

## A PARTIAL PRETERIST UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION 12-13 WITHIN AN INTERTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

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### ABSTRACT

There are two lines of thought in exegetical circles concerning the interpretation of partial preterism, applied to Rev. 12-13: (1) the consistent partial preterism, according to which the whole book of Revelation is God's judgement directed toward the apostate Jews in AD 70; (2) the transitional partial preterism which argues that the main theme of Rev. 12-19 is God's judgement on Rome. To solve these conflicting opinions, intertextual views are applied to Rev. 12-13. We have observed that two main intertextual tensions arise. These are the conflict between John's intertextuality and that of his audiences on the one hand, and on the other hand, the different views held by the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. However, the problem of the two lines of partial preterism is not a matter of either/or but of both/and. Nonetheless, the matter of priority for each group of John's audiences is of exegetical significance. For the Jewish audience, the judgement of Jerusalem is still a matter of priority, but for the Gentile audiences, God's judgement on Rome is decisive.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although contemporary interpretations of the Book of Revelation employ various kinds of (intradisciplinary) views, they are based on, and categorised into, a number of traditional approaches, namely (partial) preterism,<sup>3</sup> futur-

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- 3 The principal advocates of the partial preterism are the Tyler School in Texas, called the Christian Reconstructionists whose eschatology is postmillennialism. While they are a minority in the contemporary research of Revelation, partial preterism seems to be regarded as an appropriate interpretation in the context of the grammatico-historical method, since its advocates cautiously analyse the symbolism of Revelation and fully take into account its historical setting in the first century. The strength of the partial preterism lies in the fact that Revelation must have had some meaning for his contemporaries.

ism, historicism and idealism. This article is an attempt to turn a problem of worn clothes into the image of new fashionable garments. There are two lines of thought in the circle of the partial preterism of Revelation 12-13: one line, that of the consistent partial preterism, believes that the whole of Revelation is the story of the judgement of God on the apostate Jews at the end of Jewish age in AD 70. The argument of the other line, the transitional partial preterism, is that the main theme of Revelation 12-19 is God's judgement on Rome. Which argument is correct? Is there any truth in any of these interpretations? Are they in direct contrast or do they complement each other?

After evaluating the two partial preterist interpretations, the following are probed respectively: (1) the socio-historical context, (2) the semantic analysis of John and his audiences' intertextualities, and (3) the pragmatic analysis in terms of the reaction of John and his audiences to Revelation 12-13 in the extratextual context. The way in which the term "intertextuality" is used in this article is that all literature is made up of previous writings and reflects the earlier works through citation, allusion, use of phrases and paraphrases of older books to create newer literature. Consequently, the term "intertextuality" is used primarily with reference to the strategies used both by John to create Revelation and by his audiences to understand it. Thus, intertextuality is concerned with three aspects, namely the author-oriented, text-oriented, and reader-oriented theories. This article will briefly explore some aspects of the intertextuality of Revelation 12-13 with the intention of solving the quandary of the two partial preterisms.

## 2. THE TWO ARGUMENTS OF THE PARTIAL PRETERISM IN REVELATION 12-13

### 2.1 The consistent partial preterism

The argument of D. Chilton is illuminating in this regard, since he is prominent among scholars of the consistent partial preterism. In his commentary, Chilton (1990:295-328) affirms that Revelation 1-11 deals with "the victory of Christ" over his enemies, culminating in the glorious establishment of the Church as his holy temple. Revelation 12-22 deals with "the victory of the Church" over her enemies, ending with her glorious establishment as God's holy temple. In detail, he has commented on Revelation 12-13 as follows: the woman (12:1) is the Church in the form of Old Covenantal Israel that gave birth to the child, Jesus. Revelation 12:6 pictures the escape of the Judean Christians from the devastation of Jerusalem, so that the dragon's

wrath is expended upon apostate rather than faithful Israel. The dragon's descent (12:13) to the land of Israel is to wipe out the Jerusalem Church. The rest of her seed (12:17) is the (predominantly Gentile) Christian Church throughout the Empire and does not exclude the Judean Christians in Palestine.

