

Ouranology in the Book of Revelation:  
Its Epochs and Chiastic Structure

By

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jared C. Wellman". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jared C. Wellman  
Arlington, Texas  
January 2018

## **Dedication**

*For Amanda, Hannah, and Bethany.*

*Your love is celestial, and I am convinced you are angels from Heaven.*

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I am most obliged to God for calling me to pursue this remarkable opportunity. I am continually amazed by his grace upon my life, and it is my desire to utilize everything I have learned throughout the course of this project to help bring Heaven back to earth.

Jared C. Wellman  
Arlington, Texas  
January 2018

“Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so.”

**Mark Twain, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

## **Abstract**

The disposition of ouranological scholarship, that is the study (ology) of Heaven (*ouranos*), has been to emphasize its eschatological nature. This thesis offers an exegetical study on the subject of Heaven in Scripture, particularly in the book of Revelation, which is considered the most erudite work on Heaven in literature, in order to determine whether the scriptures show Heaven as having a vital non-eschatological nature, too. This thesis concludes that Revelation presents Jesus as inimitably involved with Heaven, and that this involvement presents Heaven as having a past, present, and future nature. Moreover, within these three chronological eras exist seven specific epochs of Heaven, which are fashioned by the ministry of Jesus Christ. The exegetical data in this thesis will therefore show Heaven is best understood when it is expanded beyond the boundaries of eschatology.

One unique contribution of this thesis is it rhetorically analyzes its exegetical findings. Rhetorical analysis is a relatively new field in NT exegetical studies, which asserts that design impacts meaning. The conclusion of this analysis shows the purported epochs are structured as a chiasm, which presents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the apex of ouranology. This is helpful in that it affirms the importance of understanding ouranology outside the boundaries of eschatology, because this is not observable when the doctrine is limited to a doctrine of last things. It is also helpful in that it correlates with a recent trend in biblical theology, which asserts the scriptures are best understood as a meta-story, specifically as a Christological metanarrative.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“...the hope that is in you” (1 Pt 3:15).

#### 1.1 Background to the Research Problem

Heaven plays an indispensable role from the very commencement of the Church. On the Day of Pentecost, the day on which the Church was born (Arnold 2002:15), Luke writes that a “noise like a violent rushing wind ... filled the whole house ... where [the disciples] were sitting.” This noise “came from Heaven” (Acts 2:2, NASB).<sup>1</sup> In his subsequent sermon, Peter cites Psalm 110:1 as being fulfilled in Christ, which portrays him in Heaven (Acts 2:14-36). This coincides with the disciples’ observation of Christ ascending “into Heaven” in Acts 1:9-10.

These verses suggest Heaven was an integral part of the original Church. It permeated its inauguration, stimulating it as a hope after which the early Christians eagerly sought. This is evidenced in events such as the stoning of Stephen, where Stephen “gazed intently into Heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” (Acts 7:59). The palpable implication is that Stephen desired to enter into the same abode as his Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

The doctrine of Heaven remained a core concept in the churches which immediately succeeded Pentecost. Paul's epistles verify this, as they are festooned with statements concerning the believer's hope in Heaven. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, for example, includes one of his strongest statements corroborating the early hope of Heaven: "For we know ... we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens. For indeed ... we long to be clothed with our dwelling from Heaven" (2 Cor 5:1-2).

This focus continued throughout Church history, where Church Fathers like Augustine (A.D. 354-430) penned historically significant works on the subject, like *The City of God*, in which he discusses the serenity Heaven alone allows. Augustine's influence is seen in later works on Heaven, such as John Bunyan's seventeenth century work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a narrative which tells the search of the Heavenly city. McGrath (2003:31) observes that Bunyan's work displays Augustine's ongoing impact on the Church throughout history, writing, "The tension between two such cities—earthly and Heavenly—had been the subject of much reflection with the Christian tradition prior to Bunyan—for example, in Augustine's *City of God*."

Comparatively, however, the doctrine of Heaven in the contemporary Church has been somewhat neglected, and at one time was outright repudiated. Wilbur Smith (1968:17), in his book *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*, discusses this repudiation, noting, while there has always been strong opposition to the great truths of the Christian faith, with the Enlightenment (1715-1789)<sup>2</sup> came a "stream of opposition to Biblical truth [which] developed into a torrent and swept before it a great mass of people." Outram (2006:29) and Zafirovski (2010:144) describe the Enlightenment as a philosophical movement that centered on "reason" as the primary source of authority. Edwin Orr (1975:xi) states that the movement "represented the greatest challenge to Christianity for very many centuries."

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<sup>2</sup> Historians typically place the Enlightenment between 1715, the year that Louis XIV died, and 1789, the beginning of the French Revolution (so Outram 2006; Zafirovski 2010).

McManners (1969), Bokenkotter (2005), Pearse (2006), Hitchcock (2012), Noll (2012), and Shelley (2013) describe the French Revolution (1789-1799) as a climactic moment of the Enlightenment, arguing that the event implemented the first concerted attack on the Christian Church since the days of Diocletian (A.D. 245-311), a third and fourth century Roman emperor who inaugurated and facilitated the historical Great Persecution of Christians. Pearse (2006:395) maintains that the world and the position of Christianity within it have “changed unimaginably” since the storming of the Bastille, maintaining that it unveiled the first appearance of “aggressive secularism.” Shelley (2013:369) abridges this by stating how historians look to the event as the birth of a new age—“the Age of Progress.” In an important insight, Hitchcock (2012:337-338) notes how those who remained loyal to their religious beliefs were accused of the crime of “fanaticism,” further noting that many religious leaders were imprisoned and murdered for such beliefs. Pearse (2006:395) concurs, detailing the event as one that hosted fresh bloodbaths sacrificed on the altar of the Enlightenment. McManners (1969:106) estimates that about two to five thousand clergy were murdered throughout the course of the event. These historical descriptions of the Enlightenment’s French Revolution help show that the philosophical movement produced an environment that had little tolerance for spiritual beliefs, especially doctrines like Heaven, because it was considered unreasonable and dangerous to believe in such “fanaticism.”

Pearse (2006:395), Virkler (2007:60), and McKim (2007:56) discuss how the Enlightenment’s impact would carry on throughout the nineteenth century via the influence of its most prominent thinkers—the philosophes. “The musings of the philosophes would come to stand in paternal relationship to the ideologies of the modern age” (Pearse 2006:395). The philosophes include, but are not limited to, Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). McKim (2007:56), in the *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, calls these individuals the “fathers of suspicion,” and indicates they headlined the

philosophical movement that called into question the reasonability of idiosyncratic doctrines like Heaven. The philosophes “claimed that whatever was not in conformity with the educated mentality was to be rejected. This included biblical records of supernatural events and doctrines” (Virkler 2007:60).

A review of bibliographies on the subject of Heaven shows there is a paucity of scholarship on Heaven during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which helps to affirm the claim the Enlightenment and its philosophes cultivated an environment of theological neglect on the subject. Wilbur Smith (1968:289), for example, offers what was once considered the “only comprehensive bibliography” on the subject of Heaven. Smith’s bibliography is fifty years old, and thus no longer the most comprehensive by age alone, but is late enough to demonstrate a conspicuous trend on the subject of Heaven during the centuries in question. An examination of the chronological data of Smith’s (1968:289-301) bibliography reveals that only seven books on the subject of Heaven were published during the eighteenth century—the century that hosted the Enlightenment—and that only seventeen books were published in the first half of the nineteenth century, the period immediately following it. Alcorn (2004:489-495) offers the most comprehensive bibliography on the subject of Heaven since Smith’s, which also affirms the dearth of ouranological scholarship during the primary years of the Enlightenment’s influence. Theology professor A.J. Conyers (1992:21), in *The Eclipse of Heaven*, offers a reflection upon this plight:

Even to one without religious commitment and theological convictions, it should be an unsettling thought that this world is attempting to chart its way through some of the most perilous waters in history, having now decided to ignore what was for nearly two millennia its fixed point of reference—its North Star. The ... longing for Heaven ... [is] not [a] prominent consideration in our modern discourse about the important matters of life. But [it] once [was].

It seems that while the doctrine of Heaven was once enormously important to the Church, that the doctrine became repudiated over time. “Belief in Heaven was not just a nice auxiliary sentiment. It was a central, life-sustaining conviction” (Alcorn 2004:9). Alcorn (2004:8-9) outlines this reality by noting the theological neglect of Heaven by distinguished scholars such as John Calvin, Reinhold Niebhuur, William Shedd, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and Louis Berkhof, some whom ignore the subject altogether, and others whom only provide little attention to it in their respective publications. “When all that’s said about Heaven is limited to page 737 of a 737-page systematic theology, it raises a question: Are there so few theological implications to this subject?” (Alcorn 2004:8-9)

Fortunately the subject of Heaven has regained the attention of the Church in recent years. Scholars like Randy Alcorn (2004) have adequately contributed to this, acknowledging the neglect of the doctrine, but also seeking to abolish the neglect by publishing substantial contributions exclusively centered on the subject. Alcorn’s bibliography shows that around the second half of the nineteenth century the subject of Heaven started regaining attention. More books (Smith’s bibliography counts eighty-one) were published in this half of the century than in the one hundred and fifty years before it, which make up the primary years of the Enlightenment’s influence (the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). This trend continued into the twentieth century, where, between 1900 and 1966, forty more works on Heaven were published, which is where Smith’s (1968) bibliography ends. Alcorn (2004) offers the most comprehensive bibliography<sup>3</sup> on the subject of Heaven since Smith’s (although Alcorn’s is now becoming dated itself), and lists one hundred and nine books written on the subject since 1966 (2004:489-495). This shows that attention on the subject has continued to mature as history moves further away from the influence of the Enlightenment.

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<sup>3</sup> Alcorn’s book is arguably the most recent contribution purely centered on the doctrine of Heaven. Other recent works on the subject do not deal with the subject so primarily, and therefore do not offer as comprehensive a bibliography as Alcorn. One example is Wright’s *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, which, alongside the doctrine of Heaven, covers other related topics, and offers no formal bibliography.

Another recent, notable contribution on the subject of Heaven is N.T. Wright's book, *Surprised by Hope* (2008), a work that highlights the resurrection as a key hope for the believer in regards to Heaven. The fact that such a prolific and influential scholar has published on Heaven is, in and of itself, evidence that the subject is recapturing its due attention.<sup>4</sup>

Other sources have also served in reigniting the passion of Heaven in the Church, such as the "Heaven tourism" genre, which was inaugurated by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' 1970 book *On Death and Dying*, which recounted tales from several people who died, visited Heaven, and returned to life. Raymond A. Moody's 1976 book, *Life After Life*, recounts the same types of tales. According to John MacArthur (1996:14), Moody is a "leading authority on near-death experiences," though MacArthur is quick to question the fidelity of the "Heaven tourism" genre. Most recently the genre has been re-popularized by Don Piper's *90 Minutes in Heaven* (2004), Kevin Malarkey's *The Boy Who Came Back From Heaven* (2010),<sup>5</sup> and Todd Burpo's *Heaven is For Real* (2011).

This thesis agrees with MacArthur (1996:14), who submits that "Heaven tourism" books are unscholarly and dubious. However, they are mentioned to help reveal a renewed enthrallment with Heaven. Fascinatingly, these unscholarly works have helped cultivate an environment ready to embrace a rejuvenated academic approach to Heaven, if, for any reason, to offer biblically sound answers to the subject.

I thus propose that a fresh study on Heaven is warranted, and therefore have felt reason to embark on a study on the subject of Heaven that is based on a biblical

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<sup>4</sup> More recent contributions related to the subject of Heaven include Beale's (2004) *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, Alexander's (2008) *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, Hamilton's (2014) *With the Clouds of Heaven*, and Middleton's (2014) *A New Heaven and a New Earth*. These works, however, merely touch on aspects of Heaven as it fits within a biblical metanarrative. These works represent what seems to be a growing trend on biblical theology that understands the scriptures via a Christological metanarrative. They will be addressed more thoroughly later in this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> The boy listed in the title of this book, Alex, has since announced that he lied about touring Heaven (Dean 2015).

system that brings lucidity of the subject to the general Christian community. This is to be done by systematically exegeting relevant scriptures, particularly in the book of Revelation, in an attempt to add a helpful contribution to contemporary scholarship.

This study endeavors to particularly show how contemporary scholarship on Heaven concentrates on eschatological elements of the subject that might be part of a more holistic system present in the scriptures, which could serve as a needle that sews the scholastic threads of Heaven together in a helpful way. The general hypothesis is that Heaven is best understood as having a ternary nature that includes, along with its categorical eschatological nature, vital historical and contemporaneous implications, too. The forthcoming sections will unpack this hypothesis in more detail.

## **1.2 Review of Scholarship**

A review of scholarship concerning the subject of Heaven reveals several insights, including (a) the accentuation of the subject to eschatology; (b) that the eschatological viewpoints originate from a variety of hermeneutical convictions; and (c) that the book of Revelation is the most oft-cited book in scholarship on the subject. Most of these insights are detailed in more appropriate locations throughout this thesis. For the purposes of this introductory chapter, it is important to detail observation (a), which concerns the eschatological accentuation of the subject.

### **1.2.1 Eschatological Emphasis of Heaven**

N.T. Wright (2008:40) submits that Paul offers a favorable starting place for tracing the doctrine of Heaven—more known as ouranology (Oxford Dictionary 2016)—through Church history. “Early Christian belief in hope beyond death ... can be plotted with remarkable consistency in writers from Paul in the middle of

the first century to Tertullian and Origen at the end of the second and beyond” (Wright 2008:40). McGrath (2011:445) agrees, but adds Jesus’ teachings, suggesting the two sources of outstanding importance for understanding Heaven “are generally agreed to be the preaching of Jesus himself, and the writings of Paul.” This review combines the two and begins with Paul’s initial experience with Jesus.

Paul’s salvation is recorded in the book of Acts, where Jesus appears to him while on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). This is an important event, because Paul’s theology comes directly from his experience with Jesus. He consistently told those to whom he preached he “delivered ... what he first received” (1 Cor 15:3). Paul is fervently clear he preaches an untainted gospel (Gal 1:6-9).

The final verses of the book of Acts disclose a major element of Paul’s theology—a focus on the doctrine of Heaven. Luke relates Paul “preached the kingdom of God”<sup>6</sup> (Acts 28:30-31). In his commentary on Acts 28:30-31, NT scholar John Polhill (2001:546) unpacks the significance of Paul’s sermon, noting how the kingdom of Heaven is ultimately the central message of Acts. Polhill (2001:546) also highlights how Acts begins with Jesus sharing the message of God’s kingdom with his disciples (1:3), revealing a significant insight of how the book both begins and ends with a focus on the subject of Heaven via the kingdom. Longenecker (1981:573) suggests Acts’ ending establishes an understanding of the kingdom which has both present and future implications: “Luke’s instinct in closing his great work as he did was completely right ... he was implying that the apostolic proclamation of the gospel in the first century began a story that will continue until the consummation of the kingdom in Christ.” Gangel (1998:469) agrees, and argues that Luke, by concluding his book with Paul’s unhindered ouranological emphasis, wanted his readers to grasp the

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<sup>6</sup> In this thesis “kingdom of Heaven” and “kingdom of God” are taken as meaning the same thing. While some take the two as speaking of different things, one general consensus is that they refer to the same thing (Enns 2014).

contemporary power of the kingdom of God in a hostile environment, even if its complete consummation is in the future. These insights help to establish at least two considerations. First, that the doctrine of Heaven was important to Paul, and second, that it was more than an eschatological hope.

Paul advances the subject of Heaven throughout his epistles, most notably in his letters to Corinth. In these letters Paul discusses the hope in a resurrection (1 Cor 15), a “building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens” (2 Cor 5:1), and his personal experience with Heaven (2 Cor 12:1-10). While these are primarily eschatological statements, they also include contemporary implications. Harris (2005:369) notes for example one reason for Paul’s refusal to become discouraged in the present—his “buoyancy of spirit”—was his assured, present hope of the future. Garland (1999:249, 507-508) espouses a similar opinion, suggesting how although death remains Paul’s most feared enemy, he is “not tempted to recoil in the face of daily danger,” because of his hope in Heaven. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul introduces the topic of visions and revelations from the Lord, even describing a rapture to paradise which impacted the way he understood Heaven in his present context. Paul shows that although ouranology is a highly eschatological doctrine, there are non-eschatological implications, too.

Halley (2000:774, 789) dates both of Paul’s letters to Corinth around A.D. 55, which is a common belief among conservative scholarship. With this said, several scholars would also agree the letter to Thessalonica is Paul’s earliest letter (Halley 2000:825). “The first letter to the Thessalonian Church is probably Paul’s earliest surviving letter and is generally dated round A.D. 51” (Halley 2000:825). This is noteworthy because this letter also includes ouranological declarations, particularly on the Church’s resurrection and “catching up” to Heaven in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The suggested dates coincide well with Wright’s (2008:40) contention that Paul’s writings in the middle of the first century

are a worthwhile starting place for tracing the doctrine of Heaven throughout Church history.

The Apostle John<sup>7</sup> contributed perhaps the most notable document ever written on the subject of Heaven—Revelation. Revelation includes some of the most decorative acumens on the subject of Heaven, detailing events such as the second coming (Rev 19:11-16), the Millennium (Rev 20), and the new Heaven and earth (Rev 21). This thesis contends the book of Revelation references (and in many ways crafts) every nuance of Heaven available in the scriptures, and therefore offers the most complete theology of Heaven available in any erudite contribution on the subject. This includes the rest of the books that make up the biblical canon. Revelation is often distinguished as the conclusion to all previous biblical revelation and therefore a reflection to the interpretation of the rest of the Bible (Walvoord 1989a:7). This is an important consideration for the argument purported throughout the course of this thesis, which is that John's ouranological insights in Revelation portray the subject as extending beyond eschatology.

The majority of biblical scholarship traditionally places the date of the writing of Revelation as A.D. 95, or in the least certainly between A.D. 80 and 100 (so Hendriksen 2002:14; Koester 2014:71).<sup>8</sup> This places the book at the end of the first century A.D., which allows it to serve as a seamless bridge from the time of

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will use "John" to refer to the author of Revelation. Osborne (2002:2) articulates a common debate on Revelation's authorship, writing, "... the identification of this "John" has led to centuries of disagreement on the part of scholars, for he never identifies himself as the "apostle." For further discussion on the topic, see Koester (2014:66), who writes, "... modern interpreters attribute Revelation to John the apostle for two reasons. First, one might expect the early church tradition to be accurate because it was held by Justin, who lived in Ephesus for a time, and by Irenaeus, who spent time in Smyrna. Since Revelation addresses churches in those cities, one might assume that they preserved information about its author. Second, those who assume that the Fourth Gospel was written by John the apostle highlight points of similarity between Revelation and the gospel in order to show that both have the same author. Osborne agrees, stating that while the problems of the authorship of Revelation are formidable, there are good reasons for upholding the viability of Revelation as penned by the Apostle John. Osborne concurs with Koester's sentiments, that several Church Fathers endorsed the Apostle John as the author, and that the similarities with the Gospel of John are sufficient. "In short, the internal evidence supports the external witness of the Church Fathers."

<sup>8</sup> Koester (2014:71) says it seems clear that it was written after the death of Nero in 68, and before the mid-second century since noted by Justin Martyr in A.D. 155-160. Walvoord (1989a:13) says the majority opinion is A.D. 95. Hendriksen (2002:14) says one cannot find a single cogent argument in support of an earlier date, because the arguments are based on late and unreliable testimonies, or on the wholly imaginary idea that John did not yet know his Greek when he wrote Revelation.

the Apostles to the age of the Church Fathers, where an eschatological accentuation of the subject becomes progressively palpable.<sup>9</sup>

One of the first Church Fathers<sup>10</sup> to reference Heaven is Polycarp (A.D. 70-155), a second century bishop of Smyrna and protégé of the Apostle John (Bingham 2002:20). Polycarp is best known for his martyrdom at the hands of the Roman Empire. In *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*,<sup>11</sup> Lightfoot and Tomkins (2015) relate his final prayer, in which Polycarp turned his gaze upon Heaven and expressed his hope of a future resurrection to eternal life. In his final moments Polycarp anticipated the hope of Heaven, which is a noteworthy insight from this early century Christian. John ended Revelation with the hope of Heaven in the first century, and Polycarp expressed the same hope in his death in the early part of the second century.

Athenagoras (A.D. 133-190) offers the earliest known complete exposition of the subject of the resurrection in Christian history, besides that which is included in the NT. His work is ultimately a defense of the future resurrection, an event Wright (2008:41) and Middleton (2014) consider a vital cog of the doctrine of Heaven. Athenagoras (2013:6356) argues how God's power to create a body is the same power he will use to raise a body. Athenagoras' statements are helpful because they show the importance of the resurrection in ouranology from an early point in history, which supports scholars like Wright (2008:41) and Middleton (2014:24) who assert the focus has been lost among recent scholarship. This thesis will seek to show the resurrection as an integral element of the doctrine of Heaven.

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<sup>9</sup> Pendleton (2010:399) offers a helpful commentary, which shows the NT authors' fascination with ouranology: It is everywhere assumed ... in the NT, that there is a Heaven. Jesus referred to himself as having "come down from Heaven," and when he ascended it is said that he was "carried up into Heaven." During his ministry he said in his Sermon on the Mount, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven." At another time he spoke of the enrollment of the names of his disciples "in Heaven" as the source of their highest joy. Paul in writing to the Colossians uses the words, "the hope which is laid up for you in Heaven."

<sup>10</sup> Any survey of the hermeneutics of the Church Fathers in this thesis is done under the mantra that determining a clear eschatology of any single Church Father is extremely difficult. Marmorstein (2001:126) warns, for example, "The problem is that, even in patristic works ... by the same author, one can find differences in eschatology."

<sup>11</sup> Bingham (2002:20) describes this document as "an account of the death of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, sent in the form of a letter from the Church in Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium of Phrygia in what is today southern Turkey."

Several other second century Church Fathers considered the doctrine of Heaven, too. Many concentrated on the future kingdom and the new Heaven and earth, but several had a fascination with the future destruction and regeneration of creation. Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), for example, in *Against Heresies* delves into all three. Irenaeus' statements on the demotion and renovation of the earth are helpful in that he believes creation is redeemed, not annihilated. This supports Athenagoras' theology of the resurrection, ultimately showing how the two Church Fathers favored the redemption of creation (earth and its inhabitants) as opposed to annihilation and reconstruction. Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) and Origen (A.D. 182-254) seem to purport the same conviction. In his *First Principles* Origen writes, "If the form of the world passes away, it is by no means an annihilation or destruction of their material substance that is shown to take place, but a kind of change of quality and a transformation of appearance." All of this is important for this thesis' overall claim concerning how Scripture presents the doctrine of Heaven in Revelation, which suggests God's goal is the redemption of creation, as opposed to an annihilation and recreation.

Consideration on the subject of Heaven continued into the third century, where Church Fathers like Cyprian (ca. A.D. 200-258) further contributed to the subject. Cyprian, in his *Treatise on Mortality*, speaks of an event which "snatches us from this place and sets us free from the snares of the world," followed by a subsequent restoration to a paradise in the kingdom. Cyprian's statements are interesting because his language echoes what is commonly referred to as a pretribulational rapture, an eschatological event which some believe precedes the coming of the kingdom. This is not to say Cyprian espoused a pretribulational rapture, only to say his language leaves room for discussion of an event which is key in the study of Heaven. It is cases like these which lead this thesis to affirm

Marmorstein's (2001:126) warning that determining a clear eschatology of any single Church Father is extremely difficult.<sup>12</sup>

Ambrose of Milan (A.D. 337-397) was a fourth century Church Father who offered ouranological insights via a eulogy he performed for the emperor Theodosius, who had died in Milan in January A.D. 395. "In his funeral oration, Ambrose asked his listeners to imagine the scene in Heaven, in which Theodosius embraces his wife Flaccila and his daughter Pulcheria, before being reunited with his father and his predecessor as a Christian Roman emperor, Constantine" (McGrath 2011:447). This shows Ambrose's convictions regarding the immediate destination of a believer upon death. In particular it shows some denied "soul sleep" as early as the fourth century, and instead confessed the inheritance of what is commonly known as the intermediate Heaven. Ambrose also wrote on the future destruction and renewal of the earth, comparing the renewal to man's resurrection: "If the earth and Heaven are renewed, why should we doubt that man, on account of whom Heaven and earth were made, can be renewed? For the resurrection ... shows that what has fallen should rise again." These statements seem to correlate with how Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen understood God's goal with creation and its inhabitants, which advocates for total redemption.

Bettenson and Maunder (2011:26-27) show how intentional consideration on the doctrine of Heaven was also present during the fourth century via the early Creeds of the Church. This includes the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325), the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (A.D. 381), and the Apostle's Creed (ca. A.D. 390). The Nicene Creed connects Heaven to Jesus, stating "all things were made, in Heaven and on earth," by Jesus, who is, "Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made" (Bettenson and Maunder 2011:26-27). The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed states Jesus "came down from Heaven [and] ascended to Heaven," that his "kingdom shall have no end," and also references the

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<sup>12</sup> See footnote 10.

“resurrection of the dead” (Bettenson and Maunder 2011:26-27). Finally, the Apostle’s Creed contains a line referencing “eternal life” (2011:25). Each Creed includes ouranologically-related sentiments, demonstrating the doctrine as a hope of the early Church (though the focus seems to be eschatological).

Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), another fourth century Church Father, contributed to the subject of Heaven extensively. His *City of God* is one of the most “influential reworkings of the corporate dimension of the eschatological ideas of the NT” (McGrath 2011:447). Duesing (2016:45) cites the book as expounding upon many profound questions of Heaven, discussing its relationship to earth and its progress throughout history. Augustine (2012:611) paints a beautiful picture of the future Heaven, declaring how it will “be tainted with no evil” and “lack no good.”

The era immediately following the Church Fathers is often referred to as the “Middle Ages,” because it falls in the “middle” of the Church Fathers and the Protestant Reformation (so Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard 2004:42; McGrath 2013:78). The era spans from roughly A.D. 500 to 1500. In *Historical Theology*, McGrath (2013:88-92) lists the key theologians of this era as John of Damascus, Simeon, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and Erasmus of Rotterdam. Of these theologians, only two have notable publications on Heaven—Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas, although Dante Alighieri’s poem, *Divine Comedy*, is worth referencing because of its influential impact on the era (so Schaff 2011:4; McGrath 2011:449, 450). Moreover, it is worth mentioning Andrew of Caesarea (A.D. 563-637), who offers the oldest Greek commentary on Revelation, and Oecumenius (ca. A.D. 990), who also offers an historical commentary on Revelation. Both consequently offer commentary on Heaven as it relates to Revelation, which will be considered in the exegetical sections of this thesis.

Anselm (ca. A.D. 1033-1109), in *Why God Became Man*, focuses on the future demolition and renovation of the present earth (2012:165). Aquinas (ca. A.D. 1225-1274) likewise offers thoughts on the future demolition and renovation of the present earth, but discusses the future resurrection, too. In fact, in *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas (2012a:91) speaks on the resurrection quite extensively, describing human nature as “deficient,” stating it will be “brought back by the future resurrection to the state of its ultimate perfection.” For Aquinas (2012b:526), this “ultimate perfection” is fulfilled when the soul is united to a “glorified body.” Aquinas’ emphasis on the resurrection is a helpful insight into this thesis’ ultimate claim, which also stresses the resurrection’s place in ouranology.

Dante Alighieri’s (ca. A.D. 1265-1321) poem, *Divine Comedy*, (particularly the third canticle, *Paradiso*), offers astute thoughts on the doctrine of Heaven during the Middle Ages, though it is more poetic than theological. “It gives a poetic mirror of Christianity and civilization in the thirteenth and the opening years of the fourteenth century” (Schaff 2011:4). The fruition of *Paradiso*—and thus Dante’s (1996:142-145) formalized thoughts on Heaven—is disclosed in the final canto: “But already my desire and my will, were being turned like a wheel, all at one speed, by the love that moves the sun and all the other stars.” Zaleski (2000:168) summarizes the canto, writing, “Briefly, Dante experiences the beatific vision, and the end of the *Paradiso* circles back to its beginning: ‘the glory of the one who moves all things.’”

McGrath (2013:139-140) lists the key theologians for the Protestant Reformation Period (ca. A.D. 1500-1750), the period that follows the Middle Ages, as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, Teresa of Avila, Theodore Beza, Johann Gerhard, Roberto Bellarmine, and Jonathan Edwards. Of these theologians, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards offer published statements on the subject of Heaven. However, John Bunyan’s work, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was also written during this era, and is a warranted inclusion in this time period.

Martin Luther's (A.D. 1483-1546) contributions on the subject of Heaven include an emphasis on the future resurrection. In his *Enemies of the Cross of Christ*, he notes how Christ will "render our bodies beautiful, pure, shining and worthy of honor, until they correspond to his own immortal, glorious body" (2012a:50), and in *Watchwords for the Warfare of Life* he states the promise of the resurrection can be observed in the seasons of the planet's annual climate calendar (2012b:515). John Calvin (A.D. 1509-1564) also stresses the resurrection, where he maintains it extends to all of creation (2012a:119). In this statement Calvin connects the resurrection of the body to the future regeneration of the earth, suggesting it is likened to the resurrection. Calvin specifically advances this notion in his commentary on Isaiah, where he applies creation's resurrection to the new Heaven and new earth (2012b:385).<sup>13</sup>

John Bunyan (A.D. 1628-1688) in *Pilgrim's Progress* also stresses the final picture of Heaven, drawing extensively on the New Jerusalem's description in Revelation. McGrath calls Bunyan's work "a profound and permanent effect on popular Christian spirituality" (McGrath 2003:31). Bunyan's work solidified the seventeenth century's ouranological mindset, which seems to correlate with the sixteenth century's mindset as purported by both Luther and Calvin—an emphasis on the future Heaven, earth, and Jerusalem.

Jonathan Edwards (A.D. 1703-1758) headlines the eighteenth century, and specifically conveys his ouranological convictions in his sermon *Heaven is a World of Love*. In this sermon Edwards argues from 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 that Heaven is a place of perfect love, that God is the source of this perfect love, and that He will impart it to Heaven's inhabitants. The aim of Edwards' sermon is conversion more than it is to offer a theological treatise on the doctrine of

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<sup>13</sup> Alcorn (2004:8) has written of Calvin, "John Calvin, the great expositor, never wrote a commentary on Revelation ... his theology of Heaven seems strikingly weak compared to his theology of God, Christ, salvation, Scripture, and the Church." Alcorn also notes how this is "understandable in light of the pressing theological issues of his day, but surprisingly few theologians in the centuries since Calvin have attempted to fill in the gaps."

Heaven. While Edwards' ouranological theology is helpful in a salvific sense, he does not offer much help in terms of expositional insights, or even thematic underscores like his predecessors.

McGrath (2013:192-194) lists the key theologians for the Modern Period (A.D. 1750-present), the period which follows the Protestant Reformation, as including F.D.E. Schleiermacher, John Henry Newman, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Jurgen Moltmann, and Wolfart Pannenberg.

Interestingly, several of these scholars, as well as others not included on the list, downplayed the importance of Heaven. Barth (2010:437), for example, describes Heaven as "inconceivable" and "inaccessible." Moltmann shares a similar opinion in *A Theology of Hope* (1993) in which he calls into question the beliefs of a future eternal life and Heaven, arguing the convictions are grounded more in Greek philosophical notions than in biblical theology. Ludwig Feuerbach (A.D. 1804-1872), an influential thinker from the Modern Period, argued the idea of "Heaven" or "eternal life" was simply "a projection of a human longing after immortality, without any objective basis" (McGrath 2011:451).

This helps to augment the aforementioned allegation that the attendant philosophies of the Enlightenment helped to deteriorate scholastic attention on the subject of Heaven in the Church. In the least the philosophies injured Heaven's place of prominence in the early church. The intensely rationalist atmosphere led to criticism of the Christian doctrine of Heaven as ignorant superstition, devoid of any real basis in life (McGrath 2011:451).

The effects of the Enlightenment began to diminish, at least in the realm of conservative theology, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, but especially in the twentieth century. The Enlightenment's impact was largely discredited by the rediscovery of the apocalyptic character of the preaching of Jesus (McGrath 2011:451-452). This was primarily done through the leadership of Johannes

Weiss (A.D. 1863-1914) and Albert Schweitzer (A.D. 1875-1965), two early twentieth century theologians who focused on the eschatological kingdom of God. Marmorstein (2001:125) describes the occasion as the “Schweitzer/Weiss hypothesis,” which contended there had been a “de-eschatolization” of the gospel message.

Weiss intentionally delayed publicizing his ouranological eschatology, particularly as it related to the kingdom of Heaven, because it diametrically opposed the convictions posed by his father-in-law, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), the “leading liberal systematic theologian of the day” (Brown 2007:1026). Ritschl understood the kingdom of Heaven as the moral transformation of the individual believer and of society. “Christ’s vocation was to be the bearer of God’s ethical lordship in the world” (Brown 2007:1027). Weiss had long concluded this ethical interpretation of the kingdom, which appealed to the liberal and Kantian ethical traditions of the Modern Period, was utterly at variance with the outlook of primitive Christianity and of Jesus, and sought to recover the eschatological teachings of Jesus as they concerned the kingdom of Heaven.

Schweitzer, the other agent credited for rediscovering the apocalyptic preaching of Jesus, is considered one of the truly incredible minds of the twentieth century. His interpretation of Jesus and his teaching, especially as it concerns the kingdom of Heaven, has had significant influence on subsequent NT studies (Mercer 2007:899-900). In this regard Schweitzer developed and popularized the views first presented by Weiss, who argued the kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus was an entirely future cataclysmic act of God; the central feature of Jesus’ life and teaching was his expectation of the coming eschatological kingdom of God in the immediate future.<sup>14</sup> Mercer (2007:901) maintains the thoroughgoing eschatological interpretation of Jesus was negatively received in Schweitzer’s day, but became a dominant scholarly interpretation of Jesus and framed much

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<sup>14</sup> Schweitzer based much of his eschatology on a literal reading of Matthew 10, and some criticized him for basing too much of his work on his reading of this text (Mercer 2007:900).

of the subsequent discussion. Some interpreters followed Schweitzer in viewing the kingdom as future in Jesus' teaching, some saw it as present, and others saw it as both future and present, and others reframed the issues (e.g., Rudolf Bultmann's existentialist interpretations and C.H. Dodd's realized eschatology) or denied the apocalyptic interpretation altogether (e.g., W. Rauschenbusch). This is an especially important consideration because this thesis seeks to explore the kingdom of Heaven as it relates to ouranology, particularly its contemporary relationship with the future. Some describe this as an "already" and "not yet" eschatology of the kingdom, a concept first proposed by Princeton theologian Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (so Ladd 1993:66-67; Enns 2011b:180). Vos is often cited as "the father of reformed biblical theology," and his ouranological publications also helped to advance the subject in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gaffin 2007:1016-1019).<sup>15</sup> In some ways Vos' views on the kingdom ("already and not yet") diametrically opposed Weiss' and Schweitzer's (primarily "not yet"), but all three helped to reinvigorate ouranology in the aftermath of the Enlightenment.

While McGrath's (2013:192-194) list of key theologians for the Modern Period is substantial for theological reasons, for the purposes of this study it is expanded to include other influential theologians who participated in the rediscovery of the study of eschatology, particularly as it relates to Heaven. These scholars include C.S. Lewis, Wilbur Smith, John MacArthur, Alister McGrath, Randy Alcorn, and N.T. Wright.

C.S. Lewis (A.D. 1898-1963) was an influential thinker of his day, and perhaps a catalyst for the contemporary resurgence on the subject of Heaven. His *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* is the most comprehensible contribution he offers on the subject, as it includes nine sermons preached by Lewis during the

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<sup>15</sup> Ladd (1959:23-25) explored Vos' eschatology in the 1950's, and concluded that the most biblical approach to the ouranological concept of the kingdom of God is to understand it as both present and future, an approach that has influenced several subsequent scholars.

early part of the twentieth century. Of these sermons, only one—*The Weight of Glory*—focuses on Heaven (2001:25-46). Lewis' overall argument is that Heaven weighs on every soul, whether every soul realizes it or not: "I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence" (2001:30). Lewis' contribution to the subject of Heaven rode—and perhaps even helped create—the wave of resurgence on the subject in the twentieth century.

Wilbur Smith's (A.D. 1894-1976) *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven* offers a robust theology of Heaven. One of the highlights of Smith's book is his suggestion that Jesus is the staple that binds the doctrine of Heaven together:

If it were not for the intimate and eternal relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ to Heaven, books on Heaven would hardly be written, and the subject itself, however rich the biblical data might be, would not assume anything like the importance that attaches to it ... Indeed Heaven would hardly be a place longed for or desired were it not that this is where Christ is and forever will be in all of his glory (1968:77).

Smith offers rare considerations of Jesus' direct impact on the doctrine of Heaven in scholarship.

In 1996 John MacArthur (A.D. 1939-present) published a work on Heaven entitled *The Glory of Heaven*. MacArthur's book concerns the future Heaven and earth, but the book also concerns how scholarship has neglected the doctrine, particularly in the modern era: "Most of us simply don't long for [Heaven] like our ancestors did" (1996:11). With this said, MacArthur (1996:13) does recognize the subject has gained momentum, writing, "More people are now talking about Heaven ... than any time in my memory," but his statements concerning the

refutation of the subject are striking considering the nature of this particular subsection.

N.T. Wright's (A.D. 1948-present) *Surprised By Hope* encapsulates his theology of Heaven. For Wright (2008:15), the subject of Heaven cannot be understood apart from the future resurrection. Wright argues the resurrection is the pinnacle of a believer's hope, and that "early Christian future hope centered firmly on resurrection" (2008:41), which is an evident reality based on this survey. For Wright (2008:41), a Christian cannot understand the doctrine of Heaven without first understanding the resurrection. Wright's contemporary thoughts on the resurrection are paramount considering the Church Fathers conveyed the same focus on the subject in their publications.

Alister McGrath (A.D. 1953-present) offers one of the most telling comments of scholarship's modern perception of Heaven by describing it as an eschatological doctrine: "Heaven is essentially that of the eschatological realization of the presence and power of God, and the final elimination of sin" (2011:461). McGrath (2011:461-462) interprets Heaven as a future realm of "Eternal life [which] is ... to be seen as sharing, with the redeemed community as a whole, in the community of a loving God." For McGrath (2011:462), the doctrine of Heaven concerns a "future reality," and this is the "natural way to think of Heaven." McGrath's eschatological insights are helpful, but they help to establish the gap which exists within modern scholarship concerning Heaven's historical and contemporary implications.

Enns (2011a) lists Randy Alcorn's (A.D. 1954-present) *Heaven* (2004) as, "the most thoroughly researched, biblically oriented publication on Heaven." Alcorn's (2004:41) major contributions to the subject are his statements on what he calls the "intermediate Heaven," the place a Christian "enters when he or she dies," which is "a transitional period between our past lives on earth and our future resurrection to life on the new earth." Alcorn (2004:119) leverages the notion of a

present intermediate Heaven to discuss the importance of the future resurrection as well as the new Heaven and earth. For Alcorn (2004:119), “all creation awaits resurrection.” Alcorn’s research is especially helpful because he explicitly acknowledges Heaven has a past, present, and future nature. Alcorn however does not unpack the past nature, and largely utilizes the present nature as a catalyst to discuss Heaven’s future nature. While Alcorn’s insights are helpful, his research still primarily focuses on the eschatological notions of Heaven. This thesis intends to build upon Alcorn’s purported triune nature of Heaven, except with the goal of showing Heaven’s holistic nature in the scriptures. This is opposed to primarily utilizing Heaven’s non-eschatological nature as a tool to bolster Heaven’s eschatological nature.

In summary, a scholarship review from the Apostle Paul, the first century’s most prolific author of Scripture, to Wright, one of the present century’s most prolific scholars, reveals, since the closing of the biblical canon, the doctrine of Heaven has largely become an eschatological doctrine. One inquiry of this thesis is to reconnoiter the eschatological emphasis of ouranology, suggesting if Heaven can be shown to have a vital non-eschatological nature in Scripture, then a gap might exist in the present scholarship on the subject of Heaven. This is specifically to investigate how Scripture details Heaven in order to discover the theological and ecclesiastical impact of Heaven’s overall nature.

### **1.3 Design and Methodology**

The proposed study intends to discover what God has revealed about the subject of Heaven, thereby making it a study in systematic theology (Smith 2008:154). Enns (2014:151) observes how the word “systematic” comes from the Greek verb *sunistano*, which means “to organize.” “Hence, systematic theology emphasizes the systematization of theology” (Enns 2014:151). The aim of this particular study is to construct a holistic model of Heaven which accounts for how the scriptures, specifically those found in the book of Revelation, present the

doctrine; it seeks to organize the Bible's teachings on Heaven, primarily in Revelation, into a system.

This study's goal will be greatly aided by including some exegetical work on key passages that have to do with the subject of Heaven. Kaiser and Silva (2007:303) describe the relationship between systematic theology and exegesis as one of the "most controverted issues in the history of biblical interpretation." The question is whether one's systematic theology influences one's exegesis, or if one's exegesis influences one's systematic theology. This thesis does not enter this debate, and sees both as helpful to discovering what God has to say about a particular subject. The major goal is to offer a holistic model of Heaven which accounts for how the scriptures present the doctrine; the model is shaped and substantiated by exegeting key passages.

The following sections follow the Basic Model (Smith 2008:189) for a study on systematic theology, and offer an overview of the necessary steps by which this study's goal can be accomplished. It includes Black's (2010:137) exegetical guidelines, which includes three basic areas of study—context, meaning, and significance.

### **1.3.1 Statement of the Problem**

The problem addressed by this thesis is that scholarship tends to emphasize, and sometimes even restrict, the subject of Heaven to an eschatological study. This thesis considers the hermeneutical implications of said emphasis, and tests them by exegetical methods in order to see if they correlate with how the scriptures present Heaven, particularly from Scripture's most erudite work on the subject—the book of Revelation.

### **1.3.2 Hypothesis**

The hypothesis to this study is Scripture portrays Heaven as having a progressive relationship with earth which is ternary in nature, and, therefore, not solely eschatological. This ternary nature includes historical, contemporaneous, and eschatological implications.

This thesis more specifically postulates there are seven epochs to Heaven which exist within its proposed ternary nature. These epochs are inaugurated by unique, Christologically-related events which alter the way Heaven relates to earth, such as the Fall (Gen 3), which separated God and man, and the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 28:1-16; Mk 16:1-13; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-18), which reunited God and man. Jesus is inimitably and catalytically involved in the inauguration and completion of each epoch, thereby crafting each one.

This leads to the foremost hypothesis of this study, which is these epochs reveal a chiasmic timeline to the subject of Heaven in its relationship with earth. This chiasm shows the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus as the apex, which correlates with a common mantra among trending scholarship of a Christological metanarrative in Scripture (so Alexander 2008; Middleton 2014; Beale and Kim 2014; Jackson 2014; Prince 2015). This study is unique in that it will show how the texts which help form the epochs of Heaven in Revelation may also be part of its meaning. Black (2010:150) stresses this is a helpful tactic in NT studies which, if neglected, can overlook an important part of the inspired text. In this case the Christological verses in Revelation will be exegeted in order to determine whether John intended any ouranological insights in how the verses are structured within the book.

### **1.3.3 Warrant of Study**

While eschatological deliberations on the doctrine of Heaven are helpful and significant, what has not been offered is a rhetorical examination of the Christological verses in Revelation. This leads to a holistic approach to Heaven,

which goes beyond the restrictions of its obvious eschatological nature, especially one which highlights a chiasmic framework which presents a Christological metanarrative imbedded in the doctrine of Heaven. This study seeks to do this in a way which offers both theological and practical significance to the doctrine of Heaven.

#### **1.3.4 A Survey of Eschatological Views**

This thesis' review of scholarship shows scholarship's tendency to predominantly understand Heaven as an eschatological doctrine. This is helpful in that it affirms Heaven's eschatological nature. However, eschatology includes varying elucidations. It is therefore necessary to conduct a survey which specifically considers how eschatology has been historically understood, with the goal of selecting an eschatological hermeneutic through which this study will be engendered. Since Heaven has been shown by scholarship as an eschatological doctrine, it is imperative to specify an eschatological hermeneutic, because it will intrinsically impact how the doctrine is understood.

Chapter Two offers such an historical survey which traces eschatological hermeneutics from the ancient Jews to the modern period. This survey particularly considers the key figures and events which developed the major eschatological approaches with the goal of determining a historically founded hermeneutic by which to develop this study. This survey employs the comparative (comparing views and analyzing their similarities and differences), dialogical (engaging with viewpoints), epistemological (critiquing the foundation on which a theory is based), polemical (arguing for or against a view), and synthetic (putting together previously unrelated concepts) tools (Smith 2008:159).

The comparative tool is used insofar as the various eschatological approaches in history are compared and contrasted with one another throughout the survey. This will help to keep the thesis accountable to the various eschatological

opinions espoused throughout history. Analyzing each view's origin will help determine which view finds the most historical and biblical warrant, or in the least whether or not this study's selected view finds reasonable, historical warrant.

The dialogical tool is employed to support the goal of the comparative tool, particularly by considering what modern scholars believe about each view. This particular tool will help provide substantive insights into the selection of a particular eschatological approach.

The epistemological tool is used to critique the foundation on which the views are founded, particularly to determine the principled reasons for the views' origins. This, along with the comparative and dialogical tools, will help determine a reasonable view for this thesis' eschatological approach to Heaven. All three tools are intertwined throughout the course of the historical survey.

After the comparative, dialogical, and epistemological tools are used to identify and outline prominent historical views, the polemical tool is then used to argue for a specific approach this study believes has reasonable historical warrant. A treatise will commence on the selected approach to demonstrate why it has reasonable warrant.

Finally, the synthetic tool is used later in the thesis (after an exegetical study, as described in the next section) to help develop a holistic model of Heaven which includes components from various eschatological approaches which are often considered contradistinctive. While several eschatological interpretations exist, this study is obliging because it seeks to show that components from varying approaches can coexist in an advantageous way. This thesis attempts to show, for example, that the literal approach to Scripture's statements on the Millennium, which in literal hermeneutics is considered a future event, allows room for some non-premillennial concepts of the kingdom, namely a present-day power.

### 1.3.5 Biblical Evidence

The next step in the Basic Model (Smith 2008:189) is to consider the biblical data. While this study is primarily one of systematic theology, it is greatly aided with biblical exegesis. This study particularly considers the ouranological data in the book of Revelation, because it is considered the premier book on the subject of Heaven, a claim argued in Chapter Three.

This thesis follows Smith's Basic Model (2008:171) for a study in systematic theology, as well as Black's (2010:137) guidelines for where exegesis occurs, which considers three main areas of discovery—context, meaning, and significance.

Black (2010:137) maintains questions of “context” are historical and literary. Historical analysis deals with the situation facing the author and his audience, and literary analysis deals with the way in which the text fits in with its immediate surroundings in the book under study (Black 2010:137). This thesis offers an analysis of Revelation which considers its historical and literary contexts, specifically to determine its genre, which will help determine a reasonable hermeneutical approach. Partnering the conclusions of the analysis of Revelation with this study's selected historical, eschatological approach, as determined by the survey in Chapter Two, will help to offer specific interpretations to the eschatological events described in the book which are commonly associated with Heaven. The proposed analysis of Revelation will help provide boundaries by which to interpret and understand the eschatological data with which Heaven is most often associated. The goal is to see if there is anything in the data worth further consideration.

This study will then offer an exegetical examination of relevant passages in Revelation derived from the results of the aforementioned conclusions. This is what Black (2010:137) calls “meaning,” which “takes us to the text itself.” In order

to ascertain the ouranological significance of the relevant texts, this study will primarily employ the lexical, syntactical, and structural analysis tools (Smith 2008:160; Black 2010:137).<sup>16</sup> This involves conducting word studies on key words (lexical), analyzing the grammar of the text (syntactical), and then determining the relationships that exist between larger units of meaning (structural). The lexical tool is a “word study,” followed by the syntactical tool, which involves the grammatical and semantic relationships between the words, followed by the structural tool, which considers each passage’s place in the context of the book, as well as in the totality of the scriptures. They are uniquely important to solving the problem considered in this thesis, because they will help directly determine whether Heaven is best understood essentially as an eschatological doctrine, or if the respective passages teach anything about Heaven which is non-eschatological.

The process by which these tools are implemented shows this study is ultimately an inductive endeavor. The suggested tools have been selected because they best satisfy the purpose of this study’s goal of developing a holistic model of Heaven via the scriptures.

The aforementioned synthesis tool (a tool in a study in systematic theology) is then employed to accomplish the task of explaining the data. The goal is to induce a holistic model of Heaven. This study will also rhetorically assess the proposed model of Heaven, a method which considers whether the text’s design<sup>17</sup> is also part of its meaning. As a tool on the newer spectrum of textual analysis this can help provide new research in the field of ouranology (Black 2010:150).

### **1.3.6 Contemporary Significance**

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<sup>16</sup> This study naturally employs the textual analysis tool, which deals with the original wording of the text, but this is not extensively employed beyond accepting how the chosen translation presents it.

<sup>17</sup> This is considered in Chapter Six, and ultimately employs Chiasm (Black 2010:151).

This study concurs with Smith (2008:154) and Black (2010:137) who note the importance of embracing an approach to theology which emphasizes its practical application for the church and the believer. This is what Black calls “significance.” The results of this study will offer both theological and practical insights to the doctrine of Heaven.<sup>18</sup>

Theologically, this study will contribute at least two helpful insights. First, it will offer a symposium of two contradistinctive approaches to Heaven’s eschatological nature. Namely, it will show how a literal approach to Heaven’s eschatological data in Revelation, which typically maintains eschatological events have little-to-no non-eschatological implications, correlates with what are typically conclusions from a non-literal hermeneutic, which is that the kingdom of Heaven does have present day power. While this is not the first time these two thoughts will be combined, it is helpful in that it has not been offered from the rhetorical conclusions presented in this study, thereby enhancing and advancing ouranological scholarship. Second, this study will offer a contribution to the growing scholarship on the Christological metanarrative of Scripture via an ouranological lense (so Alexander 2008; Middleton 2014; Beale and Kim 2014; Jackson 2014; Prince 2015).

This study also offers practical application insofar as it will bring clarity to what is often considered a mysterious doctrine. This study’s proposed epochs offer a schematic by which several questions on Heaven can be answered. For example, it will help show the deceased Old Testament saint’s ouranological experience, outline what the contemporary believer has to look forward to immediately upon death, as well as what all believers have to look forward to in the future time of eternity.

Finally, the results of this study will offer practical insights in worship. Hymns on Heaven typically combine what this study suggests are elements from several

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<sup>18</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

epochs of Heaven, thereby confusing the believer's hope in Heaven. This study desires to offer clarity which will impact the believer's declaration of their hope in how they worship God through music. In general, the goal is to help the believer to clearly "set [his] mind on the things above" (Col 3:2).

#### **1.4 Definition of Key Terms**

The word "epoch" is used to describe the major time periods of Heaven's relationship with earth. For example, one epoch of Heaven might exist between the Fall in Genesis 3 to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. Prior to this epoch, God's relationship with man, and thus Heaven's relationship to earth, was much different than it was afterward. In particular, if the only way to the Father in Heaven is through the Son (Jn 14:6), then Jesus' death and resurrection allows one to be "present with the Lord" upon death (2 Cor 5:8). It might be the case, prior to Jesus' death and resurrection, that righteous men were not yet able to enter God's presence in the present intermediate Heaven (Lk 16:19-31).

The word "*parousia*" is used to speak to Jesus' second coming, but in this thesis it can also include the rapture phase, which is considered a separate, but related segment of the event.

The word "chiliasm" is defined as belief in a future, earthly kingdom of God, which lasts for one thousand years.

The phrase "Great Tribulation" is used to discuss a future time of intense tribulation distinct from any present or past tribulation. The Great Tribulation is seven years in length.

The major term employed in this study is "Heaven," which in Scripture can mean various things depending on its context (Hays, Duvall, and Pate 2007:200). Smith

(1968:27-28) offers the following synopsis, which offers a foundational principle to the definition of Heaven proposed in this study:

Of the hundreds of occurrences of the word *Heaven* in an English Bible, almost all of them are translations of the Hebrew word *shamayim* and the Greek word *ouranos*. The Hebrew word means literally “the heights,” while the Greek word has a related but slightly different meaning, “that which is raised up.” Considering all the various shades of meaning, which may be said to attach to the original words, and to the English word, it is undeniable that the primary meaning of the actual word *Heaven* is “that which is above.” By this is meant, of course, that which is above man or the earth. Basically, Heaven has reference to those phenomena whose loci are perpendicular from us, phenomena that are a part of the vast space, which surrounds the earth, phenomena which embrace the stellar bodies. Thus, whenever man turns his eyes from that which is immediately before him, or that which is under his feet, he focuses his sight on the things that are above him. Whatever various meanings Heaven might connote in the Scriptures, the very idea of that which is above carries with it generally the ethical concept of something high, as against that which is low, something noble rather than common, something of a celestial nature rather than terrestrial or earthly.

Smith (1968:28) ultimately takes “Heaven” to always reference the “direct relationship” Heaven has with earth, and that one of the specific meanings in Scripture is “the abode of God,” a definition shared by several scholars (so Roberts 2003:4; Wright 2008:19; Köstenberger 2014a:139-140). It is the “Heaven” Nehemiah calls the “Heaven of Heavens”; God’s abode in the skies (Neh 9:6). Hays and others (2007:200-201) offer the following insights which are also helpful:

The Bible refers to “Heaven” as the dwelling place of God (Deut 26:15; Neh 9:6; Mt 5:45; 16:17, 23:22) ... As the true Tabernacle of God (Heb 8:1-5), Heaven is sometimes used as a synonym for God himself ... Heaven is [also] used in a variety of ways to refer to the believer’s hope for deliverance from evil and a permanent home in God’s presence.

McGrath’s (2011:461) definition in *Christian Theology* also offers beneficial insights into the definition of Heaven:

The most helpful way of considering [Heaven] is to regard it as a consummation of the Christian doctrine of salvation, in which the presence, penalty, and power of sin have all been finally eliminated, and the total presence of God in individuals and the community of faith has been achieved.

McGrath’s definition lends support to the conclusion this thesis seeks to achieve because it asserts the perfect restoration of God’s relationship with all of creation, which, this thesis argues, is the fruition of Heaven’s goal according to Revelation. This thesis is unique, however, in that it argues this is best seen via a holistic approach to Heaven, as opposed to merely an eschatological one.

In summary, this study understands “Heaven” with reference to God’s abode and how it relates to earth throughout history.

## **1.5 Delimitations**

Smith (2008:169)<sup>19</sup> observes how interpreters approach the biblical text with a set of presuppositions that govern and influence our exegesis. Therefore, it is best to openly share known presuppositions that will influence this study.

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<sup>19</sup> Much of the delimitations in this list are inspired by Smith’s (2008:170) outline.

I am a Southern Baptist who affirms the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. I believe the scriptures are the inspired word of God and are inerrant in the autographs, that the primary goal of biblical interpretation is to discover the author-intended meaning, that each text has one primary author-intended meaning capable of many applications, and finally that the Bible should be interpreted literally, that is, at face value according to the normal rules of communication. Smith (2008:170) describes this as grammatical-historical exegesis.

## **1.6 Objectives**

This thesis' objectives include: (1) to contribute to the growing scholarship on the subject of Heaven; (2) to show Heaven is best understood as having both an eschatological and non-eschatological nature; (3) to practically augment the believer's hope in Heaven.

## Chapter 2

### A Historical Survey of Eschatological Hermeneutics

“They read from the book, from the law of God,  
translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Neh 8:8).

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter surveys hermeneutics’ history with the goal of determining a hermeneutical approach to Scripture’s eschatological claims that has historical, ecclesiastical warrant. This is accomplished by: (1) establishing warrant for the pursuance of a survey; (2) surveying hermeneutics’ eschatological history; (3) selecting an approach that has historical warrant; (4) specifically examining the history of the selected approach; and, (5) analyzing the selected approach to ascertain if it is a viable eschatological hermeneutic for approaching ouranology in Revelation.

#### 2.2 A Definition of Hermeneutics

The Gospel of Luke includes an account in which the risen Jesus walks with two individuals to a village named Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). In response to these individuals’ confusion about his resurrection, Luke says Jesus “explained to them the things concerning himself in all the scriptures” (Lk 24:27). Wilbur Smith (1970:xiii) notes that the word “explained” in this verse “is the Greek word *diermeneuo*.” “If we take away the two first letters, the prefix, and give a rough

breathing to that initial letter ‘e’ we have exactly the word from which our word *hermeneutics* is derived.”<sup>20</sup>

Osborne (2006:21) offers a similar explanation, writing, “hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘to interpret,’” but suggests, along with Thistleton (2005:281), that the definition of hermeneutics has undergone several adaptations. For the purposes of this study, a general understanding of the discipline is satisfactory. Klein and others (2004:4) offer such a definition:

Hermeneutics describes the task of explaining the meaning of the scriptures. The word derives from the Greek verb *hermeneuein* that means “to explain, interpret or to translate,” while the noun *hermeneia* means “interpretation” or “translation.” In essence, then, hermeneutics involves interpreting or explaining. In fields like biblical studies or literature, it refers to the task of explaining the meaning of a piece of writing. Hermeneutics describes the principles people use to understand what something means, to comprehend what a message—written, oral, or visual—is endeavoring to communicate.

A general understanding of hermeneutics, thus, is “the discipline [of] the principles and theories of how [the scriptures] ought to be interpreted” (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordling 1999:59), the “critical reflection upon processes of interpretation and understanding” (Thiselton 2005:283). Davies’ (2010:494) succinct definition is astute: “Hermeneutics concerns the act of interpretation.”

### 2.3 The Challenge of Hermeneutics

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<sup>20</sup> Virkler (2007:15) submits *hermeneutics* “is said to have its origin in the name Hermes, the Greek god who served as messenger for the gods, transmitting and interpreting their communications ... by the first century, the very form *hermeneuo* was used to mean ‘explain,’ ‘interpret,’ or ‘translate.’ This verb appears three times in the NT, each time with the sense of translating from one language to another (Jn 1:42; 9:7; Heb 7:2).

## Chapter 2: A Historical Survey of Eschatological Hermeneutics

Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton (2002:31) are careful to emphasize the solemnity of hermeneutics, stating that one's interpretive approach directly affects how one both understands and applies it. In the preface to Ramm's book on the subject, Wilbur Smith (Ramm 1970:xiii) reiterates this by maintaining that hermeneutics is the most important of all the biblical sciences: "Hardly any study in the whole vast realm of intellectual life could be more important than the science of hermeneutics as applied to the Word of God, that which gives us an understanding of the eternal revelation of God to men." Osborne (2006:21) concurs, submitting a proper hermeneutic is crucial for accurately deciphering the Bible.

However, while Bible scholars agree hermeneutics is important, not every scholar agrees which hermeneutic is most accurate. This is evident in the variety of hermeneutics articulated and employed in both past and present scholarship (Virkler 2007:43). Grant and Tracy (1984:3) suggest the variety has created a history which is "long and complex," a conclusion with which Wright (2005:61) and Weber (2010:369) concur, who respectively describe hermeneutics' history as "a very long and complicated story," and more succinctly, "messy." Klein, and others (2004:2) deduce this renders hermeneutics an arduous and puzzling task.

Scholars (so Hill 2001; Virkler 2007; Daley 2010a; Walls 2010) who have reviewed hermeneutics' history concordantly affirm its complexity and disparity, noting it is especially true of the eschatological context. Daley (2010a:216:221) concludes at the end of his own survey that one might justly wonder if it is proper at all to speak in the singular of the eschatological hope of the early Church. Daley goes as far as to state that, along with the undecided questions on the general points of eschatological hope, some of the questions are of enduring controversy. Such disparities have spurred scholars to ponder the possibility of success in understanding the scriptures correctly (Plummer 2010:79).

Klein and others (2004:19) allege a survey of hermeneutics can help mollify the concern of disparity, maintaining it can help insure we hear God's voice rather than our own. Juel (2008:296) suggests that to understand scriptural interpretation, we need to know as much as possible about the ancient interpreters' arguments. This chapter therefore seeks to review the nuances of the various views espoused throughout history, with the goal of selecting an eschatological approach by which this study can be employed.

The following sections review the various hermeneutical approaches espoused throughout history in order to ascertain a historically warranted hermeneutic. The selected approach is then specifically applied to eschatology, since it is the branch of theology through which Heaven is most traditionally understood, which itself is historically assessed in order to see if it is a viable way to approach the book of Revelation.

### **2.4 A Survey of Hermeneutics' History**

A survey of an ecclesiastical history of hermeneutics is best comprehended when apportioned into specific periods.<sup>21</sup> Some of these periods can be relegated into centuries, while others can be abridged into general schools of thought that span multiple centuries.

