

## ***John and the Future of the Nations***

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*John's vision for the future includes statements concerning the nations of the earth that have been interpreted in terms of a final conversion of all nations in the future. Most interpreters find such a soteriological universalism in Rev 21:3,24-27 and 22:2-3. R. J. Bauckham seeks to establish such a hope for 11:3-13; 14:14-16 and 15:2-4 as well. Bauckham rejects the traditional view that the vision of the New Jerusalem refers only to Christians, the covenant people redeemed from all the nations, as the inhabitants of the new world. He argues that John fuses the OT promises for the destiny of God's own people and the universal hope that all the nations will become God's people: John foresees the full inclusion of all the nations in Israel's and the church's covenant privileges and promises. This paper interacts with Bauckham's interpretation of the relevant passages in Revelation.*

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The first book of the Hebrew Bible begins by depicting God's creation of a perfect world (Gen 1-2) before narrating the entrance of sin and its avalanche-like growth on the path on which man and woman began to walk when they acted in violation of God's will (Gen 3). After Adam and Eve had been expelled from the garden in which they enjoyed God's presence and perfection, their descendants continued to walk on this path of autonomous self-determination (Gen 4-11). God brought ever greater judgments on mankind, but he never withdrew his mercy. God preserved the physical life of Adam and Eve in the immediate aftermath of their rebellion; he promised Cain ultimate protection; he guaranteed Noah and his descendants the physical survival of the human race. The story of the Tower of Babel ends, however, without a promise of mercy: the language of mankind becomes "mixed up" as the people "left off building the city" (Gen 11:8).

Mankind is scattered over the face of the earth to form nations that cannot understand each other.<sup>1</sup>

At this point in the narrative a fundamental question arises: What is the relationship between God and these nations? The answer to this most universal of all questions is given in Abraham's call and YHWH's salvation-historical plan that Gen 12:3 hints at: through Abraham "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." We note, however, that the story of Abraham's call not only *universalizes* the vision of God's people, whose foundational book of reference and identity is the book of Genesis. The story of Abraham also *particularizes* the vision of God's people; it narrows the historical range of vision: from now on the focus—is not on mankind but, suddenly, on a single human being with his family—then, a single, small nation.<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the last book of the Christian Bible, we are given the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, on which primeval conditions will have been restored, or, rather, intensified (Rev 21-22). God will not only be near, he will be man's neighbor. He will not only "walk in the garden at the time of the evening breeze" (Gen 3:8), but "he will dwell with them" (Rev 21:3). God will wipe every tear from their eyes—tears that result from the thorns and thistles that grew in the lives of people and in the societies that they formed as a result of their sin. There will be no more death, which had been God's punishment for sin. There will be no more mourning, crying, or pain, because "the first things have passed away" (21:4) and because God has made all things new (21:5-6). God dwells on the new earth that is illuminated by his glory: "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (21:24). In the middle of the city there are trees whose leaves are "for the healing of the nations" (22:2). What is the vision of the last book of the Christian canon for the nations? Does John refer here, and perhaps in other passages, to a future general salvation of all nations?

#### THE FINAL CONVERSION OF THE NATIONS IN RECENT INTERPRETATION

A major proponent of the view that John anticipates the conversion of the nations in the eschaton has been Mathias Rissi. He understands the vision of the New Jerusalem with the open gates (Rev 21:24-25) as a symbol of the availability of divine grace, and the vision of the consummated world (Rev 22:1-5) as a symbol of the un-

1. Translations will be from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

2. See Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Kaiser, 1969/1968) 1.167-78.

conditional grace of God that will be effectively and finally realized in universal salvation: "The lake of fire, or the second death, is now done away with, for Israel, the nations, and the kings of the earth have entered into the fullness of the light of the divine glory. Revelation exhibits a hope that embraces the entire creation."<sup>3</sup> In his most recent study Rissi comments: "God's dealings with the world aim at bringing the nations to the knowledge of himself. . . . The seer dares to believe far beyond any restrictions of salvation to those who already believe and to see all as being grasped by redemption at the end. 'All nations' encompasses the totality of the Gentiles. . . . Healed from the sickness of their sin and freed from the curse they will be servants of God and of the Lamb in Paradise."<sup>4</sup>

Richard Bauckham has presented the most extensive discussion on the nations in Revelation.<sup>5</sup> He links the content of the scroll that appeared in the vision of 5:1-9 and that was opened in 10:1-10<sup>6</sup> with the missionary witness and the death of the faithful Christians, portrayed in 11:1-13. It is in this passage where we see, according to Bauckham, the central prophetic interest of John with regard to the arrival of God's kingly rule on the earth. God pursues a twofold strategy by which he wants to save the nations from the dominion of the beast and bring them under his own, salvific rule (cf. 14:14-16; 15:3-4): (1) The sacrificial death of the Lamb (5:6), and (2) the prophetic and sacrificial witness of his followers who have been saved "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (5:9) in order to carry the gospel to all "peoples and tribes and languages and nations" (11:9; cf. 10:11). He concludes from the assumed identity of the two

3. M. Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Rev. 19:11-22:15* (SBT 2/23; London: SCM, 1972) 81 (*Die Zukunft der Welt* [Basel, 1966] 97); cf. idem, *Was ist und was geschehen soll danach* (ATANT 46; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1965) 136-37.

4. M. Rissi, *Die Hure Babylon und die Verführung der Heiligen* (BWANT 137; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995) 40-41 (my translation). See also Heinrich Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16a; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1974) 275: "Die 'Heilung der Heiden ist ihre Bekehrung.'" Similarly George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1971 [1966]) 139-40; Dieter Georgi, "Die Visionen vom himmlischen Jerusalem in Apk 21 und 22," in *Kirche* (FS G. Bornkamm; ed. D. Lührmann and G. Strecker; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1980) 351-72.

5. R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 238-337; see also idem, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 84-108. The following critique of Bauckham's interpretation of the fate of the nations in no way diminishes my admiration and gratitude for his work on the Book of Revelation, from which there is much to learn.

6. For the identification of the scrolls of Rev 5 and 10, see Fred D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source-Critical Perspective* (BZNW 54; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) 265-79; Bauckham, *Climax*, 243-57; differently, David E. Aune, *Revelation* (WBC 52A-C; Dallas: Word, 1997/1998) 1.xcix.

scrolls in chaps. 5 and 10 that the suffering of the church is offered, from chap. 11 on, as a better strategy for achieving the repentance of the nations than the (limited) judgments portrayed in chaps. 6-9.

Most interpreters who find a soteriological universalism in John's Revelation refer to 21:3, 24-27 and 22:2-3. Bauckham seeks to establish 11:3-13; 14:14-16; and 15:2-4 as passages in previous visions in which John prepares his readers for the final universalistic hope.<sup>7</sup> The vision of the New Jerusalem in 21:3-4 and 22:2-3 is but the climax of the theme of the conversion of the nations: John's vision has "all nations"—besides the historic nation of Israel and the eschatological people of God, that is, the church—living as covenant peoples in God's presence on the new, restored earth. Bauckham rejects the view that John's vision of the New Jerusalem refers only to the covenant people redeemed from all the nations as the inhabitants of the new world. And he repudiates the view that the covenant people are the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, while the nations and their kings live outside, sharing in the blessings of the new creation but relegated to some secondary status. In his view the most plausible interpretation sees John fusing the OT promises for the destiny of God's own people and the universal hope that all the nations will become God's people: "The history of the covenant people—both of the one nation Israel and of the church that is redeemed from all the nations—will find its eschatological fulfilment in the full inclusion of all the nations in its own covenant privileges and promises."<sup>8</sup> In a footnote appended to this statement Bauckham asserts, against M. Rissi, that "this does not, of course, mean that Revelation expects the salvation of each and every human being," since 21:8, 27, and 22:15 clearly indicate "that unrepentant sinners have no place in the New Jerusalem."<sup>9</sup> This disclaimer begs the question how John can envision "all the nations," including their kings, being fully included in the new creation blessed by God's presence, if each and every member of the nations does not find ultimate salvation. Unfortunately, Bauckham does not raise this question, the answer to which surely would make him either agree with M. Rissi or lead him to a reconsideration of his interpretation of 11:3-13; 14:14-16; 15:2-4; 21:3-4, 24-27; and 22:2-3. It is to these passages that we now turn.

7. For this question, see J. W. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup 70; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 228; generally, pp. 59-62.

8. Bauckham, *Climax*, 312-13 (quote, 313).

9. *Ibid.*, 313 n. 100.

