural borrowing, a 'functional shift' tends to operate and relate the meaning of the borrowed terminology to the context of the borrowing community. Thus, the same outward expressions may signify widely different inner meaning." Strand, p. 22.

<sup>88</sup> Sands, p. 190.

<sup>89</sup> Meeks, "Christian Ethics", p. 11. In an earlier publication he says "It has become customary among some scholars to speak of the 'social world of early Christianity', ...It has a double meaning, referring not only to the environment of the early Christian groups but also to the world as they perceived it and to which they gave form and significance through their special language and other meaningful actions. One is the world they shared with other people who lived in the

It is precisely this "New Testament World" as constructed and construed by Christians living in Asia Minor in the first century CE that we now wish to examine. In doing so, and especially with regard to an examination of a theological theme as expressed by the word group nikaô, the following must be understood. Words, in and of themselves (such as nikaô) do not have special meanings. However, words as understood in the context of their expression do adopt special connotations, and this applies specifically to our discussion. Accordingly, a brief discussion of semantics is in order, and before examining nikaô in its use in Revelation, semantical considerations must take precedence.

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Roman Empire; the other, the world they constructed." Meeks, Urban Christians, p. 8.

## CHAPTER IV

### VICTORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have made reference at several points in this thesis to the Greek word nikaô. It is this word that John uses to emphasize a particular theological theme in the book of Revelation; namely, to encourage Christians to press on no matter what the cost, to overcome.<sup>1</sup> This word group will be examined in some detail, but

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<sup>1</sup> "The word group denotes 'victory' or 'superiority', whether in the physical, legal or metaphorical sense, whether in mortal conflict or peaceful competition." It does carry a variation in meanings, but "...the basic sense of genuine superiority and overwhelming success generally remains." Bauernfeind, p. 942. More specifically, "New Testament usage of the word group almost always presupposes the conflict between God or Christ and opposing demonic powers." Guenther, p. 650. "The word nikaô is in the New Testament a word of promise, an eschatological word." Bauernfeind, p. 945. Nikaô ist ein "...'johanneisches' Lieblingswort der Apc." Lohmeyer, p. 23. While nikaô and its contexts in Revelation are important towards this end, there are other passages which carry the same intention of battles, victories, conquests and successes while excluding the use of nikaô. See for example 1:3,5,9,18; 2:2-5,9,10,13,19,25; 3:4,8,10,11; 5:9,10,12; 6:9-11; 7:9,10,13,17; 11:11,12,15-18; 12:7-10,17; 13:10; 14:1-5,8,12-20; 15:4; 16:6,15; 17:6,17;

the desired end result is not an understanding of the word nikaô, but is instead an understanding of that word group as expressive of a major theological theme within Revelation.

### Semantical Considerations

The title of this thesis would seem to indicate that we are looking at a specific word (nikaô), yet our goal is not a word study per se. Nevertheless, since this thesis does revolve around that word group as expressive of a theological theme in its given contexts, a few words on semantics are in order.

One of the more important contributors in the semantical discussions of biblical language is James Barr. It has been his criticisms that have been noted with the most interest.<sup>2</sup> Barr's thesis is that a Christian use of a word does not necessitate a

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18:4,5,20,24; 19:1-9,11-21; 20:1-6,9-15; 21:1-7,9-27; 22:1-7,11-14. "There is also in the term axios an element of triumph, which is not to be rigorously restricted to moral worthiness." Leivestad, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Moises Silva, Biblical Words And Their Meaning: An Introduction To Lexical Semantics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), p. 20. Of Barr's work, many comments have been made: Luis Alonso-Schoekel said this: "Unafraid of great names, voluminous works, rigorous research--though they be called Pederson, Boman, Gerlemen, though they be inscribed TWNT. Like David, who training with lions and bears later faced the Philistine, so Barr begins with specific authors before facing TWNT." Further, H.T. Kerr thinks of Barr as a spanner tossed into the theological machinery and as a maverick "within the midst of the Biblical herd". C.F.D. Moule tells us that Barr flashed "a red light at the reckless driver who tries to take a short cut across a mine-field. We must be grateful that some of the explosives have been detonated for us." As quoted in Silva, pp. 18,19.

"conversion" of that word. To say that "everyday words" were filled with the spirit of God and hence achieved "new significance" would be erroneous in Barr's eyes. He would say that "...one must in all seriousness and reverence question whether the activity of the Holy Spirit can legitimately be listed among the causes of semantic change".<sup>3</sup>

Barr admits that Christianity did have an effect on language, and explains this statement with two conditions. The first is that the effect on language is not due to the revelatory or divine character of this new religion, but is instead a result of this new religion's existence as a social group that had a recognized, sacrally technical, pre-existent tradition. The second condition is that the effect of that change cannot be related directly to or correlated with the patterns within the theologically known divine acts and realities.<sup>4</sup>

If words did receive a "new content", then this was largely related to the degree to which these words became technical. He goes on to say that most of the important words in the New Testament were not technical.<sup>5</sup> It is one of the illusions of much modern biblical theology that any Greek word normally carries as its semantic value its reference in the most abstract philosophic system in which it is used; and, on the principles of

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<sup>3</sup> James Barr, The Semantics Of Biblical Language, (Oxford: At The University Press, 1969 rpr), p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> Barr, pp. 248-249.

<sup>5</sup> Certain words such as apostolos and baptizma were technical, whereas words such as alêtheia were not. Barr, p. 249.

such theology, very much needs an infusion of "new content" before it can be used in Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

From this we can see that biblical semantics has tended to be too narrow in its definition of words. What has happened is that there have been those who would desire to "...regiment biblical language into permissible forms by imposing a belief or attitude as criterion of meaning...". However, Gibson goes on to correctly point out that the more narrowly a language is examined, the sharper the conflict becomes between the language and our requirement.<sup>7</sup> Barr says that the TDNT has been found guilty on more than one account of this, and he has criticized the lexical studies within the TDNT.<sup>8</sup>

The recurring danger has been seen when connections with Greek words have been made that fit our mindset, but which in turn may very well have been completely foreign to the original

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<sup>6</sup> Barr, p. 249. This is much like saying that language is pagan until sanctified by the Christian use thereof.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur Gibson, Biblical Semantic Logic: A Preliminary Analysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 207-208.

<sup>8</sup> Barr offers the following three arguments against the TDNT's approach to lexical studies.

1. The words that the TDNT think are so "unambiguously biblical" are key words of Bible interpretation rather than key words of the Bible, "... and are in fact heavily charged with the values set upon them in certain schools of modern theology."

2. If a word is found to be used in a context that has something to say of God's historical acts or his purposes, that word is as a result "...deemed to be filled with eschatological content or orientated to the history of salvation."

3. The "atmosphere of the interpretation" seems to have much more control in determining semantic values than do the immediate context of those words. Barr, pp. 256-261.

writer.<sup>9</sup> Even though conscious definitions of terms have been made as an attempt to mark the semantic value of words in philosophy and law,<sup>10</sup> Barr says that "...if we are to have proof-words instead of proof-texts, I doubt if we are making progress."<sup>11</sup>

A marked difference has to be seen between the concept that is behind a word and that word itself. The scholar must decide whether his or her work will be to study words or ideas.<sup>12</sup> Silva gives a good example with the word "hypocrisy". A very important passage in regard to hypocrisy is Isaiah 1:10-15, but Silva says "...the student suckled at the concordance would never find it; instead, he would come to an unrefined understanding of the topic."<sup>13</sup>

Individual words have received far too much attention in and of themselves. To this fact Barr says

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<sup>9</sup> Silva, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Barr, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Barr, p. 271.

<sup>12</sup> Silva, pp. 26,27.

<sup>13</sup> A word of caution is needed here. Although Silva's point is well taken, he overstates and oversimplifies the problem. For any student that "suckles himself at the concordance" in search of the word "hypocrisy" would not simply and naively stay on that one word. Knowing full well what some of the classic symptoms and signs of hypocrisy are, that student would look up those related words, and as a result he would discover this classic text. Briefly then, some of those words: corruption, 1:4; (I do not) delight, 1:11; hate, 1:14; forsaken (the Lord), 1:4,28; evildoers, 1:4,16; sinful 1:4,18,28; rebellion, 1:2,5,20,23,28; abomination, 1:13; sacrifices, 1:11; (vain) offerings, 1:13; iniquity, 1:4,13.

Neither the Christian preaching nor the religious structure of ancient Israel (nor indeed, I would suppose, any other religious structure) consisted primarily (if at all) in the issuing either of new words or of new word-concepts or of new conceptual "content" for old words.<sup>14</sup>

Barr maintains that the uniqueness or newness of the structure was to be found in the new combination of words, and even here, the "changes" would not be radical.

...the sentence unlike the word is unique and non-recurrent. A language has a vocabulary, i.e. a stock of words which are constantly available and may be used again and again, but it does not have a stock of sentences...As a whole, the distinctiveness of biblical thought and language has to be settled at sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, individual words are important, but only so when read and understood in the context in which they are used. "Words isolated from their context have lost their significance and are not sacrosanct. What is essential is the truth which the words unitedly reveal."<sup>16</sup> As a result, our goal is not to deduce the theology of those who wrote the New Testament "straight out of the words they use". Instead, our task is a different one.

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<sup>14</sup> Barr, p. 263, emphasis mine.

<sup>15</sup> Barr, pp. 269-270. See also p. 249.

<sup>16</sup> Silva, p. 23 n. 28. If one attempts to relate individual words directly to theological thoughts, then this leads to a distortion "...of the semantic contribution made by words in contexts; the value of the context comes to be seen as something contributed by the word, and then it is read into the word as its contribution where the context is in fact different." As a result of this, Barr says that the word becomes "overloaded with interpretative suggestion." Barr, pp. 233,234.



We have the relatively modest goal of determining the most accurate English equivalents to biblical words, of being able to decide, with as much certainty as possible, what a specific Greek or Hebrew word in a specific context actually means.<sup>17</sup>

It is agreed by Silva, Barr and Gibson that the lexicographer's task does not include the move from the linguistic to the theological.<sup>18</sup> To treat theological assessments and linguistic assessments as synonymous can lead to confusion, for often the latter is simply used as a means to prove the former, whether or not the evidence is really there.<sup>19</sup> The failures that have been made in the attempts to do lexical studies on biblical words are proof of this.

...many such failures can be traced to the philosophy of language which allows a theological argument to do duty for a linguistic one, or assumes that the linguistic facts will fit the patterns of theological relations. Such a misuse of argument arises, I repeat, not from a deliberate intrusion of theology as such but from a philosophy which believes the language of the Bible somehow to reflect in its structure the pattern of the biblical events themselves. I think nevertheless that this ill-defined philosophy of language has been followed and cultivated because it seemed to serve and support the interests of certain types of theology.<sup>20</sup>

Much more could be said about pressing matters such as the context of a word, matters of ambiguity and synonymy.<sup>21</sup> The ideal, according to Silva, is a lexicography that balances

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<sup>17</sup> Silva, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> As cited in Silva, p. 172.

<sup>19</sup> Gibson, pp. 221-224.

<sup>20</sup> Barr, p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> Silva, pp. 138-169.

the etymology of a word with the meaning of the word. Sometimes the etymology will be seen to have a tremendous impact on the "current meaning" of a word, and at times it will not. This interdependence on etymology and current usage is the key to a proper lexicography.<sup>22</sup>

To summarize, the idea that etymology provides what is essential to a word persisted through the nineteenth century; unfortunately, today we still hear comments concerning the "basic", "proper", even "real" meaning of a word when the reference is only to its etymology. Modern studies compel us to reject this attitude and distrust a word's history; at the same time, we must use the past history of a word in coordination with its present use by means of the notion of transparency. Even in the closest ties between historical and descriptive studies, however, the priority of synchrony, the dominant function of usage, must be maintained.<sup>23</sup>

John's use of nikaô carries with it a rich and full tradition which helped to amplify the victory spoken of in the minds of the Christians to whom he wrote.<sup>24</sup> By the time that John wrote Revelation, the Greco-Roman world in which he and his audience lived had been permeated with the Greek goddess of victory (Nike), the Roman goddess of victory and equivalent to Nike (Victoria), the Jewish understanding of victory (nikaô)

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<sup>22</sup> Silva, pp. 47-51.

<sup>23</sup> Silva, p. 51. Due to the fact that the meaning of words change over time, to speak of the "real" meaning of that word is somewhat misleading. The real meaning of a word is relative to the time in which it is used. C.R. Taber, "Semantics" in IDB, Supp., p. 801.

<sup>24</sup> By taking the time to examine the many factors involved with the meaning of words such as this one, and what it meant to the Greeks, we hope to recapture "...the same total meaning and impact as the original text did to its receptors.". Taber, p. 807.

through death in the Maccabean literature, and of course the Old Testament understanding of victory. For an enlightening preface to the contexts of nikaô, we will note the contexts of this word group in a well-known contemporary of John's, Josephus.

#### The Diversity Of The Nikaô Word Group: Josephus

The nikaô word group can be found in a wide range of contexts, and a good source to note this spectrum are the writings of Josephus.<sup>25</sup> A look at his writings will reveal the many ways in which this word group was used.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout his works, the prominent contexts of nikaô are found in his discussions of military battles. Many of these references include God as playing an active role, many do not. As a result, there are examples where God is the giver of victories to mortals involved in earthly battles,<sup>27</sup> there are

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<sup>25</sup> Josephus' works are chosen as an example because of his Hebrew nationality and also because the dates of his writings concur with that of the dates of the New Testament. See J. Goldin, "Josephus, Flavius" in IDB, Vol. 2, pp. 987-988.

<sup>26</sup> We will base our discussion of Josephus' material on the following text(s): Josephus, Josephus: With An English Translation In Eight Volumes, H. St. J. Thackeray, et al trans., (London: William Heinemann, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1961 rpr., 1958 rpr., 1958 rpr., 1961 rpr., 1963 rpr.). The discussion will also use the following abbreviations for his works: Jewish Antiquities will be designated "A"; Jewish War, "B", Against Apion, "Ap"; and The Life, "Vita". The citations given out of Josephus' works are not exhaustive, but act as a representative sampling of the 325 occurrences of nikaô in his writings.

<sup>27</sup> "A" 3.45,46,54,55; 4.47,118; 5.65,204,225,263; 6.142,165,213; 7.1,75,98,109,128,220.

other examples where no mention of God is made,<sup>28</sup> and there are examples of victory statements where God is not mentioned, but His involvement is implied.<sup>29</sup> Closely related to this is the use of nikaô to describe the one, or ones who were in fact victorious ("B" 1.95; 2.270).

As a rule, in the "Jewish Antiquities" ("A"), the Israelites are the victors in battle. However, there are also times when they suffer defeat at the hands of their enemies ("A" 5.210,352; 6.368).

Sometimes it is claimed that ardour and greater knowledge result in war victorious ("A" 1.178; 7.237), at other times, to even attack someone is expressed by nikaô, but only when victory is the result of that attack ("Ap" 1.276....."Vita" 327,406).

Nikaô can be used to express success in battle ("Ap" 2.48), and it can be used to express being successful at mastering problems ("Ap" 1.120). Jacob is spoken of as having defeated an angel of God ("A" 1.332), and in another instance a man is victorious in a foot race ("A" 7.14). Along this same theme, there is victory in the Olympic games as well ("B" 1.415). In a less specific use, one can also be victorious over an obstacle ("B" 1.410).

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<sup>28</sup> "A" 1.172; 6.173....."B" 1.8,37,53,103,386; 3.156,210,451,482,496; 4.40,60,288,517; 5.125,376,390; 6.43,82,171,352; 7.326,360....."Ap" 1.185,251,266,300; 2.23,157....."Vita" 24,26,28,45,81,150.

<sup>29</sup> "A" 4.129; 6.76,116,130,140,141; 7.234,253,323.

Another significant context in which nikaô is found, are the emotions and feelings. For example, one can be overcome by hatred ("Vita" 378), one can be overpowered by feelings of rage, hate and lust all at once ("A" 6.137....."B" 6.263), and one can also be overcome by regrets ("B" 1.393; 4.285). One can triumph in a legal battle ("B" 1.540; 2.284), or one can triumph over pain ("B" 2.151). In fact, a motive itself can have conquering abilities ("A" 1.302). So strong are the emotions in this sphere, that it is said of one person that they were able to "outrival" someone else's goodwill ("Vita" 103). A direct result of this is that people are warned not to be overcome by emotions, be they displayed with wrath ("A" 2.141) or tears ("A" 4.322).

A spoken word, order or command can "prevail" ("B" 4.111), and a council, by their vote, can defeat something ("A" 6.10). Something can "deserve to win" ("A" 4.46), or, in the case of the Roman engines of war which "always did win", the name "Victor" was given to an inanimate object ("B" 5.299).

From this short discussion we see that nikaô can be found in a wide range of contexts with various meanings in Josephus' writings. By comparison, the biblical texts of the New Testament are much more focused in their use of nikaô. The victories spoken of in the New Testament deal with ethical imperatives, with God's victory of faithfulness, with Christ's victory over death, His messianic role, and with the victory that Christians can have over the "world". It is therefore appropriate to

briefly look at the contexts of victory, as expressed through nikaô, in the New Testament.

### Nikaô In The New Testament

The use of nikaô is not unique to Revelation, but the concentration of nikaô statements within the New Testament are found in Revelation (17 of 34).<sup>30</sup> The idea of victory or conquest is expressed throughout the New Testament, but is not limited exclusively to the nikaô word group. For example, in 2 Peter 2:19,20 we read:

They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved. For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first.<sup>31</sup>

Another passage, similar in content is found in Acts 19:16 where we read:

And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them,

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<sup>30</sup> Leivestad errs when he says that nikaô is found only twenty seven times in the New Testament. However, we do concur with his conclusion that "In Revelation nikaô is a key word". Leivestad, p. 212. Charles as well mistakenly says that there are only 11 occurrences of the word outside Revelation when in fact there are 17. Charles, Vol. I., p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> The Greek word group which is translated by the underlined words here is hêttaô, meaning to make worse; vanquish; by implication, to rate lower, be inferior, overcome. See for example, AGB, p. 349.

so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.<sup>32</sup>

We refer to these two passages as similar because they are the only passages in the New Testament where victory (defeat, conquering, overcoming) is expressed without the use of nikaô. Also, it is worth noting that both of these passages deal with victory in a negative manner. In the first passage, reference is made to believers who are overcome by false teachings, and enslaved once again in the defilements of the world. The state described is juxtaposed to the state of being in Christ.

In the second passage, a man possessed with an evil spirit is adjured by some Jewish itinerant exorcists. These would-be exorcists had noticed the effective use of the name of Jesus in Paul's work, and decided to emulate this formula. The result is that the evil spirit leapt on these seven men and mastered (overcame, subdued, overpowered) them. Again, as in the first passage, the conquering is a negative one.

What makes these (non-nikaô) "victories" negative is their status in comparison to the overriding picture of victory in the New Testament, where victory is seen as the crowning conclusion to the Christ-event. While outward appearances would suggest that Jesus' life had been snuffed out prematurely, the divine purpose and perception of those same events proved differently.