#### **2.4.1 Ancient Jewish Interpretation**

Virkler (2007:44) maintains a discussion of the history of biblical interpretation usually begins with the work of Ezra (ca. late sixth century B.C.),<sup>22</sup> which is an opinion also shared by Klein and others (2004:23-24), who write,

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<sup>21</sup> This thesis follows the outline proposed by Klein and others (2004:23).

<sup>22</sup> Virkler (2007:44) notes that adherents of redaction criticism suggest the interpretation of Scripture began considerably before Ezra.

## Chapter 2: A Historical Survey of Eschatological Hermeneutics

When the Israelites returned from exile, they spoke the Aramaic of Babylon instead of the Hebrew of their Scriptures. So, when on a solemn occasion Ezra publicly read the Mosaic Law, Levites explained to the crowd what he was reading (Neh 8:7-8). Probably, their explanations involved both translation of the text into Aramaic and interpretation of its content.

This incident produced a new Jewish institution—the Targum. Patzia and Petrotta (2002:112) describe the Targum as an important witness to the biblical text. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:126, 505) contend it became the standard by which to apprehend scripture, an opinion Osborne (2006:324-325) shares, who says the Targum was necessary for ancient Jews, and that it helped them understand its sense. The Targum included paraphrases of interpretations orally passed down beginning from the time of Ezra, and then eventually written down in the early part of the third century A.D. The Targum is an important witness to the biblical text in this early period of transmission, particularly with how they were interpreted by the Jewish community (Patzia and Petrotta 2002:112).

The scribes and rabbis of the following centuries continued to develop the Targum, vigorously pursuing the study and teaching of the Hebrew Scripture. They worked to resolve problems raised by the texts, explaining obscure scriptures to the issues of daily life raised by their contemporaries (Klein and others 2004:24). Virkler (2007:45) notes how the scribes took great care in copying the scriptures, believing every letter of the text to be the inspired Word of God. This was especially true during the late intertestamental era, when “the Greek and Roman empires forced Jews to define and preserve their own religious identity in the face of foreign cultural values and religions” (Klein and others 2004:24). The Jews found refuge in the study of their ancient scriptures, in the process honing their methods of interpretation to a fine edge (Virkler 2007:45). This established a pattern by which the Bible was to be read and

understood for centuries, observing how the Jews turned interpretation into a central and fundamental religious activity (Kugel 1986:13).

While this reveals how hermeneutics began, it does not necessarily detail what kind of hermeneutical methods the ancient Jews—those who lived during the intertestamental period—endorsed. Klein and others (2004:25-31) suggest the hermeneutical activity of the ancient Jews birthed three distinctive approaches to Scripture, all of which were initiated during the intertestamental period:<sup>23</sup> Hellenistic, Essenic, and Rabbinic hermeneutics. These were conceived “amid [the] intense hermeneutical activity” which began with Ezra, and continued into the early parts of the NT (2004:25).

Four traditional approaches to understanding Scripture exist under these three headings, including the literal, allegorical, *peshet*, and *midrash* approaches (Dockery 1992:27-34; Virkler 2007:45). These approaches will be categorized under Klein and others’ (2004:25-31) three major categories.

### **2.4.1.1 Hellenistic Hermeneutics (ca. 331 to 167 B.C.)**

Hellenistic hermeneutics is largely allegorical (Dockery 1995:32). Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:103-104) maintain this methodology entered Jewish thought with the influence of Alexander the Great, a fourth century B.C. king who inflicted Greek culture throughout his conquered domain. This inaugurated an influx of Greek influence upon the Jews which lasted from roughly 331 B.C. to 167 B.C. Greek replaced Hebrew as the common language, and a Greek translation of the Pentateuch—called the Septuagint—was published, which became the Bible of the early church. Klein and others (2004:25) note this offered a “fertile soil” in which “flowered a major school of biblical interpretation, one that enjoyed wide influence among Jews.” The hermeneutic finds its deeper roots in Platonic philosophy (ca. 427-347 B.C.), which taught true reality actually lies behind what

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<sup>23</sup> For information on the makeup of the intertestamental period see Halley (2000:506-527).

appeared to the human eye (Yarchin 2011:18-28). Virkler (2007:47) describes allegorical exegesis as the idea the true meaning of Scripture lies beneath the literal meaning, noting how the approach was developed by the Greeks “to resolve the tension between their mythological religious tradition and their philosophical heritage.” Evans (2005:383) denotes a similar assessment, noting how allegorical exegesis involves extracting a symbolic meaning from the text, because it assumes “a deeper and more sophisticated interpretation is to be found beneath the obvious letter of the passage.” All Jews were influenced by Greek culture in some way during the intertestamental period (Patzia and Petrotta 2002:56). The spread of Hellenistic culture caused the ancient Jews to refocus their thinking, disclosing the deep-rooted influence Hellenism had on their hermeneutics (Hauser and Watson 2008:12-13).

### **2.4.1.2 Essenic Hermeneutics (150 B.C. to A.D. 68)**

Essenic hermeneutics obtains its name from the Essene community established at Qumran, a site on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. While the Essenes are not directly mentioned in the Bible, the Jewish historian Josephus describes them in his works (1999:586). His descriptions reveal the community regarded the Judaism centered in Jerusalem as apostate, and that they preoccupied themselves with the prophecies of the OT, suggesting they were the generation about whom biblical prophecy speaks (Yarchin 2011:9-17). Josephus (1999:586) states the Essenes offered their own sacrifices, believing their offerings were purer than what was given to the Temple. This hermeneutic is sometimes referred to as *peshet*.

*Peshet* is generally understood as an interpretation which has reference to the interpreter’s own time and situation (Patzia and Petrotta 2002:92). More specifically, it is a hermeneutic concerned with identifying recent events as being those foretold in Scripture (Davies 2008:159). Russell (1964:181) states the Qumran sect followed this line of interpretation, in which the “text of Scripture

does not, and never did, refer to the prophets' own day, but to this day in which its meaning for the first time is being clearly revealed." For the Qumran sect, this was the true and only meaning of Scripture. *Pesher* assumed the text "spoke of and to the Qumran community," and "of eschatological events about to unfold" (Evans 2005:383).

The hermeneutic included a significant eschatological focus, where the Qumran community believed "everything the ancient prophets wrote had a veiled prophetic meaning that was to be imminently fulfilled through their covenant community" (Virkler 2007:46). This approach includes techniques such as textual emendation, which is a change in the biblical text to support an interpretation, and atomization, which divides texts into separate phrases and subsequently interpreting each one by itself regardless of the context (Yarchin 2011:9-17). The approach also includes a charismatic element in its exegesis, in that the interpreter knows things contained in Scripture that the original author did not (Evans 2005:382).

### **2.4.1.3 Rabbinic Hermeneutics (late 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. to New Testament Period)**

Rabbinic hermeneutics promoted obedience to the Hebrew scriptures in the face of mounting pressure to accommodate to Greco-Roman culture (Yarchin 2011:3-8). The Rabbinic approach is a nuanced one. While it began during the time of Ezra with the objective of seeking a plain sense of the text, other elements of it came into existence much later—even hundreds of years into the Common Era—which included conflicting objectives.<sup>24</sup>

The approach as a whole produced three main literary works, which showcase both literal and non-literal hermeneutical tendencies, all derived from the early

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<sup>24</sup> There is some debate about relating Rabbinic Judaism to the NT, and in particular the hermeneutics used by the rabbis (so Dockery 1992; Klein and others 2004; Pitts 2016).

## Chapter 2: A Historical Survey of Eschatological Hermeneutics

origins of the Targum tradition (translation-interpretation). These include the Mishnah, which, although published in A.D. 200, presents oral teachings of leading rabbis from the B.C. era, and two Talmuds (ca. A.D. 400 and 600, respectively), which offered a contemporary commentary on the Mishnah. “Though written no earlier than the second century A.D., their interpretive material derives from the pre-Christian era,” which is to say the intertestamental era (Klein and others 2004:29).

The interpretative method of Rabbinic hermeneutics shows several distinctive features, including: (1) dependence upon ancient Rabbinic interpretive tradition (the Targum);<sup>25</sup> (2) the endeavor to interpret scripture literally (known as *peshat*),<sup>26</sup> and; (3) the practice of *midrash*, a method developed in the Common Era which aims to uncover the deeper meanings the rabbis assumed were inherent in the actual wording of Scripture (Klein and others 2004:29-30).<sup>27</sup>

When taken in its entire early history, which stretches from the early sixth century B.C. to hundreds of years into the Common Era, rabbinic hermeneutics includes both the desire to take the scriptures in their plain, literal sense (*peshat*), and also the desire to offer an interpretation which aims to uncover a deeper meaning of the text—an approach which offers logical biblical teaching for situations not covered directly by Scripture (Klein and others 2004:30). *Peshat* is one of the four classical approaches to biblical exegesis in rabbinic Judaism included in what is known as *pardes*, including *remez* (allegorical), *derash* (metaphorical), and *sod* (hidden). Each element of *pardes* examines the meaning of the text, but is designed to uphold the straightforward meaning.

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<sup>25</sup> Klein and others (2004:29) state how the Talmuds cite what early revered rabbis say about a passage.

<sup>26</sup> Osborne (2006:325), Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:472) suggest that Jewish teachers employed *peshat* (a literal exegesis) alongside *midrash* in order to obtain the proper meaning of a text. “Rabbinic literature contains a number of examples where the scriptures were understood in a straightforward fashion, resulting in the plain, simple, and natural meaning of the text” (Dockery 1992:28).

<sup>27</sup> Patzia and Petrotta (2002:80) note *midrash* “suffers from an overload of meanings,” stressing the complexity of understanding the vast array of rabbinic hermeneutics.

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On the other hand, in an attempt to offer practical insights for life, *midrash* accentuated non-literal interpretations (namely, allegory). In an attempt to balance the tension between the literal and allegory, interpreters followed a system of exegetical rules carefully worked out over the years, including rules still deemed valid today, such as the use of analogous words and phrases, or verses from biblical cross-references (Klein and others 2004:30). Barrett (1970:377-411) cites seven rules developed by Hillel (110 B.C. to A.D. 10) by which an interpreter drew conclusions from a passage in an attempt to root interpretations from going outside the bounds of the plain sense of the text.<sup>28</sup> The rabbinical approach also typically began with the canonical text, which it explicitly quoted, helping to differentiate *midrash* from other hermeneutical approaches among the ancient Jews which did not stress the plain sense (Hauser and Watson 2008:26). In some instances, however, the *midrashic* cross-references undermined *peshat* by citing words without regard to their context, resulting in inventive manipulations of the scriptures (Klein and others 2004:31). In many cases *midrash* involved allegory par excellence (Neusner 1987:39, 44, 54), and some *midrash* writers had little regard for the historical status of the literal sense of the text (Madsen 1996:16-17). Nonetheless, *peshat* is considered a staple of ancient rabbinic hermeneutics, even with the substantial presence of *midrashic* overextensions (Dockery 1992:28). Of the three major deviations of hermeneutics (Hellenistic, Essenic, and Rabbinic), the early Rabbinic approach offers a plain, straightforward option based on the interpretation methods of the ancient Jews who lived during the B.C. era, who themselves sought the plain, literal meaning of the text. Later Rabbinic hermeneutics (for example the published Talmud and *midrash*) tend to focus on non-literal interpretations, meaning the further the approach got from Ezra's time, the less it practiced *peshat*.

The earliest disparate hermeneutical approaches show how they are largely the result of the desire to relate the ancient scriptures to the circumstances of a

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<sup>28</sup> For the list see C.K. Barrett (1970:377-411), "The Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New."

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contemporary experience. Some scholars assert the early Rabbinic approach sought to resist unbounded allegorical influences by holding fast to a literal approach, while the Hellenistic approach accommodated its beliefs to the contemporary, allegorical influx brought in by the Greeks. The Qumranians (Essenes) didn't concern themselves too extensively with a literal or allegorical approach, so much as they sought to apply each OT prophecy to themselves. Of importance here is the consideration of unchecked non-literal hermeneutics.

This thesis does not endeavor to disdain non-literal hermeneutics. Rather, this thesis embraces non-literal hermeneutics in many of its own interpretations, as will be seen. However, this survey shows the earliest interpretations of the scriptures primarily embraced a plain, literal sense, which is subsequently enriched with non-literal interpretations. Some approaches, however, primarily embraced non-literal interpretations without heed to the plain sense, which has the potential to result in unbounded allegory. Ryken and others (1998:xiii-xv) offer helpful definitions of various hermeneutical terms which exist in the non-literal family. A "symbol," for example, is an image that stands for something in addition to its literal meaning. A "metaphor" functions like a symbol, and is an implied comparison. It is a bifocal utterance that requires one to look at both the literal and figurative levels of a text. While non-literal, in both cases the literal meaning remains operative and affords retention of the link between the concrete and figurative realities. An "allegory," in its fullest sense, is like a metaphor, but typically uses a narrative to express an idea. It is "a literary form where a story is told for what it signifies rather than for its own sake. The characters, events, and places are interpreted as abstract ideas" (Patzia and Petrotta 2002:9). This means allegory, when fully fledged, embraces a figurative meaning which has been emancipated from the text. Non-literal approaches are not unacceptable; they must have a healthy relationship with the plain, straightforward meaning of the text. This thesis argues interpretive methods like symbols, metaphors, and allegory are acceptable insofar as they are used as a micro-genre as opposed to a primary interpretive method.

### **2.4.2 The Apostolic Period (ca. A.D. 30-100)**

Dockery (1992:23) notes how the early believers shared the scriptures of the Jews, but also notes how they included an additional factor which stamped a new meaning upon Scripture: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:68-69) maintain the Apostles' hermeneutics included the "all-important element" of the promised coming of the Messiah in the OT, and that this is the "hermeneutical axiom undergirding the entire NT: that Jesus was the Messiah." Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:68) further note of the Apostolic period of hermeneutics, particularly as it is displayed in the NT, that it contains abundant references to OT passages, both in form of explicit quotations and by way of allusions and echoes of Jesus as the Messiah.

Virkler (2007:48) espouses a similar appraisal to Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:68), espousing that approximately ten percent of the NT consists of direct quotations or allusions of the OT, and that of the thirty-nine books of the OT, only nine are not expressly referred to in the NT. Juel (2008:297) advocates that the followers of Jesus read the OT scriptures with "particular attention to the words and sentences." The history of Israel had reached its decisive point in the coming of Jesus; the whole of the OT pointed to him (Dockery 1992:25).

Klein and others (2004:31-32) designate this as a period marked by "continuity and discontinuity," describing the apostles as devout Jews who were also the first Christian interpreters. In terms of continuity, the apostles appealed to the OT scriptures in order to regard Jesus as Israel's promised Messiah, and the religious community he left behind as the fulfillment of Judaism's ancient hopes. In terms of discontinuity, they revered Jesus as the "new Moses" and the authority of Jesus as "superior even to that of the Law of Moses—a decisive departure from their Jewish roots" (Klein and others 2004:31-32). In this they interpreted the OT from "a radically new perspective—in light of the Messiahship

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of Jesus and the new age inaugurated by his coming” (Klein and others 2004:31-32). Jesus’ literal fulfillment of OT prophecy was the apostles’ fundamental hermeneutical principle.

This was a hermeneutic which followed the example of Jesus himself. Luke (4:18-21) and Mark (1:15) show how Jesus inaugurated his ministry in a Galilean synagogue by stating how he was the literal fulfillment of Isaiah’s (61:1-2) messianic prophecy. Paul substantiates this hermeneutic in writing that to read the Law of Moses without Christ is like reading it through a veil:

But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away (2 Cor 3:14-16).

Since Jesus is the center around which the Apostolic Period of interpretation revolves, a concentrated regard to his hermeneutical impact is not only defensible, but also demanded. “The interpretation of the Bible begins with Jesus” (Grant and Tracy 1984:8).

Grant and Tracy (1984:9-10) purport Jesus viewed the scriptures as authoritative and inspired, but that he was a highly independent teacher who might more accurately be called a nonconformist.<sup>29</sup> This correlates with Klein and others’ (2004:31) claim that the Apostolic Period is marked with “continuity and discontinuity,” because while Jesus affirmed the OT scriptures, his hermeneutics didn’t necessarily agree with some of the Judaistic interpreters of his day. With this said, Grant and Tracy (1984:10) are careful to note that Jesus didn’t set aside the Law, but he deepened and reinforced it, raising it to its highest moral

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<sup>29</sup> Jesus’ methods were often “thoroughly repugnant to his contemporaries,” because of the prophecies he interpreted as referring to himself, as well as what can be considered his “free attitude” toward the Law (Grant and Tracy 1984:11).

level. This was primarily done through his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), but also throughout the entirety of his ministry as recorded in the Gospels.

Dockery (1992:23) expresses the impact this additional factor had on the apostles: "The NT account of the ministry of Jesus maintains that Jesus himself instructed his followers to show that his life and ministry fulfilled the scripture." Dockery (1992:24) calls this a "Christological reading," arguing Jesus read the OT in light of himself. This was the primary element to the Apostolic Period of hermeneutics, the one which caused the apostles to reevaluate the OT scriptures in light of Jesus. This reevaluation resulted in the principal hermeneutics of the Apostolic Period, which, alongside a Christological reading of the OT prophecies, includes typological, literal-contextual, and principle/application approaches to interpreting Scripture (Klein and others 2004:32-33). The typological interpretive approach seeks to find events, objects, ideas, and divinely inspired types represented in the OT which anticipate God's activity later in history; the literal-contextual approach sought to interpret OT scriptures more broadly according to their normal meaning within their original contexts; and the principle/application approach interprets the passage by applying its underlying principle to a situation different from, but comparable to, the one in the original context (Klein and others 2004:32-33).

Dockery (1992:25, 44) states these hermeneutical methods reveal the NT writers followed the pattern of Jesus, interpreting the OT as a whole and in its parts as a witness to Christ:

The approach that Jesus and the apostles employed when interpreting the OT [show] that they were dependent upon hermeneutical practices established in late Judaism, but that they adapted the methods to the Church with the addition of a Christological focus ... Jesus became the direct and primary source for the Church's understanding of the OT.

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Virkler (2007:48) maintains there is a significant body of literature illustrating the interpretive methods of Jesus and the NT writers, and notes several general conclusions:

Jesus consistently treated the historical narratives as straightforward records of fact. The allusions to Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, for example, all seem to be intended and were understood as references to actual people and historical events. When Jesus applied the historical record, he drew it from the literal, as opposed to the allegorical meaning of the text. He showed no tendency to divide scriptural truth into levels—a superficial level based on the literal meaning of the text and a deeper truth based on some derived mystical level. Finally, Jesus even denounced the casuistic methods of certain religious leaders that set aside the very Word of God they claimed to be interpreting and replaced it with their own traditions (Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:6-13).

Virkler (2007:49) submits the Apostles “followed their Lord in regarding the OT as the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pt 1:21) ... like Christ they accepted the historical accuracy of the OT,” and also denotes how the NT authors “overwhelmingly utilized *peshat* in their interaction with the OT.”

In summary, apostolic interpretation both compares with and departs from the contemporary Jewish interpretive method. The apostles were the last notable interpreters with Jewish roots and “from here on, Greco-Roman influences displace Jewish ones and dominate Christian biblical interpretation” (Klein and others 2004:33).

### **2.4.3 The Patristic Period (ca. A.D. 100-590)**

The Patristic Period is deemed such because it features the contribution of the Church *Fathers*—the prominent leaders during the initial four centuries after the

Apostolic Period.<sup>30</sup> “The term ‘patristic’ comes from the Latin word *pater*, ‘father,’ and designates both the period of the Church fathers, and the distinctive ideas which came to develop within this period” (McGrath 2013:17). The Church Fathers offer the principal Christian literature of the second century, a reputation that has existed since the seventeenth century as a classification of convenience for some of the most ancient Christian literature outside the NT canon (Trigg 2008:304).

One of the major challenges during the Patristic Period was that, while the writings of the apostles circulated among the churches, they had not yet been officially canonized alongside the OT (Curtis, Lang, and Peterson 2001:36-38). The relationship of the NT with the OT was an issue raised by the Gnostics; it was the primary issue confronting the second-century Church (Dockery 1992:45). The Church had to demonstrate on biblical grounds that the same God was revealed in both Testaments, which would warrant the claim that they should not abandon the OT.

Apportioning the period helps to describe the evolution of hermeneutics during this time. Klein and others (2004:35-42) divide the period into three sub periods: The Apostolic Fathers (ca. A.D. 100-150), the Alexandrian School (ca. A.D. 150-400), and the Church Councils (ca. A.D. 400-590). Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70), Virkler (2007:53) and Young (2008:334-354) include the Antiochene School alongside the Alexandrian School.

### **2.4.3.1 The Apostolic Fathers (ca. A.D. 100-150)**

In scouring early Church leaders like Clement of Rome, Ignatius, and Polycarp, as well as early writings like the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the *Epistle of Diognetus*, Klein and others (2004:35-37), Trigg (2008:304-315), and

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<sup>30</sup> Zuck's (1991:33) statement is a helpful preface to this review: “Little is known about the hermeneutics of the earliest Church Fathers ... but it is known that their writings were filled with OT quotations, and that they saw the OT as pointing towards Christ.”

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Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:69) determine the apostolic fathers addressed two primary audiences—Christians in the churches and the Jews opposing them. Their writings serve two corresponding purposes—to instruct believers in Christian doctrine and to defend the faith against Jewish counter arguments.

These writings to these audiences reveal several methods of interpretation among the early Church Fathers, including typology, allegory, *midrashic*, and traditional interpretation, which came to regard the traditional interpretation of a biblical passage (that which the churches taught) as its correct interpretation (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:69-70). The appeal to tradition became of major importance (McGrath 2013:28).

Because of tradition, the practice of showing how the life and work of Christ was prefigured by the OT was not as prominent for the Church fathers as it was the apostles. Dockery (1992:48) states this should not surprise us because the Fathers were “primarily concerned with moral and ethical instruction, rather than explaining the significance of the life and work of Jesus.” This doesn’t imply the absence of a Christological reading of the OT, but expresses how the Church Fathers, because of tradition, attenuated the methods Jesus originally invested into the Church.

While the practice of tradition was helpful, especially in opposing early Church heretics, it eventually attained a status almost equal with that of Scripture as the Church’s ultimate authority for doctrine (McGrath 2013:21). “As the Church at Rome became increasingly powerful, tensions began to develop ... foreshadowing the later schism between the western and eastern churches” (McGrath 2013:21). Tradition dominated biblical hermeneutics until it was rejected during the summit of this schism, the Protestant Reformation (Curtis and others 2001:96-105).

### **2.4.3.2 The Alexandrian and Antiochene Schools (ca. A.D. 150-400)**

After the early Church Fathers passed away, the Patristic Period entered its second sub period when a new generation took up the task of interpreting the Bible. Much of this new generation found its influence in the city of Alexandria, which was the center of Christian theological education (McGrath 2013:22). This school interpreted Scripture in light of one single key theological idea—the person of Christ (Grant and Tracy 1984:52-62). Their hermeneutic was strongly soteriological in character; Jesus Christ is the redeemer of humanity (McGrath 2013:46). McGrath (2013:46) summarizes Alexandrian Christology, writing: “if human nature is to be deified, it must be united with the divine nature. God must become united with human nature in such a manner that the latter is enabled to share in the life of God.”

Among the various interpretive approaches available from the early Church Fathers, this generation specifically adopted the allegorical approach, the exegetical method of the Alexandrian Jewish scholar, Philo, and one long promoted by Alexandrian thinkers among Jews and Neoplatonic philosophers (so Grant and Tracy 1984:52-62; Klein and others 2004:37-40; Yarchin 2011:18-28). With the prestige of Alexandria as a center of learning behind it, the use of allegory came to dominate Christian biblical interpretation until the dawn of the Renaissance (A.D. 15<sup>th</sup> cent.)” (so Grant and Tracy 1984:52-62; Klein and others 2004:38).

The most notable proponents for this allegorical hermeneutic, besides Philo, were Clement and Origen, both of whom, like Philo, taught at the Alexandrian School (so Grant and Tracy 1984:52-62; Dockery 1992:50; Healy 2003:190-193; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:70-71; McGrath 2013:24). Philo, Clement, and Origen all taught that Scripture has a twofold meaning: “like a human being, it has a body (literal) meaning as well as a soul (spiritual) meaning hidden behind

the literal sense” (Klein and others 2004:38). Clement, signifying the hermeneutical mindset of this era, interpreted Scripture in a Christological fashion, “yet he did not so much seek to discover the OT’s message concerning the work of Christ, but offered the pictures of Christ as a basis for moral obedience” (Dockery 1992:50). Virkler (2007:52) says Clement “believed that scriptures hide their true meaning so that we might be inquisitive and because it is not suitable for everyone to understand.” The deepest treasures of Scripture were only available to those who understood the spiritual sense, which was more difficult to ascertain. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70) note that, while appreciating the historical nature of certain narratives, Clement features instances of spiritualizing interpretations.

Origen, alongside Clement, helped to develop the notion of an allegorical interpretation, arguing that the “surface meaning of Scripture was to be distinguished from its deeper spiritual meaning” (McGrath 2013:24). Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70) describe Origen as the “most noted proponent of the school of Alexandria,” and purport he “presided over the flourishing of the allegorical method of biblical interpretation.” “He believed that Scripture is one vast allegory in which every detail is symbolic” (Virkler 2007:53). Young (2008:335) states he attributed the literal approach to the Jews, and expected Christians to “go beyond the mere letter to the spiritual meaning.” Origen was said to have “a poor grasp of the historical nature of the biblical material and to be interested principally in the undersense discovered by reading the text allegorically” (Young 2008:335). Young (2008:335) goes as far to state Origen did not really understand the Bible at all, which is a weighty statement, because the Alexandrian School’s approach “would shape Christian interpretation for more than a Millennium” (Klein and others 2004:40).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Virkler (2007:53) says of the Alexandrian School that its “allegorization sprang from a proper motive: the desire to understand the OT as a Christian document. However, the allegorical method as practiced by the Church Fathers often completely neglected the author’s intended meaning and the literal understanding of a text in developing speculations the author himself never would have recognized. Once the author’s intended meaning, as expressed through his words and syntax, was abandoned, there remained no regulative principle to govern exegesis.”

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Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70) propose that Theophilus, who became bishop of Antioch in about A.D. 169, and later John Chrysostom (A.D. 354-407) best represent the Antiochene School.<sup>32</sup> Virkler (2007:53) highlights Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428) as a primary figure in the school, describing how he “staunchly defended the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation, that is that a text should be interpreted according to the rules of grammar and the facts of history.” Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70-71) note of the school:

The exegetical school of Antioch ... differed markedly from the Alexandrian approach. In fact, the contrast between the schools explains some of the most foundational issues in biblical interpretation. At the core, the difference between these two schools hinged on their approach to the biblical writings as *history*. While the Alexandrian School resorted to allegorical readings in which history took second place to an interpreter’s perceived spiritual significance of a given OT character or event, the Antiochenes proceeded in the conviction that the primary level of exegesis was the historical one. Consequently, while the Alexandrian School set aside the literal historical meaning where it was thought to conflict with an interpreter’s moral or intellectual sensibilities, the Antiochene School was committed to interpreting the biblical texts literally wherever possible ... In their interpretive restraint and their awarding of primacy to the historical, grammatical level of biblical interpretation, the School of Antioch constitutes an important precursor for the historical-grammatical interpretation propagated during the time of the Protestant Reformation.

Hauser and Watson (2008:46) extend the same conclusions concerning the Antiochene School, noting how the interpretation emphasized the dogmatic meaning of biblical texts, as opposed to the need to be discovered by allegory. The Antiochenes were interested in the “plain meaning” of the text, and often interpreted one passage with correspondence to another (Hauser and Watson

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<sup>32</sup> Zuck (1991:37) cites John Chrysostom as “the greatest commentator among the early fathers of the Church.”

2008:46). This was in response to what Zuck (1991:37) considers a “rampant disregard” for the literal meaning of the scriptures in the Alexandrian Fathers.

#### **2.4.3.3 The Church Councils (ca. A.D. 400-590)**

The catalyst for the Church Council Period was the conversion to Christianity of the Roman emperor Constantine, who “pressured the Church to settle its differences and to standardize its disputed doctrines” (Curtis and others 1991:32-34).<sup>33</sup> This expansion was driven by Constantine’s view that doctrinal disputes between the orthodox and unorthodox hermeneutical approaches threatened his empire’s political stability (Curtis and others 1991:32-34). The debate was predominantly over how much authority the Church had in interpreting Scripture. Orthodox hermeneutics argued that, “only they, the apostles’ successors, were the true interpreters of Scripture since only they had directly received the apostolic teaching” (Klein and others 2004:40). The event spurred the Church to consider how to officially secure proper doctrine. The result was that the Church leaders convened a series of Church councils to define official Church doctrine (Holcomb 2014:33-112). Klein and others (2004:40) write,

Their decisions defined correct Christian beliefs and defended orthodox views against those of the heretics. Since all sides cited Scripture as support, the conciliar pronouncements tried to spell out what, according to apostolic tradition, was the correct interpretation of the scriptures and wherein lay the heretics’ misunderstandings. The importance of the councils lies in their description of “orthodoxy,” the mainstream Christian beliefs consistent with properly interpreted Scripture and the apostles’ teaching. Those beliefs distinguished orthodoxy from the views of the heretics.

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<sup>33</sup> Patzia and Petrotta (2002:27) describe Constantine as the first Christian Roman emperor, who sought to unite the Church and expand its influence.

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Two major individuals headline this sub period—Augustine and Jerome (so Zuck 1991:38; Jeffrey 2003:382-386; Klein and others 2004:40-42; Yarchin 2011:61-63; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:71). Zuck (1991:38) states that while there are several prominent figures among this period, Jerome and Augustine are the best known of the group. They have been described as “towering figures” in biblical interpretation, whom were “unsurpassed for at least the next 600 years” (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:72).

Patzia and Petrotta (2002:17) purport that Augustine was instrumental in setting the limits of the biblical canon, and that his massive intellect, spiritual insight, and exposition of Christian truth lead some to call him “the greatest man who ever wrote Latin.” He became the first orthodox Christian in the western Church to articulate “an original and comprehensive hermeneutic” (Klein and others 2004:40-41). Augustine accomplished his hermeneutical feat by offering three interpretive principles for finding the figurative meaning of a difficult text, which include consulting what other, clearer passages of Scripture say on the subject, consulting the Church’s traditional interpretation of the text, and consulting the context to see which view best commends itself (so Grant and Tracy 1984:78-80; Dockery 1992:136-146; Klein and others 2004:40-42; Hauser and Watson 2008:48). Kannengiesser (2007:138) argues, however, that one principle element to Augustine’s hermeneutics was the need to identify himself within a cultural continuity: “He experienced receiving God’s biblical revelation through the channels of his own civilization.” According to Kannengiesser (2007:138), he was highly influenced by the Alexandrian approach offered by Origen and Philo.<sup>34</sup> Harrison (2005:77) shares a similar thought, asserting how allegory “allowed Augustine to overcome the difficulties posed by a passage that appeared contradictory, banal, immoral, or obviously figurative and to plumb its spiritual depths,” but also notes how he “used various traditional (by his day) methods of interpretation.” Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:72) illustrate this in noting

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<sup>34</sup> Kannengiesser (2007:139) is careful to note that “one cannot classify [Augustine] in a specific school of exegesis ... he transcends their ranks by his unique creativity.”

how, while there are instances of spiritualizing interpretation in Augustine, “the impressive thing about *The City of God* is that it is an attempt to take the OT seriously as history and to consider how secular and sacred history are to be regarded in relation to each other.” Klein and others (2004:41) are eager to note the difficulty in overstating Augustine’s contribution to the study of the Bible: “His thought profoundly influenced later thinkers, and Bible students still follow his principles of proper interpretation.”<sup>35</sup>

Patzia and Petrotta (2002:66) consider Jerome a premier early Church Father, who was “without equal in breadth, depth, and versatility of learning.” He contributed the Vulgate, as well as translated the Apocrypha into Latin’s common language. Hermeneutically speaking, the Church came to depend upon Jerome’s Vulgate translation for all doctrinal discussions, which was problematic, because Jerome’s dynamic-paraphrase method of translation gave renderings that were not as accurate in reflecting the original languages as they could have been (Yarchin 2011:62). This was because Jerome’s translation methods interpreted each verse “spiritually by utilizing the Septuagint and Origen” (Patzia and Petrotta 2002:66). Hauser and Watson (2008:45-46) note how Origen utilized allegory to uncover the hidden meaning of a text, which had “a profound influence in making allegory the dominant method of biblical interpretation into the Middle Ages, especially through the commentaries of Jerome, which relied heavily on Origen’s commentaries. Zuck (1991:38) offers a similar assessment of Jerome, stating that he originally followed Origen in his allegorizing. Brown (2008:371) says that, even in his lifetime, Jerome was held by many to be a great authority on the interpretation of the Bible, and that, in the centuries following his death, he was universally acknowledged as the prince of Christian biblical scholars. “His translation of the Bible became accepted everywhere as the standard biblical text” (Brown 2008:371). Jerome’s Vulgate moved the Church

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<sup>35</sup> Hauser and Watson (2008:50) note how Augustine’s allegorical approach “makes for a problem: what to do with the multiple readings that Christians devise from the same passages. Augustine argues that there is no single true reading of a passage. Truth from the mind of God can have more than one human interpretation. God intended this multiplicity, and all readings are valid that are consistent with the law of love of God and neighbor and the creedal beliefs of the Church.”

still another step away from dependence upon the original Scripture text itself as the source for its teachings (Klein and others 2004:42).

#### **2.4.4 The Middle Ages (ca. A.D. 500-1500)**

The Middle Ages is named such as it is the era which falls in the middle of the Patristic Period and the Protestant Reformation (so Klein and others 2004:42; Hauser and Watson 2008:374). McGrath (2013:78) says the age “signifies the period of transition between the intellectual glories of antiquity and those of the modern period.”

Zuck (1991:98) notes how, in the Middle Ages “words, phrases, and sentences in the Bible had taken on multiple meanings, losing all sense of objectivity.” Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:77) suggest this was the result of the allegorical and mystical interpretations reaching a climax. This approach had been “in vogue for hundreds of years—a view that ignored the normal meaning of words in their grammatical sense and let words and sentences mean whatever the readers wanted them to mean” (Zuck 1991:98). Mickelson (1963:35) maintains the Middle Ages were “a vast desert so far as biblical interpretation is concerned. There was no fresh, creative thinking about the scriptures themselves.” While allegorization was the prominent hermeneutic of the Middle Ages, it left something to be desired.<sup>36</sup>

Klein and others (2004:42-45) suggest that three hermeneutical approaches typify the Middle Ages: traditional, allegorical, and historical. The traditional approach embraced the teachings of the Church Fathers passed down over the centuries (Seitz 2003:446). The *catena* is the primary resource for this approach,

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<sup>36</sup> “The Middle Ages mark the decline of some features of the former and lay the groundwork for the emergence of the latter. Popular impression sees the period as a dark, oppressive one, and that portrait is largely consistent with historical reality. Ignorance plagued both Christian clergy and laity, and morally bankrupt Church leaders stopped at nothing to preserve their ecclesiastical power. At the same time, and usually hidden behind cloister walls, a Millennium-long, lively, and rich dialogue with the Bible quietly advanced and produced tools for its continuing study that profoundly shaped the practice of biblical interpretation in the following centuries” (Klein and others 2004:42).

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which is a chain of interpretations and comments compiled from the commentaries of the Church Fathers. “Interpreters using *catenas* tended to conform their interpretations to the Church’s doctrinal norms” (Klein and others 2004:42-43). McNally (2005:29) observes how “exegesis became almost synonymous with tradition, for the good commentator was the scholar who handed on faithfully what he had received.” While this helped quiet heretics, it arguably placed too much emphasis on man than it did on Scripture (McNally 2005:29).

The allegorical approach was the most dominant of the three hermeneutical approaches in the Middle Ages (Virkler 2007:55). Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:72) note that medieval scholars believed every Bible passage had four meanings: literal (historical), allegorical (or doctrinal), tropological (or moral), and anagogical (or eschatological). This scheme was often summed up by a Latin mnemonic, found in the writings of many writers of the early Middle Ages:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria  
Moralis quid agas, quid speres anagogia.

McGrath (2013:114) offers the following English translation,

The letter teaches deeds;  
allegory, what you should believe;  
the moral sense, what you should do;  
and the anagogical sense, what to hope for.

A third major hermeneutical approach during the Middle Ages is the historical interpretation, in which proponents sought to find the historical sense of Scripture by consulting with Jewish authorities. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:72) suggest this is an approach which arose in the latter half of the period, particularly in the school of the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris: “Proponents of this

school include Hugh, who taught at St. Victor from 1125 until his death in 1142, and his student Andrew who taught there until 1147 and again from 1155 until 1163, both of whom pursued primarily the historical, literal sense.” Andrew of St. Victor excluded spiritual commentary from his interpretation, instead concentrating on a text’s historical or literal sense, drawing on Jewish interpretation (Klein and others 2004:44). This approach is responsible for scholasticism, a pre-Renaissance intellectual awakening; the primary concern of this thought was the relationship between the Christian faith and human reason. Scholasticism “placed emphasis upon the rational justification of religious belief and the systematic presentation of those beliefs” (McGrath 2013:84), and is the hermeneutic that served as a catalyst for the Protestant Reformation.

In summary, the Middle Ages still experienced the strong persuasions of allegorization and tradition, but this long hegemony within the Church started to decline while other approaches started to flourish. A “reformulation of how the supposed four senses interrelated emerged,” and the scholastic application anchored the interpretation of the scriptures to more “rational, objective moorings” (Klein and others 2004:45). Finally, an increase in the text’s literal sense positioned medieval exegesis along a trajectory which pointed towards the Protestant Reformation, setting the stage for the next step in long saga of how the Church would interpret the Bible (Klein and others 2004:45).

### **2.4.5 The Protestant Reformation (ca. A.D. 1500-1750)**

McGrath (2012:46-48) suggests the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation can be traced back to Erasmus (A.D. 1466-1536), a sixteenth century theologian who opposed the allegorical and traditional thinking of the Middle Ages. Payne (2007:416-417) describes him as “the most widely influential NT scholar of his time,” whose method of biblical interpretation “has to do first of all with the

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restoration of the pure, original text as far as possible.” Erasmus<sup>37</sup> argued the era’s hermeneutics “offered no spiritual food for hungry Christian souls” (Klein and others 2004:46).<sup>38</sup> Many scholars detect a sense of tiredness during the fifteenth century. The Renaissance “had consolidated its hold on many centers of theological education and scholarship, creating pressure for new theological paradigms and expressions” (McGrath 2013:125). One staple of the Protestant Reformation was a return to the historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture, which was in direct opposition to the hermeneutics espoused in the Middle Ages, which let words and sentences mean whatever the readers wanted them to mean. Zuck (1991:98) notes,

The Reformers were seeking to return people to the way the Bible had been treated by the early Church Fathers, including Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Irenaeus, and the leaders in the Antiochene School, including Lucian, Diodorus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Theodoret.

Blossoming from this fatigued environment was a renewed interest in studying the Bible in its original languages as well as a growing dissatisfaction with the allegorical method. The Catholic Church’s reliance upon the Latin Vulgate only made matters worse, because it cast shadows of doubt on their authority. All of these things cultivated an environment for what would become the Protestant Reformation, a new stream of biblical interpretation (Klein and others 2004:46, 48-50).

Olson (1999:367) purports that while Erasmus “laid the egg”<sup>39</sup> to the Protestant Reformation, Luther “hatched it.” Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:73) argue that Luther operated in the wake of the revival of classical learning, epitomized

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<sup>37</sup> McGrath (2013:125) argues Erasmus set the scene for a major shift in the methods, concepts, and vocabulary of Christian theology.

<sup>38</sup> Virkler (2007:55) says “little original scholarship was done during the Middle Ages.”

<sup>39</sup> Virkler (2007:57) details how Erasmus published the first critical edition of the Greek NT, which helped turn the tide of hermeneutics back to a single sense, as opposed to a fourfold sense.

by the scholarship of Erasmus of Rotterdam, an assessment also shared by Payne (2007:417). Luther's careful exegesis "aligned the best of the medieval approach with the new ecclesiastical reality of the sixteenth century and led Christian hermeneutics into new paths" (Klein and others 2004:47). Luther's engagement with the scriptures was the "undeniable catalyst" for the Protestant Reformation (so Thompson 2009:299; McGrath 2012:76-80).<sup>40</sup>

Luther's contribution to the Protestant Reformation is impossible to overemphasize. His primary contributions were, first, that only Scripture has divine authority for Christians and second, that the allegorical method of interpretation amounted to empty speculation (Klein and others 2004:47). By combating allegory, Luther "struck where the ecclesiastical armor was weak ... [he] knew its weakness from personal experience," (Grant and Tracy 1984:94).<sup>41</sup>

Luther ultimately ceased to make use of allegorization, and insisted on the necessity of one simple solid sense. The fourfold sense collapsed under Luther's approach, which was that if there was a literal sense that referred to Christ, there was no need for spiritual sense in order to find him in the text (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:74). Thompson (2009:303) details how Luther held a robust confidence in the clarity of the scriptures when dealt with honestly and with faith. Klein and others (2004:47) elaborate upon this, noting how the Bible's historical sense, which is discerned by applying the ordinary rules of grammar in the light of Scripture's original historical context, echoed a theme of the Church Fathers and the medievalists, who claimed the whole Bible taught about Christ. Luther thus rejected allegory.

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<sup>40</sup> Virkler (2007:56) suggests that Nicolas of Lyra (ca. 1270-1340) also had a profound impact on Luther, and ultimately on the return to literal interpretation. "Although he agreed that there are four senses to Scripture, he gave decided preference to the literal and urged that the other senses be founded firmly on the literal. He complained that other senses were often used to choke the literal and asserted that only the literal should be used as a basis for doctrine. Nicolas of Lyra's work affected Martin Luther profoundly, and there are many who believe that without his influence, Luther would not have sparked the Reformation."

<sup>41</sup> "When I was a monk, I was an expert in allegories. I allegorized everything. Afterwards through the Epistle to the Romans I came to some knowledge of Christ. There I saw that allegories were not what Christ meant" (Grant and Tracy 1984:94).

Luther, however, was not alone in his reformational influence. John Calvin was also primarily responsible for contributing to the hermeneutical transition brought about by the Protestant Reformation (McGrath 2012:85-87). Some consider Calvin the “greatest exegete of the Protestant Reformation” (Virkler 2007:58). Like Luther, Calvin rejected allegory in favor of a literal/historical interpretation of Scripture (so Grant and Tracy 1984:96; Dockery 1992:160; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:74; McGrath 2012:85-87). For Calvin, allegorical exegesis was the antithesis of the more preferred historical exegesis method of interpretation. Calvin reserved his severest criticism for those who allegorized Scripture excessively (Puckett 2007:292). Calvin rejected traditional interpretations that “could not find support in what he variously described as the simple, literal, historical, or genuine meaning of the text ... Calvin displayed a quick and instinctive rejection of allegorical meanings” (Thompson 2005:96-97). Calvin is often understood as the founder of modern historical-grammatical exegesis (Puckett 2007:292).

The Protestant Reformation furthered the stress of some medievalists on the importance of Scripture’s literal sense. While cherishing and even invoking Church tradition and the interpretations of the Church Fathers, the Reformers placed the teachings of the Bible over both as the ultimate authority. They also allowed lay leadership access to the Bible, making it a common part of the ordinary Christian’s life. This ultimately produced two distinctive lines of biblical interpretation—Protestant and Catholic (Klein and others 2004:49-50).

### **2.4.6 The Modern (Post-Protestant Reformation) Period (ca. A.D. 1750-Present)**

The years following the Protestant Reformation could easily be divided into several different periods, but for the purposes of this thesis they are combined into one single period. The earlier years of this period witnessed what might well be the climax of the Protestant Reformation’s influence, the Great Awakening,

but during the same period the un-churched world witnessed a reformation of its own, the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement which minimized several of the fantastic claims of the Bible, especially Heaven (so McManners 1969; Bokenkotter 2005; Pearse 2006; Hitchcock 2012; Noll 2012; Shelley 2013). The nineteenth, twentieth, and present centuries were therefore hermeneutically dichotomous. On one hand, the Church continued to experience the positive reverberations of the Protestant Reformation, but on the other hand, it also experienced the negative impact of the Enlightenment. Both dynamics would make lasting impacts on modern day hermeneutics, particularly in what is generally known as the historical-grammatical method and historical-critical methods to biblical interpretation.

Klein and others (2004:52) maintain the nineteenth century witnessed a skeptical repudiation of Christianity, observing how “radical advances in human science created popular confidence in the scientific method, which in turn produced a revolutionary and more scientific method for studying history.” The Bible was not immune to this newfound approach, and out of this spawned an interpretive approach known as the historical-critical method of interpretation,<sup>42</sup> a method that, in its most acerbic form, questioned the veracity of the basic claims of Scripture, as well as the veracity of Scripture itself. This method treated the Bible as it would any other piece of fictional literature, rather than God’s special revelation to humanity. It sought to interpret Scripture through a naturalistic worldview which explained things in terms of natural laws, as opposed to the supernatural.

Patzia and Petrotta (2002:57) state, for conservative interpreters, the historical-critical method is the imposition of modern, scientific presuppositions upon the

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<sup>42</sup> Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:75) cite Richard Simon (1638-1712), a Roman Catholic priest, as the “father of biblical criticism,” but further note F.C. Baur (1792-1860) and Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) as the early influencers of the hermeneutic. Zuck (1991:51) cites Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) as early adherents. Osborne (2006:468), alongside Köstenberger and Patterson, consider Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) the most important figure of this persuasion in the modern period of hermeneutics. Many consider Schleiermacher the “father of modern hermeneutics.” Grant and Tracy (1984:111) say Schleiermacher “rejected the absolute authority of Scripture.” Zuck also cites Kierkegaard (1813-1855), describing him as the “father of modern existentialism.”

study of Scripture. Grenz and others (1999:59) share a similar opinion, stating it tends to downplay Scripture as a divine book. “Deplorably, the historical-critical method’s negative, critical stance toward Scripture had the effect of undermining the credibility of the biblical record as it tended to blunt the notions of biblical revelation, inspiration, and authority” (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:76). The historical-critical method was a liberal hermeneutic which radically redefined the object of biblical interpretation; the hermeneutic stressed that human intellect can decide what is true and false, rendering the Bible as corresponding to man’s reason (Zuck 1991:51). Grant and Tracy (1984:106) uphold the result of the historical-critical method is the “absolute freedom of human reason, released from the claims of theology,” and furthermore note the climate of the nineteenth century was one in which the historical-critical method was “in vogue” among the hermeneutical handbooks published during that time. The twentieth and twenty-first centuries imitated the nineteenth century, encouraging a philosophical reflection on the very nature of the interpretive process. The ascendancy of these historical-critical methods led them to become a dominant mindset in the twenty-first century.

While the historical-critical method has continued in the modern centuries, there are some who have reacted strongly to it, namely by championing the historical-grammatical method. Zuck (1991:54) maintains this follows the heritage of the Antiochene School, the Victorines, and the Reformers. Virkler (2007:54) extends a similar opinion, stating the “exegetical principles of the Antiochian school laid the groundwork for modern evangelical hermeneutics.”<sup>43</sup> McGrath (2011:451-452) offers a more specific reaction to the historical-critical method, asserting it was particularly discredited by the rediscovery of the apocalyptic character of the preaching of Jesus and the revived belief that the kingdom was an eschatological notion.<sup>44</sup> Thus, while the historical-critical method was a highly employed method

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<sup>43</sup> Virkler (2007:54) suggests one reason the Antiochian School failed to be more influential was because one of Theodore’s students, Nestorius, became involved in a major heresy concerning the person of Christ, and his association with the school, together with other historical circumstances, led to the eventual demise of this promising school of thought.

<sup>44</sup> See Schweitzer and Weiss in § 1.2.1.

of interpretation during the nineteenth, twentieth, and current centuries, there were some noteworthy developments in biblical hermeneutics which opposed it (and subsequently helped to promote the subject of Heaven). One example is Dispensationalism, a hermeneutic which, developing after the Protestant Reformation as a reaction to the historical-critical method of interpretation, finds a curious residency among hermeneutics' history. It is possible that Dispensationalism is a byproduct of the historical-grammatical method of the Protestant Reformation, which itself desired to return to the hermeneutics of the Apostles.<sup>45</sup>

Understanding how individuals and groups have interpreted the Bible in the past can serve as signs to us, giving us warnings, direction, and information (Zuck 1991:27). The following sections analyze Dispensationalism, particularly as it relates to a literal method to biblical interpretation, in order to ascertain if it is an acceptable approach for understanding the eschatological claims of Scripture, as well as whether it can be reasonably associated with the hermeneutics of the Apostles and Church Fathers.

### **2.5 Introduction to Literal Eschatological Hermeneutics**

Poythress (1994:19-29) identifies the characteristics of a dispensational hermeneutic as a predominantly literal approach to interpreting the Bible, a precise scheme for dividing the history of the world into epochs, the belief in a pretribulational rapture, and the premillennial return of Christ to reign for one thousand years. Poythress (1994:22) argues Dispensationalism lives and dies on certain eschatological claims, namely a pretribulational rapture, since “the Church must be removed from the scene at the rapture before OT prophecy can begin to be fulfilled again,” and a premillennial return of Christ, which posits that

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<sup>45</sup> Zuck (1991:230) suggests that the Dispensationalism issue is basic to the study of eschatological hermeneutics, which helps to warrant its consideration.

Jesus will physically return again before the Millennium, in order to reign during it.<sup>46</sup>

While Dispensationalism includes a host of characteristics, this thesis particularly recognizes it because it is the modern hermeneutic most associated with a literal approach to eschatology,<sup>47</sup> not necessarily as a general hermeneutic for interpreting the entirety of Scripture (so Poythress 1994:9; Ryrie 2007:69-87).<sup>48</sup>

## 2.6 Literal Eschatology in Church History

A commonly held concern about Dispensationalism is that it was formulated by a nineteenth-century separatist movement. This intimates that since Dispensationalism is recent, it is unorthodox, and since it was born out of a separatist movement, it is to be shunned (Ryrie 2007:69). This is an argument which finds precedence from a variety of scholars. Fuller (1957:136), for example, maintains the hermeneutic would not be so great “if the adherents of this system knew the historical background of what they teach.” Wright (2008:118-119) describes the hermeneutic as a “highly distorted” interpretation that grew out of a millenarian movement of the nineteenth century, suggesting the real agenda of dispensational beliefs is an ecological financial gain by iniquitous companies:

Since we [are] living in the end times, with the world about to come to an end, there [is] no point worrying about trying to stop polluting the planet. If Armageddon [is] just around the corner, it does not matter—and here, I suspect, is part of the real agenda—if General Motors went on pumping poisonous gases into the Canadian atmosphere.

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<sup>46</sup> Per Poythress (1994:19-29), these are the characteristics primarily endorsed by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) and C.I. Scofield (1843-1921), the founders of Dispensationalism.

<sup>47</sup> Poythress (1993:48) professes, “dispensationalists are the most consistently literalistic.”

<sup>48</sup> This is to say this thesis does not endorse all of Dispensationalism’s facets.

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The deeper theological intent to Wright's quote concerns the lack of concern over any present-day power to the kingdom of Heaven. Since Dispensationalism tends to interpret the Millennium as entirely future, there is no reason to express any concern for the earth in the present.

Wright's eschatological concerns are shared by a variety of scholars. Gerstner's book, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth* (2009), is explicitly dedicated to the examination of the historical origins of Dispensationalism, and includes endorsements from notable scholars including Sproul and Packer, who argue the hermeneutic is seriously astray. Gerstner (2009:xv) himself argues Dispensationalism is not sound, and a serious departure from biblical teaching.

These are strong statements from respectable scholars, warranting a consideration of the veracity of the hermeneutic altogether, including its literal approach to eschatology. Ryrie (2007:70) notes some scholars, in response to arguments like the ones posed above, suggest tenets of Dispensationalism are found much earlier than the nineteenth century, and the hermeneutic is best understood as a rediscovery of ancient hermeneutical practices, not a new system of interpretation. Gerstner (2009:1) concedes, at least partially, acknowledging how some elements of the system are very old: "There is genuine antiquity to some of the various features found in dispensational theology." Collins (1984:14) also acknowledges elements of the approach have "ancient roots," noting how a literal understanding "is in fact the oldest-known interpretation."<sup>49</sup> This helps to encourage an evaluation of Dispensationalism in Church history, particularly the tenet of interpreting Scripture's eschatological claims literally. This thesis suggests tenets of the approach are complimentary with the *peshat* of ancient Jewish hermeneutics, which was derived from the earliest form of Jewish hermeneutics during the time of Ezra, and is therefore worthy of consideration as a contemporary hermeneutic.

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<sup>49</sup> Collins (1984) espouses the historical-critical method to interpreting Revelation, and therefore does not endorse a literal approach.

### 2.6.1 Literal Eschatology in the Intertestamental Period

Dockery (1992:27-34) and Klein and others (2004:23) suggest a review of the practices of those who lived during the intertestamental period is a merited place to begin an evaluation of literal hermeneutics in Church history. Halivni (1996:43) and Jasper (2004:29) argue there are at least three general hermeneutical approaches between the time of the ancient Levites (late sixth century B.C.) and the inauguration of the Church (1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.). These include Rabbinic, Hellenistic, and Essenic traditions.

The early Rabbinic tradition<sup>50</sup> is particularly keen on a plain, straightforward hermeneutic, which was often applied to eschatology. With regard to full disclosure, Dockery (1992:28) notes the early Rabbinic approach was sometimes extremely literal, and illustrates this with how its adherents interpreted passages like Deuteronomy 6:7, in which a literal reclining and rising was expected when reciting the *shema*.

While early Rabbinic tradition can be accused of being too literal, it was not an entirely unfavorable approach to the scriptures. For one, the other two major approaches—Hellenistic and Essenic<sup>51</sup>—were largely the result of cultural convenience, while the early Rabbinic approach sought obedience to the scriptures in the face of mounting cultural pressure, particularly from Greco-Roman influence, which was largely allegorical in practice. Daley (2010a:44) illustrates this in noting how Clement of Alexandria, the first representative of the later-formalized Alexandrian tradition of Greek Christian thought, drew on both “the intellectual, anthropocentric speculations of Platonic and Stoic cosmology,

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<sup>50</sup> This thesis understands the Rabbinic tradition to include rabbis who lived during the intertestamental period. That John the Baptist and Jesus were referred to as “rabbis” by their disciples indicates rabbis were a normal part of Jewish society during this time (Jn 1:38; 20:16). Halley (2000:523) notes “rabbi” did not become an official title until much later, and that the professional, ordained, salaried rabbi did not appear until the Middle Ages. This thesis understands Rabbinic hermeneutics as including Rabbinic interpretation from the B.C. and Common Eras, and attempts to discuss the evolution of the hermeneutic as it pertains to this particular study. When necessary, this thesis includes the word “early” to qualify the type of literal Rabbinic hermeneutics it seeks to affirm.

<sup>51</sup> And later Rabbinic hermeneutics.

and on the esoteric, mythically couched revelations of the NT Apocrypha and the Gnostic documents, in elaborating his understanding of the Christian eschatological hope.”

Patte (1975:138) and Arnold (2010:29) argue the approach of the early Rabbinics extended to eschatological passages of Scripture. Arnold (2010:29) notes the postexilic prophets endorsed the literalness of future eschatological events such as the splitting in two of the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4), as well as its complete rearrangement so the valley will run east to west rather than the current north to south orientation. They also interpret Zechariah’s “living waters” (Zech 14:8) as eventually literally flowing from Jerusalem year-round, running to the Mediterranean in the West and to the Dead Sea in the East. This is a modest example which expresses literal eschatology has the deepest possible root in hermeneutics’ history. This literal tradition was considered foundational, especially for the Apostles whom followed the ancient Jews. Coleman (2010:73) submits these principles of Bible exhortation were practiced before the Apostles so often they could not help but catch on to at least some of the rules for basic scriptural interpretation and application.

### **2.6.2 Literal Eschatology in the Apostolic Period**

The period immediately following the pre-ecclesiastical era is the Apostolic Age, the period in which the Church was inaugurated. This is a vital period of hermeneutics because it is the period in which Jesus and his immediate disciples employed their understanding of Scripture, which is a primary consideration for hermeneutics. Jesus’ impact has been described as the “hermeneutical axiom undergirding the entire NT,” specifically as it relates to eschatology (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:69).

Jesus interpreted the scriptures in a manner similar to his previous and contemporary Jewish exegetes, but there was also novelty in his method and

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message (so Coleman 2010:73; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:68-69). Ultimately, this novelty was a Christological reading of the ancient scriptures, but one that often adopted the literal approach to the OT prophecies (Dockery 1992:24, 28). MacArthur (1997:1520) asserts a pertinent example of this is discovered in Luke's Gospel (Lk 4:14-37), in which Luke details Jesus' acknowledgment that he is the literal fulfillment to Isaiah's (Is 61:1-2) messianic prophecy. The NT writers followed this literal hermeneutical pattern of Jesus in their understanding of the OT as a whole and in its parts as a witness to Christ. Literal modes of exegesis are seen in NT writings including Acts (Acts 3:25 = Gen 12:3; Acts 2:25-28 = Ps 16:8-11/Ps 110:1) as well as in many of Paul's writings (Dockery 1992:38). "[Paul's] usage of the OT demonstrated the influence of his rabbinic training," which was "quite literal" (Dockery 1992:38). Rowland (2010:63), in discussing Paul's statements in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, submits it is possible Paul's eschatology presupposes a literal messianic reign on earth.

Perhaps one of the more crucial moments of the Apostolic Period of eschatological hermeneutics is Acts 1:6-8, when Jesus and the disciples discuss the timing and nature of the kingdom. In this event, the disciples ask Jesus if this is the time in which he will restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Jesus never directly answers the question, but instead redirects their attention to their present responsibility of evangelism (Acts 1:8). At this crucial moment of eschatological hermeneutics, the nature of the kingdom is never explicitly defined, which has left scholars debating whether the kingdom should be understood allegorically or literally. This is evidenced in the vast array of opinions expressed in commentaries on the passage.

Phillips (2001a:20), for example, states the disciples were "confused" and that the passage does not necessarily teach anything about the nature of the kingdom so much as it is about the task of world evangelism. Polhill (2001:84-85) contends Jesus didn't reject the concept of the restoration of Israel, but that the

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lack of rejection does not imply that the disciples' hopes of a literal restoration were accurate. Instead, they were to be the "true, restored Israel, fulfilling its mission to be a light ... so that God's salvation might reach to the ends of the earth" (Polhill 2001:84-85). MacArthur (1997:1632) takes Jesus' lack of correction as evidence that the disciples were accurate in their literal understanding of an earthly kingdom:

The apostles still believed the earthly form of the kingdom of Messiah would soon be re-established. [Acts 1:7] shows that the apostles' expectation of a literal, earthly kingdom mirrored what Christ taught and what the OT predicted. Otherwise, [Jesus] would have corrected them about such a crucial aspect of his teaching.

Church historian Brian Daley (2010a:5) shares MacArthur's (1997:1632) sentiment, writing, "the restoration of Israel in a transformed material world was a cherished hope of a large number of Jews," which, according to Daley's historical research, is demonstrated by several ancient documents, including the Qumran documents. Bass<sup>52</sup> (2005:31) offers a similar opinion, noting how the idea of the future kingdom is inherent in the Jewish concept of the kingdom.

In summary, the Apostolic Period of hermeneutics shows how Jesus and the apostles were dependent upon the literal hermeneutical practices established in ancient Judaism, and how the early Church inherited and practiced these exegetical procedures (Dockery 1992:44). Jesus' literal fulfillment of OT prophecy was a "fundamental hermeneutical principle" of the Apostolic Period

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<sup>52</sup> Bass (2005:9) is, ironically, anti-dispensational. In the introduction to his book, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, Bass writes that he found his way out of Dispensationalism, and that the book is designed to help others do the same.

(Klein and others 2004:32),<sup>53</sup> which shows that a literal methodology to eschatological hermeneutics was a stout presence in the Apostolic Period.<sup>54</sup>

### 2.6.3 Literal Eschatology Among the Patristics

Poythress (1994:19-29) and Hill (2001:1) espouse that a helpful way of considering the eschatological hermeneutics of the Church Fathers,<sup>55</sup> particularly to see if there is any literal understanding to eschatological events, is to examine it through the monocle of what Church historians call “chiliasm,”<sup>56</sup> or millennialism,<sup>57</sup> the belief in a literal thousand-year reign of Christ and his saints on earth between his second coming and the last judgment, which is an explicit tenet of Dispensationalism’s eschatology.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Dockery (1992:44) and Klein and others (2004:32-34) assert the apostles did not solely limit themselves to a literal approach to the scriptures, but both do argue it was the foundation of their hermeneutics. This is an important consideration to keep these scholars’ statements in proper context, but also to say that approaching all Scripture literally is not the goal of this thesis’ argument.