## THE WITNESS OF THE FOLLOWERS OF THE LAMB (11:3-13)

I take the vision of Rev 11 as not referring in a literal sense to the city of Jerusalem with a rebuilt temple and two specific witnesses,<sup>10</sup> but as a figurative portrayal of the Gentile-Jewish church with its sacrificial living that includes courageous witness despite the realities of persecution.<sup>11</sup> The "great city" refers to the world that has been profaned by idolatry; the temple, the altar, the worshipers, the outer court, and the holy city stand for God's true people, the followers of the Lamb among whom God dwells on earth; the two witnesses represent the entire community of faith, whose prophetic mission is the valid witness to God's binding will on mankind and whose inescapable lot is the suffering that Jesus Christ himself experienced. The validity of the figurative interpretation can be established at least on the basis of the following facts: (1) The measuring of those who worship in the temple in 11:1: in the biblical and apocalyptic tradition people are not "measured" but counted;<sup>12</sup> (2) the explicit metaphorical identifications in 11:4 ("These are [οὗτοί εἰσιν] the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth") and in 11:8 ("the great city that is prophetically called [ἡτις καλεῖται πνευματικῶς] Sodom and Egypt"); (3) the description of the two witnesses: note in 11:5 the fire that "pours from their mouth and consumes their foes."<sup>13</sup>

10. Thus recently, e.g., Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 78-102. See also Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980 [1900; German orig., 1884]) 233-41; G. H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Oliphants, 1945) 182-84; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993 [1966]) 175-77; Willem J. Ouweneel, *Die Offenbarung Jesu Christi* (Bielefeld: Christliche Literatur-Verbreitung, 1995) 295-309; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

11. Recently and with extensive and fair discussion, Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999) 557-608, especially 559-71 (on the metaphors in 11:1-2), 573-75 (on the two witnesses). See also Eduard Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993 [1960]) 64-67; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCBC; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981 [1974/1978]) 176-87; Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster, 1994) 45-46; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburger Neues Testament; Regensburg: Pustet, 1996) 240-41; also Bauckham, *Climax*, 272-74.

12. Cf. Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1993) 119; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 243.

13. Thomas, *Revelation*, 90, insists that John thinks of literal fire but does not elaborate whether it literally issues from the mouth of the witnesses; Ouweneel, *Offenbarung*, 303, limits his observations to the exclamation: "Welch beeindruckenden Anblick werden diese zwei treuen Zeugen bieten!"

The measuring of the temple and of the believers who worship there (11:1-2) refers to the protection of the people of God in the last days, that have begun with the death of Jesus, their Lord, and that bring persecution (11:8 refers explicitly to Jesus' crucifixion). This assertion corresponds to two previous visions: (1) The vision of the 144,000 in Rev 7: God promises to his people, portrayed in their eschatological completeness, that the followers of the Lamb enjoy the reality of God's protective presence, which empowers them to remain loyal to Christ in the midst of persecution; (2) the vision of the woman in Rev 12-13 whom God takes to a safe place in the wilderness while her "children" are being attacked: God promises to the members of his people that they stand under divine protection during the messianic woes.

The narrative prophecy of 11:3-13 portrays the ministry and the mission of the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the seven golden lampstands that stand in God's presence (1:12, 20; 2:1) represent "the church as the true temple and the totality of the people of God" empowered primarily "to witness as a light uncompromisingly to the world,"<sup>14</sup> so "the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" in 11:4 represent the church in its role as witness. The number two, as is well known, derives from the biblical law requiring at least two legal witnesses in a courtroom (Deut 17:6; 19:15; cf. Num 35:30), a requirement that is taken up by Jesus (Matt 18:16) and that is probably connected with his practice of forming teams of two followers when he sent them "into the harvest" to witness to the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Luke 10:1-2).

The content of the proclamation of the church in 11:3-13 surely includes a call to repentance.<sup>15</sup> Note (1) the preceding context in which "the nations" (τὰ ἔθνη) are mentioned who trample over the "holy city," who despise God's law (note the identification with "Sodom" in 11:8), and who suppress God's people (note the identification with "Egypt" in 11:8); (2) the reference to the "sackcloth" (σάκκος, 11:3) that the two witnesses are wearing signals mourning or repentance, probably both;<sup>16</sup> (3) the reaction of "the inhabitants of the earth" (οἱ

14. Beale, *Revelation*, 207.

15. A. Satake, *Die Gemeindeordnung der Johannesapokalypse* (WMANT 21; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966) 120-21, emphasizes the silence of the text on the content of the message of the two witnesses; he asserts (pp. 121-33) that they do not preach repentance but act as God's agents in judging the world.

16. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 249, refers to Gen 37:34; Isa 3:24; 22:12; Jer 4:8; 6:26; Jonah 3:5-8; 2 Sam 21:10; Matt 11:21 par. Luke 10:13. Note that sometimes prophets are depicted as wearing sackcloth, "probably to exemplify the need for repentance and humility before God" (Aune, *Revelation*, 611, who refers to Isa 20:2; Zech 13:4; *Ascen. Isa.* 2:10; Mark 1:6).

κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, 11:10), who are identical with the members from "the peoples and tribes and languages and nations" (ἐκ τῶν λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν καὶ ἔθνῶν, 11:9).<sup>17</sup> The authority of the witnesses to strike the earth with plagues (11:6) implies the same (secondary) goal as the plagues of the seals (6:1-17; 8:1-5) and of the trumpets (8:6-9:21; 11:15-19) that may bring the members of the peoples and nations to repentance, as 9:20-21 could imply: "The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols . . . and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts";<sup>18</sup> (4) the fact that Christian witness, even though it may focus on the announcement of divine judgment, always includes the proclamation of the Gospel, which promises immediate and eternal salvation to those who believe in Jesus Christ (cf. John the Baptist's message or Paul's preaching in Athens).

Just as Jesus Christ is the "faithful witness" who has died and who was raised from the dead (1:5) and, just as Antipas the "faithful witness" in Pergamon held fast to the name of Jesus and was killed because he refused to deny his faith (2:13), so the entire church is commissioned to prophetic proclamation, a task that is to be fulfilled even in the tribulations of the last days—a task that is to be carried out because it has been promised God's protection and the authority to carry out signs of divine judgment.

The period of witness is characterized by the number 1260 days (11:3). This figure corresponds to 42 months or 3 1/2 years and is based on Daniel's prophecy of a final period of tribulation for God's covenant people in which the enemies of God's people seem to triumph (Dan 7:25; 12:7, 11; and perhaps 9:27). In Revelation it corresponds to (1) the 1260 days in which the "woman" in the wilderness is provided for by God (12:6); (2) the 42 months in which the Gentiles profane the holy city (11:2); (3) the 42 months in which the "beast" claims, in an arrogant and blasphemous manner, to possess authority over the affairs of the world (13:5); (4) the 3 1/2 years for which the "woman," that is, the church, has been promised divine protection. John uses these numbers to characterize the time of the church, from the death,

17. Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament 19; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984) 214; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998) 222.

18. Bauckham, *Climax*, 277; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 249, 252; on the relationship of the ministry of the two witnesses and the trumpet plagues, see Beale, *Revelation*, 585-86, who, however, thinks that the trumpet judgments are "not intended to evoke repentance but to punish because of the permanently hardened, unrepentant stance of the unbelievers toward God and his people" (472; cf. p. 517). See, however, the next point.

resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ until his return, as the final salvation-historical period, as the last days that have the constant potential to bring tribulation on God's covenant people as Satan with his demonic and earthly accomplices seeks to exploit the little time that he has left. This period is a time where the Christians are put to the test (11:2; 12:12; 13:5), a time of potential martyrdom (11:7-10), a time in which God stands by his people (11:3; 12:6, 14), and a time of mission and evangelism in which the Christians, despite continued unbelief (9:20-21), seek to reach tribes, languages, peoples, and nations with God's message (11:3-13).<sup>19</sup>

Does the sacrificial life and ministry of the church that remains faithful unto death on account of the witness for Jesus achieve at the end what the divine judgments could not achieve? Do the pagan peoples, tribes, and nations truly repent and worship the true God? The crucial verse is 11:13:

13a καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐγένετο σεισμὸς μέγας  
 13b καὶ τὸ δέκατον τῆς πόλεως ἔπεσεν  
 13c καὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῷ σεισμῷ ὀνόματα ἀνθρώπων χιλιάδες ἑπτὰ  
 13d καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἔμβοβοι ἐγένοντο  
 13e καὶ ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

Bauckham interprets 11:13d-e in the sense that there will be a mass end-time conversion of the nations: after the vindication of the witnesses and their message (11:11-13c) "the rest" (οἱ λοιποί, that is, those who survived the large earthquake, "were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (13d-e). The followers of the Lamb who die on account of their witness participate in the victory of the Lamb that has been won through his death on the cross and through his vindication in the resurrection: "The reason why, in the final period of world history, God will not deliver his faithful people by the slaughter of their enemies, as he did in the days of Moses, Elijah and Esther, but instead will allow them to be slaughtered by their enemies, is that this is the way in which the nations will be brought to repentance and faith, and the sovereignty over them transferred from the beast to the kingdom of God."<sup>20</sup> The arguments that Bauck-

19. Cf. Donatus Haugg, *Die zwei Zeugen: Eine exegetische Studie über Apok 11, 1-13* (NTA 17/1; Münster: Aschendorff, 1936) 29; Bauckham, *Climax*, 277-78; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 249-50; cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 646-47, who suggests (with others) that the figure of 42 months also echoes Israel's wanderings in the desert for 42 years.

