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STILL THE CHOSEN PEOPLE?
THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL
IN THE HISTORY OF SALVATION ACCORDING TO THE
APOCALYPSE OF ST. JOHN

Abstract: This article attempts to answer the question concerning the theological role of the chosen people in the history of salvation on the basis of the Apocalypse of St. John. The author, analysing the text of the Apocalypse, concludes that Israel's primary task was to bring the Messiah into the world. With the coming of the Messiah, the role of the people of Israel as the chosen people comes to an end. However, the completion of this role does not mean the rejection of Israel. Although the reason for which it became the chosen nation ceases to exist, God's offer of salvation is still valid, and the promise of protection still remains in force, but to the same extent as the offer made to other nations. According to the Apocalypse, Israel rejected God's invitation, which was expressed in the persecution of Christ's witnesses in cooperation with Rome. St. John regards this action as equal to rejecting God, resulting in Jerusalem (which embodies Israel) being called the Great Harlot. For this reason, the people who had previously been chosen lost the right to call themselves the true Israel (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). This role is now taken over by a new people, depicted in the Apocalypse by means of the same imagery that referred to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. There are the image of the multitude of 144,000 and the motif of the Bride.

Keywords: Book of Revelation; Israel; Chosen People, Great Harlot; Church; history of salvation

From the outset, Christian-Jewish relations have been characterised by profound tension. On the one hand, this tension was built on the undeniable fact that real, historical individuals belonging to the chosen people participated in the trial and conviction of Jesus. On the other hand, it was founded on the premise of attributing culpability for Jesus' execution to Jews residing in diverse temporal and geographical contexts throughout the annals of

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human history. This tension primarily stemmed from the complete ignorance of the theological significance of the suffering of Jesus, who gave his life to atone for the sins of all people.

From the first century AD onwards, the history of theology has been characterized by an emphasis on the subject of Christian-Jewish relations.¹ One of the trends in theology representing this type of research was so-called supersessionism, i.e., the view promoting the idea of replacement, which stated that the Church had replaced Israel in its role as the people related to God by an unbreakable covenant. This concept primarily evolved within the context of Protestant theology. The foundation for this discourse was the teaching of St. Paul, particularly as elucidated in his Epistle to the Romans. This perspective is already evident in the writings of notable Church Fathers, including Justin and Augustine. The Second World War, and in particular the tragic events of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, resulted in a shift in perspective. In the case of the Catholic Church, this change was associated with the Second Vatican Council. The Council published a document entitled *Nostra Aetate*, which dealt with the Church's attitude towards non-Christian religions. In point 4 of this document, devoted to the Jews, the following is stated: "The Jews, because of their ancestors, are still very dear to God, who never regrets his gifts and calling," and "Although the Church is the new People of God, Jews should not be presented as rejected or cursed by God, supposedly on the basis of the Holy Scriptures." This statement indicates that the Catholic Church continues to recognise the validity of the Sinai Covenant, thereby explaining that the establishment of the New Covenant does not signify the rejection of the people of Israel. Conversely, within the same document, the Council refers to the Church as the new People of God. This prompts the following question: what about the people of the First Covenant? Following the establishment of the New Covenant,² it is pertinent to consider whether it can be

¹ Among the studies on this subject, the following are worth noting: James D.G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians. The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); William Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998); Stanley E. Porter, ed., *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries* (Brook W.R. Pearson, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword. The Church and the Jews* (Boston–New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2001); Yaakov Y. Teppler, *Birkat haMinim. Jews and Christians in Conflict in the Ancient World*, trans. Susan Weingarten (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

² In the Greek term "New Covenant", the adjective "new" is rendered by the Greek word *καινή*, which denotes a newness in the qualitative sense, as opposed to *νέα*, which denotes a newness in the chronological sense (i.e., last in a sequence). This means that the two covenants

wholly disregarded in regard to the people of Israel? The present study aims to provide an answer to the question of the role of Israel in the history of salvation according to the Apocalypse of John. The book under scrutiny is a theological commentary on the history of the world, with the central point being the coming of Jesus Christ to earth and His work of salvation.