<sup>54</sup> Daley (2010b:91) suggests that while the degree to which Jesus’ own preaching was dominated by eschatological themes is still hotly debated, it is unquestionable that he and his disciples operated in a world in which the imminent end of human history mattered.

<sup>55</sup> Marmorstein’s (2001:126) statement, “The problem is that, in patristic works ... one can find differences in eschatology” is considered in this survey. Crutchfield (1995:88) writes, “If anyone searches the fathers for a fully detailed systematic presentation about the doctrine of last things, he searches in vain.” These are shared to state that this thesis’ goal is not to suggest that the hermeneutics of the early Church Father’s unequivocally show a literal approach to Scripture, only to show that such an approach is at least generally feasible.

<sup>56</sup> Grenz and others (1999:79) argue that “chiliasm,” in contemporary theology, is often used in the narrow sense of referring to belief in the premillennial return of Christ, which is how it is used in this thesis. Hill (2001:5) writes that the term signifies a belief in a temporary, earthly, Messianic kingdom to be realized sometime in the future.

<sup>57</sup> Revelation 20 includes several verses which speak of a “one-thousand-year reign” of Jesus (Rev 20:2-7). A literal approach to these verses interprets the Millennium as a one-thousand-year reign of Jesus on the earth, as opposed to an allegorical one-thousand-year reign, which interprets the length figuratively (Grenz and others 1999:94). The view most associated with the literal approach is premillennialism, which contends that Jesus will return and rule on the earth with his saints, inaugurating the one-thousand-year kingdom, during which time peace will reign, the natural world will no longer be cursed and evil will be suppressed. A second approach is postmillennialism, which maintains that Jesus will return to earth after the Millennium, which is not necessarily to be taken as lasting for one thousand years (pg. 92). Postmillennialists assert that the Millennium will come by the spiritual and moral influence of Christian preaching and teaching in the world. A third common approach is amillennialism, which is the “belief that the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 does not represent a specific period of time between Christ’s first and second comings” (pp. 8-9). Many amillennialists believe instead that the Millennium refers to the Heavenly reign of Christ and the departed saints during the Church Age. These descriptions offer various interpretations to the meaning of “Millennium,” ranging from a literal to an allegorical understanding. The query is whether any orthodox Church Fathers offer a documented premillennial interpretation to the kingdom, and if they maintain that said Millennium lasts for a literal one thousand years. The assertion is that such evidence would lend warrant to a modern-day believer endorsing the same approach.

<sup>58</sup> Although the historical survey of chiliasm does not cover the span of literal interpretations for all eschatological events proposed in this thesis, it offers an objective option in order to detect whether any of the Patristics employed a literal eschatological hermeneutic concerning the kingdom, which is an event with which the early Church is especially concerned. Also, the historical warrant of interpreting Revelation 20:3 and 6 literally allows room to suggest the same for the seven year length of the Great Tribulation, as described in passages like Daniel 9:24-27, 12:11-12, and Revelation 11:2-3.

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The millennial issue is basic to the study of eschatology. The view one should hold on the millennial question is “not settled by appeals to historical references, but it is noteworthy that a good number of leaders in the first several centuries of the early church were clearly premillennial” (Zuck 1991:232). Several Church Fathers espoused at least a hint of a premillennial view of the kingdom, including: Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 30-95), Ignatius (ca. A.D. 35-107), Polycarp (A.D. 70-155), Papias (A.D. 80-163), Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 100-165), Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130-202), Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160-225), Hippolytus (d. A.D. 236), Cyprian (A.D. 195-258), Commodianus (third century), Nepos (third century), and Lactantius (A.D. 240-330) (so Zuck 1991:232; Hill 2001:22; Daley 2010a:18).

Papias, to note one example, offers descriptive insights into his view of a literal, future kingdom in writing, “The days will come, in which vines shall grow ... and all animals feeding only on the productions of the earth, should become peaceful and harmonious among each other, and be in perfect subjection to man” (Hill 2001:22). Papias suggests that after the resurrection of the dead will come the Millennium “when the personal reign of Christ will be established on the earth” (Zuck 1991:234).<sup>59</sup> Daley and Hill contend Papias’ premillennialism was derived from elders related to John (if not John himself), who in turn received it directly from Jesus. Papias was “an ancient man who was a hearer of John and a companion of Polycarp” (Christian Classics Ethreal Library 2015). Daley notes how Papias had close contact with the community in which the Johannine writings were produced: “He is known to have collected material about Jesus and his disciples.” Irenaeus asserts Papias’ works includes teachings attributed to Jesus containing vivid descriptions of a coming millennial kingdom.

Justin, to note another example, has been described as the most important of the apologists, and is certainly a respectable and orthodox Church Father (Daley 2010a:20). While some argue Justin never achieved consistency in his view of end-time events (Hill 2001:23), others contend there is enough evidence to

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<sup>59</sup> Zuck (1991:234) says this comes from a quote by Irenaeus and Eusebius.

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observe a premillennial hermeneutic, and that his adherence of it is “the strongest proof that it was inseparably bound up with the Christian faith down to the middle of the second century” (Hill 2001:2). “The beatitude of the saved, for Justin, will be enjoyed in two stages. Initially, they will possess the land that formerly was Canaan and will reign there with Christ for a thousand years” (Hill 2001:21). Zuck (1991:234) quotes Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*<sup>60</sup> as evidence of his premillennialism: “But I and whoever are on all points right-minded Christians know that there will be resurrection of the dead and a thousand years in Jerusalem.”

Hill (2001:11) describes Irenaeus as the most important biblical theologian of the second century, and his *Against Heresies*, particularly the portion in which he details the kingdom, is considered “the most extensive and best reasoned in Christian literature to date on the Millennium” (Hill 2001:11-12). Irenaeus offers a premillennial interpretation to the kingdom of Heaven in this work, going as far as to say believers who give no place to an earthly Millennium “resemble the heretics” (so Hill 2001:16; Daley 2010a:28-32).<sup>61</sup> For Irenaeus, non-chiliasts are “ignorant ... of the kingdom which is the commencement of incorruption” (Hill 2001:16). Both Daley (2010a:18) and Hill (2001:23) contend Irenaeus based his premillennial convictions on Papias, one of the earliest known Church Fathers to endorse the chiliastic interpretation, who allegedly received his conviction from John, who purportedly received his conviction from Jesus. In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus says the Antichrist will reign for “three years and six months, and sit in the temple at Jerusalem” (Zuck 1991:234). He further notes how the Lord will “come from Heaven in the clouds ... bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom ... restoring to Abraham the promised inheritance” (Zuck 1991:234). These direct quotes demonstrate Irenaeus’ literal approach to certain eschatological events.

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<sup>60</sup> Chapters 80-81.

<sup>61</sup> Hill (2001:11-20) states Irenaeus is careful not to call a non-chiliast a heretic.

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Tertullian is perhaps best known for his ties to Montanism, a second century prophetic movement which emphasized the imminent return of Jesus (so Grenz and others 1990:81; Hill 2001:150-155; Daley 2010a:34-37). Montanism was considered heretical by the emerging Church authority, although the Montanist leaders never intended to undermine scriptural authority (Grenz and others 1990:81). Daley (2010a:35) and Holcomb (2014:45-54) note that Tertullian drew freely on the writings of Justin and Irenaeus and defended their millenarian tradition, particularly in his writings against Marcion, a Gnostic and early Church heretic. Rowland (2010:68-69) submits Tertullian's premillennialism is evidence the belief was widely held from the second century onward, and Weber (2010:369-370) maintains Tertullian's views on the *parousia*, the first resurrection, and the thousand-year kingdom were "common." Zuck (1991:234) states Tertullian "referred to Christ in his second advent as the stone of Daniel 2, who would smash the Gentile kingdoms and establish his everlasting reign." In *Against Marcion* Tertullian notes a premillennial hermeneutic to the future kingdom: "We do confess that a kingdom is promised to us upon the earth ... it will be after the resurrection for a thousand years in the divinely built city of Jerusalem" (Zuck 1991:235).

This represents a core group of early Orthodox Church Fathers who endorsed a premillennial return of Christ, and a subsequent one-thousand-year reign. This, alongside the aforementioned individuals listed by Zuck (1991:233-235), helps reveal premillennialism was a commonly held belief among the Church Fathers living from the first century to the fourth century (so Hill 2001:11-15, 21-44; Rowland 2010:68-69). Hill (2001:3) affirms this in asserting, for the first two hundred years of Christianity, "chiliasm, inherited from Jewish political messianism, governed religious thinking." Hill moreover writes, "nearly all researchers are united in this, that the end-time conception and doctrine

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designated as ‘chiliasm’ dominated the whole Church until the great Alexandrians, and the West even into the third and fourth centuries.”<sup>62</sup>

Hill (2001:3) goes on to assert the modern-day opposition to chiliasm is the result of the Greco-Roman influence that pervaded the early Church’s scholarship, a conclusion also held by Klein and others (2004:29-30). “Dissent from the Church’s chiliastic testimony is a scattered chorus of ‘Hellenistic spiritualizers’” (Hill 2001:3). This is an important consideration, because it proposes some of the earliest hermeneutical approaches—approaches which did not employ a literal hermeneutic—were somewhat impetuous in their hermeneutical motivation. The Hellenistic approach, some argue, dawned from pressure to accommodate to culture, which presents an extrinsic motivation for interpreting Scripture (so Daley 2010a:1-4; Plummer 2010:79).<sup>63</sup> The approach induced adverse regulations which undoubtedly warped the integrity of interpretive conclusions. Over time, however, the continued influence of the Greco-Roman culture—and thus an allegorical approach to hermeneutics—became customary, and chiliasm therefore “fell into disfavor and was for ages considered heterodox by the churches of East and West” (Hill 2001:3). Hill offers an outline of this fall, attributing it to several factors, including, (1) chiliasm’s alleged association with Montanism, which is thought to have brought opprobrium upon the doctrine in the eyes of the larger Church; (2) the influence of Origen’s spiritualizing of eschatology and allegorizing of Scripture; (3) the related infiltration of the Church by “Greek philosophy,” which counteracted more Hebraic and “realistic” modes of thought; (4) the progressive deterioration of the Church’s once vibrant hope of

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<sup>62</sup> It is fair to note that Hill’s (2001:27-32) book concerns the historical relationship between premillennialism and soul sleep, and that Hill’s personal conclusion is that there is a misguided relationship between the two which developed when the Fathers fought Gnosticism. With this said, Hill is objective in his research. For example, Hill objectively notes how Tertullian has documented statements against soul sleep although he was a chiliast. Nonetheless, Hill’s research shows premillennialism has orthodox roots with the Church Fathers, even though he personally argues that they are mistaken. It is with this orthodox existence that this thesis is concerned.

<sup>63</sup> The Essenic approach—the other pre-ecclesiastical hermeneutical method—altered the scriptures to fit their personal prophetic presuppositions (so Josephus 1999:586; Klein and others 2004:27).

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Christ's return, a decay aided by the peace of Constantine;<sup>64</sup> and finally, (5) the authoritative and enormously influential rejection of chiliasm by Augustine.<sup>65</sup>

If this outline is permitted, then it lends warrant to the assertion that Dispensationalism, at least as it concerns a literal approach to eschatology, may not be the sole result of a nineteenth century millenarian movement (so Fuller 1957:136; Wright 2008:118-119; Gerstner 2009:xv), but instead the recapturing of a hermeneutic practiced in early Rabbinic Judaism, as well as by Jesus and the Apostles, which helps to attenuate the aforementioned criticisms which suggest the hermeneutic has no historical basis.<sup>66</sup>

Historically, there is no question the Plymouth Brethren, of which John Nelson Darby (A.D. 1800-1882) was a leader, had much to do with the systematizing and promoting of Dispensationalism (so Poythress 1994:14-18; Blaising and Bock 2000:10; Ryrie 2007:77; Virkler 2007:127; Sauer 2010:252-253). However, while the movement is recent in origin, its tenets are arguably historical in nature. There is evidence, some submit, in the writings of men who lived long before Dispensationalism that its modern concepts are part of an historical viewpoint. This thesis therefore proposes it is, in the least, not unreasonable to suggest that although Dispensationalism is a recent development as a hermeneutical framework, it includes tenets which have historical precedence, particularly its literal approach to eschatology.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mac Brunson (2012), pastor at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida, says in his *Church History* audio sermon series in conversing with Chinese believers they requested him not to pray for their freedom from Communism, but to pray for them to withstand it. When Brunson asked these believers why they particularly requested this, he notes their response is that, "They do not want to become like the Church in the west, who are apathetic about their faith." This perhaps illustrates this particular point of Hill's outline: Peace, although good, can bring about apathy concerning the important claims of the faith.

<sup>65</sup> Perhaps another point to this outline might be the focus of the historical Church on tradition, which moved further away from the ancient Hebraic's approach to the scriptures, for if one Church Father offered a misguided interpretation, then it would follow that the next would, too. McKim (2007:191) notes, "[Some] take formulas from the patristic tradition that do not exist in the Bible per se but consist of different scriptural elements that had come to be combined."

<sup>66</sup> This would concur with Virkler (2007:127) who states that dispensationalists are "almost always orthodox in their view of inspiration."

<sup>67</sup> This concurs with some of Ryrie's opinions on the matter (2007:69-87).

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This is especially helpful when considering Dispensationalism's residency in Church history. According to the survey outlined throughout the course of this chapter, Dispensationalism's literal tenets were a primary practice among the earliest believers, but were lost as the allegorical nature of the Greco-Roman mindset took root. Moreover, Dispensationalism has a curious residency in that it was developed after the Protestant Reformation, an event that inspired the Church to return to the Bible. McGrath (2012:91-114) describes this as a time that "saw an ancient view of the importance of Scripture being recovered—*scriptura sola*." It was also developed in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution, a staple of the Enlightenment, perhaps as an endeavor to spite the movement's historical-critical claims. Clarence Bass<sup>68</sup> (2005:21) offers apt reflections on this in writing,

There is something admirable about a system of interpretation that seeks to preserve the validity of the revealed Word of God, particularly if its validity is being questioned. The growth of Dispensationalism paralleled the rise of a rationalistic attack up on the authority of the Bible. One great impetus to its growth has been an invariable insistence that the Bible must be taken literally as the Word of God, and its meaning must not be "spiritualized." To this day, in the minds of many, a nonliteral interpretation is synonymous with liberalizing tendencies which are equated with denying the validity of the Word.<sup>69</sup>

While this thesis seeks to showcase the historical roots of literal eschatology, it is important to note it concurs with Weber's (2010:369) sentiments concerning any historical survey of hermeneutics, particularly as it relates to millennialism, a major ouranological element: "History is messy, and theological systems rarely

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<sup>68</sup> Bass (2005:21-22) is favorable towards a literal approach to Scripture, but is leery of Dispensationalism, arguing it is too "rigid and unyielding."

<sup>69</sup> Scholars on both sides of the issue often employ the same arguments to argue both for and against the hermeneutic. This is to say that an individual who is dispensational might argue it is the method of the pre-ecclesiastical believers, which therefore means modern believers should employ it, too. However, a nondispensationalist might argue this is why it should not be employed, because early believers did not have a full understanding of hermeneutics until Jesus' first coming, and thus needed the allegorical insights offered in the post OT era in order to fully comprehend the eschatological claims of Scripture.

survive unscathed over time. Thus, we should not be surprised that millennial movements are amazingly diverse and often hard to classify.”<sup>70</sup> Weber’s statement is included in order to advocate that, while a premillennial hermeneutic is endorsed here, this author finds no reason to completely bemoan other millennial approaches that offer reasonable historical and exegetical arguments which defensibly exist even among several of the sources employed in this thesis.

### 2.7 Concluding Remarks

While an ecclesiastical historical analysis of literal hermeneutics concerning eschatology is helpful to warrant the approach, it is especially important to further warrant it with sound exegesis of the eschatological claims of Scripture, which is the major goal of this thesis. Chapter Three begins to do this by examining the book of Revelation, the book most referenced among scholarship on the subject of Heaven (so Smith 1968:289, 308-317; MacArthur 1996:273-279; Hill 2007:311-312; Alcorn 2004:497-502; Wright 2008:332; Daley 2010a:66, 98, 130-131, 180, 182; Streett 2013:275-296). The query is whether an examination of Revelation shows it cooperates with the historical hermeneutical claims purported in this chapter.

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<sup>70</sup> Marmorstein (2001:129, 132) writes, “There are several reasons why Ante-Nicene writers might appear inconsistent in their eschatology. First is the danger of elaborating at length on eschatological prophecy. Justin notes that when Christians spoke of a coming kingdom, the Roman emperors assumed ‘without inquiry’ that they meant a human kingdom and, therefore, wrongly believed the Christians to be politically subversive. Second, these writers often seem to want to avoid controversy over nonessentials. Justin, for instance, is careful to preface his comments on the millennial kingdom with the concession that there are many ‘who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians,’ and who do not believe in an earthly Millennium. Finally, there is a tendency among the Ante-Nicene fathers to choose ‘proof texts’ only from among those works already considered authoritative to the ones to whom they write. [Moreover], the books of the Bible themselves differ greatly in eschatological emphasis; sometimes emphasizing an earthly messianic kingdom, sometimes the transformed life of believers, and at others the believer’s hope of unity with God. Therefore it was not inconsistent for an Ante-Nicene writer to reflect a diversity of emphasis.”

## Chapter 3

### An Examination of Revelation

“Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev 22:7).

#### 3.1 Introduction

While an historical analysis of eschatological hermeneutics is helpful, it is necessary to examine the eschatological claims in the book of Revelation. This chapter will show why Revelation is considered the most essential source for a study on the doctrine of Heaven, while also determining whether the approach designated in the historical analysis is acceptable.

This chapter initiates the exegetical portion of this thesis by observing the context of Revelation, which is the first of three basic areas of discovery for an exegetical study (Black 2010:137).<sup>71</sup> “The questions of context are both historical and literary” (Black 2010:137). Thus, this chapter employs the literary analysis tool, which is helpful to determine the genre of Revelation, and the historical analysis tool, which is helpful to determine the hermeneutical approach. “Historical analysis deals with the situation facing the author and his original audience.

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<sup>71</sup> The three areas of an exegetical study include context, meaning, and significance. Black (2010:137) says these areas cover “above” (context), “inside” (meaning), and “under” (significance) the text. This specific chapter deals with what is “above” the text.

Literary analysis deals with the way in which the text fits in with its immediate surroundings” (Black 2010:137).<sup>72</sup>

### 3.2 The Warrant of Revelation

A review of scholarship reveals that bibliographies as well as the content of scholarly resources on the subject of Heaven present Revelation as a robustly cited and referenced book of the Bible (so Smith 1968:289, 308-317; Fiorenza 1998:12; Hill 2001:311-312; Daley 2010a:66, 98, 130-131, 180, 182; Alcorn 2004:497-502; MacArthur 1996:273-279; Streett 2013:275-296; Wright 2008:332; Middleton 2014:332; Beale and Kim 2014:210-211). This prompts a consideration of the book as a primary resource for investigating the subject of Heaven in Scripture.

#### 3.2.1 Bibliographic Warrant

The index to Charles Hill’s (2001:311-312) book, *Regnum Caelorum*—a book that traces patterns of millennial thought in early Christianity—shows that Hill cites the book of Revelation over one hundred and twenty times in his discussion of the Church Fathers, which is leagues above any other book of the Bible. Moreover, Hill employs every chapter of Revelation, save chapter ten. Brian Daley’s (2010a:66, 98, 130-131, 180, 182) book, *The Hope of the Early Church*, unpacks patristic eschatology and shows that many Church Fathers exhibited a special interest in the book of Revelation, particularly chapters twenty and twenty-one, which are the most explicit chapters on the subject of Heaven in Scripture. Wilbur Smith’s (1968:289, 308-317) Scripture Index to *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*, an addendum to the most “comprehensive bibliography on the subject of Heaven” during its time, follows suit, revealing Smith cites a

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<sup>72</sup> The major aim of this study is to exegetically mine Revelation for ouranological data. This involves determining Revelation’s genre and hermeneutical approach, which is an ongoing debate in scholarship. This thesis does not seek to settle the issue, but only to show that it’s chosen approach is not unreasonable. This will give the study a necessary framework by which to pursue its exegetical study.

passage from Revelation seventy-three times from every single chapter of the biblical book, save chapter six. According to his index, this is more than any other book of the Bible, and there is not a close second. The same is true for other scholarly works on Heaven, including Randy Alcorn's (2004:497-502) *Heaven*, in which he cites from the book of Revelation almost one hundred and fifty times, from nearly every chapter of the biblical book, save chapters nine and sixteen. This is far more than any other book of the Bible in both number and content. John MacArthur (1996:273-279), in *The Glory of Heaven*, imitates these scholars, quoting from Revelation almost one hundred different times. No other biblical book comes close. Moreover, half of MacArthur's Revelation citations come from chapters 21 and 22, suggesting a sharper focus on the doctrine of Heaven in these particular chapters. R. Alan Streett's (2013:275-296) *Heaven on Earth* also stresses Revelation 21 and 22 in its focus of Heaven on earth. "Heaven on Earth: The Ultimate Kingdom"—the sixteenth chapter of Streett's book—shows he cites from the book of Revelation multiple times on nearly every page. This is especially important since this is arguably the flagship chapter to Streett's book (2013:275). N.T. Wright's (2008:332) citations of Revelation in *Surprised By Hope* show the book is a formidable part of his study. The same is true of Middleton's (2014:332) *A New Heaven and a New Earth* and Beale and Kim's (2014:210-211) *God Dwells Among Us*, two other modern works on Heaven which cite Revelation well over one hundred times, from nearly every chapter of the book. The concentration of these citations shows Revelation is valuable, if not necessary to comprehending a thorough understanding of the doctrine of Heaven.

While scholarly citations and references are indicative of Revelation's importance to biblically understanding the doctrine of Heaven, it is essential to consider what scholarship says about the book itself. This helps to gauge whether or not it is, among all the canonical books, the best possible source for unpacking the theology of Heaven.

### 3.2.2 Contextual Warrant

John Walvoord (1989a:7, 101-121, 268-270), a scholar who has long been recognized as an authority on systematic theology and eschatology, considers the book of Revelation “fundamental to Christian theology.” Walvoord (1989a:7) argues that Revelation serves as a conclusion to all previous biblical revelation and that it reflects the interpretation of the rest of the Bible. Steve Gregg (2013:20) agrees, stressing, “there is little question that [Revelation] contains recycled materials previously employed in other canonical books. The book has been called a ‘rebirth of images,’ since it takes imagery familiar from hundreds of [previous] passages.” Halley (2000:898) asserts Revelation is unique among other books, because it offers an explanation of both OT prophecies and Jesus’ NT eschatological claims, something no other book does at the same level. As the last book of the Bible, Revelation’s position in the canon makes it one of the most important books in Scripture; several biblical themes find their fulfillment in it.

Several scholars directly assert Revelation is inimitably connected to the subject of Heaven. Smith (1968:202) for example writes,

... we may rightly say that “Heaven” occurs more frequently in the book of Revelation than in any successive twenty-two chapters in the Word of God—fifty-four times to be exact. In Matthew’s gospel, the many references to Heaven which occur in the teachings of our Lord principally relate to the fact that God is the God of Heaven, and that the angels are identified with Heaven, whereas in the book of Revelation, not only is God the God of Heaven but there is tremendous activity on the part of Heavenly beings. In the Gospels, the references to Heaven are without qualifying or descriptive clauses, whereas in the book of Revelation, John sets down some of the things that he actually saw when taken into Heaven in his spirit.

Köstenberger (2014a:139) offers a similar analysis:

John is responsible for providing the Church with both the clearest statements of realized eschatology and the richest descriptions of the future state of the people of God in the entire Bible ... the book of Revelation elaborates in detail on the sublime beauty and grandeur of God's new creation in which believers will one day live.

Smalley (2005:6) undergirds these scholars' opinion, espousing that Revelation particularly takes seriously God's activity in Heaven.

It appears Revelation is a theologically fundamental book—a nerve center, if you will—for the doctrine of Heaven in Scripture. This is an assertion buttressed by: (1) the robust citations and references of the book in works centered on the subject (so Smith 1968:289, 308-317; MacArthur 1996:273-279; Hill 2001:311-312; Alcorn 2004:497-502; Wright 2008:332; Daley 2010a:66, 98, 130-131, 180, 182; Streett 2013:275-296; Middleton 2014:332; Beale and Kim 2014:210-211); (2) the canonicity and doctrine closing nature of the book itself (so Walvoord 1989a:7, 101-121, 268-270; Halley 2000:898; Gregg 2013:20); and (3) the inimitable relationship between the book and the doctrine (so Smith 1968:202; Smalley 2005:6; Köstenberger 2014a:139).

### **3.3 Examination of Revelation**

At this juncture, it is important to examine Revelation in order to determine how it ought to be approached, and whether or not this approach complies with the results of the historical hermeneutical survey detailed in Chapter Two.

#### **3.3.1 The Genre of Revelation (Literary Analysis)**

Blomberg (2006:40) observes literary genre analysis is relatively new,<sup>73</sup> but maintains it is necessary for NT study, which is an opinion extended by several scholars (so Poythress 1993:41; Hamilton 2012:20). Hamilton (2012:20) asserts that understanding a piece of writing requires an understanding of its genre, and Poythress (1993:41) notes that one's decision about the literary genre is a crucial factor in the proper interpretation of at least some portions of the book.<sup>74</sup> Thomas (1992:23) maintains the genre's effect on hermeneutics, particularly in interpreting Revelation, justifies its investigation.

This section's goal, therefore, is to appraise Revelation's genre in order to effectively determine its most reasonable hermeneutical approach (and also gauge whether the book warrants the historical approach elected and assessed in Chapter Two).

Scholars suggest there are essentially three possible genres<sup>75</sup> in which Revelation might fit, including: (1) epistle; (2) prophecy; and (3) apocalypse (so Thomas 1992:23-43; Michaels 1992:21-34; Mounce 1997:24-30; Aune 2014:lxxi-lxxxii; Osborne 2002:12-23; Hiebert 2003:234-235; Patterson 2012:24-25; Gregg 2013:9-12). Each approach is discussed in the following subsections, followed by a statement of the approach this thesis embraces.

### **3.3.1.1 Revelation as an Epistle**

Gregg (2013:9) writes, "It should be observed that Revelation, like most of the books of the NT, is written in the form of an epistle." Gregg (2013:9) cites the opening and closing of the book—as well as an intended audience—as strong indications of the book's epistolary nature, an observation with which several

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<sup>73</sup> Blomberg (2006:40) cites a twentieth century inception of the hermeneutical utensil.

<sup>74</sup> Namely Revelation 20:1-6.

<sup>75</sup> Vorster (1988:111) offers a list of several nuanced categories of these three possibilities, but this thesis considers only the three most basic categories as described by scholars like Thomas (1992:23-43), Michaels (1992:21-34), Gregg (2013:9-12), Mounce (1997:24-30), Aune (2014:lxxi-lxxxii), Osborne (2002:12-23), Hiebert (2003:234-235), and Patterson (2012:24-25). Vorster himself says it is "unnecessary to explore in detail all the different views."

scholars agree (so Collins 2001:5; Koester 2001:47; Hiebert 2003:235; Duvall 2014:5). However, most note Revelation differs from all other NT epistles, and that the differences present unusual challenges with reference to the interpretation of the book (so Hiebert 2003:235; Smalley 2005:6; Gregg 2013:9). Therefore, while Revelation is indeed a letter, it does not fit the typical epistolary genre.<sup>76</sup> Hiebert (2003:235) accentuates this in espousing that, in writing Revelation, John employed a unique combination that included more than epistolary elements, and that the epistolary elements he did employ afforded John the medium through which to transmit the book. Smalley (2005:6) offers an apt summary in declaring that while Revelation certainly has epistolary elements, it is not simply “just a letter.” Aune (1997:lxii-lxxiii) expands upon this thought:

Since almost any ancient literary genre could be bracketed with the opening and/or closing formulaic features of the letter form, the crucial issue is whether the epistolary features of Revelation constitute merely a superficial or secondary formal feature essentially external to the body of Revelation ... The possibility should not be overlooked that Revelation might exhibit other, more substantive, generic features of the letter genre that have penetrated more deeply into the body of Revelation.

Patterson (2012:25) also acknowledges the epistolary nature of Revelation, however, he avows it coexists with both prophetic and apocalyptic elements, thereby modifying the genre from being solely epistolary in nature: “In typical epistolary form, the author identifies himself ... but in addition ... the book purports to be a circular letter providing not only information about the seven churches on the circuit but also preparing the recipients of those historic congregations for the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption.”

This thesis concurs that while Revelation is written in the form of an epistle, it cannot be solely generically categorized as such. Doing so would ignore the

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<sup>76</sup> Osborne (2002:12) contends the epistolary nature of Revelation is “helpful, but least important.”

deeper elements of the epistle itself, thereby setting a study on the doctrine of Heaven via Revelation critically off-course (Thomas 1992:23).

### **3.3.1.2 Revelation as an Apocalypse**

Grenz and others (1999:12-13) maintain the apocalyptic genre originally developed during the intertestamental era (ca. 400 B.C. to A.D. 100) via ancient Jewish authors, who were conscious that true prophetic revelation, namely that of the OT prophets, had ceased. These ancient writers sought to strengthen and encourage the suffering people of God in their day with contemporary literature from OT prophets. This literature employed heavy use of visions, dreams, and symbols as instruments which revealed new insights. The writers practiced pseudepigrapha, in which the works pretended to emanate from characters of the Bible who offered new predictions for the future (Walvoord 1989a:23-24). The actual authors, however, often lived long after the character to whom the work was ascribed. Apocalyptic genre can also be described as “God’s communication to a well-known person through visual images with the message that he will intervene in the course of history,” which is how most scholars who advocate for any element of an apocalyptic genre to Revelation define it (Duvall 2014:6).

While some agree Revelation undoubtedly includes apocalyptic ingredients, many assert the book does not entirely fit the ancient definition of apocalyptic genre (so Thomas 1992:23-43; Michaels 1992:21-34; Beale 1999:37-43; Keener 2000:31-33; Hiebert 2003:234-235 Smalley 2005:7; Cory 2006:10; Fee 2011:xiii; Patterson 2012:24-25; Gregg 2013:9-12). Michaels (1992:26), for example, suggests the definition of apocalyptic literature has been enlarged since its intertestamental origin, and Walvoord (1989a:24) notes apocalyptic portions of the scriptures are in “sharp contrast” to the former pseudepigrapha, namely that,

in Scripture, the author and message are both legitimate.<sup>77</sup> Cory (2006:10) says biblical scholars have not conclusively answered the question about the origins of the apocalyptic genre. What's more, scholars commonly contend no consensus exists as to a precise definition of apocalyptic genre, so discussions attempting to classify it might be, as Thomas (1992:23-24) suggests, "vague."<sup>78</sup> Vorster (1988:112) acknowledges the uniqueness of John's first line, stating this is the first time in the history of literature that a revelatory message came to be known as an "apocalypse," but subsequently purports there is complexity in defining it as a formidable genre.<sup>79</sup> John's apocalypse differs radically from other apocalypses (Fee 2011:xiii).

For these reasons, it is difficult to find scholarship which argues for Revelation as apocalyptic in genre, without offering a clear definition of how they understand "apocalyptic."<sup>80</sup> While several scholars may embrace Revelation as generically apocalyptic, they do so with definitions which are not entirely similar to one another, rendering the genre somewhat ambiguous (Boxall 2009:2).

### 3.3.1.3 Revelation as Prophecy

The book of Revelation describes itself as prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 18, 19),<sup>81</sup> leading some to suggest its genre is best understood as such. While Koester (2001:44) does not endorse a solely prophetic genre, he is fascinated with Revelation's identification of itself as prophecy (Rev 1:3), an allure also shared by Duvall (2014:5) and Fee (2011:xii). "Its character as a book of prophecy is reinforced

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<sup>77</sup> Michaels (1992:27) advances this in writing, "Pseudepigrapha (false writings) [is] a term reflecting the Christian Church's negative judgment on their legitimacy and worth. A collection of such apocalypses would not include Revelation. John is not identifiable as a great man of the Jewish past, [so] no certain knowledge exists apart from the works that bear his name."

<sup>78</sup> Thomas (1992:24) notes Aune launches an effort to solve the problem by formulating a proposed definition from the book itself, but suggests his effort prejudices the case in favor of categorizing Revelation in a certain way by assuming an answer to the question under investigation and not allowing for the book's uniqueness.

<sup>79</sup> Vorster (1988:112) acknowledges the "serious attempt" of the Society of Biblical Scholarship group directed by Professor JJ Collins in the 1980's as providing a "very long and intensive debate and history of research" over this issue, but seems to remain comfortable suggesting that the issue still remains complicated.

<sup>80</sup> Boxall (2009:2) states apocalypse is insufficient in itself for understanding Revelation, and that other literary features must also be borne in mind.

<sup>81</sup> Trafton (2005:15) stresses the importance of Revelation's self-designation as "prophecy," noting how any proper reading of the book must take this into account.

indirectly by the similarities between its introduction and the introductions which appear on some of the prophetic books in the OT (Jer 1:1-2; Ez 1:1-3; Amos 1:1)” (Koester 2001:44). Smalley (2005:7-8) undergirds this approach, arguing that John stands in the line of OT prophets by echoing the words of Hebrew prophecy. For Smalley (2005:8), John is not unlike Jeremiah in his vocation and Ezekiel in his character. “Like many prophets in ancient Israel, John draws freely on earlier biblical traditions” (Wright 2011:4). Cory (2006:9) maintains it is reasonable to assume John understands his prophecy to function in the same way as the prophets before him.

Thomas (1992:25-28) is an example of a scholar who solely embraces a prophetic genre. With reference to passages like Romans 12:6, 1 Timothy 1:18, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Ephesians 4:11, and 1 Corinthians 14:31, Thomas (1992:25-28) upholds that prophecy is a gift administered by the Holy Spirit, and that Revelation is marked by the biblically-founded characteristics of this gift. These characteristics include: (1) immediate divine inspiration of the spokesperson; (2) an offering of exhortation and encouragement; (3) an incorporation of the prediction of the future; (4) an entailing of a degree of authority; (5) the ability to discern the validity of other prophecies; (6) the accompaniment of other symbolic acts; (7) itinerant prophets; (8) literature marked by a variety of literary forms; (9) the prophet’s being in a special state of mind; and (10) that the prophetic ability is in some cases provisional. It is for these reasons Thomas (1992:23-28) embraces the prophetic genre: “Revelation fulfills the qualifications of NT prophecy [so] the best overall characterization of the literary style of Revelation is to call it prophetic.”

It is difficult to find scholars who entirely rebuff Revelation’s prophetic elements. However, this does not also mean said scholars solely embrace the prophetic genre. This is in large part due to patent epistolary and apocalyptic elements in Revelation. Even Thomas (1992:23-28), who contends for a solely prophetic nature, recognizes Revelation features both epistolary and apocalyptic elements.

Bauckham (1993:1) and Smalley (2005:6) encapsulate the tension well in noting how Revelation, in terms of its literary genre, is an anomaly which stands on its own.

### 3.3.2 Statement of Genre

Many scholars take a combination approach which comprises epistolary, apocalyptic, and prophetic elements (Osborne 2002:12). Beale (1999:38) for example avows that Revelation “combines an epistolary form together with the apocalyptic-prophetic style.”<sup>82</sup> Pate (1998:135) upholds the book is an apocalypse (vv. 1-3) and a letter (vv. 4-8), written by a prophet (v. 3). Koester (2001:42-52) offers substantial exposition on each genre, inferring each element coalesces into an amalgamated genre, and Hamilton (2012:20) calls Revelation 1:1-8 “the apocalyptic prophecy’s epistolary opening.”

In the combination approach, the epistolary element is secondary to the apocalyptic or prophetic elements, serving more as the skeleton on which the flesh of the other respective genres bond. Thomas (1992:23-25) speaks for many in noting how the epistolary element is clearly present in Revelation, but is careful to note how “much of the book is clearly of another character that this hardly suffices as an overall category.” Fiorenza (1998:35), Bauckham (1998:1), Witherington (2003:32), and Boxall (2009:1) note how attempts to define the genre of Revelation are frustrated by its hybrid nature. Akin (2016:3) employs Winston Churchill’s description of Russia in the 1930s to describe Revelation’s genre: “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.”

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<sup>82</sup> Beale (1999:181) also suggests that, although the book opens with the Greek word *apocalypse*, the likelihood that it is not a technical term for the apocalyptic genre is evident from recognition of it as part of an allusion to Daniel 2, since the whole of Revelation 1:1 is patterned after the broad structure of Daniel 2:28-30, 45-47, where the verb “reveal” appears five times, the phrase “what must come to pass” appears three times, and “signify” appears twice.

Therefore, many wrestle with how to understand the terms “apocalyptic” and “prophecy” (Osborne 2002:13).<sup>83</sup> “The notion of genre is complex because texts often have some but not all of the same features, and literary forms change over time” (Koester 2014:104). One scholar may embrace the apocalyptic genre for certain reasons, while another scholar, for similar reasons, may embrace the prophetic genre. Osborne (2002:13) acquiesces it is impossible to distinguish between prophecy and apocalyptic.

In light of such complexity, it would be precarious for this thesis to merely state an endorsement of either a prophetic or apocalyptic genre—or even a combination approach for that matter—without offering at least a general definition of its chosen approach. This thesis recognizes Revelation as an epistle which includes apocalyptic elements, but stresses the prophetic character of the book for the following reasons: (1) the book calls itself a prophecy; (2) it aligns with Scripture’s description of prophecy; and (3) a combination approach might allow for hermeneutical confusion, based on the various definitions of each generic possibility (Thomas 1992:25, 35).

Koester (2001:44) observes how the term “prophecy” means very different things to readers, noting how the view of prophecy which emerges from Revelation has some affinities with other views, and doesn’t necessarily fit neatly into any specific category. It is therefore important to detail what this thesis means by “prophecy.”

This thesis advances Thomas’ aforementioned description of “prophecy” in which he details Scripture’s definition of it. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:319-359) detail a substantive appraisal of biblical prophecy in their book *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, in which they offer a definition of the genre which is not unlike Thomas’ definition. Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:319-359) concur

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<sup>83</sup> Bauckham (1993:1) opens his commentary on Revelation by noting how readers of the NT struggle with how to read Revelation because of its less than clear genre.

there is a unique complexity in analyzing prophecy, but stress how apocalyptic data is primarily used to support prophetic genre.

The prophetic genre stresses the book's eschatological nature, which is not necessarily at the heart of what apocalyptic literature is all about (Witherington 2003:33). If there is a difference between apocalyptic and prophetic literature,<sup>84</sup> it is that a purely apocalyptic piece does not really focus on the final form the future will take, whereas a prophetic piece does (Witherington 2003:33). The book of Revelation, however, seems to end with the final form the future will take (Rev 21-22), a claim researched further in the upcoming section on hermeneutical approaches. This is not to diminish the apocalyptic tones included in Revelation, which are visions and metaphors and images, only to state they help support the overall prophetic tone of the book (so Peterson 1988:20; Witherington 2003:34; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011:319-359). Osborne (2002:13) summarizes the relationship between the two in noting how apocalyptic data is an appendage of prophetic genre. Peterson (1991:20) extends this with an apt summarization of the relationship between the two genres in describing how Revelation describes itself as a prophecy and an apocalypse, but that the apocalyptic description is itself a prophecy. This thesis concludes Revelation is a prophecy about the future, written in the form of an epistle with apocalyptic elements.

Like Thomas (1992:23-24), the aim of this thesis is not to advance proposed distinctions in definitions of generic possibilities<sup>85</sup>—although offering a clear definition of this thesis' chosen genre is certainly helpful—but, ultimately, to comment on the literary result of its generic conclusions, which in this case renders a literal hermeneutic; that Revelation is primarily prophetic means its content is to be taken primarily literally. This does not deny the book includes

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<sup>84</sup> Peterson (1991:20) maintains "apocalypse" and "prophecy" are essentially parallel words, with a minor nuance of difference.

<sup>85</sup> This is an ongoing conversation which occurs in nearly every commentary on Revelation, and will always be a point of contention in theological scholarship. The best this thesis can do is acknowledge the tension and assert a reasonable genre which best fits the area of study. In general, this thesis looks at the historical survey, the genre, and hermeneutical approach as three sides to a triangle which rely on one another to form a framework by which to best understand Revelation.

substantial non-literal data, only that the non-literal data is used to advance the predominantly literal message. “The images and symbols represent real truths and real things” (Akin 2016:5).<sup>86</sup> As an example, Revelation 16:13 details how “three unclean spirits like frogs” come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The prophetic genre doesn’t entail these must be literal frogs, and understands they can be symbols for something else. The following verse in fact states they are symbols for the “spirits of demons” (Rev 16:14). Therefore the “frog” is a symbol for the literal “demon.”<sup>87</sup>

This helps to show a literal approach to Revelation has equitable historical and exegetical warrant. This will now be tested against the major hermeneutical approaches scholars take to the book. Overall, the historical survey (Chapter Two), genre (literary analysis), and hermeneutical approach (historical analysis) work like three sides to a triangle which function together to help form a rational framework by which to comprehend Revelation.

### **3.3.2 Hermeneutically Approaching Revelation (Historical Analysis)**

Hiebert (2003:263) notes the hermeneutical system adopted makes a great difference as to what a respective book of the bible is understood to teach. Weber (2010:365-366) notes how the book’s inclusion of both apocalyptic and prophetic elements complicates how it is to be interpreted: “Early Christians struggled to make sense of it, as can be seen in the early church’s difficulty in recognizing the book’s canonical status.”<sup>88</sup> This concurs with the earlier analysis of Revelation’s genre, which also has a complicated history, and shows why several methods of interpreting Revelation have emerged over the years.

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<sup>86</sup> Akin (2016:5) also warns “we err if we interpret them in an overly literal sense. Symbols are meant to be symbolic.” This is included to give full context to Akin’s statement, and also to express this thesis’ desire not to be overly literal.

<sup>87</sup> This is not to ignore other verses in Revelation that do not offer a literal meaning to the symbols, only to offer an example of how this thesis generally understands its elected genre.

<sup>88</sup> Longman and Garland (2006:584) offer a brief, but similar appraisal.

Scholars identify four main options to hermeneutically approaching Revelation. These include: (1) the allegorical approach (also non-literal, idealist, spiritual, or timeless-symbolic); (2) the preterist approach (also contemporary-historical); (3) the historicist approach (also continuous historical); and (4) the futuristic approach (so Walvoord 1989a:16-21; Thomas 1992:29-39; Mounce 1997:24-30; Gentry, Hamstra, Pate, and Thomas 1998:17; Beale 1999:44-49; Keener 2000:27-28; Osborne 2002:18-22; Hiebert 2003:263-266; Smalley 2005:15-16; Longman and Garland 2006:584-586; Blount 2013:8-14; Gregg 2013:9-49; Duvall 2014:6; Koester 2014:27-101).

The four major approaches are detailed in the following paragraphs and evaluated in order to determine which best fits the advocated genre.

### **3.3.2.1 The Allegorical Approach**

An allegorical approach modulates<sup>89</sup> a historical or future meaning to Revelation, and suggests the book asserts timeless principles by which one can live (Hamstra 1998:129). The view holds it is not the purpose of Revelation to predict the future or to foretell precise coming events, but rather to set forth fundamental spiritual principles which govern the experiences of the Church during the entire period of its earthly pilgrimage (Hiebert 2003:264). Longman and Garland (2006:586) note it is sometimes called the spiritualist view because it “spiritualizes” everything in the book.

Several scholars maintain this approach originated in the Alexandrian School, particularly from Clement and Origen, who taught the Bible’s correct interpretation lay in the spiritual sense, more than in a literal sense (so Grenz and others 1999:8; Smalley 2005:15; Longman and Garland 2006:586; Patterson 2012:28; Gregg 2013:30-31). Clement and Origen especially applied this to the

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<sup>89</sup> Longman and Garland (2006:586) use stronger language, stating the view “is marked by its refusal to identify any of the images with specific future events, whether in the history of the church or with regard to the end of all things.”

book of Revelation, who considered it “one great allegory” (so Mounce 1997:25; Patterson 2012:28). Allegory became the normative approach for the interpretation of Revelation for the thousand years which followed (Mounce 1997:25). Gregg (2013:30) offers the example of Tyconius, a successive Church Father to Clement and Origen, who applied the Millennium to the present interval between the first and second advents of Christ. Tyconius’ allegorical approach to Revelation was taken over by later Church Fathers like Jerome and Augustine, allowing it to become the normative approach for the next eight centuries (so Patterson 2012:28; Gregg 2013:30).<sup>90</sup>

Hiebert (2003:264) observes the allegorical view rightly recognizes the cosmic character of the conflict described in Revelation, noting how it sees “the hand of God in human history and accepts that God is moving toward the triumph of his cause in the world. Proponents of this view include Kiddle (1940), Rissi (1966), Minear (1968), and Hamstra (1998).

### **3.3.2.2 The Preterist Approach**

Adherents of the preterist approach hold that Revelation is a record of the conflicts of the early Christians with Judaism and paganism. “The book was in effect written to comfort Christians who suffered persecution from both the imperial cult and Judaism” (Gentry and others 1998:17). “Revelation describes what was happening in the time of the author” (Longman and Garland 2006:585). Thus, the approach understands Revelation from the standpoint of an ancient historical setting (Mounce 1997:26-27).

History shows preterism has pre-Alexandrian roots, and that the approach was driven from the field when the school became prominent (Mounce 1997:27). Mounce (1997:27) states it remained lost to use until scholars revived it in the

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<sup>90</sup> Gregg (2013:30) further contends that Augustine, in his *City of God*, interpreted Revelation 20 in the same manner as Tyconius, and that the method was imitated in the later commentaries of Primasius (ca. 550), Alcuin (ca. 735-800), Rabanus Maurus (ca. 775-836), and Walafrid Strabo (ca. 807-849).

seventeenth century. Koester (2014:57) says the approach was developed by the Jesuit Luis de Alcazar (d. 1613): “His approach is called ‘preterist,’ from the Latin *praetereo*, or ‘pass by,’ because it emphasizes that nearly all of Revelation’s prophecies were fulfilled in the distant past.”

With the revival of the approach came two basic views, which include: (1) the view that the book is written as a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; and (2) the view that the book is a prophecy of the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476 (so Mounce 1997:27; Gentry and others 1998:17; Beale 1999:44-45; Osborne 2002:19; Longman and Garland 2006:585; Koester 2014:57-58).

The first view requires a pre- A.D. 70 date to Revelation (Beale 1999:44), and understands it as a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (Osborne 2002:19-20). The beast is Rome, the kings from the east are the Roman generals who brought the Roman army from the eastern boundary of the empire to destroy Jerusalem, and Armageddon is the siege of Jerusalem itself (Osborne 2002:20). Kraybill (2003:32-35) takes the white horse in 6:1-2 as Rome and the red horse of 6:3-4 as the Jewish War of A.D. 66-70.

The second view understands the book as written about Roman oppression and the fall of the Roman Empire. Osborne (2002:19) writes of this view,

Due to the development of the imperial cult, pressure to conform and the resultant persecution have become serious threats to the Church. The beast thus would be the Roman Empire, and the seals, trumpets, and bowls are contemporary judgments God is pouring (or soon will pour) upon Rome itself. Thus, the book describes the conflict between Church and state, between faithfulness to God and compromise with the pagan world.

One merit of the preterist view is that it understands and interprets the plight of the early Church in terms of the crisis that had developed at that particular time: “By not relegating the book to some future period, the encouragements to the Church as well as the warnings ... are taken with immediate seriousness” (Mounce 1997:27). Proponents of the preterist view include Swete (1906), Charles (1920), Barclay (1959), Glasson (1965), Ford (1975), Bauckham (1993), and Aune (2014).

### 3.3.2.3 The Historicist Approach

The historicist approach holds that God revealed the entire Church age in advance through the symbolic visions of Revelation (Gregg 2013:34). In this view, “Revelation offers a prophetic outline of Church history from the first century until the future coming of Christ” (Duvall 2014:6). The historicist interprets Revelation as a forecast of the course of history leading up to his own time (so Mounce 1997:27; Gentry and others 1998:17; Hiebert 2003:264; Longman and Garland 2006:585).

The historicist view finds its roots in Joachim of Fiore<sup>91</sup> (ca. A.D. 1135-1202), a twelfth-century Roman Catholic scholar who is largely responsible for the first forms of postmillennialism<sup>92</sup> (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Osborne 2002:18; Longman and Garland 2006:585). Historicism later gained considerable stature during the Protestant Reformation because of its identification of the papacy with the beasts of Revelation 13 (Gentry and others 1998:17). The approach remained popular throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Keener 2000:27) and has had “many champions who have sought to work out [its] interpretation in the light of Church history” (Hiebert 2003:265). These include Henry Alford, John Wycliffe, John Knox, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John

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<sup>91</sup> Sometimes also listed as “Floris.”

<sup>92</sup> Longman and Garland (2006:585) note Joachim was a monastic who claimed to have received on Easter night a special vision which revealed to him God’s plan for the ages, subsequently assigning a day/year value to the 1,260 days of the Apocalypse. “In this scheme, the book was a prophecy of the events of Western history from the times of the apostles until Joachim’s own time.”

Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and C.H. Spurgeon (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Longman and Garland 2006:585; Gregg 2013:34).

#### **3.3.2.4 The Futuristic Approach**

“Adherents to the futurist view generally hold that, beginning with chapter 4, the book sets forth end-time events which will be fulfilled in the period immediately preceding and culminating in the return of Christ and the establishment of his millennial kingdom” (Hiebert 2003:266). The view concerns what will happen at the end of history, mainly just before the second coming (Duvall 2014:6). Thus, the view maintains that most of Revelation’s prophecies are yet to be fulfilled.

The futurist believes Revelation 4-22 primarily refers to events which will take place at the end of history and usher in the eschaton (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Osborne 2002:20; Longman and Garland 2006:585; Patterson 2012:29). There are generally two approaches to this view: (1) Dispensationalism and (2) Classical Premillennialism (so Beale 1999:46-47; Osborne 2002:20-21).

Osborne (2002:21) details the dispensational view in writing, “Dispensationalists believe that God has brought about his plan of salvation in a series of dispensations or stages centering on his election of Israel to be his covenant people.” Under this system of interpretation, “the Church age is a parenthesis in this plan, as God turned to the Gentiles until the Jewish people find national revival” (Osborne 2002:21).

A majority of scholars (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Mounce 1997:28; Osborne 2002:21; Hiebert 2003:266-268; Longman and Garland 2006:585; Patterson 2009:29-30; Gregg 2013:40) describe the dispensational hermeneutic as one which takes Revelation 4-19 as relating to the period prior to the second coming of Christ. This includes a pretribulational rapture of the Church, which inaugurates a seven-year tribulation period in the middle of which the Antichrist

will make himself known (Rev 13). This Antichrist will instigate the Great Tribulation of the 144,000 and others among Israel who become Christians. At the end of that period will come the *parousia* as Christ returns in judgment, followed by a literal Millennium (Rev 20:1-10), great white throne judgment (Rev 20:11-15), and the beginning of eternity in Heavenly bliss (Rev 21:1-22:5) (so Walvoord 1989a:20-21; Beale 1999:46-47; Osborne 2002:21). Scholars who embrace a dispensational approach include Tenney (1957), Smith (1961), Walvoord (1989), and Thomas (1992).

The second futuristic view, Classical Premillennialism,<sup>93</sup> is similar to Dispensationalism, but does not hold to dispensations (Osborne 2002:21). Moreover, instead of a separated pretribulational rapture and second coming, Classical Premillennialism holds there is only one *parousia* event which takes place after the tribulation, and that the whole Church, not just Israel, passes through the tribulation period (so Beale 1999:47; Osborne 2002:21). Classical Premillennialism is noted as being less hermeneutically literal than Dispensationalism. Scholars who embrace a classical view include Beckwith (1922), Bruce (1969), Beasley-Murray (1978, 1999), Ladd (1972, 2003), Mounce (1997), and Morris (1999).<sup>94</sup>

### 3.3.2.5 The Eclectic View

Some scholars contend for a fifth approach to Revelation, often termed an “eclectic” view.<sup>95</sup> This view prefers a mixture of at least three of the four approaches (the approach typically excludes the historicist approach), and many commentators “will opt for [it], usually combining some futurist, preterist, and idealist elements” (Keener 2000:29).<sup>96</sup> Osborne (2002:29) warns all of the

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<sup>93</sup> Beale (1999:47) calls this view “modified futurism.”

<sup>94</sup> Two scholars who did not identify as Dispensational or Classical, but were still futuristic include Lilje (1955) and Eller (1974).

<sup>95</sup> Longman and Garland (2006:587) note there are variations of this, including “preterist-symbolical,” “preterist-futurist,” and “futurist-symbolical” approaches.

<sup>96</sup> Osborne (2002:21) notes that, “While the historical approach has very limited (if any) value, the other three can be profitably combined to capture how John probably intended his book to be understood.”

approaches can be dangerous when taken to the extreme, and the solution is to allow the preterist, idealist, and futurist methods to coalesce in such a way that the strengths are maximized and the weaknesses minimized. Longman and Garland (2006:587) state the approach is motivated by the ambition to combine desirable features of different schemes. Scholars who embrace an eclectic approach include Caird (1966), Chevalier (1997), Barr (1998), Beale (1999), Prigent (2001), Osborne (2002), and Resseguie (2009). Each scholar offers a variation of an eclectic approach that is not necessarily like another scholar's eclectic approach.

### **3.3.3 Statement of Approach**

While several other views have reasonable warrant, this thesis embraces the futuristic approach for reasons detailed in the following sections, which analyze each approach's origin and claims.

#### **3.3.3.1 Analysis of the Allegorical Approach**

One major criticism of the allegorical approach is that Revelation has a predictive end in setting forth the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, which is inconsistent with the approach's employment of its own method of interpretation. In essence, the allegorical approach has to deny itself to answer for the book's major eschatological claims. Beale (1999:44-49) and Smalley (2005:15-16) respond to this criticism in noting how the allegorical portrayal must involve a final consummation in judgment and salvation:<sup>97</sup> "In the Apocalypse, salvation history is seen to be under the sovereignty of God and the risen Lamb, who guide the events 'until they finally issue in the last judgment and the definitive establishment of God's kingdom.'" Hamstra (1998:127) offers a similar approach, suggesting Revelation 20-21 completes Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24-25. Hamstra (1998:127-128) admits this makes his view "not purely idealistic," and

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<sup>97</sup> This is why both call their chosen approach "modified idealism."

that “some idealists are sure to criticize this exception, preferring a thematic interpretation that excludes any futurist prophetic conclusions.” While this acquiesces the criticism, the view as a whole is still undermined in that scholars who embrace the approach agree that many of Revelation’s major eschatological declarations are literal, not allegorical.<sup>98</sup> Hendricksen (1962), Caird (1984), Hughes (1990), Sweet (1990), Wilcock (1991), and Knight (1999) offer similar, modified approaches, although no modified approach is purely analogous to the next.

Another concern of an allegorical approach questions the integrity of its motivation. Some contend the allegorical approach was motivated more by antichiliasm than exegesis (so Mounce 1997:25; Patterson 2012:28; Gregg 2013:30). Mounce (1997:25), for example, purports the Alexandrian School developed the spiritualized approach to Revelation for a triad of reasons, including: (1) the influence of Greek thought; (2) that centuries had passed without the establishment of the awaited kingdom; and (3) as a reaction to the excessive chiliasm of the Montanist movement. Walvoord (1989a:16) alleges the Alexandrian Church Fathers “understood in a nonliteral sense much of what other expositors interpreted literally,” and that they “were motivated by their antichilastic premises which led them to take in other than a literal sense anything which would teach a millennial reign of Christ on earth.” Jerome and Augustine<sup>99</sup> imitated Clement and Origen’s antichilastic manner (Mounce 1997:25), and “were responsible for turning the early Church from its previous chiliastic position” (Walvoord 1989a:16). Longman and Garland (2006:586) supply another nuance of this criticism in noting how, as a system of interpretation, it is more recent than the other three schools, inferring it is not the approach embraced by the early church.

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<sup>98</sup> Moreover, if this is the general approach to Revelation—that the allegorical data helps to uplift the literal data—this is no different from the general approach for which this thesis argues.

<sup>99</sup> Walvoord (1989a:17) notes there is a moderate form of allegorical interpretation that follows Augustine, which has achieved respectability and regards Revelation as presenting in a symbolic way the total conflict between Christianity and evil or, as Augustine put it, the City of God versus the City of Satan.

While Revelation undeniably includes allegory, since the approach: (a) dilutes its prophetic description (because a pure allegorical approach must spiritualize Revelation's prophetic claims);<sup>100</sup> (b) has a controvertible origin; (c) was developed and embraced years after the book was written; and (d) has to de-allegorize major portions of the book (thereby undermining itself), this thesis does not embrace it as the major hermeneutical approach to Revelation. Revelation does, in line with the allegorical approach, reflect the great timeless realities of the battle between God and Satan, and it undoubtedly sees history as being ultimately in the hand of the Creator, but it also depicts the literal consummation of this battle and the triumph of Christ in history through his coming in glory (Longman and Garland 2006:586). While the book certainly includes allegorical data, approaching the book predominately as an allegory attenuates many of the book's literal claims concerning the consummation of history.<sup>101</sup>

### 3.3.3.2 Analysis of the Preterist Approach

Mounce (1997:27) argues how one major problem with the preterist position is that the decisive victory portrayed in the latter chapters of Revelation was never achieved:

It is difficult to believe that John envisioned anything less than the complete overthrow of Satan, the final destruction of evil, and the eternal reign of God. If this is not to be, then either the seer was essentially wrong

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<sup>100</sup> Hamstra (1998:128-129) says the allegorical approach does not treat the book of Revelation as prophecy, even though it acknowledges the book contains some predictions of particular events, such as the second coming of Christ. The view also stresses Revelation as apocalyptic, while granting there are discrepancies between Revelation and typical first-century apocalyptic literature, such as pseudonymity. This has been discussed in the previous section on genre. Generally, if Revelation is taken as apocalyptic, then it follows that it will be approached allegorically, and if Revelation is taken as prophetic, it follows that it will be approached futuristically.

<sup>101</sup> This is not unlike this thesis' statement concerning the relationship between apocalyptic and prophetic data, which is that the apocalyptic data is used to support and stress the prophetic data. In this thesis' chosen approach, allegorical data is used to support and stress the futuristic data.

in the major thrust of his message or his work was so hopelessly ambiguous that its first recipients were all led astray.<sup>102</sup>

Osborne (2002:20) shares a similar opinion, arguing the view is less viable because it involves an error of prophecy since final judgment and the end of the world did not come. Thomas (1992:30) observes that to justify the historical setting as the limiting factor, one must see the words about Christ's second coming as fulfilled, even though he did not appear on any occasion: "This does injustice to the prophetic nature of the work, which requires a second personal appearance of Christ on earth in fulfillment of Revelation 19:11-16."

Some argue the preterist approach generates a literary curiosity with little prophetic meaning, because it only faintly reflects actual events and destroys any future significance, which is a denial of the book's own claims (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Thomas 1992:30). Hiebert (2003:263) observes this curiosity in writing, "If [the preterists] are justified ... it is difficult to see why the Church in subsequent centuries has continued to regard it as prophetic. Christ's eschatological return is the center and goal of the book, not the events of John's own day, and not until Christ returns will its supreme meaning be fulfilled."

The general response to these claims is that Revelation is not prophetic, but apocalyptic, and therefore particularly has to do with the past. This is to say the genre must determine the hermeneutical approach, or the literary conclusions dictate the historical conclusions. Therefore, proponents endeavor to verify historical events which can reasonably correspond to John's own time (Gentry 1998:91). The advancement of the view, however, often comes down to a nonobjective discussion on what historical events correspond to Revelation's claims.

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<sup>102</sup> It is fascinating that the Second Coming in Revelation 19—and the subsequent happenings in Revelation 20-22—is the point of contention for each major hermeneutical approach. Any approach to Revelation must account and be centered on this eschatological event.

This thesis does not embrace the preterist approach largely because it denies Revelation's self-purported prophetic nature (Rev 1:3), but most importantly, like the allegorical approach, the view abandons its core principles on arguably the most important chapters of the book (Rev 19-22).