The beast from the sea (13:1) is the Roman Empire and the emperor Nero. In Revelation 13:3 the Roman Empire had been fatally wounded by the sword (cf. 13:14) of the gospel, thus the *Nero Redivivus* myth is not relevant here (see Bauckham 1993:421, 429). The land (13:3) means Israel, the apostatical Israel. According to Revelation 13:5 its prophetic usage is not primarily literal, although it is interesting that Nero's persecution of the Church did in fact last a full 42 months. In Revelation 13:10 John hammers home the certainty of the coming judgment on the heretical Jews of the first century, those who are in league with the beast in persecuting the saints (cf. Jer. 15:2; 42:11). Because the land beast (13:11) is the Jewish religious leaders (Mt. 24:5, 11; Acts 6:9-15; Dt. 13:1-5), Revelation 13:12 indicates that the heretical Judaism became completely subservient to the Roman State. As in Revelation 13:13-14, the Book of Acts records several instances of the miracle-working false Jewish prophets who came into conflict with the Church (Acts 8:9-24) and worked under Roman officials (Acts 13:6-11). In Revelation 13:15-17 the Jewish synagogues enforce submission to the emperor instead of to Christ. 666 (13:18) is not Nero, but the Roman Empire, which is not seen in terms of itself, but solely in terms of (1) the Land (Israel), and (2) the Church.

To epitomise, Chilton reached the conclusion that the destruction of Jerusalem is the main concern of the whole Revelation, even if he was careful to point out the role of Rome as the intimate co-operator with perverted Judaism in order to persecute the Gentile Christians as the woman's seed in 12:17 (cf. Gentry 1998:68). In short, the position of the consistent partial preterism is that Revelation 12-13 is God's "divorce document" to national Israel for her unfaithfulness.

## 2.2 The transitional partial preterism

Adams (1966:46-72) states that Revelation primarily pictures the fall of the renegade Jewish commonwealth and religious system, and the overthrow of the last (i.e. Roman) world-kingdom. Thus, the theme of Revelation is that these two satanically inspired persecutors of the church, debauched Judaism and pagan Rome, will soon be judged by God. The climax of the first prophecy regarding the judgment on Judaism is found in the transitional Revelation 12, where the destruction of Jerusalem is predicted in detail. The woman (12:1) portrays the Old Testament Church. John is go-

ing back to the very roots of Christianity, and sketches the moment when the present achieves the transition. The remnant of her seed (12:17) is the Gentile Church, true Israel. The beast from the sea (13:1) is the Roman Empire. The second beast (13:11) must be linked with the strictly religious aspect of the problem Christians faced in the Roman persecutions. 666 (13:18) signifies Nero. It has become clear that Adams regards the persecution of the seven churches in Asia Minor by Rome as the main focus of Revelation 13-19.

### 2.3 Evaluation and conclusion thus far

Even if the number of the advocates of the consistent partial preterism is more than those of the transitional partial preterism, mechanical calculation is not decisive here. Although, of course, the detailed arguments are not totally agreed upon by the advocates of the circle, one demerit of the consistent partial preterism is that it does not properly suggest direct consolation and a solution for John's persecuted audiences in Asia Minor. However, its merit is that while its focal point is God's judgment on the perfidious Jews, it aptly interprets the role of Rome as God's tool in the switchover of the Old Covenant to the New in God's economy. The transitional partial preterism, however, overcomes the above inadequacy of the consistent partial preterism, and obviously shows the co-operation between the Diaspora Jews and the pagan Romans against the Christians in Asia Minor. However, its error is in thinking that the conflict with Rome is the *sole* concern from Revelation 13 onwards and that the controversy with Judaism now fades from the book (cf. Beagley 1983:152).

## 3. THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF REVELATION 12-13

### 3.1 The socio-historical context of Revelation 12-13

Despite the view that the seven churches could have been persecuted in a perceived way because of the onslaught by Rome, they were suffering from both internal and external problems. The emperor veneration and worship and its attendant oppression were of critical importance to John's audiences (Rev. 2:10, 13; 6:11; 20:4; cf. Esler 1994:145). The period of AD 63-69 was a period of turmoil due to the Jewish-Roman war, the harassment of the Diaspora Jews by Nero, the turbulent situation in the Roman Empire, as well as the internal trauma caused by the false prophets, the spiritual compromise and general sloth of the Church.

### 3.2 The semantic analysis of John and his audiences' intertextualities of Revelation 12-13

#### 3.2.1 The semantic analysis of John's intertextuality for receptive production

The importance of the author's intertextuality is disclaimed in the circle of deconstruction and radical reader response criticism. In effect the death of the author has become the disappearance of the reader. The renunciation of the authorial subject requires that the reader be regarded impersonally (Rajan 1991:73). Today the consensus on the authorship of Revelation is that only one author wrote the book, though he certainly alludes to many Old Testament, Jewish, and Greco-Roman sources. While John, the beloved disciple, may well have written the book, another John could also have written it. Regardless of which John wrote the book, the author identifies himself as a prophet (1:1-3; 22:6-7). As Beale (1999:35) points out, it is therefore probable that John should be socially identified with a group of early Christian itinerant prophets. Whether John is Jesus' disciple or not, he seems to be well acquainted with the Old Testament and the eschatological discourses of Jesus. Of course he uses the framework of pagan myths and alters it for his theological reasoning.

