



2. Creation and the Gospel in the Three-Angels' Message

Creación y evangelio en el mensaje de los tres ángeles

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Abstract

The article investigates the immediate and larger contexts of the messages in Revelation 14,6-12. After focusing on Revelation's central vision surrounding the Three-Angels' Message, it looks for other messages in the Apocalypse introduced with or without speech vocabulary to get a clear picture of what the book wants to communicate. The third part focuses on the meaning of the foundational gospel mentioned in Revelation 14,6 and its relationship to creation in the next verse. The article suggests that while the messages deal with judgment the gospel must be understood in a positive sense. It also proposes not to focus exclusively on the crucial message of the three angels in Revelation but to proclaim it in the context of Revelation's other messages.

Keywords

Revelation – Three-Angels' Message – Creation – Gospel

Resumen

El artículo investiga los contextos inmediatos y más amplios de los mensajes de Apocalipsis 14,6-12. Después de enfocarse en la visión central de Apocalipsis que rodea el mensaje de los tres ángeles, busca otros mensajes en el Apocalipsis presentados con o sin vocabulario del habla para obtener una imagen clara de lo que el libro quiere comunicar. La tercera parte se enfoca en el significado fundamental del evangelio mencionado en Apocalipsis 14,6 y su relación con la creación en el siguiente versículo. El artículo sugiere que, si bien los mensajes tratan del juicio, el evangelio debe entenderse en un sentido positivo. También propone no centrarse exclusivamente en el mensaje crucial de los tres ángeles en Apocalipsis, sino proclamarlo en el contexto de los otros mensajes de Apocalipsis.

Palabras clave

Apocalipsis – El mensaje de los tres ángeles – Creación – Evangelio

In John's Apocalypse, a unique feature are the messages of three angels who follow each other instantaneously. These three messages are also referred to in the singular as the Three-Angels' Message. This message is found in the center of the book of Revelation. It is a proclamation directed especially to the people living in the last time of human history:

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.¹

The term “then” (καί) has various shades of meaning. Here it occurs in the vision formula “and I saw” which indicates a new emphasis; but in Revelation 14 also connects the first part of the chapter (Rev 14,1-5) with our section (Rev 14,5-13), ending with an audition (“and I heard”), a beatitude of a heavenly voice and the response of the Holy Spirit.² These features alert us to the fact that it is crucial to understand and interpret the message in the context in which it appears. So, we must turn to the entire vision in which it is found and summarize it to locate it in time and understand its meaning and impact. Then we need to look at other divine messages in Revelation, summarize the three-part divine address and appeal to a large part of humanity in Revelation 14, and try to elucidate

¹ Revelation 14,6-12 (NKJV). While the text quoted here follows the NJKV, the other quotations in the document uses ESV, unless otherwise indicated.

² “Then [and] I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Rev 14,13). This is one of seven beatitudes found in Revelation.

the meaning of the foundational gospel—mentioned directly right in the beginning of this passage—and its relationship to creation.

The Setting of the Message of the Three Angels

Revelation 11,19-14,20 portrays the long conflict between good and evil on earth and its outcome. After having introduced the characters of a woman, the true church of God, and the dragon, Satan, chapter 12 draws attention to Jesus' incarnation and the conflict He had to endure during His time on earth. He is depicted as the ruler of the nations, and He "was caught up to God and His throne" (Rev 12,4-5). Revelation 12 with its reference to a woman, a serpent, the woman's seed, and enmity is based on the proto-gospel of Genesis 3,15, the promise of the Redeemer and redemption after humanity's fall into sin in the Garden of Eden and the terrible consequences ensuing from this situation. Satan's attack on Jesus is followed by his war against the church, God's people throughout New Testament times, that is, church history (Rev 12,6; 13-16). But Revelation 12 also pulls away the curtain that separates heavenly realities from earthly, portraying behind the scenes a deadly heavenly struggle between Michael and the dragon, that is, between the Son of God and Satan (Rev 12,7-10). It ends with Satan's defeat but not yet with his annihilation. Consequently, the last verse of Revelation 12 and the first part of chapter 13 focus on the massive conflict at the end of earth's history, in which Satan attempts to destroy Christ's faithful remnant (Rev 12,17; 13,1-18).

Revelation 13 shows that this war is a proxy war. The dragon uses the sea beast to make war against the saints.³ Unfortunately, the believers, who have "overcome" Satan "by the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 12,11), are now "overcome" by the sea beast (Rev 13,7) at least temporarily and quite likely in another sense.⁴ They have gained spiritual victory but have not been able to escape persecution. Satan uses also a second, extremely

³ The dragon went ποίησαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν ("to make war with the remnant"; Rev 12,17). The sea beast is given power ποιήσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων ("to make war with the saints") and to overcome them (Rev 13,7).

⁴ While Satan is doomed to be destroyed, the saints are persecuted but will inherit eternal life.

deceptive beast, the land beast—later called the false prophet—which came out of the earth. It is so much opposed to God’s true people that it hinders believers from buying and selling (Rev 13,17) and thereby threatens their existence. In addition, it creates an image of the first beast and brings it to life. This image, after being alive, sees to it that non-worshippers of the beast be killed (Rev 13,15). The end of chapter 13 leaves the audience with the impression that God’s faithful people have no chance to survive the evil onslaught.

Even more important is Revelation 14. Yes, there are survivors, and they are depicted as already standing triumphantly with Jesus on Mount Zion. So, the vision ends with a description of the 144,000 (Rev 14,1-5), their message (Rev 14,6-12), and the second coming of Christ which is a kind of judgment for unbelievers (Rev 14,14-20).⁵

This central vision has been named differently, for instance, “the vision about the Satanic trinity,” “the vision of the woman and the evil powers,” and “the vision of the great war.” It is difficult to summarize it in a heading because it has many different aspects. One could also focus more on the positive side of the story than on the negative and call it the “vision of the triumph of the Lamb and His people.”

In the central vision of Revelation, the message of the three angels is the final and universal message addressed to all people in the last time of earth’s history. It comes toward the end of the historical part of Revelation (chapters 1-14) but is also linked to the eschatological part of the Apocalypse (chapters 15-22). From Revelation 15 onward the last moments of this drama are revealed. God’s intervention in favor of His saints happens in the form of the seven bowls or plagues. These plagues are the last in human history. They are poured out on those who have accepted the mark of the beast and have worshiped his image (Rev 16,2). Plagues six and seven depict the collapse of Babylon in the battle of Armageddon. Revelation 17 and 18 describe in more details this fall of end time

⁵ For a more detailed outline of these chapters and the connection between them as well as the conflict between the remnant and the evil powers see Ekkehardt Mueller, “The End Time Remnant in Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, Nos. 1-2 (2000): 188-204. This article also explains the time frame of the vision.

Babylon—already mentioned in the second message of the three angels (Rev 14,8)—and Revelation 19 pictures the intervention of Jesus with His army as the rider on the white horse. So, the vision following Revelation 12-14, returns to the time just prior to the second advent (Rev 15-18) to move again to the *parousia* (Rev 19). Revelation 20 describes the time after Christ's second advent, the millennium (Rev 20), followed by the New Jerusalem on the new earth (Rev 21-22).

This short review of the central vision of Revelation (chapters 12-14) is crucial to the understanding of the timing of the message of the three angels and its content. It is a message to unbelieving humanity in the last period of human history just prior to the *parousia*. In addition, the entire book of Revelation contributes to the interpretation and relevance of the Three-Angels' Message.

Messages in Revelation

Messages Introduced by the Verb λέγω ("to say")

All three angels, who proclaim the Three-Angels' Message, introduce their message with the verb λέγω (typically translated as "to say" or "to speak"). The first and third angels speak even with a loud voice. The first angel emphasizes worship of the creator God in contrast to worship of man-made systems and worship of Satan. He accentuates obedience to God and refers to the pre-advent judgment.⁶ The second angel proclaims the fall of Babylon, which has intoxicated the nations with immorality. Babylon's fall seems to be a spiritual fall, preceding Babylon's judgment.⁷ In the third message, the angel announces God's final judgment on those

⁶ David E. Aune, who does not seem to support a pre-advent judgment, still states: "The urgency of the call for conversion in v. 7a implies that the day of God's judgment of the world *has already arrived...*" But he adds that this "is obviously used in a proleptic or anticipatory sense." *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 827; emphasis supplied by author.

⁷ See Ekkehardt Mueller, "Revelation's Babylon and Its Characteristics," in *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching*, vol. 1, ed. by Artur A. Stele (Silver Spring, MI: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 156-161.

who worship the beast or its image and carry the mark of the beast. God responds to the Babylonian wine of wrath with His own wine of wrath (Ps 75,9). The followers of the beast have persecuted God's people, but God intervenes on the behalf of His children. The "saints" are characterized by patience/perseverance, obedience to God's commandments and the faith in Jesus/the faith of Jesus/the faithfulness to Jesus/the faithfulness of Jesus, however the last phrase is understood.

But the Three-Angels' Messages are by far not the only messages found in Revelation. In the Apocalypse many voices and persons are heard, heavenly and earthly. The book is very vivid and replete with direct speeches and hymns, but also with messages which do not occur in direct speech. Many of the direct speeches and hymns with their messages are introduced by the aforementioned Greek verb λέγω ("to say, speak, tell, report (also in writing), command, declare, proclaim, call, name").

On earth, believers and unbelievers are speaking. Among the believers are John (Rev 7,14; 22,20); the martyrs (Rev 6,10), the great multitude (Rev 7,10); the conquerors (Rev 15,3); the bride and the hearers of her message (Rev 22,17). The messages make a positive contribution with what they say and even when they ask questions. An exception is the negative message of the church members in Laodicea, who do not fare well with their pride and self-assurance: "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3,17; NKJV). However, the positive contributions are significant to the theology of the book of Revelation and its theodicy, for instance: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7,10). "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!" (Rev 15,3).

The situation is completely different with the unbelievers, the kings, the great ones, and the generals, the rich and the powerful, the slaves and the free (Rev 6,15); the worshippers of the beast (Rev 13,4); the kings (Rev 18,10), the merchants (Rev 18,16), and the shipmasters (Rev 18,18-19). They express fear and suicidal thoughts, regret Babylon's fall, and admire the sea beast. Interestingly enough, the major evil powers such as Satan and the beasts do not speak directly, except that we

hear Babylon's claim to be a queen and not a widow and be exempt from grief and mourning (Rev 18,7). The evil powers are charged with blasphemy (Rev 13,5-6.14; 17,3) and deception (Rev 12,9; 13,14; 18,23; 19,20; 20,8.10), but fortunately, we do not hear the fake news.

Now we turn to the heavenly personalities, and this is more important because the Three-Angels' Messages belongs to this category (Rev 14,6). What the heavenly beings proclaim may shed light on the threefold message in Revelation 14.

God the Father

He speaks.⁸ In Revelation 1,8 He proclaims: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." The God of the first angel's message is the God who encompasses everything, is beyond time and yet relates to time, and is the ruler over all things "with full authority over earthly and cosmic forces."⁹ In Revelation 21,5¹⁰ and the following verses God reveals Himself as creator of the new creation. In addition, he says, "It is done!"¹¹ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son" (Rev 21,6-7).

This is the good news of the gospel. If God speaks directly, humans better listen. He reveals Himself and what He has done and what He is doing in creation and salvation. This message is indispensable. It is taken

⁸ It is not completely clear if it is also God who speaks in Revelation 16,1 and 17, but it may be possible.

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 72.

¹⁰ Robert H. Mounce suggests that God the Father breaks His silence and speaks (*The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 384).