### **3.3.3.3 Analysis of the Historicist Approach**

Advocates of the historicist approach sketch Church history through the various popes, the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, and individual leaders, such as Charlemagne and Mussolini, up towards one's own time (so Mounce 1997:27; Hiebert 2003:265). "As each new generation rises, it is necessary to work out a new scheme for the identification of events" (Hiebert 2003:265). Proponents of this method take the seals, trumpets, and bowls as well as the interludes, as prophetic of salvation history, that is, as unfolding successive events of history in general chronological order (so Beale 1999:46; Osborne 2002:19).

Mounce (1997:27) contends these schemes subjectivize the historicist approach, because the interpreter reworks the content of Revelation to fit his own time. This forces its adherents to identify historical movements too specifically and limits the prophecies of Revelation to one's own culture and time (so Beale 1999:46; Keener 2000:27; Hiebert 2003:265). Beale (1999:46) writes, "Proponents of this view living at different periods of Church history cannot agree with one another, since they limit the meaning of the symbols only to specific historical referents contemporary with their own times. Osborne (2002:19) calls this a "newspaper approach to prophecy," since one must see every detail in OT and NT symbolism as fulfilled in current events. Moreover, advocates of this view "generally limit their identification of events to the Western Church and take little cognizance of the spread of Christianity to the East" (Hiebert 2003:265). Keener (2000:27) concludes "the links between Revelation's contents and history's events always have proved forced."

The historicist view is seldom purported in today's scholarship (Keener 2000:27). "Modern commentaries presenting this approach are rare to nonexistent" (Gregg 2013:34). Longman and Garland (2006:585) suggest this is largely because of the lack of consensus as to the historical identifications it entails. Mounce (1997:27) contends the view is so subjective that the few who do advocate for it find no agreement among their interpretations. Gentry and others (1998:18) consider it one of the four major historical approaches to Revelation, but offer no assessment of it in their book *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* because "while [it] was once widespread, it has passed from the scene. Its failed attempts to locate the fulfillment of Revelation in the course of the circumstances of history have doomed it to continual revision as time passed and ultimately to obscurity." This thesis shares the concerns and conclusions of the historicist view as purported by the vast array of scholarship, and therefore does not embrace it as a hermeneutical approach to Revelation.

#### 3.3.3.4 Analysis of the Eclectic Approach

It is difficult to criticize the eclectic view, because it is not a view, per se; the eclectic view is eclectic in its employment. While some commend for this approach,<sup>103</sup> others argue it is not a viable approach to Revelation. Like the combination approach described in the genre section, there are consequences to adopting elements of every view without offering clarity in how the views function together (Patterson 2012:30).<sup>104</sup> For this reason this thesis does not embrace an

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<sup>103</sup> Mounce (1997:29) writes, "... it is readily apparent that each approach has some important contribution to a full understanding of Revelation and that no single approach is sufficient in itself." Gregg (2013:41) lists a group of dispensationalists who themselves often must admit to the necessity of recognizing some aspects of other views. Hiebert (2003:268), a scholar who does not endorse the eclectic approach, writes, "Each of these four views contains elements of truth."

<sup>104</sup> "The erudition of Beale's commentary in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* series, together with the decline of interest in dispensational thought, has created substantial interest in the eclectic view. But while "eclecticism" seems always to have a pleasing sound to the contemporary ear, and while valuable insights are to be gained from gifted commentators from all positions, the essentially prophetic nature of the Apocalypse is too well established from Irenaeus until the present to be seriously doubted" (Patterson 2012:30). Thomas (1980:79) shares a similar conviction, arguing that other approaches—including an eclectic approach—fail to compliment the book's prophetic genre.

eclectic approach, but rather stresses one major hermeneutical approach which acknowledges elements of some of the other major approaches.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.3.3.5 Analysis of the Futurist Approach

Several scholars note the major weakness of the futurist view is that it can develop a perspective which removes its applicability to first-century Christians (so Beale 1999:47; Mounce 1997:28; Gentry 1998:92; Hiebert 2003:266-267; Longman and Garland 2006:585). Longman and Garland (2006:585) identify somewhat of an inverted nuance of this concern, noting how the approach seems to make all but the first three chapters of Revelation only indirectly relevant to the contemporary church (namely for those who affirm the church will be removed from the earth before the events described in 6:1ff). Therefore, while the major concern of the approach is that it can rob the book of its applicability to the first-century church, another concern is that it can rob the contemporary church, too, thereby rendering the book unimportant for a vast majority of believers.

These challenges are not insurmountable. Beale (1999:47) notes the futurist may retort the book would have been relevant since Christ's coming has always been expected imminently and that even first-century readers could therefore have thought the visions were potentially quite pertinent to them. Hiebert (2003:267) bolsters this response, writing, "This objection assumes that a prophecy can have no meaning for a believer if it does not deal with his own time," and offers the example of 2 Peter 3:10-14, stating, "it is obvious that Peter believed a distant prophetic event can have practical significance for the believer." It is thus not impossible for Revelation to retain its relevance because of the possibility for each successive generation to see the fulfillment of the book.

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<sup>105</sup> With this said, the approach embraced in this thesis is actually considered an eclectic approach by some, including Gentry (1998:92), who says an approach that stresses a "now/not yet" view, sometimes known as Progressive Dispensationalism, is an approach which "attempts to adapt elements of each of the views into one system." For simplicity's sake, this thesis approaches the confusion by stressing one of the major views, accompanied by elements of other views.

What's more, the futurist view is the method arguably employed by some of the earliest Church Fathers, including Papias, Justin, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus (Osborne 2002:20). Patterson (2012:29) asserts the view lost favor to the allegorical method of later Church Fathers, including Origen, Augustine, and Tyconius. Patterson (2012:29) describes this as the "virtual triumph of Augustinian theology," and argues it "suppressed the literal understanding of Revelation for over a thousand years." "Although the dominant approach today, futurism was not popular in many periods in Church history" (Keener 2000:28).<sup>106</sup>

This thesis embraces the futuristic approach because it correlates well with the approach endorsed by many of the Church Fathers, and because it offers, in comparison to other approaches, a balanced and evenhanded interpretation for the book's eschatological claims.<sup>107</sup> It is also not unhelpful that the approach has widespread acceptance among modern scholarship (Gentry and others 1998:17-18). Longman and Garland (2006:585) note how the approach has enjoyed a revival of no small proportion since the nineteenth century, a statement which correlates with this thesis' claim that the Protestant Reformation helped to bring about the literal hermeneutic embraced by the earliest interpreters of Scripture. Moreover, this approach best fits the proposed prophetic genre. Thomas (1992:32) states the futurist approach is "the only one that grants sufficient recognition to the prophetic style of the book and a normal hermeneutical pattern of interpretation based on that style." Hiebert (2003:266) agrees, writing, "The futurist view gives due recognition to the prophetic character of the book."

While other views offer helpful insights into understanding Revelation, futurism is the option this thesis embraces for hermeneutically approaching Revelation. Of the major options, this approach seems to offer the most balanced approach to

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<sup>106</sup> The first to recapture the futurist method from the grips of allegoricalism was Franciscus Ribeira, a Spanish Jesuit who wrote in the late sixteenth century to counter the Protestant Reformation's antipapal interpretation. Osborne states that Franciscus "was not truly a futurist," but that "he turned the attention back to the early Fathers, and after him the view returned to prominence" (2002:20). With this said, the view is again in decline (Patterson 2012:30).

<sup>107</sup> This is to say that preterism and allegoricalism tend to downplay literal interpretations, minus a literal coming of Christ, whereas futurism allows room for history and allegory to support its predictive, literal claims.

Revelation's content. The approach offers a perspective which sees several elements from other approaches as viable—partial fulfillment (the past) as well as final realization (the future) regarding those things in history—while stressing the book's eschatological claims as predictive and literal (Pate 1998:173). Hiebert's (2003:268) summary is helpful:<sup>108</sup> "While not accepting all that has been advanced under the banner of futurism ... the view presents the most profitable approach to the interpretation of Revelation."<sup>109</sup>

This thesis will now consider the exegetical impact to embracing a prophetic genre and futuristic approach to Revelation.<sup>110</sup>

### 3.4 Impact of Results

Futurism is the predominant literal approach of the four major hermeneutical options (so Gregg 2013:40; Thomas 1992:32; Osborne 2002:29; Hiebert 2003:266-268; Patterson 2012:35-45).<sup>111</sup> "The futurist approach frees the reader to take a more literal view of the visions ... Of the various approaches to Revelation, the futurist is most likely to take a literal interpretation, since it alone has the luxury of doing so" (Gregg 2013:40). "The futurist approach to the book is the only one which grants sufficient recognition to the prophetic style of the book and a normal hermeneutical pattern of interpretation based on that style ... This is the view that best accords with the principle of literal interpretation" (Thomas 1992:32).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> This is an important declaration, because, as with any approach, a handful of hermeneutical assumptions can be applied to futurism, which this thesis may not espouse. Since futurism is often linked to Dispensationalism, for example, it is important to note that this thesis concurs with Patterson (2012:41), who writes, "My own position is that the dispensations are notoriously difficult to identify. They constitute an imposed grid that has no specific support from Scripture."

<sup>109</sup> Thomas (1995:43, 103, 104, 106-107, 113, 355, 365-66), for example, allows some mingling of past and future, disjunctive intercalations, and so forth in Revelation 11:15-19; 12:1-ff; 19:1-4, 7-9) (Gentry 1998:38).

<sup>110</sup> This thesis' goal is not to settle the ongoing dispute as to the correct hermeneutical approach to Revelation, but merely to express the reasonability behind its elected approach. See Pate (1998) for a solid overview of the major approaches to interpreting the book of Revelation.

<sup>111</sup> Ryrie (2007:102) maintains a literal hermeneutic "results in accepting the text of Scripture at its face value."

<sup>112</sup> With this said, this thesis concurs with Gentry's (1998:38)<sup>112</sup> statement that virtually all evangelical scholars (excluding Classical Dispensationalists) recognize regarding the book: "Revelation is a highly figurative book that we cannot approach with a simple straightforward literalism."

The literality of a prophetic genre and a futuristic approach establishes hermeneutical boundaries which impact how Revelation—and therefore the doctrine of Heaven via Revelation—is to be understood. These boundaries, in the least, impact Revelation’s structure and eschatological delineations (Michaels 1992:51).

### 3.4.1 Revelation’s Structure

A majority of scholars argue it is a difficult task to structure Revelation, and that, resultantly, a variety of outlines exist (so Smith 1994:373; Aune 1997:xcii; Mounce 1997:32; Beale 1999:108; Korner 2000:160; Hiebert 2003:270; Patterson 2012:48).<sup>113</sup>

Fortunately, delineating Revelation’s genre and hermeneutical approach offers rules by which Revelation’s structure can be determined (so Michaels 1992:51; Smith 1994:377). “There is very broad agreement among Revelation’s interpreters as to how its structure should be sought—literary genre and hermeneutical inquiry” (Smith 1994:377). Since this thesis takes Revelation as generically prophetic and hermeneutically futuristic, which effectively produces a predominantly literal approach to the book, any outline which interprets the bulk of Revelation’s prophetic claims as solely allegorical or historical is respectfully abrogated.

Under the banner of a prophetic genre and futuristic approach, this thesis embraces the book’s own structural claim in 1:19: “Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things”<sup>114</sup> (so Thomas 1992:44-46; Hiebert 2003:271; Patterson 2012:48-50). This suggests the material of the book falls into three parts,

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<sup>113</sup> Patterson (2012:48) observes, “There are almost as many outlines for Revelation as there are commentaries.” Beale (1999:108) states the diverse proposals are a maze of interpretive confusion, and Hiebert (2003:270) notes how “The architecture of [Revelation] will vary as it is seen from different angles, and as it is interpreted in different ways.”

<sup>114</sup> Smith (2015:32) argues that most commentators see Revelation 1:19 as an outline to the book, indicating the thought is not reserved to those advocating a literal approach.

including, (1) “the things which you have seen” (1:9-20); (2) “the things which are” (chapters 2-3); and (3) “the things which will take place after these things” (chapters 4-22). Korner (2000:183) lends credibility to this particular structure, suggesting that John’s language offers significant application for the purpose of elucidating a structural outline for Revelation. Therefore, “Revelation is a book about what God will do in the future. Yet, it is also about ... the present” (Guthrie 2015:215). Generally speaking, this thesis embraces an outline which includes a ternary structure which speaks to the past (chapter 1), to the present (chapters 2-3), and to the future (chapters 4-22).

### **3.4.2 Eschatological Delineations**

The proposed structure shows the bulk of Revelation is devoted to “the things which will take place after these things” (Rev 1:19), which is to say the book, in respect to the past and the present things, is largely devoted to future things; the futurist approach views the book as focusing on the last periods of world history. This reveals one major reason why the doctrine of Heaven is often emphasized as an eschatological doctrine, since most of Heaven’s biblical data comes from the latter chapters of Revelation which deal with the future.

In accordance with the literality of the futuristic approach, the possible interpretations of Revelation’s eschatological events are greatly narrowed. It is important to offer summarizations of each here in order to present the general results of interpreting Revelation’s eschatological events through a prophetic, futuristic lens. However, it is especially important for these claims to receive proper exegetical analysis, which occurs in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis. The natures of these two chapters afford a more appropriate location to offer a more substantive treatise of each respective event.

#### **3.4.2.1 The Rapture**

A futurist outline sees Revelation 4-19 as relating to the period prior to the second coming of Christ, which includes a rapture of the Church. Gundry and Hultberg (2010:11) describe the rapture as “a theological term that refers to the ‘catching up’ of the Church to meet the Lord in the air in association with his return and with the resurrection of believers.” Futurism allows for two major possibilities concerning the rapture, which include a pretribulational (Dispensationalism) or posttribulational (Classical Premillennialism) rapture, although some opt for a prewrath rapture (Hultberg 2010:109-154).

Dispensational futurists who opt for a pretribulational rapture often assert that Revelation 4:1 symbolizes the rapture of the Church, but Walvoord’s (1989a:103) contention on the matter is noteworthy: “... there is no authority for connecting the rapture with this expression.” Patterson (2012:150) agrees and argues that, if it is to be done, “Endorsing the rapture of the Church as prior to the tribulation should be done on the basis of passages other than 4:1.”<sup>115</sup>

Preterism and allegoricalism do not allow for a pretribulational rapture, if they allow for a rapture at all. Some analyses decline the event entirely, or merge the event with the second coming of Christ. The latter approach is often based on the notion that the word “rapture” conjures up a first century event in which the king comes and visits a city. On such an occasion, there was a greeting committee which went out of the walled city and met the dignitary out where he was on the road to show him proper hospitality, and then to join him as he entered the city. Therefore, some interpret the rapture occurring at the same time as the second coming in this way (Witherington 2009:78). This is an important consideration, and one which helps to affirm the rapture. However, it does not necessarily negate the possibility of this happening prior to the Great Tribulation; the greeting committee (the Church) would still greet the King (Jesus) outside the city in the

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<sup>115</sup> A total exegesis of the rapture, particularly its timing, requires a consideration of other biblical passages concentrated on the subject. Several contend the most prevalent rapture passage in Scripture is 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, and that John 14:2 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 also offer helpful insights into the subject.

air (1 Thess 4), and accompany him as he enters it at the inauguration of the Millennium (Rev 19:14).

### **3.4.2.2 The Great Tribulation**

A prophetic genre and futuristic hermeneutic interpret Revelation 6-19 as speaking of a unique period of tribulation which lasts for seven years (McGrath 2011:461). This is commonly referred to as the Great Tribulation. Patterson (2011:69) asserts this is indicated in the time periods listed in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5, which are best understood when compared to Daniel 9:24-27. Dispensational futurists tend to argue that the rapture precedes the tribulation, while Classical Premillennial futurists tend to argue it follows it (so Walvoord 1989a:18; Mounce 1997:28; Beale 1999:47; Osborne 2002:21; Hiebert 2003:266-268; Patterson 2009:29-30; Gregg 2013:40). In either interpretation, the Great Tribulation's subsistence is inimitably tied to the event.

Preterism avows the events in Revelation 6-19 speak to historical persecutions of the early Church, and allegoricalism states the events refer to the ongoing battle between God and Satan. In both cases there is no future, seven-year Great Tribulation.

### **3.4.2.3 The Second Coming**

Futurism asserts that, according to Revelation 19:11-21, the Great Tribulation ends with the second coming of Christ (McGrath 2011:461). A literal hermeneutic construes this as a future, yet-to-occur physical return which happens prior to the Millennium. Blaising (1999:157) asserts that futurism's "most central convictions ... can be stated in relation to the word *premillennial* ... The foremost conviction is that Jesus is coming back [and that] His coming will be *prior to* a millennial kingdom."

There are three major views of the second coming of Christ, which include premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism (Bock and Gundry 1999). Generally speaking, each view correlates with one of the major hermeneutical approaches. Premillennialism is associated with futurism, while postmillennialism correlates with preterism and amillennialism with allegoricalism. Since this thesis embraces futurism as a hermeneutical approach, it logically follows that it advocates for premillennialism, because it is the natural conclusion to a literal approach to Revelation 19, although this will be dealt with exegetically in Chapter Four.

#### **3.4.2.4 The Millennium**

Futurism understands the Millennium as the future one-thousand-year physical reign of Jesus on earth (so Blaising 1999:157; Weber 2010:367; Allen 2011:75-88; McGrath 2011:461; Akin 2016:302-308). Blaising (1999:157) states a futurist believes that after Jesus comes, he will establish and rule over an earthly kingdom for a Millennium, that is, for a thousand years. Weber (2010:367) notes a futurist's crucial text is Revelation 20, which includes several mentions of a thousand-year length to Jesus' earthly reign. "Premillennialists take this passage literally and see it as the clearest evidence for an interregnum between Christ's *parousia* and the last judgment" (Weber 2010:367).

Preterism tends to take the Millennium as a gradual establishment of the kingdom, and the one thousand years a purely symbolic sum (Gentry 1998:80), while allegoricalism rejects the belief of a literal Millennium altogether. Hamstra (1998:121), in arguing for amillennialism, states that John does not relate the reign of Christ to the second coming, and that the Millennium is not the central theme of the vision. Hamstra (1998:121) also maintains the one thousand years are symbolic. These are the natural results of an approach which stresses Revelation as generically apocalyptic.

### 3.4.2.5 Eternity

Futurism maintains a distinction exists between the Millennium (Rev 20) and the new Heaven and earth (Rev 21-22), ultimately interpreting the latter as eternity (so Blaising 1999:158; Land 2011:89-107). Weber (2010:367) describes the two as being separated by the final judgment of Christ. Other analyses tend to blend the two eras together. This is detailed further in Chapter Four.

### 3.5 Common Definition of Heaven

The impact of Revelation's proposed prophetic genre has resulted in a literal approach to the book which interprets the book's own claim in 1:19 as a valid tripartite structure by which to best comprehend it. This shows the bulk of Revelation is devoted to the "the things which will take place after these things." While this is certainly a helpful analysis, this proposed outline has led several scholars to restrict the doctrine of Heaven to eschatology (McGrath 2011:444, 461).<sup>116</sup> This thesis has offered a chronological observation of this trend from the time of the Church Fathers to the modern era, showing that scholarship on the subject of Heaven progressively restricts the doctrine to its future qualities, and rarely details its non-eschatological subsistence.<sup>117</sup>

An evaluation of Revelation's eschatological claims under the exegetical restrictions of its genre, literal approach, and structure, reveals an important consideration concerning the nature of the doctrine of Heaven, which is that Jesus is a common denominator among every major eschatological event. In the least, Jesus' Second Coming (Rev 19) triggers the inauguration of the Millennium (Rev 20). He also brings about its end, in which he casts his final judgments and subsequently inaugurates the new Heaven and earth (Rev 21-22). Additionally, if

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<sup>116</sup> McGrath (2011:444, 461) affirms the traditional, eschatological restriction in writing, "... Heaven is essentially that of the eschatological realization of God."

<sup>117</sup> The historical claims in Chapter Two might support this statement, meaning, if it is true that many of the early Church Fathers understood Revelation as largely about future things, then it makes sense that they would tend to focus on that as opposed to any present, or especially past implications.

a pretribulational rapture is to be accepted, it would suggest Jesus is also uniquely involved in the inauguration of the Great Tribulation via the rapture of the Church.

This shows Revelation's eschatological events are outstandingly tied to Jesus. Thus, a comprehensive investigation into Jesus' relationship with the book of Revelation, as described by the book of Revelation itself, potentially offers significant insights into the doctrine of Heaven, generating the question as to whether the doctrine ought to extend beyond that of mere eschatology. Chapter Four is dedicated to this investigation.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has sought to examine Revelation in order to resolve a reasonable framework by which to approach it. Revelation's genre was first considered, and it was determined that a prophetic genre is not unsatisfactory. Subsequently, the major hermeneutical approaches to Revelation were examined. It was concluded that the futuristic approach is also not unsatisfactory, which is a predominantly literal approach. This literal approach was then employed to help determine Revelation's structure, which leads to the acceptance of Revelation's own structural claims in 1:19. This verse offers a tripartite outline to Revelation, which shows a bulk of the book is dedicated to eschatological events. These eschatological events were then assessed under predominantly literal hermeneutical boundaries and it was revealed that Jesus serves as the chief catalyst in every major event. Thus, the present consideration is if this Christocentric discovery offers insights into how the subject of Heaven can be more comprehensively understood.

## Chapter 4

### Jesus and the Ternary Nature of Heaven

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,  
“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

-Revelation 1:8

#### 4.1 Introduction

A significant feature to Revelation’s eschatological claims is Jesus, who is inimitably involved in the eschatological events described in the book. This chapter exegetically analyzes Jesus’ involvement in order to see what ouranological insights might be gleaned from his involvement in said events.<sup>118</sup>

This exegetical analysis employs Smith (2008:151-196) and Black’s (2010:137-159) guidelines for exegetical studies. Black (2010:137) states the three basic areas of an exegetical study include context, meaning, and significance. The questions of context are both historical and literary, both of which have been discussed in Chapters Two and Three, respectively. This chapter has to do with

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<sup>118</sup> The exegetical portions of this thesis utilize the full-notes edition of the New English Translation (NET), which is considered a literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek. It is unique in that it includes 60,932 translation notes, which are especially helpful in an exegetical study. This particular translation is used instead of the NASB (the translation employed in other portions of this thesis) because it is a more literal rendering of the Greek. “The NET Bible seeks to be accurate by translating passages consistently and properly within the grammatical, historical, and theological context. The interplay and proper understanding of these three contexts has produced some distinctive translations within the NET Bible” (2005). For word studies this thesis follows Black’s (2010:145) recommendation to consult lexicons and theological dictionaries, and also to see how the word is translated in other contexts. This thesis uses Perschbacher (1990), Rogers and Rogers (1998), Louw and Nida (1999), and Bauer and Danker (2001) for lexicons, and consults Kittel and Freidrich (1985) and Balz and Schneider (1993) theological dictionaries. When deemed helpful, this thesis utilizes a concordance search to see how the respective word is translated in other passages.

what Black calls “meaning,” which “takes us into the text itself” (2010:137). Smith (2008:160) and Black (2010:137) agree this includes several possible degrees of analysis, but not all are necessary for every passage of Scripture.<sup>119</sup> This particular study employs the lexical, syntactical, and structural analysis tools, which involves conducting word studies on key words, analyzing the grammar of the text, and determining the overall relationship of the passages with respect to the overall context of the book.

Smith (2008:186) encourages exegesis to end with a proposition detailing what the text teaches about the respective topic, which in this particular chapter concerns how Jesus impacts the doctrine of Heaven.<sup>120</sup> This chapter will exegete relevant passages, as well as offer propositions which summarize what each respective text contributes to the subject at hand.

### **4.2 Jesus in Revelation**

Strong’s Concordance (1980:545) shows Jesus’ name is expressly mentioned fourteen times in Revelation. This includes Revelation 1:1, 2, 5, 9 (twice in this verse), 12:17, 14:12, 17:6, 19:10 (twice in this verse), 20:4, 22:16, 22:20, and 22:21. While several Christological descriptions exist in Revelation which do not include Jesus’ explicit name, focusing on the explicit mentions is a satisfactory starting point.

#### **4.2.1 Revelation 1:1**

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<sup>119</sup> Black (2010:127) and Smith (2008:160) both list a variety of tools for an exegetical study, but neither suggest that every tool is necessary for every study. “I do not wish to suggest that the exegetical process described is a mechanical succession of steps or that all of the steps apply equally to every passage of Scripture” (Black 2010:137). This thesis has elected to use the syntactical and lexical tools because grammar and words studies, respectively, are especially helpful in inducing the overall meaning of the Christological passages in Revelation.

<sup>120</sup> Broadly, this thesis is a study in systematic theology—a study on what the Bible teaches about the subject of Heaven (Smith 2008:183). However, it is more specifically an exegetical study—an inductive analysis of how Jesus impacts the doctrine of Heaven in the book of Revelation (Smith 2008:186).

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must happen very soon. He made it clear by sending his angel to his servant John” (Rev 1:1).

Revelation opens with the statement that the book is “The revelation of Jesus Christ ...” (Rev 1:1a).<sup>121</sup> The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word *apocalypse* (ἀποκάλυψις), which means “the act of uncovering” (so Bullinger 1984:132; MacArthur 1997:1992; Rogers and Rogers 1998:610; Cory 2005:15; Perschbacher 2010:43; Fee 2011:2; Koester 2014:211; Richards 2014:1; Akin 2016:5). Thus, Revelation is a book about uncovering a truth which has been hidden from our eyes (so Thomas 1992:50; Osborne 2002:53; Richards 2014:2; Duvall 2014:19).<sup>122</sup> Mounce (1997:40) notes the practical importance of this: “Had God not taken the initiative, the human mind could never have understood the real forces at work in the world. Nor could anyone have known how it would all turn out.” Mounce’s statement can be taken to stress the prophetic nature of the opening line of Revelation, because it presents the book as having to do with the future.<sup>123</sup>

Several scholars agree Revelation 1:1 pronounces the book as an unveiling, but most are concerned with a more imperative question—one with which this thesis is also greatly concerned—which is, how the word “revelation” relates to the person “Jesus Christ.” The question is whether the phrase means “the revelation *about* Jesus Christ” (an objective genitive) or “the revelation *from* Jesus Christ” (a subjective genitive), or both? (so Bullinger 1984:132; Beale 1999:183; Keener 2000:53; Resseguie 2009:62; Fee 2011:2). The verse presents a certain ambiguity (Gregg 2013:52). It is the initial question to be asked (Witherington 2003:66), because the answer impacts how the rest of Revelation should be understood (Resseguie 2009:62). In relation to the goal of this thesis, the answer

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<sup>121</sup> Scholars agree this is a significant introductory verse. Beale (1999:181), for example, maintains the first two verses of Revelation “convey the origin, subject, nature, and one of the purposes of the book.”

<sup>122</sup> Weinrich (2005:2) says Apringius of Beja (ca. sixth century) shares a similar opinion.

<sup>123</sup> Mounce’s statement also stresses the importance of the practical ability of sound exegesis, which Smith proposes is vital in such a study (2008:151-196).

impacts Jesus' relationship with the content of the book of Revelation; specifically, what the book has to say about his relationship with the doctrine of Heaven.

Several do not understand the clause as including an objective genitive (Beale 1999:183),<sup>124</sup> meaning the phrase would not refer to the unveiling of Jesus (so Giesen 1997:56; Resseguie 2009:62; Fee 2011:2; Blount 2013:27; Koester 2014:211; Duvall 2014:19). "The work is a revelation mediated by Jesus Christ rather than a revelation of Christ himself" (Mounce 1997:40). Duvall (2014:19) submits "most scholars favor the subjective genitive because of the immediate context where God gives the revelation to Jesus, who then sends his angel to proclaim the message to John and others."<sup>125</sup> The notion that the clause primarily indicates the book is from Jesus is well founded.

While some contend that the Revelation 1:1 construction is best understood as including a subjective genitive ("the revelation from Jesus"), many maintain the verse still allows for Revelation to share insights about Jesus, too (so Keener 2000:54; Hendrikson 2002:52; Resseguie 2009:62; Patterson 2012:51-52). Thomas (1992:52) for example asserts the evidence favoring Christ as the revealer is "more impressive" than the disparate option, but that part of Jesus' revelation, "... to be sure, is his own personal advent in chapter nineteen." Keener (2000:54) contends the construction indicates the book is both about Jesus and from Jesus, stating Jesus is "certainly the central figure in the book" and that the "things which must soon take place" are central, too." For Keener (2000:54), of upmost importance is that John "clearly emphasizes Jesus much more than other apocalypses emphasized any character who might be vaguely compared with him." Several therefore suggest it is not unwarranted to suggest

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<sup>124</sup> One commentator who offers the rare objective genitive interpretation of the Revelation 1:1 construction is Joseph Seiss (1901:7), who writes, "This book is not the Apocalypse of the Apocalypse, but the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. And this is the key to the whole book. It is a book of which Christ is the great subject and center ... It is not a mere prediction of divine judgments upon the wicked, and of the final triumph of the righteous ... but a book of the revelation of Christ, in his own person, offices, and future administrations."

<sup>125</sup> Blount (2013:27) offers the same treatment.

that the one doing the revealing is himself also being revealed. “This is a revelation of, from, and about Jesus Christ” (Akin 2016:5). The NET Bible’s (2006:2266) translators offer a helpful note on the clause:

The phrase “the revelation of Jesus Christ” could be interpreted as either an objective genitive (“the revelation about Jesus Christ”), subjective genitive (“the revelation from Jesus Christ),” or both (M. Zerwick’s “general” genitive; D. B. Wallace’s “plenary” genitive). In 1:1 and 22:16 it is clear that Jesus has sent his angel to proclaim the message to John; thus, the message is from Christ, and this would be a subjective genitive. On a broader scale, though, the revelation is about Christ, so this would be an objective genitive. One important point to note is that the phrase under consideration is best regarded as the title of the book and therefore refers to the whole of the work in all its aspects. This fact favors considering this as a plenary genitive (2006:2266).

This thesis concurs that the objective/subjective distinction is perhaps artificial here. “Is not any revelation that comes from Jesus Christ also about Jesus Christ? Jesus is the source of the revelation that God gave to him, but the revelation is also about Jesus” (Resseguie 2009:62). This is important, because it upholds the prophetic genre and futuristic approach adopted in Chapter Three, in that the book is largely about what will literally happen in the future, as opposed to the book not literally predicting anything about Jesus. This is to say this exegetical insight concurs with the hermeneutical framework on which this thesis is constructed. Bullinger (1984:132) offers a helpful insight, in which he also maintains that both the subjective and objective senses are true, and that if the latter is true in any sense, what follows must be taken literally: “For, when the Lord would not reveal, but would hide the meaning of his words, he spoke in parables and used emblems (Mt 13:10-16; Mk 4:11-12).” If Jesus is both the revealer and the one being revealed, then it follows that the book would offer

literal and predictive insights about Jesus, as opposed to suggesting that Jesus is merely to be metaphorically understood.

Longman and Garland (2006:594) offer such an interpretation (that Jesus is to be metaphorically understood), suggesting it is not primarily about the authorship or the unveiling of Jesus, but the disclosure of “what must soon take place.” This takes the onus off Jesus, and places it upon events, which, in this hermeneutical approach, may or may not be literal or predictive, and may or may not reveal anything about Jesus. “The ἀποκάλυψις may, then, not refer to the whole book but only to that portion that ‘must soon take place’ ... [implying] the revelation concerns events that are future to John’s present” (Longman and Garland 2006:594). Longman and Garland (2006:587) offer an approach to Revelation with preterist tendencies, an approach which would be damaged if the book literally and prophetically unveiled anything about Jesus. Their treatment seems to rest more on the preterist approach as a whole, rather than a consideration of the Greek grammar. No dialogue is included about the objective/subjective genitive’s impact on the clause—or on the book as a whole—meaning their interpretation is not derived from a syntactical, or even a lexical analysis, but largely on their generic understanding of the book. While exegetical conclusions are greatly impacted by a book’s genre, it is helpful to also consider the lexical and syntactical data’s impact, too.

Smalley (2006:15, 27) offers an opinion from the idealist perspective, downplaying any broader sense of the genitive. Smalley’s argument is based on John’s use of symbols, and maintains this alone should warn against an interpretation which is literal or purely historical. This, however, is not unlike Longman and Garland’s (2006:594) approach in that it derives its conclusion merely on hermeneutical tendencies. More specifically, the approach fails to dialogue with how a literal mention of Jesus relates to the purported metaphorical content of the book. Smalley offers no response to those who embrace a broader sense of the genitive, and if the symbols are taken as tools to help advance literal

claims, as discussed and embraced in Chapter Three, then the mere inclusion of symbols does not necessarily discount a broader sense of the genitive. Boxall (2006:23) offers a similar appraisal to Smalley, but also fails to specifically speak to a broader sense of the genitive. Boxall's treatment stresses Revelation as apocalyptic, and therefore not prophetic. Interestingly, Boxall notes how the opening statement veers from a typical apocalyptic introduction: "Unlike Jewish apocalypses, which link the revelation or apocalypse with the name of the seer, John's revelation is defined specifically as a revelation from Jesus Christ." This is a critical statement, because it impedes the notion that Revelation is primarily apocalyptic. Koester (2014:222) relates how some have tried to explain this away by suggesting that the internal title and introductory comments were a late edition to the text,<sup>126</sup> but states "this is unlikely." If Revelation is to be taken as apocalyptic, then John's opening statement is somewhat of a rare and unique happenstance, one which undermines the traditional nature of the genre. This helps to affirm a distinctive sense that the author, Jesus, is himself also being revealed, either because the verse rebuffs the notion that Revelation is apocalyptic, or that the apocalyptic introduction stresses a literal Jesus as the author, thereby indicating something unique about this particular book.

A syntactical analysis of Revelation 1:1 helps to show there is warrant in concluding the book is not merely from Jesus, but also about Jesus. This is an important proposition because it helps to affirm the prophetic genre, as well as the futuristic<sup>127</sup> hermeneutical approach espoused in Chapter Three, which suggests that Revelation includes substantial content concerning the eschatological elements of Heaven, particularly through the lens of Jesus' literal involvement.

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<sup>126</sup> Ford (1975); Malina and Pilch (2000).

<sup>127</sup> Wilcock (1975:32) says the phrase "what must soon take place" discourages a futuristic view of Revelation, because the phrase is taken from a pre-Christian apocalyptic context which means the "near future." However, Wilcock readily admits that "the book deals with much that still lies in the future," meaning there is content which has still yet to unfold even two thousand years later, and also that the word has certain implications which do not necessarily mean the "near future." "The early church believed that when the Christian era began, the last days had begun also." Therefore, it isn't unreasonable to suggest that the phrase is part of the overall context of these last days, which does not hinder the futuristic view.

### 4.2.2 Revelation 1:2

“... who then testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:2).

Revelation 1:1 discloses that God gave the revelation to Jesus, who communicated it to his angel, who then gave it to John (Rev 1:1b). Revelation 1:2 reverse engineers this line of communication and asserts John “testified to everything that he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony about Jesus Christ.” Lexically there are two words of importance, “everything” and “testimony,” because the two words express the interplay between the earthly author (John) and Heavenly author (God and Jesus) of the book. At the syntax level the clause “testified to everything ... concerning the testimony of Jesus” must be analyzed, because such an analysis will show how the words relate with one another in a grammatical context, which will help determine the meaning of the Christological testimony of which John testified.<sup>128</sup>

The word ὅσος (“everything”) in Revelation 1:2 means “to the degree of correlative extent” (Bauer and Danker 2001:729), and is often translated as “everything” or “all.” The word qualifies the phrase “that he saw,” meaning to the degree that John saw, is the same degree to which John testified, thus the common translation of the word as “everything.” The word “emphasizes the completeness of the revelation transmitted by John” (Aune 1997:19). The word in context means John expressed every detail of what he saw; he did not leave anything out. Aune (1997:19) relates how this shows that John considers himself a prophet in the tradition of the OT prophets who received the word of God,

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<sup>128</sup> Since this chapter is primarily concerned with Jesus’ impact on Heaven, the phrase “concerning the word of God,” while important, will not be specifically assessed here. Longman and Garland (2006:595) say Jesus is himself identified with the name “the Word of God,” but this particular reference is not directly to Christ but to the promises and acts of God revealed in the book realized through Jesus, so it is satisfactory to focus on the part of the clause which specifically speaks of Jesus, because it accomplishes the task at hand. Resseguie (2009:64) says the “word of God” is “the testimony of Jesus,” and so it is sufficient in this particular thesis to focus on the “testimony of Jesus Christ” portion of the verse. Boxall (2006:26) shares a similar appraisal. Smalley (2005:30) says the interplay of the verses (“everything that he saw” and “testimony about Jesus”) is the paramount portion of the text.

which bolsters this thesis' claim that the book is more of a prophetic genre than an apocalyptic genre.

The word μαρτυρία (“testimony”) in Revelation 1:2 means “the confirmation or attestation on the basis of personal knowledge or belief” (Bauer and Danker 2001:618), and is most often rendered “testimony.” The word can refer to the “act of testifying” or the “content of the testimony,” and in this case refers to the latter (Bauer and Danker 2001:618). The word was originally used to refer to a witness in a court of law, and many of its uses (Jn 5:32; 21:24; Titus 1:13; 3 Jn 12) mean much the same as “credible” (Balz and Schneider 1993:392). That the “testimony” concerns “Jesus Christ” means the testimony concerning him is credible and complete. Mangina (2010:40) describes the word as “pregnant,” and maintains it at least partially refers to God’s “apocalypsing” of his Son, that is the unveiling, which would support this thesis’ literal and prophetic approach to Revelation.<sup>129</sup>

The meaning of the verse as a whole hinges on how the phrase “testimony about Jesus” (NET 2006) is to be understood. Like the Revelation 1:1 clause, there is debate about whether it is to be understood as an objective (“about”) or subjective (“from”) genitive. The difference can be important, because if it is entirely subjective, then it can be rendered “Jesus Christ’s testimony,” which could present Jesus as more of a metaphorical “prototype for Christians,” (Resseguie 2009:64) as opposed to a reference to the content of the book literally being about Jesus Christ. However, this would not necessarily rule out the prophetic sense, as will be seen, especially since the verse is contextually related to Revelation 1:1, which can be taken in a plenary genitive sense.

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<sup>129</sup> Mangina (2010:40) says the world also speaks to his past life and death, and seems to stress this as the more important notion of the sentence. This thesis agrees in part, but stresses the sentence primarily means the “apocalypsing” of Jesus in Revelation as opposed to his past testimony. Mangina is quoted to show how even though he disagrees, he still supports at least a partial recognition of Jesus’ literal unveiling in Revelation.

Several take the clause as subjective (Aune 1997:19; Boxall 2006:25; Resseguie 2009:64; Blount 2013:28). Aune (1997:19) states this is because the subject of the phrase is the one giving the witness. Boxall (2006:25) says the verse is more about Jesus' prior life and death than it is the content of Revelation: "His followers continue to bear witness to God's truth, just as Jesus did, even if that leads to hostility and even death." This shows that if the clause is to be taken as a subjective genitive, then it might have more to do with how believers can employ the example set by Jesus, as opposed to the book literally and predictively saying anything about Jesus, because it is "Jesus Christ's testimony" rather than "the testimony about Jesus Christ." Vassiliadis (1985:129-134), however, offers an argument for the objective genitive which affords the same conclusions. Vassiliadis' argument is based on a martyrological meaning of "testimony" and its cognates in Revelation. In this case, the objective genitive could also be taken as citing Jesus as a prototype for how believers are to live and die for their faith. In this sense believers would share in a martyr's death not unlike Jesus', and the objective genitive would function in a way which supports a symbolic or preterist approach to Revelation.<sup>130</sup> Thomas (1992:59) offers an example where the subjective genitive can indicate that the book's general character is that of prophetic vision, because the verse can mean it is "of" Jesus, suggesting the genitive refers to the book's content as consisting of prophetic information about Jesus; Jesus is testifying of himself. This shows how both the subjective genitive and objective genitive can be taken in several ways to support varying hermeneutical approaches.

Like Revelation 1:1, it is difficult to conclude whether the clause in Revelation 1:2 is an objective or subjective genitive, and, also like Revelation 1:1, it might be best to understand it as a somewhat artificial distinction (Resseguie 2009:62), acknowledging that the overall context of Revelation 1:1-2 shows how the book is

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<sup>130</sup> The NET translators offer a subscript which takes the objective genitive stance (2005:2408).

of, from, and about Jesus (Akin 2016:5).<sup>131</sup> While scholars disagree on the objective/subjective genitive, many agree the thrust of the verse has to do primarily with the content of Revelation as it concerns Jesus, which naturally means the clause is best understood as stating that the content of Revelation is both from Jesus and about Jesus in some sense. This lends more warrant to the proposed prophetic genre and futuristic approach this thesis endorses than if the phrase was entirely limited to Jesus' earthly testimony. Ultimately, the "testimony about Jesus" is governed by the phrase "everything that he saw" (Smalley 2005:30). The phrase "everything he saw" limits the scope of the "testimony," forcing it to primarily refer to everything that John saw in his vision, which is the content of the book of Revelation (Mounce 1997:42-43).

An exegetical treatment of Revelation 1:2 places the weight of the testimony on the content of Revelation, which includes a credible and complete testimony concerning Jesus (Patterson 2012:52; Hamilton 2012:32). Paired with the exegetical conclusions from Revelation 1:1, this not only reinforces Jesus' literal and inimitable involvement with the content of the book of Revelation, but shows how said content is credible and complete.

#### **4.2.3 Revelation 1:5**

"... and from Jesus Christ—the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, the ruler over the kings of the earth. To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood" (Rev 1:5).

Revelation 1:5 offers substantial delineations about Jesus, the one from whom and about which the book of Revelation concerns (Rev 1:1-2). These include the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. Several scholars describe these delineations as titles which describe

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<sup>131</sup> In this case the exegetical conclusions listed about Revelation 1:1 would also be ascribed to Revelation 1:2, because the verses are inimitably connected.

Jesus' person and ministry (so Keener 2000:70; Osborne 2002:62; Patterson 2012:60-61).<sup>132</sup>

Beasley-Murray (1978:56) notes a striking possibility of these titles, which centers on the three stages of Jesus' ministry: in his life he was a "faithful witness," in his resurrection he became the "firstborn from the dead," and with his *parousia* he will become "the ruler of the kings of the earth." Andrew of Caesarea (Oden and Bray 2011:115), in the oldest Greek commentary on Revelation shares a similar appraisal. Aune (1997:37) suggests the possibility that "faithful witness" seals his testimony through *death*, "firstborn from the dead" emphasizes his *resurrection*, and "the ruler of the kings of the earth" underlines his *exaltation*, also showing how the terms could speak to three varying elements of Jesus' ministry.<sup>133</sup> Akin (2016:10-11) offers an alliterative appraisal: In his *revelation* he is the "faithful witness," in his *resurrection* he is the "firstborn from the dead," and in his *rule* he is the "ruler of the kings of the earth." Walvoord's (1989a:38) commentary furthers this proposal:

As the faithful witness he fulfilled the role of a prophet (Jn 18:37). In contrast to those who were previously restored to life only to die again, Christ is the firstborn, the first to receive a resurrection body, which is immortal (Acts 26:23). As Christ is "the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15), indicating that he was before all creation in time, so Christ was first also in resurrection. His resurrection is out of the mass of men who died. As Christ is first so others are to follow him in his resurrection. His witness and his resurrection are now past. His fulfillment of the role of "ruler of the

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<sup>132</sup> Several scholars also note the stark relationship this verse has with Psalm 89 (so Aune 1997:37; Beale 2013:190; Koester 2014:216-217). Spurgeon (1984:1606) says of this Psalm: "It is the utterance of a believer, in presence of great national disaster, pleading with his God, urging the grand argument of covenant engagement, and expecting deliverance and help, because of the faithfulness of Jehovah." It is interesting to note Revelation 1:5 is set within the context of the introduction of the letters to the seven churches (Rev 1:4). The relationship between Psalm 89 and Revelation 1:4-5 could reasonably concur with this thesis' pretribulational approach for the church, who, in this hermeneutical understanding, receives deliverance and help from Jehovah during a great disaster—the Tribulation.

<sup>133</sup> Aune (1997:37) does not personally hold to this view, but merely suggests its possibility. He instead holds that the phrases have more to do with Jesus' exaltation in the future, rather than having anything to do with any past ministry. That he concedes the possibility is helpful, especially since he acknowledges this based on exegetical grounds that the term "martyrs" occurs just three times in Revelation, always in connection with those who die for their faith (2:13; 11:3; 17:6).

kings of the earth” is future, to be achieved after his victory over the beast and the false prophet (Rev 19), fulfilling Isaiah 9:6-7 and many other verses such as Psalm 72:11 and Zechariah 14:9.

This commentary suggests the titles in Revelation 1:5 describe Jesus’ past ministry (“faithful witness”), present ministry (“firstborn”), and future ministry (“ruler of kings of the earth”). Mangina (2010:42) connects the titles with Revelation 1:4, which shows the Father as having reference to past, present, and future; Jesus’ ministry is expressed in like manner in these three titles. “There is a sense in which Jesus may be observed here in his three ministries as prophet (“faithful witness”), priest (conquering for man the wage of sin exacted against man through his victory over death), and king (ruling all other kings)” (Patterson 2012:60-61). Cory (2006:16) calls these the three “roles” or “functions” of Jesus. Several others avouch at least elements of this interpretation in how they understand each title (so Mounce 1997:48; Beale 1999:191; Keener 2000:70; Osborne 2002:63; Patterson 2012:60; Duvall 2014:25-26; Akin 2016:10-11).

#### **4.2.3.1 “Faithful Witness”**

The word πιστός generally means “faithful” or “true,” and in Revelation 1:5 means “veracious” or “dependable” (so Perschbacher 1990:329; Louw and Nida 1999:198). The word μάρτυς generally means “witness,” and in Revelation 1:5 means “a testifier of a doctrine” (Perschbacher 1990:266). In this case the “doctrine” refers to Jesus’ testimony of himself as the Messiah (so Ladd 1991:25; Duvall 2014:25-26), which is credible and complete (Rev 1:2). “The Messiah was obediently faithful to his Father’s will and salvific plan, throughout his ministry and in his passion; he is now the supreme martyr” (Smalley 2005:34). Rogers and Rogers (1998:611) stress how the phrase as a whole, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός, relates to Psalm 89:37,<sup>134</sup> where the psalmist employs the sky’s constant presence as a

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<sup>134</sup> Others note a relationship with Isaiah 55:4, too (so Bullinger 1984:142; Witherington 2003:76; Smalley 2005:34).

metaphor for Jesus' faithfulness. Blount (2013:35) makes a unique point for how the title is relayed that buttresses its association with Psalm 89:37:

Since 'Jesus Christ' is in the genitive case ... the titles that follow should also be in the genitive. Instead, John puts [them] in the nominative case. John is making a point. He is following a pattern he initiated in v. 4, where the threefold formula about God is in the nominative case even though its function as the object of the preposition "from" should have it in the genitive. There, as here, John stays with the nominative because he wants to direct attention to an allusion he is making to Psalm 89:37, where the controlling moniker, faithful witness, also occurs in a nominative formulation.

Bullinger (1984:142) and Beale (2013:192) offer a similar appraisal, noting how the context of the titles all center on Jesus' enduring kingship, which he earned through his death ("faithful witness") and resurrection ("firstborn from the dead"). "The sudden change from the genitive case to the nominatives which follow it is very remarkable, and implies the immutability of the Divine Nature" (Bullinger 1984:142). This is a helpful insight, because it shows how each of the titles reflect a unique Christological perspective of Jesus' ministry, and also how they interrelate.

There is debate over how to take ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός. Several take it to reference Jesus' past earthly life of obedience, in that the "testimony of/from/about Jesus" is at least partially about his earthly ministry<sup>135</sup> in which he was faithful to the point of death (so Lenski 1943:43; Caird 1966:16; Morris 1987:49; Mounce 1997:48; Keener 2000:70; Osborne 2002:62-63; Witherington 2003:76; Longman and Garland 2006:599; Boxall 2006:32; Duvall 2014:26; Williamson 2015:45). Duvall (2014:26), and Williamson (2015:45) argue this is specifically an example

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<sup>135</sup> Oecumenius (Oden and Bray 2011:2) in a tenth century commentary highlights how John, in all of his writings, is fond of using words which highlight Jesus' deity, but in the opening lines of Revelation stresses Jesus' humanity.

for how his servants are also expected to be loyal, even to the point of death, which predominantly takes the phrase in the allegorical sense as setting the stage for the timeless battle between God and Satan. However, Longman and Garland (2006:599) also note how Jesus' faithful witness also has to do with the future consummation of all things in him, undergirding the exegetical data in Revelation 1:1-2 that Revelation is also about the future, literal events bound up in Jesus Christ. Koester (2014:227) offers a helpful treatise of the title: "In one sense, Christ was a faithful witness during his earthly ministry because he spoke the truth about God, himself, and the world in the face of opposition (Jn 3:12; 7:7; 18:37; 1 Tim 6:13). In another sense, the risen Christ continues to bear witness. Koester shows how the title is predominantly about Jesus' past ministry, while also showing how the title can have present and future implications. Kistemaker (2001:84) offers a similar opinion: "John customarily writes titles and descriptions in the nominative, even though Greek grammar demands the genitive. The term μάρτυς primarily means one who testifies and secondarily one who suffers death. In this verse, both meanings are relevant." This supports the exegetical findings in Revelation 1:1-2 which show how the book is both from Jesus (who was a faithful witness during his earthly ministry) and about Jesus (of whom Revelation testifies). The Jesus who is said to speak through John's text is congruent with the Jesus who is already known through tradition (Koester 2014:227). He is the prophet of old, who is still prophesying in Revelation.

#### **4.2.3.2 "Firstborn"**

The word πρωτότοκος is generally rendered "firstborn," and indicates a place of prominence and privilege (Rogers and Rogers 1998:611). It qualifies τῶν νεκρῶν ("from the dead"), which is a reference to the resurrection. It particularly pertains to having special status based on birth order, and as it concerns Jesus' resurrection, it shows Christ as the firstborn of a new humanity, which is to be glorified as its exalted Lord is glorified (Bauer and Danker 2001:894).

Scholars overwhelmingly agree πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν is a palpable reference to Jesus' resurrection (so Aune 1997:38; Osborne 2002:63; Boxall 2006:32; Resseguie 2009:67; Fee 2011:7-8; Hamilton 2012:36; Beale 2013:191; Duvall 2014:26; Williamson 2015:45; Akin 2016:10). "The phrase points to the way that Jesus has pioneered the resurrection from the dead. He is the first whose resurrection is not merely resuscitation of bodily life" (Hamilton 2012:36).

Scholars observe how πρωτότοκος finds its roots in other NT books (so Lenski 1943:44; Ladd 1991:25; Aune 1997:3; Longman and Garland 2006:599-600; Duvall 2014:26; Williamson 2015:45). The most notable is Colossians 1:15 and 18, where Paul calls Jesus "the firstborn over all creation" and "the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things." "This cannot mean that Christ was the first-created being but rather that he is the source, ruler, or origin of all creation. So for Christ to be the 'firstborn' of the dead (Col 1:15) signifies not merely that he was first in time to be raised from the dead, but also that he was first in importance, having supreme authority over the dead" (Col 1:18) (Longman and Garland 2006:600). Therefore, Paul's use of "firstborn" stresses both Jesus' preeminence over past creation, particularly as it concerns how things were "born" into being ("for all things in Heaven and earth were created in him" Col 1:16), as well as Jesus' preeminence over present creation, particularly as it concerns how a person can be "born" as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

Lenski (1943:44) cites the book of Hebrews as offering helpful commentary to the present implications of Jesus' "firstborn" status. Hebrews 10:21 is particularly helpful in that it shows precisely how Jesus' preeminence presently impacts believers, which describes Jesus as "a great priest over the house of God." "The 'great priest' is of course Jesus and is equivalent to calling him 'high priest'" (Allen 2010:514). In the same manner that a high priest atoned for sins in God's house on earth (the Temple), so Jesus atones for sins in God's house in Heaven. "'Firstborn' refers to the high, privileged position [the "high priest"] that Christ has

as a result of the resurrection from the dead ... Christ has gained such a sovereign position over the cosmos” (Beale 1999:191). Allen (2010:514) says the preposition “over” in Hebrews 10:21 connotes administration and responsibility for something, and in this case refers to how Jesus’ “firstborn” status gives him present authority over God’s people; it is his present ministry. Jesus was preeminent over the cosmos at creation, because all things were born by him (Col 1:16), and he is preeminent over creation now, because all believers are born by him. Therefore, while “faithful witness” primarily refers to Jesus’ past prophetic ministry, “firstborn” primarily refers to Jesus’ present priestly ministry.

There are also future implications to this title. Jesus “is not the last but provides the precedent for the subsequent resurrection of believers who have died” (Aune 1997:38). “Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our future resurrection” (Duvall 2014:26). “Just as those who follow Jesus die, they also have the promise of resurrection to endless life” (Koester 2014:227). Witherington (2003:76) maintains John is reassuring his audience that the major factor they might fear, namely death, will be overcome, as it was for Christ. Death is not beyond Jesus, for he is already ruling over it. Therefore, the weight of the title concerns Jesus’ ministry over one’s present salvation, giving hope to what that salvation implies in a future resurrection (Rom 8:30). Resseguie (2009:67) states this is a reminder that God’s new creation is a reality in Christ. This applies to people (Jn 3:1-21; 2 Cor 5:17) and also to creation proper (Rev 21-22). “Christ has gained such a sovereign position over the cosmos ... he is the inaugurator of the new creation by means of his resurrection” (Beale 1997:190).

#### **4.2.3.3 “Ruler of the Kings of the Earth”**

The word ἄρχων is generally rendered “ruler” (so Rogers and Rogers 1998:611; Louw and Nida 1999:36), and means “one invested with power and dignity” (Perschbacher 1990:55). Bauer and Danker (2001:140) state the word refers to one who has eminence in a ruling capacity. Rogers and Rogers (1998:611)

connect the title with the implications of “firstborn from the dead,” maintaining how the resurrection carried with it the potential lordship over all humanity. The title in full “stands appropriately at the head of a book representing the glorified Christ as presiding over the destinies of nations” (Rogers and Rogers 1998:611). This is the only place in the NT where ἄρχων refers to Christ, and the title is to be viewed as stressing the Christology of Revelation (Balz and Schneider 1992:167).<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the title finalizes a triad of past, present, and future terms being woven together to characterize Christ and his ministry (Balz and Schneider 1992:167).

The major question concerning “ruler” is how it relates to “kings of the earth.” If the exegetical findings of the previous two titles are to be accepted, which is that “faithful witness” generally refers to Jesus’ past ministry and “firstborn of the dead” generally refers to Jesus’ present ministry, then it seems to follow that “ruler of the kings of the earth” refers to Jesus’ future ministry, particularly his reign in the Millennium. This would render the Millennium a literal and future event.

It is fascinating that several works have little to say about this specific title, which of the three titles is the one which would most likely have to do with a predictive event (so Caird 1966:16-17; Morris 1987:49; Kistemaker 2001:83-85; Witherington 2003:76; Smalley 2005:34-35<sup>137</sup>; Cory 2006:16; Resseguie 2009:66; Mangina 2010:42; Hamilton 2012:36; Duvall 2014:26; Williamson 2015:45).<sup>138</sup> Several of these explicitly modulate the possibility that Revelation is prophetic and futuristic. However, there are some who do not hold to Revelation as primarily prophetic or futuristic who speak to the “ruler” title as not necessarily predictive. Longman and Garland (2006:600) for example suggest the term could

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<sup>136</sup> Which supports the exegetical conclusions concerning the objective/subjective genitives in Revelation 1:1-2. If Revelation is Christological, it is because it follows that the book is not merely from Jesus, but also includes insights about him.

<sup>137</sup> Smalley’s (2005:34-35) commentary is limited to stating the titles as a unit should not be understood as referring to Jesus’ past, present, and future ministry, but has little to say specifically about this particular title.

<sup>138</sup> Williamson (2015:45) for example succinctly notes this includes “the Roman emperor,” and offers no further commentary on the title.

be understood in a preterist sense to refer to Jesus' rulership over past leaders, like Nero, Domitian, Pilate, and Herod, an allegorical sense to refer to Jesus' rulership over Satan, the dragon, sin, and death, and a futuristic sense to refer to Jesus' rulership over future, literal kings of the earth. All three ideas are true for Longman and Garland (2006:600), which is not an unfounded conclusion in the general sense of the title. However, like the two other titles in the verse, those who offer commentary on the title take this it as also having a primary sense (so Ladd 1991:25; Osborne 2002:63; Akin 2016:10).

Some maintain the primary sense of "ruler of the kings of the earth" has to do with a future event in which Christ will literally reign over earthly kings (so Walvoord 1989a:38; Ladd 1991:25; Thomas 1992:70; Osborne 2002:63; Beale 1999:191; Akin 2016:10). "Christ's kingship over 'the rulers of the earth' does not yet indicate at this point his rule over his redeemed people" (Beale 1999:191). Walvoord (1989a:38) notes while Christ has the right to rule, he is not exercising this right over the kings of the earth now. Osborne (2002:63) maintains the title primarily refers to the kings who will gather for the final war (16:14; 17:14; 19:19), indicating the title refers to Jesus' reign as King during a literal, future Millennium. Aune (1997:40) offers a similar espousal, stating the title is the functional equivalent of "king of kings" in Revelation 19:16, which is the preeminent passage in the Bible on Jesus' second coming. Thomas (1992:70) maintains this is "a clear foreshadowing of Jesus Christ's future role as King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16). This helps to show there is warrant in taking the title as primarily referencing Jesus' future ministry on earth in which he will reign as King. This also buttresses the proposition that Revelation includes prophetic and literal data concerning Jesus Christ.

This consideration is buttressed by scholarship's common consensus that this title is an allusion to Psalm 89, which speaks of the kingship of David (so Thomas 1992:69-70; Mounce 1997:49; Beale 1999:190-191; Osborne 2000:62-63; Trafton 2005:20; Boxall 2006:32). "The immediate context of the Psalm speaks of

David as an anointed king who will reign over all his enemies and whose seed will be established on his throne forever” (Beale 1999:190-191). Jesus’ future reign as king is by virtue of his Davidic lineage (Thomas 1992:70). This supports a prophetic and futuristic understanding of the title, because it portrays Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic prophecy—he will literally reign on David’s throne in a restored kingdom, which many consider the Millennium (Is 9:6-7; Acts 1:6).

Ladd (1991:25) considers “ruler of the kings of the earth” as one of the central affirmations of the NT, and expresses how this title specifically combats a predominantly allegorical understanding to the content of Revelation, which states the book is mostly about the timeless battle between good and evil: “It has not been nor is it now true that God has always triumphed and right has always won the day.” For Ladd (1991:25), “ruler of the kings of the earth” shows how, behind the chaotic events of history, Jesus Christ, who chose the way of obedience and humiliation (“faithful witness”), has in fact been exalted to God’s right hand where he sits as Lord (“firstborn”). That he is ruler of the kings of the earth is a title which speaks primarily of his second coming, in which he will be understood as making manifest to the world the sovereignty which is already his (Ladd 1991:25). Ladd shows that, while this title can refer to a literal, future event, it can also have present implications. Jesus is already the rightful King, even if he isn’t literally reigning. Akin (2016:10) agrees: “It is not ‘He will be’ but rather ‘He is!’ All authorities are under his dominion and rule. That is true now, and it will be made crystal clear when he comes again (Rev 19:11-21).” “Jesus was put to death by earthly rulers, yet the resurrection means he is not subject to them—rather, they are subject to Jesus” (Koester 2014:227). Like Ladd (1991:25), Longman and Garland (2006:600) maintain Christ’s rulership is the key theme of Revelation, which continues to bolster the claim that Revelation indeed unveils things “about” Jesus, and that much of it has to do with a future, literal event.

#### 4.2.3.4 Summary of Revelation 1:5 Titles

An exegetical analysis of Revelation 1:5 shows warrant in proposing that in his first incarnation Jesus served as a prophet (“faithful witness), is now serving as a priest (“firstborn from the dead”), and will return as King (“ruler of the kings of the earth”). This expresses a tripartite understanding to Jesus’ ministry, with each title having a primary meaning which is temporal and chronometric (Beasley-Murray (1978:56; Walvoord 1989a:38; Aune 1997:37; Patterson 2012:60-61; Akin 2016:10-11).

Smalley (2005:35) disagrees, arguing there is no need to “stretch the threefold nature of this identification of Jesus.” Smalley (2005:30) argues this on the basis of what he calls a “balanced eschatology of Revelation,” which he says renders it difficult, if not impossible to force a threefold description of Christ into a chronological timescale. “Jesus is Lord over the earth and its inhabitants *now*, as well as coming in future glory” (Smalley 2005:35). While there are some who disagree with the threefold description of Christ into a chronological timescale, Smalley is unique in that he is categorically against it. However, his argument takes an either/or approach, which suggests if there are present or future implications to all of the titles, then it means there can be no firm threefold conclusion. The exegetical conclusions disclosed above agree with Smalley in that there are certainly present and future implications imbedded in every title. This, however, doesn’t seem to make it “impossible,” or even “difficult” to render the titles as chronometric. Exegesis and scholarship show there is warrant in proposing that each title has a primary, chronometric meaning that at the same time includes secondary implications concerning the present, and ultimately the future.

