

## **Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 1: Jesus in the Apocalypse**

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Many Christians are somewhat skeptical when it comes to the Book of Revelation. They have reservations against the last book of the Bible, because it is not important to them to deal with eschatological issues and the second coming of Christ or they are frightened by the “horror scenarios” of the Apocalypse. In addition, the impression may be prevalent that Revelation does not have much to do with Jesus, and it is concluded that, therefore, the book is not very crucial.

The Book of Revelation is a revelation that comes from Jesus (Rev 1:1). Jesus is the revealer, but by revealing prophecies about “the things which must soon take place” indirectly or even directly, Jesus also reveals God the Father’s and his own nature and functions.<sup>1</sup> For instance, by introducing himself to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he makes known his character and some of his functions. Through the Book of Revelation, humanity gets a better picture of Jesus and God the Father, what the

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<sup>1</sup> The genitive seems to be a subjective genitive due to its context. Cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 183; and Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 52. Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 163, argues for an objective genitive in the light of the Lamb being “the revelation of *how* God works in history.”

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Godhead is doing for them, and how the plan of salvation will succeed. Therefore, one would do well to read the book not only from the perspectives of Christian history or an end time scenario, but the focus should also be Christ-centered and God-centered.

This article attempts to gain some insights into the Christology of Revelation. Christology has been understood differently. While some take it as “the study of the person and work of Jesus Christ”<sup>2</sup> or “the study of Jesus’ self-understanding and of the titles, concepts, and conceptual patterns in which the NT church expressed its faith in him,”<sup>3</sup> others limit it to the church’s theological reflection on the nature of Christ in the centuries following the period of the early church.<sup>4</sup> The following quotation may also point in this direction: “Christology. The study of the Person of Christ, and in particular of the union in Him of the divine and human natures, and of His significance for Christian faith.”<sup>5</sup> This study follows the first definition, not limiting itself to systematic theology. Then the questions would be: What can be learned from John’s Apocalypse about Jesus Christ? How does the book challenge its readers and hearers to relate to Jesus and follow him? In spite of all the frightening events and developments today, and the evil powers portrayed in the Book of Revelation, one should not lose sight of the Lord.

This article is subdivided into three parts. The first part will take a look at designations and symbols used in Revelation to describe Jesus. It will proceed to an overview of Jesus in Revelation. Since the book highlights

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<sup>2</sup> W. A. Elwell, and P. W. Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 201), 266.

<sup>3</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, first edition (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 163.

<sup>4</sup> Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 211, suggests: “Christology. The theological understanding of Jesus Christ, specifically concerning his personhood (as distinguished from the doctrine of the atonement which describes Christ’s work of redemption). Though the New Testament portrays Jesus Christ in various ways, and the apostolic preaching may be termed christocentric (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:2), neither Christ’s own self-revelation nor his followers’ preaching about him should be considered christological, for the Church’s reflection on the nature of the person of Jesus Christ did not arise until the first centuries of the early church.”

<sup>5</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, third revised edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 339.

Jesus as a divine being, the second part will discuss the issue of Christ's divinity. The third part will focus on the Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse and will summarize important subject matters.

## **I. Designations and Symbols Used for Jesus in Revelation**

### **1. The Different Names and Depictions of Jesus**

The Book of Revelation contains a rich and distinctive Christology. In its various parts and visions Jesus is introduced with approximately thirty different names, titles, and images. The readers of the Apocalypse are not only informed about his character and nature but also about his work. Jesus is portrayed as: (1) Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1, 2, 5), (2) Jesus (Rev 1:9, 9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10,10; 20:4; 22:16), (3) Christ (Rev 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6), (4) the firstborn of the dead (Rev 1:5), (5) the faithful witness (Rev 1:5) / the faithful and true witness (Rev 3:14) / the Faithful and True (Rev 19:11), (6) the ruler of the kings on earth (Rev 1:5), (7) the one like a son of man (Rev 1:13; 14:14),<sup>6</sup> (8) the first and the last (and the living one) (Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:13), (9) the Son of God (Rev 2:18), (10) the holy and true one (Rev 3:7), (11) the Amen (Rev 3:14), (12) the beginning/ruler of God's creation (Rev 3:14), (13) the Lion (Rev 5:5), (14) the root of David (from Judah) (Rev 5:5; 22:6), (15) the Lamb (Rev 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-11, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14, 14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; 22:1, 3), (16) the rider on the white horse (Rev 6:2; 19:11-16), (17) the (strong) angel (Rev 8, 3-5; 10:1-3), (18) the Lord (Rev 11:8), (19) the male child (Rev 12:5, 13), (20) Michael (Rev 12:7-9), (21) the first among the kings from the east (Rev 16:12), (22) the Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev 17:14; 19:16), (23) the Word of God (Rev 19:13), (24) the Alpha and Omega (Rev 22:13), (25) the beginning and the end (Rev 22:13), (26) the bright morning star (Rev 22:16), and (27) the Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20-21). Other images such as shepherd (Rev 7:17), thief (Rev 16:15), and bride groom (Rev 19:7) could be added. However, they seem to be secondary images only.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The one like a son of man in Rev 1 wears a long garment with a golden sash which reminds one of the garments of priests. His head, hair, eyes, feet, and voice are described with majestic images. In his hand he holds the seven stars. A sharp, two-edged sword comes out of his mouth, and his face shines like the sun.

<sup>7</sup> Either they are mentioned only indirectly, appear in verbal form and are dependent on other images, or they are found in a comparison being introduced with the term "like."

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This imagery and these designations used for Jesus describe his multifaceted nature and ministry, i.e., his various functions as a divine-human being. While John describes Jesus as both human and divine, he does not discuss how this is possible. It is enough for him to testify to this mystery and use many different designations to point to it.

It is not unique that the Apocalypse uses different descriptions and/or symbols for certain beings. God the Father is introduced by approximately twelve different titles.<sup>8</sup> Satan appears, for instance, as the dragon, serpent, devil (Rev 12:9), fallen star, the angel of the abyss and Abaddon and Apollyon (Rev 9:1,11). The beast coming out of the earth (Rev 13:11) appears later as the false prophet (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). However, the sheer number of designations applied to Jesus surpasses those of other beings. A reason for this phenomenon may be—as already pointed out—that Jesus has to be described as both, a human and a divine being. In Revelation he is also depicted as the one who has ransomed or purchased his people (Rev 5:9 and indirectly 14:3-4). Furthermore, he is quite active in the Apocalypse. Therefore, his ministry may demand more than one or two designations.

## 2. Disputed Images of Jesus

Most of the names, titles, and depictions of Jesus mentioned above clearly refer to Jesus. However, in the case of some of them opinions are divided. These include the rider on the white horse in Rev 6, the angel of Rev 8a, the angel of Rev 10a, Michael, and the kings from the east. This article assumes that they also describe Jesus.