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<sup>32</sup> English translations of this Greek word, katakurieuô are widespread. The KJV has "overcame"; Amplified and RSV have "mastered"; NASB has "subdued"; and the NEB and NIV have "overpowered". The emphasis of this Greek word group is to lord against, i.e. control, subjugate, exercise dominion over, be lord over, overcome. See for example, AGB, p. 412.

The New Testament claim is that Jesus' victory supersedes any previous victory, and His victory is heightened by the fact that His rejection unto crucifixion and intended extinction, turned out to be the blow that fashioned Him into the "head of the corner" (Acts 3:12-4:12).

### Nikaô In The Epistles Of St. John<sup>33</sup>

1 John contains passages that are concomitant with Revelation in their use of nikaô, but the historical context of the two books is not the same. Revelation is written with an external "enemy" in mind, and 1 John is written with an internal "enemy" in mind. Doctrinal disputes, heresies, factions and ethical neglects can be cited as the occasion for the writing of 1 John, while persecution (or the very real possibility thereof) from the ruling forces is the main impetus for John's writing of Revelation.

Keeping this in mind, we realize that the victory held before the audience of 1 John is not the same as the victory held before the seven churches of Asia Minor. The struggle towards victory in 1 John is on a more metaphysical level, with Christians overcoming the "evil one" in a soteriological and ethical fashion (1 John 2:13,14). The opponents in 1 John come armed with false prophecy (4:1), false doctrine (4:3), and the

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<sup>33</sup> Seven occurrences: 2:13; 2:14; 4:4; 5:4; 5:4; 5:4; 5:5.



spirit of error (4:6). These false ways are what Christians are asked to overcome in 1 John, and they do (4:4).<sup>34</sup>

The victory in 1 John is much like the Pauline indicative-imperative. Because Christians love God, they obey and keep His commandments. Whereas the world would find such commandments burdensome (5:3), those who are born of God overcome the world (5:4). The result is that by overcoming the world, Christians are able to do what the world finds as burdensome, namely, keeping the commandments of God.

In 1 John, Christians face the evil one in the form of neglecting or perverting God's commandments. In Revelation, Christians face a more "fleshly" foe, one that challenges not only their obedience to God's commandments, but threatens to punish such behaviour, with the possible result of death for such obedience. As we shall see in the texts to follow, nikaô finds its fullest New Testament meaning only in and through the work and person of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:4; Rev. 3:21).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See for example: J.L. Houlden, A Commentary On The Johannine Epistles in "Harper's New Testament Commentaries", (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), pp. 109-110. Frederick Denison Maurice, The Epistles Of St. John: A Series Of Lectures On Christian Ethics, (London: Macmillan And Co., 1881), pp. 227-228. F.F. Bruce, The Epistles Of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes, (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970), pp. 105-106. Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistles Of St John: The Greek Text With Notes And Essays, Fourth Edition, (London: Macmillan And Co., Limited, 1902), pp. 143-144.

<sup>35</sup> With regard to the importance of Jesus for victory in 1 John see Maurice, pp. 101-116, 262-265; Houlden, pp. 72, 73, 124; Westcott, pp. 60, 61, 179, 180; Bruce, pp. 57-59, 117-118.

Nikaô In Paul's Letter To The Romans<sup>36</sup>

Our understanding of victory by means of the nikaô word group is also broadened with seven references in the Pauline corpus. Paul's letter to the Romans, like 1 John, contains similar terminology, but the occasion of the letter is also different than that of Revelation.<sup>37</sup> Part of the victory spoken of by Paul in Romans is a celebration of God's victory in faithfulness (3:4). Even though spiritual infidelity is characteristic of humankind's relationship to God, were God to be "put on trial" for His faithfulness, He would in fact be the "victorious litigant".<sup>38</sup>

The concern of the two nikaô statements in 12:21 is more of an ethical imperative than that of the statements in Revela-

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<sup>36</sup> Four occurrences: 3:4; 8:37; 12:21; 12:21.

<sup>37</sup> "There had been no general persecution of Christians by the Roman authorities at the time he [Paul] wrote [Romans]". Ernest Best, The Letter Of Paul To The Romans, in "The Cambridge Bible Commentary", (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1967), p. 103.

<sup>38</sup> See, C.K. Barrett, A Commentary On The Epistle To The Romans, in "Black's New Testament Commentaries" (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1967 rpr.), p. 63. Ulrich Wilckens, Der Brief an die Roemer, 1 Teilband, Roemer 1-5, in "Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Band VI, 1", (Zuerich: Benziger Verlag, 1978), pp. 164,165. F.L. Godet, Commentary on Romans, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), pp. 135,136. Karl Barth, The Epistle To The Romans, Sixth Edition, Edwyn C. Hoskyns, trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968 rpr.), p. 81. Anders Nygren, Commentary On Romans, (Philadelphia: Fortres Press, 1949 rpr.), p. 138. Ernst Kaesemann, Commentary on Romans, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, trans., (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982 rpr.), pp. 81-82. Best, p. 35.

tion. Romans 12:21 addresses the Christian's response to evil, and states that evil is not overcome by ignoring it and being passive, but evil is overcome only when "counterattacked" with good. Only in this way does good have "the last word".<sup>39</sup>

The remaining nikaô passage in Romans is found in 8:37 where Paul states that not only can Christians be victorious and conquerors, they can be more than conquerors. While Christians were not experiencing a systematic persecution ordained by the government, they were nevertheless experiencing sufferings and trials. In this capacity, 8:37 approaches the nature of victory that is proclaimed throughout Revelation, where persecution was directed at Christians.<sup>40</sup>

Paul's words in 8:37 are concerned with firmly implanting in the Christian mind the fact that nothing will be able to separate the Christian from the love of God. The victory, hope and salvation that becomes the Christian's inseparable possession is the result of their commitment to the Christ-event. However, it is also that same Christ-event that is the "presupposition of their tribulation".<sup>41</sup>

Paul charges Christians to keep Christ as their focal point as they experience famine, distress, nakedness, peril or even persecution and the sword (8:35). Paul's conclusion is that

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<sup>39</sup> Godet, pp. 438,439. See also Best, p. 146; Barth, Epistle, pp. 475-481; Barrett, Commentary, pp. 242,243; Nygren, pp. 423-426; Kaesemann, Commentary, p. 349.

<sup>40</sup> Which we will discuss in more detail below.

<sup>41</sup> Kaesemann, Commentary, p. 250.

Christians do not have to "just endure" these evils, but that they can in fact be more than conquerors in relation to them. Apart from Christ these victories would not be possible, but in Christ, Christians "overcome in an overwhelming victory".<sup>42</sup>

Nikaô In Paul's First Letter To The Corinthians<sup>43</sup>

The tremendous victory which Christ has accomplished, which in turn furbishes the Christian with such an unassailable armour, is His victory over death. Paul's letter to the Corinthians expresses this conquest of Christ's in 15:54-57, a passage which Barth has referred to as the crowning glory of the entire letter.<sup>44</sup>

Christ's victorious resurrection from the dead forms an important basis for Paul's entire proclamation, for had Christ not conquered death by His resurrection, all would be in vain, as he states in 1 Cor. 15:12-19. The preceding fourteen chapters of the letter to the Corinthians would be for naught had Christ not risen from the dead. But, if Christ did in fact conquer

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<sup>42</sup> Best, p. 103. See also the comments in: Nygren, p. 348; Barrett, Commentary, pp. 173,174; Barth, Epistle, pp. 328,29; Godet, p. 333.

<sup>43</sup> Three occurrences: 15:54; 15:55; 15:57.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth, Die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine Akademische Vorlesung ueber 1 Kor. 15, (Zuerich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953), p. 57. Earlier he spoke of the fifteenth chapter as "...den Schluss und hoehepunkt des ganzen Briefes...auch seinen Schluesselpunkt.". Barth, Toten, p. 1. See also F.L. Godet, Commentary on First Corinthians, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1977), pp. 868-876.

death, then we too, says Paul, will be changed (15:51,52), and because of this, the Pauline imperative immediately follows the nikaô statements found in 15:54-57:

Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

As a result, authority is given to Paul's preceding chapters, and Christ's victory over death becomes axiomatic for the Pauline indicative-imperative.

#### Nikaô In The Gospels<sup>45</sup>

The only nikaô statement in the fourth Gospel reiterates this very claim to victory.<sup>46</sup> Here Jesus says that the world may offer His followers tribulation, but the good news is that "I [Jesus] have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Evil may manifest itself in various forms (cf. Rom. 8:35), but the confidence of the Church is based on the immutable fact that Christ has already won the victory, and has won it for all times. "Evil can no longer harm those who belong to Christ..."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Three occurrences: Mt. 12:20; Lk. 11:22; Jn. 16:33.

<sup>46</sup> See John 12:31 and 16:11 as examples of "non-nikaô" victories.

<sup>47</sup> C.K. Barrett, The Gospel According To St. John: An Introduction With Commentary And Notes On The Greek Text, Second Edition, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978 rpr.), p. 499. See also B.F. Westcott, The Gospel According To St. John, (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 236. J.N. Sanders and B.A. Mastin, A Commentary On The Gospel According To St. John, (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), p. 365.

Matthew 12:20 and Luke 11:22 form the remaining nikaô statements in the New Testament, and both of these texts use the term to reveal Messianic announcements of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> These two synoptic passages however, do not, concur with the thrust of nikaô passages such as Rom. 8:37; 1 Cor. 15:54-57 and those in the Epistle of John. While Jesus' Messianic status is important to His role as conqueror, the passages in Matthew and Luke fall short of an overt proclamation of Christ as this conqueror.

The common element in all of the above cited passages is that the Christ-event becomes the basis not only for a lifestyle of discipleship to that great event and person, but also becomes the basis for the eventual systematic persecution of followers of Christ by the ruling authorities in government. The nature of that persecution of Christians by the Roman government is a point that has to be clarified before finally examining the victory motif in Revelation.

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<sup>48</sup> For Matthew see Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary On The Gospel According To St. Matthew in "Black's New Testament Commentaries", (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1971 rpr.), p. 148. H. Genedict Green, The Gospel According To Matthew In The Revised Standard Version, (Oxford: University Press, 1975), p. 125. A.W. Argyle, The Gospel Accordign To Matthew, (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1963), pp. 94,95. For Luke see E.J. Tinsley, The Gospel According To Luke, in "The Cambridge Bible Commentary", (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1965), pp. 130-131. "The earthly Jesus demonstrates by his actions that he is the hidden victor over the forces opposed to God, whilst it is not until the resurrection that he achieves the final victory over sin, death and the devil." Guenther, p. 651. It is true that Jesus does demonstrate His status by signs and actions who He is, but His victory goes unrecognized in these passages. Bauernfeind, p. 944.

Unlike the passages we have briefly looked at thus far, persecution, or the imminent possibilities thereof is found in Revelation. Further, the military language employed throughout Revelation also separates this body of victory statements from the other New Testament passages, with the exception of Rom. 8:37 and John 16:33.<sup>49</sup>

Each book of the New Testament was written to a specific group of people with a specific need. The need that Revelation addresses from beginning to end is one of a struggle, and a very real one at that. It is not a struggle involving ethical imperatives to love one another, nor is it only a struggle to be wary of false prophets and their doctrines, but it is a struggle against principalities that wish to quench the spirit of Christians via physical restraints.

In this way, Revelation's victory motif does not contradict or supersede the other New Testament victory statements, but it adds another important facet to the outworking and accomplishment of that victory. The rich tradition of victory from the Old Testament, the Intertestamental literature and the Greco-Roman victory cults finds itself applied anew to first-century Christians in their struggle to remain faithful to their God. Like the Old Testament warrior, like the martyrs in 2 and 4 Maccabees, and like the devotees of Nike and Victoria, the Christians in the

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<sup>49</sup> For the military-like verses in Revelation, see verses such as 1:9,16; 2:10,12,16,27; 6:2-4,8,11,15; 9:7-11,15-19; 11:2,7,17; 12:7-17; 13:7-10; 15:2; 16:3-6,12,14,16; 17:6,14,17,18; 18:2,17-24; 19:2-6,11-21; 20:1-4,7-10. See also Collins, Combat, p. 161.

seven churches of Asia Minor seek their God to enable them to be victorious in their specific situation of religious persecution.

We are now in a position to examine the theology of victory as expressed by nikaô in Revelation. The previous chapters have attempted to highlight victory as a religious expression not only in the Jewish faith, but also in the pagan victory cults of the Greco-Roman world.

We also noted that Revelation's use of nikaô is unique within the New Testament, and we mentioned briefly that that was due to its particular Sitz im Leben. Therefore, to begin our discussion of victory in Revelation, we will note the contemporary religio-political situation, which in turn will help us to understand the theology of victory in Revelation.



## CHAPTER V

### Nikaô IN REVELATION

#### Persecution Of Christians In Revelation

At various points throughout this thesis, reference has been made to the fact that persecution (or the very real possibility thereof) played a significant role in Revelation and its use of the nikaô motif. In ancient times, the goal of any contest, be it in the legal realm, the Olympic games, or on the battlefield, was always victory. With time, victory also came to play a role in other important areas of life, such as emotions, death in a general sense, and death in the case of martyrdoms.

It would be erroneous to say that one specific kind of victory is represented by the victory statements in Revelation. While persecution, or the possibility thereof, looms over the heads of the recipients of Revelation, it is not possible to

substantiate from the text to what extent Christians were being persecuted in a systematic fashion at the time Revelation was written.

The debate as to what level of persecution was extent at the time Revelation was written is ongoing and unresolved.<sup>1</sup> Unless some watershed manuscript is discovered, the debate will continue to be divided between those who say that Christians were experiencing a systematic persecution because of their faith by the Roman government in the first century CE, and those who say that they were not experiencing religious persecution.<sup>2</sup>

While a plethora of quotes could be delineated here in support of either position, the scope of this thesis does not allow such a detailed discussion. We can note that key documents for this debate, such as Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, have proven to be "profitable" for both sides of the argument. Nevertheless, one remaining and relevant fact that can be stated with assurance, is that persecution of Christians did in fact take place under both the rule of Nero and Domitian. Eusebius states that Domitian proved his cruelty to Christians just as

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<sup>1</sup> As an example of the unwillingness to clearly state what the extent of persecution was, see John Oman, Book Of Revelation: Theory Of The Text; Rearranged Text And Translation; Commentary, (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1923), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> For a look at some of the accumulated data for both sides of the position, see Paul Keresztes, "The Imperial Roman Government and the Christian Church: I. From Nero to the Severi" in ANRW, II, 23.1, p. 267, ns. 99,100.

Nero had done,<sup>3</sup> and that under Domitian's reign, there was persecution and martyrdoms (plural).<sup>4</sup> The extent of this persecution is not known with certainty, but following Eusebius' words, it must have been more than just a few casualties.

A prominent name in this discussion is Sherwin-White, and his conclusion is that persecution would not have been widespread until the great persecutions of the third century.<sup>5</sup> Peter Garnsey follows this line of argument, admitting that Christians were persecuted, but alerts his readers that in spite of persecution suffered by the faithful, the scenario was more like "a tolerant paganism and an intolerant Christianity".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eusebius, Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History, Kirsopp Lake, trans. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965 rpr.), Book, 3.17,18., p. 235, Vol. I.

<sup>4</sup> James Stevenson ed., A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337, (London: S.P. C.K.), Book 3.18, pp. 1-16. Eusebius, Eusebius Pamphili: Ecclesiastical History, Books 1-5, Roy J. Deferrari, trans. in "The Fathers Of The Church: A New Translation" (Washington: The Catholic University Of America Press, 1965 rpr.), Book 3.18, pp. 165-66. See also Eusebius, The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine, G.A. Williamson, trans., (New York: New York University Press, 1966), Book 3.17,18., pp. 125-126.

<sup>5</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, The Letters Of Pliny: A Historical And Social Commentary, (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 772-787.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Garnsey, "Religious Toleration In Classical Antiquity" in Persecution And Toleration: Papers Read At The Twenty-Second Summer Meeting And The Twenty-Third Winter Meeting Of The Ecclesiastical Historical Society, W.J. Sheils, ed. (Paderstow: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 1. "...the basic ground for the popular objection to the Christians was their otherness and exclusiveness." Sherwin-White, p. 785, n.2. "Although they sought in every other way to be loyal citizens of the empire, Christians were guilty of one of the most serious forms of treason: the sacrilege of nonconformity in public worship". Agnes Cunningham, ed. The Early Church and the State, (Philadel-

Others state that Christianity was persecuted by the Roman government in the first two centuries, but do not describe the nature and extent of that persecution.<sup>7</sup> Pobee is more specific when he says that the content of a book like Revelation presupposes that the "Church [is] under attack".<sup>8</sup>

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phia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 2. "Devotion produced ascetic discipline, and with a capacity for disciplined organization the Church impinged on the politics of the Empire with an impetus unknown to philosophy. The regular meetings established, and, Pliny remarks, cemented by oath (sacramento) a familiar solidarity and an absolute refusal to share in any gesture of emperor-worship. Such obstinate standing apart from the universal empire in a 'hatred of the human race' irritated the authorities and prompted a long series of purges, from the persecution under Nero occasioned by the fire of Rome in A.D. 64 to the last and greatest offensive by Diocletian in 303." Shiel, p. 50. The earliest Roman records (110-122 CE) that we have describing Christianity, cast that religion in a negative light. Christianity, because of its absolute claims, became too abrasive even for the extremely tolerant Romans. As a result, Christians were persecuted like no other contemporary religion. Dieter Luehrmann, "'SUPERSTITIO' - die Beurteilung des fruhen Christentums durch die Roemer" in Theologische Zeitschrift 42 (1986, Heft 3), pp. 193,195,200,201,205-208,211,213. See also Meeks, "Social", p. 691; A.Y. Collins, "Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation" in Apocalypticism, Hellholm, ed., p. 742, n. 70; Lilje, pp. 31-33,63. Smallwood, pp. 384,540. John Helgeland, "Roman Army Religion" in ANRW, II, 16.2, p. 1496.

<sup>7</sup> Simeon L. Guterman, Religious Toleration And Persecution In Ancient Rome, (London: Aiglon Press Ltd., 1951), pp. 41-42.

<sup>8</sup> John S. Pobee, Persecution And Martyrdom In The Theology Of Paul, in "Journal For The Study Of The New Testament, Supplement Series 6", Bruce D. Chilton, et al eds. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 13. Charles uses this line of argumentation in order to arrive at his dates for the two parts of Revelation, chapters 1-3 and 4-22. He sees world-wide persecution as "one of the chief themes of the Apocalypse." Charles, Vol. I., p. 44. For a summary of the arguments for the persecution of Christianity in the first century CE based on Nero, Domitian, Pliny, Trajan, Eusebius and Revelation, see Keresztes, pp. 247-287; J.W.C. Wand, A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1974 rpr.), p. 31; Smallwood, p. 381.