Thomas (1992:70) summarizes three ways the titles can be taken:

One defines them as speaking of divine testimony, revelation of the risen Lord, and the forecast of the issues of history. Another sees the past, present, and future works of Christ in the three. [Still another] sees all three as referring to Jesus Christ's future dominion over the earth.

Smalley (2005:35) is an example of someone who understands the titles as speaking of divine testimony, revelation of the risen Lord, and the forecast of the issues of history. Beasley-Murray (1978:56), Walvoord (1989a:38), Patterson (2012:60-61) and Akin (2016:10-11) are examples of scholars who take the titles as referring to the past, present, and future works of Christ. Bullinger (1984:142-143) and Thomas (1992:30) are examples of scholars who take the primary intent of the titles as referring to Jesus' future dominion over the earth, but Thomas in particular acknowledges that "some secondary reference may be acknowledged to the faithful witness He has born in the past, to his present ministry as the resurrected Lord, and to his future role as King of kings." This particular view concurs with the view proposed in this thesis, but switches the onus of what is primary and secondary.

An analysis of Revelation 1:5 shows the Christological titles in Revelation can be taken as referring to Jesus' past, present, and future ministry, and that each title is rooted in Psalm 89, which declares Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises made to David regarding an eternal kingdom in 2 Samuel 7 (Thomas 1992:70). This presents Jesus as having a chronometric threefold ministry, but also that these temporal ministries are all intricately interwoven in a contemporaneous way which looks towards the future in which Jesus will literally reign on David's throne as the King of kings. This is to say that Jesus shows that eschatology is intrinsically bound up in his temporal ministry. Therefore, eschatology, especially as it pertains to Heaven, cannot be fully apprehended apart from a Christological consideration of Jesus' past and present ministries.

### **4.2.4 Revelation 1:9**

“I, John, your brother and the one who shares with you in the persecution, kingdom, and endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus” (Rev 1:9)

The important facts which form the background for Revelation are introduced in Revelation 1:9 (Walvoord 1989a:41). These facts are fixed in the terms John uses in the first part of the verse, which include “tribulation,” “kingdom,” and “perseverance.” They particularly relate to the eschatological events described in the later chapters of Revelation, and John is careful to note that Jesus is exceptionally involved because they are “in” him.

#### **4.2.4.1 “Tribulation”**

The term *θλίψις* has the basic meaning of press, crush, rub, or push (so Perschbacher 1990:203; Balz and Schneider 1992:152). It more specifically means “trouble that inflicts distress, oppression, affliction, or tribulation,” and in Revelation 1:9 it particularly refers to distress that is brought about by outward circumstances (Bauer and Danker 2000:457). Louw and Nida (1999:242) note it is trouble involving direct suffering, citing Acts 11:19 as an example in which the Christians were scattered because of the trouble which occurred at the time of Stephen’s death. Rogers and Rogers (1998:612) note how the use of the article impacts how the term is to be understood.

One major question concerning *θλίψις* has to do with whether it can imply some kind of future Great Tribulation, or if it is limited to general tribulation (Thomas 1992:86). Many understand the term as referring to the latter (so Fiorenza 1991:50; Ladd 1991:29; Thomas 1992:86; Mounce 1997:54; Kistemaker 2001:90; Witherington 2003:78-79; Osborne 2002:80; Longman and Garland 2006:602; Fee 2011:13; Hamilton 2012:43; Duvall 2014:31; Akin 2016:20). The

second part of Revelation 1:9 shows that John is on the island called Patmos “because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” It is not debated that this is the realization of the general idea of the “tribulation” John shares with the churches to which Revelation is written (so Lenski 1943:55; Bullinger 1984:150; Ladd 1991:30; Thomas 1992:87; Johnson 2001:55-56; Osborne 2002:81; Witherington 2003:79; Boxall 2006:38; Barr 2012:67; Williamson 2015:49), but even if the word does primarily refer to a general tribulation, it does not at the same time mean the term is solely limited to this scope.

Several maintain the article renders θλίψις unique (Lenski 1943:55; Bullinger 1984:148; Aune 1997:75; Rogers and Rogers 1998:612; Trafton 2005:26; Mangina 2010:47; Blount 2013:41; Williamson 2015:49). Bullinger (1984:148) for example says θλίψις is “peculiar and startling.” It is possible there might be some specificity to the term’s implications in how it is constructed.

Blount (2013:41) purports Revelation is of the apocalyptic genre, and approaches it from a preterist perspective, but states the presence of the definite article renders θλίψις as referring to a specific event. Blount states, however, scholars have rightly pressed there is no long-standing or strategically organized system of persecution during the time of Domitian’s reign when John wrote. Blount (2013:41-42) endeavors to reconstruct the social-historical situation and proposes the “event” is the persecution which would arise from living out an obvious faith: “John was ordering his followers to be about the business of telling on themselves, with full knowledge of the kind of repercussions such telling would bring.” This depicts θλίψις as more of a general persecution, however, although it arrives at the conclusion much differently than those who tend to propose it. The specificity for which Blount argues becomes somewhat superficial.

Some uphold the article translates θλίψις as referring to the end times in some capacity (Barr 2003:105). Resseguie (2009:72) for example interprets the term

as “the distress associated with the last days, the labor pains that precede the birth of a new world ... it commonly refers in the NT to the distress of the end times (Mt 24:21, 29; Rom 8:25).<sup>139</sup> Boxall (2006:38) shares a similar opinion, adding that John’s choice of words challenges his hearers to re-evaluate their lives in the light of the eschatological tradition: what appears to them to be the hardships of mundane life may actually be signs of the eschatological crisis, the ‘Great Tribulation’ which will shock God’s people out of their complacency (Rev 7:14).”<sup>140</sup> Smalley (2005:50) too acknowledges the term “may include a reference to the time of intense suffering which is associated with the arrival of the millennial kingdom.”

A balanced conclusion might be that it is best to say that the term in this particular verse primarily refers to a general tribulation, but that there might be some foreshadowing of a specific event, too. Thomas (1992:86) offers a well-rounded opinion, arguing that the general understanding of the term is the more persuasive option, but that a specific Great Tribulation may be portended here. Aune (1997:76) allows room for this understanding: “... it is possible that ‘tribulation’ here refers to ‘the Great Tribulation’ (7:14).” Barr (2012:66) notes how the term occurs only five times in Revelation, and in each case is referred to as “the great ordeal.” What is important is that a general tribulation does not rule out a futuristic approach to Revelation (although a specific reference to a literal Great Tribulation event would be strong evidence for the approach), nor does a general tribulation negate the possibility of a future Great Tribulation event. Trafton (2005:26) offers a helpful nuance of the debate, suggesting the term implies some kind of specificity, although the exact specificity is not inherent in the word itself.

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<sup>139</sup> Resseguie (2009:72) does not take the word as referring to a future Great Tribulation, but does maintain the article renders the word too specific to refer to a general persecution.

<sup>140</sup> What’s more, Boxall (2006:38) also says the word is often translated as “persecution” in order to accommodate a preterist view concerning the Christians’ plight during the reign of Domitian, but says this “need not be at issue here.”

#### 4.2.4.2 “Kingdom”

The term βασιλεύς means “an area or district ruled by a king” (Louw and Nida 1999:15), and is often translated as “kingdom” (Perschabacher 1990:68).

Osborne (2002:80) notes that “kingdom” is the “central term” of Revelation 1:9a, which seems to be a common consensus among scholarship (so Beale 1999:201; Keener 2000:81-82; Patterson 2012:64-65). Thomas (1992:87) states there is “little difference of opinion” which exists over the meaning of the term, stating, “It is the millennial kingdom described more fully in Revelation 20.” Thomas is correct in that most understand βασιλεύς as referring to the kingdom described in Revelation 20, but not all agree with how the kingdom is to be inaugurated (Bock and Gundry 1999:7-9). One’s interpretation of the kingdom is inherently tied to how one hermeneutically approaches Revelation.

The major interpretations of “kingdom” include: (a) postmillennialism, which expects the proclaiming of the gospel to win the vast majority of people to salvation in the present age, gradually producing a time in history prior to Christ’s return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail; (b) amillennialism, which is the belief that the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 do not represent a specific period of time between Christ’s first and second comings, and instead refers to the Heavenly reign of Christ and the departed saints during the Church Age;<sup>141</sup> and (c) premillennialism, which is the view that the Millennium follows the return of Christ, which occurs after the Great Tribulation, and that it lasts for one thousand years, during which time Jesus will reign supreme (so Grenz and others 1999:9, 93, 94; Gentry 1999:11-57, 81-129, 155-227).

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<sup>141</sup> Grenz and others (1999:9) write, “Amillennialists usually understand Revelation 20 to mean the return of Christ will occur at the end of history and that the Church presently lives in the final era of history.”

A literal, futuristic approach to Revelation excludes amillennialism and postmillennialism, and usually favors premillennialism (so Blaising 1999:157; Weber 2010:367; Allen 2011:75-88). This is therefore how the term is understood here for reasons discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three, and also discussed further in Chapter Five.

What is important to note is that understanding the “kingdom” as a literal, future event does not at the same time negate that there can also be present implications. In the same way ὁ θλίψις is both general and specific, and thus includes both present and future implications, so is ὁ βασιλεύς. Smalley (2005:50) says there is no need to restrict the term. To do so would be to interpret it by rules which are different from how ὁ θλίψις is best understood. “The kingdom of God is the eschatological reign of Christ in which Christians participate now” (Resseguie 2009:72-73). Thomas (1992:87) believes it is the “future kingdom spoken of by Christ (Lk 12:32; 22:29), Paul (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5), and James (2:5),” and, although future, “is an integral part of the present Christian experience.” Koester (2014:239) says the redeemed already constitute a “kingdom,” since they acknowledge the lordship of God and Christ, yet they “will share in the blessings of divine rule as evil and death are overcome.” Osborne (2002:80) summarizes the tension well in stating the “kingdom” was initially inaugurated by Jesus’ first advent, but will not be consummated until his second coming.

### **4.2.4.3 “Perseverance”**

The term ὑπομονή is generally translated “patient” or “endurance” (so Perschbacher 1990:423; Rogers and Rogers 1998:612), and in Revelation 1:9 means “the act of patient waiting for someone” (Bauer and Danker 2001:1040). Louw and Nida (1999:307) state it refers to the capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances. Its initial use meant “to hold out” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:581).

There is little deliberation or discussion about the meaning of ὑπομονή in Revelation 1:9. It is not as litigious as “tribulation” or “kingdom,” and most take it as a word which links the two words together (Morris 1984:52). “Endurance is the shape that acknowledging God’s lordship takes. [It] is bearing hardship for the sake of a goal” (Koester 2014:239). Kistemaker (2001:90) outlines the tension well, and how ὑπομονή helps to solve it:

John mentions it frequently in Revelation as one of the characteristic features of one who follows Christ (Rev 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 14:12). But how do we explain the sequence of the three nouns we are examining? How does the kingdom relate to both tribulation and patient endurance? Members of this kingdom must suffer and endure ... On the one hand, Christians face tribulation because they are in the kingdom; on the other hand, they are told to endure patiently [for] the kingdom [to] come ... When thus we see the kingdom between tribulation and patient endurance, any tension is allayed.

Lenski (1943:55) offers a more apt summary of the tension: “Were it not for the kingdom, which the world opposes, there would be no affliction for the partakers of the kingdom; were it not for the powers of the kingdom, its partakers could not endure.” This expresses the general purpose of ὑπομονή—to express how believers can “hold out” through tribulations as they anticipate the inauguration of the kingdom. “Endurance” is a quality which is frequently associated with Christian living; it is the “spiritual alchemy” which transforms those who share in tribulation into citizens of the future kingdom (Thomas 1992:87).

#### **4.2.4.4 Summary of Revelation 1:9 Terms**

What has not been endeavored is a syntactical analysis of the clause in Revelation 1:9 as a whole. This requires a consideration of the sequence of the

words, as well as how the phrase “in Christ” impacts the overall understanding of the three terms.

Lenski (1943:55) and Kistemaker (2001:90) probe the sequence, which is an important consideration for the overall implications of the verse. It is interesting that the terms exist in such an order, especially for a futuristic model of Revelation. A futuristic model takes Revelation’s content predominantly literally, typically avowing for a future Great Tribulation (Rev 5-18), subsequent Millennium (Rev 19-20), and subsequent New Creation (Rev 21-22). This parallels in sequential order the three terms in Revelation 1:9: The “tribulation” parallels the Great Tribulation; the “kingdom” parallels the Millennium; and “endurance” parallels the New Creation, which endures “forever and ever” (Rev 22:5).

Beale (1999:201) and Osborne (2002:81)<sup>142</sup> take this a step further and say the threefold description is modeled on the threefold description of Christ in Revelation 1:5, namely in the spirit of Jesus’ own tribulation and enduring rulership. This is arguably what John means when he states that the “tribulation, kingdom, and endurance” are “in Christ.” On this note, Smalley (2005:50) says “in Christ” governs the whole verse in the Greek, which means that all three statements are in some way bound up in him. “All three are to be understood as having their frame of reference ‘in Jesus’” (Beale 1999:201).

Aune (1997:75-76) also acknowledges the possibility of the three substantives in Revelation 1:9 as being governed by the “in Christ” preposition, but concludes “this cannot be so since it is problematic to speak of the ‘tribulation in Jesus.’” Aune’s argument is based more on the trepidation of a tribulation being related to Jesus, rather than a consideration of the Greek’s syntax. Aune’s concern is alleviated when the threefold description is related to Revelation 1:5, as Beale

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<sup>142</sup> Ladd (1991:30) also makes this connection, although his commentary is not extensive and essentially merely cites the possibility.

(1999:201) and Osborne (2002:81) suggest, because the “tribulation” could refer to Jesus’ “faithful witness” (Rev 1:5) during his first incarnation, in which he experienced tribulation on the cross, as well as hint to his future involvement with the Great Tribulation.

Most commentary on “in Christ” tends to focus on John’s and the believer’s sharing of Jesus’ tribulation and kingdom (so Lenski 1943:55; Bullinger 1984:150; Ladd 1991:30; Thomas 1992:87; Johnson 2001:55-56; Osborne 2002:81; Witherington 2003:79; Boxall 2006:38; Barr 2012:67; Williamson 2015:49), but this thesis is particularly concerned with the Christological implications of the preposition. This is to say, if Beale (1999:201) and Osborne’s (2002:81) proposition of a relationship between Revelation 1:5 and 9 is to be accepted, then there is a query concerning what it means for Jesus, the one who still has a future ministry, to share “in” the future implications of the tribulation, kingdom, and endurance. Akin (2016:21) maintains “in Jesus” means Jesus has a “will,” and “a plan,” indicating the future allusions of the substantives. This thesis seeks to investigate Jesus’ “plan”—his specific involvement in the eschatological delineations described in the book of Revelation—in order to ascertain its ouranological implications; Jesus’ involvement in the Great Tribulation, the Millennium, and the New Creation are important to the overall goal of this thesis.

#### **4.2.5 Revelation 12:17**

“So the dragon became enraged at the woman and went away to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep God’s commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus” (Rev 12:17).

Revelation 12 details a “war in Heaven,” where Michael and his angels wage war with a “great red dragon” (first described in 12:3-4) and his angels. This dragon and his angels are not strong enough and a place is no longer found for them in

Heaven (12:8). This dragon is described as the “serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan,”<sup>143</sup> and is thrown down to earth, along with his angels (12:9). His desire is to “deceive the whole world” (12:9). The subject of salvation is then described via a male son born of a woman (12:1-2, 5-6). The dragon persecutes the woman who gave birth to the son (12:13), but she flees and survives (12:6, 16). Enraged, the dragon marches off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:17).

The major question of the verse concerns the meaning of πόλεμος, which is generally translated “war,” “battle,” or “engagement” (Perschbacher 1990:337; Louw and Nida 1999:548). This is to ask whether πόλεμος is to be taken as a reference to a general battle or engagement, or to some kind of unique event. “How readers are to understand this threat is disputed” (Koester 2014:567). A warranted interpretation is reliant upon the meanings of γυνή (“woman”) and σπέρμα (“children”), which both qualify πόλεμος. The problem is the text does not explicitly define the terms. Osborne (2002:484) offers a helpful synopsis of the varying opinions:<sup>144</sup> Some (Walvoord 1989a:196) believe the woman is Israel as a whole, and the “children” the believing remnant. Others (so Bullinger 1984:417; Thomas 1995:142) take the “woman” as believing Israel and the “children” as the 144,000 sealed in Revelation 7. Others (so Hughes 1990:142-143; Glasson 1965:78) have said the contrast is between the Palestinian church (“woman”) and the Gentile church (“children”). Still others (so Mounce 1997:242; Keener 2000:324;<sup>145</sup> Kistemaker 2001:370; Longman and Garland 2006:700; Akin 2016:217) believe the contrast is between the male seed, Christ (12:5, 13), and the church (12:13-17), and, finally, some (so Ladd 1991:174-175; Caird 1966:159-160; Aune 1997:707-708; Beale 1999:676-677; Smalley 2005:333-334; Resseguie 2009:175) see a contrast between the woman as the “ideal church”

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<sup>143</sup> This shows warrant in taking the symbols in Revelation as referring to the literal; the symbol of the “dragon” is literally the Devil. With this said, the other figures in the passage are not directly described, which spurs the ongoing debate.

<sup>144</sup> This overview includes some citations from newer sources Osborne does not originally include.

<sup>145</sup> Keener specifically takes it to refer to believers throughout history, as opposed to believers in some kind of unique war.

from a Heavenly perspective (12:6, 13-16) and the “children” as the earthly church seen as a whole (12:17).

The opinions on Revelation 12:17 are many. Thomas (1995:141-142) summarizes the opinions into four general categories: (1) seeing the “children” as Gentile Christians as distinct from the Jewish mother-Church in Jerusalem (“woman”); (2) taking the “children” to be selected members of the believing community who suffer persecution after the pattern of Christ; (3) taking “children” as a believing remnant and the “woman” as Israel as a whole; and (4) understanding the “children” as the 144,000 Israelites who were sealed in Revelation 7, and the “woman” as believing Israel. Thomas (1995:141-142) states that each proposal has strengths and weaknesses, writing: (1) falls short in eliminating Jewish Christians from among them and in restricting the woman to the Jerusalem Church; (2) is only “partially right,” because it fails to distinguish between the woman and the rest of her seed, which, suggests that she is “nothing more than the sum of her children”; and (3) does not explain why unbelieving Israel is granted divine protection from the dragon. Thus, for Thomas (1995:142), (4) is the best option because it satisfies both the “testimony of Jesus,” as well as the “children” being ethnic Jews.

Beale (1999:676) describes Revelation 12:17 as one of the most difficult in Revelation, arguing no solution is without its problems. Discovering a suitable interpretation is especially difficult because σπέρμα (“children”) is only present here in Revelation (Smalley 2005:333). In light of this, this thesis adopts an interpretation which best fits the futuristic model, as well as honors the lexical implications of πόλεμος (“war”). This establishes helpful boundaries in how “woman” and “children” might qualify the term.

A futuristic approach to Revelation takes Revelation 5-18 as primarily referring to a future event which scholars describe as the Great Tribulation (Walvoord 1989a:187; Thomas 1995:141-143; Akin 2011:46-61; Patterson 2012:270-271).

In this framework Revelation 12:17 is a verse set within the context of the Great Tribulation, a future seven-year event. The Great Tribulation is a unique period of military conflict which supports the lexical data concerning πόλεμος. Bauer and Danker (2001:844) support this in stating the term refers to a “military conflict,” which is distinct from a general battle or engagement. Balz and Schneider (1992:128) further this in maintaining the term includes the element of an eschatological catastrophe. Therefore, while it is impossible to entirely prove (Beale 1999:676), it is not exorbitant to suggest that πόλεμος is a reference to the Great Tribulation, because the event fits the lexical measurements, as well as a reasonable hermeneutical framework to the book as a whole (Gentry and others 1998:17-18).

The question still remains concerning the meaning of the “woman” and “children,” but understanding the “war” as the Great Tribulation is helpful to bring about an interpretation. A futuristic framework disavows Thomas’ (1995:141-142) first and second summarizations, because (1) is best associated with a historicist or preterist approach, and (2) is best suited for an allegorical approach. In the futuristic model the πόλεμος is both future and unique, not past and/or general. Therefore both (3) and (4) are sufficient conclusions for the purposes of this thesis. These interpretations take the “woman” to refer to national Israel, and “children” to refer to Israelites who “keep God’s commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus” (Rev 12:17). This stresses the notion of the Great Tribulation as largely concerning ethnic Israel, a claim which Akin (2016:216) says is a certain component of the dragon’s persecution.

If the Great Tribulation largely concerns ethnic Israel, particularly those who “hold to the testimony of Jesus,” the question then follows as to the fate of the Church, which by definition holds to the testimony of Jesus. Futurists overwhelmingly maintain the Church is raptured to Heaven prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation (Akin 2011:46-61). If this is to be accepted, however, it cannot be achieved purely on the exegetical data from Revelation 12:17. This thesis deals

with the matter in more depth in Chapter Five. It is helpful to note here, however, that this brings lucidity to how the “tribulation” can be “in Christ” (Rev 1:9),<sup>146</sup> because Jesus is the one who raptures the Church (Jn 14:3; 1 Thess 4:16-17; Titus 2:13), and also the one whose testimony ethnic Israel keeps. This is buttressed by the notion that Jesus is the “male child” to which the woman gave birth in Revelation 12:5, the one who is going “to rule over all the nations with an iron rod” and who has been “caught up to God and to his throne,” a symbol over which there is little debate. This description also coalesces well with the exegetical findings in Revelation 1:9, which is rooted in the Davidic language of Psalm 89 where it talks about his “dynasty” and “throne,” and Revelation 22:16, which describes Jesus as the root and descendant of David.

#### 4.2.6 Revelation 14:12

“This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

Revelation 14 describes a beast and his image, declaring that anyone who worships him or his image, or receives a mark on his forehead or hand, will drink of the wine of the wrath of God (14:9-10). John responds, “Here is the perseverance of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

The key word in Revelation 14:12 is ὑπομονή, a word originally assessed in Revelation 1:9 which means “endurance” (Perschbacher 1990:423; Rogers and Rogers 1998:612). The word’s place in the grammatical construction of Revelation 14:12 is problematic, because the initial adverb ὧδε (“this” or “here”) introduces a sentence in the Greek which lacks a verb (Smalley 2005:368). This offers the literal rendering of the phrase: “This the steadfast endurance (ὑπομονή) of the saints.” Aune (1997:837) says this might be solved if the phrase

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<sup>146</sup> Aune (1997:75-76) purports there is a problem with associating the two.

is to be taken as an explanation of the quality of “endurance” as opposed to a definition of the character of “endurance” from the saints themselves. “John is not saying here simply that the faithful should obey God’s commands and keep faith, true as that may be. Rather, he is claiming that Christian endurance involves ‘keeping God’s commands, and remaining faithful to Jesus’” (Smalley 2005:368). Aune (1997:837) and Smalley (2005:368) suggest the New English Bible offers the best translation of this verse: “This is where the fortitude of God’s people has its place—in keeping God’s commands and remaining loyal to Jesus.”

This places the burden of ὑπομονή on Jesus rather than the saints. Bauer and Danker (2001:1040) state ὑπομονή means “the act of patient waiting for someone.” In this sense waiting can be patient not because the person waiting has the character of patience, so much as the person waiting trusts the person coming will indeed come. Therefore, it is possible the saints withstand the mark of the beast not because they have a character of endurance, so much as they have a Christ who endures; they wait on him patiently because they know he will come, and this allows them to have “steadfast endurance.” If this is to be accepted, then it could be an allusion to the second coming, in which Jesus, in a prophetic and futuristic sense, will establish the kingdom of Heaven on earth (Rev 19-20).

Kistemaker (2001:413) offers a treatise on “faith in Jesus” showing how translations vary on whether it is to be taken as subjective or objective. The phrase “faith in Jesus” (NASB, NJB) is interpreted subjectively as a person’s faith in Jesus Christ (which places the onus on the saint’s endurance), while the phrase “faith of Jesus” (KJV, NRSV) is an objective faith which recites a Christian creed at worship or gives a defense of the gospel (which places the onus on Jesus’ endurance). The NET (2006:2289) translates the phrase “faith in Jesus,” but explains in the translation notes that the phrase, however it is translated, should be taken as an objective genitive. This agrees with the solution to the grammatical concerns of the verse proposed above by Aune (1997:837) and

Smalley (2005:368), in that it places the responsibility of the endurance on Christ, not on the saints; they can endure in their faithfulness to Christ because Christ endures in his faithfulness to them.

If this passage is to be taken as occurring during the Great Tribulation (Patterson 2012:35-45), then it fits within the futuristic timeline of the book, which takes the Great Tribulation as occurring prior to the Millennium. Moreover, there are ouranological implications to ὑπομονή as it is taken in its syntactical context, because Revelation 14:13 speaks of Jesus' faithfulness to the saints even in death: Then I heard a loud voice from Heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead, those who die in the Lord from this moment on! 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so they can rest from their hard work, because their deeds will follow them.'" This buttresses the objective genitive in that Christ is faithful to his followers who die for their faith<sup>147</sup> in him in that it shows how they will endure in Heaven. This, like the exegetical summary of Revelation 12:17, sheds light on what it means for ὑπομονή to be "in Christ" in Revelation 1:9; Jesus is intimately acquainted with the Great Tribulation. Although he is physically in Heaven, he is still involved with earth's happenings. He is an enduring presence for those who place their faith in him.

#### **4.2.7 Revelation 17:6**

"I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of those who testified to Jesus. I was greatly astounded when I saw her" (Rev 17:6).

The context surrounding Revelation 17:6 is fascinating in that it describes several symbols ("beast with seven heads and ten horns," "waters," "woman"), as well as literal meanings to the symbols (the seven heads are "seven mountains and

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<sup>147</sup> Revelation 13:17 seems to indicate that those without the mark of the beast will have a hard time surviving in society, which could perhaps lead to their deaths.

seven kings”; the beast is an “eighth king”; the ten horns are “kings without a kingdom”; the waters are “peoples”; the woman is a prostitute who is the “great city that has sovereignty over the kings”).<sup>148</sup> Even with the explanation of the symbols the text is considered a difficult one with much debate (Walvoord 1989a:249).

For purposes related to this thesis, it is best to stay within the boundaries of the purported futuristic approach, which understands this passage as occurring during the Great Tribulation, and particularly to discover the purpose of Jesus’ place in the verse.<sup>149</sup> These parameters render the passage as speaking of a great persecution of God’s people during the Great Tribulation. In particular, it states those who “testified to Jesus” are martyred for their faith; the “woman” or “prostitute” is drunk with the blood of the saints because they “testified to Jesus.”

The word μάρτυς in Revelation 17:6 echoes the word μαρτυρία (“testimony”) in Revelation 1:2, and generally means “witness” (Perschbacher 1990:266). Bauer and Danker (2001:620) and Louw and Nida (1999:235) share that in the context of Revelation 17:6 it refers to a person who has been deprived of life as the result of bearing witness to his beliefs. In this sense, the saint has lost his life because he played witness (Rev 17:6) to Jesus’ testimony (Rev 1:2), which in the context of Revelation 1:2 concerned his death and resurrection of which he was a “faithful witness” in Revelation 1:5. This also alludes to the “tribulation” which is “in Jesus” in Revelation 1:9, in that these saints lose their lives because they testify of Jesus. Partnered with the exegetical data derived from Revelation 14:12, these saints endure with Christ in Heaven upon experiencing death on earth (Rev 14:13). Louw and Nida (1999:235) say it is possible to render the phrase as “those who had been killed because they belonged to Jesus,” which shows how this persecution is intimately bound up with Jesus and his testimony.

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<sup>148</sup> These are all listed throughout Revelation 17.

<sup>149</sup> There is no exposition on this passage which would fundamentally threaten a futuristic approach, nor is there a futuristic exposition which would fundamentally threaten a preterist, historical, or allegorical approach. At this point in Revelation commentators have well established their hermeneutical positions and comment on the passage through such a lens.

#### 4.2.8 Revelation 19:10

“So I threw myself down at his feet to worship him, but he said, “Do not do this! I am only a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony about Jesus. Worship God, for the testimony about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).

Revelation 19:7-10 is set within the context of a new eschatological event, the second coming of Jesus (so Patterson 2012:340-346; Akin 2016:287-297), and describes a vision of a marriage supper. This causes John to worship the angel, but the angel’s reaction is, “Do not do this! I am only a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony about Jesus” (Rev 19:10a). The phrase μαρτύριον τοῦ Ἰησοῦς (“testimony from/about Jesus”) is again present, just as it is in Revelation 1:2 and 12:17, and less explicitly in Revelation 1:5, 9, 14:12, and 17:16 (Aune 1998:1038). The difference in this particular verse is that the phrase is delineated as “the spirit of prophecy.” This is a new and therefore important qualification to a phrase which is woven throughout the entirety of Revelation. Therefore, it will be helpful to assess what it means that the “testimony from/about Jesus *is the spirit of prophecy.*”

The subjective/objective debate applies to this occurrence of μαρτύριον τοῦ Ἰησοῦς (“testimony from/about Jesus”) as it has throughout the rest of the book, and the same conclusion is appropriate here, which is that it is best understood

as a plenary genitive (so Bullinger 1984:595; Barr 2012:239).<sup>150</sup> Witherington (2003:233) notes if an objective genitive is in view, then this verse must solely mean the testimony about Jesus is the very gist of Christian prophecy, and if the subjective genitive is in view, then the gist of prophecy is the testimony Christ bore about himself. Witherington (2003:233) concludes, “Either idea is possible.” It is best to conclude “in this instance, both the subjective and objective interpretations are valid” (Kistemaker 2001:517). Revelation 1:1-2 establishes the tone that the testimony of Jesus as described in Revelation is “from” Jesus, with the likelihood of it also being “about” Jesus, and Revelation 19 helps to solidify the latter as also being true, largely because the passage has to do with an eschatological event which showcases how the testimony is “about” Jesus in that it speaks of his second coming (so Patterson 2012:339-350; Akin 2016:284-301).

The notion that “testimony from/about Jesus” is best understood as a plenary genitive is strengthened with the meaning of the phrase “the spirit of prophecy,” which most take to mean as presenting Jesus as the center on which all prophecy focuses, regardless of how the genitive is understood<sup>151</sup> (so Bullinger 1984:595; Mounce 1997:351; MacArthur 2000:207; Kistemaker 2001:517-518; Patterson 2012:346-347; Akin 2016:288-289).<sup>152</sup> While there is prodigious debate surrounding Revelation’s genre and hermeneutical approach, there is little debate about the notion that all prophecy concerns in some way the Lord Jesus

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<sup>150</sup> See commentary throughout this chapter on this issue. Aune (1998:1038) argues it is best to take the genitive as purely objective, arguing that while some commentators think the phrase in this context is a subjective genitive (so Caird 1966:238; Mounce 1997:349), if the testimony borne by Jesus is in view here, that presumably would refer to the testimony he maintained during his trial. Construing the phrase as a subjective genitive would mean it would be one of the few references to the historical Jesus in Revelation (1:5; 2:8; 5:6; 11:8). But passages like Revelation 17:6 unambiguously emphasize the testimony is borne by Christians, presumably about Jesus and explicitly about Jesus. Aune notes, “For these reasons the phrase should be taken as an objective genitive.” Aune’s argument is problematic, however in that it ignores his own declaration that Revelation does include references to the historical Jesus, so it is not helpful to argue that it ought to be taken as an objective genitive purely on the notion that there are other instances in which it is best taken as such (for Aune these are 6:9, 11:7, 12:11, and 17:6). Aune seems to base his argument on how other passages in Revelation imply the phrase is objective, but ignores his own admission that the subjective sense of the term exists in other passages. This is one reason why it is best to understand the phrase as a plenary genitive, as opposed to attempting to pick and choose—the overall context of Revelation indicates that both are in view.

<sup>151</sup> One example is Mounce (1997:349-350) who argues it is best to take the phrase as how it has been understood throughout the book. In his case this means taking it as a subjective genitive, but Mounce agrees this would restrict the overall meaning of the phrase too much not to understand it as having objective tendencies. This is why it is best to take the difference as artificial, and to instead adopt a plenary genitive understanding.

<sup>152</sup> Aune (1998:1039) argues it is a genitive phrase which is literally rendered, “the prophetic Spirit.” This does not disagree with the common consensus on the issue. However, Aune’s commentary focuses more on the Spirit’s ability to prophecy through individuals, rather than what the actual prophecy is about.

Christ. “He is the spirit of it; yea, the sum and the substance of it” (Bullinger 1984:595-596). “The idea is that the true spirit of prophecy always bears witness to Jesus ... [it] always points to Jesus” (Akin 2016:288-289). Weinrich (2005:305) translates Primasius’ (ca. 560) ancient commentary as reading, “Indeed, the whole point of prophecy and of the sanctifying work of the spirit lies in the testimony of Jesus Christ, whom the entire law and all prophecy serve.” “This reminds us, looking right back to the first verse of John’s book, that the central thing about prophetic inspiration is ‘the testimony of Jesus’” (Wright 2011:170-171). This is ultimately why the angel tells John to worship God and not him, because the angel is merely a messenger sharing God’s historical prophecy of his Son, the same way the prophets have done since the beginning of time.

Patterson (2012:346) offers a helpful analysis of the meaning of προφητεία, in which he identifies the term as a combination of “speak” (*phemi*) and “before” (*pro*), which means, “speak for God before.” Patterson asks, “Before what?” “One sense of the preposition would be to speak about an event before it happens. Another sense would be to speak before listeners of the purpose and acts of God. Likely in this case both are paramount” (Patterson 2012:346). Summarily, the spirit of both the proclamation (“from”) and the telling of the future (“about”) is bound up in the testimony of Jesus; Jesus is the theme of the Revelation (Patterson 2012:346). Walvoord (1989a:273) writes, “This means that prophecy at its very heart is designed to unfold the beauty and loveliness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” This is paramount because, if Jesus is the theme of Revelation, and if Revelation is the most erudite work available on the subject of Heaven,<sup>153</sup> then it is not unreasonable to maintain that Heaven cannot be entirely understood apart from Jesus. He is the foundation on which the doctrine of Heaven is best comprehended.

#### 4.2.10 Revelation 20:4

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<sup>153</sup> This is argued in Chapter Three.

“Then I saw thrones and seated on them were those who had been given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. These had not worshiped the beast or his image and had refused to receive his mark on their forehead or hand. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Rev 20:4).

While Revelation 19 relates the second coming, Revelation 20 concerns the Millennium, in which John sees the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus. These died because they did not worship the beast or his image, and did not receive his mark, which was a response of their faith in Jesus. This is likely a reference to the martyrs in Revelation 12:17, 14:12, and 17:6 (Hamilton 2012:373). John says they “came to life” to reign with Jesus during the Millennium, which is the key phrase in the text. “How people interpret this simple statement reveals their position on the millennial question. The crux of the exegetical problem rests in the meaning of ‘came to life’ [ἐξήσαν]” (Mounce 1997:366).<sup>154</sup> The nature of the Millennium is greatly impacted by a single Greek verb.<sup>155</sup>

The specific question is whether ἐξήσαν (“came to life”) refers to a physical resurrection or a spiritual one (symbolic or spiritual). Witherington (2003:249) frames the debate in noting how it depends on whether ἐξήσαν is translated as “live” (spiritual, meaning the saints are alive in Heaven) or as “came to life” (bodily, meaning they died and were subsequently resurrected back to life). Several identify the complexity in determining a conclusion which is not without weaknesses (so Ladd 1991:263 Witherington 2003:245; Boxall 2006:282; Blount 2009:365). Premillennialists prefer to translate the expression literally, while

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<sup>154</sup> Mangina (2010:226-231) offers a sketch of how four historical theologians read Revelation 20, each of whom interpreted it differently, which shows the complexity of the issue even in church history (Irenaeus, Origen, Augustine, and Jonathan Edwards).

<sup>155</sup> Thomas (1995:416) says to understand the phrase as referring to a bodily resurrection is in essence to accept the Millennium as a future period on earth. Osborne (2002:706) says the phrase is “at the heart of the millennial debate. The meaning of [the phrase] determines the issue.”

amillennialists and postmillennialists consider it spiritual (Gregg 2013:466). Mangina's (2010:226) acknowledgment that his personal treatment cannot do justice to the extraordinary complexity of the debate is embraced here.

Some take ἔζησαν spiritually, which results in either an amillennial or postmillennial interpretation of the Millennium in which the saints "live" in Heaven (so Caird 1966:253; Morris 1987:231; Bauckham 1993:108; Beale 1999:995-996; Kistemaker 2001:539; Resseguie 2009:245; Williamson 2014:324-325). Many argue for the spiritual sense of the term on the basis that John allegedly uses an unusual term to speak of a physical resurrection, and that this therefore means it likely is best rendered spiritual (Morris 1987:231). Kistemaker (2001:539) for example says the same verb appears in the parable of the lost son, where the father rejoices that his son who was dead is alive again (Lk 15:24, 32). "The father states that his lost son has experienced a *spiritual* rebirth; similarly the saints have come to life *spiritually*" (Kistemaker 2001:539).<sup>156</sup> In this sense the saints' "reigning with Christ" is best understood as occurring in Heaven, where Christ is seated, and therefore ἔζησαν is best understood as inferring the saints are spiritually "alive" in Heaven. Beale concurs with the spiritual sense of the term, but notes one objection to this particular argument is that the intermediate state is never referred to this way in Scripture (Beale 1999:1007).

Others who take the term spiritually denote the word isn't necessarily an unusual way to refer to a physical resurrection, but maintain it is not the best rendering in the context of Revelation 20:4 (Beale 1999:995-1005). Beale (1999:995-1005) states the term has a fluid range of meaning in Revelation, sometimes referring to physical resurrection (1:18; 2:8), and sometimes having a figurative connotation of spiritual existence (3:1; 7:17; 13:14). Some who argue for a physical sense of ἔζησαν maintain it is the best interpretation because a literal resurrection (ἀνάστασις) is clearly implied in Revelation 20:6, and it is unreasonable to suggest the senses of the words would switch between two

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<sup>156</sup> Emphasis mine.

verses in the same context. Beale notes, however, how “elsewhere in the NT ἀνάστασις and ζάω (or the cognate noun, ζωή, “life”) and synonyms are used interchangeably of both spiritual and physical resurrection within the same immediate contexts” (Beale 1999:1004). One example is Romans 6:4-13:

Just as Christ was *raised* from the dead ... so also we should walk in newness of *life*. For if we have become united with the likeness of his death, certainly also we will be in the likeness of his *resurrection* ... for if we have died with Christ, we believe that also we will *live* with him ... but the *life he lives, he lives* to God. So also you reckon yourselves to be dead to sin but *living* to God in Christ Jesus ... present yourselves to God as those *alive* from the dead (similarly Rom 8:10-11).<sup>157</sup>

John 5:24-29 is another common reference for those who embrace a spiritual sense of ἐζήσαν:

The one believing him who sent me has eternal *life* and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death into *life* ... an hour comes and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those hearing will *live*. For just as the Father has *life* in himself, so also he has given the Son to have *life* in himself ... an hour comes in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice, and they will come forth, those having done good deeds to a *resurrection of life*, those having practiced evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.<sup>158</sup>

Beale (1999:1005) is careful to note that these observations do not demonstrate that the same words are used in Rev 20:4, 5 and 6 in the same way for both a spiritual and physical resurrection, but that it illustrates the possibility of a dual meaning in the same context. Some commentators have however argued that

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<sup>157</sup> Verses appear as Beale (1999:1004) portrays them.

<sup>158</sup> Verses appear as Beale (1999:1005) portrays them.

the terms in Revelation 20:4-6 do have these same interchangeable meanings. Kline (1975:366-375) for example argues the “second death” in Revelation 20:6 is spiritual, while the death of the righteous is literal in Revelation 20:4, and thus concludes the possibility that if there are two different kinds of deaths, it is plausible that there are two different kinds of resurrections, too. This argument, however, is built upon the notion that “second death” is “clearly spiritual,” as Kline suggests, but this is also debatable, as noted by Hengstenberg (1853:359), Swete (1906:263), Summers (1959:86-90), and Michaels (1976:100-109), who object on the grounds that Kline assumes too much of the text to make his argument.<sup>159</sup> Ladd (1991:266) also contests Kline’s argument, acknowledging that while it is possible to speak of a spiritual and of a physical reality in the same context, passages like John 5:25-29 do not provide true analogies to Revelation 20:4-6. “There is this all-important difference. In [John 5:24-29], the context itself provides the clues for the spiritual interpretation in the one instance and the literal in the other ... In Revelation 20:4-6 there is no such contextual clue for a similar variation of interpretation” (Ladd 1991:266).

Bauckham (1993:108) upholds a symbolic<sup>160</sup> sense on the notion that John’s intent is not to espouse any particular details about the Millennium, and therefore the interpreter should not try to either. “What is important for the development of the plot is the *meaning* of the Millennium—not the *manner* in which the saints are vindicated” (Resseguie 2009:245). In this approach John uses the Millennium to depict his concept of the victory of the martyrs over the beast (Bauckham 1993:108). They may have died physically, but they “live” spiritually in Heaven, and this is the meaning of the Millennium. This argument, however, ignores the lexical and syntactical implications imbedded in John’s words; it is true that John is interested in the overall meaning of the Millennium, but this does not also mean that he is not interested in the manner in which the saints are vindicated.

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<sup>159</sup> Because the argument assumes that “second death” is “clearly spiritual.”

<sup>160</sup> There might be a slight nuance between taking the verb spiritually or symbolically, perhaps that an amillennial view takes it symbolically and a premillennial view takes it spiritually, but this thesis understands the terms as euphemisms, mainly because both are argued on essentially the same grounds.

Ironically some who take the term figuratively implicitly suggest a literal rendering. Williamson (2015:326) for example says both the phrases “came to life” (Rev 1:5) and “resurrection” (Rev 1:6) normally refer to bodily resurrection, that is literally, but maintains they are better understood as referring to life with Christ in Heaven because the context of Revelation is symbolic. This argument overlooks the immediate exegetical data in order to affirm a presupposition about the book as a whole. Caird (1966:253) detects the influence of OT prophets and their theology in the clause, specifically citing Daniel 12:2-3 and Isaiah 11:1-11. “When [OT prophets] looked forward to the intervention of God in human affairs ... they inevitably conceived that new age as a continuation of earthly existence ... it was an earthly paradise in which there would be a place for the administration of justice” (Caird 1966:253). Caird (1966:253) concludes “it never occurred to them that the wrongs of this present world might be redressed in a different world altogether,” thereby suggesting the authors were wrong in their literal renderings of God’s kingdom. This argument, however, seems to better support a physical rendering of ἔζησαν rather than a spiritual one, because a spiritual rendering is the understanding of the modern interpreter while a literal rendering was the understanding of the ancient interpreter, the ones to whom God gave the original prophecy. Caird declares it was Daniel who first clearly enunciated the doctrine that the saints would be restored to life in order to participate in the glories of the new age (Dan 12:2-3),<sup>161</sup> but argues that “once this belief in resurrection takes hold, it must soon have become obvious that the life of resurrection need not be limited to any earthly habitat.” Caird (1966:253) suggests this is because Heaven is “more solid and lasting, and therefore more real than earth.” This conclusion seems to take Heaven as more literal and physical than earth, but argues for a spiritual resurrection which denies how the OT authors understood resurrection. This seems to do violence to the text, because it mixes and matches the spiritual and literal in ways which do not justify

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<sup>161</sup> This fails to cite Job, who might offer the earliest reference to some kind of physical resurrection: “And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God” (Job 19:26).

the immediate and transcendent context of the Greek verb (Thomas 1995:416-417).

Many take ἐξήσων literally, meaning the term is understood as referring to a bodily resurrection (so Bullinger 1984:616; Walvoord 1989a:297; Ladd 1991:265; Thomas 1995:416; Mounce 1997:366; Osborne 2002:706; Witherington 2003:249; Smalley 2005:507-508; Blount 2009:365; Hamilton 2012:374; Duvall 2014:269; Akin 2016:310). This concurs with Kittel and Friedrich (1985:832), who maintain the root form of the word in Greek denotes physical vitality of organic beings, and the NET (2005:2442) translators who offer the note that the use of the aorist denotes “dead persons who return to life *become alive again*.”

Several base their argument on the nature of ἐξήσων as it is used throughout the course of the scriptures. Bullinger (1984:616), Ladd (1991:265), Osborne (2002:706-707), and Smalley (2005:508) show how the word is used in Mathew 9:18 to refer to a dead girl who, if Jesus touches, will “come to life” and Romans 14:9 where Christ died and “came to life.” These are bodily senses. Blount (2009:365) says it is the same verb used in Ezekiel 37:10 to describe the valley’s dry bones as they take on a miraculous new physical life. In a more immediate context, the word is used in Revelation 1:18 and 2:8 to refer to Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead. Witherington (2003:249) calls these uses the “most important parallel” for the meaning of the verb, thereby rendering it physical.

It seems the word is tied to Christ both in Revelation and outside of Revelation. One could argue that if Jesus was literally and bodily raised from the dead, then the martyrs in Revelation 20:4 will also be literally and bodily raised from the dead (1 Jn 3:2), and that if the martyrs are not understood as being literally and bodily raised from the dead, then it follows that Jesus was not literally and bodily raised from the dead (1 Cor 15:14-17). “If the saints are going to reign with Christ, they will need to be alive in the same sense that he is, namely, having a

resurrection body” (Culver 1954:211). “Like Jesus’ own resurrection, theirs must be a bodily resurrection of some sort” (Blount 2009:366).

There is also the issue of context. While Kline (1975:366-375) and Beale (1999:1005) argue it is not impossible for there to be two senses in one context, Ladd’s (1991:266) aforementioned note on the localized context of Revelation 20:4-6 is important, in that there is no reason to take one resurrection literally and the other symbolically. “If there are two resurrections, the first of which has the souls of the martyrs living again and the second has the rest of the dead living again later—one spiritual, the other physical, the hermeneutical switch is arbitrary, robbing language of its normal sense and robbing Scripture of definitive meaning on any subject” (Thomas 1995:417). Alford (1958:732) offers a well cited quote: “If, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned ... the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave, then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything.” The most hermeneutically sound theory is to take Revelation 20:4 as speaking of a literal, bodily resurrection, which fits the futuristic approach to Revelation, helping to solidify it as a warranted approach to the book.

Akin (2016:302-308) says the main idea of Revelation 20 is to show that, after the Great Tribulation, Christ will establish his millennial kingdom with his saints,<sup>162</sup> and then finally and forever judge Satan and his followers for their rebellion. He offers the following futuristic purview of the Millennium, with which this thesis agrees:

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<sup>162</sup> The term βασιλεύω (“reigned”) relates to “ruler over the kings of the earth” in Revelation 1:5 and “kingdom” in Revelation 1:9, both of which inimitably relate to Christ, thereby placing the rulership on him. In general the term means “to be a king” or “to reign” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:590), and “to exercise authority at a royal level” (Bauer and Danker 2001:170). The saints will “come to life in bodily resurrection and be granted the privilege to reign with Christ as coheirs for a thousand years” (Akin 2016:310). “And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)—if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17).

## Chapter 4: Jesus and the Ternary Nature of Heaven

In Acts 1:6, just before he ascended, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" The kingdom about which they were asking, the kingdom in which Jesus Christ will be universally acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of lords, is the kingdom discussed in Revelation 20. It is the millennial kingdom, the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. The tribulation, with its seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, has ended (Rev 6-18). Israel has experienced a great end-time revival (Rev 7:1-8; see Rom 11:25-26). The nations, [some of] the people[s] of the world, have come to Christ (Rev 7:9-17). Antichrist (the beast) and the false prophet have been revealed, defeated, and cast into the lake of fire (Rev 19:19-21). Babylon, that evil, organized religious, political, social, and economic world system that stands in opposition to God, has been destroyed (Rev 17-18). Armageddon has taken place (Rev 14:14-20; 16:16-21; 19:17-21), and Jesus has come again to the earth to rule and reign for a thousand years as its rightful Master, Lord, and King (Rev 19:11-16).

Akin (2016:302-308) subsequently offers a helpful discourse on the various hermeneutical approaches to the Millennium, which is helpful here because it is one of the most recent treatments of the various approaches in scholarship:

Premillennialism refers to the time of Christ's second coming as it relates to the millennium, and thus is the position that teaches the millennium will be preceded by Christ's return to the earth. Sometimes premillennialists are referred to as "chiliasts," a word that comes from the Greek word *chilioi*, meaning "a thousand." Amillennialism holds that there will be no literal reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years. Postmillennialism means that Christ's second coming will occur after the millennium.

Akin (2016:306) endorses premillennialism because "it is the view that best honors a normal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic while still recognizing the

prophetic and apocalyptic nature of Revelation.” This has been argued in Chapters Two and Three. Akin further endorses a literal, future millennium for three reasons: The abundant use of “millennium” (six times in verses one through seven); the word “year” is used with “one thousand,” and the word is never used in Scripture with a number where its meaning is not literal; and finally, that the two resurrections mentioned in verses four through seven clearly speak of physical, bodily resurrections. This is a helpful argument, because it lets the exegetical data of Revelation 20:4 do the work of interpreting the meaning of “thousand years,” rather than trying to attach a meaning to it. This is to say a literal understanding of the “thousand years” is more of a natural calculation of the exegetical findings in Revelation, rather than a forced timeframe.<sup>163</sup> This is helpful and important in that a literal rendering of the length of time lends warrant to the forthcoming question on the Millennium’s relationship with a “new Heaven and new earth,” which considers whether the two should be interpreted separately or combined in some way.

#### 4.2.11 Revelation 22:16

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star!” (Rev 22:16).

Revelation 22 is the final chapter of Revelation, and is set within the context of “the new Heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1).<sup>164</sup> Several take “the new Heaven and the new earth” (Rev 21:1) as speaking of a future, everlasting Heaven, which is different from the present, intermediate Heaven, and also different from the future Millennium, when the kingdom of Heaven will come to earth (so Mounce

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<sup>163</sup> Patterson (2012:355) argues for a literal rendering of “thousand years” based on the notion that the OT prophets abounded with kingdom age expectation (Is 2:2; 11:6; 19:23-25; 35:1-2). “There is little doubt that the prophets and those who read their prophecies anticipated a literal fulfillment of their prophecies ... the one thousand years should be taken literally in an anticipated fulfillment not only of what is promised here but also what is promised extensively through most OT prophecies” (Patterson 2012:355). This helps to establish the overall meaning of “reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”

<sup>164</sup> “Heaven” is mentioned more than five hundred times in the Bible, and right at fifty times in Revelation. Revelation 21-22 is a major section in Revelation on the final form Heaven will take (MacArthur 2000:262).

1997:380; Blount 2009:376; Akin 2016:327). This is an important distinction, because it establishes the context of the final three mentions of “Jesus” in Revelation. The major question is how καινός (“new”) and ἀπέρχομαι (“passed away”) are to be rendered in Revelation 21:1.

The word καινός pertains to that which is new or recent and hence superior to that which is old (so Louw and Nida 1999:593; Bauer and Danker 2001:497). Kittel and Friedrich (1985:447) compare καινός with another Greek word, νέος, which also means “new,” stating the two words are the most common for “new” in Greek. Kittel and Friedrich (1985:447) note that νέος signifies “what was not there before” or “what has only just arisen or appeared,” while καινός means “what is new and distinctive.” The word “νέος is new in time or origin, i.e., young, with a suggestion of immaturity or of lack of respect for the old, and καινός is what is new in nature, different from the usual, impressive, better than the old, superior in value or attraction” (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:447). Perschbacher (1990:215) says καινός can mean “renovated” or “better.”

Rogers and Rogers (1998:649) note how in rabbinical literature the word ἀπέρχομαι had several different understandings: Some taught the present world would be renovated so that it would return to its original state after creation. Others taught the earth would return to the original chaos and would then be recreated with a new existence. Others taught it would be completely destroyed and the new Heaven and earth would be a totally new creation. Bauer and Danker (2001:102) take the word in the first sense, as the discontinuation of a condition or state. Perschbacher (1990:39) notes one interesting use of the word in Luke 23:33, where it is used to denote arriving at a destination. In this sense ἀπέρχομαι would mean the first Heaven and first earth have arrived at their final destination, which would not indicate total annihilation, but more of a new beginning, which seems to correlate with how Bauer and Danker understand the term (2001:102).

In a futuristic sense, the Millennium ends after a literal one thousand years, after which a “new Heaven and new earth” is created. Blount (1009:376) says this is the logical flow of the events which have transpired since 19:11. Therefore, this is rendered as a new and different era from the Millennium, and since it is on earth, it is different from the present Heaven to which believers go when they pass away. This Heaven “has not yet been created, and no one is there right now. Believers who die do immediately go to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), but that is an intermediate place of blessing, not our final home” (so Alcorn 2004:77; Akin 2016:327). Smalley (2005:525) takes Revelation figuratively and symbolically and agrees the “new Heaven and new earth” (Rev 21:1) is a reference to something different, but doesn’t uphold a literal distinction with the Millennium. For Smalley (2005:525), the first Heaven and earth “passing away” is more of a symbolic reference of a universe freed from sin and renewed for rejoicing. In this sense the “new creation” is the same, present creation. Koester (2001:192) offers a similar opinion, maintaining “new” is a reference to the absence of powers which oppose God, and the presence of the God who gives life. “What makes the new Heaven and earth ‘new’ is above all else the reality that now ‘the dwelling of God is with men ... they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (v 3)’” (Longman and Garland 2006:778). This outlook does not undermine the futurist’s understanding of the era as unique. The major question is how this particular thesis understands the meaning of “new” and “passed away.”

This thesis embraces the assertions of the lexical data, which show *καινός* as referring to a renovation, as opposed to a brand-new creation. This is buttressed with how *ἀπέρχομαι* is understood, which is that it is not an obliteration, but a discontinuation of a state. Therefore, Revelation 21:1 describes the present earth, on which the kingdom of God is inaugurated upon Jesus’ second coming, as reaching its destination at the end of the one thousand years, after which it experiences a miraculous renovation which makes it “new.” This is how several of the early church fathers seemed to understand the phrase (Irenaeus,

Tertullian, Origin, Ambrose, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin),<sup>165</sup> and it seems to be the best conclusion of the lexical data. In short, this thesis takes the phrase as meaning “all things new,” as opposed to “all new things.” This correlates with the overall purpose of Jesus’ ministry, which is to save and resurrect creation.

Jesus’ name is explicitly mentioned three times in Revelation 21-22, the chapters which deal with the “new creation” (22:16, 20, 21). Revelation 22:16, the first of the three verses, echoes the “testimony from/about Jesus” clause, and also includes two new, self-given titles: “the root and the descendant of David” and “the bright morning star.” The debate surrounding the “testimony from/about Jesus” clause applies here as it has with other uses throughout Revelation, and the exegetical conclusions which have been offered throughout this chapter are applicative here. What is of importance is what might be gleaned from the new titles.

#### **4.2.11.1 “The Root and the Descendant of David”**

Osborne (2002:792) and Duvall (2014:306) observe how “I am the root and descendent of David” is one of several “I Am” statements in Revelation. The other statements occur early in the book (Rev 1:8, 17; 2:23; 22:13, 16). Osborne (2002:792) states this is to anchor the reality of who Jesus is, and to bind the book together. This expresses the objective sense of the genitive in that it stresses the book as unveiling things about Jesus.

“The root and descendant of David” is a military metaphor drawn from Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10 (so Barr 2012:256; Koester 2014:843), which for Jews prophesied of a Warrior Messiah who would destroy their enemies. This helps the case that the “new creation” in Revelation 21-22 is unique from the Millennium in Revelation 20, because the Millennium ends with a great rebellion (20:7-10), signifying that it isn’t until this new era of creation that Jesus has conclusively destroyed the

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<sup>165</sup> This was discussed in Chapter One.

enemy. This is what is meant that Jesus is David's "descendant"—he is the fulfillment of all the Davidic messianic promises of an everlasting kingdom (Oden and Bray 2011:205). "Given the whole context of Revelation's Christology, this passage may present Jesus as the very root from which David's line grew and on which it ultimately depends" (Keener 2000:516).

#### **4.2.11.2 "The Bright Morning Star"**

The second title, "the bright morning star," recalls the oracle of Balaam, who in Numbers 24:17 said a star would rise from Jacob to rule the nations (so Witherington 2003:282; Hamilton 2012: 417; Koester 2014:843). Duvall (2014:306) says the star image suggests that a new day dawns beginning with Jesus' eternal reign. This is not unhelpful to the argument that this is possible because this is a new, unique era distinct from the Millennium, since that period ends with a rebellion (20:7-10), while this one will forever be free of "anyone who does what is detestable or practices falsehood" (Rev 22:3).

#### **4.2.11.3 Summary of Revelation 22:16 Titles**

The two titles "root and descendant of David" and "bright morning star" are two titles which express the same idea—that in Jesus are gathered up the fulfillment of all known eschatological hopes (Beckwith 1922:778). These titles are not appropriated to Jesus until the context of the "new creation." This is important when contrasted with the titles appropriated to Jesus in Revelation 19:11-16—the second coming event—which present Jesus as fulfilling specific eschatological hopes, namely that he is the "King of kings" (Rev 19:16) who will rule the nations with an iron rod (Rev 19:15). The titles in Revelation 22:16 are unique in that they seem to finalize every eschatological hope, thereby helping to solidify the "new creation" as a unique era distinct from any other in history.

#### **4.2.12 Revelation 22:20**

“The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon!’ Amen! Come Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

John, in some of his final words in Revelation, quotes Jesus, writing, “Yes, I am coming quickly,” and responds by saying, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:30).

This verse offers insights into Jesus’ Heavenly relationship with earthly time. It is contextually connected to verse thirteen in which Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” These descriptions speak of Jesus’ eternality, and therefore express how Heaven relates to earth through Jesus within the context of eternity (Keener 2000:97). Walvoord (1989a:335) writes, “When the one who exists from all eternity states, ‘Behold, I come quickly,’ it means that from the divine point of view, end-time events are impending.” Therefore, while the time of Jesus’ second coming might seem extensive by the standard of earth’s inhabitants, a thousand years is like a day to the Lord (2 Pt 3:8).

In order to better comprehend the impact this makes on the doctrine of Heaven, the titles “Alpha and Omega,” “first and last,” and “beginning and end” merit assessment.

#### **4.2.12.1 “Alpha and Omega,” “First and Last,” and “Beginning and End”**

Walvoord (1989a:40, 47) connects the titles “Alpha and Omega,” “first and last,” and “beginning and end” to the description found in Revelation 1:8, which pronounces Jesus as the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” This verse is found within a similar context which portrays Jesus as the “Alpha and Omega,” and therefore the titles are typically taken as three ways of saying the same thing (Keener 2000:97). Therefore, alongside the “Alpha and

Omega,” “first and last,” and “beginning and end” titles found in Revelation 22:13, is the description that Jesus is the one “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” as stated in Revelation 1:8. This is an important backdrop for the meaning of Revelation 22:20, because the titles have to do with time.

Patterson (2012:63) describes the titles as a declaration of God’s immutability: “First, God is prior to all creation, and last he is the only One who can bring to consummation the purpose of the cosmos. The declaration is made by attributing to God the initial and ultimate letters of the Greek alphabet—alpha and omega.” Patterson (2012:63) contends that the titles describe a ternary nature to Jesus: “... this one who is Alpha and Omega is the one who continually exists (present active participle of the “to be” verb), who always was (imperfect of the same verb), and the one who is himself yet coming (a present middle participle) ... Christ describes himself as one who is living continually, though he ‘was dead,’ only to live again into the ages of the ages.” Keener (2000:79) says the titles echo the Genesis creation event:

Because of the properties of recently discovered particles, many late twentieth-century physicists have argued for the necessity of at least nine dimensions at the creation event, not simply the four we experience. The creation event involved all those dimensions and necessarily originated with a source outside those dimensions. This discovery is just one reminder that God our Creator is bigger than space and time, and no point in the history of the universe—whether beginning or end—is ever inaccessible to him.

Morgan (2010:16) describes the titles, particularly the one found in Revelation 1:8, as a reference to the special name God gives Moses in Exodus 3:

There is a deep significance in the name by which God here declares himself, Jehovah. It is a combination of three Hebrew words, which may

be translated into an English form thus: Yehi, “He will be,” Hove, “being,” and Hahya, “He was.” The whole name means, “He that will be, he that is, he that was.” Thus the very name brings into the presence of the supreme, the eternal, the self-existent God, who is because he is—a great and perpetual mystery to the finite mind of man, and for the most part beyond all human analysis.