- (1) *The Rider on the White Horse*. This rider appears in Rev 6:2 and 19:11-16. The description of the rider in Rev 19 resembles the description of the one like a son of man in Rev 1b. His eyes, his head, his name, and his garment are depicted. A sharp sword

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<sup>8</sup> (1) God (Rev 1:1; in total 96 times), (2) he who was, is, and is to come (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5), (3) Father (Rev 1:6; 2:28; 3:5, 21; 14:1), (4) Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6), (5) the Lord (*kyrios*) (e.g., Rev 1:8; in total about fifteen times for God the Father), (6) the Almighty (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), (7) he who sits on the throne (Rev 4:2, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5), (8) he who lives forever and ever (Rev 4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7), (9) the Lord (*despotēs*) (Rev 6:10), (10) the King of the nations (Rev 15:3), (11) the Holy One (Rev 15:4; 16:5), and (12) the Beginning and the End (Rev 21:6).

comes out of his mouth. In addition he rules with the iron rod and treads the wine press of the divine wrath (cf. Rev 12:5 and Ps 2:9). The term “word of God” creates associations with John 1:1-3, 14 and 1John 1:1-3. The title “King of kings” refers back to Rev 17:14 and reminds the reader of Rev 1:5. The rider on the white horse in Rev 19 is without doubt Jesus. In spite of the similarity with Rev 1b the aspect of judgment is more articulate in Rev 19.<sup>9</sup> The rider on the white horse in Rev 6 should also be Jesus.<sup>10</sup> This rider receives positive marks only and is distinguished from the other riders. So Jesus is found at the beginning of the Christian era, throughout history, and at its end. He is victorious and so are those with him.

- (2) *The Angels in Rev 8 and 10.* The angel in Rev 8:3-5 seems to be a kind of mediator, offering the prayers of the saints on the golden altar in heaven. This fact may point to Jesus (Rom 8:34; 1John 2:1).<sup>11</sup> Other expositors are opposed to such an identification.<sup>12</sup> Oftentimes the reason is that they assume Jesus could not be identified with an angel. It is also suggested that angels in Revelation are inferior to Jesus Christ which is generally true, but John uses angels in various and creative ways—most likely also

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Sophie Laws, *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John*, Good News Studies 31 (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 33.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jens Herzer, “Der erste apokalyptische Reiter und der König der Könige: Ein Beitrag zur Christologie der Johannesapokalypse”, *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999): 230-249; Ekkehardt Müller, *Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4-11*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, Vol. 21 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1996), 275; *ibid.*, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 147-152.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Beale, 454, Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 80, and Francis D. Nichol, (ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 volumes (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 7:787.

<sup>12</sup> E.g., Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 269; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition, *New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 173-175, and Osborne, 343.

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describing humans.<sup>13</sup> We should not limit his multifaceted and innovative approach. However, it is quite possible that John refers back to the OT in which the angel of the Lord is a divine person (cf. Exod 3:2-4). Probably the strong angel of Rev 10 is also Jesus. He is clothed with a cloud. A rainbow surrounds his head. His face shines like the sun, and his feet resemble pillars of fire. The last two characteristics remind the audience of Jesus in Rev 1b. The cloud was mentioned in Rev 1:7 in connection with Jesus, while the rainbow in Rev 4:3 is linked to the throne of God. Furthermore, the angel resembles the heavenly being of Dan 10-12. Beale states that the angel has divine attributes and therefore is either Christ or the angel of the Lord,<sup>14</sup> who again would be Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Other scholars admit the similarity with Rev 1b, but avoid identifying the angel with Jesus.<sup>16</sup>

- (3) *Michael*. When investigating Michael in Scripture (Rev 12:7) the impression is created that this being is also Jesus. In Jude 1:9 Michael is called archangel. Another archangel is unknown to the NT. At his second coming, Jesus returns with the voice of the

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Kistemaker, 102-103. Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 203 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 211, dealing especially with Rev 19 comes to the following conclusion: “The resulting contradiction between Christ’s equal status with (A) God and his superiority over angels and (B) his portrait which draws on angelic categories could be best explained on basis of a deliberately created model of Christology, defining Christ as a divine being who remains angelic solely in his description in order to appeal to a certain readership which held some respect for angelic beings. Nevertheless, the angelic features in Christology serve to enhance, and not detract from, Christ’s status.”

<sup>14</sup> Beale, 522: “If he is an angel, he is an extraordinary one, since he is described in a majestic way, unlike any other angel in the Book. He is given attributes that are given only to God in the OT or to God or Christ in Revelation. Therefore this heavenly being is either the divine Christ himself or the divine angel of Yahweh . . .” Beale discusses the angel extensively on pages 522-526. Cf. Doukhan, 91; and Nichol, 7:797.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Beale, 525.

<sup>16</sup> So Kistemaker, 308-309; Mounce, 201-202; and Osborn, 393. Mounce admits: “The phrases by which he is described are elsewhere used of deity” (201).

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archangel (1 Thess 4:16). Jesus is also the arch-shepherd (1 Pet 5:4).<sup>17</sup>

- (4) *The Kings from the East*. The kings from the east (Rev 16:12) are understood differently. Preterists oftentimes suggest them to be the Parthians.<sup>18</sup> Rissi understands the kings of the earth and the kings from the east as humans and as a growing opposition of the world powers against all that is divine.<sup>19</sup> However, the drying up of the Euphrates River should not be connected to Egypt, as done by a number of interpreters, but to Babylon, because the Euphrates River is the river of Babylon. Morris thinks that John may have in mind the drying up of the Euphrates River by the Persian king Cyrus as reported by Herodotus.<sup>20</sup> Nestle-Aland correctly notes an allusion to Isa 44:27 and Jer 50:38; 51:36.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, we are not left with the historian Herodotus only when it comes to the drying up of the Euphrates River. Biblical prophecy had already pointed out such an event. In addition, scholars have stressed that Rev

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 385-386. Wilfried J. Harrington, *Revelation, Sacra Pagina* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 195, suggests that Michael's victory over the dragon was in reality the victory of the Lamb.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. David Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 891; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 285; Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Das Neue Testament Deutsch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 93; Hubert Ritt, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, Die Neue Echter Bibel (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1988), 83; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 190; Ben Witherington III., *Revelation, The New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 209.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mathias Rissi, *Die Hure Babylon und die Verführung der Heiligen* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1995), 46. Other suggestions are found in Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 408; and Osborne, 590.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 191. Unfortunately, he does not draw the obvious conclusions from this statement, 191-192.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1995), 664.

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16:12-16 is described in more detail in Rev 17-19.<sup>22</sup> The sixth plague contains (1) the different parts of Babylon, (2) the kings of the earth, and (3) the kings from the east. In Rev 17 we meet (1) harlot Babylon, (2) her allies, namely the beast and ten kings which will turn against her, and (3) Jesus, the King of kings, and his elect. In Rev 19b the prediction concerning Armageddon is being fulfilled. (1) Parts of Babylon as well as (2) the kings of the earth with their armies are mentioned. (3) Jesus as the rider on the white horse appears with his heavenly army. The many crowns on his head point to him as the King of kings. As such he is reintroduced in verse 16. In all three passages the same entities seem to occur and be paralleled. The kings from the east should, therefore, not be identified with the kings of the earth but with Jesus and those who belong to him.

In the sixth plague typology appears. As Cyrus, the type, followed by his army dried up the Euphrates river, conquered Babylon, and freed God's people which were held in captivity, so Jesus, the antitype, will conquer end time Babylon and rescue his people (Isa 44:24-45:4). Both are called the anointed/Messiah. In Matt 24:27-31 Christ's second coming is associated with the east. Therefore, it seems to be legitimate to connect the kings from the east with Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. General Observations

After the short discussion of the disputed descriptions for Jesus, we return to all of them. A certain number of the designations used for Jesus

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 244; Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984) 282, even if they arrive at different conclusions.