The discussion of the relationship between Christians and the Roman government continues to be controversial and complex because of the scarcity of evidence. This controversy will not be resolved in this thesis, but what is important for our discussion is that there was some level of persecution and oppression directed at Christians from the Roman government when Revelation was written.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, due to the fact that Christians maintained their faith to the exclusion and rejection of all other gods, tensions arose and brought Christians into an

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<sup>9</sup> There are numerous scholars who admit that the exact severity of the persecutions is not certain. Nevertheless, these same scholars go on to say that persecution was a very significant factor in John's writing. See for example: Smallwood, pp. 351-352; Wand, p. 10; Archie Penner, The Christian, The State, and the New Testament, (Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., 1959), pp. 116,117; Barrett, Background, pp. 15-19; Kiddle, p. 61. Donald L. Jones, "Christianity and the Roman Imperial Cult" in ANRW, II, 23.2, pp. 1023-1035. In 1976, A.Y. Collins published her Ph.D. dissertation on the combat myth within Revelation. In this work she stated quite firmly that persecution (State ordained) was the "contemporary situation" of Revelation. Collins, Combat, pp. 185,186. However, in a later publication, no doubt due to the thesis of that work, she is less certain of this persecution. She now reports in one part of her book that the level of State ordained persecution was very low, in light of the many reports from scholars that it was high. A.Y. Collins, Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse, (Philiadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 69-71,73, 77,84. In the later part of her work however, when applying her catharsis thesis, which of course demands a crisis (having earlier referred to it as a "perceived crisis" as opposed to a "real" one), she now emphasizes the severity of the persecution. Collins, Catharsis, pp. 98-104,116,123-136,129,133,137-138,141-144,149-154,156-161. Our discussion of nikaô in Revelation will work under the well-attested presupposition that persecution was directed at Christians because of their beliefs at the time of Revelation.

unfavourable position with their contemporaries.<sup>10</sup> This conflict is expressed throughout Revelation, and we begin our examination of the text with the letters to the seven churches.

### The Letters To The Seven Churches

While a systematic persecution may not have been the case, Revelation

...could not have been written when the Church enjoyed external peace; on the contrary, it demonstrates beyond

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<sup>10</sup> "...the sporadic actions of the Roman 'government' against Christians during this period were due primarily to the pressure of public opinion. This negative public opinion was owing, ostensibly, to the belief that Christians were guilty of certain abominations (flagitia) such as incest and cannibalism. De Ste. Croix argues plausibly that such accusations only masked a deeper truer reason, namely that the Christians' refusal to worship any god but their own aroused pagan hostility. The pagans feared that this exclusiveness alienated the goodwill of the gods and endangered the well-being of nature and society." Collins, Catharsis, p. 70. We had noted in chapters 3-5 that the gods were very important to the Greco-Romans, therefore, "The polis protected its gods because the gods protected the polis". Garnsey, p. 3. Fears, pp. 737,772. See also Michael P. Speidel and Alexandra Dimitrova-Milcheva, "The Cult of the Genii in the Roman Army and a New Military Deity" in ANRW, II, 16.2, p. 1542. The continuing conviction of this position carried over even into the fifth century, when Christianity was "blamed" for Rome's losses in battle. "The debate as to whether the greatness of Rome had been created by the old gods or whether the new religion [Christianity] had brought about a rejuvenation of the Empire had been pursued without intermission from the time of Tertullian. The last great confrontation had been brought about by the conflict around the statue of Victoria." When the Goths sacked Rome, "Those of the old faith clamorously complained to the Christians that their religion had brought Rome to her downfall". Johannes Geffcken, The Last Days Of Greco-Roman Paganism, Sabine MacCormack, trans., "Europe in the Middle Ages, Selected Studies, Vol. 8", (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1978 rpr.), pp. 226,227.

doubt that Christianity was engaged in a death battle with Imperial Rome.<sup>11</sup>

The letters establish the tone for the entire work, and they also include 8 of the 17 nikaô references. When John began his letter in 1:9 he said that he shared in their tribulation and in their patient endurance. Further, he said that he was on the island of Patmos because of his allegiance to Christ. Five of the seven churches share the experience of suffering because of their allegiance to Christ, and the two churches that do not (Sardis and Laodicea), are chastised for their weak testimony.

The "faithful" five churches are admonished for certain shortcomings, but are largely praised for enduring patiently and bearing up for Christ's name, and for not having grown weary in doing so and they are exhorted to continue doing so. The picture, while not specific, is nevertheless clear. Specifically we do not know what they were suffering, but we do know that they were experiencing some forms of serious oppression.

When their lifestyles emulate that of Christ (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira and Philadelphia), they are then persecuted as Christ was. However, when their lifestyles are accommodated to "the world" (Sardis, Laodicea), then persecution

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<sup>11</sup> Keresztes, p. 271. Gager: "Whatever its date and location, the writing inescapably presupposes a situation in which believers had experienced suffering and death at the hands of Rome." John G. Gager, "The Attainment of Millennial Bliss Through Myth: The Book of Revelation" in Visionaries And Their Apocalypses, Paul D. Hanson ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 147. Perrin: "...it [Revelation] is self-evidently written to encourage Christians in a situation of persecution." Perrin, "Apocalyptic", p. 138.

is no longer a factor. The task set before the churches cannot be down-played, for if they overcome (their obstacles, persecutions, oppression), then they will sit with Christ on His throne, which was His reward when He overcame (3:21). Hence, just as Christ's task on earth was difficult yet possible, so too the churches are challenged to follow His example in their difficult but possible situation.<sup>12</sup>

### The Role Of Persecution In Revelation

The purpose of the letters to the seven churches is especially important in arriving at an understanding of the conqueror in Revelation. Each of the seven letters ends with the promise that "To him who conquers I [Jesus] will grant...", and therefore we must ask, what are they encouraged to conquer? Given the nature of the content of the letters, we realize that there is more at stake in these letters than an investigation to see if the churches are ready for the parousia.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of the

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<sup>12</sup> Note the language which demonstrates that their overcoming has already occurred in past difficulties (2:2,3,9,13,19,24; 3:8), that it continues in the present (2:3,9,13,19,24; 3:8), and that it will face them in the future as well (2:7,10,11,17,25,26). They are praised for not denying the faith, which of course implies that they were being "encouraged" to do so (2:3,10,11,13,24,25; 3:8).

<sup>13</sup> Charles, one of the few commentators who subscribes to a two-part Apocalypse (chs. 1-3; 4-22), says that the letters were originally written with the parousia in mind. However, when the latter chapters of Revelation were written under the reign of Domitian and persecution became widespread, then the letters were edited to now address that need. Then, with the editing complete, the now redacted 22 chapters were finally sent to the



letters is more likely to see if the churches are prepared to endure persecution, now, and in the future as well.<sup>14</sup> While some churches have already experienced hardships, they are also told to expect more. But through it all, they are exhorted to continue to persevere, and to hold fast until the end.<sup>15</sup>

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churches. While his presentation of this hypothesis is interesting, it is a circular argument. His starting point is that 3:10 was a later addition made by John. Based on that statement he then proceeds to say that there were more changes made. Whenever he finds any references in the letters that hint at persecution and suffering, he then includes them with 3:10 as later redactions. Of the 51 verses in chapters 2 and 3, he systematically removes at least 20 of them (2:7,8,10,11,13,17,18,26-29; 3:3,5-7,12-14,21,22; and the number may even be as great as 26 if we include passages such as 2:2,3,9,19; 3:1,8) because they contain persecution-type connotations, which he says could not have been in the original letters. Therefore, based on his exclusion of 3:10 (for which no substantial argument is given), he removes these other verses. In this way he hoped to show that the letters were originally written to prepare the readers for the parousia, and then later redacted for the prevalence of persecution. Charles, Vol. I., pp. 43-47.

<sup>14</sup> For to conquer is to "stand fast in the ordeal of persecution". T.F. Glasson, The Revelation Of John, "The Cambridge Bible Commentary", (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1965), p. 23. "...and the conqueror is he whose life bears the marks of purity and love, and whose faith triumphs over persecution." Kiddle, p. 25. See also p. 18. See also Oman, p. 100; Lilje, pp. 31,63; Charles, Vol. I., pp. 53,54; W. Harrington, pp. 85,86; Philip Carrington, The Meaning Of The Revelation, (London: Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), pp. 98,303; Ladd, Commentary, p. 41; George Eldon Ladd, A Theology Of The New Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 619; Gager, pp. 153 ff. Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation" in The Harvard Theological Review, Vol. 69 (Massachusetts: The Faculty Of Divinity In Harvard University, 1976), p. 424; Graeme Goldsworthy, The Gospel In Revelation: Gospel and Apocalypse, (Exeter, Devon: The Paternoster Press, 1984), p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ellul says that each of the churches faces its own particular persecution and/or temptation, but the common denominator is that these churches are all in a "combat situation". He goes on to say that "...there is never here a combat or victory of the moral or socio-political order; it is a victory

Caird says the letters were not written with the parousia in mind, but instead, that they were written to see if the churches were ready to face an imminent "thorough-going persecution".<sup>16</sup> The conquering entailed in the letters is largely related to

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first of all spiritual, called to be inscribed subsequently in all human forms. It is moreover a victory won on our plane, on our level, but which goes much further: toward eternal life (2:7), communion with God (2:2), victory over death (2:17), lordship and victory over the destructive powers (3:5,12,21): then in all these cases there is affirmation of life, the triumph of life.". Jacques Ellul, Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation, George W. Schreiner, trans. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 126-128.

<sup>16</sup> Four reasons are given for this: First of all, the examination is being conducted by Christ, who continually says that He is aware of their weaknesses and their strengths. Accordingly, "...they are being prepared by him, not for him". Caird, p. 27. Secondly, in four of the seven letters, Christ admonishes the churches that they are to repent and be watchful, or else He (Christ) will come in judgment. Here we need to note that if an imminent parousia was the issue that the letters addressed, then these admonitions would seem out of place. That fact (His return) would be a foregone conclusion, they would not need to be reminded of it. Instead, what it does seem to suggest is that the churches are to continue on in their perseverance (cf. 3:21). "The entire sequence is a literary composition designed to impress upon the Church universal the necessity of patient endurance in the period of impending persecution". Mounce, p. 84. Thirdly, the Christian virtues which are praised with the most frequency are those of loyalty, endurance, patience and constancy, whereas other Christian virtues such as love and joy are hardly mentioned. The reason? It seems that the church is not living in particularly "normal" times, but instead are facing times which indicate that the churches are facing a struggle. This is not to say that love and joy are not important characteristics in the Christian, but what it does indicate to us is the nature of the situation of the church at that particular time. A specific Weltanschauung is being conveyed. Lastly, "The character of the letters is determined by the promises to the Conqueror which form their climax.". Caird, p. 27. Others combine the parousia and persecution as the occasion for the writing of Revelation. Schuyler Brown, The Origins of Christianity: A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 30. For a summary of some other positions on the purpose/function of the letters, see Mounce, pp. 83-85.

persecution. To be sure, a certain level of persecution was already present, but a full scale, systematic attack on the church was yet to come. This fact is never disputed throughout Revelation, but instead, the Christians to whom Revelation was written are encouraged and exhorted to overcome these events, not to shirk away from them.

To say that the earth is the stage for the cosmic (spiritual) battle occurring elsewhere would not be erroneous. There is a conflict occurring, and the manifestation of that battle is seen in the life of the church. However, behind all of the activities that take place on earth, lie the "...mysterious happenings of the divine ordination".<sup>17</sup> The spiritual dimensions of this battle cannot be skirted, for we are told in Revelation that

...as a consequence of Satan's failure against Christ, spiritual wickedness has ceased to work in the high places of heaven, and has mustered its forces on earth for the outbreak of Antichrist.<sup>18</sup>

The essential truth that John is trying to convey is that this persecution is not meaningless, it is an essential part of God's redemptive purpose.<sup>19</sup> As a result, three facts are stated

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<sup>17</sup> D.H. Lawrence, Apocalypse And The Writings On Revelation, Mara Kalnins, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> Austin Farrer, The Revelation Of St. John The Divine (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 145,146. The basis for Farrer's statement is Rev. 12:7-12. See also Leivestad, pp. 226,227.

<sup>19</sup> The troubles that Christians face are not without cause. They evidence the tension between the forces of evil and righteousness which manifest themselves until the eschatological

at the outset of Revelation which lay an important foundation for the nikaô statements that follow. First, the Revelation comes from the God who holds eternity as one of His attributes (1:4). Secondly, it also comes from Jesus Christ (1:5) "...and this is a reminder that the whole purpose of God had been contracted to a microcosm in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus."<sup>20</sup> Thirdly, by Christ's death, His followers are appointed "...to be a royal house of priests to his God and Father" (1:6), and therefore called to share in "...the ordeal and sovereignty and endurance (1:9), to reign in the midst of their martyrdom as he had reigned from the Cross."<sup>21</sup>

John wants to remind his readers that the events which lie before them are part of the ultimate "all-embracing purpose."<sup>22</sup> Christ becomes the paradigmatic figure to which the believers

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release found in the parousia. Until the Kingdom of God is finally established, this age will be an age filled with that tension. Living within this tension, the followers of Christ must endure the onslaughts of the evil one and continue to preach the Gospel (cf. Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:10). For if this cause (preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth) is only to be met with defeat, then we could quote 1 Cor. 15:19b and say that "...we are of all men most to be pitied". However, such is not the predicament which Christ leaves His churches in. "It [the Gospel] will be preached effectively in all the world." Ladd, Commentary, pp. 98,99; underlining mine. "There is no question in Revelation that the present tension between heaven and earth, the life of the age to come and this age, is any other than a temporary phenomenon and cannot be considered a fact which is accepted as a permanent theological datum." Rowland, Origins, p. 293.

<sup>20</sup> Caird, p. 291.

<sup>21</sup> Caird, p. 291.

<sup>22</sup> Caird, p. 292.

must look as they suffer, for God "...holds his hand, not willing that any of his creatures should perish, and as long as he does so, the martyrs must suffer. Martyrdom, like the Cross, is the cost of divine patience."<sup>23</sup>

Jesus has been a faithful witness (1:5; 3:14), and this historic testimony is now used to encourage the seven churches: "John never allows his readers to forget that earthly conduct matters and matters eternally."<sup>24</sup> The church plays a fundamental role in that through it, God wishes to lead the world to repentance (3:7-9; 11:13; 14:6,7; 20:1-6). This can only be accomplished if the Lamb is followed (14:4).

The acts of Christians on earth help to complete the past-present-future schema of God's redemptive plan: past = the Christ-event; present = overcoming; future = the reign of God.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, "Any achievement of man in the old order, however imperfect, provided it has value in the sight of God, will find its place in the healed and transfigured life of the new Jerusalem."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Caird, p. 295.

<sup>24</sup> Caird, p. 297.

<sup>25</sup> Overcoming then follows that same schema. Because of the Christ-event in the past, they are called, and are able to, overcome in the present, which in turn has eschatological ramifications.

<sup>26</sup> Caird, p. 300. The promised victory is present already; in fact, it is a past event (cf. 1 John 5:4ff). See Bauernfeind, p. 945.

Finally, all of this eschatological activity is working towards a goal. As we noted above, it is fulfilling God's redemptive plan. Revelation, in its understanding of history does not offer us "a preview of events to the end of time" but instead, it gives us "insight into principles which govern the course of history in all times."<sup>27</sup> But what is this history, and what is its purpose?

Meaning in history lies in its forward direction--one in which human freedom raises itself ever higher toward Divinity, and evil comes ever closer to being conquered. There is either this kind of meaning in history, or else there is no meaning in it at all.<sup>28</sup>

#### The Overcomer Of Revelation

As a result the overcomer, or the conqueror, of Revelation is a very specific person with a very specific task.<sup>29</sup> The seven letters indicate that part of the "conquering task" is to avoid the ploys of apostates or heretics, such as the Nicolaitians, the teachings of Balaam, those who follow Jezebel, and those of the synagogue of Satan (2:6,9,14,15,20,24; 3:9). However, even

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<sup>27</sup> Henry Sloane Coffin, "To Him That Overcometh" in Interpretation: A Journal Of Bible And Theology, (Vol. 5, January 1951), p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, God's Presence In History: Jewish Affirmations And Philosophical Reflections, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> While John does not give an operational definition of "the conqueror", a purusal of the context of the nikaô statements elucidates who the conqueror is, and what is required of him or her.

though these false teachings exist and are obviously a temptation in varying degrees, only the church in Thyatira seems to have a significant number of its members involved in this unacceptable behaviour (2:20-23). The false doctrines and teachings are a significant element of the letters, but only in that the outworking of all falsehood is the persecution of the embodiment of all truth, namely Christianity.<sup>30</sup>

The conqueror is presented with a formidable task in Revelation. He does the will of Christ, no matter what the cost (2:26), his victory is to emulate Christ's victory (3:21), he has Christ as his example of someone who successfully conquered (3:21; 5:5; 12:11; 17:14), he has persevered until the end (7:14), he has conquered Satan because of Christ's previous work (12:11), he suffers a possible martyrdom by Satan, who in martyring Christians actually gives victory to those whom he kills (11:7; 13:7), and the conqueror's final status is that even in death he is victorious (15:2), will partake in the defeat of evil once and for all (17:14), and will partake in the heavenly heritage (21:7).

The conqueror, in other words, is the victim of persecution, whose martyr's death is his victory, just as the Cross was the victory of Christ. He is

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<sup>30</sup> For an example of someone who combines persecution and heresy as the two "cementing" factors of the church, see: Erwin R. Goodenough, The Church In The Roman Empire, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 33. For more on the conflict of pseudos and alêtheia in Revelation see John Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John", in Suffering, Horbury & McNeil eds., pp. 101,102,105,114-117.

the Christian in whom Christ wins afresh with the weapons of love the victory of Calvary.<sup>31</sup>

### Conquering Does Not Necessitate Martyrdom

An important facet of the conqueror in Revelation is found in the debate as to whether or not the term applies only to those who die a martyr's death, or if it is a more inclusive term, referring to any and all Christians that "hold fast to the end". Kiddle boldly states that the conqueror "...can be only the martyr."<sup>32</sup>

I cannot agree with his conclusion for three reasons. First of all, the previous discussions of New Testament nikaô contexts outside Revelation clearly show that martyrdom alone is not the criterion by which conquering is brought to fruition. While passages such as Rom. 8:37 do use nikaô in the context of death (martyrdom), this passage also includes non-fatal results such as famine and nakedness (8:35). Further, in Rom. 12:21 the

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<sup>31</sup> Caird, p. 33.

<sup>32</sup> Kiddle, p. 63. Note however that at one point Kiddle says that faithful endurance need not lead to death. Kiddle, p. xlvi. Rosscup misconstrues Kiddle's statement quoted above, and incorrectly says that Kiddle necessitates martyrdom for the conqueror in only two churches. Rosscup, "Overcomer", p. 262. Charles agrees with Kiddle that the conqueror is only the martyr. Charles, Vol. I., pp. 53, 54, 101. He does concede that martyrdom has many facets to it, such as not eating forbidden meats in the case of the church at Pergamos (p. 66). Further, in his comment on 2:26 he says that the one who keeps Christ's works is the victor, and he makes no reference to martyrdom in this context (p. 74).



context of nikaô pertains to ethical imperatives, not to martyrdoms alone.

As well, to overcome the evil one in 1 John does not involve martyrdom. Instead, overcoming involves obedience to God's commandments (2:13,14), to be wary of false doctrines (4:4), to be faithful to, and to have faith in, Christ (5:4,5). Also, very important in this discussion is the fact that victory is the result of Christ's death, not the death of others (1 Cor. 15:57).