20. Bauckham, *Climax*, 278-83 (quote, p. 283). Among interpreters who see 11:13b as referring to the conversion of the nations are Robert H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920 [reprint 1989]) 1.291; Haugg, *Zeugen*, 34; Caird, *Revelation*, 140; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 187; Jürgen Roloff, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (ZBKNT 18; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984) 118 (*The Revelation of John: A Continental Commentary* [Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993]);

ham adduces to support his interpretation in terms of a future conversion of the nations are not convincing.

First, the content of the scroll of Rev 10 is, according to 10:11 (δεῖσεν ἄλλιν προφητεῖσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς), further prophecy "against" (ἐπί) "peoples and nations and languages and many kings."<sup>21</sup> Most translations render ἐπί (+ dative) with "about" or "concerning" (RSV, NRSV, NIV, JB, NET; NEB has "over";<sup>22</sup> major German versions such as LÜ, EÜ, REÜ, GNB, and HfA, translate correspondingly), thus interpreting John's focus in what follows in terms of a more neutral, possibly prophetic, attitude toward the nations. Only the NJB translates "against"—that is, understands it as "a marker of opposition in a judicial or quasi-judicial context" (with *dativus incommodi*).<sup>23</sup> This interpretation of the preposition is surely correct:<sup>24</sup> (1) The phrase προφητεύω occurs in the LXX only 25 times, with 21 occurrences in Ezekiel and, with only three exceptions, always refers to prophecy "against" sinful Israel or another nation (cf. Jer 32:30 [MT Jer 25:30]; Ezek 4:7; 6:2; 11:4; 13:2, 17; 21:2; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 34:2; 35:2; 38:2; 39:1); note that 10:8-10 establishes an Ezekiel context with the allusion to Ezekiel's commission.<sup>25</sup>

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C. H. Giblin, "Revelation 11.1:-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration," *NTS* 30 (1984) 433-504, esp. pp. 444-46, 453; Harrington, *Revelation*, 124; Rissi, *Babylon*, 22; Osborne, *Revelation*, ad loc. There is no consensus about who the converted are: Charles sees a conversion of Jews; Haugg a conversion of apostate Christians; many conservative scholars see a conversion of those who have survived a specific earthquake in Jerusalem in the final period of world history; most interpret in terms of a conversion of those people who survived until the end of history.

21. Most translations relate πολλοῖς to all four nouns (cf. RSV, NRSV, NIV, NASB; also Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 237), whereas many commentators link it only with the last noun, βασιλεῦσιν (cf. Charles, *Revelation* 1, 269; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 62-63; Müller, *Offenbarung*, 199; Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 106; Aune, *Revelation*, 573; Beale, *Revelation*, 554), which seems to be correct: when John highlights the plurality of nations in his lists of four ethnic units, he uses πᾶν/πολλά at the beginning (5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 14:6; in 11:9: 17:15 πᾶν/πολλά is omitted). The only instance where (πᾶν/) πολλοί is mentioned at the end of the list is 10:11, where it follows "kings," which anticipates the next visions in which the kings will be judged.

22. Also Harrington, *Revelation*, 116.

23. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Society, 1989 [1988]) §90.34.

24. Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (Helps for Translators; UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1993) 162, note these two options, but do not discuss the issue. For the following arguments, see Aune, *Revelation*, 573-74; Beale, *Revelation*, 554-55, both referring to K. G. C. Newport, "Semitic Influence on the Use of some Prepositions in the Book of Revelation," *The Bible Translator* 37 (1986) 328-43, esp. pp. 330-31. Pace Bauckham, *Climax*, 263, 265-66.

25. Charles's reference to 22:16 in support for the meaning "concerning" (*Revelation*, 1.cxxxiii; cf. p. 269) is not convincing. The phrase μαρτυρῆσαι . . . ἐπί has a dative object, ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις; which, in chap. 22 and generally in Revelation (particularly in

(2) The fourfold phrase "peoples and nations and languages and many kings" (λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς, 10:11) is used negatively, as is indicated by the insertion of βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς. Note John's usage of lists of ethnic units:

5:9 ἕκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους  
 7:9 ἕκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν  
 10:11 ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς  
 11:9 ἕκ τῶν λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν καὶ ἔθνῶν  
 13:7 ἐπὶ πᾶσαν φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ ἔθνος  
 14:6 ἐπὶ πᾶν ἔθνος καὶ φυλὴν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ λαόν  
 17:15 λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι

In 5:9 and 7:9 the list of four ethnic units describes the multinational and multiracial character of the people who have been redeemed by the Lamb. In 11:9; 13:7-8; 14:6; and 17:15 the phrase is used of unbelievers who will be judged because of their identification with the beast or with Babylon.<sup>26</sup> (3) The exchange of φυλαῖς for βασιλεῦσιν establishes the negative character of the ethnic units. The repeatedly used phrase "the kings of the earth" (1:5; 6:15; 17:2; 18:3, 9; 19:19) refers to Christ's defeated enemies,<sup>27</sup> to which the seven and the ten kings of 17:10 and 12 belong as well.<sup>28</sup> (4) The context of Ezek 2-3,

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chaps. 2-3!), are the object of God's blessing, whereas the dative object(s) in 10:11 is λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς which, in the context of what follows, are the object of divine judgment.

26. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 355; for the correspondence to the similar formulas in Daniel, see p. 359; cf. also Bauckham, *Climax*, 326-37.

27. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 191, 555.

28. The possible allusion to Matt 10:18 ("and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles"; par. Luke 21:12) and Mark 13:9b ("and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them"; par. Matt 24:18) is understood in opposite ways: Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 111, takes the "old early Christian apocalyptic tradition" of Mark 13:9 and Luke 21:12 as proof for the positive character of the mission that is given to the church in Rev 10:11, because the reference to the witness before kings and nations describes the task that the church has publicly before the world. Aune, *Revelation*, 574, thinks that Matt 10:18 and Mark 13:9 confirm the negative character of the Christian witness. However, the witness in Matt 10:18 and Mark 13:9 is a positive "witness to them" (cf. e.g. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988-1991] 1.184; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993] 766, who correctly points out that an accusatory witness against Gentile governors and kings makes no sense at all, "for they would not have heard the good news before and therefore would not yet have had opportunity to reject it and persecute its preachers"). If the witness before kings in Matt 10:18 and Mark 13:9 is a positive, missionary-evangelistic witness, and if the witness about the kings in Rev 10:13 is a "negative" pronouncement of judgment, it seems preferable not to see an allusion to Matt 10:18 and Mark 13:9 in Rev 10:13.

which is the background for the scroll vision in Rev 10:8-10, confirms the interpretation of 10:13 in the sense of "prophesying against" peoples and nations. Ezekiel's message is primarily one of judgment, a fact that explains why the scroll is described as displaying "lamentation and mourning and woe" (Ezek 2:10). (5) The following vision (11:1-13), which develops the ideas of chap. 10, focuses on God's judgment on the "peoples and tribes and languages and nations" (11:9). The prophecy of judgment on the nations that was predominant in the early chapters continues after chap. 10. John's focus from chap. 11 onward is, as G. Beale correctly observes, "not on a new strategy for converting the world but on the world's rejection of the church's witness."<sup>29</sup> We conclude that the content of the scroll in Rev 10 does not support the view that John relates to the church a missionary mandate for an evangelistic ministry to the nations, thus anticipating the conversion of the Gentiles who respond to the witness of the church.

Second, the term ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο (11:13d) hardly has the positive sense of "fear of the Lord." (1) John uses the word "fear" indeed in the positive sense of worshipful stance toward God, but (i) only in the subsequent context (11:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5), (ii) often with clear reference to "the prophets and saints" (11:18) or "his servants" (19:5), (iii) usually in the context of divine judgment on the nations (11:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5), and (iv) never with the use of the noun φόβος, which is used only negatively in Rev (11:18; 18:10, 15).<sup>30</sup> (2) In the preceding context the notion of "fear" is not used in the sense of the "fear of the Lord" but negatively in the sense of being afraid of God (cf. the μη[δεν] φοβοῦ in 1:17; 2:10). (3) ἔμφοβοι with a form of γίνομαι always means "frightened" or "terrified" in the NT, never implying faith, even though both believers and nonbelievers may be in view (Luke 24:5, 37; Acts 10:4; 24:25). (4) The possible allusion to the fear of the Philistine sailors in Jonah 1:9-10 and 16 confirms the interpretation of "fear" in terms of anxious apprehension: after the prophet tells them that he worships YHWH the God of heaven (τὸν κύριον θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐγὼ σέβομαι, v. 9), the pagan sailors are terribly afraid (ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες φόβον μέγαν, v. 10; ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ἄνδρες φόβῳ μεγάλῳ τὸν κύριον, v. 16) and offer sacrifices to Jonah's God. There is no hint that they stopped worshiping their own gods or that they joined God's covenant people. (5) The parallels in Rev 9:20; 19:21; and 20:5 that also speak of οἱ λοιποὶ use the phrase with regard to unbelievers who experience the beginning of the last judgment.