Keener (2000:97) agrees these titles express Jesus’ transcendent deity over time and space (earth), and, furthermore, offer profound insights into how Jesus, who is eternally outside time and space, operates within the earthly parameters.

While several passages in Revelation provide insights into how Heaven through the person and work of Christ can be understood in its relationship with earth, this particular verse provides insights into the nature of Heaven itself. Jesus’ eternal nature—that he is prior to all creation and the only one who can bring to consummation the purpose of the cosmos<sup>166</sup>—reveals a transcendent nature to Heaven, his abode, which extends beyond eschatology (so Roberts 2003:4; Wright 2008:19; Köstenberger 2014a:139). Christologically speaking, Jesus’ nature shows a complete doctrine of Heaven must include the past as much as it includes the future, because Jesus, the intersection between Heaven and earth, is “prior to all creation” (Patterson 2012:63).

#### **4.2.13 Revelation 22:21**

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all” (Rev 22:21).

The final words of Revelation include a general epistolary conclusion in which John offers a blessing of Jesus’ grace upon mankind (Rev 22:21). Beale (1999:1156) also offers valuable insights into John’s benediction by noting how

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<sup>166</sup> Ladd (1972:296) writes, “The final affirmation in Revelation is a word of the Lord ... reassuring the prophet as to the central fact of the consummation: Surely I am coming soon.”

the purpose of a NT epistle is to address specific problems in the church rooted in the readers' present and future participation and blessings in Christ. One example is 1 Timothy 6:11-16 in which Paul admonishes Timothy to "fight the good fight" by "taking hold of eternal life" and "keeping the command" of God "until the appearing of Jesus Christ." Paul encouraged Timothy to be presently active because of his future hope in Christ. Beale entertains the thought that the epistolary element to Revelation could be taken similarly. In the case of Revelation, however, the eschatological hopes are entirely outlined and fulfilled in Christ. If Beale's suggestion is to be accepted, it offers a helpful insight because it stresses a unique "already-and-not-yet" interpretation of Revelation's content concerning Christ, which Beale (1999:1156) argues is "present throughout the book." Such an explanation helps to express the unique relationship Heaven has with earth via Jesus, for it speaks to the timelessness of Heaven and the ephemeralness of earth, and how Jesus uniquely intersects the two. Since Revelation is a letter which is both from Jesus and about Jesus, and since Revelation offers the culmination of the eschatological prophecies in Christ, the eschatological promises therein have a contemporary impact on the churches to whom Jesus wrote.

### **4.2.14 Non-Explicit Descriptions of Jesus in Revelation**

While Jesus' explicit name is an identifiable indicator that a respective verse might offer insights regarding his relationship with Heaven, there are several other titles and descriptions included in Revelation which do not list his explicit name, but are contextually about Jesus (so Osborne 2002:792; Bible Resources 2016).

Revelation includes several other titles and descriptions of Christ, including, "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), "the lamb who has been slain" (Rev 13:8),<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Patterson (2012:52) writes of the title "lamb": "Twenty-eight times in the book of Revelation, Jesus is referred to as 'the Lamb' ... This metaphor alone reveals much about the nature and purpose of the Christ."

“king of the nations” (Rev 15:3), “name written on him which no one knows except himself” (Rev 19:12), “Word of God” (Rev 19:13), and “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16) (Bible Resources 2016). Moreover, several descriptions of Jesus which do not include his name are included in the introductions to the letters to the churches (Rev 1:13-16; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Walvoord (1989a:40) offers a helpful summary of these descriptions in writing,

Jesus Christ is the central figure of ... Revelation. As the source of revelation he is presented in verse one. As the channel of the word and testimony of God he is cited in verse two. His blessings through his revealed word are promised in verse three. In verse five he is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through his shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the one who died for men. He is the almighty one of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of chapter one, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ as such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.

All of these titles and descriptions solidify the notion that Jesus is the central figure in Revelation, and advance the present discussion concerning Jesus' relationship to the doctrine of Heaven. However, while an exposition of each title and description would be helpful, it is not necessary, in the least because the exposition offered on the verses which do explicitly mention Jesus' name reveal sufficient insights to the present query concerning Jesus' impact on the doctrine of Heaven in Revelation.

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#### **4.2.15 A Summary of Jesus in Revelation**

At this juncture it is important to summarize what has been seen in the observation of the passages in Revelation which expressly include Jesus' name.

An analysis of Revelation 1:1 reveals the doctrine of Heaven cannot be separated from Christology. The book of Revelation—a book centrally concerned with the fulfillment of Heaven on earth—expresses this fulfillment through the lens of Jesus Christ. The plenary genitive shows the book is of, from, and about Jesus Christ, a claim echoed and observed several times throughout the book of Revelation.

Revelation 1:2 substantiates the plenary genitive, and advances it by revealing that the book portrays a credible and complete testimony of, from, and about Jesus Christ.

Revelation 1:5 reveals critical insights of Heaven and earth via Jesus' ministry as a prophet, priest, and king. This verse offers insights concerning Jesus' earthly ministry prior to his death, resurrection, and ascension, as well as his current ministry in Heaven, and also his future ministry upon his second coming. Furthermore, these represent a past, present, and future ministry of Jesus which correlates with his past, present, and future nature ("who is, and who was, and who is still to come"; Rev 1:8).

Revelation 1:9 provides the eschatological results of Jesus' ministry. The eschatological events detailed in Revelation, which are inseparably a part of the doctrine of Heaven, cannot be separated from Jesus' ministry. His earthly ministry establishes the boundaries of earth's eschatological events, which include tribulation—perhaps a Great Tribulation—a Millennium, and a future era of eternity.

These three events are substantiated throughout the course of the book. Jesus is expressly mentioned as being involved with the Great Tribulation (Rev 12:17; 14:12; 17:6), particularly with believers' transcendence to Heaven, the Millennium (Rev 19:10; 20:4), and the new creation (Rev 22:16; 22:20; 22:21). All of this shows Jesus is inimitably involved in every eschatological event related to Heaven. Jesus' activity inaugurates and culminates each event, and Heaven subsequently cannot be understood apart from Jesus Christ: "If it were not for the intimate and eternal relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ to Heaven ... the subject itself, however rich the biblical data might be, would not assume anything like the importance that attaches to it" (Smith 1968:77).

A summary of these observations can be summed up in the statement that the doctrine of Heaven is best observed through a Christological lens. "Revelation is Jesus-spoken. God the Father revealed to Jesus, who revealed to the angel, who revealed to John the encouraging word for the Church, so that she might hope in the definite physical return of Jesus the Warrior Messiah to right every wrong, redeem his bride, and bring justice on his enemies. It is the last word on the last word" (Smith 2015:6-7). This Christological lens offers substantial observations into comprehending Heaven, including the unfolding of eschatological events on earth, as well as the nature of these events themselves. "John's thinking about Christ is from first to last rooted in earthly fact ... all Christ's Heavenly authority is grounded in his earthly existence" (Caird 1966:16). Most importantly, this Christological lens, which expresses the eternality of Jesus, provides insights into the transcendent nature of Heaven itself.

### **4.3 Expanding the Doctrine of Heaven Beyond Eschatology**

An exegetical analysis of Revelation encourages a tripartite structure by which to best comprehend the book. As John writes, "Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after

these things” (Rev 1:19). This verse offers a structure to Revelation which delineates the book into a past (1:9-20), present (chapters 2-3), and future (chapters 4-22) outline (so Thomas 1992:44-46; Hiebert 2003:271; Patterson 2012:48-50). This suggests Revelation has a ternary nature which is mostly focused on future things. This is largely why Heaven, a subject in which most of its biblical data is included within the context of what “will take place,” has been traditionally understood as an eschatological doctrine.

The exegetical analysis of the eschatology of Revelation in this chapter, however, encourages the doctrine to be expanded beyond it, because the doctrine is uniquely tied to Christ, whose nature extends beyond eschatology. This chapter argues that an exegetical analysis of Jesus’ involvement in the eschatological events detailed in Revelation shows that the doctrine of Heaven is inimitably related to Jesus. Furthermore, this relationship demands the nature of the doctrine of Heaven be understood through the Heavenly nature and earthly ministry of Jesus. It is therefore argued that Heaven does not dictate its own nature, but God’s nature through the person and work of Jesus dictates the nature of Heaven, especially in how it relates to earth.

This chapter examined several passages which detail Jesus’ involvement in eschatology and concludes the book of Revelation presents Jesus as having a tripartite Heavenly nature and a tripartite earthly ministry. Jesus is described as the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev 1:8), which speaks of his tripartite Heavenly nature, but he is also described as having an earthly ternary nature in Revelation 1:5, in that he was a prophet (past), is a priest (present), and is coming as king (future). These verses offer a profound consideration into the relationship between Christology and the doctrine of Heaven—since Jesus is the one “who is and who was and who is to come” in Heaven, he was able to be a prophet in his first incarnation, is able to serve as a priest in his current ministry, and will be able to come back as king in his second incarnation. This reveals a nature to Heaven which must extend beyond eschatology, because the

eschatology is rooted in Jesus, who is not reserved to eschatology; reserving the doctrine of Heaven to eschatology would concurrently restrict Jesus' eternal nature in his person and in his work specifically as it relates to Heaven, because the two are inimitably linked.

Jesus' inimitable involvement with eschatology forces it to be understood in a non-traditional way. Wright (2008:122) maintains that while the word "eschatology" means "the study of last things," that the entire sense of God's future for the world and the belief that said future has already begun is what we find in Jesus himself. Bock and Gundry (1999:7) extend a similar opinion: "Eschatology is the study of last things [which] means 'future thing' only, but ... we already live in an era of initial fulfillment of promises concerning the Messiah Jesus. We are in a world where eschatology is now at work." Moo (2010a:188) maintains this is an "especially important" conviction concerning eschatology. Without it we limit the impact of Jesus' person and work on earth. The exegetical conclusions in this chapter affirm this extension of eschatology's definition into the present, but the conclusions also suggest the need to consider the past, too.

### **4.4 Conclusion**

Restricting the doctrine of Heaven to eschatology diminishes the Christological implications of the doctrine. Evaluating Heaven through a Christological lens reveals that, while the doctrine is considerably eschatological, this eschatology is inaugurated, culminated, and authenticated by Jesus, whose nature extends beyond eschatology. Eschatology does not define Jesus, but Jesus defines eschatology; the eschatological events listed in Revelation do not establish the Christological involvement, but are established by Christ's involvement.

The Christological impact to Heaven is best described in Revelation 1:8 and 22:13, which portray Jesus as having an eternal nature. This eternal nature allows Jesus, within the scope of time and space, to serve as a prophet during

## Chapter 4: Jesus and the Ternary Nature of Heaven

his first incarnation, a priest during his present ascension, and a king at his second incarnation. These roles express the doctrine of Heaven as having a progressive relationship with earth which includes historical, present, and eschatological implications.

This conclusion raises the question: If Revelation portrays Jesus as being inimitably involved in Heaven's eschatological realizations on earth, does it also portray his involvement with non-eschatological realizations on earth? That is, how does Revelation portray the doctrine of Heaven, via Jesus, in the past and also in the present? If Jesus establishes the eschatological events of Heaven on earth, then it seems likely that he also establishes the past and present implications, too. Chapter five is devoted to deliberating this query.

## Chapter 5

### The Seven Epochs of Heaven

“It is He who changes the times and the epochs” (Dan 2:21).

#### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four argued that viewing the doctrine of Heaven through a Christological lens encourages it to be understood beyond the traditional eschatological framework, and instead expands it to include historical and present significance too. Analyzing Jesus’ involvement in the eschatological events listed in Revelation has shown the events do not dictate Jesus, but the other way around. Therefore, while eschatology is certainly a major factor of the doctrine of Heaven, the doctrine of Heaven is not solely limited to eschatology. Severing Heaven’s eschatological notions from the historical (“the was”) and contemporary (“the is”) nature imbedded in Christ inhibits a total comprehension of the doctrine.

The following question is now posed: If Revelation portrays Jesus as being inimitably involved in Heaven’s eschatological happenings on earth, does it also portray his involvement with non-eschatological happenings? This question is based on the hypothesis that if Jesus determines the major eschatological events of Heaven on earth, then it seems to follow that he also determines the past and present (non-eschatological) events, too.

This chapter investigates this question, and marries the potential findings with the eschatological notions previously detailed in former chapters. The goal is to discover the overall impact of Jesus' non-eschatological and eschatological activities so that a holistic system of Heaven can be developed. This will be accomplished by employing the synthetic tool, which seeks to synthesize the exegetical information derived from the study.<sup>168</sup> It is important to note this particular chapter does not consider non-futurist perspectives. The parameters for this hermeneutic have been exegetically discussed in the former two chapters, and offering further discussion on other views at this stage would broaden the scope of this thesis beyond helpful means. The goal of this chapter is not to argue for a certain eschatological perspective, but to show the ouranological results of the futuristic perspective in non-eschatological ways.

### **5.2 Outlining the Ternary Nature of Heaven Through Jesus**

This thesis argues for a ternary structure for Revelation. Revelation 1:19 asserts this structure, which details that John writes about the things which he had seen, the things which are, and the things which will be. The presented summary is that Revelation's structure includes sections on the past (chapter 1), the present (chapters 2-3), and the future (chapters 4-22).

This thesis moreover argues for a ternary nature for Jesus, which Revelation 1:4 and 1:8 outlines by describing him as the "one who is, who was and who is to come." This nature portrays Jesus as the intersection between Heaven and earth, suggesting that the doctrine of Heaven cannot be totally understood apart from him.

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<sup>168</sup> Smith (2008:185) states the task of systematic theology is to construct a model which accounts for what all the relevant scriptures teach about a topic. In the case of this thesis this concerns the Christological verses in Revelation which were assessed in Chapter Four. The conclusion of this chapter will offer a broad picture of the results of the narrow exegetical data from Chapter Four. The goal is to construct a model which accounts for all of the data in a unified way (Smith 2008:188). This is sometimes called "retroduction" or "abduction," which looks at the data and asks how it all makes sense (Smith 2008:188).

The ternary outline for Revelation and the ternary nature of Jesus are both important, because, hypothetically, if Revelation is divided into sections on the past, present, and future, then it stands to reason the non-eschatological sections concerning the past (Revelation 1) and present (Revelation 2-3) could include respective descriptions of Jesus' past and present ouranologically-related work. This is to say the sections of Revelation which concern the past and present might correlate with the descriptions of Jesus' past and present nature, which could allow for significant insights into Heaven's overall functionality, particularly as it pertains to earth.<sup>169</sup> "The idea of Revelation is based on the belief that God's sphere of being and operation ('Heaven') and our sphere ('earth') are not after all separated by a great gulf. They meet and merge and meld into one another in all kinds of ways" (Wright 2011:3). This chapter considers how Jesus is the intersection through which the two spheres meet.

The following sections outline the proposed ternary structure of Revelation in order to identify applicable verses within each respective section, which highlights how Jesus impacts Heaven's relationship with earth. This is a unique contribution to current ouranological scholarship.

### 5.3 The Historical Nature of Heaven

The historical section of Revelation, which comprises the things John "saw" (Rev 1:19), is confined to Revelation 1. Therefore, Revelation 1 is excavated for descriptions concerning Jesus which might offer insights into how Heaven can be understood through him in its historical nature.

Marshall, Travis, and Paul (2011:331) stress three Christological passages in Revelation 1. These include the descriptions "who is and who was and who is to

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<sup>169</sup> This is not to say that non-eschatological sections of Revelation can not and do not include eschatological descriptions of Jesus, or vice versa, only that it seems reasonable to purport, if Jesus truly is inimitably involved in the unfolding of Heaven on earth, that the descriptions of his nature would especially parallel the respective eras. Walvoord (1989a:37) lends credibility to this postulation, writing, "The concept of past, present, and future corresponds to the threefold chronological division of the book itself."

come” (Rev 1:4, 8), the “Alpha and Omega” (Rev 1:8), and the “Son of Man” (Rev 1:13).

### **5.3.1 Exposition of “... who was” (Rev 1:4, 8)**

Revelation 1:4 describes the intended audience of the book as the “seven churches that are in Asia.” John subsequently writes, “Grace to you and peace, from him who is and who was and who is to come.” While this description includes three separate declarations, it is the “was” with which this particular section is concerned.

Phillips (2001b:24) maintains this particular description concerns God the Father, not Jesus Christ. Walvoord (1989a:37) offers a similar opinion, writing, “... because of the subsequent references to Christ (Rev 1:5) ... this references God the Father. This same phrase, however, is repeated in Revelation 1:8. Walvoord (1989a:40) notes of this verse that, “In concluding the salutation in verse eight ... The description of the Father given in verse four is repeated ... It is probably that verse eight applies to Christ ... There is no reason ... why eternity should not be ascribed to Christ as well as to the Father (Rev. 1:10-18; 22:12-13). Phillips (2001b:24) shares a similar outlook, avowing the phrase was previously used to describe the Father, but “it is now used to describe the Son.” Bauckham (1993:57), Marshall, Travis, and Paul (2011:331) acquiesce, maintaining the parallel descriptions unambiguously portray the eternal nature of Jesus alongside the Father.

Patterson (2012:63) offers a stark description to the meaning of “was,” claiming it means “prior to all creation.” Hamilton (2012:39) adds it means, “nothing was before him.” William Lane Craig (2010:598), in his chapter on “Time, Eternity, and Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, describes this existence as “... the property of existing permanently, without beginning and end.” Koester (2014:215) states Greco-Roman sources used three-part formulas,

like the one present in Revelation 1:4 and 8, to encompass all of time, and John's use of it in Revelation underscores God's true deity in contrast to the claims of others.<sup>170</sup> Köstenberger (2014b:99) and Wellum (2014a:122-123, 130-131) show this is a claim bedecked by several verses outside of Revelation, most notably John 1:1-2, Philippians 2:6, and Colossians 1:17. These are unpacked in the following paragraphs.

### 5.3.1.1 John 1:1-2

Köstenberger (2014b:99) summarizes the claims of John 1:1-2 ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God") by stating the passage presents Jesus, "as the preexistent Word" at creation. Borchert (1996:104) shares a similar opinion, writing, "[The] Word was true deity, and John wanted there to be *no doubt* about it. This affirmation is fundamental ... Logically for John the essential (ontological) being of the Logos preceded the acting of the Logos in time and space." Dunn (2009:63) calls the verse the most striking exercise of a divine role attributed to Christ. Westcott (2012:2) connects the verses to the Torah:

The phrase carries back the thoughts of the reader to Genesis 1:1, which necessarily fixes the sense of the beginning. Here, as there, "the beginning" is the initial moment of time and creation: but there is this difference, that Moses dwells on that which starts from the point, and traces the record of divine action from the beginning, which John lifts our thoughts beyond the beginning and dwells on that which "was" when time, and with time's finite being, began its course. Already when "God created the Heaven and the earth," "the Word was." The "being" of the Word is thus necessarily carried beyond the limits of time ... This force of in the beginning is brought out by a comparison with the corresponding phrase

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<sup>170</sup> Koester (2014:215) writes, "It was said that true gods were eternal." Therefore, one might say that Isis is "all that has been, and is, and shall be" and "Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus shall be" and Aion, the god of time, "is and was and will be."

in 1 John 1:1, “from the beginning.” The latter marks the activity of the Word in time from the initial point: the former emphasizes the existence of the Word at the initial point, and so before time.

Köstenberger (2004:25) asserts that “in the beginning” echoes the opening phrase of the Hebrew Bible (Gen 1:1) and establishes a canonical link between the first words of the OT scriptures and the present Gospel. Köstenberger (2004:35) succinctly asserts that “Beginning points to a time prior to creation,” a thought he cites as shared by Brown (1966:4), Beasley-Murray (1999:10), and Schnackenburg (1990:1.232).<sup>171</sup> Carson (1991:113) offers a comparable thought, suggesting the verse “reminds any reader of the OT of the opening verse of the Bible.” Carson (1991:114) also speaks to the verse’s portrayal of Jesus’ pre-existent nature: “... it was inevitable that at the origin of everything he already was.” The verse inherently presupposes Jesus’ pre-existence (Michaels 2015:47). It is the strongest statement of Jesus’ pre-existent nature among the gospels (Keener 2003:367).

### 5.3.1.2 Philippians 2:6

The one “who ... existed in the form of God” (Phil 2:6) is the key phrase of the entire Philippian passage (O’Brien 1991:206). The phrase leads the passage to take into account the pre-existence of Christ (Collange 1979:90). Wellum (2014a:122-123) maintains the preexistence and deity of the Son is clearly taught by this phrase, stating *morphē* (“form”) shows Jesus has always existed in the *morphē theou* (“form of God”), which is another way of affirming the full deity and equality of the Son with the Father (Dunn 1998:245; Sanders 2015:439, 577, 602, 709). The verse assumes the majesty and glory Jesus had from all eternity; it calls readers to consider Jesus’ preexistent state (so Melick 1991:101; Wellum 2014a:122-123).

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<sup>171</sup> Köstenberger (2004:25), in a footnote on this commentary, notes how John’s phrase can also mean “first cause.” “It is possible John seeks to convey both meanings, ‘in the beginning of history’ and ‘at the root of the universe.’” Köstenberger cites Morris (1995:65) as supporting this interpretation.

### 5.3.1.3 Colossians 1:17

Wellum (2014a:130-131) argues “He is before all things” (Col 1:17) underscores the deity of the Son, “teaching the Son’s preexistence and supremacy over the entire universe as its creator and providential Lord.” “This comment has a time orientation, and it teaches that before creation Jesus existed ... [it] gives [Jesus] a prominent position with respect to creation” (Melick 1991:220). Moo (2008:125) contends the text is best taken as referring to Christ’s preexistence, and notes this is the conviction of most commentators. “Christ is supreme in both time and rank ... [his] preexistence is clearly affirmed” (Pao 2012:98). The entire hymn is one which includes explicit creation language, and this particular phrase shows Jesus as existing prior to it (Dunn 1998:275).

### 5.3.1.4 Summary of John 1:1-2, Philippians 2:6, Colossians 1:17

These expositions of Jesus’ pre-creation nature institute an important ouranological insight, which is that Heaven existed prior to creation.<sup>172</sup> Wright (2008:19) substantiates this in asserting that Heaven is not reserved for a future destiny, but encapsulates God’s dimension. Köstenberger (2014a:139) states this is how John’s Gospel presents Heaven, as the “abode of God,” a demarcation also purported by Roberts (2003:4). Thus, one discovery of mining the “past” section of Revelation is that Heaven existed prior to time. This insight suggests Jesus’ eternal nature establishes an ouranological era which is eternal and prior to creation. This thesis identifies such a period as an “epoch,” a word which denotes a particular period of time marked by distinctive features.

The concept of a pre-creation ouranological epoch is corroborated by extracurricular erudition, namely, apologetical arguments for the existence of

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<sup>172</sup> This takes into account that the definition of Heaven, as listed in Chapter One, includes the “dwelling place of God,” as purported by several scholars listed in said section.

God. While several arguments for God's existence subsist, it is the cosmological argument which best highlights God's pre-creation existence.

Some apologists argue that the cosmological argument demonstrates the pre-creation existence of God by appealing to the observation of the world, its objects, and its processes (so Grenz and others 1999:31; Geisler 2002:160-164; Boa and Bowman 2002:51-60). "The basic idea of this argument is that, since there is a universe, it must have been caused by something beyond itself" (Geisler and Brooks 2013:10); "the Creator of space and time must be uncaused" (Hindson and Caner 2008:36). Thomas Aquinas, one of the earliest proponents of the argument, maintains that everything which moves points to something else moving it. Hence for every movement there must be a prior mover. Aquinas further asserts that tracing this causal chain leads eventually to a First Mover which is unmoved. This Unmoved Mover, Aquinas concluded, is God (Grenz and others 1999:31). Craig (2010:605) comments on this argument:

... the beginning of the universe [did] not transition from nothingness into something; rather, it [came] into being absolutely. But if anything seems metaphysically impossible, it is that something can come into being absolutely without a cause. Being only comes from being. There must therefore be causally prior (if not temporally prior) to [creation] an ultra-cause of the universe. Such a cause must transcend physical space and time and therefore be immaterial, not physical.

For Craig (2010:605), "physical eschatology itself provides grounds for believing in the existence of just that sort of agent who is capable of altering the projections of physical eschatology." Creation itself testifies of a being who is in some way prior to and transcendent of it, because were creation to come into existence, as well as exist, without such a being, creation itself would look much different. "Physical eschatology paints a very bleak and different picture of the

future than that of theological eschatology” (Craig 2010:602). Craig (2010:603) expands further:

Already in the nineteenth century with the enunciation of the second law of thermodynamics, scientists realized that the application of the law to the universe as a whole (which, on naturalist assumption, is a gigantic closed system, since it is all there is) implied a grim eschatological conclusion: given sufficient time, the universe would eventually come to a state of equilibrium and suffer heat death. But this apparently firm projection raised an even deeper question: if, given sufficient time, the universe will suffer heat death, then why, if it has existed forever, as naturalists assume, is it not now in a state of heat death?

Without an eternal being to intervene, the universe should already cease to exist. However, “If intelligent beings are able significantly to manipulate natural processes, then the actual future of the cosmos could look quite different than the trajectory predicted on the basis of laws and present conditions” (Craig 2010:602).

This allegation is corroborated by Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:17: “... in Him all things hold together.” Christian eschatology is inextricably bound up with the person of Jesus (Craig 2010:605).

### **5.3.2 Exposition of “Alpha” (Rev 1:8)**

A second Christological description underscored in Revelation 1 is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev 1:8). While this statement includes two descriptions, it is the “Alpha” sector with which this particular subsection is concerned.

Bauckham (1993:57-58) and Witherington (2003:281) render the same contextual question for this description as with the aforementioned description,

which is: Does it expressly concern the Father or the Son? Ladd (1972:293), Morris (2009:252), Mounce (1997:407), Beale (1999:1138), and Koester (2001:33), along with Bauckham (1993:57-58) and Witherington (2003:281), agree that this particular description, albeit spoken by the Father, describes both the Father and the Son for the simple reason the exact same description unequivocally refers to the Son in Revelation 22:13.<sup>173</sup>

Mounce (1997:51-52) summarizes the Christological description in writing, “Alpha and Omega represent the Hebrew *Aleph* and *Tau*, which were regarded not simply as the first and last letters of the alphabet, but as including all letters in between.” Ultimately, “Alpha” is a reference to the beginning of creation itself, and, more specifically, a word which references Jesus as creation’s original architect (so Morris 1987:252; Mounce 1997:407; Beale 1999:1138; Osborne 2002:789; Keener 2002:515; Hamilton 2012:415). Hamilton (2012:415) agrees, arguing the description shows Jesus “started everything.” Mounce (1997:407) contends it “sets him apart from the entire created order,” a sentiment also shared by Morris (1987:252). Keener (2002:515) supplements this by stating it is a reminder that “God created the world.” Beale (1999:1138) describes the title as showcasing “Christ’s presence at and sovereignty over the beginning of creation,” and Osborne (2002:789) states that Jesus controls the beginning of creation.<sup>174</sup>

Jesus as “the Alpha” is a reference to the beginning of creation, but more importantly, it implies Jesus started creation.<sup>175</sup> Köstenberger (2014b:91) and

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<sup>173</sup> Mounce (1997:407) writes, “In 1:8 and 21:6 it was God who identified himself as the Alpha and the Omega. Now the risen Christ applies the title to himself ... the attributes of the [Father] belong to the [Son] as well.” Morris (1987:252) states that, in all locations, the descriptions “mean much the same.” Beale (1999:1138) substantiates this by writing, “[Revelation] has already called God ‘the Alpha and the Omega’ (1:8; 21:6) and ‘the Beginning and the End’ (21:6), and Christ has been called ‘the First and the Last’ (1:17; 2:8). Now all these titles are combined and applied to Christ to highlight his deity.”

<sup>174</sup> Osborne (2002:788-789) offers strong commentary in favor of the titles referencing both the Father and the Son. In his commentary on 22:13 he writes, “... this completes the attribution of the titles to God and Christ in a kind of ABAB order: in 1:8 it refers to God, and in 1:17 and 2:8 it applies to Christ. Then in 21:6 it refers to God and in 22:13 to Christ.”

<sup>175</sup> Koester (2001:33) argues that the book of Revelation is framed by this description: “This announcement corresponds to Revelation’s structure, because the book begins and ends with visions which bring readers into the presence of God and the risen Christ.” For Koester (pp. 51-52), this is a “significant point.”

Wellum (2014a:127, 130, 136) state this is a claim substantiated by several NT passages, most notably John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2b.

### **5.3.2.1 John 1:3**

Köstenberger (2014b:91) writes of John 1:3 (“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being”) that “John unapologetically and from the very outset claims that Jesus was ... God’s agent in creation,” a conviction with which Keener (2003:374), Carson (1991:118), and Westcott (2012:4) agree. Köstenberger (2004:30), in a separate commentary, furthermore writes, “The thrust of this verse is to point to creation,” a conclusion shared by Ridderbos (1997:37) and Carson (1991:118). “The evangelist emphatically asserts that ‘everything owes its existence to the Word’” (Morris 2009:71). Carson (1991:118) asserts that the pre-existent Christ created everything is a common theme in the NT, citing the two other passages included in the subsequent sections of this thesis as evidence of this claim (Col 1:16; Heb 1:2).

### **5.3.2.2 Colossians 1:16**

Wellum (2014a:127, 130) describes Colossians 1:16 (“For by Him all things were created, both in the Heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him”) as “one of the Christological high points of the NT,” and offers the following exposition:

[Colossians 1:16] contains [an] affirmation that ... solidifies the deity of the Son. Not only is the divine work of creation attributed to the Son, but the extent of the Son’s supremacy is also highlighted by citing three ways the creation is related to him: “in him, through him, and for him.” First, “in him” (*en autō*) all things were made. Here Paul asserts that all God’s creative

work was “in terms of” or “in reference to” Christ, which links the Son to the Father in the closest of terms and ties the dependence of creation entirely upon the Son. Second, “through him” (*di’ autou*) and then, third, “for him” (*eis auton*) focus on the beginning and end of creation. The Son stands at the beginning of creation as the one through whom all things were created, and he stands at its end as the goal of the universe—“for him.” The thought of this verse moves from the past (the Son is the agent of creation), to the present (the world owes its allegiance to the Son), and to the future (the Son whose sovereignty will become universal). Again, we would be hard-pressed to find stronger affirmations of the deity of the Son, as Schreiner argues: “Jesus is the goal as well as the agent of all creation. The glory that belongs to the only God also belongs to Jesus as creator and Lord.”<sup>176</sup>

Wellum’s (2014a:127, 130) discussion on the importance of the Son’s supremacy in the phrase, “in him, through him, and for him” is a consideration also emphasized by Moo (2008:120), Melick (1991:218), and Dunn (1998:275-276). The verse presents Jesus as “the effective agent of creation” (Melick 1991:218)<sup>177</sup> and the “unique agent of creation” (Pao 2012:95).

### 5.3.2.3 Hebrews 1:2b

Wellum (2014a:136) describes Hebrews 1:2b (“through whom also He made the world”) as a “crucial” Christological statement, and avers the text is consistent

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<sup>176</sup> Wellum (2014a:120-131) also comments on verse seventeen, which bolsters the eternity of Jesus: “... if the three affirmations of the first stanza (vv. 15–16) underscore the deity of the Son, the intervening stanza (v. 17) continues to do so as it transitions to the glorious work of the incarnate Son (v. 18a). The opening line, ‘And he is before all things,’ looks back to verses 15–16 with its focus on the Son’s relationship to creation, while the last line, ‘and he is the head of the body, the Church,’ introduces the focus on Christ’s redemptive work that is developed in verses 18b–20. The middle line, ‘And in him all things hold together,’ looks both directions, uniting the twofold presentation of NT Christology, namely, Jesus is Son/Lord because of who he is and by virtue of what he does. In particular, verse 17 teaches the Son’s preexistence and supremacy over the entire universe as its creator and providential Lord. In other words, apart from the Son’s continuous sustaining activity, prior to his incarnation and as the incarnate Son, the universe would disintegrate—yet another clear and direct affirmation of the Son’s deity. Even in the state of humiliation, the NT attributes to Jesus of Nazareth divine cosmic functions that underscore his identity as God the Son incarnate, thus making kenotic views high impossible.”

<sup>177</sup> To substantiate the other passages cited in this section, Melick (1991:218) cites both John 1:3 and Hebrews 1:2 as the two other passages which corroborate Jesus as the creator.

with other NT texts which attribute the divine work of creation to the Son, thus teaching his deity (Jn 1:1–3; Col 1:15–17). “There is a close link between Christology and cosmology in three of the four great Christological passages in the NT (Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:13-20; Heb 1:1-4). The clause ... identifies the Son in his preincarnate role as [the] protological agent of creation” (Allen 2010:110).<sup>178</sup>

Allen (2010:111) discusses a common question surrounding the word “world” (*aiōnas*) in the verse: “A common question surrounding this clause is the meaning of the direct object *tous aiōnas* (“the universe”). Twice in Hebrews the author speaks of *aiōnas* as the object of God’s creation (1:2; 11:3)”. Allen (2010:111) identifies several interpretations,<sup>179</sup> but argues for the following with which this thesis concurs:

...*aiōnas* includes not only the material universe but also the vast periods of time and all that transpires in them. To put it in contemporary scientific language, *aiōnas* includes the space-matter-time continuum that is the universe, the totality of all things existing in time and space. It seems best to include both the temporal and spatial idea in the term.

Allen (2010:112) notes that, in Jewish apocalyptic and rabbinic literature, similar Hebrew terminology has both spatial and temporal connotations as well. Allen (2010:112) further substantiates his interpretation in citing John of Damascus, who remarked, “This kind of age is to eternal things exactly what time is to temporal things” and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who said, “The ‘creator of the ages’ means nothing different than ‘everlasting, existing beyond every age, having his own limitless existence.’”

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<sup>178</sup> Allen (2010:111) also adds a comment worth noting concerning the preexistent deity of Jesus: “... it is impossible not to see in the Son’s agency in the creation of the universe a statement of his eternal preexistence.”

<sup>179</sup> These are not identified or discussed because, according to Allen (2010:111), it is generally considered to be a settled issue that the interpretations are null.

#### **5.3.2.4 Summary of John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2b**

Grenz and others (1999:31), Geisler (2002:160-164), and Boa and Bowman (2002:51-60) maintain the previously espoused cosmological argument is also applicable to the claim the world was made through Jesus, as purported in John 1:3, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2b. The argument helps to establish the pre-creation ouranological era of Heaven, as well as the immediate post-creation ouranological era. The argument, while citing the pre-creation existence of an eternal being, is primarily about the necessity of said being for creation's conception (Geisler 2013:10). Geisler's (2013:10) outline of the argument is helpful:

1. The universe had a beginning.
2. Anything that had a beginning must have been caused by something else.
3. Therefore, the universe was caused by something else, which we call "God."

Partnering this with the exposition of "Alpha" and the support of several other NT passages that substantiate Jesus as the beginning of creation, as done above, offers the conclusion that Heaven, as it existed prior to creation, experienced a significant alteration, because it transitioned to include a relationship it previously did not have (creation). Therefore, at this juncture, there are two epochs of Heaven established through the historical nature of Jesus as presented in Revelation 1, which include the pre-creation epoch of Heaven and the immediate post-creation epoch of Heaven.

#### **5.3.3 Exposition of "Son of Man" (Rev 1:13)**

Ortlund (2014:57), Pennington (2014:69, 74), and Noll (2014:209, 217) implore that a key description in Revelation 1 is the title "Son of Man." Hays, Duvall, and Pate (2007:432) define this title as Jesus' "favorite title for himself" in the four

Gospels, which concretizes its significance. Hays and others (2007:433) further argue that Jesus' Jewish audience would have understood this term in light of the OT usage of the title, particularly Daniel 7:9-13, and assert it has as its background the ancient Judaistic idea of "the Messiah," an interpretation with which Osborne (2002:88) and Feinburg agree (1984:90-91). Patterson (2012:67-68) and Aune (1997:90-92) substantiate this conviction in avowing that much of how John describes Jesus in Revelation 1:13-16 parallels Daniel's rehearsal of his own encounter with the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-13. "To readers familiar with the Scriptures, speaking of one 'like a Son of Man' in Rev 1:13 recalls how Daniel saw 'one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of Heaven' to receive dominion over the peoples of the world" (Koester 2001:53).

Several scholars hint that "Son of Man" in Revelation 1:13 finds its roots in Daniel 7:9-13 (so Feinburg 1984:90-91; Aune 1997:90-92; Koester 2001:53; Osborne 2002:88; Hays and others 2007:433; Patterson 2012:67-68; Hamilton 2014:208). In light of this, the context of Daniel's use of the title is important in order to discover the implications of its use in Revelation, particularly the portion of Revelation designated to Jesus' historical nature (Rev 1).

### 5.3.3.1 "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:9-13

Miller (1994:41) writes that "Son of Man" is the "grand climax" of the vision of Daniel 7:9-13. Goldingay (2015:167) states that while Daniel's climactic vision is located on earth, "the phrase 'among the clouds of the Heavens' (Dan 7:13) draws our attention away from earth ... [and depicts] a movement from Heaven to earth." This scene thus portrays a significant ouranological moment between Heaven and earth.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Baldwin (1978:158) notes that Daniel 7:13 "has been the subject of more scholarly papers than any other book," indicating its centrality, not only for Daniel but for the NT also.

Goldingay (2015:167) submits that “Son of Man” means “one in human likeness,” and that the literal translation of the Hebrew phrase is “a human being.” The title ultimately evokes the first human being, Adam (Hamilton 2014:90). This “human being,” however, is qualified by the word “like,” and therefore “one in human likeness” is “a symbol for some entity given authority by God” (Goldingay 2015:167-168). Miller (1994:41) synthesizes the qualification in maintaining that, while the phrase depicts one who is in human form, the qualifier makes the one “more than a man.” Longman (1999:186) writes, “... the imagery makes it clear the ... participant is divine and ... celestial and not [merely a] human creature.”

The climactic presentation of the “one like a Son of Man” comes within the context of Daniel’s vision of four beasts (Dan 7:1-8). Some scholars identify these four beasts as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (so Goldingay 2015:161-164; Longman 1999:183).<sup>181</sup> Baldwin (2009:159) and Longman (1999:194) suggest these four beasts are better understood when placed within the context of the Genesis creation account. God made the various components of his creation “according to their kinds” (Gen 1:11-12, 21, 24, 25), meaning the different parts of creation were created to be unique and separate, but “these beasts are bizarre; they are mutants, perversions of what God intended by his creation” (Longman 1999:194).<sup>182</sup> Longman (1999:183) purports these images would have been especially troublesome to an ancient Israelite:

The Israelite concern with separation of species was embedded in their laws, which indicated that the original creation order was to be preserved through history. A series of laws in Deuteronomy 22:9-11 is a case in point. “Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled. Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. Do not wear clothes of wool

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<sup>181</sup> One popular view is that the fourth beast is Greece, in line with dating Daniel to the Maccabean period, but this is not necessarily the major view among scholarship.

<sup>182</sup> Hill (2008:134) also notes this thought. Also, Baldwin (1978:159) argues that the human-like nature of the “Son of Man” reveals he “is what every human being should be if he is true to type, that is, one who is made in the image of God.” This comment supports the purity of the “Son of Man” in comparison to the impurity of the beasts.

and linen woven together.” Thus, the four beasts that arise from the chaotic sea are images of grotesque horror to the original Israelite readers ... The hybrid beasts represent powerful, destructive forces that intend to harm others.<sup>183</sup>

These beasts parallel the Genesis creation account in that they echo the beast in Eden (Hamilton 2014:90), that is the serpent, and that they come out of a sea (Dan 7:2-3), which corresponds with God’s Spirit moving over the surface of the waters in Genesis 1:2. The contextual conclusion is that these beasts desire to usurp the dominion God gave to man, as well as create chaos out of order, a reversal of God’s original design. “They are symbols of forces raged against God and his creation order” (Longman 1999:183). They portray an opposition to God’s rule, formidable in appearance and powerful (Baldwin 2009:153). Daniel 7 ultimately shows how the “Son of Man” comes to take dominion back, and to organize the chaos (Hamilton 2014:91).

The initial deviation from order to chaos occurred in Genesis 3, in an event best known as “The Fall.” The Fall brought sin and death into the human race, and as a consequence humans have become alienated from God and from created order (Grenz and others 1999:50). Longman (1999:196) describes the event in writing,

The Garden of Eden was a picture of shalom until the appearance of the serpent ... the supernatural rebel. This creature introduced disharmony into the peace of the Garden ... The disobedience of Adam and Eve broke the shalom of the Garden when they took the side of the serpent against God.

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<sup>183</sup> These beasts differ from other beasts in Scripture, namely the beasts listed in Ezekiel 1, which Ezekiel describes as cherubim in Ezekiel 10:1.

Longman (1999:196) ultimately argues that while the beasts represent evil kingdoms, they represent corporate rebellion as well. Daniel 7 “paints a horrifying picture of human evil,” not just the evil of ancient kingdoms (Longman 1999:194). Daniel 7 captures the “scope and essence of sin in the human heart ... the beast is in the heart of each one of us” (Longman 1999:195).

Feinberg (1984:90), in a telling comment, argues that while the “Son of Man” in Revelation 1:13 is rooted in Daniel 7:13, that Daniel 7:13 is itself rooted in Genesis 3:15: “[Son of Man] relates Christ to the promise of the redeemer as the seed of woman, a part of the human race (Gen 3:15).” If Feinberg’s comment is acceptable, then Daniel’s, and thus Revelation’s, use of “Son of Man” is closely associated with the Fall. Alexander (2008:189) offers a more recent exposition on this possibility:

In the process of denouncing the serpent, God indicates that his eventual punishment will come fittingly through “the woman’s seed.” Thereafter Genesis traces a unique line of descendants that moves initially from Adam to Noah, and then from Noah to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Beyond Genesis, this line is linked centuries later to the royal house of David and ultimately to Jesus Christ ... through Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension ... Satan is defeated, preparing the way for the future establishment of God’s uncontested reign in the New Jerusalem.

Jackson (2014:15) extends this consideration, tying the “seed” to Jesus’ bodily return.

### **5.3.3.2 Summary of “Son of Man”**

The implications of the overall context of Revelation’s use of “Son of Man” reveals at least two important conclusions. First, the Fall marked a significant change in Heaven’s relationship with earth. Revelation 1:13 cites the fulfilled

prophecy of Daniel 7:13, which corroborates Genesis 3:15's promise that, because of sin, a unique "seed" would come to earth, ultimately to redeem it (so Feinburg 1984:90; Alexander 2008:189; Jackson 2014:15). This leads to the second conclusion, which is that the Fall marked a new epoch which is distinct from the one present during the Garden of Eden, the biblical setting for the immediate post-creation epoch. As seen in the context of Daniel's vision (Dan 7:1-13), chaos reigned from the time of the Fall to the time of the coming of the Son of Man. It was not until the Son of Man actually came from Heaven to earth that a new epoch would begin.

### **5.3.4 Summary of the Historical Nature of Jesus in Revelation 1**

An analysis of Revelation 1 reveals that Jesus establishes three historical epochs of Heaven, which include pre-creation eternity to creation, creation to the Fall, and the Fall to Jesus' death and resurrection. The delineation of these epochs reveals several alterations in the relationship between Heaven and earth. The implications of these alterations are delineated as epochs which are detailed in the following subsections.

### **5.4 Epoch One: Pre-Creation Eternity to Creation**

Christian theologians agree that God is without beginning and without end, but not all theologians agree with the characteristics of his eternal nature (Wolterstorff 2007:159). Craig (2010:598) cites two general schools of thought concerning God's pre-creation existence: timelessness and infinite, omnitemporal duration. These can also be described as temporal and atemporal natures, respectively. "To have a temporal location is to exist at a time, so as to stand in temporal relations of simultaneity with other entities existing at that time and of posteriority or priority to any entities that either have existed or will exist relative to that time. As such, it differs from an atemporal entity, for the category of temporal extension does not apply to a timeless entity." There are weighty

arguments on both sides of the debate over the nature of God's divine eternity and scholars argue in favor of both options. "Christian tradition has favored divine timelessness, but the consensus has recently turned very markedly in favor of divine omnitemporality" (Craig 2010:599). Wolterstorff (2007:159), for example suggests God exists and operates within time, while Boethius (2007:155) advances the traditional view of God's eternity in Christian theology, which is that "God lives completely outside of time, in a changeless 'eternal now' that contains all of time within itself."

For purposes related to this thesis, it is only necessary to concur with the general consensus which states that Revelation 1:4 and 8 express Jesus as incontrovertibly divinely eternal, but it is not necessary to advocate for either a temporal or atemporal post-creation eternal nature. Scholars in both the temporal and atemporal camps argue that Jesus' post-creation capability to be involved with creation requires his pre-creation eternal nature, which is the primary factor of this particular epoch. A brief discussion of the temporal and atemporal interpretations is included to show that both thoughts have been considered, and also to show that neither of the two thoughts endangers the conclusion that Jesus is eternal. As an example, Craig (2010:596-613) argues that an atemporal nature would mean that God is incapable of operating within a temporal creation, but others refute this, arguing that the mere fact that Jesus is eternal and existed prior to creation is evidence that he is capable of uniquely impacting it (Loftin 2015:177-187). There are weighty arguments on both sides of the issue, which affirms Jesus' ability to be inimitably involved, regardless of how one understands the qualities of his eternal nature.<sup>184</sup>

### **5.5 Epoch Two: Creation to the Fall of Creation**

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<sup>184</sup> Exploring the historical, contemporary, and eschatological results of this involvement is a primary goal of this thesis.

The Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4-25) serves as the setting for the immediate post-creation epoch of Heaven. This epoch is sandwiched between Genesis 1, which details God's construction of creation, and Genesis 3, which details the Fall of creation. This setting allows a platform by which Heaven's post-creation relationship with earth can be observed.

One outstanding verse for this particular epoch is Genesis 3:8, which describes Adam and Eve hearing "the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." While this verse is found within the context of the narrative of the Fall, it offers significant insights into the kind of relationship God had with man before the Fall. "The description of Eden with its trees, rivers, gold, and so on emphasized God's presence there. Therefore it seems likely that it was not unusual for him to be heard walking in the garden ... a daily chat between the Almighty and his creatures was customary" (Wenham 2014:76). Hamilton (1990:192) observes how the verb used here to describe the divine movement—*mithallēk*—is a type of Hithpael which suggests iterative and habitual aspects. The term is subsequently used of God's presence in the Israelite tent sanctuary (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:15 [14]; 2 Sam 7:6-7), indicating that God's walking in the garden is not unusual (Wenham 2014:76). Mathews (1996:239) writes, "The anthropomorphic description of God 'walking' in the garden suggests the enjoyment of fellowship between him and our first parents."

The nature of Heaven's relationship with earth immediately following creation is that of perfect harmony between God and man. Sin had not yet impacted creation, and Heaven is represented on earth. Genesis 2:17 shows death did not exist prior to sin, and thus the nature of Heaven was entirely different than it was post-Fall: "... for in the day that you eat from [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will surely die."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Romans 5:12 supports this: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."

### 5.6 Epoch Three: Fall of Creation to Incarnation of Christ

Ross (1998:143) argues that the first sin brought an immediate break in God's fellowship with man: "It appears that ... immediately after the sin there was the presence of the one who knows how to ask questions ... After they sinned, then, they sensed the awesome presence of God, and they hid themselves." "Far from anticipating another time of fellowship with deity, the couple now attempts to hide from God" (Hamilton 1990:192).

The impact of the Fall is potently seen in Genesis 4:8, when "Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." God commanded Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen 2:28), but Cain reversed this commandment by murdering his brother. It is the first death recorded in Scripture, emphasizing the marked difference between the time prior to the Fall and the time after the Fall. Death did not exist in the time of the Garden of Eden (Rom 5:12), but death is now a ubiquitous reality.

As mankind continued to procreate, "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:50). God responds by sending a flood to destroy mankind (Gen 6:13). Noah was the only man who found favor in God's eyes (Gen 6:8), but the narrative shows that even he was incapable of being perfect. Gentry and Wellum (2012:224) maintain that Noah's story parallels Adam's story, and that God made a "new start" with him. However, like Adam, Noah ate from a garden in a forbidden way (Gen 9:21). In Genesis 11:8 God "scattered [mankind] abroad ... the face of the whole earth," and what follows is OT books which detail the Fall's impact upon God's creation. The picture is that which is opposite of the prior epoch—while the second epoch portrays an unhindered relationship between Heaven and earth, the third epoch portrays absolute hindrance, ornamented with death.

While the discernible element of this particular epoch is death on earth, it is important to consider how this specifically impacts the believer's post-death destination in a pre-resurrection (of Christ) context, which is to ask how death impacts Heaven's relationship with earth in this particular epoch. "Death takes place when the spirit leaves the body (Ja 2:26). But death is not the end; it is the beginning of a whole new existence in another world" (Wiersbe 2007:194). This "other world" includes Heaven, and the question with which this thesis is concerned is: In this particular epoch, did a deceased follower of God enter into the abode of Heaven (God's dwelling place) since it was prior to Jesus' death and resurrection?

Snodgrass (2008:430-431) writes, "The problem of understanding the biblical material on life after death is much more problematic than most Christians are aware. We know far less, and Scripture is far less clear, than most think." Snodgrass's statements are made in light of Luke's Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), a parable which includes significant deliberations on the subject of the afterlife. Snodgrass (2008:419) notes how this is the only parable from Jesus which transcends everyday reality to focus on the afterlife.

Bock (1996:1362) maintains that the major question concerning the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is whether or not it is a parable at all. The question is inspired by the unique nature of the story, namely that it specifically designates Lazarus (so Stein 1992:421-427; Bock 1996:1366). "It is the only case in all the parables where [Jesus] uses a name" (Morgan 2010:222). In fact, it is the only parable which includes names for its characters. Stein (2008:419) says this leads some to suggest it is not a parable, but a historical account of John's account of Lazarus' resurrection:

The striking similarities between this parable and Lazarus' resurrection in John 11-12 include: the name 'Lazarus,' the death of Lazarus, the request to send him back from the dead—Lazarus' return from the dead, and the

lack of faith resulting from such an event (Lk 16:31; Jn 12:9-11). It has been suggested that the Johannine account is a 'historization' of the parable. It has also been suggested that the parable arose from the story. The similarity between these two accounts is interesting and curious ... [and] ... quite puzzling.

Snodgrass (2008:426) purports the answer to the question of parabolic distinctiveness is that it is "without question a parable." "Preachers and certain people throughout Church history sometimes have asserted that this story is not a parable but depicts real people ... I am not aware of any modern scholar who would agree" (Snodgrass 2008:426). There are modern scholars who at least slightly disagree with Snodgrass, however, in that they consider the story a "subclass parable," rather than an outright parable (Blomberg 2006:73). Bock (1996:1363) considers it an "example story," and says that the account is not exactly like most parables does not at the same time mean it is not illustrative or comparative. Morgan (2010:222) offers an opinion with which this thesis concurs: "... if [the] actual case [was] known to Jesus, that he used [it] parabolically there can be no doubt."

While scholars concur the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a parable, Bailey (2008:279-280) suggests a parabolic nature does not, at the same time, suggest a parable cannot include doctrinal implications. Bailey (2008:279) states the early Christians drew their theology from parables, but in later centuries they became a source of ethics instead. Bailey says this approach "sidelines" the theology a parable seeks to convey because Jesus is a "serious theologian" and his parables offer "serious theology."<sup>186</sup>

Snodgrass (2008:7) argues that every parable must be approached in its own right and not assumed to look or function like other parables. This is especially

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<sup>186</sup> Bailey (2008:279) does not explicitly state whether or not he agrees or disagrees with the notion that the parable offers literal insights into the afterlife, but instead focuses on Jesus' "metaphorical theology."

true for the unusual Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Morgan (2010:223) offers a valuable warning concerning the nature of this parable in asserting, "... there are two perils we must avoid. We have no right to leave anything out of the story ... [and] we have no right to read into it anything which is not found therein."

While the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is unique in that it specifically names Lazarus, it is also unique in that it includes two parts (Bock 1996:1365-1367). Stein (1992:421-427) notes that the first part is connected to the preceding parable as an example both of a man who is a lover of money (16:14) and who foolishly made poor use of his possessions (16:9-13). The parable's second part tells the story of the rich man's death and entrance into hades, which is juxtaposed with Lazarus' death and entrance into "Abraham's bosom" (Wiersbe 2007:103). Morgan (2010:223) draws a connection between the two sections, writing, "[Jesus] told them men unfaithful in the much were unfaithful in the little, and the relation of the much to the very little, of the spiritual to the material is the relation of time to eternity; and so the relation of money and its possession to the life that lies beyond. That was the occasion of the story." While the first section is contextually important to the overall understanding of the parable, it is the second section with which this thesis is especially concerned.

As the only parable from Jesus which transcends everyday reality to focus on the afterlife, the parable's insights on the afterlife are helpful contributions to the pre-resurrection, post-life destination of the believer:

In this story we find the one occasion when our Lord stretched out his hand, and drew aside the veil that hangs between the now and the hereafter, and allowed men to look and see not merely what lay beyond, but the intimate relationship between the now and the then, between the here and the hereafter (Morgan 2010:224).

The second section of the parable presents a new setting in the narrative. “Death is not the end, and so the story continues. Lazarus is borne up immediately to Abraham’s bosom by the angels ... The rich man also passes away ... [he] is in torment in hades ... [and] his situation stands in stark contrast to Lazarus’ (Bock 1996:1368-1369).

Bock (1996:1368) contends that “Abraham’s bosom” represents an aspect of Heaven, writing, “Abraham’s bosom was a place of blessing and represents the patriarch’s reception of the faithful into Heaven.” Stein (1992:421-427) says that 1 Kings 1:21, 2:10, and 11:21 contain a similar idea to “Abraham’s bosom,” intimating there is a relationship between the Heaven presented in the post-Fall OT and the parable. Snodgrass (2008:20-21) supports this concept in noting that one characteristic of Jesus’ parables is that they frequently allude to OT texts: “Some of [Jesus’ parables] adapt OT themes, and, more than is recognized, a number of them address specific OT texts and ideas.”

Stein (1992:421-427) asserts that hades, in Greek thought, is the place of the dead. Hades is the place in the OT and in Judaism where the dead were gathered (Bock 1996:1369). The ouranological question here is how hades and Abraham’s bosom might relate to one another in a post-Fall, pre-resurrection era. Bock offers the following commentary on the question:

The righteous (2 Macc 6:23; 1 Enoch 102.4-5) and unrighteous (Sol 14:6, 9-10; 15:10) both reside in hades, though they are separated from one another (1 Enoch 22). However, 1 Enoch 39 seems to place the righteous in a separate locale called Heaven (Creed 1930:212). Thus, within Judaism there is some dispute about who inhabits hades. The NT shares this ambiguity, for Acts 2:27, 31 states that Jesus was not abandoned or left in hades after his resurrection, which implies that he went there. But hades generally has negative connotations in the NT, since other parts of Jesus’ teaching suggest that only the power of death and judgment is

associated with hades (Mt 16:18; 11:23). If so, hades comes close to equaling gehenna, although technically gehenna is the place where the final judgment of the unrighteous occurs (Creed 1930:212). In the NT, hades is where the dead are, while gehenna is where they experience final judgment. It is clear that the righteous do not end up in *gehenna*. Wherever the rich man is, Lazarus is not there (16:26). As a righteous man, Lazarus does not seem to be in hades in its negative sense, but it is not clear that he is not in a compartment of hades (Plummer 1896:394; Arndt 1956:365). Marshall (1978:637) suggests that the distinction between the rich man's locale and Lazarus' is real but states it with some reservation (Fitzmyer 1985:1132).

Wiersbe (2007:194) shares a similar conviction, commenting that Jesus' description presents hades as having two sections, a paradise section called "Abraham's bosom," and a separate punishment section. Wiersbe moreover writes, "It is believed by many theologians that our Lord emptied the paradise part of hades when he arose from the dead and returned to the Father (Jn 20:17; Eph 4:8-10). Today 'paradise' is in Heaven, where Jesus reigns in glory (Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:1-4)."<sup>187</sup> Wright (2008:171-172, 174) also maintains that "paradise" is a synonym for "Heaven," and offers insights on a Christian's experience upon death:

Though [it] is [sometimes] described as sleep, we shouldn't take this to mean that it is a state of unconsciousness. Had Paul thought that, I very much doubt that he would have described life immediately after death as "being with Christ, which is far better." Rather, sleep means that the body is "asleep" in the sense of "dead," while the real person—however we want to describe him or her—continues. This state is not the final destiny

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<sup>187</sup> Wiersbe (1994:194) is careful to note how "There is no indication in Scripture that souls in Heaven can communicate with people in hades or with people on earth," meaning this is not necessarily a doctrinal implication of this particular parable. This, however, does not threaten the possibility that "Abraham's bosom" used to reside in a righteous side of hades.

for which the Christian dead are bound, which is the resurrection. But it is a state in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Jesus Christ while they await that day. There is no reason why this state should not be called Heaven ... or paradise.

Richards (2014:135-136) expands upon the discussion:

In Luke 16:19-31, we learn a little about the underworld. In this region, a great divide separates two sides. One is *paradise*, where the righteous resides in perfect peace. The other is what we typically refer to as Hell, a place of torment ... [today] “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). When those who have accepted Christ die, they go directly to Heaven ... As Christians, we have the assurance that we don’t have to go to *paradise*, waiting for a day when we can be with Christ. We have the mansions in Heaven because Jesus sprinkled his blood on the altar there, giving us immediate access to the Father. Now, the only residents of the underworld Hades, in what we call Hell, are those who are not with Christ but await judgment at the Great White Throne.

Liefeld and Pao (2007:263) offer an expedient warning: “While the parable does contain a few doctrinal implications, the expositor must keep in mind that one cannot build a complete eschatology upon it.” This thesis does not seek to build a complete eschatology upon this parable, but it does argue that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the parable offers noteworthy ouranological implications worth considering concerning the post-Fall, pre-resurrection era of the afterlife.

In summary, John’s use of the “Son of Man” title in Revelation 1:13 encapsulates the nature of this particular epoch of Heaven, because its original use in Daniel 7 depicts the epitome of an era which exhibited the reign of ungodliness in a pre-

resurrection era. Daniel, while in Babylonian captivity, saw a vision of four ungodly kingdoms eventually contrasted by one “like a Son of Man” (Dan 7:13), showing that while chaos reigns during this epoch, there is hope for a new era headlined by this “Son of Man.”

It is with the coming of this “Son of Man,” from Heaven to earth, that this particular epoch finds its conclusion and the next epoch finds its beginning. The next epoch, however, exists within a new category. Jesus’ first coming concluded the historical epochs of Heaven and inaugurated the contemporary era, the one in which mankind presently abides.

### **5.7 The Contemporary Nature of Heaven**

The contemporary section of Revelation, which comprises the things “which are,” is confined to Revelation 2-3. Therefore, these chapters are excavated for descriptions concerning Jesus which might offer insights into how Heaven can be understood through him in its contemporary age.

Revelation 2-3 comprises seven letters to seven churches. One common interpretation of these churches is that they were literal churches during John’s day, and that they represent the various attitudes and reputations into which every ensuing Church fits (so Hemer 2001:1; Walvoord 1989a:51; MacArthur 2007:15; Hadjiantoniou 2011:14; Hamilton 2012:54). “[Revelation] arises out of local ... circumstances; it is, in the first instance at least, the answer of the Spirit to the fears and perils of the Asian Christians towards the end of the first century ... all that can throw light on the Asia of A.D. 70-100 ... is of primary importance to the student of the Apocalypse” (Hemer 2001:1).<sup>188</sup> Walvoord (1989a:51) agrees, but expands the idea to include subsequent churches: “The selection of the churches was ... governed by the fact that each Church was in some way

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<sup>188</sup> Hemer (2001:1) believes viewing the churches in this way helps determine the “aim and drift of the entire work [of Revelation].”

normative and illustrated conditions common in local churches at that time as well as throughout later history.” Hadjiantoniou (2011:14) espouses, “[the] seven churches [are] representative types of the various shades of Church life in all ages.” Hamilton summarizes the interpretation well in asserting, “There is a sense in which by addressing these seven churches, John has representatively addressed all churches.”<sup>189</sup>

Hamilton (2012:57) notes that every letter in Revelation 2-3 begins with unique descriptions about Jesus, but there are two in particular which present the stark break between what this thesis deems the “historical” and “contemporary” epochs of Heaven. The first description is found in the Ephesus letter (Rev 2:1-7), in which Jesus is described as the one who “walks among the seven golden lampstands” (Rev 2:1). The second description is found in the letter to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11), in which Jesus is described as the one “who was dead, and has come to life” (Rev 2:8). Both of these descriptions offer significant insights into the ministry of the “Son of Man” presented in the previous epoch of Heaven. Specifically, these descriptions provide insights into Jesus’ earthly ministry and how it inaugurated a new relationship between Heaven and earth, and thus a new epoch. “There is a high Christology in these seven letters, and it comes in the way that Jesus describes himself and what he has accomplished” (Hamilton 2012:58). Boring (1989:88) maintains the same conclusion: “We see that these Christological statements at the beginning of each letter are neither casually chosen nor mere decorations, but they serve a theological purpose.”