<sup>23</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *Chariots of Salvation: The Biblical Drama of Armageddon* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 114-121, and C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Revelation For You and Your Family, Vol 2* (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985), 440-443, connect the kings from the east with Jesus and his heavenly army, the unfallen angels. Stefanovic, 487, proposes Jesus and his elect, redeemed humanity. These are called a kingdom/kings in Rev 1:6 and 5:9-10.

emphasize more specifically his human nature such as “Lamb,” “male child,” and “firstborn of the dead.” Many other designations point to Christ’s divine nature. In Revelation some are used for both God the Father and Jesus. They also emphasize Jesus’ divine nature. Others describe Jesus’ authority and his functions.

We will now look at standard designations of Jesus as found in Revelation and the rest of the NT, continue with designations of Jesus found in Revelation but seldom in the NT, and finally discuss unique designations of Jesus in the Apocalypse.

**a. Standard Designations for Jesus in the NT**

Some designations of Jesus are of a more general nature and occur also in other parts of the NT. They include the names and titles “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Jesus Christ,” “Son of man,” “Son of God,” “Lord,” and “Lord Jesus.” Reymond notices that

one should not be surprised to find its Christology to be more “marvelous,” if not more “other-worldly,” than elsewhere in the New Testament. But this is not to suggest that its representation of Christ differs in any essential way from the Christology of Christ himself or of Paul, or of the Synoptic Evangelists, or of the writers of the General Epistles, or of that of the rest of the Johannine corpus. But it must be acknowledged that its Christology is more consistently “advanced,” to use Beasley-Murray’s term, in that it portrays Christ almost singularly from the perspective of his state of exaltation. The customary names and titles for Jesus are still present . . . .<sup>24</sup>

These standard designations are important for the audience. They allow people to relate to the Jesus that they know through these names and titles and prepare them to recognize him later in the unique designations.

- (1) *Jesus Christ*. The title “Jesus Christ/Messiah/the anointed one” is found in the very first verses of Revelation. However, it occurs also at the end of the Gospel of John (John 20:30-31): “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may

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<sup>24</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, second revised edition (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1998), 308.

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believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Revelation makes it clear from the beginning that Jesus is the Messiah, the incarnate, crucified, and risen Savior.<sup>25</sup> His descent from David is stressed twice (the root of David and the descendant of David—Rev 5:5; 22:16). In the last place where the designation “Jesus Christ” is employed, namely in Rev 1:5, it appears in a Trinitarian formula: “Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ . . .” Thus, from the beginning Revelation associates Jesus with God. Nevertheless, John does not abandon monotheism. It is God only who should be worshiped (Rev 19:10; 22:9).

The name “Jesus” alone is found in the first chapter of the Apocalypse (Rev 1:9), but occurs throughout the book. The name “Christ” is used in chapters 11, 12, and 20. In all texts an intimate relationship with God the Father is given. “Christ”—whether by itself or in connection with “Jesus”—occurs seven times in Revelation. This may not be a coincidence.<sup>26</sup>

- (2) *Lord and King.* In the NT the term “Lord,” *kyrios*, is normally used for Jesus. In OT quotations it replaces the divine name Yahweh. However in Revelation, the “Lord” is usually God the Father (e.g., Rev 1:8; 15:4). In some texts it is not easy to know whether the term refers to the Father or the Son (e.g., Rev 11:4; 14:13). Yet there are also texts in which it clearly points to Jesus (Rev 11:8). Revelation ends with calling Jesus “the Lord Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in Revelation God the Father as well as Jesus are the Lord. Jesus is declared to be equal with the Father.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Osborne, 52.

<sup>26</sup> In Revelation the series of seven are obvious. However, in addition to the well-known series of the seven churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues others are found, for instance, the seven beatitudes. The sevenfold use of the title “Christ” and the 14 uses of the name “Jesus” (two times seven) may not be mere coincidence. They may point to fullness and completion and mark Revelation as a Christological work. The numbers of those two designations are surpassed by the image of the Lamb only.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. David E. Aune *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1997), 37.

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In Rev 1:5 Jesus was already called “Lord/ruler/prince (*archōn*) of the kings of the earth.” Thereby John pointed out Jesus’ exalted position. Twice a similar title stresses Jesus’ grandeur and power, “Lord of lords (*kyrios kyriōn*) and “King of kings” (Rev 17:14; 19:16). The expressions “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” appear together only in the just mentioned texts. They may be synonymous to some extent. Interestingly, in Rev 17 “Lord of lords” comes first, while in chapter 19 “King of kings” is first. According to Revelation Jesus exercises universal power. He, who as the Lamb appears to be weak and bruised, is not only victorious; he is truly the Lord and King.<sup>28</sup> All other kings including the Roman emperor are nothing if compared to him. All must bow their knees before him. Together with his army and the kings from the east he brings Babylon to an end. Jesus’ kingly function is clearly seen in the description of him as the male child and the rider on the white horse reigning with an iron scepter and defeating the enemies of God’s people.

- (3) *Son of Man and Son of God.* In Revelation Jesus is one like a Son of Man (Rev 1:13; 14:14). During his life on earth Jesus used the title Son of Man repeatedly when talking about himself. The first time it is found is in Matt 8:20. The one like a Son of Man is the heavenly being of Dan 7:13, who in the context of the pre-advent judgment comes to the throne of God and receives power and an eternal kingdom over all nations.<sup>29</sup> According to Matt 9:6 the Son of Man has power to forgive sins. In Rev 1, preexistence, death, resurrection, and eternal existence of the one like a Son of Man are described; yet also his appearance. His hair, white as wool, is the hair of the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:9. The dignity and highness of this being are emphasized. He possesses the characteristics of God. In Rev 14 the coming Lord is called “the One like a Son of Man.” He brings about the harvest of the world. The title Son of

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<sup>28</sup> Dan Liroy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, Studies in Biblical Literature 58 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 166, writes: “While the description of the exalted Savior resembles supernatural epiphanes . . . , the Messiah is unveiled in the Apocalypse as the divine, eschatological Lord.”

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology of the Book of Revelation* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 175-176.

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Man points to Jesus' divinity, as Smalley notes: "John's Christology in the present passage . . . is consistently high. The Son of man figure seems to merge with God."<sup>30</sup>

The expression "Son of God" is found only once in Revelation (2:18). The eyes like flaming fire and the feet like burnished bronze, describing the Son of God, are characteristics of the Son of Man in Rev 1. The Son of Man and Son of God are the same person. Jesus is found in the Gospels not only as the Son of Man but also as the Son of God. This is also true for the Apocalypse. Again Jesus' majesty is stressed, but especially his unique relationship with God.<sup>31</sup>

**b. Designations which Occur Seldom in the NT**

In addition to the designations of Christ found frequently in the NT and in Revelation there are those which occur only seldom in the NT. They include the terms "firstborn of the dead" and "holy and true."