1. THE WOMAN IN REVELATION 12 AS A METAPHOR FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

The initial stage of the analysis will entail the identification and examination of the motif of the Woman in Revelation 12. In our opinion, this Woman embodies Israel – the chosen people who gave birth to the Messiah. Chapter 12 is one of the most frequently commented passages in the Book of Revelation. In the history of exegesis, the motif of the woman clothed with the sun has been interpreted in various ways, which can be divided into four categories. In Catholic exegesis, the mariological interpretation, which proclaims that the woman in Revelation 12 is Mary, the mother of Jesus, has gained considerable support. It is evident that scholars have made reference to the links between Revelation 12 and Genesis 3:15. The motif that ties both texts together is that of the Woman, as well as that of the Serpent. Nevertheless, this interpretation, despite being endorsed by numerous Church Fathers, is not without its difficulties. This is primarily related to the text of Revelation 12:17, which speaks of ‘the rest of the Woman’s offspring. The interpretation of this verse has been variously proposed, including a reference to Mary’s spiritual motherhood in relation to the faithful of the Church. While this claim finds expression in Catholic theology, it is more closely associated with John 19:25–27 than with Revelation 12:17. Furthermore, a thorough examination of the Bible reveals no explicit mention of Mary being exalted, and the Apocalypse itself makes no explicit reference to this concept. At the time of the writing of the Apocalypse, the text of Genesis 3:15 was not interpreted in a mariological sense; it was only patristic exegesis that introduced this reading. Furthermore, it is challenging to apply the concept of labour pains to Mary, as, as stated in Genesis 3:16, these are a consequence of original sin, a state from which Mary was exempt. In a similar fashion,

cannot be treated as on the same level. Gerhard Schneider, „*ἡ ἁγία*,” In *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hrsg. Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 2:1137.

the motif of the Woman's flight into the desert (12:6) gives rise to difficulties³.

An alternative interpretative direction posits that the Woman symbolises the people of God (Israel). This image draws upon a rich tradition of Old Testament symbolism, as exemplified in the Books of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Furthermore, the reference to the birth of a man (12:5) is undoubtedly a reference to the birth of the Messiah (as indicated by the reference to the messianic text of Psalm 2:9). Nevertheless, critics of this interpretation posit that in other passages of the Apocalypse there is an absence of references to the chosen people in their totality.⁴

Another exegetical tendency interprets the Woman as a symbol of the Church in its earthly and heavenly reality. However, further doubts arise in this context, to which there is no clear response. If the term "Woman" is to be considered as having a collective meaning, can the offspring of that subject be considered as an individual figure? Moreover, the question arises as to whether the Church can exist prior to the arrival of the Messiah? Or can the Church give birth to the Messiah?⁵

The predominant contemporary perspective is that the concept of Woman symbolises the collective of the faithful, encompassing both the Old and New Testament periods. This refers to both Israel and the Church. This perspective was articulated in antiquity by Victorinus of Pettau, and subsequently by scholars such as Allo, Charles, Feuillet, Wikenhauser, and Lohse in more recent eras. This interpretation is predicated on the assumption that John's focus is invariably on the true Israel, that is to say, the Church, which is experiencing a situation of tribulation. Conversely, the motif of the Woman, which exhibits numerous Old Testament allusions is indicative of the chosen people. This interpretation circumvents the question of how the Church gives birth to the Messiah (in 12:5). It is evident that, on the one

³ Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburg: Verlag F. Pustet, 1997), 271-272 (where he also gives references to the individual researchers representing this direction of interpretation); Akira Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 281-282.

⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 107: „She represents the persecuted People of God from whom comes the messiah”; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung*, 272; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Dallas, TX: Word Books 1998), 680.