##### 3.2.1.1 John's New Testament intertexture

Revelation 12-13 constitute a remarkable unity of thought. However, we find a surpassing profusion of quotations and allusions from possible sources (cf. Mazzaferri 1989:56). Two prominent New Testament apocalyptic texts are to be investigated, namely the Olivet Discourse and 2 Thessalonians 2.

- The Olivet Discourse

In regard to John's New Testament intertextuality, Painter (1997:561) contends that the Olivet Discourse (esp. Mt. 24:16-26) is John's main source for Revelation 12-13. In a sense, John could have intended Revelation as the extended version of the Olivet Discourse (Sproul 1998:145). The following diagram illustrates the details of the parallels:

Revelation		Matthew
12:1-12	Defeat of the dragon in heaven leads to -	
12:13-17	Flight of the woman (symbol for the Church)	24:16-20
13	Kingdom of beasts on earth	24:15

13:1-10	Sea beast: war on the saints	24:21-22 (cf. Mt. 26:52)
13:11-18	Land beast: deception	24:23-26

If the above comparison is correct, John, without a doubt, intends to depict the fall of Jerusalem in Revelation 12-13 as the parousia, because the main theme of the Olivet Discourse is Christ's judgment on the apostate Jews in AD 70, which anticipates the parousia of the Lord. Although Israel can be seen as a prominent focus of Revelation and the Olivet Discourse, it has to be kept in mind that Revelation is also directed towards the Roman Empire (Gentry 1998:59). In this way John introduces the inauguration of the new covenant and the universal salvation through which the demarcation of Jews and Gentiles is demolished. At this point, John and Paul (e.g., Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; 1 Th. 2:14-16) share the same intertextuality (e.g., Gal. 4:25-26).

- 2 Thessalonians 2

As Gentry (2000:5) indicates, with regard to the intertextuality of Revelation 13, the beast is interpreted as Nero. According to 2 Thessalonians 2, written c. AD 52, the man of lawlessness is to be preteristically understood for several reasons: (1) obvious parallels with Matthew 24 and Revelation 13 link the man of lawlessness by interpretation into their framework of writing: the late AD 60s up to AD 70; (2) the reference to the temple as still standing (2:4; Rev. 13:6); (3) the present restraining (i.e., the imperial law and Claudius Caesar) of the man of lawlessness (2:6); (4) the contemporary operation of the man of lawlessness in mystery form during Paul's day (2:7; Rev. 13:3); and (5) the overall relevant correspondence of the features with the contemporary situation in which the Thessalonians found themselves. Not only was Jerusalem destroyed, but the man of lawlessness — Nero himself — died a violent death in the midst of the Jewish War (June 8, AD 68). The strong similarity between 2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 implies that 2 Thessalonians 2 could have been used for the production of Revelation by John (Van der Waal 1981:13).

### 3.2.1.2 John's Old Testament intertexture

There is a unanimous consensus that John uses the Old Testament as his paramount source with a high degree of liberty and creativity. As Beale (1988:321) notes, actual visions would have been experienced in John's own thought forms, so that it might be difficult to distinguish a description of a visionary experience from that of a retelling of the experience through the (un)conscious appeal to various traditions. The fact that Revelation contains

no direct quotations of the Old Testament makes John's intertextuality more delicate.

- Genesis

John relates Revelation 12 to Genesis 3:15-20 on which the literary integrity of the scenario of Revelation 12 is based (Van de Kamp 2000:306). As Minear (1991:71, 75) remarks, one key to understanding this prophecy is the observation of the multiple ways in which God's curses are executed and finally reversed in John's vision (Rev. 12:2, 4, 10). Moreover, John's vision echoes the Cain story (Gen. 4:1-16) in many respects, though in Revelation 12:15-16 the earth plays an opposite role; the earth had been a witness to fratricide in Genesis 4. Additionally, as in Genesis 3, a feminine character plays an important role in the conflict in Revelation 12. According to Chevalier (1997:356), Eve and the sunlit woman in Revelation 12 differ in that one falls under the influence of the serpent while the other is freed from satanic persecution because of the pain she endured when giving birth to the Messiah and giving her son away on the cross. In short, the presence of the common motifs of the woman, her offspring, the serpent, and the importance of obeying the commandments (Rev. 12:17) strongly suggests that Revelation 12 appears to be a dramatisation of the so-called protevangelium of Genesis 3:15 (Aune 1998:708). Steeped in the creation themes, John explains the experience of the new creation of the seven churches on the basis of the victory of Christ and the saints.