Secondly, we concur with Beasley-Murray who says that

"...the letters themselves allow neither the view that all who belong to the Church must die, nor that participation in the redemption of Christ is restricted to an group of believers within the Church."<sup>33</sup>

Martyrdom need not be the result of perseverance, but that possibility does loom on the horizon for every believer.

What John wishes to do is to prepare his readers for that possibility: "He [John] is not an armchair theologian..."<sup>34</sup> talking about abstracts; instead, he writes about the ordeals that they might encounter, and how victory is within their grasp if only they hold fast to the faith, claiming Christ's death and

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<sup>33</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 78. "This is not to say that John expected all Christians to suffer martyrdom, or that he believed that only martyrs shared the blessedness of Christ. Always, the purpose of his book must be kept in mind. He writes to encourage his readers in an hour of imminent peril. Persecution looms and there will be martyrs: it is a prospect that all must face." Harrington, pp. 85,86. See also Rosscup, "Overcomer", pp. 261-286; A.Y. Collins, "The Political Perspective Of The Revelation To John", in Journal of Biblical Literature 96 (2, 1977), p. 251; I. Howard Marshall, "Martyrdom and the Parousia in the Revelation of John", in Studia Evangelica 4 (1968), pp. 338-339; Sweet, "Maintaining", p. 101.

<sup>34</sup> Caird, p. 33.

victory as their own role model. The overcomer may face martyrdom. However, death is not the prerequisite for the reward awaiting the overcomer. The promise awaits those who remain faithful, be it unto martyrdom or not.<sup>35</sup>

Thirdly, it is true that Revelation portrays a domination of the evil forces over God's people. However, what is demonstrated through this preoccupation with the effects of evil is a "prophecy of the victories to be won by Christ and his church."<sup>36</sup> To conquer means that a battle has to take place, and this battle

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<sup>35</sup> Ladd, Commentary, p. 69. To be sure, we can note a difference between the overcomer in chapters 1-3 and in 4-22. For after chapter 3, the only Christians mentioned are likely to be martyrs. While chapters 1-3 speak of the "present" situation, chapters 4-22 speak to the "future" situation in which most of the forewarned persecution will have run its course. This accounts for the differences between chapters 1-3 and 4-22. Leivestad correctly says "It is nowhere indicated that ho nikôn is used exclusively of the literal martyr (in the pregnant sense). On the contrary, the letters to the seven churches give the impression that a bloody martyrdom is a rather extraordinary occurrence." He continues by saying that "One must be faithful unto death to obtain the crown of life (2:10), but that does not necessarily imply a bloody death. Literal martyrdom is not a sine qua non, but perseverance and faithfulness are, likewise, a fearless confession of the name of Christ and a conduct worthy of the Christian name, a life in purity, honesty, and discipline (cf. 21:7ff). Those 'who have not soiled their garments' are worthy to walk in white (3:4), to those who have kept the word of God the door is open (3:8,10), if they hold fast what they have (3:11). If 'martyr' is used in a wider sense, equivalent to confessor, we may without reservations speak of a martyrological idea of victory. All do not die for their faith, but all suffer for it. To be a Christian implies affliction (cf. 1:9); it means being hated by the world. The road to heaven always leads 'through many tribulations'. In that sense Christianity always means martyrdom. The struggle of the Christian has a double front: against fleshly passions and against tribulations, and the stress is on the latter." Leivestad, pp. 214,215. See also pp. 232-237.

<sup>36</sup> Ladd, Commentary, p. 40.

is against the powers of evil (cf. Eph. 6:12,13). As such, it is like Christ's victory, which was achieved by his willingness to die upon a cross. This same willingness is required of the would-be-conqueror as well, for "...every disciple of Jesus must be in principle a martyr and be ready to lay down his life for his faith."<sup>37</sup> The Christian becomes a conqueror only when he leaves this earth, however, this does not necessitate martyrdom as Kiddle maintained. Christians leave this earth in one of two ways; either they die naturally, or else they are martyred, but in both cases they are still conquerors if they hold fast to the end.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ladd, Commentary, p. 41. Cf. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:4. "It is perhaps worth noticing that in the early church the day of a man's martyrdom was often called the day of his victory." Morris, p. 188.

<sup>38</sup> Caird, p. 46. We noted above in footnote 35 that chapters 1-3 and 4-22 have a functional difference. While the first three chapters addressed the present situation of the readers, 4-22 seemed to refer to their future. It would be most convenient had John written exactly who the conqueror is: martyr and/or faithful Christian. Since that is not the case, a closer look at the text offers some interesting results. Alongside the conqueror as a "title" given to Christians in Revelation, at least nine more "titles" can be found. Based on 11:18 we arrive at 1. servant 2. prophet 3. saint 4. those who fear thy name both great and small. Other texts: 5. those who die in the Lord (14:13) 6. martyrs of Jesus (17:6) 7. the chosen and the faithful (17:14) 8. Priests of God and of Christ (20:7) 9. the nations, a generic term used to describe all those in heaven (21:26; 22:2). The interesting results arise from an examination of these nine "titles" in their contexts throughout Revelation. Briefly put, these nine "titles" quickly diminish, in references, to servants and saints (#'s 1 & 3 above). However, the contexts of these two groupings prove that they are in fact addressing different kinds of Christians. A. Saints. In 6:9-11 we are told that white robes are given to those who have been martyred for the faith. That this refers to the saints is substantiated by 19:8 where we read that fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. This concurs with 7:9-17 where we read that there were

Therefore, Kiddle's bold statement that the conqueror can be only the martyr is not supported by the text. In fact, to limit the options to being only the martyr, or only the faithful one is also not supported by the text. The prospect of martyrdom must be actualized in each believer, whether or not that possibility comes to fruition.

Hence, in the letters, "he who conquers" is, first and foremost, the martyr--one who has won the victory, by the laying down of his life. This is not to say that John expected all Christians to suffer martyrdom, or that he believed that only martyrs shared in the blessedness of Christ. Always, the purpose of his book must be kept in mind. He writes to encourage his

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innumerable people wearing white robes, given to them after having come through the great tribulation. This great tribulation is the onslaught of the beast (12:10,11,17) as he conquers the saints (13:7). Immediately following his onslaught, the saints are encouraged to endure (13:10; 14:12). Finally, the special privilege accorded the saints is that they will ride with Christ into battle to defeat the one who had earlier killed them (19:14). B. Servants. In 7:3-8 we are told that it is the servants who constitute the 144,000, and who are in turn given a seal on the forehead (see also 9:4; 22:4). The servants are those who are faithful to God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (19:10; 22:9). In 14:1-5 we discover that the distinguishing mark of the servant is not their martyrdom, but it is their sexual chasteness, their honesty, their spotlessness and their following of the Lamb wherever He goes (That some of these servants do die is referred to vaguely in the text [19:2] but not in the clear martyrological terms used to describe the saints [6:9-11; 7:9-17; 13:7; 17:6; 18:24]). Only this 144,000 (the servants) sing the song which no one else can sing (14:3). Then again in 15:1-4, reference is made to those who sing the song of Moses, "the servant of God". The fact that a song is being sung, and that they sing the song of God's servant would support a conclusion that these are the servants of God once again (note that the saints are not reported to have sung songs). This is crucial, because in this same passage, we are told that these servants are the ones "who had conquered the beast" (15:2). Revelation clearly attributes different roles to the saint and the servant of God, but not to the extent that one is a Christian and the other not. The term conqueror does not therefore refer only to the martyr but includes both the saint (martyr) and the servant (faithful). See also Rosscup, pp. 261-286.

readers in an hour of imminent peril. Persecution looms and there will be martyrs: it is a prospect that all must face."<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps part of the problem lies in the fact that too much attention has been focused on the victor, as opposed to the Victor who makes any victory possible. The whole idea of conquering in a theological capacity had its background in God as the sole conqueror, with the result that His believers can conquer because of His divine aid.<sup>40</sup> Within Revelation, this sole conqueror is of course Jesus Christ (3:21; 5:5; 12:11; 17:14). The importance of Christ for those who overcome can not be exaggerated. Accordingly, we now turn to look at the central role played by this One who conquered.

#### The Importance Of Christ For The Conquerors

The prophecy of Jesus in Matt. 1:18-23 as "God with us" is fulfilled in Revelation, for He is with His people. The crucial role that the Christ-event played in God's Heilsgeschichte is not forgotten, and it comes to bear in two powerful ways for those who are to overcome. First of all, "His [God's] presence still

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<sup>39</sup> W. Harrington, pp. 85,86.

<sup>40</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 78,79. "Der Begriff nikōn weist in einen grossen religionsgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang, in dem der verehrte Gott der einzige 'Sieger', der Glaebige sein Kaempfer und durch ihn 'Sieger' gegen irdische Maechte ist.". Lohmeyer, p. 23. See also Guenther, p. 651; Bauernfeind, p. 944; Barclay "Themes", p. 293; Collins, Combat, p. 234; Wright, pp. 509-518; A.Y. Collins, "The Revelation of John: An Apocalyptic Response to a Social Crisis", in Currents In Theology And Mission 8 (1, February 1981), p. 10; Cross, Canaanite, pp. 333,334.

comforts, for it holds out hope for a future salvation as His past saving acts are remembered."<sup>41</sup> Secondly, Christ's Messiahship is a present reality, not one that has yet to occur. Accordingly, the churches can benefit from such a fact in that they can be assured that the evil which surrounds them is temporary.<sup>42</sup>

Christ is continually with His followers. In their suffering (1:9) and in their death (14:13). He is in the midst of the church (1:13,16), and He constantly comes to them either in discipline (2:5,16; 3:3), or in fellowship (3:20; 22:17-21). He is with them in their triumphs and in their ordeals (14:1; 17:14). Though the Christian may be under attack, "...their inner life is secure under the protection of God."<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, to know about Jesus, to know Him and to be obedient to Him (to follow Him) is of great importance to the conqueror.<sup>44</sup> In 2:25-27 the conqueror is instructed to keep Christ's works until the end. One can only do the works if one

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<sup>41</sup> Fackenheim, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ladd, Commentary, pp. 68,69.

<sup>43</sup> Caird, pp. 297,298. See also 7:1-8; 11:1,2; 12:14. "...if the God present in one moment of history is the God of all history, He is in conflict with the evil which is within it." Fackenheim, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> "The letters to the Churches, and the moral exhortations scattered throughout the book, show that the author saw the presence of the city of God to inhere in the obedience of men to the will of Christ." R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, Pre-Existence, Wisdom, And The Son Of Man: A Study Of The Idea Of Pre-Existence In The New Testament, (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1973), pp. 265-266.

knows them, and one can only know them if one has learned of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> It follows then that to know about Jesus serves several functions: First, it reminds the believers that Christ is always with them. Secondly, it provides motivation and assurance to the task set before them. Lastly, it sets the example for believers, to show them that He too had in fact conquered. This last point is crucial in order for Jesus to be a present reality for the churches, and one who could truly understand what the church was going through.<sup>46</sup>

#### Christ As Conqueror

The example that Christ set by conquering (3:21; 5:5; 12:11; 17:14) makes Him the paradigmatic figure for the church as they endure suffering, or as they approach impending martyrdom. To wage war against the Lamb is synonymous with the persecution of the saints, for this is the only way that the Lamb can be assaulted: through His followers. Christ's victory on the cross does indeed give credence to the title of King of kings and Lord of lords, but what is important for us to understand in the

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<sup>45</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 93.

<sup>46</sup> The church's strength lies in Christ's fellowship with them (1:13,16,20). It is from this Christ who holds the churches in His hand that the church draws its resources: "Christ is indispensable to the church, and the church is essential to him for the achievement of his kingdom throughout history." Coffin, p. 42. See also Guenther, p. 651; Rissi, p. 9.

context of conquering is that His act has to be "...re-enacted again and again in his companions."<sup>47</sup>

It is because of the Lamb's victory that the conquerors can be victorious. The conqueror is one who follows Christ on the road which leads to victory, and in this way, he shares in Christ's victory because his victory is Christ's victory. "God knows no other victory and needs no other victory than that which is won by the Cross of Christ, faithfully proclaimed to the world in the martyr witness of his church."<sup>48</sup>

A key passage in Revelation is when John first finds himself confronted by the One like a son of man. Here John's response is that he fell at His feet as if dead. Jesus' response to John, and without a doubt to the conquerors is, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (1:18). True, suffering may occur, but through it all the church can be comforted as they attempt to conquer because of the fact that Christ has already conquered (3:21). As a result, their suffering is not unique, and they are told in the Revelation that as a result of His victory, He now holds the keys of death. Christ's victory, and His power over the final enemy (death) provide the impetus necessary for the would-be conqueror.

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<sup>47</sup> Caird, p. 220. The victory over Satan comes as a result of Christ's death on the cross. Further, to witness to this fact is the penultimate victory. To be victorious over Satan is to stand up to him, no matter what the cost, as Christ did. Ladd, Commentary, pp. 172-173.

<sup>48</sup> Caird, p. 58. See also Guenther, p. 651.



Temporary victories will be experienced by "both sides", but the ultimate victory is Christ's. Any victory that is accomplished on earth is not to be understood as the one decisive victory, it is only provisional. The ultimate victory lies beyond the grasp of such victories (11:7), for the final victory can only be won by the one who fits the description of 17:14. The direct result of this is that those who conquer in these "provisional" battles are in fact victors in the ultimate, final sense. That is to say, that even though the beast overcomes the faithful in 13:7, 15:2 reveals to us those standing on the crystal sea who have overcome the beast. The beast's victory was a victory, but only temporarily so. The ultimate victory belongs to the Lord of lords and the King of kings (17:14).

However, we note that those who conquer are with the Lamb as He fights and overcomes the evil forces.

He [Christ] does not conquer alone; in his retinue are those who have been called and chosen by God and who have remained faithful to the Lamb in the face of the final persecution.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ladd, Commentary, p. 232. "It was a well-known Jewish expectation that the righteous would take part in the destruction of the wicked...The martyrs are not here engaged on a mission of revenge, but in the fulfilment of a righteous retribution." Charles, Vol. II., pp. 74,75. A.Y. Collins is no doubt closer to putting her finger on the pulse of this theme in Revelation when she says: "The hope articulated here [19:1-10] involves a reversal of roles of the persecutor and persecuted. It would be less than honest to deny that, read in its historical context, this hope is tainted by vengefulness." Collins, "Persecution", p. 738. She does clarify this statement by saying "...Revelation limits vengeance and envy to the imagination and clearly rules out violent deeds." Ibid, p. 747. See also William Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John" in Catholic Biblical Quarterly 28 (July 1966): 300-311.

Those who suffered for the sake of Christ will also be with Him as He (and they) conquer; which is to say that those who were with Him during their "...hour of testimony will be with him in the hour of his triumph."<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Christ's success in conquering in the past gives the church the impetus to face whatever may await her. Present afflictions and/or future persecutions constitute the life of the church. Even though the faithful experience significant defeats (11:7; 13:7), Caird observes: "The interpreter is apparently treating not only the Cross but the great martyrdom as a fait accompli."<sup>51</sup>

#### The Conqueror In 11:7 And 13:7

Two passages in particular (11:7; 13:7) come to bear at this point, In these passages we find nikaô being used to ascribe victory to the forces of Satan. If we look back to 3:10 we note that the question asked of the church is if they are ready, for

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<sup>50</sup> Beasley-Murray, pp. 258-59. In this connection note also Kiddle, pp. xlvii-xlvi and Rev. 19:14.

<sup>51</sup> Caird, p. 156. This is based on 12:11 where the believers overcame the dragon, and the verb (enikêsan) is in the aorist tense, meaning that it is a past action or event which has been completed. This is because Christ's victory is a "once and for all" victory, and one that has already been completed. Charles, Vol. I., p. 140. "The word enikêsen marks the centre of the Revelation's christology." Rissi, p. 8.

they will be experiencing a further test of their faith, "which, by the Lord's help, they will be able to withstand."<sup>52</sup>

However, to be conquered by the evil one and his forces seems to contradict victory as portrayed not only by Revelation, but in the entire Bible, or so it appears at first glance. The saints are overcome by the beast in these passages, but 15:2 shows that the final victory belongs to the faithful. "In the crucial test of faith they relinquish their lives rather than their confidence in God. This is true victory."<sup>53</sup> Further, we must note that God permits (11:7) His people to be overcome, just as He allowed His son to be crucified at the hands of the Romans.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Schuyler Brown, "The Hour Of Trial: 3:10" in Journal Of Biblical Literature, LXXXV (Sept. 1966), p. 314.

<sup>53</sup> Mounce, p. 255.

<sup>54</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 185. To equate these references of conquering (11:7; 13:7) to the conquerors found throughout the rest of Revelation is not justified, especially when we note that the beast is "allowed" to wage war and "conquer" God's people. Caird, p. 80. Simcox (1893) correctly points out, and most commentators do not, that it is "the Devil" that gives the beast this power and authority, and refers his readers to Lk. 4:6 as further support. William Henry Simcox, The Revelation Of S. John The Divine in "Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges" J. Armitage Robinson, ed. (Cambridge: At The University Press, 1893), p. 134. While this is true, he fails to address the fact that in Lk. 4:6 that which he (Satan) gives has been given to him by God. And in this sense, his interpretation of Rev. 11:7 is not accurate. "The permission is not only given by Satan, but in the last instance by God. The power to plague and persecute the Church is wholly dependent upon the permission of God." Leivestad, p. 228. See also Caird, p. 167; Bauernfeind, p. 944; Harrington, pp. 179,180; Kiddle, p. 248; Lenski, pp. 396-397; Swete, p. 165.

The purpose that the beast is bent on achieving is to turn humanity away from Christ. The beast is therefore allowed to inflict a fierce persecution upon the faithful. For the beast to "conquer" Christians in this context (11:7; 13:7) does not mean that his purpose has been achieved. The opposite is true.<sup>55</sup> In reality, by their martyrdom, these Christians become the victorious ones (15:2).

God's plan of redemption, His own purpose of good and of grace, judgement and glory find fulfillment in the temporary and subordinated victories of evil.<sup>56</sup> No better example can be given than that of Christ's death and "defeat" on the cross. "There is something fitting in the thought that the other hour in which the nature of history is laid bare is the season when the church of God suffers its passion."<sup>57</sup>

### The Good News Of Revelation

The gospel (good news) of Revelation is that the overcomer is involved in a struggle whose ultimate outcome has already been sealed in the Christ-event. However, this does not mean that Christians will not suffer because of their allegiance to this axiomatic part of God's salvation-history. The very real

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<sup>55</sup> "The monster from the abyss can be conquered only by being allowed to conquer and so to burn itself out." Caird, p. 293.

<sup>56</sup> Ladd, Commentary, pp. 180,181.

<sup>57</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 213. See also p. 191, n. 51.

possibility presented throughout Revelation is that persecution may encounter all Christians as it did Christ. If it does, then Christ's example will have to be re-enacted in their lives, but not necessarily to the point of martyrdom. The form in which that persecution manifests itself for Christians may be the threat of death. But it also comes in other, less overt forms, such as the seduction of false doctrines, disobedience to God's commandments, and in not fulfilling the important imperative to love as Christ loved.<sup>58</sup>

Whether the conqueror's life is ended by natural death or martyrdom, each of the seven letters includes a reward for the conqueror. Before Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God, a difficult yet possible task was set before Him. Upon successful completion of that task, Christ inaugurated the beginning of the end. Granted, Satan and his forces continue to attack and accuse the righteous, but Christ's victory ushered in a radically new, hereto unknown, precedent. Because He had conquered, He was now in a position to require the same of His devotees, but above and beyond that, He was now in a position to enable them to do so.