- (1) *The Firstborn of the Dead.* In the NT the term "firstborn" (*prōtotokos*) is used six times in connection with Jesus. He was Mary's firstborn son (Luke 2:7), the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29), the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), and the firstborn who is worshiped by the angels (Heb 1:6). The firstborn has specific privileges and a specific position. The OT background is Ps 89:20,27. David as the last child of his parents became the firstborn, the highest of the kings on earth. The issue is not birth per se. Jesus was raised from the dead, not born from the dead in the literal sense. Chronologically he was not even the first. Others were raised before him. But he was the first in the sense that all resurrections whether past or future were and are dependent on his resurrection. Without his resurrection there are no other

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<sup>30</sup> Smalley, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 116-117; Liroy, 128; and Kistemaker, 136.

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resurrections. Jesus has primacy. Jesus as the firstborn is the absolute ruler and king of the universe.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that Jesus died as a witness for truth and as a martyr and rose from the dead. B. Kowalski stresses that a close connection exists between Jesus' resurrection, his love for Christians, and their salvation from sins through his blood. The first text dealing with resurrection in Revelation is connected to salvation and provides the key to understand salvation as portrayed in the Apocalypse.<sup>32</sup> This text paves the way for other texts dealing with and pointing first to Jesus' resurrection and then to the resurrection of others.<sup>33</sup> Christians are being persecuted and die as martyrs just as Jesus died as a martyr. But, as pointed out by L. Griffith, the resurrection is God's terror against the terror of the evil powers. These are being robbed of the only power they have, namely the power of death. They are unable to keep the children of God in the realm of death and cannot hinder them to worship God instead of the satanic trinity. At the same time, they themselves are subject to resurrection and judgment.<sup>34</sup>

- (2) *Holy and True.* Jesus introduces himself in Rev 3:7 as the one who is holy and true. Truth is a specific characteristic of God. Isa 65:16 calls God the "God of truth." In the Gospel of John the term "truth" is associated with Jesus repeatedly (John 1:9, 14; 14:6). In Revelation truth is also an important concept. Self-deception and deception through false teachers and the harlot Babylon are confronted by truth, Jesus, the true and faithful witness, the Amen,

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<sup>32</sup> See Beate Kowalski, "Martyrdom and Resurrection in the Revelation to John," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41/1 (2003), 56.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Rev 1:9-20; 2:8; 5:6-12; 6:9-11, 20:4-6; 21:4.

<sup>34</sup> Lee Griffith, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 214, writes: "Indeed, it is resurrection that John identifies as the terror of God . . . arrayed against Beast and Empire . . . Resurrection deprives Empire of its only power, the power of death. Resurrection poses the terrifying possibility that people will give glory to God rather than to the Beast . . . Resurrection is the terror of God insofar as the 'great and small' alike awaken to judgment . . . Resurrection as the terror of God pervades the book of Revelation in the figure of the slaughtered Lamb. It is the slaughtered Lamb who conquers. It is this resurrection terror of God that marks the imminent demise of earthly terror."

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the Holy and True One. Jesus is absolutely reliable and trustworthy, although others are not.

As the Holy One Jesus is not only found in the Apocalypse but also in John 6:69. According to Rev 4:8 God the Father is three times holy. So both, Father and Son, are holy. In Isa 6:3 we hear about God's holiness. Isa 6:3 is applied to God the Father in Rev 4:8. Interestingly, Isa 6:3 refers also to Jesus, because according to the Gospel of John Isaiah saw Christ's glory (John 12:41).

The title "Holy and True" does not only emphasize Jesus' divinity but may also indicate that it is the nature of Christ to be authentic, straightforward, and reliable.<sup>35</sup> Kistemaker points out that "holy" and "true" together appear only in Rev 3:7 and 6:10 and refer to Jesus and God the Father.<sup>36</sup> The same attributes are used for both of them. This means that Jesus is of the same nature as the Father, and therefore he is God.

**c. Unique Designations of Jesus in Revelation**

Most of the designations of Jesus in Revelation are unique and are not or not directly applied to him in other biblical books. They include "witness," "ruler," "the first and the last," "the lion from the tribe of Judah," "the Lamb," "the rider on the white horse," "the angel," "the male child," "Michael," "the kings from the east," "the Lord of lords and King of kings," "the Alpha and Omega," "the beginning and the end," and "the morning star." Some of them have already been discussed. Others will be discussed later. Therefore, we will concentrate on a few of them here.

- (1) *The Faithful Witness.* In the NT various witnesses appear. God is called upon as a witness (Phil 1:8). The believers are witnesses (Heb 12:1). Also Stephen (Acts 22:20) and Paul were witnesses (Acts 26:16). However, apart from Revelation Jesus is not called witness. In Rev 11 two witnesses are killed. They are raised again. Believers and especially Antipas are witnesses (Rev 17:6; 2:13). But most important, Jesus appears as the faithful and true witness (Rev 1:5; 3:14). The term "witness" (*martus*) has taken on the

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Liroy, 129.

<sup>36</sup> See Kistemaker, 157.

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additional idea of martyrdom.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, other witnesses follow Jesus and imitate his life being willing even to share in his death.<sup>38</sup> Through his life Jesus bore witness to God. Consequently, faithful witness may not only lead to opposition but also to death.<sup>39</sup> Johns states:

John suggests that Jesus' own faithful witness led to his execution, but that that execution itself proved to be Jesus' victory over the powers of death. . . the 'witness' envisioned in the Apocalypse is not just a 'passive acceptance of suffering,' as Adelo Yabro Collins has maintained, but rather the sort of nonviolent resistance to evil in which both Jesus and John engaged. . . *Witness* in the Apocalypse thus connects the work of the Lamb with the faithful response of the readers/hearers.<sup>40</sup>

- (2) *The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth.* The word "ruler" (*archōn*) occurs only once in Revelation (Rev 1:5). Outside of Revelation it refers to earthly authorities (Acts 23:5) or Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31). In Revelation Jesus is the sovereign Lord.
- (3) *The Word of God and the Bright Morning Star.* The two terms "Word of God" and "bright morning star" are not found next to each other (Rev 19:13; 22:16). However, in 2 Pet 1:19 the prophetic word and the morning star appear in one verse. Yet the vocabulary is not the same as in Revelation, and the prophetic word does not refer to Jesus Christ. In Revelation both designations refer to Jesus. The expression "Word of God" reminds the readers of Revelation of the prologue of John's Gospel

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Morris, 66.

<sup>38</sup> Antipas is being honored by being called just as Jesus, his master, is, "my faithful witness."

<sup>39</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 72, notes: "The title refers primarily to the witness which Jesus bore to God during his life on earth and to his faithfulness in maintaining his witness even at the cost of his life." Johns, 173, notes: "Although the 'witness of Jesus' for which John was banished to Patmos (1:9) may eventually have been *sealed* with his martyrdom, it is not *synonymous* with his martyrdom."

<sup>40</sup> Johns, 172-175.