### **5.7.1 Exposition of “was dead, and has come to life” (Rev 2:8)**

Revelation 2:8 presents an integral conviction to the Christian faith, because it offers the hope that Christians who die will also rise (Koester 2012:274). Patterson (2012:94) contends the verse is “especially poignant ... The fact that

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<sup>189</sup> Hadjiantoniou (2011:14) quotes Augustine’s support of this view: “Augustine comments: ‘Writing to the seven churches he wrote to the one Church in its completeness.’”

he came back to life again is ... refreshing to saints.” “As [Jesus] was victorious over death, so [the saints], too, can face martyrdom knowing that faithfulness is rewarded with eternal life” (Mounce 1997:74).

Revelation 2:8 ultimately presents the denouement of the first incarnation of Jesus’ earthly ministry, and reveals the commencement of a new relationship between Heaven and earth. Through Jesus, Christians have a tactile hope. “The primary emphasis on Jesus’ resurrection here is the promise to the Smyranean Christians, who may face death, yet dare hope in a crown of life to follow (2:10), and whose experience of martyrdom would spare them the horror of the ‘second death (2:11)’” (Keener 2000:116-117). “Jesus guarantees one’s future life” (Osborne 2002:128). The Revelation 2:8 characterization brings together what Jesus accomplished on earth and what he is by nature (Thomas 1992:161). “His death and subsequent life ... [is] especially relevant to those to whom he promises life subsequent to their death for his sake” (Thomas 1992:161).

Thus, while the Fall installed an epoch where Heaven and earth were disassociated from one another by the power of death, Jesus’ death and resurrection introduces a novel relationship between the two, one in which he serves as an inimitable bridge which could not exist apart from his victory over death. This is congealed by the description of Jesus presented in his letter to the Church in Ephesus, which is detailed in the following exposition (Rev 2:1-7).

### **5.7.2 Exposition of the “seven golden lampstands” (Rev 2:1)**

Jesus’ letter to the Church in Ephesus begins with the description that he is the “One who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (Rev 2:1). The symbol of the “lampstand” is first introduced in Revelation 1:13, when John saw one like “the Son of Man” in the middle of seven golden lampstands. In Revelation 1:20 Jesus tells John that the lampstands represent the seven churches. Mounce says Jesus’ walking among them in Revelation 2:1 implies he is present in the

Church's midst and aware of their activities (1997:68). The churches are to "realize [Jesus'] abiding presence" (Mounce 1997:63). Aune (1997:142) states the term "walking" portrays Jesus as "the unseen presence ... among the Christians of the congregations." The phrase "indicates how near [Jesus] is to his people and how complete is his control" (Williamson 2015:58).<sup>190</sup> The phrase speaks to the invisible Christ who walks among the churches (Witherington 2003:95). Christ's introduction of himself as walking among the seven golden lampstands shows he is always in their midst (Beale 2013:229).

This prevailing thought—that Jesus is in the midst of the churches—is buttressed by the statement that he also "holds the seven stars in his right hand" (Rev 2:1). Several explanations have been proposed for the meaning of "angels."<sup>191</sup> Three of the major interpretations include: (1) human beings which are prominent figures in the churches; (2) Heavenly beings which identify with the churches; or (3) a way of personifying the prevailing spirit of the Church (Mounce 1997:63). It is not necessary for this study to endorse a specific interpretation for the angels, so long as the interpretation supports the notion that Jesus, by holding the angels in his right hand (Rev 1:16), is inimitably involved in the leadership of the churches, which is a common theme among scholarship which varies on the specific meaning of the term. Hamilton (2012:65) positively claims, and this thesis concurs, "That Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand means that he has authority over the angels of the seven churches, because 1:20 identified those stars as the angels of the churches."<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> An interesting side note to Williamson's (2015:58) commentary is his argument that Jesus, in each of the seven letters, introduces himself usually by referring to some part of the vision in Chapter One. This is an important insight because it shows the deep-seated relationship between the epochs for which this thesis argues. While the epochs are distinct in and of themselves, they are also sewed together by the thread of Jesus Christ. Witherington (2003:90) seems to agree, writing, "Revelation 2-3 constitutes a highly structured epistolary section that picks up some of the elements we saw in the vision in Revelation 1." Hamilton (2012:64) writes, "We should read the letters to the churches ... in light of the glory of Jesus that John described for us in the second half of chapter 1."

<sup>191</sup> For example, Hailey (1979:116) lists seven explanations, Thomas (1992:116-119) lists four, and Keener (2000:99-100) lists three.

<sup>192</sup> Hamilton (2012:65) also notes, "That Jesus walks among the lampstands means that Jesus is present with his people, because 1:20 identifies the lampstands as the churches. Jesus is present, and he is in control right now."

This description buttresses the protuberant place Jesus holds within the Church, a place he achieved via his death and resurrection (Rev 2:8).

### 5.7.3 Summary of Revelation 2:1, 8

Osborne's (2002:112) commentary on Revelation 2:1 offers an exemplary summary of Jesus' inimitable involvement among the churches:

...the more emphatic *kratōn* ("grasp") is used (1:16 has *echōn*, "hold") to make the sovereign control of Christ over the stars/angels more graphic and rhetorically powerful. Second, Christ is portrayed as *peripatōn en mesō* ("walking in the midst of") the churches (1:13 has just "in the midst of"). As in the first change, the meaning is the same but more emphatic. The imagery of "walking" combines the ideas of concern for and authority over the Church ... Christ is present among his people and is both watching over them and watching them.

Aune (1997:142) argues that Revelation 2:1 "is a reference to the presence of Christ in *all* the seven congregations." When married with the conviction that the churches also represent every Church since the Son of Man's first incarnation (so Walvoord 1989a:51; Hemer 2001:1; Hadjiantoniou 2011:14; Hamilton 2012:54), Aune's argument helps establish a new epoch of Heaven has begun, one which is prominently different from the one presented by the exegetical conclusions of the "Son of Man" title in Revelation 1:13.

The present contention is that "Son of Man" in Revelation 1:13 captures the things that "were" (historical nature of Heaven), while the "One who walks among the seven golden lampstands" in Revelation 2:1 captures the things which "are" (contemporary nature of Heaven), namely because of Jesus' death and resurrection as presented in Revelation 2:8. Thus, whereas the prior epoch of Heaven details a separation between God and man, this new epoch displays a

newfound relationship made possible through the ministry of the “Son of Man.” Therefore, the contemporary age could not exist apart from Jesus’ work on the cross, in the grave, and outside of the grave. Jesus’ death and resurrection exposes a marked difference between what “was” and what “is,” signifying an entirely new era, and also a fourth epoch of Heaven, which resides within this new era (Rev 2-3).

### **5.8 Epoch Four: Jesus’ Incarnation to the Rapture**

An analysis of Revelation 2-3 reveals that Jesus establishes a contemporary era of Heaven, and also a fourth ouranological epoch which began with his death and resurrection. “The NT is saturated with the belief that something new has happened in the life and death of Jesus Christ, and above all through his resurrection from the dead” (McGrath 2011:445).

Melick (1991:241) argues that Paul describes this contemporary period as the “mystery age,” a term he analogously uses in Romans 11:25, 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:7, 4:1, 15:51, Ephesians 1:9, 3:3, 4, 9, 5:32, Colossians 1:26, 27, 2:2, 4:3, 1 Timothy 3:9, and 16.<sup>193</sup> “In Pauline terminology, a mystery was a truth which lay hidden in the pages of the OT, and its explanation awaited another day. The day of understanding came with the death and resurrection of Christ, and the mystery was revealed to the believers” (Melick 1991:241). The phrase is closely oriented with Jesus, and suggests the general definition of the “mystery” is the indwelling of Christ in a believer (Moo 2008:157-158). Paul’s frequent use of the term showcases the present age is different from the historical age.

Paul argues that Jesus’ resurrection marked a meaningful change between Heaven and earth, namely that absence from the body now means presence with

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<sup>193</sup> John uses the word in Revelation 10:7 to detail the conclusion of the time of mystery.

the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). Garland (1999:264-265) deliberates this point in his commentary on the verse:

Paul's whole life is suffused with confidence because of the hope of the resurrection ... He can abandon himself entirely to his mission because he knows that God will not abandon him in death, for he knows the Lord has determined a glorious destiny for him. He knows that Christ dwells in Heaven. The picture he paints shows that as soon as we are away from the physical body we are present with the Lord in a new dimension that is qualitatively different from our experience of the Lord's presence in this body.

Garland's commentary discloses the contextual makeup of Paul's post-resurrection hope, and establishes the newfound relationship Heaven has with earth because of Jesus' earthly ministry. Immediate presence with the Lord upon death is now possible in the contemporary age.

Moo (2008:155) connects Paul's "mystery age" terminology with the OT, particularly the book of Daniel, writing,

... Paul borrows this word from the OT ... particularly significant are the occurrences of the word in Daniel ... Paul uses the word characteristically to denote truth about God and his plan of salvation that had remained hidden in the past but that had now been revealed.

According to Walvoord (1989b:216-237), "mystery" is perhaps most appropriately rooted in Daniel 9:24-27, in which Gabriel provides Daniel with "insight and understanding" (Dan 9:22) about God's historical plan of salvation in the Messiah. Longman (1999:226) entitles the passage "the Seventy Sevens," and Walvoord (1989b:216) considers it "one of the most important prophecies of the OT." "The prophecy as a whole is presented in verse 24. The first sixty-nine

sevens is described in verse 25. The events between the sixty-ninth seven and the seventieth seven are detailed in verse 26. The final period of the seventieth seventh is described in verse 27” (Walvoord 1989b:216).

Many divergent interpretations exist on Daniel 9:24-27 (Hill 2008:172), but it is best to interpret the passage through a Christological lens, which is to say Jesus is the one who ultimately determines the breakdown of Daniel’s “weeks.” “There is general agreement that the prophecy relates to the Messiah” (Walvoord 1989b:219). Hill (2008:173) writes, “The messianic interpretation ... has a long tradition in the Church.” Hill (2008:173-174) offers a general summary of the messianic interpretation:<sup>194</sup>

The 490 years are understood literally and extend from the command to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile to the second advent of Jesus the Messiah. The end of the first seven weeks (49 years) coincides with the completion of the work of Ezra and Nehemiah in restoring Jerusalem. The next set of sevens, the sixty-two sevens (434 years), extends sequentially from the end of the set of seven sevens to the first advent of Jesus the Messiah. A great gulf of time intervenes between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week. The final seven-year period will conclude with the second coming of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>195</sup>

Hill’s (2008:173-174) messianic synopsis reveals there is an undetermined amount of time which occurs between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, and that this period of time is inaugurated by the earthly ministry of the first incarnation of Jesus. Jesus’ first incarnation concluded with his death, burial, and

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<sup>194</sup> Hill (2008:173) states both premillennial and amillennial interpreters tend to interpret the passage in this way.

<sup>195</sup> Another popular approach to this passage is the Antiochene interpretation (so Baldwin 1978:181-197; Goldingay 1989:223-268). This approach offers specific dates to the weeks, mostly based on the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Hill 2008:174). It is not necessary for this thesis to offer specific dates and events to break down the weeks, only to provide a general outline which interprets the passage both literally and Christologically, for reasons provided throughout the course of the thesis.

resurrection, which, coincidentally, is the precise description Jesus employs for himself in Revelation 2:8. The language in Daniel's vision seems to be a picture of Christ, in which he reconciles the world to himself. The hitch, however, is this "great gulf of time" was a "mystery" to Daniel, as well as to all of God's followers up until Jesus' ascension (so Melick 1991:241; Hill 2008:173-174; Moo 2008:155). This is revealed in Acts 1:6 when the disciples ask Jesus if the seventieth week is now concluded, since he has risen from the dead: "Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus' response reveals God is in control of the times and epochs (Acts 1:7), and the disciples' responsibility is to be prepared for the coming of the power of the Holy Spirit, not the knowledge of the inauguration of the kingdom (Acts 1:8). Of special importance is this same idea—God's authority over the times and epochs—is expressly communicated in Daniel's response to the "mystery" of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:21), in which he describes God as the one "who changes the times and the epochs," further emphasizing the notion that Paul's use of "mystery" is rooted in Daniel (Moo 2008:155).

Jesus' response to the disciples intimated the conclusion of the weeks would not take place at the denouement of his first incarnation, which was the expected arrangement according to Daniel's vision from Gabriel. Paul subsequently calls this postponement a "mystery," because it was "a truth which lay hidden in the pages of the OT ... only revealed to the saints ... with the death and resurrection of Christ" (Melick 1991:241). Moo's (2008:157-158) definition of the term "mystery" as including Gentile believers is initiated in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, and unfurled throughout the rest of the NT. Ultimately, "Paul's specific reference to the mystery ... touches on an epochal salvation-history shift" (Moo 2008:158). Paul uses the term in a functional manner, applying it to the aspects of God's climactic work in Christ.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Paul's use of "mystery" is not shared in order to interpret Revelation, so much as it is shared in order to underscore the notion that Scripture, via the most prolific NT writer (Paul) and a prolific OT prophet (Daniel), emphasizes the unique nature to the contemporary age, which was inaugurated by Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.

The practical change in this particular epoch is deceased believers are now immediately translated into Heaven, whereas in the previous epoch believers were translated to a righteous side of Sheol. “Scripture ... indicates that [believers] are immediately ushered consciously into the Lord’s presence” (MacArthur 1996:71). Jesus says, “no one comes to the Father but through me,” (Jn 14:6) a statement which is spoken within the context of his pending death (Jn 13), suggesting that it was not possible to enter the presence of the Father in Heaven until after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the principle event which inaugurated the fourth epoch of Heaven.

Alcorn (2004:41) calls this the “intermediate Heaven” or “intermediate state,” a title also employed by others, including Cromhout (2004:88) and Calhoun (2014:258). Alcorn writes, “When a Christian dies, he or she enters into what theologians call the intermediate state, a transitional period between our past lives on earth and our future resurrection to life on the new earth.” Deceased believers already exist in the intermediate state (Cromhout 2004:88). Alcorn (2004:42) describes this state of Heaven as “temporary,” and, therefore, “not our final destination. “Though it will be a wonderful place, the intermediate Heaven is not the place we are made for—the place God promises to refashion for us to live in forever. God’s children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected earth.”

Calhoun (2014:258) espouses a similar opinion, writing, “At death the soul goes directly to Heaven to be with the Lord ... The bliss of the intermediate state is infinitely more to be desired than anything that can come to us on earth; it is less desirable only than the completed redemption yet to come.” Calhoun (2014:258) quotes from Warfield’s *Princeton Sermons*, who describes the Christian in Heaven “as the storm-tossed mariner” who “desires the haven which its vessel has long sought to win through the tossing waves and adverse winds—gate only though it be of the country which he calls home, and long though he may need to wait until all his goods are landed.”

Peterson (2014:32) and Wellum (2014b:95) agree there is an intermediate state of Heaven which is temporary, noting how Scripture teaches that at death believers' souls immediately go to be with Christ, but they also note how the Bible presents the situation as an interim existence which is "temporary." "For Paul and the entire NT, our ultimate hope is found in Christ's return and the resurrection ... Yet prior to Christ's return, there is a temporary state for believers between their death and resurrection, what has been called the 'intermediate state'" (Wellum 2014b:95). "The whole point of what Jesus was up to was ... not saving souls for a disembodied eternity but rescuing people ... so they could enjoy ... that renewal of creation which is God's ultimate purpose—and so they could thus become colleagues and partners in that larger project" (Wright 2008:192).

Thus, while Jesus' death and resurrection inaugurated the fourth epoch, the glorification of the believer concludes it and begins another. Because the glorification of the believer is a future event, the future epoch falls into a new ouranological category which is eschatological in nature, as do the epochs which follow it.

### **5.9 The Eschatological Nature of Heaven**

The eschatological section of Revelation—the traditional understanding of Heaven which comprises the things "which will take place after these things" (Rev 1:19)—is reserved to Revelation 4-22 (Hiebert 2003:271). Therefore, these chapters are excavated for descriptions concerning Jesus which might offer insights into how Heaven can be understood through him in its eschatological nature.

Revelation 4-22 details three significant eschatological events. These include a Great Tribulation (Rev 4-18), a Millennium (Rev 19-20), and new creation/eternity

(Rev 20-21). The general framework for these events is detailed in Chapter Three, where the impact of a literal hermeneutic for Revelation is observed. Two of these events—the Millennium and new creation—have been discussed exegetically throughout the course of Chapter Four, and will therefore not be detailed here. What has not been discussed in detail is the rapture and subsequent Great Tribulation. The following section therefore offers insights on these two subjects according to a futuristic approach. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the goal is not to necessarily argue against positions which oppose the eschatological conclusions of a futuristic approach to Revelation, but to offer general insights which show the reasonability of, in this particular case, a pretribulational rapture and Great Tribulation.

### **5.9.1 The Rapture**

The “son, a male child” figure in Revelation 12:5 serves as a Christological catalyst to help frame the nature and duration of the Great Tribulation, but this interpretation begs scholarly commentary on the rapture, because it is the Christological event which inaugurates a new ouranological epoch which exists during the time of the Great Tribulation. The rapture “denotes a sudden and forcible seizure, an irresistible act of catching away, due to divine activity” (Hiebert 1996:214). It ultimately presents a newfound nature to Heaven during the Great Tribulation which is significantly different from the previous epoch, namely because believers are glorified (1 Cor 15:51).

One point of contention among theologians is the timing of the rapture, especially in relation to the Great Tribulation period. “The views regarding the related timing of these events lead to the designations pre, mid, and posttribulationists for the views that the rapture occurs prior to, during, or at the end of the Great Tribulation” (Grenz and others 1999:99). This thesis opts for a pretribulational rapture of the Church.

Blaising (2010:25-26) describes pretribulationism as “the view that the rapture, the ‘catching up’ of resurrected and translated believers to meet the coming Christ in the air, precedes the tribulation, the time of trouble and judgment.” Christ will visibly descend to the earth at the climax of the Great Tribulation with his saints to begin his millennial reign, which establishes the denouement of this particular ouranological epoch, as well as separates the rapture from the second coming. Heibert (2003:269) describes the process as being divided into two states: “the Second Advent will be in two phases, the rapture, when the Church will be caught up to meet her Lord and be eternally united with him, and the revelation, when Christ will return to earth in open glory with his Church to establish his millennial reign.” It is “a ‘coming’ of Christ *for* his Church before or sometime during the tribulation and a ‘coming’ *with* his Church after it” (Moo 2010a:195). Though Moo disagrees with pretribulationism, he concedes it has theological warrant, suggesting the interpretation is not explicitly ruled out in Scripture.

One major concern for those who oppose a pretribulation rapture is it is allegedly not espoused by the Church Fathers. Stitzinger (2002:151) agrees with Heibert (2003:269) and considers the rapture as part of the “wider study of the *parousia*,” that is, as the first phase of a two-phased coming which concludes with Jesus’ second coming, stating, “The NT makes it clear that the *parousia* is not merely the act or arrival of the Lord but the total situation surrounding Messiah’s coming ... The uses of the term in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, James 5:7-8, 2 Peter 1:16, and 1 John 2:28 all refer to the coming of Christ in general.” Stitzinger (2002:153) further argues that, “the rapture in Church history is really a history of pretribulationism” and that “partial, midtrib, and prewrath positions are recent positions that have very little if any history.” Walvoord (2015) submits, “The early Church Fathers understood the scriptures to teach that the coming of the Lord could occur any hour,” a sentiment with which Dunbar (1983) agrees: “Many members of the Church during the early centuries shared an expectation of the imminent return of Christ.” Stitzinger (2002:156) also stresses the Church

Fathers' common emphasis of the immanency of Christ's return, which Crutchfield (1995:103) purports as constituting "what may be termed, to quote Erickson, 'seeds from which the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture could be developed.'"<sup>197</sup> "It is commonly recognized that if the coming of Christ is after the Great Tribulation, then his coming cannot be imminent. Too many events are pictured as preceding his coming to allow it to be a daily expectation if he does not come for his Church until after the Great Tribulation" (Walvoord 2015).

Stitzinger's (2002:156) survey of the early Church Fathers concludes that several endorsed an imminent tribulation with pretribulational inferences, and that this thought was largely lost during the Middle Ages when Augustine and the Renaissance spiritualized the Millennium as the reign of Christ in the saints. During the Middle Ages there are only "sporadic discussions here and there of a literal, future Millennium," which made pretribulationalism very rare, thereby suggesting pretribulationalism is the more founded option (Hannah 1992:315-316).<sup>198</sup>

Another dominant concern of pretribulationalism is it is purportedly not explicitly stated in Revelation (or its Daniel counterpart) (so Koester 2001:25; Moo 2010a:195), which is a concern because, as Gundry (1973:64) submits, "As the major book of prophecy in the NT, Revelation has great pertinence to the discussion of the rapture." This is a concern also noted by those who endorse the belief (so Essex 2002:216; Hiebert 1992:218-219; Patterson 2012:150). "One must ask where the rapture is found in Revelation before one asks the question of when the rapture is said to take place" (Svigel 2001:24).<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Crutchfield further notes, "Had it not been for the drought in sound exegesis, brought on by Alexandrian allegoricalism and later by Augustine, one wonders what kind of crop those seeds might have yielded—long before J.N. Darby and the nineteenth century.

<sup>198</sup> Stitzinger (2002:157-159) provides some examples which, during the time of Augustine, recognized a literal, earthly and future Millennium, including Ephraem of Nisibis (306-373) and the Codex Amiatinus (ca. 690-716).

<sup>199</sup> Essex (2002:216) suggests that ten passages have been traditionally proposed as references to the event, but only two (Rev 3:10 and 4:1) receive the most attention, and are therefore considered here.

Some pretribulationist scholars interpret Revelation 4:1 as the rapture (Gaebelein 1911:44),<sup>200</sup> but Patterson (2012:150), a pretribulationist, offers an astute exegetical insight, arguing that to read this into the verse would be to miss the point it is making about the nature of how John observed Jesus' vision. Koester (2001:25) interprets the verse as God calling John into a temporary visionary ascent, not an ingathering of all the faithful in Heaven. "The evidence points to this being a statement of John's personal experience in the first century and not the Church's future experience" (Essex 2002:227). Walvoord (1989a:103), an avid pretribulationist, offers a similar view:

The invitation to John to "come up hither" is so similar to that which the Church anticipates at the rapture that many have connected the two expressions. It is clear from the context that this is not an explicate reference to the rapture of the Church ... there is no authority for connecting the rapture with this expression.<sup>201</sup>

The most important and most widely discussed of the proposed passages where the rapture is referred to is Revelation 3:10 (Essex 2002:221), in which a remarkable promise is made to the Church in Philadelphia: "Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." Osborne (2002:192) describes Revelation 3:10 as "the most important single passage in the book for the dispensational position" and Moo (2010a:186) says it is the "only text in the NT that might suggest that God will physically remove his people from the final tribulation." "If there is a proof text for the pretribulationist position, it is Revelation 3:10" (Winfrey 1982:5). Mounce (1997:103) summarizes the challenge of the verse: "The major question is

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<sup>200</sup> W.A. Criswell (1995:17), former pastor of First Baptist Dallas, Texas, preaches that Revelation 4:1 presents the rapture "in type and in symbol ... [it] is a type and a picture of the door of the ascension of God's sainted people, the door opened wide to receive God's sainted people from the earth."

<sup>201</sup> Walvoord (1989a:103) notes, "... there does seem to be a typical representation of the order of events, namely, the Church age first, then the rapture, then the Church in Heaven," an order with which this thesis agrees.

whether Christ is promising deliverance from the period of trial or safekeeping through the trial.”

Patterson (2012:132), in discussing the nature of this promise, states pretribulationists often maintain this is a promise that the Church will not be present for the Great Tribulation, while posttribulationists argue on the basis of the grammar that nothing is said here about taking the Church out of the world, only that Christians will be “kept from the hour of trial.”<sup>202</sup> Aune (1997:239), for example, contends the verse “refers to a situation out of which people are taken, not their separation from that situation” and Osborne (2002:192) maintains the verse emphasizes the Church’s perseverance as the basis of God’s protection of them. Hamilton (2012:116) agrees, noting, “It seems to me that this text refers to the Church’s being preserved through the tribulation rather than to the Church being raptured before the tribulation.”<sup>203</sup>

Some disagree. Walvoord (1989a:87), for example, contends “if this promise has any bearing on the question of pretribulationism ... what is said emphasizes deliverance from rather than deliverance through [and] implies the rapture of the Church before the time of trouble referred to as the Great Tribulation.” Patterson (2012:133) argues that, given the description in the Apocalypse of the nature and extent of the judgment of the tribulation, it becomes difficult to account for how the Church could be living in such a world. “The scriptures picture a time of unparalleled upheaval ... how exactly could the Church expect to be in the world under such conditions, and how could any significant understanding of being kept ‘from the hour of trial’ realistically remain meaningful?” (Patterson 2012:133).<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Patterson (2012:133) maintains that “an honest assessment ... leaves us with no ability to resolve the question based on vocabulary, grammar, and syntax alone.” Mounce (1997:103) offers a similar opinion, arguing the preposition “from” is “inconclusive.” Mounce however personally contends the thrust of the verse opposes a pretribulationist rapture.

<sup>203</sup> The most common argument for those who dispute a pretribulationist rapture is that if the content of the book is made future, then it would have been of no value to suffering Christians in the day in which it was received (Koester 2014:326), but this method of reasoning finds weakness in that the same concern could be applied to future (now modern) churches. “If the Apocalypse was intended only to comfort the first-century Church, then what is its enduring value for the Church for the next 19 centuries?” (Patterson 2012:132)

<sup>204</sup> Patterson adds to this the strange omission of the word ‘Church’ from the text of the Apocalypse following chapter 3 to develop a strong argument for a pretribulationist rapture.

Thomas (1992:286-287) maintains the view that the promise of removal from the earth prior to “the hour of trial” is well supported. Thomas (1992:287-288) provides several arguments on pretribulationalism, including: (a) it fits the immediate context of the message to Philadelphia, assuring the faithful who had already undergone their fiery test that they would be spared the stress and storm that were to come on others after the arrival of the “hour of trial”; (b) it allows for an adequate meaning of “the hour of trial,” a period of time during which the trial exists, which is to say that if the promise pertained to the trial itself, the deliverance conceivably could be only partial, but the promise is strengthened considerably by referring to the period itself; and (c) John 12:27 includes language akin to Revelation 3:10 when Christ prayed to be saved from the hour of his crucifixion, meaning that, humanly speaking, he wanted to be physically delivered from the awful agony of that experience. To this Thomas (1992:288) writes, “... the most natural understanding of the expression ‘kept from the hour’ is not to be preserved through it, but to be kept safe in a place away from where it occurs.”

Pentecost (1958:216) offers another pretribulational analysis of this verse, citing Thayer’s Greek Lexicon (1889:622), which suggests that the word John uses for “kept” (*tērēō*), when used with *en*, means, “to cause one to persevere or stand firm in a thing,” and when used with *ek* means “by guarding to cause one to escape in safety out of.” Pentecost (1958:216) submits,

Since *ek* is used here it would indicate that John is promising a removal from the sphere of testing, not a preservation through it. This is further substantiated by the use of the words “the hour.” God is not only guarding from the trials but from the very hour itself when these trials will come on those earth dwellers.

MacArthur (2007:27) offers a similar opinion, observing how the verb “to keep” is followed by a preposition whose normal meaning is “from” or “out of.” MacArthur argues that the phrase “keep ... from” supports the pretribulational rapture of the church.

Stanton (1991:46-50) derives four facts from Revelation 3:10, including: (a) this promise applies not only to one local assembly existing in the days of the apostle John but to the entire Church, because the constant refrain in all seven messages from Christ to these churches is “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22); (b) the trial which is coming is not local, but is “about to come upon the whole world”; (c) “those who dwell on the earth” is not a suitable description for the members of the Church (Phil 3:20; Heb 11:13); (d) the grammar (*těřěo ek*) favors “removal from” the hour of trial. Stanton (1991:50) concludes,

In the words “I come quickly” [3:11] may be seen the rapture, and the reference to “thy crown” [3:11] suggests the Bema seat judgment to follow. “Because though has kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” Here, then, is a promise which clearly indicates the pretribulation rapture of the Church.

Thomas (1992:288) states there are noteworthy arguments for both a pretribulational and posttribulational rapture, and it is best to regard Revelation as mysteriously silent on the subject. This, however, does not solely injure the idea of a pretribulational rapture, because by the same logic it would also injure a posttribulational rapture. “There is no *explicit* mention of the rapture in the book of Revelation. This silence per se favors none of the tribulational positions” (Blaising 2010:61). Scholars may disagree on the timing of the rapture, but several concur there will be one (so Gundry and Hultberg 2010:25-74; 109-154; 185-241). The question of the relationship of the Church to the tribulation is not

clearly delineated in Revelation. Endorsing the rapture of the Church as prior to the tribulation should be done on the basis of passages outside the book (Patterson 2012:150). Blaising (2010:27) cites 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 as the premier passage in Scripture for a pretribulational rapture.

#### **5.9.1.1 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Blaising (2010:27) describes 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 as “the text that most clearly designates the rapture,” and summarizes the passage in writing,

In the first chapter of this letter, Paul describes the Thessalonian Christians as waiting for the Lord to come from Heaven and deliver them from the wrath to come (1:10). Apprehension had apparently arisen concerning believers who die before his coming. They will not be lost, Paul assures his readers (1 Thess 4:16). After resurrecting the dead in Christ, the Lord will then “snatch up” living believers together with them to meet him “on the clouds,” and “in the air.” After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17). The Greek verb *harpagēsometha*, translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, is more vividly rendered “snatched up,” correctly indicating a sudden, forceful removal of the whole lot of resurrected and living believers up to the presence of the Lord. This is the same verb used in Acts 8:39 to describe how the Spirit of the Lord “snatched away” Philip after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Blaising (2010:26) ultimately argues that a pretribulational rapture is consistently affirmed as “proper to [a] historical, grammatical, [and] literary reading of the biblical text,” and that it is the result of a “consistent interpretation” of Scripture.

Hiebert (1996:200, 217) offers a similar opinion, describing 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 as “the classic NT passage on the rapture of the Church,” and the

pretribulational rapture as the event in which “the Church, in its entirety, will be resurrected and translated, removed from the earthly scene ... before any part of the Great Tribulation runs its course ... It holds that the rapture, the next great prophetic event, is imminent and that believers should be expectantly prepared for it.” Hiebert’s (1996:217-218) dialogue on the endorsement of a pretribulational rapture is helpful:

The epistles do not explicitly state the chronological relationship of the rapture to the Great Tribulation. The problem arises out of the natural effort to set forth a harmonious sequence of end-time events. Walvoord, an advocate of a pretribulational rapture, says, “The fact is that neither posttribulationism or pretribulationism is an explicit teaching of Scripture. The Bible does not in so many words state either.” And Ladd, an advocate of a posttribulational rapture, remarks, “With the exception of one passage, the author will grant that the Scripture nowhere explicitly states that the Church will go through the Great Tribulation ... Nor does the Word explicitly place the rapture at the end of the Great Tribulation.

For Hiebert (1996:218), “the view one accepts will be determined largely by doctrinal and exegetical presuppositions.” Hiebert (1996:218) espouses a pretribulational rapture, because he claims it is “in harmony with his understanding of prophecy in general, his views concerning biblical interpretation, and the implication of [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18] as [it] relates to the discussion.”<sup>205</sup>

Delineating the nature and timing of the rapture is helpful because the event establishes a new epoch of Heaven, one which is different from the epoch during

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<sup>205</sup> Hiebert (1996:219) offers a helpful statement: “Equally devout and sincere students of Scripture will doubtless continue to hold different views on the question of the time of the rapture. Advocates of their respective views must avoid attributing unworthy motives or insincerity in exegesis to each other because they do not agree. It is appropriate and proper that diligent efforts should be given to the study of the evidence for a chronology of end-time events. But these efforts must not be allowed to lead to a preoccupation with uncertain details so that the sanctifying power of this blessed hope for daily living is lost sight of.”

the present age of mystery. The major difference is strongly observed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, which portrays the glorification of the believer via the rapture and resurrection. This glorification is a major element to the doctrine of Heaven. Shogren (2012:194) writes, "... too many Christians neglect the resurrection doctrine and place too much weight on the doctrine of dying and going to Heaven."<sup>206</sup> Paul defends the necessity of the resurrection in his first letter to the Church in Corinth, and divulges the theological claim that the believer will ultimately experience a "change" that is like Jesus' (1 Cor 15). This chapter is often cited as the primary passage through which a believer can ascertain the nature of the future hope of glorification through the rapture and resurrection (pg. 189).

### 5.9.1.2 The Nature of Glorification

Paul considers the physical resurrection of Christ absolutely essential to the Christian faith (1 Cor 15:17, 19).<sup>207</sup> "Christianity has long recognized that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the Christian faith" (Rhodes 1996:50-51). "The early Christian future hope centered firmly on resurrection ... [Early believers] virtually never spoke simply of going to Heaven when they died ... when they spoke of Heaven as a postmortem destination, they seemed to regard this Heavenly life as a temporary stage on the way to the eventual resurrection of the body" (Wright 2008:41). Alcorn (2004:109) avows the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of redemption—both for mankind and for the earth, and that, without it, "there is no Christianity." "Every doctrine of Christianity stands or falls on the doctrine of Christ's resurrection" (Rhodes 1996:51).

Alcorn (2004:112) contends that Jesus' resurrected body is the template for the believers' resurrected body, a sentiment echoed by Wright (2008:149) and

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<sup>206</sup> Shogren (2012:194) recommends N.T. Wright's *Surprised By Hope* as a "corrective" for this mindset.

<sup>207</sup> Wright (2008:152) notes how "All discussion of the future resurrection must sooner or later do business with Paul and particularly with his two letters to Corinth."

Shogren (2012:194-195). “The risen Jesus is both the model for the Christian’s future body and the means by which it comes about” (Wright 2008:149). Kreeft (1990:98) asserts the only sure way to explore the resurrection is to examine the only case of a resurrection we know to be authentic—Jesus’. “We have an example in Scripture of what a resurrection body is like, and we’re told that our bodies will be like his (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Jn 3:2; 1 Cor 15:49)” (Alcorn 2004:114).

Jesus’ resurrection helps show how resurrected human beings will ultimately dwell on earth, because Jesus walked the earth in his resurrected body for forty days. This is a picture of both the future Millennium and the new earth (Rev 20-22):

So when Paul says, “We are citizens of Heaven,” ... he means the savior, the Lord, Jesus the King ... will come *from* Heaven *to* earth, to change the present situation and state of his people. The key word here is transform: “He will transform our present humble bodies to be like his glorious body” (Wright 2008:100).

The resurrection is also physical, because in Luke 24:13-35 the two disciples who met Jesus while walking towards Emmaus did not seem phased by his physicality.<sup>208</sup> “Scripture clearly says that our resurrection bodies will not be immaterial in nature, but rather they will be material and physical ... Jesus himself said, ‘Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself!’” (Rhodes 1996:64). “It will be a recognizable body, having identity with the physical body that has been laid to rest” (Sanders 1993:89). Gilbert (2015:115) notes how the authors of the Gospels were “dead set on denying that what they saw when Jesus appeared to

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<sup>208</sup> This is also supported by Mary’s response to him in John 20:15 (Alcorn 2004:114-118). With this said, Kreeft (1990:98-99) is careful to observe how it is a “fascinating puzzle that on three occasions Jesus’ disciples who knew him intimately for three years did not at first recognize him.” For Kreeft (pp. 99-100), this might indicate another aspect of resurrection, which is that we will be more recognized by our personalities than we will by our physical bodies. Lutzer (1997:79-80) agrees, writing, “Heaven is the earthly life of the believer glorified and perfected ... death does not change what we know; our personalities will just go on with the same information we have stored in our minds today.” Therefore, while we will be physically the same, the perfection might mask the damage sin has done to our earthly, pre-glorified bodies.

them was something incorporeal (that is, without a physical body), like a ghost or spirit.” Alcorn (2004:112) suggests this by arguing that the resurrection is “physical and continual,” meaning we are still the same person, albeit glorified, as we were prior to resurrection. “Some assume that God will create new permanent bodies for us *ex nihilo*, that is, out of nothing. But if that were so, there would be no need for the doctrine of resurrection” (Lutzer 2015:90). “If resurrection meant the creation of a new body, Christ’s original body would have remained in the tomb ... His disciples saw the marks of his crucifixion, unmistakable evidence that this was the same body” (Alcorn 2004:113). Wright’s (2008:159) commentary is helpful: “What precisely will the resurrection body be? Here I pay homage to ... C.S. Lewis ... he manages to get us to envisage bodies that are more solid, more real, more substantial than our present ones.” Wright (2008:159) states this is the task of 2 Corinthians, and that these bodies embody the phrase “the weight of glory” (4:17), in that they will be seen, felt, and known to be appropriate.

While Jesus’ body was physical and could be touched and clung to, it could dematerialize as well, because he was able to pass through shut doors in John 20:19 (Alcorn 2004:114-118). “He was able to pass through closed doors. He was no longer confined by our limitations of time and space” (Sanders 1993:93). Luke records he “disappeared” from the Emmaus witnesses’ sight (Lk 24:31).<sup>209</sup>

Perhaps the most important feature of the glorified body is that it is imperishable (1 Cor 15:42-44). “In particular, this new body will be immortal ... it will have passed beyond death not just in the temporal sense but also in the ontological sense of no longer being subject to sickness, injury, decay, and death itself. None of these destructive forces will have any power over the new body” (Wright 2008:160). Rhodes (1996:65) writes, “Resurrection is portrayed in Scripture as that which will utterly defeat death,” and quotes Hosea 13:14, where God himself

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<sup>209</sup> Alcorn (2004:116) is careful to note that some aspects of Jesus’ resurrection body, such as this one, might be unique because of his divine nature.

declared, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?” Sanders (1993:89) states that the resurrected body is “incorruptible ... it will be deathless, not subject to decay.”

Finally, John 21:25 lends reason to believe the nature of our glorified states remains a mystery. Wright (2008:149) describes Jesus’ resurrected body as “almost unimaginable to us in its glory and power.” We can be sure, however, that Jesus’ resurrected body, particularly its immortality, is an unquestionable tenet of the believer’s future, resurrected body. And we can be sure that, in harmony with the anthem of early Christian hope, the purpose of this new body will be to rule wisely over God’s new world. “Forget those images about lounging around playing harps. There will be work to do and we shall relish doing it. All the skills and talents we have put to God’s service in this present life will be ... enhanced and ennobled and given back to us to be exercised to his glory” (Wright 2008:161).<sup>210</sup> Wright (2008:161) contends this is the “least explored aspect of the resurrection life,” a statement with which this thesis concurs, especially when it is appropriated to life in the Millennium.

### **5.9.2 Great Tribulation**

Succeeding the rapture of the Church is the Great Tribulation, a future, unprecedented period of global suffering detailed in Revelation 4-18 (Grenz and others 1999:116). Revelation 12:5 is a major Christological verse among these chapters, in which Jesus is described as “a son, a male child.” The chapter also includes two other symbolic figures. An exposition of the passage, via the identification of the figures, helps establish both the nature and duration of the Tribulation.

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<sup>210</sup> Wright would disagree with the chronological timeline, as well as much of the eschatological makeup of this thesis, however, his commentary on the resurrection is still appropriate and helpful.

Alongside the “son” (Rev 12:5), other primary figures include “a woman clothed with the sun” (Rev 12:1-2, 4-6, 13-17) and “a great fiery red dragon” (Rev 12:3-4, 7-9, 13-17). The Son is Jesus the Messiah and the great fiery red dragon is the serpent who first tempted Eve in the garden (Gen 3:1-16), the one who caused the first sin. The woman clothed with the sun is more ambiguous (Patterson 2011:63-64). Koester (2014:542-543) offers four modern interpretations, including (1) the people of God both before and after Jesus’ birth; (2) the Christian Church; (3) Mary; and (4) the Jewish community. This thesis advocates for the fourth option.

Some understand Revelation 12 as the history of an event which occurred before creation, included to help frame both the nature and duration of the future Tribulation (MacArthur 2007:4). “Most of [the chapter] deals with the past, but part has to do with the future” (Thomas 1995:117). Patterson’s (2011:67) commentary provides specificity to the event: “... this may refer to a time before the creation of the cosmos when Satan, as the ‘anointed guardian cherub’ (Ez 28:14, 16), lifted up his heart in pride ... [and] God threw [him] together with his angels out of Heaven.<sup>211</sup> “When the dragon saw that he had been cast out to the earth, he persecuted the woman (Rev 12:13) [because] he could not get to the male child” (Patterson 2011:67). This helps establish the nature of the Great Tribulation, which is ultimately an unbridled persecution of the Jewish community. “[The] future struggle is merely the outworking of a conflict between God and Satan that has lasted throughout history since Satan’s fall” (Thomas 1995:117), which is to say, Satan’s desire to pollute and destroy the bloodline of the Messiah.

A resultant duration of the future persecution is specified in Revelation 12:14, which is “a time, times, and a half a time,” which corresponds with other likened durations in the book, including “1,260 days” (Rev 11:3) and 42 months” (Rev

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<sup>211</sup> Patterson (2011:65) cites Revelation 12:9 as evidence of this battle.

11:2, 13:5). Those who believe in a future Great Tribulation interpret this as the final half of the event, when the Israelites will be given “two wings of a great eagle” (Rev 12:14) so that she might fly into the wilderness to a place where she will be given care. The Lord will preserve them until the end of that time, which comes with his physical return. “[Some] relate the first part of the vision to the Messiah being born from the Jewish people and the last part to threats against Jewish Christians at the end of the age” (Koester 2014:543).<sup>212</sup>

This event is in agreement with Daniel 9:20-24,<sup>213</sup> where Israel is given a prophecy that the Jews and Jerusalem will be restored in “seventy weeks,” or 490 years. There is a gap between the 483-year period and the last seven years; the future Great Tribulation is the fulfillment of the last seven years:

Luke 21:24 identifies a period known as “the times of the Gentiles.” The length of the gap is not stated. During [this] time God cease[s] to focus on the Israelites and assign[s] to them judicial blindness so that the majority of the Jews do not come to Christ, but the Gentiles hear the gospel. Then suddenly comes the end of the Church age, and time returns to the seventieth week of Daniel. In the first three and a half years of the tribulation (Dan 9:27), the Antichrist will make a covenant with the Jewish people, promising that he will care for them. But he is a liar (Jn 8:44) ... At the end of the three and a half years “the coming prince,” the Antichrist, will break his covenant and “destroy the city and the sanctuary” (Patterson 2011:70).

The Israelites will need supernatural protection from the Antichrist during this period, which occurs in Revelation 12:14 when the “woman” receives “two wings of the great eagle” so she can “fly into the wilderness, where she [is] nourished

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<sup>212</sup> Koester does not personally advocate this position, but his summary is helpful.

<sup>213</sup> Koester (2011:27) sees a profound relationship between Daniel and Revelation, writing, “Within the Bible, the book most like Revelation is Daniel.” Moo (2010a:189) also concludes that Daniel’s prophecy “with some degree of probability” might describe the tribulation.

for a time and times and a half time.” There seems to be some kind of supernatural care of Israel during this period such as that which Elijah experienced by the brook Cherith, or that which Israel experienced during the forty years she lived on the manna in the wilderness. “Whether natural or supernatural means are used, it is clear that God does preserve a godly remnant” (Walvoord 1989a:195).

Thus, by combining Revelation 12:14 and Daniel 9:27, we may construe the Great Tribulation as the final week of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks (its duration), and particularly as a time to “finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place” (Dan 9:24), which is to say the final week allows for the completion of God’s original promises with Israel (its nature). This interpretation is a primary motivation for scholars of the futuristic persuasion to contend for a pretribulation rapture of the Church, because “The Jewish community is to be sharply distinguished from the Gentile Church” (Koester 2014:543), and it is this Jewish community on which the Great Tribulation focuses.<sup>214</sup>

### **5.9.3 Summary of Eschatological Nature of Jesus in Revelation 4-22**

An analysis of Revelation 4-22 reveals that Jesus establishes three eschatological epochs of Heaven, which include periods from the rapture and resurrection of believers to the second coming of Jesus, the second coming of Jesus to the final judgment, and future eternity which follows the final judgment. The delineation of these epochs reveals an altered relationship between Heaven and earth. The implications of these epochs are detailed in the following subsections.

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<sup>214</sup> This thesis shares Patterson’s (2012:40) heart on this issue, in which he writes, “While [pretribulationism] is the personal conviction of this author, I recognize that ... the relationship of the Church to the tribulation period is less [than] certain. Texts can be marshaled and interpreted to support pretribulationism and posttribulationism, and there are also proponents of midtribulationism, partial rapturism, and prewrath rapturism. Whatever the view adopted, a measure of humility and grace toward others is warranted.”

### **5.10 Epoch Five: Heaven During the Great Tribulation (The Rapture and Resurrection to the Second Coming)**

This thesis advances a pretribulational rapture, and contends it establishes a new, fifth epoch of Heaven which is different in nature from the previous epoch. All believers are now in God's abode and have glorified, incorruptible bodies (1 Cor 15:51-52).<sup>215</sup>

While the book of Revelation never explicitly refers to a rapture, it is not unreasonable to maintain that the book, when compared to the rest of Scripture, shows the Church is removed from the earth prior to the forthcoming "hour of trial." Patterson (2012:41-45) offers a list of helpful considerations with which this thesis agrees to help substantiate this claim: (a) events such as the *bema*, the judgment seat of Christ, and the marriage of the Lamb have time to take place in Heaven (Rev 19); (b) if every true believer is glorified at a posttribulational rapture and if only believers enter the Millennium (Mt 25:31-46), the millennial kingdom cannot be repopulated, since resurrected bodies will not have the capacity for reproductive acts or results (Mt 22:29-30); (c) the first three chapters of Revelation mention the churches extensively, but this stops in chapter 4; (e) a remarkable promise is made to the Church in Philadelphia in 3:10 which might intimate a pretribulational rapture; (f) the NT is unanimous in its proclamation of the imminent return of Christ (Phil 3:20; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 1:10; Ja 5:8; Rev 3:3; Titus 2:13), which might be the first phase (the rapture) of his coming; (g) Daniel's Seventy Weeks (Dan 9:20-27) seems to best correspond with a seven year Great Tribulation for the Jewish community; (h) understanding the "woman" in Revelation 12 as Israel agrees with the understanding of Daniel's seventieth week, which helps establish the nature and duration of the Great Tribulation.

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<sup>215</sup> Moo (2010a:197) argues against a pretribulational rapture on the notion it would require us to believe the Church will occupy Heavenly mansions (Jn 14:1-6) for a short period of seven years, only to vacate them for a thousand years, but this neglects the consideration of all of the saints who have died since Jesus' resurrection, who are able to enjoy the mansions in the present, not to mention that time might function differently in Heaven than it does on earth, as previously discussed, and that Heaven, along with these mansions, comes down to earth in Revelation 21-22.

These claims help establish the possibility of a pretribulational glorification of the believer, which impacts the nature of Heaven during the period known as the Great Tribulation.

### **5.11 Epoch Six: Heaven During the Millennium (Jesus' Second Coming to the Final Judgment)**

The Millennium is intrinsic to the doctrine of Heaven. Patterson (2011:71) says it is "as close to Heaven as one can ever get on earth."

Some fail, both intentionally and unintentionally, to include the Millennium in their respective ouranological works, but this commentary shows it is a necessary motif in the theology of Heaven. Alcorn (2004:140), for example, says little about the Millennium in his book *Heaven*, writing, "The Millennium ... is not the subject of this book," and only devotes two paragraphs to the subject, save a handful of other minor references. This thesis contends the Millennium is an indispensable constituent of ouranology, because it is the realization of God's Heavenly kingdom present on earth, and therefore, cannot be divorced from a comprehensive discussion on the topic of Heaven.

The major shift from epoch five (Heaven during the Great Tribulation) to epoch six (Heaven during the Millennium) is that Jesus leaves his Heavenly throne to dwell on his earthly throne, and that his kingdom will be filled with both resurrected and non-resurrected believers (Rev 19:11-16; 20:4).

While several believers will have experienced resurrection for several years (namely, those who experienced the rapture and resurrection prior to the Great Tribulation), it is one of the preeminent features of this particular epoch of Heaven because glorified believers will dwell on earth in Jesus' kingdom. The most preeminent feature is the resurrected and reigning Christ, whose own

resurrection serves as a template for the believer's resurrection (so Alcorn 2004:109; Wright 2008:149).

While there will be several glorified believers dwelling in the earthly kingdom, there will also be non-glorified believers, too, namely those who were not martyred during the Great Tribulation (Rev 20:4). These will physically inhabit the earth and have the ability to procreate in order to repopulate Jesus' kingdom (Patterson 2012:41). Zechariah prophesies that a large number of these believers will be Jews who will turn to Jesus upon his second coming, a prophecy which encourages the notion that the Millennium is largely about restoring the kingdom to Israel (Zech 12:10-14; 13:9; 14; Acts 1:6-8).

Hiebert (2003:269) notes that "Evangelical scholarship is sharply divided on the millennial issue, [but] all admit that the great hope of the Church is the ultimate coming of Christ which will be personal and literal."

### **5.12 Epoch Seven: The Eternal Heaven**

Revelation 21-22 conveys several features of the eternal Heaven. The two major aspects of this particular epoch which differentiate it from the previous epoch is, first, that the curse is purged from all of creation. Thomas (1995:440) notes how there are seven evils John says will no longer exist in the eternal Heaven, including the sea (which symbolizes separation) (21:1), death, mourning, weeping, pain (21:4), the curse (22:3), and night (21:25; 22:5).

The second and most important characteristic of the eternal Heaven is that God and man will dwell in perfect, unimpeded harmony. John says man will be able to "see God's face," (Rev 22:4) which captions the unmatched nature of the epoch. Wright (2011:132-133) emphasizes Jesus as the fulfillment of the Temple, and suggests this represents the perfect fulfillment of Heaven on earth (Rev

21:22).<sup>216</sup> “The Temple was ... the center of the world. It was the place where Heaven and earth met. This is not just a way of saying the Jews are attached to their land and their capital city, [but] a vital expression of a worldview in which ‘Heaven’ and ‘earth’ are not far apart, but actually overlap and interlock” (Wright 2011:132-133). For Wright (2011:133), when Jesus came, it was his way of showing that Heaven and earth were joining up, but “no longer in the Temple in Jerusalem ... The joining place was taking place where Jesus was and in what he was doing ... Jesus was, as it were, a walking Temple.” Köstenberger (2014b:97) expands upon Wright’s assertion in stating, “There are several strategic references to Jesus as the fulfillment and/or replacement of the Temple in John’s Gospel. Köstenberger (2014b:97) details these “strategic references” in writing,

The first is 1:14, where John speaks of Jesus as the Word-made-flesh, who literally “pitched his tent” among God’s people, a clear allusion to the tabernacle that preceded the Temple (Ex 26-27; 1 Kings 6:13). Later in the first chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus is presented as the place where God is revealed, in keeping with Jacob’s vision at Bethel, the “house of God” (Gen 12:28). Perhaps the two most important references to Jesus as the replacement of the Temple are found in the account of Jesus’ clearing of the Temple (Jn 2:14-22) and in the context of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:19-24). In the former account, Jesus’ clearing of the Temple serves as an acted-out parable signifying the Temple’s forthcoming destruction. With prophetic symbolism, the Temple’s destruction, in turn, is said to be a sign of the “destruction” of Jesus’ body (the crucifixion) and of its resurrection on the third day (Jn 2:18-19).

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<sup>216</sup> Wright and Köstenberger both use Jesus’ fulfillment of the Temple as a way to downplay the idea of a literal Temple in the Millennium. This thesis would disagree with certain elements of both scholars’ eschatology, but these disagreements do not necessarily threaten the major argument of this study. Here, both scholars’ convictions are appropriated to the future eternal Heaven, where “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are [the] temple” (Rev 21:22).

The overall idea is that the curse which deemed man unworthy is absolutely destroyed, and man and God can dwell together in perfect harmony for eternity because Heaven and earth are now one. The narrative of Exodus 33:18-23 summarizes the historical statute that man “cannot see God’s face ... and live” (Ex 33:20),<sup>217</sup> yet, when “all things are made new,” (Rev 21:5) God and man will dwell together on earth in unobstructed communion. This is unique even to the Millennium, because of the final rebellion in Revelation 20:7-10, as well as the presence of the Father, who might physically still reside in a Heavenly abode distinct from earth during the Millennium (Rev 22:3).<sup>218</sup>

### 5.13 Concluding Remarks

The implications of the exposition of this chapter suggest Heaven is best understood as existing in seven epochs.<sup>219</sup> These epochs are framed by Jesus, and allow one to better understand the ouranological minutia among scholarship included in the doctrine of Heaven. Alcorn (2004:44) supports this intonation, contending scholarship “often fails to distinguish between the various phases of Heaven, using the one word—Heaven—as all-inclusive ... but this has dulled our thinking and keeps us from understanding important biblical distinctions.”<sup>220</sup> This is not to suggest former scholarship on Heaven is null, but quite the contrary. It is to concur with—and build upon—Alcorn’s and others’ research to suggest understanding the doctrine in this way allows for a unique clarity for the “hope that is in us” (1 Pt 3:15), which complements and enhances ouranological scholarship.

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<sup>217</sup> A statute also imposed in John 1:18.

<sup>218</sup> Stitzinger (2002:151-152) submits a helpful thought in showing how eschatologically might unfold: the *parousia* is best understood as an essential event which ties ouranology together by “looking backward to Christ’s first coming on earth and looks ahead to the future.” This begins with the rapture, followed by the seven-year tribulation, followed by the second coming, followed by the one-thousand-year millennial kingdom, followed by the eternal state.

<sup>219</sup> Korner (2000:161) notes how some scholars propose an overall septenary outline for Revelation referencing the seven Churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. He cites what he considers an “influential treatment” of this given by R.H. Charles in *Revelation* (1920). This thesis does not specifically explore the value of the number seven, but it does find it interesting the epochs proposed herein naturally equal seven, which is a common number in the book.

<sup>220</sup> Alcorn only offers three eras to Heaven (past, present, and future). This thesis extends this concept into seven epochs.

This thesis, particularly the content of this chapter, suggests Heaven exists in past, present, and future eras, and argues these eras serve as primary eras to epochs which exist within them. This thesis also argues that Jesus, via significant Christological happenings, determines each era, and ultimately each epoch.

This chapter is best summarized in the Christological title presented in Revelation 1:8—“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty”—because it helps to establish both Jesus’ ternary nature as well as Revelation’s ternary structure, which collaborate with one another to help produce the suggested epochs. Osborne (2002:71-72) offers a helpful comment on the Christological title in which he maintains Revelation 1:8, “... brings in the nuance of the eternal God who unites past, present, and future under his sovereign control ... In a sense all of Revelation 1:8 looks to God as ruler over all of history, in control of this world and the next, with full authority over earthly and cosmic forces.”

To conclude, this chapter argues that while the eras of “past, present, and future” help to show God’s absolute authority over Heaven and earth, the purported epochs offer a novel approach which flesh these eras out in a more holistic way which hopes to bring lucidity to the doctrine of Heaven.

## Chapter 6

### The Ouranological Chiasmus

“He made known to us the mystery of his will ... which he purposed in him ... that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the Heavens and things on the earth” (Eph 1:9-10).

#### 6.1 Introduction

Chapter Five argued that Revelation presents seven epochs of Heaven, ultimately framed by Jesus. This chapter offers a rhetorical assessment of said epochs in order to determine their overall relationship with one another, namely to ascertain whether a chiasm exists among them.<sup>221</sup> This demands the verification of chiasmus as a credible literary device, as well as reasonable evidence the biblical authors employed it in their writing of Scripture, particularly John in the book of Revelation.

Smith (2008:187) says systematic theology is not complete until the truths are shown in relation to one another. “The theologian must develop a model that explains how they relate” (Smith 2008:187). The goal of this chapter is to show the relationship of the data proposed in Chapter Five.

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<sup>221</sup> Black (2010:150-151) notes that chiasm is one common indicator that the author intended the structure of the text to also be a part of its meaning.

## 6.2 Introduction to Chiasmus

The term “chiasmus” originates from the classical Greek verb *chiazō*, which means “to mark with two lines crossing like a *X* [*chi*]” (Liddell and Scott 1968:1991). Hamilton (2012:55) cites the same etymological origin, and provides the following commentary concerning chiasmus’ purpose:

The term chiasm refers to the Greek letter *chi*, which is shaped like an “x.” If you’re not familiar with this term, think of a picture frame. A picture frame has an outer wooden piece, and inside that you’ll often find a mat. Inside the mat is the picture. Just as a nice frame and a well-chosen mat complement whatever is in the frame, so also chiasms often highlight whatever is at the center of the chiasm.

Thus, the crossing lines of *chi* disclose the fundamental idea to chiasmus—“inverted parallelism between two or more (synonymously or antithetically) corresponding words, phrases, or units of thought” (McCoy 2003:19).

Norrman (1986:276) offers a succinct definition to the literary tool: “[Chiasmus is] the use of bilateral symmetry about a central axis.” McCoy (2003:18) expands upon this, offering a more detailed definition: “[Chiasmus is] the use of inverted parallelism of form and/or content which moves toward and away from a strategic central component.” According to McCoy (2003:18), this definition “explicitly mentions the literary dynamics of chiasmus in its fullest technical sense.”

## 6.3 Historical Use of Chiasmus

Chiasmus has been used for several millennia (McCoy 2003:22). Breck (1994:21) notes how chiasmus has been found as early as the third Millennium B.C. in the organization of certain Sumero-Akkadian and Ugaritic texts. Brouwer

(2003:22) states the term's specific use<sup>222</sup> can be found as early as the fourth century B.C. in the writings of the Greek rhetorician Isocrates. McCoy (2003:22) cites the fifth century historian Herodotus' use of the device:

Herodotus describes the amazement of Xerxes at reports of Artemisia's heroic actions in connection with the Battle of Salamis. Responding to this unexpected good news in the midst of a larger disaster, Xerxes chiasmatically (in a non-technical sense) exclaimed, "My men have behaved like women, and my women like men!"

McCoy (2003:18), referencing Breck (1994:21) and Brouwer (2003:22), determinately concludes the tool is "commonly found in ancient literature and oratory, both secular and sacred." McCoy (2003:22-23) further notes the work of scholars like Jebb (1820), Boys (1824), Stock (1984), and Lund (1992) as documenting this employment. Thus, "chiasm occurs to one degree or another in most languages and literatures" (Breck 1994:7).

### 6.4 The Impetus of Chiasmus

According to Stock (1984:23), chiasmus provided "a needed element of internal organization in ancient writings, which did not make use of paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization, and other synthetic devices to communicate the conclusion of one idea and the commencement of the next." Bailey and Broek (1992:182) note how this is starkly different from the modern day literary method of establishing a central point, particularly in the west, which focuses on the abovementioned tools—paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization, and other synthetic devices. Wright (2014:131, 145), in *Surprised by Scripture*, offers perspicacious thoughts on this in regard to Scripture, contending the west's natural approach to the holy writ, although "possessing a grain of truth ... [is] in fact seriously misleading," writing,

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<sup>222</sup> Brouwer (2000:23) says this is the earliest specific mention of the term in literature.

In the Bible, when we let it be itself, we find a mode of knowing that is neither the brightly lit supposed objectivity of post-Enlightenment scientism nor the fuzzy and indistinct supposed subjectivism that is its opposite. The Bible confronts ... our knowing that has so bedeviled the modernist project.

Wright's counsel discourages any approach to Scripture which ignores its original literary context, a context which, according to Bailey and Broek (1992:182), McCoy (2003:23), Breck (1994:60), Blomberg (1989:5), Freedman (Breck 1994:7), Man (1984:146), and Meynet (1998:256), employed chiasmus as a common literary device.