- Exodus

John associates the dragon (12:3) with Egypt and Rome, since the Old Testament metaphors of the sea monster predominantly portray Egypt as an opponent of God's people (Pss. 74:13-14; 89:10; Hab. 3:8-15), and John sees in Revelation 12 a replay of the exodus pattern (Beale 1999:633). The first historical circumstances to which the idea in Revelation 12:4 corresponds, and in which it is realised, may be found in the effort of Pharaoh to destroy the infant Moses (Miligan 1889:202). Revelation 12:6 and 13 describe the woman's flight to the wilderness in clear Exodus terms. Even the eagle's wings (12:14) clearly refers to Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:10-12 in which the wings of the eagle are a symbol of God's protection and providence (cf. Mazzaferrri 1989:371). Revelation 12:16 may be linked to Exodus 15:12, in which "the earth" drank the enemies who were pursuing the fleeing Israelites (Minear 1991:76). The desert (12:6, 14) is a common symbol in both Old and New Testament for a place of God's protection while one waits for the fulfilment of promises. The earth opening its mouth (12:16) calls to mind the destruction of Korah in Numbers 16:32 (cf. Dt. 11:6; Gen. 4:1-16). It is possible to conjecture that Revelation 13:4 is a parody

on Exodus 15:11 in that the beast's victory over death is paralleled with God's victory over the Egyptians (Kraft 1974:272). The dragon's sending of the two beasts (13:1, 11) corresponds with the test at the hands of Balak and Balaam which Israel encountered upon their entry into the Promised Land (Sweet 1990:203). Relying on the Exodus-based theme, John intends to convince his audiences, as the community of the new Exodus, of the fact that God protects them (as He led the Jerusalem Church to asylum in Pella *via* the Jordan River during the Jewish–Roman war) (cf. Kraft 1974:264).

- Wisdom writings

In Revelation 12:5 John returns to Psalm 2:9, one of his favourite texts, to explain the notion that God's Son defeats all worldly enemies to be enthroned as ruler over the earth (Chilton 1990:308). The emphasis on Satan's accusatorial role in Revelation 12:10 recalls Job 1:6-11 and 2:1-6. Revelation 12:10-12 may refer to Psalm 96:10-13 in which the psalmist exults in the fact that the Lord is the King and judges the world and its peoples (Kraft 1974:263). The destructive waters (12:16) suggest the destructive power of chaos, which God had to overcome in creation (Pss. 32:6; 69:1-2; 124:2-5; Na. 1:8). The Leviathan-like character of the sea beast (13:1) calls to mind the theme of "the Divine Warrior" (cf. Ps. 74:12-17). The acclamation of the beast in 13:4 reminds John's audiences of Psalm 35:10 and Job 41:33-34. Alluding to the Wisdom writings, John emphasises both the rule of Christ as the enthroned King and God's new creation by conquering the disorder.

- Isaiah

The labour pains of the woman (12:2) is an image of Israel, used in Isaiah 26:16-27; 54:1; 66:7-9 (cf. Jer. 4:31; Mic. 4:9-10; Linton 1993:93-96). The language of Revelation 12:1-2 may be partly compared to the typological prophecy of the mother and child in Isaiah 7:10, 14 (Fekkes 1994:179; Beale 1999:630). Revelation 12:5-6 is reminiscent of Isaiah 66:7-8, which is part of a prophecy figuratively describing Jerusalem as a reborn child when God restores Israel from captivity and brings about a new creation (Fekkes 1994:183; Beale 1999:641). Isaiah 27:1 LXX has τὸν δράκοντα ὄφιν, similar to ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφτις in Revelation 12:9 (Fekkes 1994:186; Aune 1998:697; Beale 1999:656). The only plural form οὐρανοί in Revelation (12:12) recalls οὐρανοί in Isaiah 44:23; 49:13 (Fekkes 1994:189; Beale, 1999:666). Alluding to Revelation 13:16, Isaiah 44:5 says that each person, who receives God's Spirit in the end time, "will write in his hand, I am God's" (Kraft 1974:281; Beale, 1999:716). In short, in Revelation 12-13 John stresses both the fulfilment of the promises of Isaiah in the long-awaited Messiah and the restoration of the Church.