29. Beale, *Revelation*, 531.

30. In 13:13 several MSS read ἐν φοβῶ instead of ἔμφοβοι: ⚭ 2351 pc lat sy<sup>ph.hmg.</sup>; cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 605.

Third, the phrase "[the rest] gave glory to the God of heaven" (ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 11:13e) is generally used in a positive sense by John, that is, in the sense of willing acknowledgment of God. The phrase "to give glory to God" is, of course, often used for expressing true covenant faith (e.g., Ps 29:1-2; Isa 42:12; Jer 13:16; Dan 5:21-23; in the NT: Matt 5:16; Luke 7:16; 17:18; 18:43; 1 Pet 2:12). In Revelation glory is given to God by John (1:6), by the four living creatures who glorify God (4:9 [using δόξα with δίδωμι] 11), the heavenly angels (5:12-13), the angels surrounding God's throne (7:12), and the saints in heaven (15:4), the assembly of the believers at the consummation of history (19:1, 7); in 16:9 the phrase refers to people who blaspheme God and do not repent (16:9: "they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory"). The analogy of Dan 4:34 may indicate that John does indeed anticipate the conversion of the nations: Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the "great" city (Dan 4:30; Rev 11:8), who has received divine punishment, praises and honors the Most High (δοξάσαν τῷ ὑψίστῳ, Theodotion: δοξάζω τὸν βασιλέα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; Rev 11:13e: ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ).

However, several factors make this interpretation of Rev 11:13d-e in terms of a future conversion of the nations unlikely: (1) In the OT the phrase often occurs in the context of judgment doxology (*Gerichtsdoxologie*)<sup>31</sup> and refers to the praise that God claims and enforces (by the circumstances of his intervention) on account of his majesty as creator of the universe, without reference to a conversion of those who are forced to praise God (cf. the Philistines in 1 Sam 6:5; the nations in Ps 96:7-8 and Isa 42:12; perhaps also Achan in Josh 7:19) or with reference to the judgment that is about to occur (the kings and the mighty in *I En.* 62:6-13; 63:2-12). (2) The glorification of God by the nations in Rev 11:13e is not the result of missionary proclamation by the church but the result of judgment.<sup>32</sup> This confirms that their "glorification" of God is judgment doxology. And we must not forget the context of 11:1-13: the passage belongs to the second woe (note 11:14a, "the second woe has passed") and to the sixth trumpet vision (9:12). In the seventh trumpet vision (11:15-19), the third and final woe is fulfilled—the rage of the nations is overcome by the wrath of God, the enemies of the followers of the Lamb are defeated, the disobedient destroyers of the earth stand before the judgment seat of God and are judged, and all those who were faithful to the Lord God Almighty, all who fear his name, "both small and great," receive their reward in the kingdom of God and of his Messiah that has arrived

31. Cf. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 258-59.

32. Rissi, *Babylon*, 22 n. 52.

(11:15, 18-19). (3) The analogy of Nebuchadnezzar does not necessarily prove Bauckham's point.<sup>33</sup> His acknowledgment of God's sovereignty was only temporary, since the next chapter in Daniel relates his attempt to force everyone to worship an idol and presumably simply meant that he added YHWH to the pantheon of gods he was in the habit of worshipping. This would not be "saving faith" from Israel's point of view (cf. Exod 20:3-5; Deut 6:4-15). (4) The interpretation in terms of less than saving faith is confirmed by the fact that John speaks of a "great earthquake" in 11:13a (καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ ἐγένετο σεισμὸς μέγας), which functions in John as a reference to the commencement of the last judgment: the sixth seal brought a "great earthquake" (6:12), followed by the consummation of the seventh seal, which again mentions an earthquake (together with "thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning," 8:5), as does the seventh trumpet (11:19) and the seventh bowl (16:18).<sup>34</sup>

Fourth, the partial effect of the earthquake ("a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake," 11:13c-d) is not meant to indicate that the survivors become genuine believers who glorify God. The reference to 7,000 killed may be an allusion to the 7,000 faithful associated with Elijah (1 Kgs 19:18) in terms of a *lex talionis* penalty: "Just as the figurative seven thousand faithful witnesses (= the two witnesses) were killed, so must their persecutors be killed."<sup>35</sup> Or the number 7,000 could signify the totality of unbelievers who are judged at the conclusion of history. The figure "one tenth" is more difficult to interpret.<sup>36</sup> If the figure has been used for the survivors of divine judgment (cf. Isa 6:13; Amos 5:3; also *Jub.* 10:9), its use in 11:13 "would be a reversal of that conception."<sup>37</sup>

Fifth, the focus of Rev 11:11-13 is not the fate of the inhabitants of the "great city" but the fate of the two witnesses, that is, the fate of the church. John assures the believers who continue faithfully in their witness for Christ that nobody can take away their future as

33. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 603-4, who concludes that the allusion to Dan 4 in Rev 11 "enforces the idea that Rev. 11:13 is speaking of those who acknowledge God's heavenly sovereignty but remain unbelievers."

34. Muller, *Offenbarung*, 216, comments: "Der festgestellte Kontrast zwischen anfänglichem Jubel der Welt and ihrem nachträglichen Erschrecken dient dazu, die Macht Gottes, die diesen Wandel bewirkt, besonders eindrücklich zu machen—die Macht dessen nämlich, der die christliche Gemeinde in ihren Zeugen endgültig bewahrt."

35. Beale, *Revelation*, 602.

36. Those who interpret 11:1-13 literally link the figure with the 70,000 inhabitants Jerusalem might have had in the first century, thus arriving at the 7,000 casualties of the earthquake. However, it is far from certain that Jerusalem had 70,000 inhabitants: Josephus mentions 120,000 inhabitants on the basis of a figure given by Hecataeus; on the various estimates, see Aune, *Revelation*, 628.

37. *Ibid.*, 627.

those who have been called to live in God's presence, despite the rage of a hostile and united world and despite the prospect of a martyr's death. The expansion of the sixth trumpet vision in 11:1-13 has thus the same function as the expansion of the sixth seal vision in chap. 7: John confirms that the existence and witness of the church cannot be vanquished by tribulation that may take place before Christ returns, because the church will reach the consummation through suffering.<sup>38</sup>

Sixth, Bauckham cannot explain how the vindication of the followers of the Lamb in 11:11-12 may lead the nations to repentance and faith, when he emphasizes simultaneously that the nations do not need to see the literal resurrection of the Christian martyrs before being convinced by the truth of their witness: They are converted when they recognize that the martyrs participate in Christ's triumph over death.<sup>39</sup> But he does not explain how this may actually happen, even though the plausibility of his interpretation depends on the implied historical possibility (since conversion is always an *historical* event!).

We conclude in regard to the thrust of 11:3-13: the life and ministry of the church that always includes the task of faithful evangelistic witness is a binding obligation in the tribulations of the last days until the *parousia* of Christ. As believers—missionaries and evangelists, teachers, and Christians in general—live and minister to fulfill this obligation as faithful witnesses, made effective with divine authority, they encounter intense opposition and aggressive persecution, as was the case in the days of Jesus and the apostles. The reality of the world and of the powers that rule the world requires the willingness to be faithful even unto death. But the reality of God assures them that he will eventually vanquish his enemies and that they will be vindicated in his heavenly presence. John does not give his readers a vision of ultimate salvation,<sup>40</sup> where the disobedient nations will have been converted to the worship of the one true God. John wants to encourage the Christians in Asia Minor for whom he writes by reminding them that the obligation to sacrificial life and ministry for the Gospel has not been annulled even in times when society wants to silence them. He reminds them that God's promise of salvation and vindication remains valid even and precisely in times of dangerous antagonism. He reminds them that the death of Christians, killed by a mob or executed by city magistrates, is not the end. And he reminds them that at the end of history even their enemies will be forced to acknowledge God's reality and sovereignty. But the will-

38. Cf. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 259.

39. Bauckham, *Climax*, 281.

40. Pace Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 118.

ingness to live in fellowship with God in the present time, the period of the messianic last days—which means following the Lamb—is the unrenounceable prerequisite for eternal salvation.<sup>41</sup>

#### THE HOUR OF THE HARVEST (14:14-16)

The visions of Rev 12:1-15:4 (the center of the book of Revelation) form the longest interruption of John's narration of the cycles of divine judgment (in 15:5 the vision of the bowl judgments begins). These visions enable the churches in Asia Minor to understand the conflict in which the followers of the Lamb are involved. In a series of seven "signs" John narrates the conflict between the church and the world, beginning immediately before the birth of the Messiah (12:1-6)—or perhaps beginning with the Garden of Eden (12:9), where the conflict between the woman and the serpent began—and ending with the return of Christ and the last judgment (14:14-20; 15:1-4). The links between 12:1-15:4 and 10:1-11:13 (e.g., the eschatological "time" of the 42 months or 3 1/2 years, 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5) indicate that John writes about the same events.<sup>42</sup> The dominant theme of chaps. 12-13 is the violent conflict between the powers of evil and the Lamb and his army who stand on Mount Zion, resisting God's enemies triumphantly (14:1-5).