¹¹ This may be a reminder of Jesus' words on the cross. The plan of salvation has finally come to a conclusion. A new creation, based on salvation achieved through Jesus death on the cross, has been established. G.K.Beale notes: "...here it designates the accomplishment of the new creation, which was set in motion at the cross when Jesus cried, 'It is finished!'" (*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999], 1055).

up again, we would suggest, in the Three-Angels' Message, but the latter does not eclipse or replaces the former. The message of the first angel builds on God's direct speech. Without it, one would hardly know who the God is whom we are called to worship. So, Christians must proclaim who God is and what He does.¹²

Jesus Christ

Jesus uses direct speech with λέγω, for instance, in Revelation 1,11; 1,17-4:1, and 22,10-20. Because of Jesus, believers do not need to fear. "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev 1,17-18). Jesus is the Savior and the resurrected Lord who guarantees eternal life to His followers. In the messages to the seven churches, Jesus introduces Himself in a way that meets the situations of each of these churches. He tells them that He has the seven churches in His hand and thus cares for them (Rev 2,1), He was dead and is alive and thus is the Lord of life (Rev 2,8), He has the two-edged sword, which is His powerful word (Rev 2,12), He is the Son of God with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze, being divine (Rev 21,18), He has the seven Spirits of God, the Holy Spirit (Rev 3,1), He is holy and true, absolutely reliable and trustworthy, and has the power to shut and open doors (Rev 3,7), and He is the Amen and the Faithful Witness, the Originator, Chief, and Ruler of God's creation (Rev 3,14).

In addition to telling us about who He is, Jesus provides astonishing promises to the overcomers: eating from the tree of life in the Paradise to come (Rev 2,7); receiving the crown of life (Rev 2,10); getting the hidden manna, a white stone, and a new name (Rev 2,17); obtaining authority over the nations and the morning star (Rev 2,26-28); receiving white garments and having their names in the book of life (Rev 3,5); becoming pillars in God's temple and having God's and Jesus' name written on them (Rev 3,12); and participation in His throne (Rev 3,20). How do they overcome? "... by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,

¹² Therefore, Adventists cannot limit themselves to a simple repetition of Revelation 14,6-13 in their own words. There is more to be said.

and they did not love their lives to the death” (Rev 12,11; NKJV). Later, Jesus will say, “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22,12-13; cf. 22,20). It is the Jesus in whom the saints believe and His faithfulness in which they trust (Rev 14,12). He is the Alpha and Omega as the Father is. If believers die before the *parousia*, they “die in the Lord” and are blessed (Rev 14,13). “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22,14). Believers are longing to meet Jesus at His second coming and will see Him personally. This has also to do with the gospel.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit speaks in all the messages to the seven churches (Rev 2,6.11.17.29; 3,6.13.22) and supports what Jesus has already addressed and what He has told them. “Yes,” says the Spirit [affirming the beatitude concerning those who die in Christ], “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (Rev 14,13; NKJV). Finally, He calls the thirsty to come and receive the water of life free of charge (Rev 22,17). “The gospel message is about salvation as a free gift. It is in God that all human spiritual thirst will be ultimately quenched.”¹³

The Twenty-Four Elders

The twenty-four elders before God’s throne praise God as creator: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev 4,11). They are to be emulated by all “those who dwell on earth... every nation and tribe and language and people” by worshiping “him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14,6-7), that is the Creator. One of them explains to John and thereby to the readers and hearers of Revelation that Jesus, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can

¹³ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd edition (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 621.

open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5,5); also, that those who have come out of the great tribulation “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7,14). “...one’s ability to stand before God in purity is determined entirely on the basis of the shed blood of the Lamb and its application to the unholy and stained lives of those who come to the cross.”¹⁴ This is again the gospel. In Revelation 11,17, the twenty-four elders affirm what God has said about Himself in chapter 1,8, and they proclaim His rule: He is the “Lord God Almighty, who is and who was,” and He has taken His “great power and begun to reign” (Rev 11,17).

The Four Living Creatures

The four living creatures around the throne speak in Revelation 5,9.14; 6,1.3.5.7; and 19,4. Occasionally, they join the twenty-four elders. For instance, the two groups seem to sing together a new song to Jesus, praising Him for having brought about redemption (Rev 5,9). This hymn as well as others are not only recorded in the Apocalypse to enhance the narrative; they are at the same time important messages of Revelation. They share among other things the gospel. Humans from every tribe, language, people, and nation have already been saved. The same four groups occur again in Revelation 14,6 and those who have not yet decided to love God and follow the Lamb are called to “Fear God and give him glory” (Rev 14,7). Salvation is still possible, even at the end of time.

Angels

Angels speak also, and they speak frequently.¹⁵ In Revelation 5,12, they praise the Lamb, who was slain and is now alive, and attribute to Him “power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5,12), and they praise God the Father (Rev 7,12).

¹⁴ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 203.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Revelation 5,12; 7,3.12; 10,9; 14,7.8.9.18; 16,5; 17,1.7-18; 18,2-3.21; 19,17-18; 21,9; 22,6.9-11.

Individual angels are protecting the saints by sealing them (Rev 7,3) and are announcing judgment on evildoers (Rev 14,7-9; 17,1.7-18; 18,2-3; 19,17-18). The second angel's message (Rev 14,8) is to some extent repeated by the angel of Revelation 18,2: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon" and Babylon's nature is exposed, especially its connection to the demonic realm, to spiritualism and occultism.¹⁶ The call "Worship God!" (Rev 14,7) in the plural is restated in the singular in Revelation 19,10 and 22,9, "Worship God [you, John]."¹⁷ An angel calls out to the One like a Son of Man to bring in the harvest through His second coming (Rev 14,18). The angel of the waters declares God's justice in judgment (Rev 16,5). One of the seven bowl angels explains the nature and fall of Babylon (Rev 17,1-2.7-18). An angel announces the nearness of time (Rev 22,10) and proclaims a situation in which people can no longer change for the better or the worse (Rev 22,11). An angel explains that the Lamb will conquer as Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev 17,14).

The Great Multitude

The great multitude of the redeemed before the throne of God declares with a loud voice: "... Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7,9-10; NKJV). In its introduction, the seal vision portrays God the Father as Creator (chapter 4) and Jesus as Savior (chapter 5); in the expansion of the sixth seal salvation is ascribed to both Jesus and God the Father, as creation was also ascribed to the Son in Revelation 3,14. In Revelation 19, the great multitude first connects salvation with judgment (Rev 19,1-3). A bit later, it praises God for His rule, rejoices, and—as in the first angel's message—gives glory to God because the marriage of the Lamb with His bride has come (Rev 19,6-8).

¹⁶ A dimension is added in chapter 18 which is not present in Revelation 14,8. The second angel's message is a kind of report and information about Babylon and an indirect warning. But an imperative is not used with it. This is different in Revelation 18 where people are commanded to separate from Babylon (Rev 18,4).

¹⁷ The angelic speech (λέγω) begins in Revelation 19,9 with another beatitude and continues in verse 10.

Voices

Repeatedly *voices* from heaven are speaking, some of them with a high volume. These voices are either identified or unidentified.¹⁸ The identified voices include the voice of Jesus (Rev 1,10-11), the voice of angels (Rev 5,11-12; 14,6-7.9), the voice of one of the four heavenly beings (Rev 6,1.7), the voice of an eagle exclaiming “woe, woe, woe” (Rev 8,13), and the voice of the altar (Rev 16,7). We have discussed these entities in part above. So, we turn to the unidentified voices or those more difficult to identify. Some of the unidentified voices pronounce relatively short commands associated with judgment, for instance, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (Rev 9,13; NKJV); “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down” (Rev 10,4); “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (Rev 16,1); “It is done” (Rev 16,17; NKJV).¹⁹ Revelation 11,12 has a positive notion: “Come up here” (NKJV). Revelation 18,4-8 begins positively but continues with judgment on Babylon. “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues...” (NKJV). Some contain important theological concepts: the concept of salvation through Jesus’ blood (Rev 12,10-11), the promise of resurrection (Rev 14,13), the necessity of praising God (Rev 19,5), and the climaxing message that God will dwell with redeemed humanity forever,

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21,3).

Messages Introduced by Other Verbs Related to a Speech Event

Messages in direct speech are also introduced in Revelation with the verbs *λαλέω* (“to speak,” “to tell”), *κηρύσσω* (“to proclaim,” “to announce”),

¹⁸ Some are just reported to be saying something, but the content is not revealed.

¹⁹ See also Revelation 6,6.

κραῖζω (“to cry out,” “to call out,” “to scream”), ᾄδω (“to sing”), and φωνέω (“to cry out,” “to proclaim with emphasis”).

Sometimes, these verbs are combined with λέγω (“to say”), and thus we may have covered them partially. Jesus calls John to come up to heaven and see future events (Rev 4,1—λαλέω and λέγω). In the next chapter, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders inform the reader about Christ’s work of salvation and sing (ᾄδω) to Him saying (λέγω):

You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth (Rev 5,9-10; NKJV).

This song recapitulates to some extent the introduction of Revelation 1,5-7, which is at the same time the message of the book in a nutshell and to which we will return in moment. The martyrs in Revelation 6,9-10 cry out with a loud voice (κραῖζω and λέγω), “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6,10). In Revelation 7,9-10 and still in the same seal vision, the great multitude attributes (κραῖζω and λέγω) salvation to God and the Lamb, not to human effort, determination, insight or innate goodness. The mighty angel of chapter 10—probably Jesus—calls John to eat the bitter-sweet scroll (Rev 10,8-9—λαλέω and λέγω) which becomes foundational for his later ministry because “You [John] must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (Rev 10,11), foreshadowing the Three-Angels’ Message. The third angel associated with the harvest of the world in Revelation 14,18 cries out (φωνέω and λέγω) to bring in the harvest of grapes, which means judgment coming on those who are opposed to Christ. One of the plague angels calls John to come and see the judgment of harlot Babylon (Rev 17,1—λαλέω and λέγω), and John receives more information about Babylon, which was introduced in the second angel’s message. It covers chapters 17-18. In Revelation 18,2 an angel repeats the message of Revelation 14,8 about the fall of Babylon (κραῖζω and λέγω). Later, an angel invites the birds to God’s supper of those killed in the battle of Armageddon (Rev 19,17—κραῖζω and λέγω). Finally, John is called (λαλέω and

λέγω) to see the Lamb's bride (Rev 21,9). These messages deal mainly with salvation and judgment.

In the speeches connected with the verbs κηρύσσω and κρᾶζω, but not with λέγω, an angel proclaims (κηρύσσω) the worthiness of the Lamb to open the sealed scroll (Rev 5,2) and thus to allow for the plan of salvation to proceed. With Revelation 14,14 begins the symbolic description of Christ second coming. It is described as a double harvest. An angel cries out to the One like a Son of Man to initiate the harvest of grain by putting in the sickle for the harvest is more than ripe. Jesus is the One in charge of the final harvest (Rev 14,15—κρᾶζω). With Him, the plan of salvation is being fulfilled.

*Messages Not Introduced with Verbs
Related to a Speech Event*

As shown above, important messages of the book of Revelation are often introduced with speech formulas. But this is not always the case. Sometimes, they are just recorded without such an opening. We will focus only on a few rather than exploring all, and these are Revelation's beatitudes and its first doxology.

Revelation contains seven beatitudes, which indirectly are calls to a full commitment to Jesus, true Christian behavior, and Christian action. Two of them are associated with "to say" and even "to write" (Rev 14,13; 19,9), the other five are not.²⁰ The two which are introduced with a form of the verb λέγω are about the blessedness of those dying in the Lord (Rev 14,13) and the blessedness of those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19,9). But the other five are not less important with the messages they share, although they do not have a similar introduction as the first two have:

1. Blessed are the readers, hearers, and keepers of what is written in Revelation; the time is near (Rev 1,3).

²⁰ In this respect, the beatitudes differ from the hymns of Revelation because the hymns of the Apocalypse are introduced with a form of λέγω ("to say").

2. Blessed is the one who at the second coming is awake and has kept his/her garments (Rev 16,15).
3. Blessed are those who experience the first resurrection; they will be priests of God and Christ (Rev 20,6).
4. In view of Christ's soon coming, "blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Rev 22,7).
5. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates" (Rev 22,14).²¹

These beatitudes mention, for instance, how to get saved and what to expect for the future in terms of blessings and positive experiences.