⁵ The answer to the last question may be affirmative, but then we stray far from the literal meaning and move to a spiritual level, distant from the biblical text. For example, in the theology of spirituality, it is said that with the help of the Church, the Messiah is “born” in the heart of a believer.

hand, there is a continuation and, on the other, a certain turning point. From the birth of the Messiah, the Church takes on the role of the true Israel.⁶

It is the view of the author of this text that the woman depicted in Revelation 12 is a representation of Israel, which, as stated in the Book of Revelation 12:17, gives birth to the Messiah. The church as a community of believers is mentioned only in Revelation 12:17, where it is presented as “the rest of the woman’s seed”. It is evident that there are a number of arguments that lend support to this interpretation.⁷ Firstly, the image of the Woman as Israel is rooted in the Old Testament. The woman is presented there as a symbol of Israel, often in a negative context – that of an adulterous woman symbolising an unfaithful chosen people (cf. Isa 1:8; Jer 6:2, 23; 14:17; 18:13; 31:4).⁸ Secondly, in relation to Israel, the motif of the sun, moon, and stars can also be considered (cf. Gen 37:9–10; TestAbr B 7:4–16; Midrash Rabbah on Num 2:13). According to Jewish interpretation, this symbolism was intended to emphasize the indestructible nature of the chosen people: just as the stars in the sky are beyond the range of human power, so Israel was free from the attacks of all human powers (cf. Tg Neofiti to Gen 50:21). In further Jewish writings, this image was employed in reference to faithful Israel (e.g., Midrash Rabbah on Ex 15:6, Num 2:4). In Isaiah 60:19–20, the motif of the bride is associated with the sun and the moon, though stars are not explicitly referenced. The term refers to Zion, which is depicted as the bride of YHWH.⁹

A particularly intriguing motif related to the interpretation of the Woman in Revelation 12 as a metaphor for Israel is that of labour pains. In the context of Revelation 12, if we assume that the figure in question is representative of the Church (or the people of God of both Testaments) and if we find it difficult to explain the meaning of this image, then we must consider alternative interpretations. It is difficult to assert that the Church is the origin of the Messiah. In the context of scholarly discourse on the motif of labour pains, it is a commonly posited theory that this motif should be related to a persecution. For instance, the people of Israel is presented as experiencing a time of tribulation in the following biblical texts: Isa 21:3; 26:17–18; 37:3; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; Mic 4:9; 1 Hen 62:4. It is noteworthy that the motif of labour pains is associated with the coming of the time of salvation, as

⁶ Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 274–275.

⁷ Tomasz Siemienieć, „Kościół jako Reszta potomstwa Kobiety-Izraela w świetle Ap 12,” in *Gloriam praecedat humilitas. Księga Pamiątkowa dla Księdza Profesora Antoniego Troniny w 70. Rocznicę urodzin*, red. Mariusz Szmajdziński (Częstochowa: Regina Poloniae, 2015), passim.

⁸ Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 629.

⁹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 626.

illustrated in Isaiah 66:7. In this context, it is important to refer to the research conducted by Claudia D. Bergmann, who asserts that labour pains are a symbol of crisis and turning point, thus indicating the arrival of a decisive moment. Bergmann distinguishes between various types of crises, which are of different natures: local, universal, or personal. The crisis in the universal dimension is indicated by such Old Testament texts as Jer 4:19-31, Isa 13:1-22, Isa 26:7-27:1, and Joel 2:1-11. A moment of such critical importance in the universal dimension is characterised by several distinguishing features. Firstly, it has a universal impact on all of humanity. Secondly, the concept under discussion also encompasses that sphere of creation which appears to be inviolable (i.e. the world), resulting in the emergence of a completely new order (e.g. in Jer 4:19-31, the world returns to its original state of chaos – *tōhū wābōhū*)¹⁰. It appears that the context provided by the metaphor of labour pains is compatible with Revelation 12. Consequently, it is our opinion that the woman experiencing labour pains should be regarded as the people of Israel, who are facing a decisive moment in world history. This moment of decisive significance, as outlined in Revelation 12:5, which speaks of a man who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, is identified as the coming of the Messiah. This assertion is substantiated by the quotation from the Messianic Psalm 2:7, as well as by the terminological correspondence between Rev 12:1-2 and Isa 7:10, 14 (according to the LXX).¹¹