According to Bauckham, the messages of the three angels in 14:6-11 symbolize the effect of the confrontation between the powers of evil and the church upon the nations of the world. The message of the first angel (14:6-7) is a positive invitation extended to the nations to repent and to worship the one true God. The second angel reinforces the message of the first angel by announcing the fall of Babylon (14:8). The third angel reinforces this message by proclaiming judgment on those who do not repent but insist on worshiping the beast (14:9-11). Thus, the three angels present the option of repentance or of continued idolatry resulting in divine judgment. This twofold option is underscored by the vision in 14:14-20 that speaks of a twofold outcome of the history of mankind: the image of the grape harvest (14:17-20) symbolizes God's judgment on the nations, while the image of the grain harvest (14:14-16) symbolizes the gathering of the converted nations into the kingdom of God.<sup>43</sup>

41. Cf. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 261

42. Cf. recently Bauckham, *Climax*, 284; Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 191-92; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 269-70; Beale, *Revelation*, 622-23.

43. Bauckham, *Climax*, 283-96; for other interpreters who hold that 14:14-16 refers to the gathering in of the elect at the end, and that only 14:17-20 portrays judgment, see Beale, *Revelation*, 776 n. 489, who mentions Alford, Swete, Holtz, Farrer, Ladd, Wilcock, Prigent, Aune, Krodel, Mulholland and P. E. Hughes; add Theodor Zahn, *Die*

Bauckham's interpretation of the grain harvest derives from three considerations. (1) The followers of the Lamb who are victorious through martyrdom "have been redeemed from humankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb" (14:4). The notion of the firstfruits requires that there will be "a full harvest of which the firstfruits are the token and pledge."<sup>44</sup> (2) The grain harvest differs from the grape harvest (for which John mentions the two actions of gathering the grapes into the winepress and treading the winepress) in that only one action is specified: the reaping. The fact that John does not describe the grain harvest in terms of threshing and winnowing, traditional images of judgment, indicates that it is a positive image referring to the ingathering of the nations of the earth. (3) The grain harvest is carried out by "one like the Son of Man" (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, 14:14). This literal allusion to Dan 7:13-14 (used only here and in Rev 1:13) must be interpreted in the sense of that passage: the son of man in Dan 7 appears not as judge but as the person who receives his universal kingdom. Bauckham concludes that Rev 14:14-16 signals the extension of Christ's kingdom from the church to the nations.<sup>45</sup>

Bauckham's interpretation of 14:14 is not entirely impossible. In biblical tradition, reaping can have a positive meaning (John 4:35-38), and the absence of a reference to threshing, almost always a negative metaphor, may signal that this grain harvest refers to the eschatological salvation of those "harvested." However, this interpretation is not as obvious as Bauckham thinks. Note the following considerations.

First, the fact that the Christian believers are characterized as "firstfruit" does not automatically lead to the conclusion that there is to be further fruit that will be harvested. (1) The reference to "firstfruits" may serve to reinforce the certainty of the "harvest", that is, of complete, visible salvation after Christ's return, in the sense of an eschatological pledge (cf. Rom 8:23).<sup>46</sup> (2) There is evidence that the term "firstfruits" can be taken as a holistic concept, expressing the totality of Israel (as in Jer 2:2-3; cf. also 2 Kgs 19:30-31; Sir 24:9, 25-26); note that Israel is called God's "firstborn" (Exod 4:22; Jer 31:8), a concept that is related to that of "firstfruits." This concept of a reference to a totality with no thought of more "fruits" to come also occurs in

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*Offenbarung des Johannes* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1986 [1924/1926]) 517, who asserts that John paints "ein Bild der fortzusetzenden Heidenmission, welcher ein die Welt umspannender Erfolg verheißen wird."

44. Bauckham, *Climax*, 291-92.

45. Bauckham, *ibid.*, 296, at least acknowledges that the question is not answered in Rev 14 whether the nations will accept the witness of the church and comprehend the death of the church's witnesses as triumph over the beast or whether they will continue to be led astray into worshipping the beast.

46. Cf. A. Sand, *Exegetisches Wörterbuch des Neuen Testaments* 1.279.

the OT with regard to crops and land (Ezek 48:8, 10, 20 LXX). This means that, as in Jas 1:18 ("he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures"), the term "firstfruits" in 14:4 may affirm that the redeemed believers inhabiting the new Jerusalem (Zion) are "the beginning of the rest of the new creation, *not* an anticipation of more people to be redeemed."<sup>47</sup>

(3) The characterization of the believers as "firstfruits" may also serve to remind them, in the context of the graphic description of the conflict between the dangerous powers of evil and the church in Rev 12-14, that they are God's possession and thus under his protection.

(4) The context 14:14-20 suggests that believers are "firstfruits" of God's harvest, not in the course of history where the nations might (still) repent and turn to Christ,<sup>48</sup> but at the end of history where the unbelieving nations will be judged.<sup>49</sup> A reference to the conversion of the nations at this point would be plausible only if it had been mentioned, or hinted at, in the previous visions. But this is not the case.<sup>50</sup>

Second, the clause "for the hour to reap has come" (14:15) signals that the grain harvest of 14:14-16 refers only to punishment, as G. Beale convincingly argues.<sup>51</sup> (1) If this phrase in 14:15 develops 14:7 ("for the hour of his judgment has come"), the metaphor of "reaping" portrays the notion of judgment in the earlier verse that clearly speaks of the last judgment of the nations. (2) The term ὥρα refers in the other nine passages in which it occurs in Revelation to the judgment of the unfaithful, particularly the nations and Babylon the Great (3:3, 10; 9:15; 11:13; 14:7; 17:12-13; 18:10, 17, 19).

Third, the missing reference to threshing and winnowing must not be overinterpreted. The meaning of metaphors, always potentially variable, is to be determined primarily in the immediate literary context in which they are used. (1) The image of the grain harvest could perhaps have a twofold significance, similar to the description of the *parousia* in 14:14: it may refer to the return of Christ as effecting the ingathering of the elect into his kingdom, and it may refer at the

47. Beale, *Revelation*, 743.

48. This possibility is indicated in the message of the first angel in 14:6-7, as the use of the term εὐαγγέλιον and the possible allusion to Ps 96:2 indicate (Bauckham, *Climax*, 286-89; Osborne, *Revelation*, ad loc.).

49. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 223-24; Beale, *Revelation*, 743-44.

50. The interpretation of Aune, *Revelation*, 818, who after a long discussion of the various meanings of the term ἀπαρχή in various contexts concludes that it should be taken "in terms of a widespread Greek understanding of the term . . . as people who have been devoted to the deity as servants," is not convincing, given the strong evidence of the primary importance of the biblical tradition for the message and the metaphors of John. Still, Aune asserts that "it makes little sense, however, to construe ἀπαρχή as the first of a set, the others of which will follow, i.e., all humanity."

51. Beale, *Revelation*, 774.

same time to the judgment of those who did not repent and who are sentenced to eternal condemnation. That is, the metaphor of the grain harvest may be a general picture of the coming judgment.<sup>52</sup> This understanding of the grain harvest does not necessarily imply a conversion of the nations. (2) If the grain harvest of 14:14-16 has to be interpreted in connection with the firstfruits of 14:4, the former expanding on the latter, John would speak of the redemption of the believers in 14:14-16 and of the judgment of the rest in 14:17-20.<sup>53</sup> The figurative use of "harvest" does not by necessity refer to redemption. Harvesting is sometimes a metaphor for judgment (Jer 51:33; Mic 4:12-13; Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17), and the probable allusion of 14:15-16 to Matt 13:30, 39-42 confirms this interpretation.<sup>54</sup> Matthew 13:30, 39-42 mentions a harvest in the sense of gathering unbelievers, has angels as reapers, and relates this event to the "end of the age" and to the authority of the "Son of man." Still, John does not hint at a mass conversion of people and nations that are hostile at the present time. (3) The content of the programmatic messages of the three angels in 14:6-11 who proclaim the coming judgment makes it unlikely, however, that the grain harvest signifies the gathering of the elect (or, more generally, of those who repented).<sup>55</sup> (4) The allusion in 14:14-20 to Joel 3:13 [MT 4:13] can indeed be interpreted as a twofold metaphor describing the final battle in which God vanquishes the evil powers: the Joel text, the only OT passage where harvesting with a sickle is spoken of metaphorically, speaks only of judgment.<sup>56</sup> Beale takes issue with Bauckham's claim that John twists Joel's meaning by turning the harvest image into a positive picture of redemption, pointing out the fact that "John uses the OT consistently with its contextual meaning, even when creatively developing it."<sup>57</sup> (5) The parallel pronouncements in 14:17-19 confirm that the metaphor of the grain harvest in 14:15-16 refers to the judgment of unbelieving mankind:

15 καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ τοῦ  
ναοῦ

κράζων ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ  
τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῆς νεφέλης

18 καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος [ἐξῆλθεν] ἐκ τοῦ  
θυσιαστηρίου [ὁ] ἔχων ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τοῦ  
πυρός  
καὶ ἐφώνησεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ  
τῷ ἔχοντι τὸ δρέπανον τὸ ὄξυ λέγων

52. Mounce, *Revelation*, 278.

53. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 774.