Despite coming with the frame of a letter (Rev 1-3 and 22b), Revelation does not begin precisely as many Pauline letters do, namely by introducing the author first, then the recipients, then sending wishes of grace and peace, afterwards mentioning the apostle's thanksgiving and/or prayers for the respective church, followed by the theological and the practical content. Revelation contains a prologue as do John's Gospel and his first letter.²² A kind of chain of command is developed which begins with Jesus and God the Father and via an angel and then John reaches the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse (Rev 1,1-3). The point is made that John's Apocalypse is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1,1; NKJV). In other words, Revelation focuses in a special way on Jesus. If this is so, it should also be reflected in the Three-Angels' Messages.

²¹ There is an alternative reading: "Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev 22,14; NKJV). For a discussion of this option see, e.g., Ranko Stefanovic, "'Wash Their Robes' or 'Do His Commandments?'" in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, ed. by Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MI: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 450-453.

²² Cf. Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 22-23. On page 23, he notes: "However, in place of Paul's thanksgiving (e.g., in Gal. 1:5), a christological formula of praise (doxology) appears in v. 6b that is expanded and developed by the adoption of a type of confessional formula... There follows a prophetic saying that proclaims the return of Jesus Christ (v. 7), as well as a direct statement by God that solemnly confirms this announcement."

With a short wish of grace and peace²³ to the seven Asian churches, the Trinity is introduced in an unusual order: God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ (Rev 1,4-5). Jesus comes last, and the reason seems to be that the mention of Jesus is immediately expanded to include three of His titles or descriptions—“the faithful witness (martyr),²⁴ the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth” (Rev 1,5; NKJV)—followed by four of His works (Rev 1,5-7).²⁵ God the Father follows in Revelation 1,8 in direct speech.

As the prologue of John’s Gospel (John 1) and the prologue of his first epistle (1 John 1,1-4) are programmatic for these documents, so Revelation 1,1-8 is programmatic for the book of Revelation. Peter Leithart states:

Jesus’s titles anticipate events and characters that appear later in Revelation. Jesus is the firstborn of the dead, and the beast presents a parody of resurrection, a head slain and healed (13:3). Jesus is also the true witness, but there is a false witness, the land beast who performs wonders and makes everyone worship the first beast from the sea (13:11-14). According to 17:18, the harlot has βασιλεία [royal power or rule] over the kings of the earth. Jesus is the true beast (Lion and Lamb), the true prophet, the head of the true bride. Jesus is the measure of all things, of his enemies also.²⁶

All the well-accepted hymns of the Apocalypse are introduced by a form of λέγω (“to say”). Hymns are found in Revelation 4,8.10-11; 5,9-10.12.13; 7,10.12; 11,15.17-18; 12,10-12; 15,3-4; 16,5-6.7;

²³ Joseph L. Mangina observes: “Grace and peace! These are words we do not often associate with the Apocalypse. Many would say that there is more divine wrath than divine mercy here, more violence and bloodshed than peace. Nevertheless... [g]race and peace are the very content of this apocalyptic irruption into our world” (*Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010], 41-42).

²⁴ Brian K. Blount defines the term witness as “a word of provocative testimony and therefore active engagement, not sacrificial passivity” (*Revelation*, The New Testament Library [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009], 29).

²⁵ See also Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 76.

²⁶ Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 1-11*, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 92-93.

19,1-2.3.4.5.6-8.²⁷ They are ascribed to persons or unidentified voices. Revelation 1,5-7 could also be a hymn, but it is not introduced by λέγω nor is it like the other hymns ascribed to the four living beings, the twenty-four elders, angels, all of creation, the great multitude, the conquerors, the altar in heaven, or heavenly voices. It seems that John himself is speaking in Revelation 1,5-6. If this section is not a hymn it is in any case a doxology²⁸ as doxologies are found in some of the hymns (e. g., Rev 4,11; 5,12.13). Osborne speaks of a “hymnic... format” of Revelation 1,7-8.²⁹ John’s message in Revelation 1,4-8, which he has just received, does not only describe the Godhead and the work of Jesus, but seems to summarize the entire Apocalypse:

1. Jesus loves us.³⁰ His love is “complete and ultimate—Jesus ‘loved his own until the end’ ([John] 13,1). It is sacrificial...”³¹
2. Jesus has freed us from our sins. His love led Him to the cross.³² “John goes on to describe the salvation/vindication achieved by Christ as a

²⁷ Hymns in Revelation have, e. g., been defined by Justin J. Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Reihe 381 (Tübingen, DE: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 22. A hymn is a poetic and oftentimes doxological passage, sometimes even designated as “song” (ὠδή; Rev 5,9; 14,3; 15,3), and is typically directed to God the Father or Jesus Christ.

²⁸ That Revelation 1,5-6 is a doxology is recognized by many commentators, e. g., David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1997), 43-46, 49; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 227; Mangina, *Revelation*, 31; 35.

²⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 68.

³⁰ It has been pointed out that the elements of this doxology are unusual because love occurs in the present tense, while redemption and the new status of the believers are described with aorists. Leithart notes: “He *loves* us, not just loved us in the past but loves us now with a love expressed in his death” (*Revelation 1-11*, 91).

³¹ John C. Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 77.

³² Buist M. Fanning points out that here a second unusual element occurs: “Also unusual is the focus on Christ’s love that led to the cross—the New Testament more frequently cites the love of God the Father as expressed in the atonement (e. g., John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:39; Eph 2:4; 1 John 4:8-10)” (*Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020], 82).

ransoming from sin (cf. Isa 40:2). This is the only pairing of sin and redemption language in the Apocalypse.”³³

3. Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests. J. C. Thomas and F. D. Macchia notes that Revelation 1,5-6 is the “first occasion of worship in Revelation, John leads the way in giving glory and honor to Jesus. The unlimited praise ‘forever and ever’ matches the unlimited worthiness of Jesus. The prayer ‘amen,’ or ‘so let it be,’ concludes the doxology.”³⁴

In addition, He will be coming with the clouds (Rev 1,7). Glory and dominion belong to Him (Rev 1,6). And God the Father is the Alpha and Omega, the Lord, and the One who is and was, and is to come, the παντοκράτωρ (the Almighty; Rev 1,8), “an identification that will act as a refrain throughout the rest of the Apocalypse (4,8; 11,17; 15,3; 16,7.14; 19,6.15; 21,22).”³⁵ The message of Revelation 1,4-8 is foundational to the Three-Angels’ Message. The following table tries to show the interconnectedness of Revelations initial message and the Three-Angels’ Messages. The passages are compared both on a literary and a topical level. The same approach would be possible for other passages. The comparison of the message of Revelation 1 and the Three-Angels’ Message shows overlap between the two. We would, therefore, suggest that the message in the introduction to Revelation should be considered when one interprets the Three-Angels’ Message.

³³ Blount, *Revelation*, 36.

³⁴ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

Reference Rev 1	Content	Reference Rev 14	Content
1,4.6.8	God	14,7.9.12	God
1,4.8	God as creator (the Alpha; the One who was) ³⁶	14,7	God as creator
1,5-7	Jesus Christ	14,10.12.13	Jesus, Lamb, Lord
1,5-7a.12	Gospel (topical)	14,6	Eternal gospel
1,5.7	Earth	14,6.7	Earth
1,7	All tribes	14,6	Every tribe
1,7	Second coming and judgment	14,7.11	Pre-Advent judgment/final judgment
1,6	Glory	14,7	Glory
1,5-6	Worship setting (doxology)	14,7.9	Worship
1,7	Forever	14,11	Forever
1,4	The Holy Spirit	14,13	The Holy Spirit
1,5	The dead (resu- rrection implied)	14,13	The dead (resu- rrection implied)
1,7	Second coming	14,14-20	Second coming

Figure 2.1. Comparison between Revelation 1,4-8 and 14,6-12
with Its Immediate Context

Parallel Messages in the Historical Part of Revelation

The historical part of Revelation extends from chapter 1 to chapter 14. From chapter 15 onward the Apocalypse is purely eschatological. The historical part contains four subsections or visions which are basically parallel and recapitulate each other.³⁷ They begin at the time of the author of Revelation in the first century A. D. and run at least to the second coming and are (1) the messages to the seven churches, (2) the seven seals,

³⁶ See Koester, *Revelation*, 226; 230.

³⁷ See Ekkehardt Mueller, "Recapitulation in Revelation 4-11," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, Nos. 1-2 (1998): 260-277.

(3) the seven trumpets, and (4) the central vision of the great war of the evil powers and the triumph of Jesus and His people.³⁸ Visions (2) to (4) have a similar structure. All of them begin with an introduction placed in a sanctuary setting. Then the prophecy is developed. However, shortly before the final event and the culmination of history an “interlude” or expansion of the last element before the glorious climax is inserted. This expansion has been called “spotlight on last events.”³⁹

These “spotlight on last events” sections are parallel and contain messages which have to do with the time prior to the second coming or prior to the establishment of the new earth. The messages to the seven churches do not have an expansion but can be outlined as sanctuary setting (Rev 1b) and the seven messages (Rev 2-3).

If we place these parallel messages next to each other, the following picture emerges:

³⁸ We assume that the messages to the seven churches are closer to classical prophecy than to apocalyptic prophecy—as the following visions are—and that they apply to a situation of seven churches in the first century as well as to seven periods in world history beginning with the first century A. D. and ending with the Parousia.

³⁹ See Kenneth A. Strand, “The ‘Spotlight-On-Last-Events’ Sections in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 27 (1989): 201-221. E. g., the seals have an introductory sanctuary segment—the throne vision (Rev 4-5), the historical development with the opening of the first six seals (Rev 6), the expansion of the sixth seal with the portrayal of the 144,000 and the great multitude (Rev 7), and the climax in the seventh seal (Rev 8,1).

Relevant End Time Sections			
<i>Seven churches:</i> The message to the church in Laodicea.	<i>Seven seals:</i> The 144,000 and the great multitude.	<i>Seven trumpets:</i> The eating of the scroll and the two witnesses.	<i>The great war:</i> The 144,000 and the Three-Angel's Message.
Relevant Messages			
Message for lukewarm and self-confident Laodicea to repent (3,14-22).	Worship of God for His salvation (7,9-12); the Lamb as Shepherd and the blessings of heaven (7,13-17).	Taking and eating the scroll and prophesying to peoples, nations, languages, and kings (10,8-11).	The Three-Angels' Messages to all nations, tribes, languages, and people (14,6-12).
Evaluation			
Audience: Church. Powerful criticism. Promise for the repentant.	Audience: Church. Very positive message about life in the presence of God/Jesus.	Audience: Church. Its mixed experience and its mission.	Audience: people on earth. Powerful criticism. Call for making a decision.

Figure 2.2. Final Messages in the Visions of Revelation 1-14

This chart shows that the Three-Angels' Message is one of the messages for the end time in the first part of Revelation, not to speak about Revelation 15-22. The Three-Angels' Message has been understood as being quite negative by first time readers. Yet, if one takes the perspective of persecuted Christians, who are longing for judgment, it takes on a different perspective, but it is not written for this specific group, at least not primarily. The message is positive from the perspective that salvation is still possible, and people can still decide to follow God and Christ. While the Three-Angel's Message contains powerful criticism on evil powers, one should not forget that Jesus' message to the church in Laodicea, which is most likely parallel, contains powerful criticism on the church and its members. The two need to be kept in a balance in

order that the church may not fall into the trap of triumphalism while still maintaining its identity.