The Christ-event constituted the most important cog in God's salvation-history timepiece, and now Satan's days were understood as coming to a close. Held before the prospective conquerors was the fact that the day was soon approaching when Satan would

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<sup>58</sup> See Rom. 8:37; 12:21; 1 John 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4-5; Rev. 2:6,9,14,15,20,24; 3:9.

finally and completely be destroyed. The eventual defeat of Satan would be paralleled in heaven by the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride (the church). Only when this long-awaited abolishment of evil is completed do we find the only four references in the entire Bible to the heavenly hosts saying allélouia (19:1-7).<sup>59</sup>

When Christ conquered, He was richly rewarded. Now, Christians are asked to conquer, and they too will be rewarded for their perseverance (21:7). God declares that only such a person shall be His son, and to whom He will be God. The cost of salvation was high, but the price had been paid in full, and the conquerors "...need not fear if they are called upon to suffer, for in that way they too will conquer."<sup>60</sup>

Herein lies the tremendous paradox of salvation as depicted in Revelation: to lose is to win. The temporary loss which the conquerors seem to suffer is actually their victory, and the victory which the beast seems to enjoy is, in the end, defeat.<sup>61</sup> For the beast's real purpose has been frustrated in that the believers remained faithful to the end.

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<sup>59</sup> Literally: "Praise Yahweh", AGB, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Morris, p. 85. "Thus, just before the second coming, the corpse of the Church, whose public and official testimony has been silenced and smothered by the world, lies on the great city's High Street." Morris, Revelation, pp. 149-150. Charles, Vol. I., p. 287.

<sup>61</sup> "...the Apocalypse unites the historical life-work of Jesus with his exaltation. The paradox--'the Lamb is the Conqueror'--sums up the faith of the first Christians." Lilje, p. 20.

The conquerors in Revelation are encouraged to look beyond the possibility of martyrdom to the need of persevering, wherever they find themselves. They are encouraged to remember that evil will soon have its last day, and it is precisely this view of history which catapults the conquerors to the victory:

The identification of the adversary with the forces of chaos and the depiction of the ultimate defeat of that adversary provide a proleptic experience of victory for the readers and enable them to pursue a course of non-violent resistance to the point of death.<sup>62</sup>

The reward for remaining steadfast is glorious, and this should not come as a surprise, since the source of that reward is the same source who provided strength for them to conquer in the first place. As Mounce says: "Faithfulness in trial now is to be rewarded beyond measure in the life to come."<sup>63</sup>

Those who overcome will, as a reward, be with Him forever through whom and for whom they conquered. Also, they will receive the same reward for conquering as Jesus received from His Father when He (Jesus) conquered.<sup>64</sup> John's understanding of what

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<sup>62</sup> A.Y. Collins, "Combat", p. 424. "Nothing distinguished the early Christians so much as their contempt for death. They ignored it; for them it did not exist. They had no fear of death, and no sorrow over it; triumph rather, and alleluias." Carrington, p. 338.

<sup>63</sup> Mounce, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 107. "To John the uniqueness of Jesus as Son of the Father is expressed by reserving alone the right to regard God as Father. Believers are God's sons, but derivatively through their relation to the Christ, who is the unique Son of the Father." Beasley-Murray, pp. 313,314. See also Charles, Vol. II., p. 215; Ladd, Commentary, p. 54.

heaven is, says Caird, is described as being a part of the family of God. This can only be accomplished by being a conqueror.<sup>65</sup>

### Summary

Nikaô can be found in many contexts, thereby adopting a wide range of meanings in those respective contexts. However, in Revelation, nikaô is not used to describe someone as being victorious in a legal battle, in an argument, or even over their emotions. Nor is the word group used to describe the victory experienced by athletes, or those involved in any kind of earthly mortal contests. Clearly the word group is used in Revelation to talk about a contest, but it is a contest between spiritual kingdoms that manifest themselves on earth.<sup>66</sup>

The Christian's battle is not against mere flesh and blood, for if it were, then their martyrdom would not differ from those who give their lives to fight for political causes. Revelation, however, does not depict the conqueror as such a victor. The battle that the conqueror presently fights is secondary only to God's final battle. At the same time, the conqueror involved in this eschatological struggle is contributing to that final ultimate victory (6:9-11).

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<sup>65</sup> Caird, p. 267.

<sup>66</sup> That is, God is "represented" on earth in His faithful ones, and Satan is "represented" on earth, in Revelation, by the Roman government. See A.Y. Collins, Combat, p. 233. Also, Jones, pp. 1034-1035.



The attitude towards imminent persecution, suffering and death is of utmost importance. Accordingly, John makes sure that he holds the supreme example before his audience. That example is a very real and relevant one, for the exemplary figure is the exalted Christ. He is the one who stands among the churches, not at a distance. He is the one who admonishes and praises the churches. He is the one who, like the churches, faced the onslaughts of evil, and He conquered. He is the one who is worthy to open the scroll. He is the one who is the source of their strength in being able to overcome evil, and He is the one who waits to reward the good and faithful servants. The power of this model as a source for motivation and encouragement is used to its fullest capacity by John.

## CHAPTER VI

### APPLICATION OF CHAPTERS I-V TO REVELATION

We have now completed a discussion of the development of a theology of victory in various religious traditions. Throughout this discussion, the pervading theme woven in all contexts has been, first of all, the desire for victory, and secondly, the petitioning of gods for that victory.

The records of the Old Testament, Maccabean literature, Greco-Roman cults, New Testament and in particular Revelation all indicate with marked clarity that victory is hinged upon the favour of their respective deities. We now wish to substantiate Revelation's place within this matrix of victory theologies.

Therefore, I will now attempt to bring the previous chapters to bear on Revelation's theology of victory as expressed by nikaô in light of the rich victory tradition that preceded it. I will

begin the discussion with a comparison of the theology of victory in Revelation with the theology of the victory cults in the Greco-Roman (henceforth GR) world.

### The Victory Cults Of The Greco-Roman World

#### Similarities

The theology of victory has a rich and old heritage, dating back to approximately 700 BCE with the inception of Nike, followed by Victoria's genesis in approximately 295 BCE. Fundamental to this discussion are chapter II which dealt with the GR theology of victory. Because of their coexistence, no study of victory in the New Testament should divorce itself from an examination of the carefully thought-out theology of victory in the GR world.

Even though the victory held out in the New Testament is presented as superior to the claims of the GR cults, it would be a gross injustice to the piety of the GR cults to ignore their claims. Their deities of victory were served with devotion and experienced tremendous growth. At the time John wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the contemporary world, as indicated in chapter II, was permeated with pagan victory cults. In

light of this development we now address the similarities and differences of these victory theologies.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Seeking Of Gods For Victory

The first significant similarity we turn to is the dependence of the devotee upon the gods whom he or she believes determines victory. In Revelation, victory is not possible apart from God giving it (12:11; 17:14), and this is no different in the GR cults.<sup>2</sup> Inherent in this claim is that only if the deity grants the request of the devotee will victory ensue. The proof of this divine intervention comes precisely in victory, and therefore entrenches the believers' faith in their deity.

### 2. Possibility Of Defeat

Both Christian and GR traditions experience defeats within their theologies of victory. Invincibility was the ideal, but neither Christians nor devotees of Nike and Victoria experienced

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter II will serve as resources which the reader can consult for the discussion that follows.

<sup>2</sup> Fears, pp. 752,755,806,815; Helgeland, p. 1503; Oberhummer, pp. 285,286,294; Haufman & Pollard, p. 735. See also ch. II, pp. 51-57, ns. 8-30; 60, ns. 47-52; 62,65-68, ns. 75-80; 70-77, ns. 91-110; 84-86, ns. 52-57. These entries constitute the relevant pages of chapter II for the discussion that follows, and will not be cited again in this detail.

this. In Revelation, Christians are overcome by their adversary (11:7; 13:7), and so too in the GR victory cults.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Belief Despite Defeat

The result of temporary defeats was not an abandonment of worship, but instead explanations were sought for and arrived upon. In the GR cults as well as in Revelation, piety usually increased based on the understanding that their impiety had resulted in the defeat. Also, defeat was viewed as having been allowed, and ancients believed that the tables would turn in their favour again in the future.

### 4. Growing Allegiance

Both Christian and pagan victory theologies experienced growth over time. The theologies of their deities were always becoming more solidified, which was a result of occurrences such as referred to in the above third paragraph, and because of previous victories.

### 5. Claims Of Superiority

As well, Christian and pagan theologies were clear in that it was their deity that provided victories. This comes as no

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<sup>3</sup> Carter, p. 153.

surprise of course, for that is the very nature of religious devotion, the presupposition being that one's object of worship is the highest source upon which to draw.

#### 6. The Nature Of The Victory

While victory was sought for in areas such as beauty, health, finances, agriculture, fertility, athletic competitions and military battles, victory was most zealously sought over death. The common fate of anyone in any class and in any religious tradition was death, and this was addressed in the GR world<sup>4</sup> as well as in Revelation (2:11).

#### 7. Perseverance Of Devotees

Christian and pagan theologies dedicated themselves to their deities "to the end". In the specific situation of religious service in the Roman army, the would-be soldier had to swear an oath (also referred to as a sacrament) which was binding.<sup>5</sup> So too, the Christian could only be an overcomer if he or she made the same binding commitment (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 12:11; 15:2; 17:4; 21:7).

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<sup>4</sup> Nash, pp. 133-134. Closely related to this is the reward of deification after death, via apotheosis in the GR world (Toynbee, pp. 60-61; Fears, pp. 819-820; Ch. II, pp. 65-66,74-77, ns. 104-110) and sonship in Revelation (21:7).

<sup>5</sup> Helgeland, pp. 1478,1479.

## Differences

There are however, marked differences between the Christian and pagan theologies of victory. Among the GR victory cults themselves, I never came across a reference to devotees of Victoria denouncing Nike's effectiveness, or vice-versa. The relationship between the GR cults was a very affording and accommodating one.<sup>6</sup> The same cannot be said with regard to the Christian opinion of these other cults, and the claim within Revelation. For in Revelation, there is only one true source of victory, over and above any other claim.

### 1. God As Supreme

Revelation follows the claims made in the Old Testament that God is supreme over any and all other gods.<sup>7</sup> This is significant, for while the GR cults also claimed invincibility as the chief attribute of their gods, they did not make claims to total exclusiveness. It is a well-attested fact that in the first century the GR cults were very tolerant of "other" religious claims. The main charge made against Christians was

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, ch. II, pp. 67, 68, 73.

<sup>7</sup> See ch. III, p. 118, n. 47. That Christ is not different from this God is made clear in Rev. 20:6.

not that they worshipped their own God, but conversely, that they did so to the denial and exclusion of all other gods.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Personification Of Victory

While the GR cults personified victory in their goddesses of Nike and Victoria,<sup>9</sup> the Christians pledged their allegiance to a man who had conquered death, and now assured them of a similar victory.<sup>10</sup> Eusebius said that

Victory has proved the kingship of Christ; and for all their hoary tradition, the gods of Rome were vanquished, proof in itself that they were nothing but false and evil demons.<sup>11</sup>

This was also the claim made by John the prophet<sup>12</sup> in Revelation. While John never lived to experience the eventual annihilation of the pagan gods,<sup>13</sup> his prophecy is substantiated with today's church, and the lack of the GR victory cults. In short, the GR world personified an idea, whereas Revelation saw their victory as personified in a person, someone not different from themselves (cf. Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16).

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<sup>8</sup> See ch. V. pp. 168, n. 6; 171, n. 10.

<sup>9</sup> See ch. II, p. 51, ns. 6,8; 66-67, n. 76; 81,82. Later, this was transferred to Emperor worship, see ch. II, pp. 73-76.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 15:16,20,54-58; Rev. 1:18; 3:21; 12:11; 17:14; 21:7.

<sup>11</sup> The text, Sym. Rel. 3.8 as cited in Fears, p. 752.

<sup>12</sup> For John as prophet see Sweet, "Maintaining", p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> Liebeschuetz, p. 177; Yonah and Shatzman, p. 477; Carter, pp. 152,153; Fears, p. 824.



### 3. Range Of Effectiveness

Both theologies stated that their deities provided benefits, such as victory, in the present and for the future as well. However, once again, Revelation's claim supersedes that of the GR's claims.<sup>14</sup> The crux of this third point is based upon the second one made above in that the GR cults experienced extinction, whereas the church, and more importantly their object of worship, Christ, did not.

### 4. Involvement Of Devotees For Victory

With time, the GR cults began to experience a shift in their focus. At the outset, their deities alone were responsible for victory, but soon the human contribution came to be seen as equal.<sup>15</sup> Some similarity can be found in Revelation, in that with every martyr's death God's intervening action is brought closer (6:11). However, at no point in Revelation does victory become an attribute of the conquerors. Their attainment of victory is due solely to the work of Christ which they can use in order to be victorious (3:21; 12:11; 17:14).

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<sup>14</sup> For the effectiveness of the GR gods for the present and the future, see Fears, pp. 748,749.

<sup>15</sup> Oberhummer, pp. 302,303; Fears, p. 789; Ch. II, pp. 73-76, ns. 100-107.

## 5. Deification As Reward

A fresco dating from the Neronian era depicts the heroes of the GR world who have been deified because of the benefits which they bestowed upon humankind.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, these victories are significant, but very limited. Only a select few ever attained this status in the GR world in comparison to the horde that shares in "deification" (21:7) in Revelation. So great is the number of those who arrive at this state in Revelation that "no man could number" it (7:9).

## 6. Proof Of Victory

The proof for victory is not only the defeat of the enemy, but comes in the total subjugation of that enemy. The enemies of the GR world were those who represented chaos and disorder and who sought to overthrow "the order of civilized authority".<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the would-be conqueror would have to prove his or her worthiness by eliminating the foe. The eventual disappearance of the GR victory cults is contrasted in Revelation by the One who

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<sup>16</sup> Toynbee, pp. 60-61. See also Fears, pp. 820-824. Contrast this claim to the claim in the New Testament, and especially that of Revelation where Christ alone has benefited humankind, over and above anyone else (Rev. 5:1-14).

<sup>17</sup> Fears, pp. 742, 750, 751, 771. Ch. II, pp. 71-74, ns. 92-103.

alone has proven His defeat of death.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a significant facet of Revelation's Christology is His removal of "the enemy" forever (20:10; 21:4; 22:3).<sup>19</sup>

### 7. Expendability Of Deities

By the end of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), Athens had lost approximately half her population due to the war and the plague, and she had also lost her leadership of Greece. Even though she had not been sacked or occupied, her wealth had been drastically depleted due to the war effort. So dire was the need for capital that even the gold cladding of the Victoriae kept in the treasury were melted down.<sup>20</sup>

No such option exists in Revelation. While the melting of Victoriae could be construed as an act of apostasy or blasphemy, it would be wrong to read into this a rejection of Victoria as a goddess of worship. The circumstances surrounding the Peloponnesian War and its effect on Athens were germane to their actions, "against" Victoria at that time, but as the worship of Victoria continued into the fourth century CE, the act did not

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 15:16,20,54-58; Rev. 1:8; 3:21; 12:11; 17:14; 21:7.

<sup>19</sup> This important theme was described in detail in chapter II, and true victory can not be understood apart from the extinction of evil for all time. See also the contributions in Caird, pp. 293-301; Ford, p. 241; Rowland, Origins, p. 284. A similar claim to remove for all time "the enemey" can not be substantiated in the GR cults.

<sup>20</sup> Boardman, p. 213.

constitute her extinction. What is significant for our discussion is that the nature of the act finds no real parallel in Revelation.<sup>21</sup> While Christians may choose apostasy in the forms of heresies and the denial of Christ's name (2:6,9,14,15,20,24; 3:9), their actions have no direct effect on Christ Himself, not even in a temporary fashion as it did in the GR world.

### Summary

Considerable space has been devoted to a comparison between the theologies of victory in the GR pagan cults and that found in Revelation. The main reason for this is that of all foreign victory influences, the GR influence were the most prominent.<sup>22</sup> Also, the scope of this thesis has been narrowed in trying as, thoroughly as possible, to assess a specific influence pertinent to Christians living in Asia Minor in the first century CE.

In chapter V we discussed who the overcomer of Revelation was. Upon closer examination we noted that John never gives the

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<sup>21</sup> A parallel does exist in the Old Testament. 2 Kings 18:13-16 contains the account of Hezekiah's agreement with Sennacherib king of Assyria. The Assyrian King agreed to remove his troops if Hezekiah provided three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah's treasuries alone were not sufficient to meet this demand, therefore the treasures of the temple were taken. The account reports that he took "...all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord..." and that he "...stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord".

<sup>22</sup> For discussions of theologies of victory in Egypt and the Near-East see Fears, pp. 811-815; Wright, "Conquest", pp. 509-518; Eric Birley, "The Religion of the Roman Army: 1895-1977", in ANRW, 16.2, (1978), pp. 1521-1523.

reader an operational definition of who ho nikôn is. "John introduces this mysterious, almost numinous, term over and over again without any attempt at definition...".<sup>23</sup> There are two significant reasons for this. First of all, we see that the purpose of his work is to provide the answer for that question. He does not do so in the form of an operational definition, but instead he slowly delineates the attributes of what constitutes the conqueror.

Secondly, John does not need to introduce formally the reader of Revelation to ho nikôn. Not only was the world of first century CE Asia Minor permeated with victory cults, but these cults were widely propagated throughout Asia Minor in the first-century CE. The recipients of Revelation were surrounded with claims of victory, and the terminology of ho nikôn was not foreign to them. Their very Sitz im Leben would preclude the necessity of an explanation.

The propagation of these victory cults was furthered by the wide-spread travelling prevalent at that time.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, we already noted that the very coins carried by those in Asia Minor

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<sup>23</sup> Caird, pp. 32-33. See also Lohmeyer, p. 23; Franz Boll, Aus der Offenbarung Johannis: Hellenistische Studien zum Weltbild der Apokalypse, (Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 1967 rpr.), p. 49, n. 1.

<sup>24</sup> See pp. 87-89; Fears, p. 754. Pagan worship was intense and pursued with zeal. See, Fears, pp. 739,764; Helgeland, pp. 1470-1472,1487,1496,1504; Speidel, p. 1543. As a result, worship of victory in faraway Rome would not have gone unnoticed by the inhabitants of Asia Minor. Part of this worship in Rome at the beginning of the Christian era were the three temples on the Velian hill, all bearing *victoriae*, and one of the temples being the temple of Victoria. Palmer, p. 198.

in the first century CE depicted these goddesses of victory on a large scale.<sup>25</sup> Jesus' response of "render to Caesar what is Caesar's" to the Pharisees in Mt. 22:15-22 would have been to coins (denarii) that were stamped with the images of these goddesses.<sup>26</sup>

It is very likely that John took the theologies of victory inherent in the cults of Nike and Victoria, being well-known to his readers, and used them to promote Christ.<sup>27</sup> In typical New

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<sup>25</sup> ch. II, pp. 82,84. See the following footnote as well.