In the context of this study, the motif of the woman's refuge in the desert (12:6) assumes a significantly greater importance, as it serves to indicate Israel's contemporary role in the history of salvation. The preponderance of scholarly opinion identifies this motif as a reference to the exodus from Egypt (Ex 12). The escape described in Revelation 12 thus becomes, as it were, the beginning of a new exodus, a time of experiencing God's protection, but also a time of trial. Another motif from the Old Testament that is evoked here is Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, where he experiences a profound encounter with God that serves to strengthen his faith (1 Kings 17; 19:3-8).¹²

¹⁰ Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis. Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1-18* (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 115-126. The author draws the following conclusion: "What better way to describe turning points of on human history than by means of the Birth Metaphors, which metaphorically compares these turning points in human life to the turning point in the life of a woman?" (page 126).

¹¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 631.

¹² Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 643. There are also scholars who see here an allusion to specific historical events from the time contemporary to the author of Revelation. Robert H.

The research carried out by Diane Treacy-Cole indicates a novel interpretative direction.¹³ She contends that in order to fully comprehend Revelation 12:6, it is essential to shift the focus from the motif of the desert itself to the motif of the woman's flight into the desert. In the Old Testament, this motif is evident in Genesis 16 and 21, in texts that refer to Hagar. In Genesis 16, Hagar flees to the desert after experiencing humiliation at the hands of Sarah. The desert is a place of escape for her, but also a place where she experiences God's care. According to the biblical narrative, God sends an angel to deliver a word of encouragement to her (Gen 16:10). Hagar is depicted as journeying to the desert for the second time following the birth of Isaac. This second sojourn to the desert is related to the question of inheritance from Abraham. Sarah is concerned that Ishmael will become a rival to the primary heir, Isaac. Consequently, she demands that Hagar and her son be sent away. Hagar's repeated sojourns to the desert are replete with instances of divine benevolence. In this instance, the Almighty's benevolence encompasses not solely an message from God (Gen 21:18), but also a tangible provision of food (21:19) and the divine presence ("God was with him" – 21:20).¹⁴

It is evident that Hagar's departure into the desert is associated with the loss of her son, Ishmael, in regard to his status as Abraham's primary heir. Consequently, the aforementioned inheritance shall hereby be transferred to Isaac and his descendants. On the other hand, however, the alteration in her status does not signify that she is deprived of God's protection. It is evident that both she and her son continue to experience this protection (in all its dimensions). When considering the motif of Hagar's departure into the desert as referenced in Revelation 12, a far-reaching analogy can be observed between these texts. The woman, who is referred to as Israel, is depicted as giving birth to the Messiah. At this juncture in history, the role of the Israelites was of particular significance. It is at this juncture that the Son of the Woman – that is, the Messiah – and those bound to Him, that is, the Church, will take possession of this place.¹⁵ Consequently, the Dragon, who initially

Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 234 argues that this is an echo of the escape of Palestinian Christians to Pella at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in 66 AD.

¹³ Diane Treacy-Cole, "Women in the Wilderness: Rereading Revelation 12," in *Wilderness. Essays on Honour of Frances Young*, edited Rasiyah S. Sugitharajah (London–New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 45-58.

¹⁴ Treacy-Cole, "Women in the Wilderness", 45-48.