The message contained in the section “spotlight on last events” of the seal vision is extremely positive. It comes in the context of Christ’s second coming (Rev 6,17). Here believers praise God for salvation and are joined by the angels in their worship of God. A very important piece of information is also shared, which reoccurs in Revelation 21 and 22. It is the life of the believers in the immediate presence of God, where they serve Him and experience all the blessings of heaven: Jesus’ cares for them, and they are freed from hunger, thirst, and a scorching sun. “... the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7,17). The Three-Angels’ Message does not explicitly talk about such a wonderful future; it talks about the torment of the enemies of God “with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev 14,10). This is understandable because the message of the three angels appears in the context of the great war and speaks especially to that situation: God will establish justice and will liberate His people; but even His worst enemies have still a chance to repent, that is, to “fear” and worship Him. Still, they need to know that God is serious when it comes to justice and judgment. The end time messages of Revelation 1-14 remind us that we need to hear all of them, because one by itself does not furnish a complete picture.

The expansion of the sixth trumpet prepares already for the great war vision in Revelation 11,19-14,20. The church is going through a sweet-bitter experience. Still it has to prophecy, that is, to engage in mission to the fourfold audience also mentioned in Revelation 14,6. Fortunately, in Revelation 11,13 we hear about a positive response to God’s interventions. There is a remnant which gives glory to God (Rev 11,13), a result not mentioned in Revelation 14.

Summary

Now we are able to summarize:

1. The Three-Angels' Message is a crucial message to be proclaimed worldwide, but it is not the only message in Revelation. It is not even the only end time message. There are other messages in Revelation, which need to be heard in connection with the Three-Angels' Message, and there are other end time messages. It is not only the immediate context of Revelation's central vision which determines the understanding of the Three-Angels' Messages, but also Revelation's other messages—either introduced by verbs of speaking or without such verbs. They influence to a large extent the interpretation of Revelation 14,6-12.
2. Many messages in Revelation are leading toward the Three-Angels Message and shed light on it. For example, the Three-Angels' Message calls humans to fear and worship God and designate Him as creator. But the question about God's true character and His works is not sufficiently answered by Revelation 14,7 alone. We need more information from other parts of Revelation, especially its other messages and even more specifically the messages coming directly from God the Father and Jesus Christ.
3. Some messages of Revelation go beyond the Three-Angels' Message and furnish more information on future events, especially from a positive perspective. The Three-Angels' Messages have little to say about positive eschatological developments, dealing more with the negative ones in judgment, unless Revelation 14,13 is included, where the resting of the dead in the Lord points to resurrection. However, Revelation 14,13 is a beatitude spoken by a voice from heaven and is not attributed to one of the three angels in the preceding verses. The Three-Angels' Message does not mention the second coming, found so frequently in Revelation. It does not mention the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem and the immediate presence of God among His people. While it speaks about creation, it looks back

to the Genesis creation but does not focus on the new creation. In other words, one must listen to the entire book of Revelation.

4. Other messages explain, for instance, in more detail:
 - a. Who God is, who Jesus Christ is, and who the Holy Spirit is (e. g., Rev 1,4-8; 4-5).⁴⁰
 - b. They speak about and explain salvation—the involvement of Jesus in redemption, the cost of salvation, and how humans can be saved (e. g., Rev 1,5-6; 5; 7,9-10.13; 12,10-11; 15,3; 19,1; 22,14).
 - c. They clarify what the eternal gospel is.
 - d. Creation is important to them. It occurs with Jesus in Revelation 3,14, climaxes with the God of creation who is being worshiped in Revelation 4, and permeates Revelation 21-22 as well as many other parts of Revelation.⁴¹
 - e. Worship of Jesus begins with the first doxology of the Apocalypse (Rev 1,5-6), and worship of God the Father and Jesus, portrayed as a Lamb, reaches a peak in Revelation 4 and 5. But there is also false worship, which culminates in Revelation 12-14.
 - f. False worship, which amounts to blasphemy of God, rejection of His character, dismissal of salvation offered by Him, disregard for His commandments, and opposition and persecution of His people are major causes for the eschatological judgment in Revelation 15-20. A pre-advent judgment is already indicated in the fifth seal (Rev 6,9-11).
 - g. Babylon appears indirectly in the sixth trumpet (Rev 9,14) and in Revelation 12-13. It dominates Revelation 16-19.
 - h. Eschatology includes Christ's second coming, reflected in the introduction to Revelation (1,7), and the major visions, and in its epilogue (Rev 22b). The positive effects of God's ultimate rule are shown in Revelation 21-22.

⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit is referred to as “the seven Spirits” (NKJV). See Osborne, *Revelation*, 61. On the Holy Spirit in Revelation, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “O Espírito Santo No Apocalipse de João,” in *Pneumatologia Pessao E Obra Do Espírito Santo*, ed. by Reinaldo W. Siqueira and Alberto Timm (Engenheiro Coelho, SP: Unaspress, 2017), 321-352.

⁴¹ For more information, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “Creation in Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 30, Nos. 1-2 (2019): 21-68.

While the Three-Angels' Messages are critical and decisive messages to be proclaimed in these days, they are not all-comprehensive and need to be understood in the context of the entire book of Revelation, especially its other messages.

Creation and the Gospel in the Three-Angels' Message

The term “gospel” appears prior to the concept of creation in the Three-Angels' Message. So, we will begin with the gospel, then turn to creation, and finally focus more directly on Jesus.

The Three-Angels' Messages and the Gospel

The first angel with his worldwide message must *εὐαγγελίζω* (“to announce/bring good news/proclaim the gospel”) *εὐαγγέλιον* (“good news/gospel”). This is a kind of tautology because the good news of the gospel is contained in both verb and noun. Typically, the gospel (*εὐαγγέλιον*) designates the good news of salvation through Christ. The term is used only once in all of John's writings. The verb *εὐαγγελίζω* appears only twice, both times in Revelation (10,7; 14,6).⁴² But it is no question that John knows the concept of the good news of the gospel. Probably his best-known verse is John 3,16 which describes the gospel as not perishing but having eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. The next verse mentions salvation: Jesus did not come to condemn the world but came for its salvation (John 3,16).

However, the question is if the “eternal gospel” in Revelation 14,6 must be defined through its immediate context only and this would be judgment. Various well-known scholars, including Evangelical interpreters, have pointed out that here the term gospel must be understood in a restricted sense, pointing primarily to judgment.⁴³

⁴² While John uses the terms only sparingly, Paul seems to be fond of them. “Gospel” is used by him about 60 times out of 76 in the New Testament and “proclaiming the Gospel” 23 times, out of 54 in the New Testament.

⁴³ E. g., Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*, 407; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 270-271.

In addition, apart from the context in which the everlasting gospel appears, it occurs without article. Therefore, some translations render the phrase as “*the* everlasting/eternal gospel” (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV) while others translate “*an* eternal gospel” (e.g., ESV, NASB, NET, NRSV) and still others avoid an article completely, for instance, “eternal/everlasting good tidings/news” (ASV, CEB, NAB). It is argued that in the New Testament the gospel in the positive sense is identified with the article (Greek has only a definite article or no article, not an indefinite article) and that a lack of the Greek article points to another gospel. S. K. Tonstad claims: “The word *euangelion* does not have the article and should not be confused with the ‘gospel’ in NT usage elsewhere... A traditional conception for the ‘good news’ will thus miss the mark.”⁴⁴ And G. K. Beale note: “The wrathful nature of this angel and his ‘gospel’ is suggested by the similarity to the messenger of the three woes in 8:13.”⁴⁵ However, he admits that the “absence of the article before *εὐαγγέλιον* (‘gospel’) could reflect only stylistic variation....”⁴⁶

In the New Testament, *εὐαγγέλιον* is the good news of the kingdom of God (Matt 4,23). Before the end will come, it will be preached in all the world to all the nations (Matt 24,14). It is the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20,24). For Paul, the gospel is associated with Christ (2 Cor 10,14) and is “the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1,16). The “gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1,13) is the gospel of peace (Eph 6,15). It is also associated with truth (Col 1,5) and hope (Col 1,23). “Our Savior Jesus Christ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1,10; NKJV). G. B. Caird argues:

... the word *euangelion* can only mean “good news,” and it is improbable that John should have thought of using it in a cynical sense... it is an eternal gospel, a gospel rooted and grounded in the changeless character and purpose of God. If the

⁴⁴ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 203.

⁴⁵ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 748.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

angel carried a gospel which was eternal good news to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, it is hard to see how this could differ from *the* gospel.⁴⁷

But it is better not to look primarily for the usage of the term elsewhere in the New Testament but investigate first how Revelation understands the concept of salvation and consequently the terms “gospel” and “to preach the gospel.”

In the Apocalypse, the gospel is found in the passages, which directly or indirectly mention salvation and redemption, in the invitations to make a decision for God such as accepting the water of life without pay (Rev 22,17), in the apostolic wish for the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse to receive grace (Rev 1,4; 22,21), and in the eschatological promise of God's presence among His people (Rev 21,3-7; 22,1-5) and access to the tree of life (Rev 2,7; 22,2.14). The prologue of the Apocalypse contains a clear description of the gospel. Jesus, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the death, and the ruler of the kings of the earth loves us and has redeemed us through His substitutionary death (Rev 1,5). In Revelation 3,9.19, John's audience hears again about Jesus' love. The major title used for Jesus in the Apocalypse is “Lamb.” Because Jesus was crucified (Rev 11,8), slaughtered as Lamb (Rev 5,6.9.12; 13,8), and His blood shed (Rev 1,5; 5,9; 7,14; 12,11), but was also raised from the dead (Rev 1,5.17-18), He is able to save humans (Rev 7,10). Salvation is described in Revelation, 5,9; 7,14; 12,11; 14,3-4; 21,27; 22,14 and elsewhere with imagery such as being purchased, having washed one's robes, and having one's name written in the book of life.

The immediate context to Revelation 14,6, the Apocalypse's central vision (Rev 11,19-14,20) is also enlightening. The ark of the covenant in Revelation 11,19—the introductory scene to this great war vision—with

⁴⁷ George B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 182; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12-22*, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of Old and New Testaments (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 94. “God's kingdom comes through judgment, and judgment is good news because it means that God is at long last going to deal with the wicked...” “Why would this *not* be the gospel itself, the announcement that the Creator is taking over as Lord of all nations, that he has overthrown ‘Babylon.’ And that he will reward his loyal followers as he judges his adversaries?” (ibid., 95).

the implied mercy seat and the Decalogue stresses the gospel message. Revelation 12 is the fulfillment of the divinely proclaimed post-Fall prediction of the proto-gospel in Genesis 3,15 regarding the Messiah who would defeat Satan. A woman, the seed—the male child, a serpent, and a life-and-death struggle appear in both passages. Jesus' incarnation heightened the conflict with Satan and brought Him to the cross. But at the same time, He overcame Satan. Therefore, a loud voice can triumphantly shout: "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down... And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb..." (Rev 12,10-11). The shedding of Jesus' blood for humanity, an act of substitutionary atonement, guarantees salvation to those who accept Jesus' sacrifice and commit themselves to Him.

In the tantalizing conflict of the saints with the sea beast, the book of life is mentioned (Rev 13,8). The inhabitants of the earth, followers of the beast, are not written in this book;⁴⁸ but true believers in the church of Sardis will not be blotted out from the book of life (Rev 3,5). The book of life is also the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21,27), in which the names of true believers are recorded. Salvation is dependent on one's relationship with Christ. The phrase "book of life" has positive connotations of eternal life and is another image to describe the potential effect of the gospel, dependent on the individual's decision.