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and the prologue of 1 John. In these texts Jesus is also the word. While in the Gospel of John the preexistence, divinity, and the activity of the word as creator are emphasized, in Rev 19 the word is connected to judgment on the enemies.<sup>41</sup> The morning star may remind one of Jesus as the light in John's Gospel (John 1:7-9; 8:12), the star of Balaam's oracle (Num 24:17), and/or the light of Isa 60:1-3. "Jesus is being presented once more as the source of salvation for the nations . . ."<sup>42</sup> Mounce notes: "The star was a familiar symbol in Jewish writings for the expected Davidic king (*T. Levi* 18:3; *T. Judah* 24:1). The morning star is a promise that the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn."<sup>43</sup>

It is also interesting that Rev 22:16 contains one of the five "I am" sayings in the Apocalypse. Rev 1:8 and 21:6 refer to God the Father. Rev 1:17; 2:23, and 22:16 refer to Jesus. Rev 22:13 talks about Jesus and must be translated "I am," but the copula *eimi* is not present. The phrase "I am" is a self-designation of God and Jesus (cf. Exod 3:14) and has been suggested to be the source of the divine name Yahweh.<sup>44</sup>

- (4) *The Root of David*. The phrase occurs twice in Revelation (5:5; 22:16). A similar designation is found in Rom 15:12. Paul quotes Isa 11:10 which talks about the root of Jesse, applying the phrase to Jesus. Root of David clearly points to the Messiah, "the ideal king of the line of David who will judge with righteousness and usher in an era of peace."<sup>45</sup> Fekkes comes to a similar conclusion:

. . . the title *Root of David* functions not only as a messianic identification, but emphasizes Christ's royal authority as the legitimate Davidic heir. Its presence in a vision of Christ's enthronement and reception of authority (Rev. 5) is not

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the term "word" see Smalley, 492.

<sup>42</sup> Smalley, 577.

<sup>43</sup> Mounce, 409.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Moody Press, 1992), 110.

<sup>45</sup> Mounce, 131. Johns, 168, talks about "the inset of the messianic redemption long awaited."

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incidental but provides a foundation for later statements concerning Christ's *kingship, kingdom and rule* (11:15; 17:14; 19:16; 20:4, 6; 1:5).<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, the Root of David alludes more to Jesus' humanity than to his divinity.<sup>47</sup>

- (5) *The Lion and the Lamb*. Jesus is Lion and Lamb. While the first term occurs only once in Revelation, the term "lamb" permeates Revelation as no other designation of Jesus does. In an audition Jesus is introduced as a lion (Rev 5:5) who has gained the victory and is able to open the scroll sealed with seven seals. However, as soon as John looks, he does not see a lion but a lamb. The lamb (*arnion*) appears 28 times in Revelation as a symbol for Jesus,<sup>48</sup> however not before chapter 5 and not in chapters 9-11, 16, 18, 20, and 22b, the epilogue. The first three chapters of Revelation as well as its conclusion are written in a letter style, directed to seven churches. It is remarkable that the Lamb does not appear in these less symbolic parts of Revelation. However, the Lamb occurs in the apocalyptic section of Revelation (Rev 4-22a), although not in all chapters.<sup>49</sup> Maybe this is due to the fact that in these chapters judgment scenes dominate.<sup>50</sup> Seven times the Lamb is directly connected to God (Rev 5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 14:4; 21:22; 22:1, 3). It is true that the lamb is also found outside the Book of Revelation, for instance, in John 1:29, 36.<sup>51</sup> There the term *amnos* is used, while in Revelation the lamb is the *arnion*. The latter term is also found once in the Gospel of John, namely in John 21:15.

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<sup>46</sup> Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press 1994), 153.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 87, talks about a "fully human yet divinely authorized agent."

<sup>48</sup> In addition, the term "lamb" is used with the beast coming out of the earth (13:11). Kowalski, 58, discussing 28 places in which the lamb represents Jesus suggests: ". . . these 28 quotations symbolically point toward the complete and worldwide victory of the Lamb."

<sup>49</sup> In these chapters Jesus is depicted with other designations.

<sup>50</sup> This is not to deny that the wrath of the lamb is mentioned in Rev 6:16, but judgment may not be a very prominent idea linked to the concept of lamb.

<sup>51</sup> See also Acts 8:32 and 1 Pet 1:19.

However, there it does not refer to Jesus but to his disciples. Although different terms for Jesus as the Lamb are used in the Johannine literature, the concept is still the same.

The symbol “Lamb” stresses the idea of victory through suffering, adversity, and defenselessness. The number seven plays an important role in Revelation and expresses perfection and completion.<sup>52</sup> Also the number four appears frequently and is the number of the earth.<sup>53</sup> Seven times the nations of the earth in their fourfold designation as tribes, tongues, peoples, and nations are mentioned (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).<sup>54</sup> The fact that the Lamb appears four times seven times may point to the worldwide extent of his complete victory through pain and suffering.<sup>55</sup> We will return to the Lamb later.

## II. Overview of Jesus in Revelation

The various designations for Jesus paint a very rich picture of the nature and the functions of Christ. Our next step will be to create an overview of Jesus in Revelation. This will enable readers to see how pervasive Christology is in the Apocalypse of John. Here are the chapters of Revelation in which Jesus appears:

- (1) Rev 1a - The revelation of Jesus Christ
- (2) Rev 1b-3 - Jesus as the one like a Son of Man and his messages to the seven churches
- (3) Rev 5-8:1 - Jesus as Lamb who opens the seven seals and shepherds his people
- (4) Rev 10 - Jesus as the strong angel
- (5) Rev 11:8, 15 - Jesus as the crucified Lord and as Christ to whom belongs the kingdom
- (6) Rev 12 - Jesus as male child and as Michael; the testimony of Jesus

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<sup>52</sup> See the different series of seven such as the seven seals, the seven trumpets, the seven plagues, the seven beatitudes, or the seven direct promises of Jesus regarding his second advent.

<sup>53</sup> See the four corners of the earth (Rev 7:1; 20:8) or the four parts of the earth (Rev 5:13; 14:7).

<sup>54</sup> There are two exceptions: Rev 10:11 replaces “tribes” by “kings,” and Rev 17:15 substitutes “tribes” by “multitudes.”

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Bauckham, 66-67.

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- (7) Rev 13:8 - The book of life of the Lamb
- (8) Rev 14 - Jesus as the Lamb with the 144,000; Jesus in the message of the three angels; Jesus as the one like a Son of Man and the harvest of the world
- (9) Rev 15:3 - The song of the Lamb
- (10) Rev 16:12, 15 - Jesus with his army as kings from the east; the promise of his second coming
- (11) Rev 17:14 - Jesus as Lamb and Lord of lords and King of kings is victorious
- (12) Rev 19 - The marriage supper of the Lamb and Jesus as the rider on the white horse
- (13) Rev 20:6 - The redeemed believers as priests of Christ
- (14) Rev 21-22a - Jesus as Lamb and the new Jerusalem
- (15) Rev 22b - Christ's coming

Lioy even proposes that the various introductory scenes to the visions of Revelation are Christological in nature.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, to claim that the Apocalypse has little to do with Jesus means to ignore the facts. Revelation is not only “the Revelation of Jesus Christ,” but also reveals his character and activity in almost every chapter.

**1. Jesus in the Prologue (Rev 1:1-8)**

In the beginning John states that Jesus himself has given the Book Revelation. At the same time, the book reveals his character and work (Rev 1:1-2). In the initial greeting it is stressed that

- Jesus loves us (Rev 1:5).
- He has redeemed us through his substitutionary death. The sin problem is resolved (Rev 1:5).
- Jesus sets us in a new position. We are a kingdom and priests (Rev 1:6).
- Jesus will come again (Rev 1:7).