¹⁵ This refutes the argument that scholars have put forward against identifying the Woman with Israel, namely the question of whether the author of Revelation is interested in Israel. The

intended to attack the Woman as well (12:15), ultimately ceased to turn against her. The new target that has been identified is “the rest of her offspring”, that is the Church.¹⁶ The transformation in the status of the Woman–Israel–does not signify an absence of divine protection. This protection is expressed in the event mentioned in 12:16. Exegetes perceive an evident reference to the biblical narrative of the crossing of the Red Sea in this event. This episode is widely regarded as the most remarkable manifestation of God’s assistance experienced by the people of Israel.¹⁷

In accordance with our analysis of Revelation 12, it can be concluded that the role of the chosen people of the earth, i.e. the Jews, and their task of giving birth to the Messiah, will come to an end with the coming of the Lord. However, the termination of this role does not entail the rejection of Israel (cf. Romans 11:28). It is evident that the reason for its selection as the chosen people has been rendered extinct, as the mission entrusted to it by way of its election has been fulfilled. However, it is important to note that God’s redemptive offer remains valid, and the promise of protection continues to be in force, albeit to the same extent as the offer made to other nations. Consequently, individuals belonging to this community are not rejected; rather, they are invited to join the community of those who bear witness to Christ and maintain obedience to God’s commandments (12:17). However, it is important to emphasise that God’s invitation is intrinsically linked to Israel’s recognition of its position on an equal level with other nations. This recognition entails the acceptance of the Messiah, as well as the joining of the community collectively referred to as “the rest of the offspring of the Woman.” As previously stated, this objective is realised through adherence to divine commandments and the affirmation of Jesus’ teachings. The central question that needs to be addressed is whether Israel will be able to successfully carry out this process.

answer is as follows: he is interested insofar as Israel’s role in the history of salvation is concerned. This role ceases at the birth of the Messiah.

¹⁶ Siemienieć, “Kościół jako Reszta,” *passim*.

¹⁷ Giesen, *Die Offenbarung*, 293.

2. THE WOMAN IN REVELATION 17 AS A METAPHOR FOR THE REBELLIOUS PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Once again, the figure of a woman is introduced in Revelation 17:1, where she is described by an angel as ἡ πόρνη ἡ μεγάλη, and then, in Revelation 17:5, we learn that she bears the symbolic name “Great Babylon”. Interestingly, in 17:3, the visionary is taken by the aforementioned angel to the desert, where they see a figure described as a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. This raises the question of whether this is a different woman to the one mentioned in Revelation 12, or the same one. In our opinion, it is the same woman, and there are two arguments in favour of this: Firstly, in Revelation, when John presents different figures, he clearly distinguishes between them if he wants to differentiate them. For example, in 6:4, there is “another horse” (ἄλλος ἵππος), to distinguish it from the one that appeared in 6:2. A similar situation occurs when it comes to the presentation of angels, who appear in great numbers in the Apocalypse. “Another angel” (ἄλλος ἄγγελος) appears in 8:3; 10:1; 14:6,8,9,15,17,18 and 18:1. The same is true of “signs” (12:3; 15:1 – ἄλλο σημεῖον), “the Beast” (13:11: ἄλλο θηρίον), “another voice” (καὶ ἤκουσα ἄλλην φωνήν) or “another book” (20:12: καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοίχθη). If John had wanted to indicate that this was a different woman to the one mentioned in Revelation 12, he would have made this clear. Furthermore, the woman shown in Revelation 12 and the woman shown in Revelation 17 are in the same place. It is the desert. The term ἔρημος appears three times in the Apocalypse, always in connection with a woman (12:6,14; 17:3). Taking a synchronic view of the Apocalypse, one can conclude that Revelation 12 and Revelation 17 fit together. First, the woman flees into the desert, and after some time, she can be seen sitting on the beast. Therefore, it can be inferred that a strange transformation occurred in the desert while the woman was there. Originally clothed with the sun, the woman is now clothed in purple and scarlet (the same perfect participle derived from the verb περιβάλλω appears in 12:1 and 17:4).