Later in the same vision, the readers and hearers encounter the 144,000 with Jesus on Mt. Zion. They are safe and secure because they have been purchased (*ἀγοράζω*; Rev 14,4), purchased "from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (Rev 14,4). Those who were no longer able to buy (literally "purchase") and sell (Rev 13,17) have become God's and the Lamb's property. The concept of redemption through a "purchase" appears for the first time in Revelation 5,9, "... by your blood you [the Lamb] ransomed [purchased] people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5,9). Interestingly and remarkably, this verse is connected to Revelation 14,6 through the mention of the

⁴⁸ The book of life occurs in Revelation 3,5; 13,8; 17,8; 20,12.15; 21,7. In half of the cases, Revelation mentions those not being written in that book (Rev 13,8; 17,8; 20,15).

same four groups, although in different order: nations, tribes, languages, and people. Revelation 5,9 is the first of the seven texts in which the four groups of humanity appear.⁴⁹ While it does not seem that the four groups themselves and as a whole are saved, members of these groups are redeemed. The great multitude of the saved contains persons from the four groups (Rev 7,9). Other members of the four groups, however, are negative and are under the influence of the sea beast (Rev 13,7), forming the waters where Babylon the prostitute sits (Rev 17,5). Nevertheless, members of the four groups have heard the gospel and have been saved. The angel of Revelation 14,6 intends to reach these groups with the true gospel, and Revelation 7,9-10, which on a timeline follows the proclamation of the Three-Angels' Messages declares that the effort will be successful and that a great multitude from the nations, tribes, peoples, and languages will be saved when confronted with the gospel.

Still there are more indicators in the immediate context which suggest that the gospel is not different from that in the other parts of the New Testament canon. In the third angel's message, the group of the worshippers of the beast and its image and the bearers of the mark of the beast are contrasted with the "saints." One of the characteristics of the saints is that they keep τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. This phrase is ambiguous. It can mean faith in Jesus, the faith of Jesus, faithfulness to Jesus, and the faithfulness of Jesus. Tonstad suggests:

... all the four leading alternatives... claim a measure of legitimacy and relevancy. None of the possible options is entirely unacceptable... And so they endure, these four, "the faithfulness of Jesus," "the faith of Jesus," "faith in Jesus" and "faithfulness to Jesus," and greatest among these is the faithfulness of God in Jesus.⁵⁰

It is Jesus in whom the saints believe and His faithfulness in which they trust. And this has to do with the gospel. R. D. Philipps suggests:

⁴⁹ These four groups appear seven times in Revelation (Rev 5,9; 7,9; 10,11; 11,9; 13,7; 14,6; 17,15). In two cases, one of the four terms is replaced by another similar term (Rev 10,11; 17,5).

⁵⁰ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of "Pistis Iesou" in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 337 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 193-194.

When John urges us to continue in “faith in Jesus,” he means that we must continue to look up to that gospel carried by the angel in heaven. It tells us that through faith we are forgiven by Christ’s blood and reconciled to God. It bears good news that our Savior has conquered the evil power under which we have suffered.⁵¹

Finally, in Revelation 14,13, a voice from heaven pronounces blessed those “who die in the Lord from now on.” They are assured of being able to rest (*ἀναπαύω*) “from their labors.” While the worshippers of the beast and its image have “no rest [*ἀνάπαυσις*], day and night” (Rev 14,11), the followers of Jesus do. The verb *ἀναπαύω* has already occurred with the martyrs in Revelation 6,11. These martyrs, wondering how long it takes God to bring about justice, are given eschatological white garments but need to rest a little longer. Obviously, the resting of those dead in the Lord implies an awakening from that rest in the resurrection. This is extremely good news.

Thomas and Macchia describe salvation in Revelation in the following way:

1. Salvation is linked to creation. (We still need to explore that thought).
2. “Salvation is... focused on the Lamb, who is slaughtered, for the redemption of the world.”
3. Salvation is not only to be understood as redemption or ransom but also as liberation.
4. Salvation implies transformation “in every way imaginable.”
5. Judgment “is the flip side of salvation... In fact, judgment is vital to the fulfillment of salvation in Revelation... Divine justice is fulfilled in mercy, but it involves the exclusion of those who remain persistent in opposing it.”
6. “God does not just save from a distance... but invites us to partake of the divine life in being made new.”

⁵¹ Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 407. See also Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*, 413.

7. "Though salvation is possible in Revelation only by the work of the Lamb and the Spirit, believers must also by God's grace repent, obey, and patiently endure in order to overcome the forces of darkness."
8. Salvation is not limited but "is for the nations as well as for individuals."
9. To belong to the book of life means to belong to the Lamb.
10. "Salvation in Revelation is costly grace... This grace is free, but it is not cheap..."⁵²

The eternal gospel of Revelation 14,6 must be read on this background. The author knows and understands the gospel, the good news. Noun (εὐαγγέλιον) and verb (εὐαγγελίζω) put together describe in a powerful way that what is presented in the message of the first angel is still based on the gospel and is not only judgment. When the first angel introduces his message as "eternal gospel," it is evident "that the end-time gospel, while relevant in particular to the people living in the closing period of earth's history, is not a different gospel from that preached by Paul. It is the same and unaltered gospel, the proclamation of which started at Pentecost."⁵³ Caird suggests: "Having written the word gospel, he [John] expected his readers to fill it with the full rich content of the apostolic preaching."⁵⁴ When John refers to it, he must have in mind the major features of the gospel including the details that he will mention in the next verses. It is good news that even in this late hour of world history salvation is still available. It is good news because the investigative judgment is still in progress and "Christ is still working in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf..."⁵⁵ It is good news because people can leave behind deception and come out of Babylon (Rev 18,4). On the other hand, the executive phase of the judgment mentioned later assures believers that there will be justice and vindication. The bright future for them is developed in Revelation 21 and 22.

⁵² Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 537-543.

⁵³ Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 453.

⁵⁴ Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 183.

⁵⁵ Rodriguez, *Future Glory*, 131.

The expected response to the proclamation of the everlasting gospel is to fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him (Rev 14,7).

The Three-Angels' Message and Creation

While the gospel comes first in the Three-Angels' Message this is not so on a chronological basis. Creation precedes salvation. However, the two are linked. In the first angel's message, the good news of salvation is based on the worship of the Creator.

Surprisingly, Revelation has more direct and indirect references to creation than expected at first glance.⁵⁶ Much of this creation language points forward to the Creator in Revelation 14,6.

Revelation 3,14

The first direct reference to creation is found in Revelation 3,14. Jesus is the beginner or the originator (NET; ἀρχή) of God's creation.⁵⁷ This verse belongs to the seven letters in Revelation 1-3. When we talk about the Creator in Revelation, Jesus must be included.

⁵⁶ We will briefly discuss the direct creation statements, but the indirect references have also to be taken in account when creation in Revelation is being discussed. Allusions to the Genesis creation are the references to (1) heaven, sea, earth, (2) the presence of God, (3) life, (4) precious stones and gold, (5) the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars), (6) day and night, and (7) the ruling of humanity. Further allusions are the phrases "from the foundation of the world," "It is done," the silence in heaven, and the beasts coming from the sea and out of the earth. Creation themes occur with the divine designations, the verb ποιέω (to make), the undoing of creation in the trumpet vision, the abyss, and humans as souls.

⁵⁷ The NKJV calls Jesus "the Beginning of the creation of God." But such a translation can be misunderstood in the sense that Jesus would be the first being created by God, not the Creator Himself. In Revelation, "beginning" (ἀρχή), applied to Jesus and God must be understood actively, as we do in the phrase Jesus is "the Beginning and the End" (Rev 22,13). This phrase is used verbatim also for God the Father who is likewise "the Beginning (ἀρχή) and the end" (Rev 21,6). Some English translation prefer "ruler" as translation of ἀρχή (e.g., the NIV). However, this does not seem to be likely due to John's use of the term. The meaning "ruler" or "powers" is mostly found with Paul, e.g., in Rom 8,38; 1 Cor 15,24, Eph 1,21; 3,10; 6,12; Col 1,16; 2,10,15; Tit 3,11, however, not in Hebrews (see, e.g., Heb 1,10; 2,3; 3,14; 5,12; 7,3). In addition, John seems to distinguish between ἀρχή and ἀρχων (ruler, authority) in Revelation.

Revelation 4,11

In the seal vision, Revelation 4,11 refers to the Creator: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” This hymn is preceded by another one: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4,8). Revelation 4 focuses on the worship of God the Father, on His magnificence and power and on His activities. Twice in verse 11 the verb κτίζω (“to create/to make”) is used. This statement contains several important points:

1. The “you” is emphatic. It stresses and highlights God as the creator in the sense that “Creation is a fundamental component of who God is.”⁵⁸
2. God created all things. This includes all living beings and all inanimate things. But God is not part of creation.
3. Creation by God is expressed twice in verse 11, once in the indicative modo—“God created”—and once in the passive—“they were created—.” The passive is a divine passive. No being can claim that it does not exist as a result of divine creation.
4. Creation is not an accident or a mere coincidence. Creation is rooted in the will of God.
5. The order of the verbs “created,” “existed,” “were created” may stress God as sustainer of creation.⁵⁹
6. To recognize God as creator has repercussions on humanity. As a defeated king prostrated himself before the Roman emperor, so the twenty-four elders prostrate before God, recognizing Him as the

⁵⁸ Gregory Stevenson, “The Theology of Creation in the Book of Revelation,” *Leaven* 21, No. 3 (2013): 140.

⁵⁹ The strange order of verbs has triggered a number of suggestions, among them that God planned creation in His mind before executing it. See, e. g., Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 127. Beale proposes that the meaning of lines 2 and 3 is: “they continually exist and have come into being” (*The Book of Revelation*, 335). Aune talks about “an instance of *hysteron-proteron*, i.e., the inversion of events, which sometimes occurs in Revelation...” (*Revelation 1-5*, 312). On the other hand, Osborne suggests an ABA pattern, a chiasmic pattern, in which creation is being restated without implying a chronological order (*Revelation*, 242).

supreme authority of the universe. Their symbolic act of casting their crowns before the throne underlines their complete commitment to the Almighty. They acknowledge their dependence on the Creator.⁶⁰

The two hymns of Revelation 4 occur in the same immediate context of worship. It is the holy God, who sits on the throne, the Lord God Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come, who is the creator God. In other words, the divine designations in verse 8 and similar ones in Revelation 1,8 must be understood as descriptions of the creator God. At least from chapter 4 onward the divine names and titles carry with them the notion that God is to be understood as the creator.⁶¹

Revelation 5,13

In Revelation 5,13 creation language occurs again: "...I heard every creature (κτίσμα) in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them..." (Rev 5,13). The noun κτίσμα refers to "creatures" and "everything created."⁶² Creation worships the Creator because He is worthy of it. Therefore, the first angel of Revelation 14,4-7 can demand worship.

Revelation 10,6

Revelation 10,6 occurs in the expansion of the sixth trumpet of the vision of the seven trumpets. Most likely, the strong angel of verses 1-7 should be understood as Jesus. He swears "by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it" (Rev 10,6). Important is the mention of the areas of creation: heaven, earth, sea, and what is in them. The angel's reference to the Creator and the scope of creation reminds Bible students of

⁶⁰ See Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 181, and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 126.

⁶¹ Koester understands the title One who was, is, and will come as "Affirming God's present, past, and future... role as Creator" (*Revelation*, 2265). Referring to Alpha and Omega he states (230): "As the Alpha God is the Creator, the beginning of all things (4:11); as the Omega, he brings all things to completion in the new creation (21:1)."

⁶² Κτίσμα occurs also in Revelation 8,9, the second trumpet, where a third of the sea creatures dies. In Revelation 5,13, however, God's creatures include "every creature in the universe."

Genesis 14,19.22 (LXX), Nehemiah 9,6; Psalm 146,6; Acts 4,24; 14,15 and the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20,11, emphasizing God's universal creatorship and therefore His universal authority. The threefold repetition of the phrase "and the things in it" heightens the emphasis on the Creator's omnipotence and sovereignty. The Sabbath commandment is of special importance because it does not only have a literary connection to creation, but the seventh day is also an element of creation. The Creator and Lord of the Sabbath "precedes all things, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word in creation. He has the last word in the new creation."⁶³ The contribution of Revelation 10,6 to Revelation's creation theology is that it links protology to eschatology.⁶⁴ It is the Creator God who controls the events on earth and ushers in the end in the form of judgment and new creation. As already pointed out in the discussion of the gospel, Revelation 10 ends with the commission to prophetic ministry in the context of peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. It prepares for the Three-Angels' Message.