- Daniel

It is appropriate to pay attention to Beale's argument on the two ways in which John uses Daniel as his main source in Revelation 12-13. He (1988: 331) notes the purpose of John's *inverted use* of Daniel 7:21 in Revelation 12:7-8: Daniel 7:21 refers to an anti-theocratic "horn" which was waging war with the saints and overpowering them. This is applied in reverse fashion in Revelation 12:7-8 to describe the overthrow of Satan by Michael and his angels (cf. Dan. 10:21; 12:1; Beale 1999:652). With regard to John's *analogical* use of Daniel, Beale (1988:326) insists that John's theological basis for maintaining continuities between the Old Testament and Revelation, lies in his conviction that the Old and New Testament histories are but the working out of God's unified design of salvation. The following is a sampling of these analogies with a brief description of the primary point of continuity: (1) judgment and persecution of God's people (Dan. 3:4; 7:25; 8:10; 12:7/Rev. 12:1, 4; 13:5, 15); (2) idolatrous teaching (Dan. 3:2-3/Rev. 13:3, 15-16; cf. Kraft 1974:279); (3) divine protection (Dan. 3:25; 6:23/Rev. 12:6, 14, 16); (4) victorious battle of God's people over the enemy (Dan. 2:35; 11:32/Rev. 12:7, 12); and (5) apostasy (Dan. 3:7/Rev. 13:15). In addition, it is important to note that the sea beast (13:1), which has attributes of Daniel's first three beasts in Daniel 7, acts like the "little horn" (Dan. 7:8) — Antiochus IV who in 167 BC savagely attacked the Jews, their temple and their law, aided by elements from within Judaism itself (Dan. 11:30-39). Therefore, John wants his picture of the sea beast to evoke in the imaginations of his audiences' images of Rome and the emperors who persecuted the followers of the Lamb with the help of profane Judaism.

Alluding strongly to Daniel, John convinces his audiences that they experience the fulfilment of Daniel's message in Christ's incarnation and ascension, and that the covenantal God gives them victory over their enemies (the Roman Empire and the apostate Jews) in terms of the Christ event. This implies an eschatological significance. John, like Daniel, criticises the status quo of apostasy, compromise, and syncretism. The world system in which the Christians of Asia Minor live is an antithetical parallelism (e.g. the counterfeit trinity) between the dragon and God, the sea beast and Christ, and the land beast and the Holy Spirit (Beale 1999:729).

- Ezekiel

While Vogelgesang (1985:30) accentuates the fact that the interpretation of Ezekiel in Revelation provides a key to an overall understanding of the Apocalypse, he mentions only one verse (Rev. 13:16) in Revelation 12-13 which has verbal parallels to Ezekiel 9:6. Yet the image of a woman used as a symbol for a community can also be found in Ezekiel 16:8b (Linton

1993:93-96; cf. Jer. 3:6-10; Hos. 2:19-20; 4 Ezra 9:38-10:59). In Ezekiel 32:3ff. the dragon (12:3) is applied to the tyrant Pharaoh, whose doom is declared to be as sure as that of the watery Tiamat (Beasley-Murray 1990: 198). And the fact that Revelation 12:12 bespeaks an imminent *eschaton* in John's very day (cf. 1:3; 22:10) accords with Ezekiel 30:3, because it is conceivable that ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει (cf. ἐγγύς, 1:3) reflects the prophetic כִּרְיָן (Mazzaferrri 1989:236-237; cf. Isa. 13:6; Joel 1:15). With the intertextuality of Ezekiel in mind, John reminds his audiences as the new Exodus community of the imminent persecution by their enemies and of their judgement.

### 3.2.1.3 John's non-canonical intertexture

At this stage, it is useful to examine the non-canonical intertextuality of Revelation 12-13 in terms of the ideology and religious and socio-political circumstances of Asia Minor in the mid of 1<sup>st</sup> century. In his article, Barnett (1989:119) succinctly delineates the polemical parallelism between Revelation and the Greco-Roman world. By depicting the splendid appearance of the woman (Rev. 12:1), John could have intended to contrast the glorious reality of his audiences with the parody of Nero, who described himself as Apollo Helios. As a person living in Proconsular Asia, John would almost certainly have known of the decree issued in 9 BC, by the *Koinon Asias* changing the local calendar so that Augustus' birthday (23 September) became New Year's Day. In consequence, the birth of Christ in Revelation 12:5 is John's deliberately declaration about the nativity of the true God, Jesus the Messiah, in comparison with Augustus as a false and pretentious ruler (cf. Barnett 1989:118). With the doxology in Revelation 12:10-12, John opposes the imperial panegyric frequently directed to Hellenistic rulers (cf. Barnett 1989:114). In particular, the magnificent praise of the Almighty God and that of the Lamb (Rev. 12:10-11) is linked with the ancient *argumentum et consensus omnium* (the argument from universal agreement), that is, the very serious place given to the governed in the making of emperors and the legitimating of their taking power. This may explain the pointedness of the universal, cosmic and eternal acclamation of the Lord God and of Christ (cf. Barnett 1989:115). Similarly John could have chosen "the eagle" (12:14) to contrast the Roman power with God's power (4 Ezra 11:1; cf. Aune 1998:734).