54. Beale, *Revelation*, 777.

55. Caird, *Revelation*, 190-94, relates both metaphors to the ingathering of the elect, which is implausible in view of the "heading" of 14:14.

56. Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 228-29; Muller, *Offenbarung*, 270; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 338; Beale, *Revelation*, 774-75, who also points to Zech 5:1-3 LXX for the image of a "flying sickle," implied in Rev 14:14 and 17 as a picture of imminent judgment.

57. Beale, *Revelation*, 777-78. See generally his *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

14 ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ δρέπανον ὄξυ  
Πέμψον τὸ δρέπανόν σου  
καὶ θερίσον

ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα θερίσαι  
ὅτι ἐξηράνθη ὁ θερισμὸς τῆς γῆς  
16 καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τῆς  
νεφέλης  
τὸ δρέπανον αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν  
καὶ εθερίσθη ἡ γῆ

Πέμψον σου τὸ δρέπανον τὸ ὄξυ  
καὶ τρύγησον τοὺς βότρυας τῆς  
ἀμπέλου τῆς γῆς  
ὅτι ἤκμασαν αἱ σταφυλαὶ αὐτῆς

19 καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ἄγγελος

τὸ δρέπανον αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν  
καὶ ἐτρύγησεν τὴν ἀμπελον τῆς γῆς  
καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν ληνὸν  
τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μέγαν

Fourth, Bauckham's argument regarding the context of Dan 7:13-14 is not convincing. (1) The specific meaning of the allusion in 14:14-16 to Daniel's vision must be established in the context of Rev 14. It is implausible that the proclamation of the angels in 14:6-11 hints at a potentially twofold outcome of the history of mankind, illustrated in the two metaphors in 14:14-20. The message that the three "other" angels (14:15, 17, 18) convey is addressed to present Christian believers who persevered in the midst of opposition, who kept God's commandments, and who held fast to their faith in Jesus (14:12): they are pronounced blessed (14:13) as God triumphs over his enemies and over the enemies of his people. The judgment metaphors confirm the message of the angels. The believers for whom John writes Revelation are assured that God and his Spirit guarantee their salvation, just as God and his Messiah will be vindicated visibly and irrevocably as ruler and judge of the world at Christ's return. (2) Even though the tradition of the coming of "one like a son of man sitting on a cloud" usually speaks of both redemption and judgment (cf. Matt 24:30 in the context of Matt 24:27-51; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Rev 1:7; 1:13-20), the context in 14:15-20 suggests that only the Son of man's role as judge is in mind in 14:14.<sup>58</sup> (3) In regard to Dan 7:13-14 itself, we must notice that the "son of man" in Dan 7 is not a figure who simply receives people into his universal kingdom, as Bauckham suggests. The son of man represents the saints, and Dan 7:22 asserts that "judgment was given for the saints of the Most High." We also note that the preceding context in Dan 7:9-12 describes a courtroom in which the judgment of the fourth beast is declared.<sup>59</sup> And we further note that, whereas in Dan 7:13 LXX the "one like a son of man" is said to "come" with the cloud (ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ . . . ἦρχετο), Rev 14:14 asserts that he "sits" on the cloud (ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον), probably

58. Cf. recently Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 337; Aune, *Revelation*, 842, 844; Beale, *Revelation*, 770.

59. Beale, *Revelation*, 777.

reminding the readers of the "sitting" of the judge.<sup>60</sup> (4) The fact that the harvest instrument is a δρέπανον ὄξύ ("sharp sickle") indicates that judgment is in view. The metaphorical use of the term δρέπανον often has an extremely negative meaning, signaling death, destruction, and judgment (cf. Zech 5:1-5 LXX; *T. Abr.* 4:11; 8:9, 10; *Vit. Proph.* 3:6-7).<sup>61</sup> In 14:17 the identical phrase is used to describe the harvest instrument for the grape harvest. (5) Even though in biblical tradition reaping can have a positive meaning (John 4:35-38), it often has a negative significance (cf. Job 4:8; Prov 22:8; Isa 17:4-5; Jer 12:13; 51:33; Hos 8:7; Gal 6:7-8). And, as Aune has pointed out, in some rabbinical texts the two harvests of Joel 3:13 were both understood negatively (*Midr. Ps.* 8,1).<sup>62</sup> Thus, the twofold narration of judgment in 14:14-16 and 14:17-20 "emphasizes the severity and unqualified nature of the punishment."<sup>63</sup> The negative metaphor of the grape harvest is placed last for emphasis, hinting in 14:20 at the worldwide destruction of the impious<sup>64</sup> that will be described in more detail in 19:17-21.

#### THE WORSHIP OF THE NATIONS (15:2-4)

In Rev 15 John resumes his description of the messianic judgments (15:1). After the symbols of the seals and of the trumpets he now uses the symbol of the bowls (15:7; 16:1), which often symbolizes God's wrath in the biblical tradition.<sup>65</sup> Before John describes, for the third and last time, the plagues of divine judgment on a godless world (15:5-16:21), he relates a hymn of praise about the redemption that God has provided by the mission of the Lamb (15:2-4). John writes a new version of the "Song of Moses" in Exod 15:1-18 (cf. Deut 32), as did Isaiah (12:1-2, 4-6) and some Qumran Essenes (4QFlor 1:2-7) before him. Using Jer 10:6-7; Ps 86:9-10 [LXX 85:9-10]; and Ps 98:1-2, John interprets the deliverance at the Red Sea, in the

60. Cf. A. P. Schaik, "Ἄλλος ἄγγελος in Ap 14," in *L'Apocalyptique johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; BETL 53; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1980) 217-28, esp. p. 223 with n. 16; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 337.

61. Cf. Aune, *Revelation*, 843. If the "one like a son of man" is interpreted not as a reference to the divine Christ, but to an angelic being, one is not forced to link the "harvesting angel" of 14:14 with the early Christian tradition, going back to Jesus, that the reaping angels gather the elect (cf. Matt 13:39; Mark 13:26-27 par. Matt 24:30-31); Jewish tradition knows angels of punishment (*1 En.* 53:3; 56:1; 62:11; 63:1; 66:1; *3 En.* 32:2; 32:1; 33:1; *b. Šabb.* 55a, 88a), as does John (Rev 9:15); cf. Aune, *ibid.*, 843.

62. Aune, *ibid.*, 845.

63. Beale, *Revelation*, 774-75.

64. Cf. Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 155; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 339; Talbert, *Apocalypse*, 67; also George IV. Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy* (Mellen Biblical Commentary 22; Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen 1993) 382-83.

65. Cf. Isa 51:17ff.; Jer 25:15ff.; 49:12-13; Ezek 23:33; Hab 2:16; Ps 75:8.

victory over the Egyptians, in terms of the new, eschatological exodus that will bring God's people into the promised land of God's eternal kingdom.<sup>66</sup>

Bauckham understands 15:4 ("Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed") in terms of a conversion of the nations.<sup>67</sup> However, it is a non sequitur to link the effect of God's mighty deeds at the Red Sea on the nations who heard about them (Exod 15:14-16) with the effect that the vindication of the martyrs by God's eschatological victory has on the nations, interpreting the latter in terms of a conversion of the nations who come to worship the one true God (15:4). His conclusion that John's use of OT passages shifts "the emphasis in the significance of the new exodus, from an event by which God delivers his people by judging their enemies, to an event that brings the nations to acknowledge the true God," is unlikely.<sup>68</sup>

First, the nations of Exod 15:14-16 heard and trembled (ἤκουσαν ἔθνη καὶ ὠργίσθησαν). Their terror is specified in that the inhabitants of Philistia are "seized by birth pangs," the chiefs of Edom are "dismayed," the leaders of Moab are "seized by trembling," and all the inhabitants of Canaan "melted away." Verse 16 summarizes: "Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O LORD, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by." The nations are not led to repentance, conversion, and a joyous recognition of Israel's God; they are terrified and silenced, and they remain dangerous enemies of God's people. The broader context of the Song of Moses in Deut 32 also "underscores the idea of judgment of Israel's enemy leading to Israel's redemption."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, Jer 10 emphasizes that Israel and the nations who refuse to fear God will be judged.