Rev 1:5-6 “is the first doxology in the NT addressed only to Jesus.”<sup>57</sup> After the doxology his second coming is described. Verse 8 returns to God the Father. John changes his address from “to the seven churches that are in Asia” (verse 4) to “us” (verse 5) and thus gets more personal and more

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<sup>56</sup> Lioy, 58. He calls them “throne room scenes” (59).

<sup>57</sup> Osborne, 63.

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comprehensive.<sup>58</sup> While the statement that Jesus loves us is found in the present tense emphasizing the continual and never ending love of Jesus toward us, salvation and the privilege to be a kingdom<sup>59</sup> and priest have already been realized in the past<sup>60</sup> and are a present reality. Obviously they are depending on Jesus' death on the cross.<sup>61</sup>

These verses can be understood as a summary of the message of Revelation. Revelation has to do with Jesus and salvation through him. Its aim is Christ's second coming and God's kingdom of glory thereafter. These themes are developed in other places. In Rev 3:9, 19 one hears again about Jesus' love. Because Jesus loves his church, the church loves him (Rev 2:19; 12:11). Salvation is described in Rev 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 14:3-4 and elsewhere with wonderful images. Priesthood and kingship are again mentioned in Rev 5:9 and 20:4, 6, where the audience is assured that the redeemed will reign with Jesus for a thousand years (Rev 20:4, 6). It is noteworthy that on one hand this reign is described as a present reality, while on the other hand it is still future.<sup>62</sup> The second coming of Jesus permeates the entire Apocalypse and is depicted through the verb "to come" and various images at the end of major visions in Revelation. The content of the prologue reaches from the cross to the Second Coming.

**2. Jesus and the Message to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:9-3:22)**

The messages to the seven churches are ushered in by the introductory scene in Rev 1:9-20. In this introduction Jesus is found in majestic position among his churches. John sees him as one like a Son of Man. The

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<sup>58</sup> Rev 1:3 calls those blessed who hear and read Revelation which does not limit the audience to the first century AD.

<sup>59</sup> This term should be understood actively, i.e., in the sense of kingly rule.

<sup>60</sup> John uses the aorist indicative. Cf. Beale, 194.

<sup>61</sup> Osborne, 64, declares: "Here the ecclesiological aspect of Christ's work is described . . . ."

<sup>62</sup> The question, what it means in practical terms to be a kingdom and priesthood, is discussed by Beale, 193: "Precisely how the church is to exercise these functions is yet not explicit, but it will not be surprising to find that the answer lies in understanding how Christ himself functioned in these two offices. . . . Believers spiritually fulfill the same offices in this age by following his model, especially by being faithful witnesses by mediating Christ's priestly and royal authority to the world . . ." Osborne, 66, mentions mission and direct access to God.

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Apocalypse contains a number of theophanies (e.g., Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19).<sup>63</sup> However, it begins with a Christophany.<sup>64</sup> Some of Christ's characteristics are also characteristics of God the Father. The Son of Man sends messages to each of the seven churches. Each message is personalized, specific, and reflects the situation in which the respective church finds herself in.<sup>65</sup> Thus Revelation contains seven personal letters of Jesus to seven churches. The leaders of the churches are in Jesus' hand. Jesus' special interest in his church, his care and love—although paired with the announcement of judgment in the case of apostasy—becomes evident. S. Laws points out that Jesus walks among the stars, which is not in heaven but on earth according to the context. Initially, Jesus is not portrayed as a person in the heavenly realm to be expected at the end of days. Rather, as Son of Man he is present in his church.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Jesus is exalted because he came to earth and died innocently. He is present on earth through the Holy Spirit (Rev 2:7; 5:6). As rider on the white horse he will appear in the future as judge.

In the introductory scene (Rev 1:9-20) Jesus' death and resurrection are referred to. Because he has the keys of death and hell, the resurrection of his children is guaranteed. The overcomers are permitted to take part in his rule (Rev 2:26-28). Jesus makes sure that their names remain in the book of life (Rev 3:5). He recognizes them as his own. He desires to have intimate fellowship with his church and asks her members to open their door and let him in (Rev 3:20). At the end of the seven churches the way is paved for the seven seals which form the second vision of Revelation (Rev 3:21). We hear about the throne of God which simultaneously is Jesus' throne. The redeemed are allowed to sit with Jesus on his throne.

Jesus' work in this first part of Revelation does not only reach from his cross to his kingly rule, but also contains a reference to creation. Jesus as the beginning of creation is the creator (Rev 3:14).<sup>67</sup> As God works through

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<sup>63</sup> These appearances of God are accompanied by certain phenomena and go back to Exod 19:16.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Bauckham, 54.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Liroy, 126.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Laws, 84. She continues: "That tension between realized hope and future expectation, the 'already' and the 'not yet' found in the preaching of Jesus and elsewhere in the New Testament is found here too."

<sup>67</sup> See the later discussion of the term "beginning of creation."

Jesus to achieve final salvation and consummation, so he also has brought about creation through him.

### 3. Jesus and the Seven Seals

In the second vision, after God the Father is portrayed as sitting on the throne of heaven (Rev 4), Jesus appears as Lamb for the first time. Although the Lamb is victorious it still looks as if slain. This is not a lovely picture. Quite to the contrary! It is awful to see a slain lamb which is still alive. But the Lamb has purchased humans for God. Very clearly salvation through Jesus and his vicarious death are pointed out. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb, the Passover lamb.<sup>68</sup> Through his death Jesus has freed and purchased people and has set them in the new position of kings and priests. Because Jesus has made possible salvation, he is worthy to open the sealed scroll. By doing this the plan of salvation can be realized and brought to a conclusion (Rev 5).

So Jesus opens the different seals. Almost all of them have to do with events on earth.<sup>69</sup> The sixth seal takes the reader and hearer to the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb, the day of the Lord as known in the OT. Jesus' ministry as Redeemer does not exclude judgment. Judgment is part of the final salvation of God's children (Rev 6). Therefore, the way leads through sealing and tribulation to the throne of God where all negative things will be done away with. In a paradoxical picture John describes the Lamb as a shepherd<sup>70</sup> who cares for those whom he has saved through his blood and supports them with all that is necessary.

Again the vision ranges from Calvary and especially Christ's enthronement<sup>71</sup> to the end of history. It begins with Jesus' death on the

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Laws, 29; Bauckham, 70.

<sup>69</sup> Donald Guthrie, "The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 65, writes: "The Lamb is therefore the initiator of the first series of judgments."

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 66.

<sup>71</sup> This conclusion is supported by the reception of the book from the right hand of God through the Lamb (Rev 5:7). Liroy, 134, summarizes the debate among NT scholars in the following way: "Beale has noted that Daniel 7:13 is 'the only OT text in which a divine Messiah-like figure is portrayed as approaching God's heavenly throne to receive authority.' Beale surmises that the 'reception of authority places Christ in a position together with his Father as Lord of all affairs in heaven and earth.' Aune . . . convincingly argues that the primary focus is not on either the enthronement or commission of the Lamb, but rather on

cross and Pentecost whose meaning is explained in Acts 2:33 by Peter: Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. John's goal in this section of the Apocalypse seems to be to portray Jesus as Lamb in his majestic role as savior, ruler, and judge. Jesus controls all events of human history. This is strong comfort for suffering Christians.<sup>72</sup>

#### **4. Jesus and the Seven Trumpets (Rev 8:2-11:18)**

In the third vision, the trumpet vision, Jesus is found in the beginning and toward the end.<sup>73</sup> He seems to be the angel at the golden altar involved in mediation and in meting out judgment. Since this altar is mentioned again in Rev 9:13, it can be assumed that the altar scene with Jesus forms the background of the entire trumpet vision. The emphasis of this vision is the judgment on those who dwell on earth, which is supposed to lead them to repentance. The term "those who dwell on earth" is a negative expression throughout the Apocalypse designating the enemies of God and his people. In this respect the trumpet vision sharply differs from the seal vision. The seal vision concentrates on God's people and, therefore, may have a strong Christological orientation. This is different with the trumpet vision.