With regard to Revelation 13:3-4, hymns were integral features of the cults of all ancient Mediterranean religions. When they were addressed to men, the implication was that they were equal with the gods (cf. Acts 12: 22). Nero, in fact, had a group of five thousand equestrians, called Augus-

tiani, who followed him everywhere and provided hymns and acclamations that emphasised his divinity (Aune 1983:15-16). It seems that by the land beast (Rev. 13:11) John as a true prophet wants his audiences to think of the false prophet as the high priest of the province. By doing so John makes clear the fact that it is the high priest of Asia Minor, a local dignitary, who exercises what John portrays in Revelation 13:12-17 (cf. Barnett 1989:116). In short, John grapples with the icons of the popular culture of his day in order to unmask them, so that when his audiences see the realities that lie behind the facades, they might better resist compromise and persevere in faith.

As Roloff (1993:142-143) argues, Revelation 12 holds a special place; it is the only chapter in which myth is employed as a means of depiction. Two very ancient mythological traditions are used here: (1) the astrological myth of the goddess of heaven who gives birth to the sun every day, and of the dragon of darkness who pursues her to devour her. (2) The myth of the battle of the gods in heaven and of the defeat of Satan. Revelation 12:1 contains astrological images that reflect the signs of the Zodiac (Roloff 1993: 145; cf. Mt. 24:29-30; Mk. 13:24-25; Lk. 21:15; Gen. 39). The image of the dragon (12:3) or sea monster (13:1) as the opponent of God, is an archetypal image found in the Old Testament (Pss. 74:14; 87:4; Ezek. 29:3-5; Isa. 27:1; 30:7; Dan. 7:1-7; Jer. 51:34) as well as in ancient mythology (Leviathan, Lotan, Tiamat) and in apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch 60:7-10; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; 2 Bar. 29:4). In Revelation 13, the imagery of the two beasts reflects the Jewish myth of the two beasts: the female monster Leviathan lived in the sea, and the male monster Behemoth lived on the land (Job 40:15-24; 1 Enoch 60:7-25; Aune 1998:728). John shapes both the astrological and the combat myths in very free fashion, the basic elements of which he knew from popular tradition and whose familiarity among his audiences he could assume. John joins them together and reinterprets them for his own theological purpose (i.e., a distinctively contemporary Christian view of history) and in order to communicate their points more effectively. As Beasley-Murray (1990:196) asserts, by using the non-canonical intertextuality, John claims the fulfilment of pagan hope in Christ (esp. Revelation 12:11). There is no other deliverer but Jesus. The Babylonians' Marduk, the Persians' son of Ormuzd, the Egyptians' Horus and the Greeks' Apollo are all mythical expressions of pagan piety and religious yearning, which Jesus alone can fulfil.

Therefore, the importance of the New and Old Testament intertextuality cannot be denied or minimised. John's intertextual world is so sufficiently multifaceted that its complexities cannot be understood apart from a con-

sideration of the intertexts of the Greco-Roman world of which he was part. The above intertextures of John illustrate that he does not choose Old Testament, New Testament, and non-canonical sources at random but in accord with the main themes of Revelation 12-13: the new creation, the new Exodus, God's judgment on the enemies of the churches, the immanent persecution, and the fulfilment of Old and New Testament promises in Christ (cf. Beale 1988:332).

### 3.2.2 The semantic analysis of John's audiences' intertextuality for productive reception

Moyise (1995:110, 142), who provided the first serious attempt to apply the postmodern hermeneutical perspective of intertextuality to the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, notes that most Old Testament studies by New Testament scholars fall under the heading of source and redaction criticism. Researchers are interested in how a particular author has used the Old Testament in order to meet the needs of the recipients. However, this emphasis on the "author's intention" seems to have been replaced by a focus either on the text itself or on the role of the reader in recent studies. By utilising past texts, John has produced a fresh composition which invites the audiences to participate and create meaning. Likewise, Linton (1993:11) holds that the extensive intertextuality and highly symbolic imagery of Revelation combine to create much "uncertainty" about the meaning of the visions. Revelation allows John's audiences space in which to produce meaning. Here, Aune's claim is proper: even if no two early Christian readers would have understood the Apocalypse in precisely the same way, it is likely that particular congregations of readers would have a relatively *homologous understanding* of the Apocalypse because of their shared knowledge of antecedent texts (Aune 1991:142-143). Thus, instead of Linton's "uncertainty" of the meaning, "multiplicity" of meaning seems to be more proper.