Second, it is correct that John alludes in 15:4 to the OT tradition of the pilgrimage of the nations to worship God in Jerusalem/Zion (cf. Isa 2:2-4; 14:1-2; 45:14; 60:1-3; 66:19-21; Jer 16:19; Zech 8:20-23; 14:9). However, John differs—perhaps deliberately?—from this tradition in that he omits reference to a proclamation before the nations (differently Isa 66:19: "And from them I will send survivors to the nations,

66. On John's exegetical method in Rev 15:2-4, see Bauckham, *Climax*, 297-306.

67. *Ibid.*, 306: "Just as the latter led to the awed recognition of his deity by the nations who heard of them (Exod 15:14-16), so the former leads to the repentance and worship of all the nations (Rev 15:4)." See also Charles, *Revelation*, 2.37; Caird, *Revelation*, 198-99; Rissi, *Zukunft*, 99-100; *idem*, *Babylon*, 71; Harrington, *Revelation*, 159-60; apparently also Aune, *Revelation*, 876, 1172.

68. Beale, *Revelation*, 799.

69. Beale, *ibid.*, 799.

to Tarshish, Put, and Lud who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations"), nor does he mention a conscious decision of the nations to turn to God and to Jerusalem (as does Isa 2:3-4: "And many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths"; similarly Jer 16:19; Zech 8:21).<sup>70</sup> On the contrary, in the broader context of 15:2-4 and the bowl visions, John underscores continual impenitence (cf. 16:9, 11, 21: "They were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory . . . and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds . . . until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague").

Third, the context indicates that the polarity between the redeemed and the unredeemed that characterizes the past and the present continues to determine future reality. (1) In 15:1 John introduces the seven angels with the seven last plagues with whom the wrath of God "is ended"—that is, the bowl visions "portray the full-orbed wrath of God in a more intense manner than any of the previous woe visions."<sup>71</sup> (2) The Exodus tradition of the crossing of the Red Sea, to which 15:2-4 alludes, is controlled by the same polarity. (3) The "sea of glass mixed with fire" (15:2a) and the "sea of glass" beside which stand those who "conquered the beast and its image" (15:2b) are a reference to the church that stands victoriously in heaven while the rest of mankind is judged, as Pharaoh's army drowned in the fiery Red Sea of God's wrath.<sup>72</sup>

Fourth, the cause of the universal recognition of God's rule in 15:3b–c is the comprehensive rule of God: he is the "Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ) and the "King of the nations" (ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν). This description seems to imply that the nations are forced to recognize God's sovereignty. This is confirmed by the rhetorical question in 15:4a: "Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?"—a question that underlines the inescapability of this acknowledgment in the last judgment.<sup>73</sup>

Fifth, the worship of God by the nations is grounded by the first ὄτι-clause of 15:4 in God's holiness. This means that the reference to

70. Cf. Müller, *Offenbarung*, 275; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 345.

71. Beale, *Revelation*, 788.

72. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 75-76.

73. Müller, *Offenbarung*, 275; see Adolf Pohl, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Wuppertaler Studienbibel; Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1975/1976 [1969/1971]) 2.176.

the nations serves the glorification of God. John does not intend to make a pronouncement on the fate of the nations at this point.

Sixth, the third ὅτι-clause of 15:4 grounds God's worship by the nations in the "righteous actions" (NIV, NEB) or "judgments" (NRSV) of God. The term δικαιώματα may refer either to God's "righteous judgments" in terms of the punishment of the ungodly or positively to the vindication of the saints, or perhaps to both.<sup>74</sup> The parallel statement in 16:5-7, belonging to the same context of the bowl visions, confirms that a "negative" interpretation of δικαιώματα (in terms of punishment of the ungodly) should not be excluded. Note that the "angel of the waters" says: "You are just (δίκαιος), O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged (ἔκρινας) these things; because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"—to which "the altar" responds: "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου)!" The nations will be forced to recognize God's acts of judgment as just. To say that this recognition is conversion is not warranted by the text or its context.<sup>75</sup>

Seventh, the interpretation of 15:2-4 must also take the addressees of John's Revelation into account: believers in Asia Minor who face difficult and dangerous situations. The Song of Moses, interpreted by John as the eschatological Song of the Lamb, assures them that God's acts of judgment, described in the next cycle of visions, serves to procure and guarantee for them salvation.<sup>76</sup> How are the persecuted believers to draw from the hymn in 15:2-4 strength and courage to persevere if the hostile nations will be converted anyway in the end?

#### THE OPEN GATES OF THE NEW JERUSALEM (21:1-8)

The vision in 21:1-8 that describes the transition to God's new creation narrates the effect of the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem to

74. Cf. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1970 [1926, 1953]) 131-32. Beale, *Revelation*, 798, speaks of "vindication of his people by condemning their opponents."

75. The view that "the nations will experience the wrath of God, but at the same time some will indeed 'fear and glorify' . . . God, referring to conversion" (Osborne, *Revelation*, ad loc.), is probably indeed a fair assessment of John's own conviction, that, as "the nations" respond to the call of repentance, they will face either judgment or salvation (ibid.). However, 15:4 does not differentiate between "the nations" that will experience God's wrath and "some" who will be converted.

76. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 345: "Daß Gottes Gerichtshandeln, das in den folgenden Plagen beschrieben wird, allein dazu dient, den Seinen das Heil zu verschaffen and zu sichern."

the new earth in terms of unimpeded access to God in the consummation. The heavenly voice that explains the meaning of the vision interprets the New Jerusalem as God's dwelling place among the people: "See, the home of God is among mortals (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων). He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples (αὐτοὶ λαοὶ αὐτοῦ), and God himself will be with them" (21:3). Bauckham takes μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων in a universalistic sense as the whole of humanity and λαοί (in the context of 21:24-26) as "all nations." He suggests that according to 21:3 all nations will be covenant peoples in God's new world.<sup>77</sup>

Considering the persistent assertions and descriptions of judgment over the nations and the ungodly in Revelation in general, and in Rev 21-22 in particular, this interpretation seems unlikely. First, John's readers would have had to conclude from the immediately preceding visions in chaps. 19-20 that the only people who "survive" the return of Jesus are the resurrected saints. Thus they are the most likely candidates for identifying the ἀνθρώποι and the λαοί in 21:3. It is the followers of the Lamb, those who remained faithful to God, who constitute the new, redeemed, and consummated humanity, despite the ferocious hostility of the ungodly.<sup>78</sup>

Second, Bauckham himself acknowledges that "of course" we must not conclude that John expects the redemption of every single human being. The list of vices in 21:8, the conditions mentioned in 21:27 that disallow access to the city, and the assertions, formulated in the indicative, about the people who are excluded from eternal salvation make it perfectly clear that unrepentant sinners have no place in the New Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> If John indeed asserts that unrepentant sinners will have no access to God's new creation, it makes no sense to suggest that "all nations" will become God's covenant peoples.

Third, the covenant language that is used with regard to οἱ ἄνθρωποι and λαοί in 21:3 is interpreted in 21:7 in terms of God's presence among those who have overcome (ὁ νικῶν): "Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my

77. Bauckham, *Climax*, 310-13; cf. Dieter Georgi, "Die Visionen vom himmlischen Jerusalem in Apk 21 and 22," in *Kirche* (FS G. Bornkamm; ed. D. Lührmann and G. Strecker; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1980) 356-58; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 264; Harrington, *Revelation*, 209-10; perhaps also Aune, *Revelation*, 1123, who asserts that the covenant language that 21:3 employs "is significant because it is applied to all people universally."

78. Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 228.

79. Bauckham, *Climax*, 313 n. 100, against the universalism of Rissi, *Future*, passim. It may have changed his view of the fate of the nations in Revelation if he had discussed in more detail the questions that are raised by 21:8, 27; 22:15; and other passages. See also Buchanan, *Revelation*, 573-74, who argues against Celia Deutsch, "The Transformation of Symbols: The New Jerusalem in Rev 2:11-22:5," *ZNW* 78 (1987) 106-26.

children." The "people" of 21:3 are those who refused to compromise their faith despite the hostility of the nations, despite the persecution by the ungodly. It seems to be beyond doubt that the ἄνθρωποι of 21:3 are the members of the Christian churches.<sup>80</sup>

Fourth, the λαοί in 21:3 should therefore be taken as a reference to the multiethnic composition of the church whose members come from many peoples and nations.<sup>81</sup> John may have deliberately changed the traditional singular λαός of the OT prophecies that speak of a final restoration in which God himself would dwell in the midst of Israel and Israelites would "be to him a people" and he would "be their God" (Lev 26:11-12; Ezek 37:27; cf. *Jub.* 1:17, 29) in order to assert that the prophecies that originally focused on ethnic Israel have been fulfilled in every people and nation.<sup>82</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the "new song" of 5:9, in which the majesty of the Lamb is praised that has died a sacrificial death and has thus "ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation." Similarly, in the vision of redeemed humanity in heaven in 7:9, the great multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" derives its "standing before the throne," that is, its worship in the presence of God, from its standing "before the Lamb, robed in white," that is, from its association with Jesus and the forgiveness of sins through his death and resurrection. "The reference to the peoples does not annul the restriction to the Christians, who come, precisely, from all peoples and nations."<sup>83</sup>

Fifth, the "nations" and their kings who enter the gates of the New Jerusalem in 21:24-26 are identified by John in 22:14 with those "who wash their robes" and thus obtain "the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates" (ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσέλθωσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν). In other words, they are those who continue to be faithful to their original commitment to Jesus Christ and his saving work.