Revelation 14,7

Revelation 14,7 is built on three infinitives. The first calls people to fear God, the second to give Him glory (as a reason the hour of judgment is mentioned), and the third to worship Him because He is the Creator. "Worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Rev 14,7). While these infinitives are building one on the other and may be parallel to some extent—God needs to be "feared" as the Creator, He needs to receive glory as the Creator (*cf.* Rev 4), and He needs to be worshipped as the Creator—we will focus on the last imperative. We also need to compare the major creation texts encountered so far, Revelation 14,7 with Revelation 4,11 and 10,6.

⁶³ Larry L. Lichtenwalter, "Creation and Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, No. 1 (2004): 127. *Cf.* John Sweet, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 178.

⁶⁴ See Gerald L. Stevens, *Revelation: The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 386.

No part of the Apocalypse is so dominated by the term “to worship” as is its central vision (Rev 11,19-14,21). Seven of the eight usages of the term in this central vision apply to (1) the dragon (once), (2) the sea beast (three times), (3) the image of the beast (once), and (4) both sea beast and image of the beast (twice). In addition, this worship is universal and enforced by the evil powers. No wonder that the first angel’s message must call the world to worship God. This is mentioned only once in contrast to the demands to worship either one or more of the three evil powers. But the call is weighty and determines humans’ eternal destiny.

In Revelation 4,11 God is worshiped by the twenty-four elders, beings in heaven. The scene plays in the throne room of the heavenly temple. The worship is continuous and is not challenged by beings around the throne. Rather one gets the impression that the worship of the Creator is a joyful worship of deep gratitude. The literary form of Revelation 4 is a narrative. The ongoing worship can be understood as a worship of the past, the present, and the future.⁶⁵ God is praised because of who He is—in this case, His immeasurable holiness, omnipotence, and eternal existence—and what He has done: He has been active in creation, and He is active in sustaining what and whom He has created. However, Revelation 14,7 portrays a completely different situation. The setting is on earth and not in heaven. God does not deal with His loyal heavenly entourage but with sinful human beings who on top of their innate problems are drawn into a great war with a focus on worship and loyalty. They must decide whether to follow the tangible—the enormous power, influence, and propaganda of the evil powers which appeal even to the worst human traits—or to opt for the less tangible, the holy Creator God who by His sheer existence challenges human sinfulness, though not human life. The text is not embedded in a nice narrative but comes with a divine imperative. Yet, this imperative reveals that God still loves humans so much

⁶⁵ Ekkehardt Mueller suggests that true worship is theocentric, tinitarian, objective and not only subjective, universal and all-encompassing, continuous and unending, maintains the tension between God’s immanence and his transcendence, extols the character and nature of God, praises the works of God, and provides a new perspective to life on earth. The completion of the plan of salvation is set into a worship setting (“Reflections on Worship in Revelation 4 and 5,” *Reflections: The BRI Newsletter* (July 2012): 1-6).

that He wants them to be saved and experience ultimate *shalom*. As their Creator, He knows what is best for them, better than they themselves know.

The two creation texts, Revelation 10,6 and Revelation 14,7, appear in parallel contexts, namely shortly before Christ's second coming. They are quite similar and yet different:

1. Revelation 10,6 uses the verb κτίζω ("to create") to describe creation, Revelation 14,7 employs the broader term ποιέω ("to make"). However, ποιέω is used in Genesis 1 and 2 (LXX),⁶⁶ and the connection of Revelation 14,7 to Genesis 1 and 2 is more direct.
2. Revelation 10,6 enumerates three spheres of creation plus "what is in them" (heaven, earth, sea and what is in them), Revelation 14,7 contains four elements (heaven, earth, sea, and springs of water). In both cases, the first three elements come in the same order, and both refer to the Sabbath (Exod 20,8-11). Yet even the connection to the Sabbath is clearer in Revelation 14,7⁶⁷ because its context refers also to the Decalogue.⁶⁸ Those who live on earth in the last days need to acknowledge the Creator by respecting him and his will and by recovering the true Sabbath which He has instituted at creation and has asked humanity to observe.
3. While contextually both texts are dealing with final events, Revelation 10,6 may appeal more to the church, whereas Revelation 14,7 is a call to humanity to make right choices. In Revelation 13-14, the issue of whom to worship reaches its point of culmination. True and false worship are pitched against each other. Revelation 14,7 challenges people to commit themselves completely to the Creator.

⁶⁶ Applied to God's creative acts ποιέω is found in Genesis 1,1.7.16.21.25.26.27 (three times), and 31; 2,2 (twice), and 2,3.4.18. According to Genesis 3,21 God made garments for Adam and Eve.

⁶⁷ See Jon Paulien, "Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, Nos. 1-2 (1998): 179-186.

⁶⁸ Revelation 11,19 mentions the ark of the covenant which contained the ten commandments (Exod 25,21; Deut 10,1-2). Observance of the commandments occurs in Revelation 12,17; 14,12, rejection in Revelation 12,4.15 and 13,15 (killing); 13,4.8.12.14.15 and 14,11 (idolary); 13,6 (blasphemy).

In mentioning that judgment has come, people are warned about the choices they make. All humanity is called to repent.⁶⁹

The inhabitants of the earth have been amazed by the powers displayed by the beast and his false prophet (13:12-14); they are now reminded that they have to do with one who is mightier than the beast—with him who is the source of all things in heaven and on earth.⁷⁰

Revelation 21 and 22

So far, the readers and hearers of Revelation have encountered the original creation of Genesis 1 and 2. In Revelation 21 and 22, they are confronted with a new, yet future creation. Revelation 21,1-2 introduces a new heaven and new earth and in addition the holy city. The description of the city dominates the second part of Revelation 21. The first part of chapter 22 adds to the imagery garden elements such as the river with the water of life and the tree of life. John portrays the New Jerusalem as bride, city, and garden. Obviously, it is a garden-city.⁷¹ All of this is couched in sanctuary language. However, most important is the unmitigated presence of God with saved humanity. God will tabernacle under His people as He did in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen 2).⁷² The wonderful result of his presence is described with the positive affirmation that in fatherly love God will take care of all tears of his children. Personally and in tenderness, He will remove what creates hurt and injury. This is followed by the undoing of four detrimental aspects of present life that were not found in the first creation: death, mourning, crying, and pain. Moo notes that with these positive effects the curse of the Genesis 3 fall is

⁶⁹ See George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 193.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁷¹ Michael J. Gorman concludes: “Thus this paradise is not just a garden but an urban garden, or even better, a *garden-city*” (*Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness; Following the Lamb into the New Creation* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011], 164).

⁷² In Jesus God “tabernacled” also among humans, however, in a more hidden way (John 1,14).

undone.⁷³ The truly new aspect in the new creation and in the eschatological sanctuary however is salvation. Here we will not continue to explore the new creation because it is not directly in view in the Three-Angels' Messages.⁷⁴ The description of God's creative activity in Revelation 14,7 is restricted to the past. Only the third message will proceed to the use of future tenses, creating a chronological sequence with the three messages.

Summary

In Revelation, creation is assumed as a given. God created all things. This includes everything not only in our solar system but also in the universe. God is the source of life and not part of creation. Therefore, there is a marked difference between Creator and creation/creature and always will be. But once created, God wanted to be close to His creatures, including humanity. In this case, the transcendent God drew close and met with His created beings. This is His immanence. From this uniqueness as Creator derives God's ownership of and authority over all creation. He can create, un-create, and recreate. He is the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is to be praised and worshiped even more so because the biblical Creator God is not a deist God, winding up a clock and leaving it to itself. He sustains creation and cares for it. Revelation teaches that not only God the Father is Creator but also Jesus Christ is. This highlights even more His love and care for humanity.

Creation does not only inform us about God's nature, but it also helps us better to understand humanity. Humans are not an accident of nature. They are part of God's creation and yet can think beyond creation. Being moral beings with their own will and freedom of choice, they can distinguish between good and evil and can choose what is right or what is wrong, life or death, whether to follow God or oppose Him

⁷³ Jonathan Moo, "The Sea That is No More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse if John," *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009): 165.

⁷⁴ Revelation 14,7 with the addition of the springs of water to the threefold sphere of creation as heaven, earth, and sea may have in mind the eschatological water of life that is available at no cost (Rev 21,6; 22,17). But still creation is expressed in the first angel's message with an aorist and in the context of the Genesis creation account.

(Rev 14,6-12). To know what creation means and how it closely links humanity to God allows people to find meaning in life.

Creation and Sabbath go together in Genesis 2, in the Sabbath Commandment of Exodus 20,8-11, and in various New Testament passages including Revelation 14,7. Creation theology in Revelation includes the seventh-day Sabbath and following the will of God. It is foundational to an understanding of the nature of sin, Satan, evil, and theodicy, the great controversy, and eschatology. The appreciation of the value of human life and the establishment of a theology of marriage and sexuality, God's good gift, are an outcome of creation theology, to mention some others. Therefore, the call to worship God as Creator has tremendous implications regarding biblical teachings and a Christian lifestyle and will be heeded by true followers of Christ.

The Three-Angels' Message and the Interplay of Gospel and Creation

So far, we have shown both the importance of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the importance of creation in the Three Angels' Message. But these cannot be treated completely separately. While the gospel comes first in Revelation 14,6 and is followed by the message of God as the Creator, in reality creation preceded salvation. Salvation is not possible without creatures having been created. On the other hand, creation by itself does not reach God's intended goal of the restoration of all things if there is no salvation. Because creation was followed by the fall, the sin problem would only end with the global death of the created beings were it not for God's intervention in terms of redemption. Only salvation through the Lamb can open the door to a new creation. Thus, creation and salvation are dependent on each other and cannot be separated.

This is seen early in the Apocalypse and needs to inform the situation in the Three Angel's messages. Jesus is introduced as Redeemer in Revelation 1,5⁷⁵ but a little later He appears also as Creator (Rev 3,14).

⁷⁵ According to Revelation 1,18 he has the keys to death and Hades and is able to bring about resurrection to eternal life.

He introduces Himself to a lukewarm but financially affluent and therefore self-confident church of Laodicea as the beginning of God's creation. While the issue is not that Jesus was created and is the first created being,⁷⁶ the question is still if the phrase refers to Him as the cause and originator of creation or as the ruler of creation who had nothing to do with the creation process. Some have suggested that with Jesus the new creation in a spiritual sense or the creation of the church has come.⁷⁷ Others see Jesus involved in the Genesis creation, following Jesus' description of the divine Logos as Creator in John 1,1-3. R. Bauckham argues: "Christ preceded all things as their source. In this belief in Christ's role in creation, Revelation is at one with the Pauline literature (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15-17), Hebrews (1:2) and the Fourth Gospel (1:1-3)." And he goes on to call Jesus the "divine agent in God's creation of all things and in God's eschatological fulfillment of all things."⁷⁸ Osborne suggests that "beginning" (ἀρχή)

means not only preeminence or ruler but also "source" or "origin," and that is a likely connotation here [...] Jesus is the beginning and source of "God's creation." Again, this is a message to the Laodiceans. In their wealth and complacency, they

⁷⁶ See discussion above.

⁷⁷ E. g., Beale understands Jesus "as the sovereign inaugurator of the new creation" (*The Book of Revelation*, 298). This does not mean that He would be sovereign "over the original creation." He also mentions the view that Jesus is "the beginning, not of the original creation, but of the newly created church or of the new age of the church." Fanning states that "Christ is never presented in this book as creator or agent of creation" (*Revelation*, 8), but this would probably not mean that He is not its ruler (185). See also M. R. Mulholland Jr., "Revelation," in *James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. by G. R. Osborne and M. R. Mulholland Jr., Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 18 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 452. Dwelling on the aspect of "ruler", Robert M. Royalty Jr. suggests: "The phrase 'the origin of God's creation' (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως) evokes the political theme of the proem, where Christ is called the ruler (ἀρχων) of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5). This play on words (*paranomasia*) on *archōn* and *archē* in Rev 1:5 and 3:14 grounds Christ's political authority over the kings of the earth in his cosmic authority as the beginning or origin of creation (see also Rev 22:13)" (*The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998], 165).