Rev 11:8 contains a reference to Jesus' death on the cross. In "the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt" the "Lord was crucified." The two witnesses suffer a similar fate as their Lord. However, as he was raised, so they also come back to life. In Rev 11:15 Jesus' reign at the end of earth's history is noted. Again the kingship motif is referred to. Although on the cross Jesus looked like a loser, in reality he is the victor. Christ's kingly reign includes judgment on God's enemies.<sup>74</sup> The trumpet

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His investiture. Aune means by this 'the act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds formally.' He notes that John grounded the investiture 'on the sacrificial death of Christ.'"

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Liroy, 135.

<sup>73</sup> Guthrie, 66, thinks that it is remarkable that in this vision Jesus does not appear as the Lamb at all. But because Guthrie connects the seven seals with the seven trumpets and because in the seventh seal the Lamb is mentioned indirectly, he assumes that the Lamb forms the background to the trumpet vision.

<sup>74</sup> Bauckham, 67, writes: "The role of Christ in Revelation is to establish God's kingdom on earth: in the words of 11:15, to turn 'the kingdom of the world' (currently ruled by evil) into the 'kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah.'" This includes salvation as well as

vision proceeds from the cross and reaches to the completion of the plan of salvation.

### 5. Jesus and the Satanic Trinity (Rev 11:19-14:20)

Rev 12 associates with Jesus a people faithful to him. As Jesus is the descendant of the woman (Rev 12:5) so are the remnant. The woman has brought forth Jesus, the Messiah; and the woman, God's church, brings forth the remnant (Rev 12:17). The first and last parts of Rev 12 remind the audience of Gen 3:14-15. In both passages the woman, the serpent, seed/descendants, and animosity between the two parties is stressed.<sup>75</sup> Rev 12 including its central part is a fulfillment of the divine promise of Gen 3:15. In Rev 12 the remnant are not only structurally found in a place parallel to Jesus, but also have a special relationship with him and belong to the Lord. They keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

Although the Lamb is not found at the beginning of Rev 13, it appears indirectly. The sea beast is an imitation of Jesus. We will return to this thought later. In Rev 13:8 the book of life of the Lamb occurs. Life is dependent on the Lamb. Whoever is found in the book of life of the Lamb has no reason to fear the second death (Rev 20:15). Initially the beast from the earth has lamblike traits, but is a tool in the hand of the dragon.

According to Rev 14 the Lamb together with the 144,000 stands on Mount Zion. They belong to him. Because they are purchased and therefore saved, they follow the Lamb wherever it goes. Salvation is followed by discipleship. According to Rev 14:12 this includes obedience and faith in Jesus/faith of Jesus. The others who have accepted the mark of the beast and have worshiped the beasts are being judged in the presence of the Lamb (Rev 14:9-10). Guthrie points out that after mentioning God the angels are referred to and only then the Lamb. He concludes that for unbelievers the worst part of judgment is to be able to see the Lamb against which they have waged war.<sup>76</sup>

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judgment. Those who destroy the earth (Rev 11:18) are the evil powers described in Rev 19:2 as Babylon. They have corrupted/destroyed the earth with their immorality. Cf. Bauckham, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Nestle-Aland, 655-656, lists Gen 3:14 and 15 together with Rev 12.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Guthrie, 67.

At the end of chapter 14 the double harvest of the world takes place, a picture of final salvation and final judgment.<sup>77</sup> The first fruits of the wheat harvest are the 144,000 of Rev 14:4. This harvest is dependent on the appearance of the one like a Son of Man. He sits on a white cloud and wears a golden crown of victory.

This central vision of Revelation encompasses the time from Jesus' incarnation up to his second coming. In this vision the aspect of the great controversy between good and evil is more strongly pronounced than in any preceding vision.

### **6. Jesus and the Seven Plagues (Rev 15-16)**

The introductory scene to this vision contains the song of the Lamb and the song of Moses. A motif not used in the previous vision is been utilized here, the motif of the exodus.<sup>78</sup> Under Moses Israel left Egypt and entered the promised land. Under Jesus the overcomers, the 144,000, are involved in an exodus—which later will be connected to Babylon<sup>79</sup>—and have come to the sea of glass in front of God's throne (Rev 15). They are finally saved.

The plagues, which initially remind the readers of the Egyptian plagues, have not affected the faithful followers of Christ. Jesus with his army, the kings from the east, have won the battle against Babylon (Rev 16:12-21 and its context). The conflict is clearly portrayed. However, these events are from our present perspective still in the future, although they are described with the aorist.

In Rev 16:15 Jesus predicts his soon return and through his beatitude admonishes people indirectly to stay awake.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Bauckham, 94-98. He states that the wheat harvest is concluded by one action, namely harvesting. The grape harvest consists of two actions, the gathering and the treading of the wine press (96). He suggests that the wheat harvest does not proceed to the process of judgment as is the case with the grape harvest (97).

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Bauckham, 71.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth Strand, The 'Victorious-Introduction' Scenes in the Visions in the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 (1987): 283, has pointed to the motif exodus from Egypt and fall of Babylon.

<sup>80</sup> Liroy, 169, explains: "Because the world's unrepentant inhabitants reject the Messiah as their Savior, He comes again as their Judge. This warning, which suddenly appears in 16:15, is an important Christological theme in the Apocalypse (3:3)."

### **7. Jesus and the Judgment on Babylon (Rev 17-18)**

Rev 17 and 18 are a more detailed description of the last plagues, the destruction of Babylon. One of the angels involved with the pouring out of the plagues explains the judgment on Babylon, mentioned in Rev 16, in more detail. In Rev 17:14 Jesus occurs. Ten kings fight against the Lamb. The number should be understood symbolically and include all political powers which will turn against God and Jesus. Nevertheless, the Lamb gains the victory because he is the Lord of lords and the King of kings. With him are “the called and the chosen and the faithful.”<sup>81</sup> Guthrie describes the battle as one-sided, because the power of the beast<sup>82</sup> and its supporters is easily surpassed by the power of the Lamb. The description of the complete destruction of Babylon in Rev 18 stands in stark contrast to the triumph of the Lamb, although the Lamb is not mentioned in this chapter.<sup>83</sup> It is important to have in mind the broad picture of Revelation and to notice the contrasts found in the larger sections of the book.

The Lamb has not only suffered; it has not only brought about salvation; it has not only opened the seals; but the Lamb is the victorious King and Lord of all lords.