Bailey and Broek (1992:182) highlight how chiasmus offers practical benefits to the comprehension of biblical literature, namely by detailing how chiasmus includes an inherent benefit as a mnemonic aid: "Relatively unconcerned about a linear ... flow of ideas, biblical communities relished sayings ... that were memorable, and they appreciated repetition that we might consider redundant." McCoy (2003:23) notes that, "without ready access to inexpensive pen and paper to make notes, they used chiasmus for memorization." Breck (1994:60) offers a similar opinion, writing, "The ancients learned by rote ... Once [an individual] had in mind the first half of ... a chiastic structure, it was a relatively easy matter to recall the rest."

Breck (1994:29) maintains Greek thinkers "were trained throughout their school years to read from the center outward and from the extremities towards the center." McCoy (2003:23-24) notes how students of the Greek alphabet were trained to conceive of its twenty-four letters in three distinctively different ways. "First, the alphabet was taught from beginning to end." "After this it was also taught backwards, from omega to alpha, and then both ways at once, alpha-omega, beta-psi ... [to the middle]" (Marrou 1956:151). "All of these factors are

consistent with an inherent characteristic of the common medium of scrolls in the ancient world ... When fully unrolled, a scroll creates a symmetrical perception of the overall content and leads to a focus on the content at its center” (McCoy 2003:24).

For McCoy (2003:24), “Such information concerning the most basic paradigms of ancient thought and education makes it clear that the chiastic structure as an organizing principle in communication would have been readily grasped by thinkers in the ancient ... world,” a sentiment also maintained by Blomberg (1989:5) and Freedman (Breck 1994:7). The authors of the scriptures, coming from the ancient literary culture, would have likely employed this device in their contributions to the holy writ, both in the OT and NT (so Man 1984:146; Meynet 1998:256). Evidence of this use is displayed in the following section.

### 6.5 Chiasmus in Scripture

McCoy (2003:25) asserts, as a general axiom, that chiasmus is a basic element in the formal structure of biblical literature, citing Lund’s *Chiasmus in the NT*<sup>223</sup> as the seminal modern work on the matter. Man (1984:146-147) considers Lund’s work as “the first major, systematic treatment of the subject,”<sup>224</sup> and asserts, alongside Lund (1984:146), that chiasm “infused the thought and speech patterns of the Semitic mind, and in this manner found its way into the OT and then into the NT.” Osborne (1991:39) agrees, specifically citing its use in the NT: “Chiasm is ... found frequently in the NT (Jn 6:36-40; 15:7-17; 16:16-31; 18:28-19; 16a; 19:16b-42).<sup>225</sup>

McCoy (2003:27-29) offers two prime examples of biblical chiasmus, one from the OT and one from the NT, to demonstrate “the superb literary beauty” of

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<sup>223</sup> First published in 1942.

<sup>224</sup> McCoy (2003:25) also lists Blomberg (1989:3-20), di Marco (1975:21-97), Fiorenza (1977:258-366), Gaechter (1917:555-559), and Luter (1995:89-101) as incorporating Lund’s work into their respective works.

<sup>225</sup> Osborne refers to Brown (1990:157-170) to highlight these chiasms.

chiasmus. These are listed in the following subsections in order to display the employment of chiasmus in Scripture.

### 6.5.1 The Chiasmus of Genesis 17:1-25<sup>226</sup>

**A** Abram's age (17:1a)

**B** The Lord appears to Abram (17:1b)

**C** God's first speech (17:1c-2)

**D** Abram falls on his face (17:3)

**E** God's second speech (emphasizing "names/kings/nations") (17:4-8)

**X** God's third-most important speech (emphasizing "the covenant") (17:9-14)

**E'** God's fourth speech (emphasizing "names/kings/nations") (17:15-16)

**D'** Abraham falls on his face (17:17-18)

**C'** God's fifth speech (17:19-21)

**B'** The Lord goes up from Abram (17:22-23)

**A'** Abraham's age (17:24-25)

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<sup>226</sup> McCoy notes he adapted this from Yehuda Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in John Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analysis, Exegesis* (1991:105)

**6.5.2 The Chiasmus of John 1:1-8<sup>227</sup>**

**A** The Word with God the Father (1:1-2)

**B** The Word's role in creation (1:3)

**C** God's grace to mankind (1:4-5)

**D** Witness of John the Baptist (1:6-8)

**E** The incarnation of the Word (1:9-11)

**X** Saving faith in the incarnate Word  
(1:12-13)

**E'** The incarnation of the Word (1:14)

**D'** Witness of John the Baptist (1:15)

**C'** God's grace to mankind (1:16)

**B'** The Word's role in re-creation (1:17)

**A'** The Word with God the Father (1:18)

**6.5.3 Summary of Chiasmus in Scripture**

McCoy (2003:29) argues the acknowledgment and acceptance of chiasmus is critical, writing, "The structural arrangement of any organized body of

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<sup>227</sup> McCoy notes he adapted this from M.E. Boismard, *Le Prologue de Saint Jean*, *Lectio Divina* (1953:107).

communication ... contributes to its overall message.” Guthrie (2000:254) offers a similar statement, writing, “no discourse simply consists of a collection of words or sentences [in such a way] that if you added up the semantic content of all the individual words and all the individual sentences, you could make sense of the discourse.” Louw (1973:101), in an earlier commentary, writes, “the structure, in which a notion is communicated, is the heart of its effectiveness.” McCoy (2003:30) upholds this as an essential dynamic, particularly as chiasmus relates to Scripture:

This dynamic is especially important in biblical literature, because its human authors not only specifically structured their material to enhance the impact of its message, but often intentionally utilized specific and sophisticated structural features in the organization of their texts to reinforce the impact and the implications of their messages, as well as to make them as memorable as possible.

For McCoy (2003:34), “... recognition of the presence and the function of chiasmus in biblical literature [has] considerable exegetical significance.” Breck (1994:193) asserts that failure to recognize the existence of chiastic structuring can—and has—led interpreters to weave some rather fantastic theories. Meynet (1998:256) argues that chiasmus is an important key to accurate exegesis.

According to McCoy (2003:29), the majority of biblical scholars today recognize the use of chiasmus in the literature of both the OT and NT.

### **6.6 Applying Chiasmus to the Epochs**

An important question to the use of chiasmus in Scripture is whether it can be expanded beyond sentences and passages and into the structure of a book, the combination of several books, or even general ideas included in a book, such as the ouranological epochs presented in this thesis. This is specifically to ask

whether it is warranted to appropriate chiasmus to the ouranological epochal system presented in Chapter Five, which presents ideas not confined to a sentence or passage, but ideas present throughout the book of Revelation.

Meynet (1998:256) argues that chiasmus is an important key to an accurate exegesis of many major passages, sections, and at times even whole books. Bailey and Broek (1992:182) maintain a similar opinion, suggesting it is not only possible for chiasmus to exist within a large structure of ideas, but, as a literary tool designed to communicate a primary message, it is an inherent part of the nature of chiasmus. Bailey and Broek (1992:182) define this as the difference between “micro” and “macro” chiasms. Microchiasm is expressed in a sentence, such as the aforementioned Herodotus chiasm, while macrochiasm is defined as existing in a passage of Scripture, a book, or even several books, which is to say chiasmus can exist across large spans of text within a body of work. Chiasmus can “take place at a micro level (within a single sentence) or at a macro level (within a broad flow of a large discourse) (McCoy 2003:19). McCoy (2003:33) notes how some believe John’s Gospel is written in a macrochiasm:

In regard to the Gospel of John, scholars have proposed a plethora of theories concerning its content and organization in effort to explain certain literary rough spots and supposed inconsistencies in the chronological and geographical flow of the narrative of the book. These theories include the important suggestion by Bultmann (which has been revised in various ways by different scholars since his time) that chapters five and six have somehow been displaced from their original order. Recognition of the broad chiastic structure of the Gospel readily explains apparent difficulties such as this one without resorting to speculative redaction of the order of the large blocks of its text. While several specific chiastic proposals for the discourse structure of the book have been suggested, the point being made here is that this paradigm of its overall arrangement of material

nicely explains otherwise confusing aspects of its organization and content.

Dorsey (1999:47-102), who has specialized in the literary form and structure of the OT, is convinced that Genesis through Joshua forms one prodigious macrochiasm with the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19:3-Num 10:10) as the central and climactic component (McCoy 2003:27). For Dorsey (1999:97), there is a design in the plot line which begins in Genesis and continues through Joshua, which is filled with “foreshadowings, predictions, instructions, commands, promises, introductions, and preparatory actions which do not find their fulfillments, completions, or conclusions until the story’s grand finale in Joshua ... Such interrelated, interwoven lines of suspense multiply as the story progresses, creating an ever-intensifying anticipation of the story’s conclusion.” For Dorsey (1999:97), this macrochiasm centers on prominent analogous ideas stretched across several books.

Dorsey’s convictions encourage the possibility of an ouranological macrochiasm in Revelation. Like Dorsey’s chiasmus, this thesis’ ouranological chiasmus offers a design which presents ideas that find their fulfillments, completions, and conclusions in a central truth towards which the other epochs lead. This central truth is rooted in the fourth epoch, which was inaugurated by Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is the central point, the bottom line, of ouranology. Jesus, in his earthly ministry, successfully defeated death, allowing all of creation the opportunity to be redeemed through him. All else leads toward or derives from this central truth, as history ends in a “new Heaven” (Rev 21:1) where, because of Jesus, “nothing unclean ... shall ever come into it” (Rev 21:27).

If an ouranological macrochiasm in Revelation is to be accepted, then it would follow that, per the nature of chiasmus, each ouranological epoch would share analogous characteristics with a respective counterpart, leading toward and

deriving from an epoch that hosts the death and resurrection of Jesus. When displayed in a chiasmic structure, the epochs appear as follows:

**A** Epoch One: Pre-Creation Eternity: Pre-Creation to Creation (Rev 1:4)

**B** Epoch Two: Garden of Eden Period: Creation to the Fall (Rev 1:8)

**C** Epoch Three: Period During the Fall: The Fall to the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus (Rev 1:13)

**D** Epoch Four: Church Age (Mystery Age): The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus to the Rapture and Resurrection of the Church (Rev 2-3)

**C'** Epoch Five: Great Tribulation Period: The Rapture and Resurrection of the Church to the Second Coming (Rev 4-19)

**B'** Epoch Six: Millennium Period: The Second Coming to the Final Judgment (Rev 19-20)

**A'** Epoch Seven: New Creation Eternity: The Final Judgment to Eternal New Creation (Rev 21-22)

The following seeks to display the suggested chiasmic relationships between each epoch, ultimately showing how the fourth epoch serves as the apex of the macrochiasmic structure, particularly the event which inaugurated it.

### **6.6.1 Epoch One (Past Eternity) and Epoch Seven (Future Eternity)**

The first epoch of Heaven consists of the time prior to creation. Wright (2008:19) and Köstenberger (2014a:139) maintain the term “Heaven” refers to God’s domain, which helps to advance the claim that this period is part of the ouranological chiasmus.

The pre-creation period is considered eternal, because God’s nature is eternal (so Boethius 2007:155; Wolterstorff 2007:159; Köstenberger 2014b:99; Wellum 2014a:122-123, 130-131). Köstenberger (2014a:139) and Wellum (2014a:122-123) maintain this is well observed in Jesus’ eternal nature, which is articulated in John 1:1-2, Philippians 2:6, and Colossians 1:17. These verses present Jesus as existing prior to creation, and therefore present Heaven, “God’s dimension/abode” (so Wright 2008:19; Köstenberger 2014a:139), as necessarily and eternally existing prior to creation (so Roberts 2003:4; Wright 2008:19; Köstenberger 2014a:139). “He was in the beginning with God” (Jn 1:2).

The seventh epoch of Heaven is portrayed in Revelation 21-22 as an eternal, post-original creation period in which mankind dwells with God in a new Heaven and new earth (so Walvoord 1989a:311-312; Thomas 1995:440; Alcorn 2004:9; Patterson 2012:361). The eternal nature of epochs one and seven suggests a chiastic connection between the two. Messenger (2015:231) accentuates the plausibility of this relationship in declaring “the future [is] modeled on ... the past.”

### **6.6.2 Epoch Two (Garden of Eden) and Epoch Six (Millennium)**

The Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4-25) is the immediate setting upon which Scripture focuses in the aftermath of creation,<sup>228</sup> and therefore the expression used to categorize the second epoch of Heaven, particularly in its relationship with earth. Genesis’ author describes the Garden of Eden period as “the account of the Heavens and the earth when they were created,” indicating it as the setting, which expresses how creation initially functioned prior to the Fall (Gen 2:4). This

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<sup>228</sup> Ross (1998:117) says the narrative “traces what became of the universe God had so marvelously created.”

account displays an environment in which the Fall and its consequences had yet to affect creation (so Ross 1998:119-120; Walton 2001:174-175; Hill 2008:74; Patterson 2012:355).

Genesis' author describes the Garden of Eden as a unique environment which is free from the effects of the Fall (Gen 2:4-7, 3:1-24). Hill (2008:74) accentuates the purity of the environment in showing how the author's phraseology for "shrub of the field" and "plant of the field" suggests how he anticipates the "thorns and thistles" which are to come as a result of the curse of the ground. This suggests the way in which the author wrote these phrases suggests the nature of a "shrub" and "plant" experienced significant change after the Fall.

The death of mankind is the most powerful result of the Fall, and thus did not yet exist during the Garden of Eden period (Gen 2:17). Walton (2001:174-175) explores God's warning to Adam and Eve ("but from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die") by looking at the same warning in Jeremiah 26:8, a passage which shows how death was a "sentence for disobedience." Walton (2001:174-175) concludes that God's warning clearly shows how man was impervious to death until after Adam and Eve's disobedience, helping to establish it as a consequence to their sin.

Genesis 3:8 exhibits how God and man enjoyed an unhindered relationship in the Garden of Eden. Wenham (2014:76), Hamilton (1998:192), and Mathews (1996:239) maintain the language employed to express God's "walking in the Garden" indicates the activity was habitual, and that his relationship with man during this period was untainted by the forthcoming effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience (Gen 2:10-25, 3:8). Ross (1998:120) emphasizes the "perfect environment" in which God placed Adam and Eve, an environment in which the first man and woman existed as a "corresponding partner in the service of God."

The harmony also extended to the relationship between man and animals (Patterson 2012:355).

The Millennium, the future period in which the kingdom of Heaven is on earth (Mt 6:10), encapsulates the sixth epoch of Heaven. The major elements of this epoch echo several of the major elements of the second epoch—Heaven during the Garden of Eden—which implies a chiastic relationship between the two epochs (so Ross 1998:128; McGrath 2003:52-54, 74; Patterson 2012:355).

McGrath (2003:52-54, 74) describes the Millennium as a period where the curse is reversed (Zech 14:11), and one in which mankind lives in perfect harmony with God (Gen 2:10-25; 3:8). Patterson (2012:355) emphasizes the domesticity of the animals during the Millennium, a domesticity which has not existed since the Garden of Eden. Moreover, the prophet Isaiah (Is 65:20) emphasizes the longevity of life during the millennial kingdom (MacArthur 1997:1055). MacArthur (1997:1055) offers the following commentary on Isaiah's prophecy:

In the millennial phase ... a sinful person may die at age 100, but will be considered a mere youth at the time of his premature death. Having died an untimely death at such a youthful time, it will be assumed that God has taken his life for sin. The curse will be reversed in the Millennium, but it will not be removed until the eternal state."

McGrath (2003:52-54, 74) maintains the Garden of Eden and the Millennium share a reciprocal relationship, suggesting the Garden is an image with a "controlling influence over Christian reflection on Heaven," especially as it relates to the Millennium. McGrath (2003:52-54, 74) further maintains this is the prevalent thought of early Christian scholarship:

One of the most interesting aspects of early Christian reflections concerning the afterlife is its interest in the idea of the Millennium ... early

Christian writers found it irresistible to speculate on what the one thousand years might be like ... during this era, the earth would be restored to its former status of paradise, and humanity would enjoy the privileges of Adam and Eve.

The Garden of Eden is “a symbol of innocence and harmony, a place of peace ... part of Israel’s hopes and expectations for the future centered around the nostalgic longing for a restoration of this paradisiacal relationship with the environment and God” (McGrath 2003:41, 43). This is the thought of OT prophets, like Ezekiel, who prophesied that the land of Israel would “become like the garden of Eden” (Ez 36:35) and Isaiah, who foresaw that the Lord would “comfort Zion ... her wilderness he will make like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord” (Is 51:3). Furthermore, Hosea, who, “writing in the eighth century before Christ, looks forward to a future transformation of the human situation ... along with a restoration of the integrity of the original created order (Hos 2:18), [and] a related theme can be seen in Joel 3:18” (McGrath 2003:44-45). MacArthur (1997:1204) notes of these verses that, “Millennial conditions will be similar to those in Eden,” and McGrath (2003:45) states “The future state of Israel is depicted in terms of a new Eden.” Russell (1997:43) avows Heaven is “the transformed Garden of Eden.”<sup>229</sup> Patterson’s (2012:355) commentary highlights the nature of this Garden of Eden-like abode, writing,

In Isaiah 11:6, the domesticity of all animals is revealed when the wolf dwells with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the young goat, [and] the calf and a young lion feed together ... In Isaiah 19:23-25, a day is anticipated when ... God will say, “Blessed be [to] ... Israel my inheritance.” In Isaiah 35:1-2, Isaiah the prophet anticipates a time when

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<sup>229</sup> If these descriptions are to be accepted, then it suggests the Garden of Eden period ended with the removal of the first Adam, and the Millennium, which is the restoration of the Garden of Eden, per the prophets quoted above, begins with the entrance, that is the second coming, of the second Adam. Unlike Adam, there will be “no end” to Jesus’ presence in restored Eden (Is 9:7).

the desert shall blossom like a rose. In Isaiah 62 he prophesies a time when Israel once again will be married to God.

Richards (2014:129) shares a comparable opinion:

The earth will return to its Edenic beauty (Is 55:12-13). There will be bounty in crops and wildlife (Is 35:1). Longevity of human life will be like it was before the flood. Peace will be evident in the animal kingdom. It will be a golden age. The land will look like it did in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned.”

It seems there is a putative connection between the Garden of Eden and the Millennium, which helps to advance the notion that the two periods—epochs two and six—are chiastically complementary to one another.

### **6.6.3 Epoch Three (The Fall) and Epoch Five (Tribulation)**

The third epoch of Heaven began with the Fall (Gen 3), when “conflict entered into the world” (Longman 1999:256). This is the period of Heaven which exists from the Fall (Gen 3) until Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, upon which it finds its conclusion (Mt 27:33-28:15; Mk 15:22-16:13; Lk 23:33-24:12; Jn 19:16-20:18). While the results of the Fall endure in some capacity until the final judgment (Rev 20:11-15, 21:27), the third epoch is unique in that it is a period which exhibits earth’s happenings prior to Jesus’ first incarnation, as well as one which especially focuses on God’s dealings with the Israelites.

The third epoch of Heaven chiastically corresponds with the fifth epoch of Heaven, which occurs during the Great Tribulation. The fifth epoch of Heaven is like the third epoch in that it portrays a setting, which, because of the rapture of the Church, is absent of Jesus’ direct witness. Furthermore, the period is marked with the anticipation of the Messiah’s earthly incarnation. Finally, there is a

special focus on God's dealings with the Jewish people during the period (so Thomas 1992:286-287; Grenz and others 1999:116; Patterson 2011:62-74).

The overall relationship between the third and fifth epochs of Heaven is best appraised by considering the book of Daniel, a book which has a profound relationship with Revelation (Koester 2001:27), the book from which these epochs are derived. Daniel's rapport with Revelation is especially displayed in Daniel 9:20-24, where his prophecy of "Seventy Weeks" is detailed. The weeks begin in the OT, the period which marks the third epoch of Heaven, but are not completed until the Great Tribulation, the period which marks the fifth epoch of Heaven. "The 490 years (seventy weeks) are understood literally and extend from the command to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile to the second advent of Jesus the Messiah ... [but] a great gulf of time intervenes between the end of the sixty-ninth week and the beginning of the seventieth week" (Hill 2008:173-174). This "final week" is the Tribulation of which Revelation speaks, and occurs in an environment in which God's testimony through the Church has been removed, where an ungodly and anti-Semitic leader akin to Nebuchadnezzar, the Antichrist, reigns, and where God employs a special focus upon the Jewish people (Koester 2014:543).

This presents a chiastic relationship between what this thesis considers the third and fifth epochs of Heaven. Daniel's prophecy establishes the timeline of Israel's punishment for disobedience as well as their restoration to the kingdom (Dan 9:24), which began in the OT and ends upon the conclusion of the Great Tribulation (so Hill 2008:173-174; Patterson 2011:70).

Feinburg (1984:48), Walvoord (1989a:79-84), De Haan (1995:72-8), and Ironside (2005:33) buttress this correlation by proposing that Israel's persecution from Babylon, while historical, serves as a prophetic metaphor which designates the

intent of the Great Tribulation.<sup>230</sup> Hill (2008:86), for example, specifically cites the fiery furnace narrative (Dan 3)<sup>231</sup> as a staple which presents “theological truths that cross the OT and NT.”

Walvoord (1989a:79) contends the fiery furnace narrative provides historical insights into the characteristics of the period, but some “interpret the chapter as not only history but parable and prophecy.” Goldingay (1989:74) agrees, suggesting the narrative is both literal and metaphorical, proposing that while it was literally about the ancient Jews, it can also be applied to “many Jews who are not threatened with a literal furnace.” De Haan (1995:73-74) maintains the metaphorical notion applies to Jews alive during the Great Tribulation, writing,

Jesus tells us that Daniel was a prophet and that his prophecies deal with future events. So beyond the immediate lesson of God’s care for his own, we look also for a prophetic lesson concerning the future ... which we believe is the most important one, because Daniel is first of all a prophetic book, according to the Lord Jesus himself (Mt 24), and so we look for the prophetic lesson ... The three young Hebrews are a picture of the nation of Israel among the Gentiles. Cast into the furnace of affliction and persecution, they should perish by all human standards, but miraculously they are preserved, even in the fiery furnace of persecution, because they are God’s covenant people and will finally be marvelously delivered and exalted among the nations.

For De Haan (1995:80), we can “clearly see ... in the light of Revelation and the words of Jesus in Matthew 24 the prophetic picture presented to us by the image

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<sup>230</sup> Longman (1999:255) maintains the book of Daniel details how God is Israel’s “warrior,” but also their “enemy” when they disobey him. “Israel had been carried off into captivity, not as a historical accident, but rather at the command of Yahweh ... [but he] fought on Israel’s side when they were obedient.”

<sup>231</sup> As a side note, Hill (2008:73-74) notes how the plot of the story may be outlined in seven scenes, which exist in a chiasmic structure. At the center of this proposed chiasmus is the faith of the Hebrews in Daniel 3:16-18. This note is shared to encourage the notion that chiasmus is an inherent part of Scripture.

of Nebuchadnezzar and the three young men in the fiery furnace.” De Haan (1995:80) further writes,

Nebuchadnezzar is a type of the beast of Revelation 13. The image is the type and picture of the abomination of desolation. The fiery furnace is a picture of the Great Tribulation. The three young Hebrews are a type of the nation to which they themselves belonged. Their deliverance from the furnace tells us in prophetic preview God’s future program of deliverance and exaltation. The fact that the men who threw them into the furnace were themselves burned, while the three young men escaped unharmed, is God’s own prediction of what will happen to those who seek to destroy God’s ancient people.

Ironside (2005:33) offers a comparable assessment, writing,

This event, though actual history, is a typical scene picturing the trial and deliverance of a faithful remnant of Daniel’s people that is to take place in the time of the end. There will come a day when (like the great image set up by Nebuchadnezzar) what the Lord Jesus calls “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (Mt 24:15), is going to be set up in Jerusalem by the Antichrist of the future. After the Church has been caught away to Heaven, the Jews will be deceived into owning the claims of a blasphemous impostor claiming to be the Messiah. He will demand that all men worship the image that he sets up, and thus the scene of the plain of Dura will be reenacted. In that day, as in the past, a remnant among the Jews will refuse to own his claims or to obey his voice. This will be the signal for the breaking out of the Great Tribulation. But many of the faithful shall be saved out of it, just as these three Hebrew young men were preserved by God in the midst of ... the furnace of fire.

Feinberg (1984:48) says “These men remind us of that faithful remnant in Israel in the coming day of the Tribulation who will defy the insane commands of the beast despite persecution and death (Rev 12:17).”

Walvoord (1989a:94) offers a respectable statement on the relationship between the fiery furnace narrative and the Tribulation period, writing,

The main thrust of the passage is ... a display of a God who is faithful to his people even in captivity and is ever ready to deliver those who put their trust in him. The contrast of the God of Israel to the idols of Babylon is a reminder that the god of this world ... is doomed to judgment at the hands of the sovereign God. The downfall of [ungodly] nations is a foreshadowing of their end when the Lion of the tribe of Judah returns to reign.<sup>232</sup>

### 6.6.4 Epoch Four (Church Age)

The fourth epoch is separated from the third epoch via the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, an event McGrath (2011:445) says inaugurated “something new.” Jesus’ resurrection is an unprecedented and unparalleled event which changed the trajectory of ouranological history. Whereas the Fall (Gen 3) threatened creation with total destruction, Jesus’ resurrection reversed the course back towards a pre-Fall climate, which will begin anew during the Millennium, and be completely fulfilled in the new Heaven and earth (Rev 19-22).

Paul says that without Jesus’ resurrection mankind is “still in his sins” (1 Cor 15:17). He also says the “wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), averring that without Jesus’ resurrection, mankind is relegated to perpetual mortality. Paul speaks of deceased believers as merely “sleeping,” implying a departed believer’s body is

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<sup>232</sup> According to the ouranological chiasmus presented in this thesis, this return marks the conclusion of the epoch of Heaven which occurs during the Tribulation.

dormant, awaiting the resurrection, and his soul is still alive (1 Thess 4:13). “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). Therefore, because of Jesus’ resurrection, every believer will eventually experience a resurrection of his own (Wright 2008:15). “If the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus the Messiah, dwells in you, says Paul, then the one who raised the Messiah from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies as well, through his Spirit who dwells in you” (Wright 2008:149).

The fourth epoch thus showcases the immediate effects of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection upon the believer—the “hope of redemption” (Wright 2008:147). The period features the Church, the institution of believers inaugurated in Acts 2 after Jesus’ ascension, which serves as Jesus’ body during his physical absence from earth (Eph 1:23, 5:30). The Church exists because Jesus “gave himself up for her” (Eph 5:25), and the Church’s responsibility is to serve as Christ’s “ambassadors, as though God were making an appeal through us, begging others on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). Through Jesus, believers have “eternal life” (Rom 6:23), and will ultimately live with him forever (Rev 21-22). Therefore, Jesus’ resurrection provides a unique hope which was not active prior to his resurrection.

### **6.7 The Chiastic Apex of Heaven**

Every ouranological epoch has a synonymous counterpart, save epoch four, which, according to the rules of chiasmus, signals it as the apex of the structure. “Chiasmus always involves a balanced multiunit inverted parallelism which leads to and then moves away from a distinct central component” (McCoy 2003:20). In this case, the central component is the Church age, which was inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (and ends upon the Church’s resurrection and rapture). As argued in Chapter Four, Jesus is inimitably related to each epoch, and therefore, while each ouranological period is identified by an earthly era, a Christologically-related happening ultimately frames each epoch.

The proposed ouranological apex matches what some scholars call a “metanarrative,” or overall tenor, to Scripture, which is a novel point of focus in scholarship (so Alexander 2008; Middleton 2014; Beale and Kim 2014; Jackson 2014; Prince 2015). “We usually read the Bible as a series of disconnected stories ... Rather [the Bible] comprises a single story, telling us how the human race got into its present condition, and how God through Jesus Christ has come and will come to put things right” (Keller 2011:36-37). Keller (2011:37) believes the Bible presents a “great biblical story arc,” with Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as its summit. Alexander (2008:10-11) has pleaded for further research on this subject because “there is value in seeing the big picture,” which helps to warrant the purpose and findings of this thesis. “Biblical scholarship as a whole has not articulated clearly the major themes that run throughout Scripture” (Alexander 2008:11).

Christopher Wright (2012:1131) shares a similar opinion, arguing the theme of Scripture is for God “to make himself known to his creation ultimately for the purpose of redeeming and restoring all creation to its right relationship with God.” Jesus comes to his creation, and his creation finds its own future in him (Bauckham 1993:30). NT Wright (2008:122) maintains it was a “strongly held belief of most first-century Jews, and virtually all early Christians, that history was going somewhere under the guidance of God and that where it was going was toward God’s new world of justice, healing, and hope. The transition from the present world to the new one would be a matter ... of its radical healing ... this is what we find in Jesus himself.” “The Christian gospel ... tells how for the world’s redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of Heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ” (Bruce 2003:7-8).

Alexander (2008:189) pens an entire work on the subject of the biblical metanarrative, in which he declares that, “the biblical meta-story describes how

God acts to reclaim the earth, and especially its people, from Satan's control." For Alexander (2008:189, 191), this is the result of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, which this thesis argues is the apex to ouranology according to Revelation. The significance of the metanarrative, Alexander suggests, cannot be overstated. Jackson (2014:15) who also contributes an entire work on the subject of Scripture's metanarrative, argues the basic plot of the story of Scripture follows the tragic story of humankind through our fall into sin and the promise and fulfillment of our redemption in Christ, who, through his death and resurrection, restores our relationship with God." "This is the big picture ... we will not be able to understand ... the Bible apart from [it]" (Jackson 2014:15). Messenger (2015:231-232) concurs, writing, "It is clear, in some sense, the 'end times' begin with the death and resurrection of Jesus." Wolterstorff's (2007:159) commentary bolsters the thought:

... the biblical writers present God as a redeeming God. From times most ancient, man has departed from the pattern of responsibilities awarded him at his creation by God. A multitude of evils has followed. But God was not content to leave man in the mire of his misery. Aware of what is going on, he has resolved, in response to man's sin and its resultant evils, to bring about renewal. He has, indeed, already been acting in accord with that resolve, centrally and decisively in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Merida (Prince 2015:9) extends this in stating, "The Bible tells us this: God has acted to redeem fallen humanity through the work of Jesus Christ. The Bible is a book about salvation ... about redemption ... God is telling us a grand story [which] ends in Revelation." "Christ is the one in whom God chooses to sum up the cosmos, the one in whom he restores harmony to the universe. He is the focal point, the instrument, the functionary through whom all this occurs" (O'Brien 1999:111-112). "God's plan is that all things be eternally summed up in Christ ...

[He] is the hermeneutical key. Christ crucified is the central point, in which all the lines meet and are united” (Prince 2015:15, 64, 68).<sup>233</sup>

This helps to show Jesus is not only the inaugurator of each proposed epoch, or merely the intersection between Heaven and earth, but also the redeemer of creation. He reversed the trajectory of fallen creation by “emptying himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men ... [and] humbling himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:7-8), and by being “raised on the third day” (1 Cor 15:4). He “came down from Heaven” to do the Father’s will (Jn 6:38), which was “to reconcile all things to himself” (Col 1:20). “Jesus is the subject of it all” (Wright 2014:148), “the key to the interpretation of the Bible” (Geisler 1968:30), and the “goal of all of creation” (Pao 2012:98). “[He] is the key to the cosmos” (Wright 2008:106). Köstenberger and Patterson (2011:70) maintain this is the approach of the early Church, writing, “... [the] early defenders of the Christian faith maintained that both Testaments were unified around Christ as their center and that all of Scripture must be interpreted within an overarching Christological framework.” This thesis’ goal is to re-embrace this narrative, and argues that the hermeneutical approach proposed herein helps to accomplish this. Stitzinger (2002:149-150) helps to show how this is not only the apex to ouranology, but a categorization of the entire epochal system purported in this thesis:

The entire Bible can be understood in relation to this theme. The OT declares, *He is coming* (Is 7:14; 9:6). The four Gospels declare, *He has come—and is coming again* (Jn 1:29; 14:3, 18-19). Finally, Acts, the epistles, and the Book of Revelation declare, *Having come, he is coming again* (Acts 1:11; 2 Thess 1:10; Rev 1:7).

Some scholars see this alleged metanarrative motif in Revelation, a beneficial proposition for the arguments included in this thesis (so Koester 2001:191;

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<sup>233</sup> Prince (2015:68-69) further states “all doctrines and duties bear a relation to him.”

Köstenberger 2011:167; Patterson 2012:173; Smith 2015:32-33; Messenger 2015:231). Koester (2001:191), for example, maintains that, “Revelation envisions the salvation of the whole of creation.” Köstenberger (2011:167) writes, “The book of Revelation continues the Gospel portrait of Jesus as the pierced Son who will return as the glorified Son of Man to exercise his God-given role in salvation ... Christ is presented as the ultimate, eschatological demonstration of God’s sovereignty over all of human history.” Patterson (2012:173) says the book of Revelation is “highly Christological.” Messenger (2015:231) notes, “The book of Revelation provides some of the keenest insights in Scripture concerning the ‘big picture.’” Smith (2015:32-33) agrees, writing,

Revelation is the most intertextual of all the books ... it begins with a vision of Christ, his word to the churches, and a sense of direction as to where these things are all headed. Most commentators see an outline in 1:19, which [displays] the movement of [the] story ... the book is one dramatic narrative ... [which] proclaims Christ [and] brings all of salvation history to a climax.

Walls (2010:401) shares an efficacious commentary to the notion of a biblical metanarrative, one which encapsulates the sentiment of this section’s claims, writing,

... our relationship with God is through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Despite the sin of humanity, God acted to save us and restore us to himself. What this shows is that the Christian concept of Heaven must be understood theologically within the biblical narrative of fall and redemption. Within this narrative, Heaven is the climax of the story of salvation. Whereas the story begins with sin and death, and humanity separated from God and cut off from the tree of life, it ends in the final chapters of the bible with the curse lifted, with the tree of life freely available, with death overcome, and with God reunited with his people so

closely that they will even see his face. Seeing Heaven as the climax of this story points out that the final hope of Christians is yet to be realized in its fullness. The NT teaches that those who have died are with Christ, but they await the future resurrection.

As Wright (2003:59-60) puts it, “the ultimate future, as Revelation ... makes clear, is not about people leaving ‘earth’ and going to ‘Heaven,’ but rather about the life of ‘Heaven’ coming down *from* Heaven to earth.” This “life” is Christ, who died and was raised in order that all of creation might experience redemption through him (Eph 1:7). “Precisely because the resurrection has happened as an event within our own world, the implications and effects are to be felt within our own world, here and now” (Wright 2008:191).

Partnering this metanarrative with the literal approach to Revelation espoused in this thesis yields a “not yet” understanding to the kingdom, but also an “already” understanding in the sense that the earth is right now presently on its way back to redemption. All believers can experience the implications of this today, especially in death, which is something which could not necessarily be said during previous epochs, because Jesus’ death and resurrection allows all believers freedom from the grip of death upon our lives. Although the kingdom is “not yet,” believers presently rest in its surety.

### **6.8 Conclusion**

This chapter analyzes the seven epochs of Heaven against the ancient literary device known as chiasmus. It is suggested the epochs exist within such a structure, and the structure presents Jesus’ death and resurrection as its apex. This apex reveals a common mantra among scholarship known as the metanarrative of Scripture, which suggests the gospel offers redemption to all of creation. This reasserts this thesis’ claim that ouranology is best understood in light of Jesus, and helps to establish the overall goal of this thesis, which is that

Heaven is best understood as existing in epochs which present the theme of universal redemption. This assertion rests on the apex of the proposed ouranological chiasmus, which resonates with the biblical metanarrative espoused by several scholars. When appropriated to the subject of Heaven, this metanarrative purports that, although Heaven's eternal destiny lies in the future, Jesus' resurrection inaugurates certain elements of the future Heaven during our present day (Streett 2013:296). His death and resurrection changed the trajectory of history from decay and corruption to perfection and harmony.

## Chapter 7

### Nature of Epochs, and Theological and Ecclesial Implications

“For to us God revealed ... in [words] taught by the Spirit ... things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and ... all that God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9, 10, 13).

#### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to build upon modern scholarship on the subject of Heaven, particularly upon the notion that it exists in past, present, and future eras, as well as upon important elements of said eras, such as the resurrection, with the goal of tying the research together in a helpful way. The ultimate conclusion is that Scripture, particularly the book of Revelation, presents seven epochs of Heaven. These epochs are framed by Christologically related happenings on earth, and exist within a chiastic structure which reveals Jesus’ death and resurrection as the apex to ouranology.

This chapter serves as a conclusion to this thesis’ overall argument. It offers a necessary deliberation on the nature of an ouranological epoch, suggesting it is not without biblical warrant to maintain that Heaven retains the ability to be altered by Christologically related events on earth. Moreover, several implications of understanding Heaven via a chiastic-epochal system are proposed, particularly in the context of theological scholarship and ecclesiastical practice. “Good theology always has pastoral implications. Doctrine and praxis ought to be

closely related” (Alexander 2008:11). It is for this reason this study of ouranology moves into the area of application.

## 7.2 The Nature of an Epoch

This thesis endeavors to show that Revelation, via the work of Christ, renders seven unique epochs which frame the doctrine of Heaven in history. Before concluding this thesis, however, it is important to consider the nature of said epochs. This is to ask whether it is biblically warranted to suggest that Heaven can change, as the proposed chiastic-epochal system implies. Alcorn (2004:43-44), Wolterstorff (2007:161), and Wright (2008:115-116) are among those who offer statements which suggest the possibility.

For Wright (2008:111), Heaven and earth in biblical cosmology are not two different locations within the same continuum of space and matter, but two different dimensions of God’s good creation. He (2008:115) writes,

When the Bible speaks of Heaven and earth it is not talking about two localities related to each other within the same space-time continuum or about a nonphysical world contrasted with a physical one but about two different kinds of what we call space, two different kinds of what we call matter, and also quite possibly (though this does not necessarily follow from the other) two different kinds of what we call time.

Wright (2008:116) believes that Jesus, via his earthly ministry, serves as a bridge that connects the disparate realms:

What we are encouraged to grasp ... is that God’s space and ours—Heaven and earth, in other words—are, though very different, not far away from one another. Nor is talk about Heaven simply a metaphorical way of talking about our own spiritual lives. God’s space and ours interlock and

## Chapter 7: Nature of Epochs, and Theological and Ecclesial Implications

intersect in a whole variety of ways even while they retain, for the moment at least, their separate and distinct identities and roles. One day ... they will be joined in a quite new way, open and visible to one another, married together forever.

For Wright (2008:111), Heaven relates to earth decussately so that the one who is in Heaven can be present simultaneously anywhere and everywhere on earth, and this is especially true because of Jesus' earthly work. Wright (2008:111) maintains because of his earthly ministry and his ascension back to Heaven, "Jesus is available, accessible, without people having to travel to a particular spot on the earth to find him ... Heaven is ... the control room for earth; it is the CEO's office, the place from which instructions are given. 'All authority is given to me,' said Jesus, 'in Heaven and on earth.'" Wright (2008:111, 113) further notes that "Jesus is in charge of Heaven and earth, not only in some ultimate future, but also in the present," and that grasping this rescues us from a wrong view of Heaven.

This suggests that, while Heaven and earth maintain separate locales, Jesus' earthly ministry altered Heaven's nature, and his presence in Heaven allows for future alterations as well. Heaven is not a location which remains impervious to alterations via earthly events, but, through Jesus, retains the ability to be affected. Wolterstorff (2007:161) offers a similar opinion, arguing that change is an evident reality of Heaven, writing,

God is described as a being who *acts*—in creation, in providence, and for the renewal of mankind. He is an agent, not an impassive factor in reality. And from the manner in which his acts are described, it seems obvious that many of them have beginnings and endings, that accordingly they stand in successive relations to each other, and that these successive acts are of such a sort that their presence and absence on God's time-strand constitutes changes thereon.

For Wolterstorff (2007:161), this succession constitutes a change on God's time-strand, but not a change in his essence. He writes,

God is spoken of as leading Israel through the Red Sea and later sending his Son into the world. So does not his doing the latter succeed his doing the former? And does not the fact of this sort of succession constitute a change along God's time-strand? It seems evident that the biblical writers regard God as having a time-strand of his own on which actions on his part are to be found, and that ... these actions vary in such a way that there are changes along the strand.

Wolterstorff (2007:161) believes these changes are not reserved to earth, but extend into the Heavenly realm, too. It is worth remarking that both Wright (2008:111, 113) and Wolterstorff (2007:161) emphasize the inimitable relationship Jesus has with the doctrine of Heaven, a claim deliberated throughout the course of this thesis.

Alcorn (2004:44) categorizes Heaven into three eras, including the "past Heaven, the intermediate Heaven, and the eternal Heaven," and contends these eras prove that Heaven changes. Alcorn (2004:43-44) argues this is possible because "God created Heaven, it had a beginning and is therefore neither timeless nor changeless ... Only God is eternal and self-existent. All else is created. Heaven is not ... part of his essential being." Wright (2008:19) extends a similar emphasis, writing, "God made Heaven." The notion that God created Heaven allows for the abode to experience alterations throughout its history, without threatening the nature of the uncreated God who dwells in it.

Alcorn (2004:43-44), Wolterstorff (2007:161), and Wright (2008:115-116) concur that the integrity of Heaven is not threatened by its ability to experience change, and that accepting its ability to change brings about a better understanding of the

doctrine. “Once we abandon our assumption that Heaven cannot change, it all makes sense ... God does not change; he is immutable. But God clearly says that Heaven will change. It will eventually be relocated to the new earth” (Alcorn 2004:44).

This delineation helps to establish that the epochal ouranological system purported in this thesis is not without scholastic and biblical abutment.

### 7.3 Theological Benefits

This thesis espouses a predominantly literal approach to Revelation commensurate with the hermeneutical approach generally known as Dispensationalism, particularly its eschatological claims (pretribulationism, a seven-year Great Tribulation, premillennialism, a one-thousand-year Millennium, and a new Heaven and earth). While this thesis does not embrace every tenet of Dispensationalism, its relationship with the approach’s eschatological notions is, in some cases, ardently disparate with some modern, widely held eschatological viewpoints, particularly Covenant Theology,<sup>234</sup> which emphasizes the present-day breakthrough of the kingdom (so Poythress 1994:7; Gentry and Wellum 2012:22; Streett 2013:9-21). “These two systems differ on many matters” (Gentry and Wellum 2012:23).

The general disagreement is that Dispensationalism strongly encourages a future Heaven, with little-to-no present-day implications, while Covenant Theology encourages the kingdom’s present-day power, sometimes via amillennialism, which maintains the Millennium is a present period inaugurated upon Jesus’ ascension into Heaven<sup>235</sup> (so Bock 1993:23; Saucy 1993:13; Poythress 1994:7; Grenz and others 1999:8; Gentry and Wellum 2012:22).

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<sup>234</sup> Also referred to as “kingdom theology.” Gentry and Wellum (2012:22) note the hermeneutical discussion is “not limited to these views,” but they are arguably the two foremost, disparate views.

<sup>235</sup> The one-thousand-year length is metaphorical in this system.

If this thesis' espousal of a chiastic-epochal ouranological system is acceptable, it can help to bridge the gap between these two disparate hermeneutical approaches, namely because of how it understands the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection upon the present epoch of Heaven. This amalgamation is not unprecedented, and would cooperate with what Saucy (1993:13) considers "continued developments within the two schools of interpretation" perhaps via the medium of Progressive Dispensationalism.

### **7.3.1 Progressive Dispensationalism**

The particular contrast between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology is observed in how dispensationalists have classically understood Heaven, in what is often known as Classical Dispensationalism. Bock (1993:23-24) cites the "most important feature of Classical Dispensationalism" is its "dualistic idea of redemption." According to Bock (1993:23-24), "dualistic redemption" includes "a Heavenly humanity and an earthly humanity." The earthly humanity consists of an eternal, immortal earthly people whose purpose is to "release the earth from the curse of corruption and decay" (Bock 1993:23-24). This earthly humanity "first appears in the Millennium, but it will not have reached its eternal glory until the end of that time. It will then continue onto the new earth populating it forever" (Bock 1993:23-24). The Heavenly humanity is "made up of all the redeemed from all dispensations who would be resurrected from the dead ... Whereas the earthly humanity concerned people who had not died but who were preserved by God from death, the Heavenly humanity is made up of all the saved who have died, whom God will resurrect from the dead" (Bock 1993:23-24). Bock (1993:23-24) summarizes the Classical Dispensationalist view in writing,

In summary, the central dualism of Classical Dispensationalism asserts that God is pursuing two purposes in redemption, one relating to Heaven and a Heavenly people and one relating to the earth concerning an earthly people. Both purposes will be accomplished and confirmed forever.

This particular view of Heaven—eternal dualism—deemphasizes the hope of the resurrection for all believers and downplays the present-day implications of the kingdom, two thoughts which modern scholarship (Wright 2008:19) and Scripture (1 Cor 15:51; Mt 10:7) distinctly champion, and two thoughts which this thesis advances. Wright (2008:18) contends the language of Heaven in the NT does not minimize the resurrection of all believers, or the present-day implications of the kingdom. For Wright (2008:18), God’s kingdom in the preaching of Jesus refers to God’s sovereign rule coming “on earth as it is in Heaven,” which began during his earthly ministry.

Several scholars (so Saucy 1993:15; Bock 1993:30; Poythress 1994:19-29; Bass 2005:19, 28, 34, 150; Gerstner 2009:9-10; Gentry and Wellum 2012:40) identify Scofield as the founder of eternal dualism, which has come to be known as Classical Dispensationalism. Classical Dispensationalism has since been widely disavowed (Bock 1993:47). Ladd (1952) in particular strongly criticized Classical Dispensationalism, suggesting the approach is “indefensible” and “inaccurate,” although Ladd himself was a foremost defender of premillennialism, a position with which Classical Dispensationalism is traditionally associated (Bock 1993:39). Other scholars (so McClain 1959; Ryrie 1986; Walvoord 1989; Pentecost 1990;) followed suit, developing a hermeneutic known as Revised Dispensationalism, which rejected Classical Dispensationalism’s eternal dualism, forcing them to choose between a more Heavenly or more earthlier view of how Heaven is to be understood in its eternal state. Bock (1993:47) notes how “Some chose one, some chose the other,” and, eventually, graduates of dispensational schools “hardly knew what Classical Dispensationalism was [anymore].” As time progressed, Revised Dispensationalism itself has been revised, ultimately into what has come to be known as Progressive Dispensationalism.

## Chapter 7: Nature of Epochs, and Theological and Ecclesial Implications

Progressive Dispensationalism is a hermeneutic which, in several ways, bridges the disparate thoughts of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology together. Bock (1993:47) elaborates upon Progressive Dispensationalism, writing,

[Progressive Dispensationalism maintains] that God's work with Israel and Gentile nations in the past dispensation looks forward to the redemption of humanity in its political and cultural aspects. Consequently, there is a place for Israel and for other nations in the eternal plan of God. On the other hand, [Progressive Dispensationalism maintains] that the Church is a vital part of this very same plan of redemption. The appearance of the Church does not signal a secondary redemption plan, either to be fulfilled in Heaven apart from the new earth or in an elite class of Jews and Gentiles who are forever distinguished from the rest of redeemed humanity. Instead, the Church today is a revelation of spiritual blessings which all the redeemed will share in spite of their ethnic and national differences. [Progressive Dispensationalism maintains] a holistic and unified view of eternal salvation ... God will bless mankind with the same salvation given to all without distinction. These blessings will come to all without distinction through Jesus Christ, the King of Israel and of all the nations of redeemed humanity.

Concerning the kingdom, Progressive Dispensationalism sees one promised eschatological kingdom which has both spiritual and political dimensions (Bock 1993:54). Bock (1993:54) contends this kingdom is "always centered in Christ," and every aspect of the eschatological kingdom (whether spiritual or physical) prior to the eternal reign of Christ "follows the history of Jesus Christ and is dependent on him as he acts according to the will of the Father." Although Progressive Dispensationalism asserts a future, one-thousand-year kingdom, it also maintains elements of that kingdom are presently active.

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This thesis espouses an eschatology commensurate with Progressive Dispensationalism. Dispensationalism generally espouses seven dispensations which divide God's work and purposes into seven periods of time. These include innocence (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15-17), conscience (Gen 3:8-8:22), human government (Gen 8), promise (Gen 12:1-Ex 19:25), law (Ex 19-23), grace (Dan 9:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Thess 4), and the millennial kingdom (Rev 20:11-14). Progressive Dispensationalism's major distinctive is its conception of the progressive accomplishment and revelation of a holistic and unified redemption in the millennial kingdom, a tenet which, in many respects, agrees with Covenant Theology, particularly as it has to do with the eternal nature of Heaven. "This redemption covers personal, communal, social, political, and national aspects of human life. It is revealed in a succession of dispensations which vary in how they stress the aspects of redemption, but all point to a final culmination in which all aspects are redeemed together" (Bock 1993:56). "Classical Dispensationalism tended to emphasize the differences in the various periods of human history brought about through the progressive revelation of God's salvation program [and], on the other hand, non-dispensationalists [were] inclined toward an emphasis on the unity of God's work in biblical history" (Saucy 1993:13). The ouranological epochal system described in this thesis offers an approach which arguably promotes tenets from each of the disparate views, because it accepts the futurism of Dispensationalism and the present-day implications of Covenant Theology, hence contributing to the continued developments within the two schools of interpretation (so Saucy 1993:13; Poythress 1994:7).<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Poythress' (1994:37) comments are helpful in offering a final word on how the ouranological claims asserted throughout this thesis correlate with Progressive Dispensationalism, particularly how the Church and Israel, albeit two distinct groups, will both experience the same final redemption in the eternal Heaven, and also how redemption to all of creation offered through Jesus' death and resurrection is, during the present Church Age, already viable: "[Some] prophecies are seen as being fulfilled both in the Church age (in a preliminary way) and in the millennial age (in a final way). But if so, the Church is not so alien to Israel's prophetic heritage. Rather the Church participates in it (in a preliminary way). Christians participate now in the fulfillment of Abrahamic promises, because they are in union with Christ who is the heart of the fulfillment. The full realization of the promises, however, still comes in the future [with Israel]." Poythress (1994:28-29) expands upon this description, writing, "At this point dispensationalists come to a position close to classic premillennialism, like that of George E. Ladd. Classic premillennialism believes in a distinctive period of great earthly prosperity under Christ's rule after his bodily return. Following this period there is a general resurrection and a creation of new Heavens and a new earth (the consummation or eternal state). But it does not distinguish two peoples of God or two parallel destinies. Some dispensationalist scholars ... still call themselves dispensationalists because they wish to emphasize the continuing importance of national, ethnic Israel (Rom 11:28-29). They expect that the Abrahamic promises concerning the land of [Israel] are yet to find a literal fulfillment in ethnic Israel [until] the millennial period." This thesis endorses this caveat, wishing to emphasize the future, one-thousand-year Millennium with a focus on ethnic Israel.

## 7.4 Ecclesiastical Benefits

In order to determine the practical benefits of this thesis' argument, a few words need to be said concerning the historical confusion on the doctrine of Heaven, after which a few more words will be shared concerning the implications this thesis wishes to have in an ecclesiastical context.

### 7.4.1 Modern Day Confusion

Alcorn (2004:19) maintains that 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him," is the most misused verse in the Bible concerning the doctrine of Heaven. Alcorn (2004:19) cites verse ten, "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit," as evidence which "makes clear that this revelation is God's Word (1 Cor 2:13), which tells us what God has prepared for us." "[1 Corinthians 2:9] is a wonderful verse ... [but] it says precisely the opposite of what it is cited to prove." Peterson (2014:19) agrees, writing,

Paul's words are ironic. On one hand he says that "what God prepared for those who love him," what Paul calls "our glory" is beyond human knowing. It is inaccessible to human senses; we cannot find it out. Moreover, "the heart of man" cannot even imagine its greatness. On the other hand, in the very next verse, the apostle affirms, "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit." On our own we have no access to the divine. But God has stooped to reveal himself supremely in the apostles' preaching and writing of Scripture. Thus we can know what God has told us ahead of time about Heaven.

Alcorn's (2004:19) commentary extends this notion:

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What we otherwise could not have known about Heaven, because we are unable to see it, God says he has revealed to us through his Spirit. This means that God has explained to us what Heaven is like. God tells us about Heaven in his word, not so we can shrug our shoulders and remain ignorant, but because he wants us to understand and anticipate what awaits us.

A misinterpretation of this verse—which encourages the unbiblical principle to remain obtuse on the subject of Heaven—has produced rampant confusion in today’s Church (Wright 2008:19). Pennington (2014:75) elaborates:

It has long been popular to think of the end goal of God’s redemptive work as life with God in Heaven. For this reason, a disembodied, cloud-based existence is the most common evocation that the word *Heaven* creates. But ... *Heaven* in [Scripture] reveals a strikingly different conception. *Heaven* is not used in the Bible to refer to a generic, ethereal, postmortem existence; rather, it is used specifically to refer to God himself and the place from which he comes and reveals himself on earth ... [this is] consistent with the whole canon.

Wright (2008:88-89) identifies the root of this confusion as the infiltration of Gnosticism into Christian thinking, which inveigled improper interpretations of passages like 1 Corinthians 2:9-13:

The Gnostics believed that the material world was an inferior and dark place, evil in its very existence, but that within this world could be found certain people who were meant for something else. These children of light were like fallen stars, tiny pinpricks of light currently hidden within a gross material body. Once they had realized who they were, this knowledge (Greek *gnosis*) would enable them to enter into a spiritual existence in

## Chapter 7: Nature of Epochs, and Theological and Ecclesial Implications

which the material world would no longer count. Having entered upon that spiritual existence, they would then live by it, through death, and into the infinite world beyond space, time, and matter.

According to Wright (2008:90), Gnosticism's attitude infiltrated Christian thought, especially as it concerns the doctrine of Heaven, creating a "just passing through" spirituality, where the purpose of being a Christian is simply, or at least mainly, to "go to Heaven when you die." "The normal Western Christian view is that salvation is about 'my relationship with God' in the present and about 'going home to God and finding peace' in the future. This belief is simply not what the NT teaches" (Wright 2008:196). Moore (2015:50-51, 96) concurs, writing,

If we were to inject truth serum into the communion wine in our churches, I think we might find that many of us dread life in [Heaven], not because we find it terrifying but because we find it boring. The vision of the end many Christians hold is pleasant enough—a white, antiseptic family reunion with super-powers, and calorie-free food, and singing, singing that goes on and on and on, forever.

However, Scripture teaches us that, while it is true that we are present with the Lord in an intermediate Heaven when we die (Calhoun 2014:256-258), the overall goal is not for us to go to Heaven, but for Heaven to come to earth. "This is the ultimate rejection of all types of Gnosticism, of every worldview that sees the final goal as the separation of the world from God ... God's design, and promise, was to sum up all things in Christ, things both in Heaven and on earth," and this is especially seen in Revelation (Wright 2008:104-105). "The central Christian affirmation is that what the creator God has done in Jesus Christ, and supremely in his resurrection, is what he intends to do for the whole world—meaning, by world, the entire cosmos with all its history (Wright 2008:91). Moore (2015:50-51, 96) writes, "[Heaven] is about far more than 'going to Heaven when

you die' ... God is restoring the harmony between humanity and himself, between humanity and nature." Calhoun (2014:258) offers a helpful remark:

Christian hope looks forward to even more than Heaven. It looks beyond Heaven to the new Heaven and the new earth. The God who will say to you and me one day, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," will also say someday, "Behold I am making all things new." The Christian hope in the complete triumph of God over the poisonous reality of death goes beyond our personal and individual salvation to the ultimate goal of God, who will make all things new.

Wright (2008:107) offers a profitable conclusion as to how Jesus' earthly ministry offers redemption to the entire creation, which is, at least as far as this thesis is concerned, the apex to ouranology:

What I am proposing is that the NT image of the future hope of the whole cosmos, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus, gives as coherent a picture as we need or could have of the future that is promised to the whole world, a future in which, under the sovereign and wise rule of the creator God, decay and death will be done away with and a new creation born, to which the present one will stand as mother to child. Creation needs ... redemption, and [it is] promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

#### **7.4.2 Practical Implications in Worship**

According to Wright (2008:20), Streett (2013:272), and Prince (2015:71), ouranological confusion particularly shows up in hymns. "[This] many-sided confusion plays out in the hymns we sing ... A glance through the average hymnbook reveals that a good many reference to the future life beyond death [is not resonate of] orthodox Christianity." Streett (2013:272) maintains that the first-

century Church's hymns exuberated present-day implications of Heaven, not a "just passing through" mentality as advanced in several modern-day hymns."<sup>237</sup> In accordance with this thesis' ouranological apex, songs which declare the worth, work, and wonder of Jesus Christ lead us toward true worship as we rest in the saving work of our heroic King" (Prince 2015:72).

One modern hymn, for example, states, "Till in the ocean of thy love, we lose ourselves in Heaven above" (Wright 2008:20). This lyric purports a theology of Heaven which ignores God's desire to redeem all of creation, and submits that our ouranological goal is to eternally dwell in "Heaven above." A concomitant hymn, "How Great Thou Art," in its final stanza, declares a similar theology: "When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart" (Wright 2008:22). "The second line might better read, 'And heal this world, what joy shall fill my heart'" (Wright 2008:22). Another example is found in the lyrics to the 1939 hymn *Victory in Jesus*. One verse in this song reads, "I heard about a mansion, he has built for me in glory. And I heard about the streets of gold beyond the crystal sea ... And some sweet day I'll sing up there the song of victory" (Popular Hymns 2015). If the argument of this thesis is correct, then this particular stanza merges several tenets from several epochs together into one single idea of Heaven, as well as purports that the ultimate goal of Heaven is for believers to eternally exist "up there," that is, the intermediate Heaven. For example, the "street of gold" is found in Revelation 21:21, which speaks of the new Heaven, not the intermediate Heaven, as suggested in the refrain.

While these lyrics are by no means inimical, they inadequately render the hope Jesus offers through his resurrection, thereby quelling the believer's comprehension of God's ultimate goal for all of creation. Streett (2013:272) maintains that when a believer offers adequate worship to God, he participates in

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<sup>237</sup> Streett (2013:272) cites Robert Coleman's *Songs of Heaven* (1982) as a work which offers an accurate glimpse into Heavenly worship and calls believers to follow suit on earth.

God's will on earth as it is in Heaven, which is to say he engages, if even partially, in a present-day experience of the future eternal Heaven. For Wright (2008:186), "[If] we could rework the Church's liturgies so that they expressed the surprising hope held out in the NT, we would find ... in particular that the question of the Church's mission was suddenly catapulted into center stage and reshaped in the process." Alcorn (2004:21) quotes C.S. Lewis, who observes, "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next." "The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven" (Alcorn 2004:21).

The hope of this thesis is that the chiastic-epochal system offers a method by which the tenets of Heaven can be properly categorized, thereby aiding the believer's comprehension of how Heaven has functioned, is currently functioning, and will function in the future, which could provide a clearer apprehension into "all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9), which could then be espoused in ecclesiastical practices, like the worship of God through the singing of hymns, as well as in how the general faith of the believer is practiced during our present age.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

In the beginning, when God "created the Heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1), Heaven and earth were in perfect harmony with one another, illustrated perfectly in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8). Adam and Eve's sin, however, forced a separation between Heaven and earth, and this remained true until Jesus died and rose from the grave, overturning the power of sin which subjected creation into a slavery of corruption (Rom 8:18-25). While Heaven and earth are not yet perfectly unified, via Jesus' resurrection, "creation ... [has been] set free ... into

the freedom of glory” (Rom 8:21). Jesus “bought back God’s original design ... Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection secured a renewed humanity upon a renewed earth” (Alcorn 2004:xx, 91, 92).

This thesis has sought to show that Jesus’ resurrection is the apex to ouranology. Jesus’ resurrection set creation on a course to be redeemed, with Heaven and earth reunited (Rev 21:1), and earth’s residents living in perfect harmony with Heaven’s Resident (Rev 22:4). “The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future” (Wright 2008:192, 197-205). Jesus’ resurrection provides his followers with a future hope that we, too, will be raised from the dead, but it also holds present implications, because it altered the course of history itself. Where the Fall set creation on the course of total ruin, Jesus rerouted creation onto the course of redemption. This thesis shows the ultimate goal of Heaven is for resurrected people to live in a resurrected creation with a resurrected Jesus (Alcorn 2004:91), an argument showcased in an ouranological-chiasmus rooted in Revelation.

The ouranological epochs proposed in this thesis concur with modern scholarship’s avowal that Heaven is best understood as having a past, present, and future era, but these epochs extend the notion further by offering a holistic approach which showcases the inimitable relationship Jesus has with Heaven. Moreover, the epochs offer a lucid approach to ouranological history, as well as a novel way, via its chiastic structure, to understand the power and prominence of the resurrection.

Heaven played an indispensable role in the commencement of the Church, and the hope of this thesis is that the ouranological-chiasmus herein will aid Heaven to play an indispensable role in the modern-day Church, too, by providing a systematic approach to what is often considered a mystifying doctrine.

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