⁷⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56. See also Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 256; Sweet, *Revelation*, 107; Patterson, *Revelation*, 138.

thought of themselves as in control; Jesus is telling them that he alone controls creation; he is the very source of their wealth and power.⁷⁹

Later in the Apocalypse Jesus is called the Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End (Rev 22,13), appropriating the titles of God the Father. If these titles refer indirectly to God as Creator—as we have proposed above—Jesus needs also to be seen as Creator and Authority. In the message to Laodicea Jesus as Creator warns the church of divine judgment but also offer salvation, as church members repent. “The message to the Laodiceans is that their boast in earthly riches is misplaced because all things belong to Jesus, who is worthy of praise and glory.”⁸⁰ So in the first chapters of Revelation Jesus appears as Redeemer and is also associated with creation. Both crucial concepts are brought together in one person, and this is Christ.

Creation and salvation appear again in the seal vision, especially in the introductory scenes of Revelation 4 and 5. God the Father is portrayed and worshipped as Creator (Rev 4,8-11), Jesus is praised as Savior (Rev 5,9-12). Two hymns are devoted to God the Father, and two hymns are devoted to the Son, the Lamb. Throughout these hymns one can observe a crescendo as the groups and numbers of worshippers increase. Both Father and Son are addressed in the same way with the phrase, “Worthy are you” (Rev 4,11; 5,9), and a number of identical attributes are attributed to both of them (Rev 4,9; 5,12.13). But the first hymn to the Son is singled out and designated as a “new hymn.” As important as creation is, something breathtaking has happened with the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, which has revealed to humanity and to the universe not only the unlimited power of God but more importantly the character of God, not only His wonderful holiness but also His incomprehensible love. The Creator God has established the possibility for sinful beings to be saved through the death and in the person of His own

⁷⁹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 205. Leon Morris opts for both: “Christ has the supreme authority over creation and... he is the origin of created being” (*Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], 84).

⁸⁰ Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*, 169.

Son. This leads to a fifth hymn in Revelation 5,13 in which both God the Father and Jesus Christ are being worshipped and praised. But the vision contains still two more hymns. The great multitude of the redeemed in front of God's throne sing: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7,10) before all the angels fall on their faces glorify God in the last hymn of the seal vision (Rev 7,11). As Jesus is Savior and Creator, God the Father is Creator and Savior. As Father and Son are inseparable, the concepts of creation and salvation are inseparable in biblical theology and in the theology of the Apocalypse. They are complementary in the best sense of the word, and it is only possible to move from the old creation to the new creation via salvation. Thomas and Macchia observe:

Since all of creation has its being in the creating and sustaining power of the Creator, they can be redeemed, liberated, and made ultimately new only by this same God. In the light of what Revelation says about the creation in relation to the Creator, it is unimaginable that salvation could come from any other source than God.⁸¹

This is also true for the next vision in Revelation, the trumpet vision. The mighty angel, with divine characteristics (Rev 10,1-2), who obviously is Jesus, swears by the Creator God, most likely God the Father (Rev 10,6). In the next chapter, Jesus appears as crucified Lord (Rev 11,8), picking up on statements on His death, resurrection, and on salvation achieved made earlier in Revelation (Rev 1,5.18; 5,9.12). With the last trumpet the plan of salvation, consisting of creation, salvation, judgment, and new creation has come to a closure. Father and Son are again united in a hymn sung by heavenly voices: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev 11,15).

About Revelation 11,19-14,20 we have already extensively discussed the themes salvation and creation separately. We stressed that the background of chapter 12 is Genesis 3 with its proto-gospel. With the exception of the last two verses, Genesis 3 still takes place in the Garden

⁸¹ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 538.

of Eden and therefore has a creation background. The introduction of Satan as “the serpent of old” (Rev 12,9; NKJV) highlights this creation background. In other words, the central vision of Revelation begins with creation and moves directly to salvation (Rev 12,10-11). The two topics are again combined in Revelation 13,8 in which the book of life of the Lamb is mentioned—those written in it are saved (Rev 21,27)—and on the other hand the time “from the foundation of the earth.” The text has been translated and interpreted in two major ways: (1) “... everyone whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world* in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” and (2) “... whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb *slain from the foundation of the world*.”⁸² In the first case, the meaning would be that salvation was determined for humans before creation by them being entered into the book of Life.⁸³ In the second case, it would mean that the plan of salvation with the death of the Messiah was devised already from the foundation of the world. Mounce explains: “That is, the death of Christ was a redemptive sacrifice decreed in the counsels of eternity.”⁸⁴ Both options are based on “God’s foreknowledge of the Fall,”⁸⁵ not on predestination. No matter how Revelation 13,8 is being interpreted—whether option (1) or option (2), the plan of salvation and creation are intimately linked. The plan to save humanity if humans would decide against God is not a divine afterthought but is woven into the plan of creation. Therefore, creation and salvation appear also together in the Three-Angels’ Messages of the same vision. We suggested that salvation is addressed by the preaching of the eternal gospel (Rev 14,12), the description of the believers (Rev 14,12), and the addendum of the second beatitude of the Apocalypse (Rev 14,13). Why does the mention of the gospel precede

⁸² The parallel text in Revelation 17,8 is clear: The names of the earth dwellers “are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.” But the message of Revelation 13,8 may have a different emphasis. In the Greek text, the direct antecedent is “the Lamb slain.”

⁸³ God’s plan is to save all people, but not all people allow God to save them. Therefore, they can be blotted out from the book of life—Revelation 3,5; 22,19—or their names are not found in the book of life—Revelation 20,15.

⁸⁴ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 252.

⁸⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 504.

the reference to creation (Rev 14,7). Maybe this is the greatest need of the end time, when people have to make a decision between life and death, Christ or Satan. However, it is based on the fact that God is the Creator, the giver of life and owner of all, the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who breathes life—literally “the breath/Spirit (πνεῦμα) of life from God”—into the dead bodies of the two witnesses (Rev 11,11).⁸⁶

While from Revelation 15 onward the Apocalypse is mainly dealing with judgments still a number of pages contain passages on creation and on salvation. A note on creation:

1. The call, “It is done,” alludes to finished creation. The Greek consists of one word: γέγονεν (Rev 16,17). It is derived from the verb γίνομαι, which has various meaning, dependent on the context.⁸⁷ This term is frequently used in Genesis. It relates especially to God’s creative acts in Genesis 1 where it appears no less than twenty-three times.⁸⁸ Depending on its verbal form and its context, γίνομαι means “let there be” (Gen 1,3), “it was” (Gen 1,5) or together with the particle οὕτως “it was so” (Gen 1,6).

⁸⁶ Πνεῦμα means breath but also spirit and may refer to the Holy Spirit. This phrase has been translated as “breath of life” by a variety of modern English translations (e.g., ESV, NASB, NIV). However, it has been translated “Spirit of life” by older English versions such as the Geneva Bible, KJV, but also by the Revised Webster Bible of 1995. “Spirit of life” is also the choice of the French translation of Louis Segond (1910) and the Nouvelle Edition de Genève (1979). Many if not most of the German translations use “Spirit of life” (e.g., Luther [1545, 1912, 1984, 2017], revised Elberfelder Bibel [1993], Münchner NT, Schlachter [2000], Zürcher [2007/2008]). While some commentators opt for “breath of life” (e.g., J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997], 142), others allow for the translation “Spirit of life” or even choose it (e.g., Keener, *Revelation*, 296; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation*, A Continental Commentary [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 134.) The Old Testament background for Revelation 11,11 is Ezekiel 37, the valley of the dry bones where these bones came to life again through the Spirit. Thomas and Macchia, seem to be correct when they assert: “Significantly, the Spirit who now enters the two prophets is the same Spirit who has inspired their prophetic activity” (*Revelation*, 207).

⁸⁷ These meanings include “to be born,” “to be produced,” “to be made,” “to be created,” “to come about,” “to happen,” “to become,” and “to be.” See Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 196-199.

⁸⁸ Genesis 1,3 (twice); 1,5 (twice); 1,6 (twice); 1,8 (twice); 1,9.11.13 (twice); 1,14.15.19 (twice); 1,20.23 (twice); 1,24.30.31 (twice); 2,4.5.7. See the chapter by Jon Paulien, “Creation in the Johannine Writings,” unpublished document.

2. The seven plagues describe an undoing of creation just as part of the seven trumpets refer to a reversal of creation. Ramsey notes: “The four areas affected—earth, sea, fresh water and sky—made up the whole of the human environment as the ancients perceived it. These four spheres were what Jews and Christians acknowledged as God’s creation (compare 14:7).”⁸⁹ The plagues are an intensification of the trumpets. The first plague affects the earth, the second the sea, the third the waters/springs, the fourth the sun, the fifth brings intense darkness, and the sixth Armageddon so that humans are directly affected (Rev 16). U. B. Müller suggests that with the pouring out of the first four bowls the entire creation of earth, sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies is affected.⁹⁰ The bowl series describes the complete undoing of creation and, therefore, stands in contrast to the new creation in Revelation 21-22a.
3. The abyss is mentioned a number of times (e. g., in Rev 17,8; 20,1.3). It is found in Genesis 1,2 (LXX). The “surface of the deep” (Gen 1,2), which is connected to the state of planet earth being formless or void, is translated with the term *abyssos*. “‘Over the surface of the deep’ parallels ‘over the waters’ in the subsequent clause... On the second and third days these waters are eventually separated from the expanse and land masses when the waters are called ‘sea’ (vv. 6-10).”⁹¹ After the separation sea (θάλασσα) and earth (γῆ) became visible. It is precisely from these two areas that the two beasts of Revelation 13 come forward, the sea beast and the beast out of the earth. In Revelation 17,8 another beast emerges, but it comes from the abyss. Obviously, John takes his imagery from the creation account in Genesis 1.⁹²

⁸⁹ Michaels, *Revelation*, 121.

⁹⁰ Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19 (Gütersloh, DE: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 281.

⁹¹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 133.

⁹² For a more detailed discussion of the abyss, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 1),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 1, No. 1 (2007): 40-50.

Intertwined with the allusions to creation are references to salvation:

1. The redeemed at the sea of glass singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15,2-4) are found in the introduction to the seven plagues.
2. The beatitude of those who are awake at the second coming occurs in the sixth plague (Rev 16,15).
3. The followers of Christ sing about salvation after the judgment of Babylon who was sitting on the beast of the abyss (Rev 19,1), and the marriage supper of the Lamb is announced to which people who are not associated with Babylon are invited (Rev 19,7-9).
4. The resurrection of the faithful believers and their reign with Christ is recorded while Satan is imprisoned and the worshippers of beast and image are dead. This is still indicated in the third angel's message, although not discussed in detail.

The last two chapters of Revelation are mostly positive. The theme of the new earth combines creation and salvation. While the new creation builds on the Genesis creation and surpasses it, it also contains the concept of salvation (Rev 21,1-7.22; 22,1-7). This is also true for the epilogue (Rev 22,12-14.16-17.20-21). The Three Angels' Messages do not develop these aspects.

We summarize: The messages of creation and salvation are found throughout the visions of Revelation. While they can be studied separately, it is important to look at them also together because such an approach allows for a broader picture to emerge. In Revelation, the Creator is not only God the Father but also Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In Revelation, the Savior is not only Jesus but also God the Father and the Holy Spirit.⁹³ Salvation is not an afterthought but is already envisioned with creation. Creation is a prerequisite for salvation and will be reestablished after the Millennium. In the interim, salvation is a kind of spiritual renewal and recreation—though not strongly emphasized as such in Revelation. The Three-Angels' Message may be understood as a summary of the Genesis creation account and the salvation passages of Revelation.

⁹³ See the Holy Spirit as the One who also communicates the messages to the seven churches and who raises from death the two witnesses.