### **8. Jesus, His Marriage Supper, Armageddon, and the Millennium (Rev 19-20)**

With Rev 19 the readers have arrived at the long anticipated marriage supper of the Lamb.<sup>84</sup> His bride is ready. Again a strong contrast is created. While on one hand the marriage supper of the Lamb takes place, on the other hand the meal for the birds is depicted which affects those who in the battle of Armageddon were defeated by the rider on the white horse and his army. The message contained in this contrast is: Either you are a participant of the marriage supper of the Lamb or you become a meal for the birds.

The rider on the white horse is called Word of God. Through him God speaks to humanity. However, this rider is also envisioned as a king who leads his army into battle. There are also hints to Jesus' function as a judge.

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<sup>81</sup> Bauckham, 105, proposes that these form the heavenly army of Rev 19:14.

<sup>82</sup> This is the scarlet beast of Rev 17, not the sea beast of Rev 13.

<sup>83</sup> Guthrie, 68; vgl. Lioy, 169.

<sup>84</sup> This may be foreshadowed in Rev 3:20. The verb *deipneō* may point to the *deipnon* in Rev 19:9.

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Although blood is shed when God's people are liberated, this king fights with justice (Rev 19:11). Bauckham stresses that Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb, does not become a slaughterer himself. The "faithful and true witness" (Rev 3:14) is now called "Faithful and True" (Rev 19:11). His faithfulness toward truth makes him a judge for those who persist in lies.<sup>85</sup>

In Rev 20:4 the testimony of Jesus is found again. Those who have been killed because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him during the Millennium (Rev 20:6). The book of life in Rev 20:12, 15 must be the book of life of the Lamb. In addition the people of the Lamb, the saints, and the bride of the Lamb, the beloved city, are referred to (Rev 20:9). Liroy seems to be correct when he claims that the focal point of the Apocalypse is Christ. His glorious presence, his ability to judge, and his sovereign rule are stressed by John.<sup>86</sup>

The emphasis on salvation in the first part of Revelation is replaced with the description of the eschatological war in the second part of Revelation. The goal is to uproot evil and completely save Jesus' people.

**9. Jesus and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:5)**

The extensive description of the New Jerusalem in Rev 21 and 22 includes many details and has Jesus as the background. He is the husband of the bride. Yet we do not just hear about the bride/wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9), the New Jerusalem, and about the apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:14) but also that in the new Jerusalem the temple will be replaced by God the Father and the Lamb (Rev 21:22). The sun will no longer be necessary. The glory of God and the Lamb enlighten the city (Rev 21:23). From the throne of God and the Lamb goes forth the river of life (Rev 22:1). Again the throne of God and the Lamb is mentioned (Rev 22:3). Four times God the Father and the Lamb are directly connected.

In addition to the theme "marriage of the Lamb" which begins in Rev 19 and is continued in Rev 21 the topic creation appears. Bauckham has called attention to the fact that the non-existence of the sea on the new earth indicates that creation will not again fall prey to chaos. The symbolic sea out of which the beast came has disappeared and cannot bring forth again

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<sup>85</sup> Bauckham, 105.

<sup>86</sup> Liroy, 170.

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a flood of disaster and evil. Father and Son as creators guarantee the fulfillment of the covenant promises.<sup>87</sup>

Those whose names are found in the book of life of the Lamb (Rev 21:27) have the right to live in the New Jerusalem in which the throne of God and the Lamb is placed. They will serve him (Rev 22:3) and reign with him (Rev 22:5). The intimate relationship between Jesus and his people is emphasized. Guthrie notes that in this part of Revelation the Lamb occurs seven times which is more than in the other visions of Revelation. His importance for the church is undeniable. At the same time the mention of Jesus as Lamb stresses salvation more than judgment.<sup>88</sup>

In this vision a direct reference to the cross is not noticeable. But the concept of Jesus' sacrificial death is present through the strong emphasis on Jesus as the Lamb. The wonderful future is dependent on Jesus' cross and his unique dedication to humanity.

**10. Jesus in the Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21)**

In the prologue God the Father appeared as the Alpha and Omega. In the Epilogue this title is applied to Jesus. Jesus no longer appears as the Lamb, but is addressed with his name "Jesus" and the title "Lord Jesus." In addition he is the bright morning star and the root and the descendant of David. The Apocalypse begins with an emphasis on Jesus and on what he has done and would do for humanity. It climaxes in Jesus' Second Coming (Rev 1:7). In the epilogue the book ends with an emphasis on the work of Christ, in this case predominantly his soon coming (Rev 22:7, 12, 20).<sup>89</sup> Jesus will come again and bring the respective reward, be it positive or negative. John, however, just prays: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." The grace of the Trinity in the prologue is followed by the grace of the Lord Jesus in the epilogue.

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<sup>87</sup> Bauckham, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Guthrie, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Lioy, 156, states: "The Apocalypse began by stressing the certainty of the Lord's return (Rev 1:7), the importance of remaining faithful to Him (vs. 3), and the genuineness of the prophecy John had received (vss. 1-2). These same Christocentric themes are emphasized in the conclusion of the book (22:12)." On page 171 he notes about the epilogue: "Also, these verses reveal that the Messiah is the starting point and end point for all of God's plans."

### **Conclusion and Implications**

In this first part of the paper we took a brief look at the amazing number of designations of Jesus in Revelation which surpasses what we find in other NT books.<sup>90</sup> They highlight Christ's nature and his functions and invite the reader to try to better understand him and draw close to him. They also create certain emphases which have practical implications for persons who profess to be Christians, followers of the Lamb. These need to be further explored.

The overview over the Christology in the Apocalypse revealed that Jesus occurs in all parts of Revelation and repeatedly forms the background to major visions. The book should not be read and interpreted without a constant consideration of its Christology. The christological backgrounds contribute to the theological understanding of the Apocalypse. For instance, the seal vision portrays Jesus as the one who is actively involved in the unfolding of history and brings about the final consummation. The trumpet vision begins with Jesus mediating the prayers of the saints and reminds of this ongoing process during the sixth trumpet. While Jesus takes notice of the needs of his people and hears their cries for justice, he supports them and intervenes for them by allowing for the judgments to come on those who dwell on earth. His mediation is the natural consequence of his atoning death on the cross (Rev 11:8), or in other words, his death is the prerequisite for this heavenly ministry. He also assures his disciples of a final positive outcome of the great controversy between good and evil (Rev 11:15-18).

Again, instead of heavily focusing on the evil powers portrayed in the Apocalypse, its Christology invites readers and interpreters of the book to notice the larger background and understand Revelation as a book of hope which places the emphasis not on these powers and on terrifying events but on Jesus Christ and God the Father especially, or the Trinity in general. So this first part of the article would suggest the necessity of making a deliberate attempt to interpret the Apocalypse christologically.

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<sup>90</sup> E.g., the Gospel of Mark has about sixteen: Jesus (1:14), Jesus Christ (1:1), Christ (8:29), Jesus of Nazareth (1:9), Lord (1:3), beloved Son (1:11), Son of Man (2:10), Son of God (3:11), Son of David (10:48), Teacher (4:38), Rabbi (9:5), Rabboni (10:51), The Holy One of God (1:24), King of the Jews (15:2), the Stone (12:10), and the Bridegroom (2:19).

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The next part of this article will take a closer look at the divinity of Jesus as portrayed in John's Apocalypse.

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