<sup>26</sup> From a historical point of view we can substantiate that Victoria was popular during Nero's reign (Bulle, pp. 313-315), and that from 69-117 CE volumes of coins were minted depicting Victoria and Nike (Bulle, pp. 354-357). Nero's claims to divinity as struck on coins have been discovered as well as coins struck by Domitian showing him as "father of the gods" and sitting on a throne (Helgeland, pp. 1029,1033). Fears has made a noteworthy contribution in his thorough study of the coinage in the GR world. From as early as 226 BCE, Victory was struck in "enourmous bulk" in the Roman commonwealth (Fears, p. 775). More germane to the time frame of our study, there is a "...consistent importance of Victoria Augusta as a coin type throughout the history of the imperial coinage form [sic] Augustus to Constantine." (Fears, p. 812). After delineating staggering references to coins of victory struck from the time of Augustus he says that "...this reiterative insistence on Victoria Augusti [should not] dull our senses and lead us to believe that we are dealing with a mere hackneyed phrase, to be invoked when nothing else was available to the mint officials. The remarkable coinage of Commodus' last years shows vividly how central was the image of victory in the proclamation of a new golden age ensured by the labors of the imperial saviour." Fears, pp. 813,814.

<sup>27</sup> I have been concerned in gathering information for this thesis to try and understand the historical background and context of a victory theology in Revelation. In the process, I have uncovered data sufficient to supporting such a claim. Were John's "victory theology" a ground-breaking proposition, then I would have no basis for making such a claim. Such is not the case however, and therefore one can assert in all liklihood that not only was John aware of these pagan victory cults, but he made it clear to his readers that there was only one victor and giver thereof. In the chapter that follows, I will pursue this

Testament fashion, the claim of Revelation is that Christ is supreme in a world filled with a plethora of gods (Acts 17:22-31). More to the point, John utilized pedagogical excellence by holding Christ up as the conqueror. The world, John said, may make claims to victory based on various historical occurrences, but the victory will only be found in the One who has truly conquered (5:5). The pagan's claim to victory is eclipsed by the Lamb that was slain and thus became the Victor (5:9,10).

#### Victory In The Maccabean Literature

One can justifiably expect more harmony between the traditions of the Maccabean literature (henceforth ML) and that of Revelation. Christianity saw itself largely as a continuation of the Jewish religion as fulfilled in Christ, and not as being at enmity with those roots.<sup>28</sup> A significant Jewish contribution to Revelation's theology of victory is found in the ML, especially in the martyrdom accounts in 2 and 4 Maccabees.<sup>29</sup>

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hypothesis further.

<sup>28</sup> To be sure, the mechanics of this merger needed constant attention. Paul's letter to the Galatians has strong words for those who would promote Jewish ways in order to disrupt the balance he had worked to establish (Gal. 1:7-9; 5:12). Christians, at the time of the writing of Revelation, had also experienced persecution at the hands of the Jews (Smallwood, pp. 217-219; Frend, Rise, pp. 109,126; Kiddle, p. 19), and Revelation speaks of the "synagogue of Satan" (2:9; 3:9).

<sup>29</sup> That this tradition would have been known and adopted by Christians has already been substantiated in ch. III, pp. 112-117.

## Similarities

### 1. Persecution From The Ruling Powers

The ML is clear in its portrayal of the enemy. 1-4 Maccabees all state that the king's claims as superior to the Torah<sup>30</sup> are to be understood as a trumpet summoning them to battle. The king may demand and decree obedience to himself, but the Maccabees will not obey his command.<sup>31</sup> Revelation is no different in its condemnation of Rome as the cause for their suffering.<sup>32</sup>

### 2. Persecution Is Allowed

The pagan authorities may appear to have the upper hand as they defeat their opponents with various forms of persecution. However, this persecution is not indicative of God's inability to

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<sup>30</sup> "The struggle in Jerusalem after 175 BC, which reached its climax between 167 and 164 BC, was a struggle over the law." Hengel, Hellenism, Vol. 1, p. 305.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Macc. 1:41-50; 2 Macc. 5:27; 6:1,2,6-11; 3 Macc. 2:28-30; 4:14; 4 Macc. 4:23; 5:2,3; 8:5-11; 12:3-5.

<sup>32</sup> In Revelation see: 12:17 in conjunction with 13:1-18; 14:8; 16:19; 17:1-18; 18:24. See also Jones, pp. 1034,1035; Collins, Combat, p. 233.



intervene, but it is stated that God allows these atrocities to occur so that His name will be glorified.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Theology Of Suffering

The result of apparent defeat comes in the bold claim that even though death may await the believer, defeat is reversed upon their oppressors. In the ML, it is clearly stated that there is a reward for those who are willing to suffer apparent defeat.<sup>34</sup> While the king offers his own "reward" if they obey him, the Maccabees look beyond his offer to a much greater one.<sup>35</sup> Revelation encourages those who are suffering and those who are about to suffer that their work is not in vain.<sup>36</sup> Each of the seven letters describes a specific reward for conquering (2:7, 11,17,25-28; 3:5,12,21). More importantly, they will be involved in the defeat of their oppressors (6:11; 7:14; 19:14,19; 21:7).

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<sup>33</sup> 2 Macc. 6:12-16; 7:16,18,32,33,37,38; 8:5; 10:4; 4 Macc. 11:20; Rev. 11:7; 13:7; 15:2. God's role is seen as superior to any fabrication from any earthly powers. The size of earthly armies are irrelevant in the eyes of the God who controls the outcome of the battle. 1 Macc. 3:19; 2 Macc. 10:38; 15:8,21. See also ch. III, pp. 126,131,132.

<sup>34</sup> 2 Macc. 7:9,11,14,23,36; 12:45; 14:46; 4 Macc. 7:3,18,19; 9:8; 13:17; 16:25; 17:5,12; 18:3,23.

<sup>35</sup> 4 Macc. 12:5; 15:2-3,26-28. They do not see themselves as defeated, but conversely, they see their deaths as defeating the king. 4 Macc. 11:20,24; 17:2,11-24. Rev. 6:9-11 echoes this, and we will discuss this in the next chapter.

<sup>36</sup> "We were not born into Paradise, but into this world. Our lives achieve meaning only as they are engaged in God's conflict to make the world his Kingdom." Wright, "Conquest", p. 517. See also Collins, Combat, p. 234.

#### 4. Salvation In The Present

In both the Christian and Maccabean traditions, the hope for a cessation of persecution is evident. That hope is both present and future in that change is needed not only for those who presently experience suffering, but also that the horrors would not continue into the future.<sup>37</sup>

#### Differences

##### 1. Extent Of The Victory

We noted above that victory is both a present and future phenomenon in the two traditions. However, the ML is not clear in its depiction of evil as being removed once and for all. True, the Maccabean struggle came to be seen as the impetus for the defeat of Antiochus' oppression,<sup>38</sup> but its claims did not have the eschatological ramifications found in Revelation. Revelation's claim is, like the ML's, that victory is accomp-

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<sup>37</sup> 2 Macc. 3:24-39; 9:4-9; 10:29,30; 11:8-10; 12:11,16,22; 13:4; 15:34; 4 Macc. 3:20; 4:9-13; Rev. 1:9,13,16; 7:1-8; 11:1,2; 12:14; 14:1,13; 17:14. See also Caird, pp. 297,298.

<sup>38</sup> 2 Macc. 7:36-38; 4 Macc. 1:11; 6:27-29; 7:4; 16:14; 17:10,20,21; 18:4.

lished in the present, but its gospel was one that saw evil defeated for all times (20:10; 21:4; 22:3).<sup>39</sup>

This is evidenced in the temporal victories accomplished in the ML. Since these victories are more concerned with immediate results, the mortal combatants are often extolled with more praise than God is. For example, 1 Macc. is permeated with a pro-Hasmonean bias that gives glory to the warriors. The Jewish guerilla forces attract more attention than does the admitted source of their strength. God receives His "due" in 2 Macc., but 4 Macc. couches that reverence in more individualistic victories. To be sure, God is seen as the source of motivation, but the individual's steadfastness of mind (temperate mind) is claimed as the source for victory (4 Macc. 3:17; 6:33; 7:4,11; 9:18; 11:27; 13:2,7).

## 2. Source Of Strength

From the last paragraph above, we see that both Christian and Maccabean traditions acknowledge the source of their victory in varying degrees, and as a result there is a marked difference in the outworking of their theologies. The Maccabeans are

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<sup>39</sup> To be sure, the Maccabean martyrs rebuke Antiochus and inform him that his dues are "yet to come", as is their reward for persevering (2 Macc. 7:36-38; 4 Macc. 7:3; 9:8,24,30; 10:11; 11:24-27; 12:18; 15:3; 17:11-22; 18:5,23), but no claim can be found in the ML for God's total and eternal abolishment of the manifestations of evil.

correctly referred to as the "first martyrs",<sup>40</sup> and by no fault of their own, their martyrdoms could not be related to other significant previous martyrs. In contrast, Christians in Revelation are reminded that the One who beckons them to perseverance does so because He Himself first conquered (3:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:20). Revelation offers the believers a risen Christ as an example, while the ML can only offer a contemporary "mortal" for an example (4 Macc. 9:23).

#### Summary

The relationship between early Christianity and the martyrs of the ML can be viewed in derivative terms. Early Christian martyrs saw their deaths as concomitant with those in the ML.<sup>41</sup> There is no record of Christians denouncing the martyrdoms of the Jews in the ML because they preceded Christ, but instead there is praise for their endurance. The information given in chapter III is reason enough to state that Christian belief was not opposed to the claims in the ML. There is no reason to suggest the existence of animosity between the martyrdoms in the ML and Revelation as there is between Revelation and the victory cults of the GR world.

In light of this, it is surprising that Staples is hesitant to use the martyrdoms of the ML as a "lever" to help explain

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<sup>40</sup> See ch. III, pp. 112-117.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Christian origins.<sup>42</sup> In fact, there are reasons to suggest the opposite of his conclusion. First of all, the deity to which both cry out is the God of gods. Secondly, the martyrdoms of the Jews were deemed worthy of praise and emulation by Christians.<sup>43</sup> Thirdly, the extent of this acceptance is noted in that the early church appropriated the graves of these martyrs as their own.<sup>44</sup>

The data would accommodate the suggestion that Christians of the first-century were familiar with this tradition, and that it served as another, if not as the major source of encouragement. Three examples to support this suggestion can be stated at this point. First of all, a common pattern is noted in both accounts, a pattern well documented from studies of literature dealing with a crisis.<sup>45</sup> The consistent pattern is 1. Persecution of the faithful. 2. Punishment of the persecutors. 3. God's victory.

Secondly, there is a common cry voiced by people in such situations, and that is the cry of "How long must we wait (or endure)"? This same complaint is brought before God in 2 Macc.

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Staples, "Unused Lever? A Study on the Possible Literary Influence of the Greek Maccabean Literature in the New Testament" in Modern Churchman 9 (1966), p. 224.

<sup>43</sup> Winslow, "Maccabean", p. 86; Hengel, Hellenism, Vol. 1, p. 309.

<sup>44</sup> Pfitzner, p. 15; Smallwood, p. 508; Horbury, "Suffering", p. 155; Charles, Apocrypha, p. 131, n. 2; Bammel, p. 79; Beck, "Imitatio", p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> See for example Collins, Combat, p. 32.

7:36; 8:3; As. Mos. 9:6,7; 1 Enoch 47:2,4 and of course in Revelation 6:10. The answer and result of the answer constitutes the third reason for suggesting a familiarity of these Jewish accounts.

The victories in the ML are consistently accompanied with the singing of songs (hymns) of praise.<sup>46</sup> This was of course preceded by similar actions in the Old Testament after victories,<sup>47</sup> and is repeated in Revelation as well (5:9; 14:3; 15:3).<sup>48</sup> The songs are not only songs of praise and glory to God, but the songs encapsulate the reason for His greatness which is seen in His defeat of all those who would dare to challenge His authority.

Victory in Revelation is, for the most part, an extension of the victory depicted in the ML. No polemic can be found suggesting that Revelation's victory is a greater one. The victory of Revelation does supersede the victory in the ML in that Revelation's claim is based on Christ's victory, as opposed to a mortal role-model in the ML. This superior victory is then projected,

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<sup>46</sup> 1 Macc. 6:22; 3 Macc. 7:16; 4 Macc. 9:23.

<sup>47</sup> The most frequently cited hymn is the one praising the Lord for what He did against the Egyptians (Ex. 15:1-18,21). Other passages include 1 Sam. 18:6,7; 21:10,11; 29:5; 2 Sam. 22:1-51; Ps. 18:1-50; 136:10-22. See also Ford, pp. 75-80,241.

<sup>48</sup> We should note that these victory songs were not to be understood as just "another" victory song. These songs were likened to the great victory song of Moses in Ex. 15 (Rev. 15:3), but more importantly, the songs herald the dawn of a new era. This new era does not include the world's entire population, but is constituted by those who have overcome. In 5:9 we read that they sang a new song, and in 14:3 we are informed that no one could learn the song other than the 144,000.

in Revelation, onto the cosmic canvas for all to view. As a final summarizing statement, the contribution of the Old Testament will be examined.

### Victory In The Old Testament

Based on our previous discussion of victory in the Old Testament, it is clear that Revelation found its greatest source for a theology of victory from the Old Testament Scriptures.<sup>49</sup> It was demonstrated in ch. III that victory in the Old Testament was the gift of God. Whether it was His hand of protection, His giving of the promised land, His sustenance after the battles had been won, His control over "fate" and "luck", or even His depiction as a warrior, victory was understood in theocentric terms.

The divine status afforded to Jesus in Revelation<sup>50</sup> renders superfluous a discussion of "Christ" as important for the conqueror in Revelation in comparison to "God" as important for victory in the Old Testament. Just as the God of the Old Testament crushes even the greatest foe, so too Christ is responsible for the defeat of "the enemy" in Revelation.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "...its 404 verses contain 518 quotations from the Old Testament". Sands, p. 185. See also Lohse, Einheit, p. 330; Fitzmyer, pp. 59-61; Smith, "Old Testament", p. 63.

<sup>50</sup> 1:17,18; 4:8-11; 5:12-14; 20:6.

<sup>51</sup> Sweet, "Maintaining", p. 117.

References to God and Christ are distinct in Revelation, but at the same time they are seen as a united force, giving evil its well-deserved punishment. The acts of God in Revelation are understood as an extension and continuation of His previous acts of salvation in the Old Testament, with Christ spear-heading the divine counter-attack.<sup>52</sup> While the Old Testament depiction of God as conqueror is an awesome one, the capstone of His conquests is finally cemented in Revelation. The final battle has begun with the Christ-event, and because of God's proven victories throughout the past and in this age, His adherents are assured of the victory in the age to come.

#### Concluding Remarks

The rich tradition of victory that preceded Revelation is now finally consummated in the greatest victory of all. Throughout the ages victory proved to be the deciding factor in determining whose god was superior. The desire for victory was common for races of the past, and continues to evidence itself even in our technologically superior world today. Victory (success) is indeed one of the more significant considerations to be made in humankind's perception of existence.

In the previous chapters we have sought to illustrate some traditions that emphasized the importance of victory for their everyday life as expressed in their theologies. Revelation's

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<sup>52</sup> Boring, "Theology", pp. 263-267. See also ch. III.



claim is not that victory in and of itself is unique or novel, but that the victory found in Christ most certainly is. Nike and Victoria experienced almost a millennium of worship, before suffering a death of theological disinterest. Conversely, devotees of Christ continue to worship this giver of victory for what now appears to be the third millennium. As a result of this continued and growing devotion, Revelation's place in the historical development of theologies of victory becomes more than just another facet of this multi-sided diamond. It rightly becomes the standard by which all other victories should be compared, and by which their efforts are found to be wanting.

The claim of victory as absolute in Christ in the context of the GR cults of Asia Minor in the first century resulted in a specific response from the ruling authorities. Similarly, the earlier claims of Christ also brought specific responses from the ruling authorities. These two concepts are inextricably tied together in the gospel of Revelation in that Jesus apart from His victory was not Christ, and victory apart from Christ was not victory. It was this gospel, deemed obstinate by pagans, that caused a foul stench to arise in the noses of the governing powers. Another victory cult, or another saviour would be tolerated, but when the claims became exclusive, then persecution ensued.

Revelation is permeated with both of these elements, victory and persecution. Though persecution seems to contradict the alleged victory of Christ, Christ shines all the brighter as

Satan gathers his demons to confront Him in this last battle. Eternity is now at stake, and the forces are mustered to prepare for this battle. Satan's attacks can not be directed at Christ Himself, and so he launches an attack on those who offer allegiance to Him. Those whom Satan afflicts are encouraged by Christ and His example. Unlike any other battle, the outcome of this battle is assured because of His victory.

In the midst of this persecution stands the exalted Christ. His victory sets Him apart from all who preceded Him, for His victory is achieved by the power of love and not by a love for power.<sup>53</sup> He offers hope to those who unfortunately have to experience the dying efforts of a satanic onslaught, and promises riches beyond belief and compare to those who hold fast unto the end, as He did.<sup>54</sup>

In this context it is somewhat strange to note Revelation's recognition and graphic delineation of the power that evil has.

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<sup>53</sup> Klassen, Love, pp. 133-136. As we noted in ch. II, both Nike and Victoria found their genesis in the GR desire for more power as manifested in their never ceasing military campaigns.

<sup>54</sup> Christ's offer of hope to the would-be conqueror illuminates further the the Gestalt of ho nikôn, who cannot be understood apart from this hope. See for example, Feuillet, p. 17; Whealon, pp. 56-58; Leivestad, p. 217; Terence J. Keegan, "Revelation: A Source of Encouragement" in The Bible Today 19 (6, November 1981), pp. 373-377; Lilje, p. 72; A. Hausrath, A History Of The New Testament Times: The Time Of The Apostles, Vol. IV. L. Huxley, trans. (London: Williams And Norgate, 1895), p. 282; Eduard Lohse, The First Christians: Their Beginnings, Writings, and Beliefs, M. Eugene Boring, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), pp. 99-103; Sands, p. 202. Just as Christ faced the temptation to succumb to Satan's wiles (Mt. 4:1-10; 26:39) and overcame them (Heb. 2:16-18; 4:14-16), He is now alone in a position to be the source upon which the conqueror is to draw.

This, however, is part of the theology of Revelation which acknowledges the power of evil, but only as contrasted to the greater power of God. The readers of Revelation were given an honest and candid description of all that lay ahead, but not to discourage them. Conversely, the purpose of describing evil's power was a purifying one, providing the ultimate catharsis for all causes of affliction.<sup>55</sup>

The conqueror is challenged to hold fast until the end. In this claim, no significant difference is found with other theologies of victory. However, the outworking of this claim in Revelation separates ho nikôn from all other conquerors and claims thereto. The conquerors of Revelation are not conquerors by their own powers and strategies, nor do they conquer with the aid of gods that would eventually be defeated themselves, but they conquer by the One who has alone truly conquered.