When discussing the messages of the three angels these other passages need also to be consulted. We also noticed a connection of creation, salvation, and judgment. Many messages of Revelation come in a sanctuary context, which we have noticed in passing but have not developed in this paper. It may suffice to mention that the sanctuary features strongly in all introduction scenes of the visions of Revelation (Rev 1; 4-5; 8,2-5; 11,19; etc.) and in many other places (Rev 7; 14; 15; 21-22; etc.).

E. Brasil de Souza is correct by emphasizing that all of these come in a sanctuary context:

In Revelation, interconnections between salvation and creation occur within the framework of sanctuary imagery. As the concluding chapters of Revelation clearly show, the ultimate outcome of salvation is the full restoration of creation when “the tabernacle of God is with men” (Rev 21:3).⁹⁴

Jesus and the Three Angel's Messages

If it is true that the Apocalypse is a Revelation of Christ and not only from Christ, and we assume it is, then we may briefly raise the question where Jesus is in the Three-Angels' Messages. In the central vision of Revelation, Jesus appears first as the male child and later as Michael (Rev 12). We hear about His blood and about the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12,17). The slain Lamb is the owner of the book of life (Rev 13,8), and there is no way around Jesus if one wants to be saved. In Revelation 14,1-5 Jesus is portrayed with His people, the 144,000, standing on symbolic Mt. Zion, safe and secure. They belong to Him, are purchased by Him, and follow Him wherever He goes. At the end of chapter 14, Jesus is revealed as the One like a Son of Man who will bring in the great harvest through His second coming (Rev 14,14-16).

What about the Three-Angels' Message directly?

1. Jesus is the One through whom the good news of salvation has become a reality.

⁹⁴ Elias Brasil de Souza, “Sanctuary: Cosmos, Covenant, and Creation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 24, No. 1 (2013): 37.

2. Jesus is the Creator together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. He deserves to be worshipped. As Creator He is also the Lord of the Sabbath as He claimed in the Gospels to be (Matt 12,8; Mark 2,28; Luke 6,2). Therefore, it is not enough to be only emotionally attracted to Jesus, but as Lord we also need to listen to and do what He tells us about living the Christian life, including the observation of the seventh-day Sabbath.
3. Jesus is mentioned in the third angel's message when people are tormented. Revelation 14,10 states, "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." This text should not be understood as Jesus taking "pleasure in the torment of his adversaries."⁹⁵ "John here stresses the inescapability and finality of judgment, not the satisfaction it could afford to those who witness it."⁹⁶ Interestingly, Revelation does not record that the redeemed are looking on when their persecutors are judged.⁹⁷ There is no virtue in delighting when others are suffering. The angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15,10). Jesus does not triumph when His adversaries suffer. He came to save people. His death on the cross stresses His love that went to the extreme sacrifice. But love does not eclipse justice, and Jesus' ministry as Redeemer does not exclude judgment. The phrase may not describe the state of mind in which the angels and the Lamb find themselves. Rather it may indicate the gravity of the situation for those who are lost. These people are not only suffering from "extreme depression,"⁹⁸ but they are also confronted with Jesus whom they have to

⁹⁵ Roloff, *Revelation*, 176. See also Patterson, *Revelation*, 293. Tonstad states: "In the emerging scenario, the Lamb is not the agent of the torment, and it misses the mark to see the Lamb 'and the holy angels' as indifferent spectators" (*Revelation*, 209). However, he differs from other interpreters by suggesting that the execution of judgment, described as torment, is Satan's doing: "In the contrastive reading, the torment 'with fire and sulfur' shows the work of the dragon, but the deed has *witnesses* (Aune 1996-98, 835)" (*Revelation*, 209, emphasis by author).

⁹⁶ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdmans, 1983), 226.

⁹⁷ See Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 209-210.

⁹⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 760.

acknowledge as Lord,⁹⁹ simultaneously understanding the extent of what they have done and what they are going to miss. They lived their lives with wrong priorities, false decisions, opposition to and rejection of the One who is the Source of life.¹⁰⁰ However, Jesus does not change what He is ontologically and what He stands for.

4. Jesus is mentioned again at the end of the third angel's message. As pointed out above, the phrases *pistis Iēsou* (Rev 14,12) can be translated differently. But whether understood as faith in Jesus (ESV), faith of Jesus (NKJV), our faithfulness to Jesus ("remain faithful to Jesus," TNIV, NIV 1984) or Jesus' faithfulness,¹⁰¹ the focus is and must always be on Jesus. While followers of Christ have faith in Him and are faithful, they can rely on the faithfulness of Jesus and should live with the assurance of salvation. Salvation is a gift to be received and cannot be attained by human effort and work.
5. The addendum to the Three-Angels' Message (Rev 14,13) mentions the Lord. His followers die in Him and rest unless He returns while they are still alive. In this case, they will be transformed directly, without tasting death. Whatever will happen, this verse contains strong hope. But it also reminds the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse of Christ's solidarity with humanity when He took it upon Himself to become one of us, live, suffer, and die as we do also.¹⁰² However, Jesus did not stay dead. He was raised, and His resurrection is a guarantee of ours. Jesus is the "firstborn of the dead" (Rev 1,5).

⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Richard Lehmann notes: "It can be argued that it is not the angels and the Lamb who stand before the damned as ironic observers of their suffering, but the idol worshippers who stand before the angels. They are paralyzed by the reality whose existence they have denied. After having mocked the One who had worn a crown of thorns, they find him crowned with glory. The time of grace has passed. The opportunity has been lost. Not to receive grace is to face the sad reality of one's own failure" (*L'Apocalypse de Jean: Commentaire biblique* [Collonges-sous-Salève, FR: Faculté Adventiste de Théologie, 2018], 387); translated.

¹⁰¹ See Tonstad, *Revelation*, 210.

¹⁰² This is not to deny that the death of Jesus had dimensions that ours does not have.

An Approach to Sharing the Three-Angels' Messages

An important question is how the message should be shared once its content is at least partially understood by the presenters. This question is related to another one: If the message is to go to all people, this would include people from all walks of life, from all cultures, with very different worldview, and from all world religions as well as people who are secular and claim to be atheists and agnostics? How would, for instance, a Hinduist or Buddhist understand the message or an adherent to indigenous religions? The answer is that the message needs to be unpacked. Here are some suggestions:

First, the message is about God and Jesus. Proclaiming the Three-Angels' Message would mean to explain who God is and who Jesus is. People would need to know about God's character, about His authority, and about His sphere of influence. People would especially need to be introduced to Jesus because in Him God has become tangible and has revealed Himself. To fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him presupposes people to have or receive some basic knowledge about who this God is. Otherwise, they may just hate or ignore Him.

Second, since the message begins with the eternal gospel, people need to know what the gospel is, why the gospel is necessary, and how they can be saved. Obviously, the gospel is not only a means for people to reach a situation of unending life or to escape the circle of reincarnations. The problem of sin, the desperation, and the apparent meaninglessness of life must be addressed. Salvation is about reconciliation with God and with a life in intimate fellowship with the One who is Life.

Third, in this context creation needs to be explained. The biblical God is the only Creator who is able to create *ex nihilo*. He is the author of creation and the owner of Creation who has created beings as an expression of His love and His desire to communicate with His creatures, bless them, and allow them to participate in His goodness. All other theological insights rest on the fact that God decided to create. Thus, God's creative act has set a model for people to live in a healthy relationship with God and each other.

Fourth, the Three-Angel's Messages refer to God's commandments including the Sabbath. Thus, God's law needs to be explained, its purpose, its benefits, its relation to salvation. While the Sabbath is very important, the context of God's central vision points also to the first commandments of the Decalogue—no other god; no image of God, no blasphemy of God—but also to the second table—no killing, no deception and falsehood, no adultery (even if understood primarily in a metaphorical sense), no coveting. All of the ten commandments need to be maintained and taught, not only the Sabbath commandment, but especially the Sabbath commandment.

Fifth, the problem of evil powers needs to be explicated—at least in a rudimentary way. This includes the great controversy which is expressed most clearly in Revelation 12-14 and also permeates the Three-Angels' Message. The issue is not only that some powers are opposed to God from their very beginning but also that there are powers who started out as God-honoring movements but turned their back more and more to the Creator and Redeemer God.

Sixth, divine judgment needs to be addressed. What does it mean? Why does God judge? How does He do that? What will the outcome be? Judgment touches also on the question of theodicy, especially when people expect the just God to intervene when they deem fit, while God does not seem to do anything.

Seventh, the Three-Angel's Messages are not only about head knowledge, although cognitive truth is important. People need to be challenged to turn to God and follow Jesus and love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, and all their mind. This has very practical implications and will lead to a lifestyle which in the positive sense singles out people as disciples of Christ.

One of the questions to be raised is, if the Three-Angels' Message replaces all other messages in Revelation or other places of Scripture, for instance, Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28, or if it is an additional and final message that calls humanity to make a decision for God. This paper suggests that the Three-Angel's Message while understood as the final message is nevertheless built on other messages and needs to be

understood through these, due to its brevity. We also acknowledge that it does not cover all areas of biblical truth and when it comes to eschatology it focuses mainly on the judgment on evildoers¹⁰³ and does not develop the many positive aspects of God's kingdom on earth.

Conclusion

The Three-Angels' Message is an extremely important message to be proclaimed at this time. It has to be taken very seriously but needs to be understood more comprehensibly. Even today, it is still foreign to many believers and not fully understood.

We noticed that the Three-Angels' Message is by far not the only message in Revelation to be proclaimed. Revelation has many more messages of enormous importance, some spoken directly by God. Many of these come together in a nutshell in Revelation 14,6-12. But John's Apocalypse does not stop there. It has more to say. For instance, Christ's second coming is mentioned very frequently in Revelation, but it is not found in the Three-Angels' Message. While creation occurs in the message of Revelation 14,7, it is the Genesis creation—that which *was* made (Rev 14,7)—not directly the new creation which *will* be made. In this respect it looks back to the past because the original creation was and is foundational to whatever follows for humanity. But it does not speak of the creation which will be established and will surpass everything of the past, especially through the direct presence of God and His throne among redeemed humanity. Revelation does not end with chapter 14 or chapter 20. It does not conclude with so-called negative aspects of judgment—namely the eradication of the wicked, which seem to dominate the Three-Angels' Message. It tells us about a wonderful future, about a new heaven and new earth, a new Jerusalem, the end of all pain and turmoil, and about direct fellowship with God. This must also be proclaimed. The Three-Angels' Message talks about God, creation, redemption, and judgment.

¹⁰³ Even the end of the great war vision of Revelation 11,19-14,20 with its symbolic depiction of Jesus' second coming as harvest of the world focuses much more on the evildoers and their fate than the believers. This is appropriate in its context. But other visions with other perspectives are able to round out the picture.

Judgment may appear as being threatening to some readers and as a negative motivation to “fear God.” The positive motivation is the concept of salvation in the Three-Angels’ Message and the new creation in communion with the God of love, holiness, and justice which is being proclaimed in Revelation 21-22.

However, the Three-Angels Message has to be understood in an end time context of extreme pressure on the saints, even in a context of persecution and martyrdom. In such a context it makes a lot of sense, and judgment can and should also be understood as a positive event because it is linked to God’s justice. This justice will overturn unjust verdicts of earthly courts. It will make things right. Perpetrators will not be able to get away with all the evil and bloodshed they have brought on humanity. And the problem of sin will be solved once for all. Therefore, the subsequent chapter of Revelation, starting with chapter 15, will spell out in more detail how God’s astonishing plan of salvation will be finished.

To be warned of a judgment to come and to be encouraged reconsidering one is live, making things right with God, and accepting the gift of eternal life is of inestimable value. So, the Three-Angels’ Message is a call to the world population and to all sincere people to turn to God and come out of fallen Babylon, even if one was not aware of being part of it. Therefore, listen to the eternal gospel of salvation and fear God, give glory to Him, and worship the Creator and Savior and who loves us (Rev 14,6-7).

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Recibido: 12/10/2020
Aceptado: 02/12/2020