In 21:1-8 John assures the faithful believers who come from all peoples and nations, that they will enjoy the immediate presence of God when Jesus Christ has returned. The promise of the direct presence of God is confirmed by a new and final *Bundesschluss* that applies

80. Beale, *Revelation*, 1057, correctly points out that 21:7 "more precisely defines who God's people are."

81. Cf. Martin Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John* (Moffatt New Testament Commentary; New York: Harper, 1967 [1940]) 438-39; R. H. Gundry, "The New Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People," *NovT* 29 (1987) 254-64; Müller, *Offenbarung*, 351; Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 455; Beale, *Revelation*, 1047.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Müller, *Offenbarung*, 351: "Der Blick auf die Völker hebt die Beschränkung auf die Christen nicht auf, die eben aus alien Völkern stammen."

to all who overcome. Since the consummation of their redemption is not yet visible, John points his readers in the churches of Asia Minor to the significance of staying faithful to God and Jesus Christ.

### THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS (22:2)

In his vision of the new creation (21:9-22:5) John depicts the New Jerusalem in which "the river of the water of life," "flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1), is lined by trees<sup>84</sup> of life that are phenomenally fruitful. The leaves of the trees are "for the healing of the nations" (εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἔθνων, 22:2). Bauckham interprets this phrase as the climax and fulfillment of the theme of the conversion of the nations: the nations that will inhabit the New Jerusalem will be healed from their idolatry and other sins so that they will never again come under the curse of God's judgment (cf. 22:3a: "Nothing accursed will be found there any more").<sup>85</sup> This interpretation is, again, not convincing.

First, as in 21:3, the reference to the nations does not annul the qualification of eternal redemption in terms of God's people who persevered in being committed to God's will—that is, specifically the saints of 5:9 who have been "ransomed for God" by the sacrificial death of the Lamb, the great multitude of 7:9 that stood "before the throne and before the Lamb."<sup>86</sup> The "nations" of 22:2 are the believers "from every tribe and language and people and nation and language" (5:9; 7:9).<sup>87</sup>

Second, the nations that are "healed" are explained in 22:3 in terms of those who have been liberated from the curse: "Nothing accursed will be found there any more" (καὶ πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι). This "unexpected phrase,"<sup>88</sup> taken from Zech 14:11, which announces the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy in the New Jerusalem, whose inhabitants will be immune to the destructive curse that is God's punishment for the sins of mankind, may have been used deliberately by John in order to underscore two facts for his readers:

84. The singular ξύλον ζωῆς in 22:2 is to be taken as a collective singular; cf. Ezek 47:12. Cf. Charles, *Revelation II*, 176, and most other commentators. Beale, *Revelation*, 1106, comments: The one tree of life in the first garden has become many trees of life in the escalated paradisaic state of the second garden!

85. Bauckham, *Climax*, 316-18.

86. Giesen, *Offenbarung*, 474; cf. Müller, *Offenbarung*, 363; and Beale, *Revelation*, 1107 who notes that 5:9 and 7:9 are the only clear references to the "nations" as God's people outside Rev 21-22.

87. The phrase τῶν ἔθνων is thus not "simply mechanical," as Aune, *Revelation*, 1178, thinks (who adds, however, correctly, that "there is no real place in the eschatological scheme of Revelation for the 'healing of the nations' construed as their conversion").

88. Aune, *ibid.*, 1178.

(1) regarding the church whose members come from all nations, God's curse fell on Christ, who suffered death on their behalf so that they would be released from the penalty of their sins (cf. 1:5; 5:9). This means that they never again will suffer God's curse in any form as paradise is restored; (2) regarding all other human beings from the nations whose names are not found written in the book of life, God's curse affected them as depicted in the judgment visions, and it fell on them once and for all as they were thrown into the lake of fire to suffer eternal punishment with the beast and the false prophet (19:20; 20:14-15).

Third, the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem who eat from the "tree of life" (ξύλον ζωῆς) that stands on the banks of "the river of the water of life" (ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς) that proceeds "from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1-2) are clearly identical (1) with those who, according to 21:6, have gained access to "the spring of the water of life" (ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς) on the basis of God's grace (δωρεάν) and in "overcoming" (ὁ νικῶν, 21:7) the temptation to compromise with the world—that is (note the larger context of John's and his entire message to the churches of Asia Minor), with those who have abandoned their arrogance and hostility toward God, who have acknowledged their "thirst," who have come into fellowship with God as followers of the Lamb, and who have maintained their faith in the atoning death of the Lamb, and their witness to his redemptive work.<sup>89</sup> And they are identical (2) with those who, according to 22:17, receive the "water of life" (ὕδωρ ζωῆς) as a result of the proclamation of the prophetic leaders of the church and of individual believers who are spiritually alert, on the basis of grace (δωρεάν)—that is, those who thirst for the spiritual fulfillment that God offers in the life and proclamation of the church and that only God and Jesus Christ can provide.<sup>90</sup>

Fourth, perhaps the reference to the healing of the nations, also implies a figurative healing of the scars of those who have suffered on account of their faith in Jesus Christ: "In their undying bliss there shall be ample recompense for the hardships endured on earth."<sup>91</sup>

Fifth, the "nations" that are "healed" by the leaves from the tree of life (ξύλον ζωῆς) in 22:2 should be linked with the one previous reference in 2:7 to "the tree of life that is in the paradise of God" (τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὅ ἐστιν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ). In 2:7 it is those who listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches and those who

89. Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 1056.

90. On the options for interpreting 22:17, see now Aune, *Revelation*, 1227-28; Beale, *Revelation*, 1148-49.

91. Kiddie, *Revelation*, 443.

"conquer" who will be given permission to eat from the tree of life (τῶ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῶ φαγεῖν). The "nations" in 22:2 are those who have refused to compromise their faith in the midst of the hostility of the nations, that is, those who have held fast to the victory won by Christ in the battle between God and the evil powers.

### CONCLUSION

John's vision of the history of mankind speaks, on the one hand, of the fellowship of the followers of the Lamb who persevere in their faith in the "eternal gospel" (14:6), holding fast to the victory of the Lamb in his death and resurrection, suffering patiently, prepared and willing to die on account their faith. On the other hand John speaks of the fellowship of the people associated with and controlled by the evil powers who refuse to fear God and give him glory, despite the plagues of God's judgment, but assault the church and kill its members if and when they refuse to accommodate to their values. It is in view of this situation that John urgently impresses on his Christian readers the obligation to remain faithful to Jesus Christ even in dangerous times. He comforts and encourages by repeatedly painting a picture of the future consummation that believers in Jesus Christ are certain to inherit. And he reminds them (in 11:3-13) that the obligation to evangelistic proclamation has not been canceled, even though they live in a world that wants to silence their witness.

The vision of God's new creation that follows the vision of the last and final judgment on rebellious humanity is no longer determined by the polarity of the redeemed and the unredeemed. John nowhere predicts mass conversions. He does not predict a conversion of humanity--whether this be a conversion of all individual human beings or a conversion of nations. He does not predict a universal success of the missionary proclamation of the church. John predicts the decisive victory that Jesus will finally win over the hostile powers and over the people who follow them when he returns (19:11-21). He predicts the eternal condemnation of Satan, of his human accomplices, and of the people who were deceived by them (20:7-15). He predicts the eternal death of "the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars" (21:8).

The people who have the unspeakable privilege of living in God's new and forever perfect creation in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb are the saints "from every tribe and language and people and nation" who have been redeemed by Jesus' sacrificial death (5:9). They are those who worship God and the Lamb (7:9-10), having received white robes (7:14). They are those who have over-

come the pressures to conform to pagan society on account of the efficacy of Christ's death and "by the word of their testimony," willing to sacrifice their lives in the face of death (12:11). They are those who are written in the book of life (20:12, 15; 21:27). They have overcome the temptation to compromise in the time of tribulation that was a reality in the first century and that will end only when Jesus returns (21:7). They belong to the bride of the Lamb (21:9). They are the servants of the Lamb (22:3) who keep the words of the prophecy of John's book (22:7). They are those who continue to be righteous and holy, separated from the evildoers and the filthy (22:11). They are those who continue to be faithful to their commitment to Jesus Christ and his saving work (22:14). They are those who have responded to the call to come to Jesus, who thirst for full fellowship with God, who have received, by faith, the eternal life that God in his grace offered in Jesus Christ (22:17). The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem are those who live in the presence of "the grace of the Lord Jesus" that will be with them always (22:21).