Most, if not all, of the seven churches addressed were among those planted during Paul's evangelistic ministry of AD 52-54. Allowing for the Lucan hyperbole in Acts 19:10, widespread propagation of the gospel apparently occurred about two decades before Revelation was written (Wilson 1996:26). Apart from these full (proselytes) or partial (God-fearers) Gentile converts as the majority group (Lichtenberger 1996:2162, 2171), a migration of Palestinian Christians took place during the Jewish revolt. As Wilson (1996:32) observes, it seems that, like the Jewish Christians in Rome, John's Jewish audiences in Asia Minor formed the core of the congregation in each of the seven churches. This core community, because of its morality, literacy, and familiarity with the Old Testament, provided spiritual sta-

bility for the pagan converts. The most important aspects of Nero's persecution of Christians in connection with the burning of Rome are (cf. Lichtenberger 1996:2172-2173): (1) There is no information that the Jews were persecuted; (2) crucifixion is a proof of the fact that the majority of the Christians did not possess Roman civil rights; (3) the difference between Christians and Jews must have continued to be perfectly clear to the Roman authorities. This presupposes a clear separation of the Jewish and Christian congregations in Rome.

In spite of the fact that John's intertextual audiences, as the implied or ideal audiences, know the Old Testament and all kinds of other sources well and interpret their situation in the light of the sources (cf. Vorster 1989: 34), a question naturally arises: Are John's real audiences so accustomed to the Old Testament, the New Testament, and non-canonical intertextures that they can understand Revelation in that light and apply Revelation to their situation? To answer this question, a study of intertextuality of John's audiences is required.

### 3.2.2.1 The Jewish Christians

The use of the Old Testament in narrative material, such as the Book of Revelation, points to the importance of the intertextual competence of the (implied) reader in the text (Vorster 1989:34). Like this implied reader, (who knows about other texts) and who can use his/her intertextual competence to interpret Revelation in the light of a reinterpretation of other texts, the Jewish Christian audiences of John, who came from Palestine in AD 64 and were converted by Paul's mission work in AD 52, appear to possess the same intertextual competence. They were also accustomed to Jesus traditions which must have made a tremendous impact on Christianity outside Palestine (cf. Perrin & Duling 1982:88). Here, Scott's explication is noteworthy (1974:224-225): unlike the Pharisaic (legalistic) Hebrew Christians, the moderate Hebrew Christians as the largest group in the church of Jerusalem rejected circumcision and the Torah as essential conditions for salvation and continued to worship in the temple, to participate in Jewish rituals, and to observe at least some requirements of the Torah in freedom. Moreover, they acknowledged that the position of the Jewish nation as the sole channel through which God calls people to himself had come to an end. To some extent, they participated in the world mission of Christianity. Accordingly, they might have had a direct influence on — and reflected the thought of — John's Jewish audiences in Revelation.

It is reasonable to assume that the Jewish audiences could have interpreted Revelation 12-13 in terms of God's retribution for the Jewish rejec-

tion of Jesus and of malicious treatment of them, and could have realised the coming of the New Covenant. The impact of the fall of Jerusalem upon the Jewish Christians is different from the effects of the event upon those from the Gentile background (Scott 2002:1, 12). At first, they must have been acutely affected, but eventually realised the fulfilment of the Judaistic system in Christ.

### 3.2.2.2 The Gentile Christians

Even if reluctant to read astrology into Revelation, most exegetes will readily admit that John's contemporaries were certainly versed in Zodiacal lore and assumed that earthly destinies were determined by, and reflected in, the stars (Chevalier 1997:335). Consequently, in regard to Revelation 12:7-9, John's Hellenistic audiences (who are acquainted with the Platonic cosmology) assume that what has transpired in heaven will have its historical duplicate on earth. Thus, if the heavenly and invisible war between God and the Evil One had ended with God's triumph through the exalted Lamb, then the Evil One will surely be defeated by God in an earthly and visible war (Wall 1991:162).

Apart from astrology, the pagan combat myths could have played a crucial role as intertextuality when John's audiences listened to Revelation 12-13. Yarbrow Collins (1976:232) stresses the fact that Revelation 12 most closely resembles the myths of Seth-Typhon's attack on Isis and Horus and of Python's pursuit of Leto in the pattern of threat (vs. 3-4) ➔ salvation (vs. 5-6) ➔ combat-victory (vs. 7-9) ➔ victory shout (vs. 10-12). By interpreting the Apollo myth and related symbology to portray the birth of the Messiah and his triumph against the dragon, Collins (1976:190) avers that John formulates a further element in the antithesis of Christ and Nero. As mentioned in John's non-canonical intertexture, like John, the Gentile audiences also grasped the fulfilment of this combat myth in Christ who can fulfil all mythical deliverances and religious yearnings. Moreover, the Gentile audiences were convinced by the polemical parallelism between Revelation and the Roman Empire that they should stick to the Triune God, not to the evil trinity.

To epitomise, John is undoubtedly a considerate author who is reader-focused and rhetorically sensitive (cf. Malina 1994:169-170). In Revelation 12-13, the above-mentioned pagan sources are rewritten so as to contradict its current political application and bring back memories of Messianic struggles of the Old Testament. By casting these materials in a Jewish-Christian mould, John turns paganism into a parody of the divine, an expression of self-adulation and satanic idolatry. Therefore, John's Gentile Christian audi-

ences naturally might have connected these two chapters with Christ's victory over the Roman Empire by which they were persecuted.