The ultimate and proven claim of victory in Revelation lies in its dependence on the central figure of the book, Jesus

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<sup>55</sup> This is the thesis of A.Y. Collins' work, which describes how John used the crisis and perceived crisis to elicit catharsis for his readers. "Catharsis is a process whereby vague, semi-conscious, disquieting feelings are brought to the surface, focused, brought to a climax, and thus released." A.Y. Collins, "Coping With Hostility" in The Bible Today 19 (No. 6, November 1981), p. 370. "By projecting the tension and the feelings experienced by the hearers into cosmic categories, the Apocalypse made it possible for the hearers to gain some distance from their experience. It provided a feeling of detachment and thus greater control." Collins, Catharsis, p. 161. Similar theories of catharsis were suggested before Collins forwarded hers. For example, John G. Gager did so in 1983, and in his work cited two earlier scholars from whom he drew upon, Mircea Eliade (1963) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1967).

Christ who alone has conquered death.<sup>56</sup> Although Revelation has been referred to as the book of the Bible that has caused the most confusion among Christians,<sup>57</sup> its presentation of Christ is clear. Although some great men in the church of this Christ found Christ's picture in Revelation as unclear, He is indeed, in Revelation, the clearest New Testament manifestation of an all-powerful, all-conquering God.<sup>58</sup>

The hymns of victory in Revelation laud this Christ as representing the epitome of victory over all other claims. They gave outward expression to the inner joys experienced by those who held fast to the end in spite of Satan's wiles. These hymns brought glory and honour to the One who by His conquering sealed the future of His church. It is fitting therefore to conclude this section with another hymn that captures the very theology, theme and purpose that Revelation holds out to ho nikôn. Somewhat ironically, this hymn was penned by the great Reformation theologian Martin Luther.

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<sup>56</sup> See for example texts such as Rev. 3:21 and 1 Cor. 15.

<sup>57</sup> "From the earliest ages of the Church it has been universally admitted that the Apocalypse is the most difficult book of the entire Bible." R.H. Charles, Lectures On The Apocalypse, "The Schweich Lectures, 1919" (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 1. See also A.Y. Collins, "Reading", p. 229; Marshall, "Martyrdom", p. 334; Alastair Hamilton, "The Apocalypse Within: Some Inward Interpretations Of The Book Of Revelation From The Sixteenth To The Eighteenth Century" in Tradition, Henten, ed., pp. 278,279; J.J. Collins, "The Apocalypse: Revelation and Imagination" in The Bible Today 19 (No. 6, November 1981), p. 361.

<sup>58</sup> "Bousset said that the Christology of the Apocalypse is probably the richest of the entire New Testament." Feuillet, p. 82; Tenney, Revelation, p. 29.

A mighty Fortress is our God, a Bulwark never failing;  
Our Helper He amid the flood, of mortal ills prevailing:  
For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and power are great,  
And armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal!

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be  
losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side; the Man of God's own  
choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth His name,  
From age to age the same, and He must win the battle!

And though this world, with devils filled,  
Should threaten to un-do us,  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph  
through us:  
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo! his doom is sure - One little word shall fell him!

That Word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them  
abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours, through Him who with us  
sideth:  
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;  
The body they may kill;  
God's truth abideth still; His Kingdom is forever!<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" in Worship Hymnal, Paul Wohlgemuth, chairman-editor (Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1971), p. 72. I have chosen to cite this translation of Luther's hymn. The reader may wish to see Martin Luther, Luthers Works, Volume 53. Ulrich S. Leupold ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), pp. 284-285.

## CHAPTER VII

### REVELATION'S ABSOLUTE CLAIM TO VICTORY

The purpose of this final chapter is to provide a working example of the fruit that can result from a Historical Critical examination of a theological theme (victory) in Revelation. We stated in our first two chapters that theological themes had largely been neglected in the scholarly work on Revelation. However, since I am convinced that John's purpose for writing Revelation was motivated by theological concerns, I stated that those theological concerns could in turn be better understood with a Historical Critical approach.

Chapters II-IV were concerned with exploring theologies of victory outside of Revelation. This involved the pagan victory cults of the Greeks (Nike) and Romans (Victoria), because they were contemporary to Revelation (ch. II). It also included the theologies of victory in the Jewish tradition, and I concen-

trated on the Maccabean literature and in particular the martyrdom accounts found in 2 and 4 Maccabees (ch. III).

Similarly, the Old Testament Scriptures were then examined to see how a theology of victory was presented there (ch. III). These two chapters (chs. II-III) then concluded with a discussion of how much syncretism could be realistically assumed by the texts of the New Testament. Finally, chapter IV examined the contemporary texts of the New Testament as well as Josephus' works to see how these contributed to a theology of victory.

Whenever possible, attempts were made to note texts that implemented the use of nikaô in victory statements. Chapter V served to facilitate an understanding of the theological theme of victory in Revelation as expressed through the nikaô word group. Chapter VI drew comparisons between Revelation and all other victory theologies previously examined. The conclusion was that victory in Revelation was understood as having reached its zenith in expression. No claim of victory could be greater than the one made by God in Revelation through Christ.

I have chosen to examine the Greco-Roman cults, the Maccabean literature, the Old Testament and the contemporary writers of the New Testament (as well as Josephus) because they were proven to have had a significant impact on Christians living in Asia Minor in the first century CE. The pursuit of "victory" forms a significant part of each of the aforementioned's theology.

Victory has a source, and giver thereof, and each of the religious traditions examined in this thesis had its own way of expressing that process. To be sure, the Intertestamental literature and the Old Testament (as well as the contemporary New Testament texts) find Revelation to be on a continuum with their theology of victory. Minor differences were noted in chapter VI, but no contradictory or polemical agendas were found to exist between Revelation and these texts.

However, this is not the case when a comparison between Revelation and the Greco-Roman cults was made. The victory claims of Revelation were definitely of a superior nature to those of the contemporary Greco-Roman world. As we noted in chapter VI, the Greco-Roman victory cults did not make exclusive claims over one another. The Christian's claim was exclusive, and that was precisely what brought them into conflict with the contemporary political system, which was closely associated with the victory cults.<sup>1</sup>

I have contended from the outset of this thesis that an examination and comparison of contemporary and prior theologies of victory to that in Revelation is more than exploratory. An examination of the rich victory tradition that preceded and coexisted with that of Revelation's theology of victory is pertinent to an understanding of John's use of this theological theme. My reason for pursuing this topic for a thesis arose out of the scholarly neglect that theological themes in Revelation

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<sup>1</sup> See ch. V, pp. 168-171.



had received. Further, only two short aforementioned works<sup>2</sup> directed themselves to John's use of nikaô, but both studies were very limited in their contribution thereto.

Ho nikôn in Revelation referred to those who were faithful, at any cost. But it also had implicit connotations to Christ, who having conquered, now enabled the would-be-conqueror to be victorious. Nevertheless, even though Christ's claims were unique, the victory motif as part of religious expression was not. More specifically, victory through (or in spite of) death was not an original contribution by John. In this context Leivestad, who wrote an article on victory in Revelation, made an interesting remark:

But to grasp the implications of the term [nikaô] in Revelation it is hardly necessary to instance analogous expressions in other religions. The paradoxical idea of the victory of the martyr is deeply rooted in Jewish martyrology, and it has from the outset been a fundamental Christian concept.<sup>3</sup>

Leivestad operates on several false premises that cause him to make this erroneous statement. The first is, that nikaô in Revelation refers only to the martyr. His second false premise is that the paradoxical idea of a martyrological victory is a Jewish phenomenon. His third false premise is that "Jewish martyrology" is the same as "Christian concept". As a result, his conclusion, stated in the first part of the quote, is not sound.

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<sup>2</sup> See ch. I, p. 45, n. 95.

<sup>3</sup> Leivestad, p. 216.

I have already demonstrated that nikaô in Revelation was not a term used exclusively for the martyr.<sup>4</sup> I showed that nikaô also referred to Christians who "kept the faith" in the face of any form of temptation not to do so. Leivestad states that this idea has been "from the outset a fundamental Christian concept". I showed that already from the time of Homer that "death for a cause" was in fact a victory.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the cause may not be the same as in Revelation, but the idea is the same, and it is not a Christian concept from the outset.

Lastly, Leivestad's ecumenical remark about Jewish and Christian theology on this matter is not in order. As I have already demonstrated, Christians appropriated these martyrs as their own.<sup>6</sup> While it is true that Christianity largely saw itself as on a continuum with the Jewish tradition,<sup>7</sup> Christianity also saw itself as distinct and separate. Jesus' death at the hands of the Jews<sup>8</sup> and the conflicts recorded in Acts are enough to show that "Jewish" and "Christian" are not synonymous.

As a direct result of these erroneous presuppositions, Leivestad concludes wrongly that it is not necessary to look at "analogous expressions in other religions". Therefore, as a

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<sup>4</sup> Ch. V, pp. 181-186.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. II, pp. 64-65.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. III, pp. 112-117, esp. n. 34.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Winslow, "Maccabean", p. 86 and Pobee, pp. 13-46.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 3:13-17; 4:10-12.

conclusion to this thesis, we take upon ourselves a two-fold task. The first part of the task is to give an example, as stated in the first chapter, of the fruit that can be gleaned from a Historical Critical study of a theological theme in Revelation.

The second part of this task is to correct Leivestad's remark. I will integrate these two concerns in the pages that follow in the hope of showing that John was aware of these pagan victory cults. I will also seek to prove that John intentionally polemicizes these pagan victory cults, especially with his use of nikaô.

In the first chapter, we noted that most scholars promoted the pursuit of attaining the best possible knowledge of John's contemporary world. John's writing of Revelation did not occur in a vacuum, but was the product of a man who had lived and experienced life in Asia Minor. Since his reference points become the key to unlocking the contents of the book, a study of his contemporary world is priority number one.<sup>9</sup> Given that

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<sup>9</sup> "Since the author [John] does not employ discursive language and logical arguments but speaks in the language of symbol and myth, the often somewhat unsophisticated discussion of the imaginative, mythopoeic language of Rev[elation] needs to be replaced by a literary approach and symbol analysis that would bring out the evocative power and 'musicality' of its language, which was written to be read aloud and to be heard." Fiorenza, Justice, p. 22. Beckwith: "For the understanding of the Revelation of John it is essential to put one's self as far as is possible, into the world of its author and of those to whom it was first addressed. Its meaning must be sought for in the light thrown upon it by the condition and circumstances of its readers, by the author's inspired purpose, and by those current beliefs and traditions that not only influence the fashion which his visions themselves took, but also and especially determined the

victory is a major theological theme, and not expressed in a similar way in other New Testament texts, I suggested and then pursued a logical path of scholarly investigation towards a better understanding of that theme.

The Jewish texts of the Maccabees and the Old Testament largely find Revelation as being on the same continuum. This in and of itself affords us the opportunity to see how John used, built and expanded upon the tradition that he inherited. Therefore the contemporary Greco-Roman pagan victory cults which John and his readers were immersed in, provide a much more revealing foil on which to cast nikaô in Revelation.

For nikaô is used in Revelation as an exclusive term. Nikaô in Revelation is used to represent the unsurpassed victory of Christ, which in turn can become the victory of those who follow Him. Any claim to victory outside of those parameters is not true victory. In particular, I suggest that nikaô is deliberately used with reference to the surrounding pagan victory cults. In testing this hypothesis, I will be applying the fruit of my Historical Critical research on the theological theme of victory in Revelation.

Let me begin by first substantiating the pervading existence of these victory cults at the time and place of John's writing. More conclusive evidence can be given to substantiate Nike's

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form of this literary composition in which he has given a record of his visions." Beckwith, p. v. See also Sweet, p. 13. An earlier (1892) hermeneutical view was that the spiritual intent of Revelation nullified the need for such endeavours. Milligan, Lectures, p. 131.

pervading presence in the life of first-century Christians in Asia Minor. Of the Greek cults that Nike was associated with, the cults were almost invariably from Asia Minor. One of the cities suggested for a Nike cult was Olbia, but this city is found far away from Asia Minor north of the Black Sea, some 600 miles north of Pergamum.

The island of Carpathos was also believed to have a Nike cult, and this island is only 90 miles south of Patmos and about 130 miles south of Ephesus. This brings us much closer to the area within Asia Minor that Revelation addresses. Lastly, we can also mention that a cult of Nike was also rumored to be functioning in the city of Aphrodisias. This city is approximately 75 miles east of Ephesus, and about 25 miles south-west of Laodicea.

Unfortunately, Nike cults cannot with certainty be confirmed for Olbia and Carpathos. However, a Nike cult can be substantiated for Aphrodisias, and this puts us in very close proximity to the seven churches mentioned in Revelation. Other Nike cults that can be confirmed with absolute certainty in this region are those in the cities of Tralles, Illium and Erythrae.<sup>10</sup> Tralles is about 75 miles northwest of Pergamum, while Illium is about 25 miles east of Ephesus and Erythrae is approximately 50 miles west of Smyrna.

Reference should also be made to an alabaster relief dated to the first century CE. The relief shows Zeus as interested

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<sup>10</sup> Bulle, pp. 311-312; Weinstock, p. 2515; Farnell, p. 313; Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735.

in finding out what the various divinities have to say in regard to the claims of Athena and Poseidon to the country. The twelve divinities have made their votes, and none other than Nike is seen as taking the votes from the urn that stands on the altar. This first century CE alabaster relief was found in Smyrna, one of the cities containing one of the seven churches in Revelation.<sup>11</sup> Nike's Gestalt was most certainly known by the first century Christian recipients of Revelation.

The presence of these Nike cults in Asia Minor is important not just because of their proximity to the churches of Revelation. It is important because these pagan centers of worship were experiencing a tremendous growth in cultic activity at this time. In Chapter II (pp. 62-64) we reported that due to Nike's increased popularity, she experienced a Vervielfaeltigung. That her cult experienced this increase at the same time Revelation was written is attested to by historical records. Dionysius Halicarnassensis wrote that before the birth of Christ, there were several Nike cults in Ilion and Tralles. Dionysius is evidence that after the birth of Christ, these Nike cults took on an even greater acceptance and propagation in Asia Minor.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Christians living within the area of Asia Minor containing the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 were exposed to growing pagan theologies of victory in numerous ways. In the

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<sup>11</sup> Farnell, p. 323. Note also that victory cults are also attested to for the city of Smyrna. Oberhummer, pp. 291-293.

<sup>12</sup> Oberhummer, p. 297.

actual worshipping of victory as well as through the media of art, architecture, travel and currency, these pagan ideologies of victory that permeated the Greco-Roman world of Asia Minor would have impacted Christian's lives tremendously. As a result, we can say with assurance that at the time John wrote from the island of Patmos to the seven churches in Asia Minor, the Christians he wrote to were well-aware of these pagan victory cults.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that careful attention should be directed to the growth of these victory cults. In doing so we notice that from the time of Christ, the pagan worship of victory is heightened considerable. Augustus clearly marks the point and time at which this change occurred.<sup>14</sup> Victory over death in these pagan victory cults also took on a renewed fervor at this time.<sup>15</sup> It is more than coincidental that John's vocabulary in Revelation

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<sup>13</sup> Note also some of the other cults in the Greco-Roman world, in cities such as Rome (up to 4 victory cults attested to), Taras, Terina, Tarentum, Olympia, Delphi, Athens, Megara, and the region of Aetolia. Bulle, pp. 318-320; Oberhammer, pp. 291-293; Farnell, p. 313; Haufmann & Pollard, p. 735; Vermeule, p. 105; Richter, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> See for example, Weinstock, pp. 2518, 2519, 2526-2530; Oberhammer, p. 297; Bulle, pp. 311, 354; LeBouniec, p. 3226; Palmer, p. 198.

<sup>15</sup> Although the earliest traces of this can be found in the third century BCE, it comes to its fullest expression at the time of Augustus. Weinstock, p. 2539.

finds direct association with the changes that were occurring in the pagan victory cults of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>16</sup>

More and more we realize that, if possible, a precise knowledge of the date of Revelation will help us to more accurately interpret its message.<sup>17</sup> With remarkably few exceptions, scholars have dated Revelation as having been written during the reign of Domitian.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the discussion that follows operates on the premise that Revelation is concomitant with the historical realities operative at the time of Domitian.

The Domitianic date and virtual certitude thereof is important in understanding the connection between victory in

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<sup>16</sup> We make this remark conscious of Collins' caution with regard to these kinds of comparisons. She says that a search for "similarities" is one of the fundamental options used in interpreting texts. Her caution is that there is a tendency to over-simplify, and to focus only on the similarities, so that the differences go unnoticed. The possibility also always exists that a false premise undermines any given study, the premise that similarity "always implies dependence or influence". Collins, Combat, p. 207.

<sup>17</sup> The importance of establishing the date of Revelation is stressed time and again by Collins (Catharsis, pp. 20,25,50,54), and finds virtually no worth in Goldsworthy's study (pp. 31,32). This thesis follows the former, and disagrees with the latter.

<sup>18</sup> Those who reject the Domitian date are mavericks such as Ford (p. 37), and J.A.T. Robinson, Redating The New Testament, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 230,231. Jacques Ellul shys away from a Domitian date, but at the same time does not commit himself to any specific date (Ellul, p. 19). Among those who date Revelation to the reign of Domitian we find the following: Oman, pp. 27-30; Lenski, pp. 5,82; Glasson, pp. 8,9; Lohse, Offenbarung, p. 7; Ladd, Commentary, p. 8; Mounce, pp. 31-36; Smith, p. 9; Morris, pp. 34-40; Feuillet, p. 37; Kiddle, pp. xxxvi-xliii; Caird, pp. 5-7; Swete, p. civ; Collins, Catharsis, pp. 76,77,84; Boll, p. 94; W.M. Ramsay, The Letters To The Seven Churches Of Asia: And Their Place In The Plan Of The Apocalypse, (London: Hodder And Stoughton, 1904), p. 94.



Revelation and the contemporary pagan victory cults. That Domitian was involved in the persecution of Christians has already been noted. However, we will now suggest that the choice facing Christians under Domitian's rule was very likely the choice between worshipping Christ, or worshipping the pagan victory goddesses.

Twenty years after Domitian, Pliny wrote to Trajan for advice on how to deal with Christians with regard to the imperial cult.<sup>19</sup> Pliny proceeded to determine if these Christians were willing to conform, or if they would remain obstinate<sup>20</sup> in their faith. He did so by ordering the Christians to present offerings to the Roman empire, to Caesar, and to the statues of the gods.<sup>21</sup> If they participated in this worship, then they had proven they were not obstinate. Conversely, if they would not genuflect, then they were killed.

The point of connection between Revelation and the Greco-Roman victory cults occurs precisely with this test. Pliny

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<sup>19</sup> The following is based on (ep. X 96ff). Even though this correspondance is two decades after our time of concern, Smallwood says that it is indicative of procedures dating back to the time of Domitian. "When Pliny was faced with the problem of the Christians in Bithynia in 112, there were among the apostates some who had given up their faith twenty years previously, which points to the Church being under pressure in the early 90's; and his remark to Trajan that he had 'never attended trials of Christians' implies that such trials had occurred before he instituted them in his province.". Smallwood, p. 381.

<sup>20</sup> See ch. V, p. 168, n. 6 and p. 171, n. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Note that this form of a "test" for true citizenship was attempted as early as 66/67 CE in Antioch against the Jews. Josephus, "Antiquities Of The Jews", Book XII, ch. iii.

wrote that he took the Christians and showed them what they were to do. First they came before the image of Caesar, and before the statues of the gods and goddesses. The offering was then presented to the images, and the Christians' lives were spared if they emulated his worship.

The offering given to the gods and goddesses was incense and a libation of wine. As we noted at the end of our discussion on Victoria, it was this sacrifice of wine and incense to Victoria made by the senators that infuriated the Christians and caused the eventual removal of the pagan practice. There is much historical proof that associated the worship of Victoria with these specific offerings.<sup>22</sup> That the image of Caesar is included with part of the "test" confirms what we saw in chapter II, namely, that Caesar and Victoria were inextricably associated from at least the time of Augustus.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, we can suggest that Christians in the region of Asia Minor were included in the persecution by the state. The reason given for this persecution was not that they had their own faith and cultic activities. Their persecution was the direct result of their obstinacy in that they refused to partake in any

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<sup>22</sup> Pollitt, p. 198; Carter, p. 152; Luehrmann, pp. 197,198; Weinstock, p. 2526; Bulle, pp. 314,315.

<sup>23</sup> It was Augustus who had a special statue of Victoria made in Tarentum, which was then placed in the Senate House. Some time later a fire destroyed the Senate House, and Domitian rebuilt the House and rededicated this same Victoria in the Senate chambers. Harry Thurston Peck ed., "Nike" in Harper's Dictionary Of Classical Literature And Antiquities, (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1963), p. 1096.

other worship. The victory cults in the cities surrounding and including the seven mentioned in Revelation became the crucible in which the Christians were tested. The references in the letters to this opposition (Rev. 2:10,13-15,20,24; 3:4,8,10) in all likelihood referred to the accepted worship of many deities, centered around emperor worship.

Therefore, John concluded each letter with a reference to those who would conquer. While claims to victory surrounded and threatened Christians as a test of citizenship, John boldly encourages the Christians to press on, and to "strengthen what remains" (3:2). It is the pagan worship of victory that brought Christianity into conflict with the Roman empire, and ironically, it is victory (the victory of Christ) that is held out to Christians as the final solution to this problem. John's banishment to Patmos reflects the hostility toward the Christian proclamation. At the same time, John's words indicate in a "touche" like fashion that victory belongs to Christ, His followers, and to no one else.

While the above has been the subject of many studies concluding in various interpretations,<sup>24</sup> more substantive evidence can be given that John polemicizes the victory cults of the contemporary Greco-Roman world. It is the widespread enthusiasm of the victory cults in the Greco-Roman world that

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<sup>24</sup> "Dieser Briefwechsel [Pliny/Trajan] ist in den letzten Jahren verschiedentlich analysiert worden, mit recht kontroversen Ergebnissen freilich." Luehrmann, p. 195.

provides another backdrop on which to examine the theology of victory in Revelation.

The importance of victory, especially in battle, and Victoria's close association therewith is illustrated in Josephus' work. He describes how Vespasian was greeted after a series of successful military campaigns. When word came that Vespasian was on his way to Rome,<sup>25</sup> many could not wait for his arrival, and so they went to meet him.

Not just a handful of zealots, but so "possessed" were they with this victory, and the parade that accompanied it, that the whole city of Rome is described as going out to meet him.<sup>26</sup> When Vespasian and his two sons (Titus, Domitian) arrived in Rome, the celebrating was so overwhelming, that the only free

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<sup>25</sup> Keeping in mind our previous discussion that the affairs of Rome were not foreign to those seemingly far-removed in Asia Minor. Ch. II, pp. 87-89. See also n. 34 below.

<sup>26</sup> They could not "...endure the delay of seeing him, but did all pour out of the city in such great crowds, and were so universally possessed with the opinion that it was easier and better for them to go out than to stay there, that this was the very first time that the city [Rome] joyfully perceived itself almost empty of its citizens; for those that stayed within were fewer than those that went out; but as soon as the news was related with what good humour he received every one that came to him, then it was that the whole multitude that had remained in the city, with their wives and children, came into the road, and waited for him there; and for those whom he passed by, they made all sorts of acclamations on account of the joy they had to see him, and the pleasantness of his countenance, and styled him their Benefactor and Saviour, and the only person who was worthy to be ruler of the city of Rome." Wars Of The Jews, VII, 5, following the translation of William Whiston.

place left to stand was "a passage as was necessary for those that were to be seen to go along it".<sup>27</sup>

These festivities continued for at least two days, and were crowned by the march beginning at the "Gate of the Pomp, because pompous shows do always go through that gate...".<sup>28</sup> The purpose of this march was to dramatize the army's victories to the civilians who had not been able to see them firsthand. This was accomplished by the penultimate climax of the march (which included such events as the parading of the spoils and captives taken), the pageants. The pageants were "portraits" of the war on massive floats<sup>29</sup> depicting various stages of the attack, such as the sacking and defeat of the enemy.

No detail was neglected. Every pageant represented a sacked city, and on that pageant was placed the commander of that city. According to Josephus' account, the parade seemed endless, and the crowds constituted the entire population of the city of Rome.

The crowds had now seen pageant after pageant, intended to fill them with enthusiasm. The spoils were paraded past the crowds, saving the best spoils for the end of the parade in order to bring about the awaited climax of the parade. This climax was when Vespasian, Titus and Domitian passed before the crowds. The

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "For indeed he that met them could not but be afraid that the bearers would not be able firmly enough to support them, such was their magnitude." Ibid.

immense pageants and seemingly endless spoils of war had passed, leaving only these rulers to ride through the streets.

Though the emperor's introduction had been lengthy and calculated to arouse the crowds, his introduction was not quite complete. For placed in between the last, and therefore the greatest, of the spoils and the emperor marched "...a great many men, carrying the images of Victory, whose structure was entirely either of ivory or of gold."<sup>30</sup> Now it was fitting for the emperor and his sons to ride past the crowds.

...Vespasian marched in the first place, and Titus followed him; Domitian also rode along with them, and made a glorious appearance, and rode on a horse that was worthy of admiration.<sup>31</sup>

Two things are worth noting. First of all, the fact that outside of the emperor and his sons, Victoria provides the crowning glory to the festivities. Secondly, Josephus' concern to emphasize that Domitian's appearance was glorious, and that he rode on a horse that was "worthy of admiration."<sup>32</sup> Given the Domitian date for Revelation, Josephus' account provides some interesting parallels.<sup>33</sup>

The first parallel that we can mention is the fact that both "key figures", the emperor and Christ, constitute victory in the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> While both can be taken as historically accurate, the latter no doubt reflects the fact that Josephus' writings were published in Rome, 93 CE, in the thirteenth year of Domitian.

<sup>33</sup> As we list these parallels, keep in mind the aforementioned circumstances surrounding John's writing of Revelation.

eyes of their adherents. Victory precedes Augustus as he rides majestically on his horse, and victory precedes Christ as He rides on His horse.<sup>34</sup>

Further parallels can be seen as we read on in Josephus' text about this victory parade.<sup>35</sup> After the emperor and his sons arrived at the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus,

...they stood still; for it was the Romans' ancient custom to stay till somebody brought the news that the general of the enemy was slain.<sup>36</sup>

This general of the enemy's army was bound, tormented and then slain, after which the people "set up a shout for joy". In Revelation, the general of the enemy's army (Satan) was also bound (20:2), tormented (20:10), and when he was slain, there was also much rejoicing (19:1-6).

After these festivities were finished, according to Josephus, some people went away to the palace, some were entertained by the emperor at his feast,

...and for all the rest there were noble preparations made for their feasting at home, for this was a festival-day to the city of Rome, as celebrated for the victory obtained by their army over their enemies, for the end that was now put to their civil miseries, and

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<sup>34</sup> Rev. 19:11,19-21.

<sup>35</sup> We also draw the reader's attention to the fact that victory parades such as these had a long history. The earliest verified reference to such parades is with Ptolemy II (308-246 BCE). The date of their inception before this late third and early fourth-century BCE date is not known with certainty. Weinstock, pp. 2516,2528.

<sup>36</sup> Josephus, "Wars", VII,5.

for the commencement of their hopes of future prosperity and happiness.<sup>37</sup>

Revelation's victory celebration is virtually the same. Those who have their name written in the Lamb's book of life, are invited to partake in the Lamb's marriage supper (19:9).

Note also that the celebration was not only because "the enemy" had been defeated, but the resulting joy came because their miseries had now come to an end. Together with this also came the beginning of hope for "future prosperity and happiness". So too in Revelation, the "present miseries" experienced by the followers of the Lamb are also removed, and a perfect future awaits the faithful. Of course the claim of Revelation is that these conditions are, unlike those of the pagan victory cults, permanent (Rev. 21:1-5a,23-27; 22:1-5).

There is one last important facet of this Roman celebration that is paralleled in Revelation:

After these triumphs were over, and after the affairs of the Romans were settled on the surest foundations, Vespasian resolved to build a temple to Peace, which he finished in so short a time, and in so glorious a manner, as was beyond all human expectation and opinion: for he having now by Providence a vast quantity of wealth, besides what he had formerly gained in his other exploits, he had this temple adorned with pictures and statues; for in this temple were collected and deposited all such rarities as men aforesaid used to wander all over the habitable world to see, when they had a desire to see them one after another...<sup>38</sup>

So too in Revelation, after the triumphs are over, and after all affairs have been "settled on the surest foundations"

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



(19:1-6,20,21; 20:9-15; 21:1-7), then something "glorious" and "beyond all human expectation and opinion" is revealed (see 21:10-21). The temple that Vespasian built was incredible, as it reflected all that he had accomplished. But in Revelation, no temple can be built to reflect the greatness of God and His victory, and so it is the Lord God who is the temple (21:22-26).

Josephus' account certainly underscores the greatness of Vespasian's temple. It is "beyond all human expectation", and this because of the wealth that he had accumulated in his military exploits. The temple in Revelation surpasses Vespasian's attempt, and once again, it seems that the theological coup de grâce has been dealt.

We have noted the following parallels: victory as associated with the "key figure" (Domitian/Christ); the key figure riding a horse; the proclamation of the defeat of the enemy; the enemy being bound, tormented and removed for all time; a shout of joy following this defeat; a feast of celebration, where the key figure dines with his followers; an end to their miseries because of the victory of the key figure reflected in celebration, and the appearance of a magnificent edifice to celebrate this victory.

It is now made clear that the implications of the theology of victory in Revelation as expressed through the nikaō word group are better grasped by looking at analogous expressions in other religions. The similarities just noted have to be understood in a relational capacity. One could not assert that each

tradition developed independently from the other. Nor could one hope to argue that either tradition was not even in the least familiar with the other. Precisely because Josephus' account and Revelation's date concur, the similarities in their theologies of victory cannot be disregarded as coincidence.<sup>39</sup>

Victory was deified hundreds of years before the gospel of Christ was preached. Long before John wrote of ho nikôn in Revelation, the Greco-Roman world had propagated a victory gospel. Long before the Christian, or Maccabean concept of "victory through death", Homer wrote of dying for a cause as being the more noble death. Long before John wrote about the victory celebration, the Greco-Roman world had celebrated.

What then do we make of the theology of victory in Revelation? It certainly was not a ground-breaking concept. In fact, in almost all of its manifestations, it does not differ from the theologies of victory that preceded and were contemporaneous to it. Therefore, the few differences that do exist between Revelation and the "analogous expressions in other religions", to quote Leivestad, become the most informative to us.

For it is within those differences that Revelation's superior victory claims are made. Vespasian (or any Roman emperor) became the saviour-figure for his citizens in that he defeated the enemy; he removed the commander of the enemies for all time; he gave peace, hope, comfort, security and future to

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<sup>39</sup> Josephus' entire account of these pagan victory celebrations find parallels in John's account in Revelation.

his citizens because of his successful warring; he celebrated this victory with his citizens; and then he built a worthy edifice to celebrate that accomplishment.

We are now in a better position to understand the theology of victory in Revelation. Because our Historical Critical examination has given us the ability to see the contributing factors that helped to establish the Sitz im Leben of Revelation. First, the close, and often indistinguishable, association of the emperor with the victory cult. Secondly, the long history of the victory parades that constituted an obviously important facet of Greco-Roman life. Thirdly, the growth and development of the victory cults from 700 and 295 BCE, which experienced a significant period of growth at the time Revelation was written. Fourthly, the widespread representation of pagan victory cults throughout Asia Minor, as evidenced by Domitian's megalomania. Fifthly, the rich Jewish victory tradition preceding and informing Revelation. And lastly, the Christian proclamation of Christ's victory over death (Rev. 1:5; 1 Cor. 15).

It is upon this foundation that John writes the Revelation. In earlier chapters we showed that influence can be substantiated from all the religious traditions investigated in this thesis. John wrote on a continuum with the theology of the Jewish literature. However, with regard to his contemporary situation, Revelation is seen in a different light. John has been banished to Patmos because of his faith in Christ (1:9), and the church

has experienced persecution from Rome. The attitude toward the state in Revelation 13 has changed remarkably from Romans 13.

It is this conflict with Rome that is expressed in Revelation as the conflict between good and evil. Chiefly it is expressed in the Christians refusal to bow the knee in accordance with emperor worship.<sup>40</sup> The peak of the Christian's obstinacy comes in that the claims of victory made by the emperor are quashed by the theology of Revelation which says that Christ alone is the true conqueror (5:1-14). The victory claims of the Greco-Roman victory cults most certainly antedated the claims of Revelation, but Revelation's claims definitely surpassed those of the pagans. The difference lay not in victory, but in the nature and extent of that victory.<sup>41</sup>

It is in the overarching nature of the victory claims in Revelation that we see most clearly how unique this victory claim is. To be sure, it was this unadulterated allegiance to these claims that resulted in the persecution of Christians. However, it was also the content of Christ's victory claims as expressed in Revelation that encouraged Christians to press on, no matter what.

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<sup>40</sup> See for example, Collins, "Reading", p. 235; Barclay, "Themes", p. 296; Collins, "Hostility", p. 371; Collins, Combat, pp. 186, 232-234; Penner, p. 117; Lilje, p. 31. The combination of the Domitian date for Revelation, Domitian's obsession with victory, and the Christian's obstinacy all contribute to the tension between the state and the Christians.

<sup>41</sup> Earlier in ch. VI we noted the eventual dissipation of the pagan victory cults in comparison to the continued adherence of Christians to the claims of Christ into the third millennium.

The pagan victory cults offered their devotees security as based on previous victories. But the pagan cults did not guarantee a permanent removal of evil as Christ could. To be sure, the claims that the emperor had conquered death in apotheosis were similar to the church's claims with regard to Christ. The test of time however showed how firmly the Greco-Roman world continued to be convinced of such a claim.

Revelation makes it clear that there is a tension between good and evil which is expressed in Satan's assault on the devotees of Christ.

The aim of the author of Revelation seems to have been to characterize the contemporary situation as a dualistic struggle in which his readers must take sides and firmly resist the powers of chaos expressed in the form of persecution.<sup>42</sup>

Part of the comfort given to the reader of Revelation is the promise that this conflict is temporary.<sup>43</sup>

The other part of the comfort given to the reader of Revelation, that the pagan devotee did not have, was the tremendous hope afforded to him or her because of the fact that Christ

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<sup>42</sup> Collins, Combat, pp. 185,186. See also, Rowland, Origins, p. 284; Meeks, "Social", p. 697; Barclay, "Themes", p. 293; Rissi, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> "There is no question in Revelation that the present tension between heaven and earth, the life of the age to come and this age, is any other than a temporary phenomenon and cannot be considered a fact which is accepted as a permanent theological datum." Rowland, Origins, p. 293. See also Collins, Combat, p. 44 where she says that the "primary impact" of Revelation is precisely the movement from persecution to salvation.

had already conquered.<sup>44</sup> The hope held out to the seven churches is inextricably associated with the perspective of Revelation. This hope is not just a future hope, but it is one that has bearing on the present predicament of the seven churches.<sup>45</sup> Since John, like Jesus, is more concerned with the exodus of evil than with its genesis, hope permeates Revelation.<sup>46</sup>

It is precisely because of the hope offered to Christians in Revelation, which is the direct result of Christ having conquered, that Revelation is lauded as "the crown of biblical eschatology".<sup>47</sup> Revelation

...is much nearer to the centre of early Christian belief than is often allowed. Not only the thrust of its eschatological message but also its concern with fulfillment (e.g. Rev. 5) indicate how accurately it mirrors, albeit in the imagery of apocalyptic, the central message of the New Testament. The eschatological message of the book of Revelation, therefore, is in essential continuity with those major voices of New Testament theology, Jesus and Paul. To understand the heart of the New Testament is to grapple with the message of hope in the pages of the Apocalypse.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> On the importance of Christ's victory as a fait accompli see: Rissi, p. 8; Guenther, pp. 651,652; Lohmeyer, Offenbarung, pp. 190-192; Caird, Commentary, pp. 292,293; Swete, p. xcvi. See also ch. V, pp. 178, ns. 25,26; 186, n. 40; 188, n. 46; 189, n. 47; 191, n. 51; 195, n. 61.

<sup>45</sup> Fiorenza, "Phenomenon", p. 301. This is precisely the purpose of chapters 4-22 says Swete, p. xcvi. See also Brown, p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> Caird, pp. 293-295.

<sup>47</sup> Beasley-Murray, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> Rowland, Origins, p. 117. See also Perrin, "Apocalyptic", p. 140; Collins, "Persecution", p. 738; Lohse, Offenbarung, p. 1; Penner, p. 116.

Revelation's perspective is that Christ alone constitutes the final and all-consuming victory. With this perspective in mind, the surrounding, growing and influential pagan victory cults have been negated as offering any worthwhile claims of victory. While Nike is pictured as crowning horses, athletes, kings and even herself,<sup>49</sup> Revelation depicts those who wear crowns as casting them at the feet of God in worship (4:9-11).

Christ's victory is superior not only because He vindicates the oppressed, but He deals with the oppressors as well. Unlike the other texts of the New Testament, conflict abounds in Revelation. While the idea of conflict is similar to that in the Greco-Roman world with their victory cults, Christ's total abolishment of evil is not paralleled in the pagan cults.

Christ's victory in Revelation is the basis for this elimination of evil. It is also the reason that He invites His followers to emulate His example, even if it requires their own deaths. Ho nikôn in Revelation participates in a victory that is assured, but not yet complete. Ho nikôn is also assured that this victory supersedes all other claims of victory. Ho nikôn in Revelation shares in a most glorious reward for being steadfast, and for not forsaking the name that affords that opportunity.

John's pastoral letter to the churches experiencing hardships is intent on encouraging the faithful to remain so. Their present and future situation is one of conflict, the conflict between good and evil. While the pagan world celebrates victory

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<sup>49</sup> Farnell, Vol. I, pp. 128,361,367.

on an expanding scale around these churches, John attempts to draw the churches attention to Christ. The churches are to focus on the victory of Christ, which in turn will become their salvation, both in the present and in the future. The pagan cults may claim that victory is brought by Nike and Victoria, but John's message in Revelation is that Christ is victory.

And when [Christ] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou was slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth". Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing"! And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever"! And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshipped. (Rev. 5:8-14)



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