### 3.2.3 The pragmatic analysis of John and his audiences' intertextualities

As Thompson (1990:29-30) argues, the social dimensions of language may be located (1) in the language itself, which includes both what is said and its illocutionary point; (2) in the situation occasioning that language; and (3) in the consequences or effects of the speech activity on further social intercourse. In terms of the above argument, it can be deduced that John's Jewish and Gentile audiences have the same form of illocution in Revelation 12-13. But the perlocutionary act by which John achieves certain intended effects in his audiences in addition to those achieved by the illocutionary act, is different to both the Jewish and Hellenistic audiences.

At this stage, it is important to note that there is abundant evidence in the Gospels (Lk. 23:2, 12; Jn. 11:47-48; 19:12-15) as to the co-operation of the Jews with Rome to persecute Jesus and his church. Similarly, because John's audiences were persecuted by both the Jews and by the Romans (cf. Beagley 1983:152), John intended to accuse both of them by his intentional use of provocative symbolism. In this regard, John's language is an anti-language in which metaphorical modes of expression are the norm to maintain a counter-reality which is under pressure from the established world. Like anti-language, the function of the language John uses, is to create an alternative reality with the help of his intertextual world (cf. Halliday 1976:581-582).

What, then, is the priority between God's judgement on Jerusalem and that on Rome? With the consistent partial preterism, John provides the Jewish Christians with a direct solution. But with the transitional partial preterism, he provides a direct solution for the Gentile Christians. Therefore, both solutions function complementarily; not contradictorily. It is reasonable to conclude that, on the one hand, the Jewish Christian audiences — who emigrated to Asia Minor in AD 66 and were converted by Paul's Ephesian mission in AD 52 — were persecuted especially by the unbelieving Jews. Therefore, using the Old and New Testament knowledge they might have interpreted Revelation 12 onward in terms of God's judgement on the infidel Jews. The removal of the Jewish temple was absolutely necessary to relieve the stress of persecution by the Jews on first century Jewish Christians. As Russell (1996:163) contends, the annihilation of the Jewish nationality therefore removed the most formidable antagonist of the gospel and brought rest and relief to suffering Christians.

On the other hand, the God-fearers (i.e., the Gentile worshippers of God) were persecuted by the heretical Jews (Acts 18:7, 13), because they did not observe the law strictly. The degree of this persecution, however, is weaker than that of the Jewish Christians, because the predominant relationships between Jews and Gentiles were positive. The Hellenistic Christian audiences, who were acquainted with the pagan sources and daily experienced the Roman persecution, were not severely persecuted by the renegade Jews and interpreted Revelation 12 onward in the light of God's judgement on Rome.

### 3.2.4 Concluding summary

The intricate layers of semantic intertextuality in Revelation cast doubts on how well the audience could have understood the Biblical allusions. But in the light of the semantic intertextuality of John and his audiences, it is reasonable to conclude that John's production of the non-canonical intertextures and his audiences' reception of them bear not so much the consistent partial preterism as the transitional partial preterism. This is not only because the pagan intertextures have universalistic and pseudo-triune characteristics, but also because the seven churches are under the direct influence of the persecuting Roman Empire. John's use and his audiences' reception of the Olivet Discourse, however, primarily prop up the consistent partial preterism, due to its strong message of God's judgement on the Jews. But 2 Thessalonians 2 holds up both the consistent and transitional partial preterism. In the same way, the use and reception of the Old Testament intertextures seem to support both the consistent and the transitional partial preterism in that the emphases of the Old Testament prophets are on God's judgement on Jerusalem as well as on the Gentile nations. Meanwhile, from the pragmatic analysis of John and his audiences' intertextualities, it can be deduced that for the Jewish audiences the judgement of Jerusalem is still a priority matter, but for the Gentile audiences, God's judgement on Rome has precedence.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Book of Revelation is a complex intertextuality, an interweaving of texts, codes, language, and images that exceed the finitude and coherence of a whole, formal structure. Thus, it is a "writerly" and "open text" that calls for the audience's participation in its creation (Linton 1993:212). Two intertextual tensions arise, not only because John does not communicate in steno-symbols, but also in consequence of the two types of audiences that

he has. These are on the one hand, the conflict between John's intertextuality and that of his audiences, and on the other hand, the different views held by the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians. In conclusion, the problem of the two lines of partial preterism is not a matter of "either...or" but of "both...and". Nonetheless, the matter of "priority" for each group of John's audiences is significant. For the Jewish audiences, the judgement of Jerusalem is still a matter of priority, but for the Gentile audiences, God's judgement on Rome takes precedence.

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