Since at least the third century, scholars have interpreted the figure of the Woman in Revelation 17 as an allegory of imperial Rome, as evidenced by the following characteristics: moral degeneration, predatory and cruel domination. This interpretation can be traced back to the time of the great persecutions of Christianity. Subsequently, during periods of conflict within Christianity itself (for example, the Donatist controversy of the fourth and fifth centuries or the Reformation of the sixteenth century), opponents of the

Roman Church perceived this woman as a symbol of that Church. The predominant scholarly perspective contemporaneously asserts that this pertains to Rome,¹⁸ occasionally regarded as the archetype of systems antagonistic to God.¹⁹

However, as Eugenio Corsini observes, when the motif of the woman is considered in relation to the context, it becomes evident that the Great Harlot cannot be a reference to Rome. The city of Rome is indicated by the Beast upon which the Harlot is seated. It is not possible for two symbols of a completely different nature to refer to the same reality in one scene. Furthermore, Corsini observes that commentators who perceive the woman as a symbol of Rome base their interpretation on two distinct categories of connections: The harlot is characterised by the following descriptive features: moral depravity, a luxurious lifestyle, cruelty towards the witnesses of Christ, and idolatry. In turn, the Beast is characterised by the following descriptive features: seven heads (which are associated with the seven hills of Rome, or possibly with the seven rulers of Rome); and ten horns (ten vassals of Rome).²⁰

It is important to note that two separate realities are presented here: the one that the Harlot symbolises and the one that the Beast symbolises. These

¹⁸ M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989) 179 (“There can be no doubt that the harlot city of John’s vision is Rome”); Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 608-609 (“the prostitute is clearly Babylon/Rome, depicted in all her alluring depravity”); Beale, *Revelation*, 755; Philip L. Mayo, “*Those who call themselves Jews*”. *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 20 (“Babylon is more clearly identified with Rome than with Jerusalem”); Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 829-831; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1998), 936-937; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 89; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 194; John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 142; Ben Witherington, III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 220-222; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1984), 57-58; Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96(1977), 241 (she describes the identification of Babylon with Rome as one of the victories of historical-critical exegesis applied to the Apocalypse of John). Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT–London, UK: Yale University Press, 2014), 671 (“the Whore is Rome, yet more than Rome”).

¹⁹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 671. Beale (*Revelation*, 859) speaks of “transtemporal nature of Babylon.”

²⁰ Scholars, referring to the image of the Harlot from Revelation 17 to Rome, make a certain mental shortcut, stating that she sits on seven hills. Meanwhile, she sits on the Beast, which is associated with seven hills.

realities are distinct entities, although they are interconnected by a specific fellowship. The Beast to which reference is being made in this text has already appeared in Revelation 13:1ff., where its connection with the Dragon is exhibited.²¹ The allusion to seven heads, which are often interpreted as seven hills, is evidently a reference to Rome. This could be interpreted as an allusion to the location of the capital of the empire, or alternatively, to the rulers of the empire and the order in which they appear in history.²² Kenneth L. Gentry's contribution to the debate included the systematization of arguments against identifying the Great Harlot with Rome.²³ It was noted that such an interpretation reveals several inconsistencies. Initially, in 17:3, it is stated that the Woman is seated upon a Beast that possesses seven heads. If this is indeed the case, then the image in question should be interpreted as follows: The city of Rome is located on the city of Rome.²⁴ This claim is not supported by the evidence. Secondly, the distinctiveness of these two figures should be emphasised, which at the conclusion of chapter 17 will be expressed by mutual hostility, resulting in the destruction of the Woman by the Beast and its ten horns (17:16). Rome cannot destroy Rome.²⁵ Thirdly, the

²¹ Eugenio Corsini, *Apocalisse prima e dopo* (Torino: SEI, 1980), 442.

²² There is an ongoing debate as to whether the list of rulers should begin with Julius Caesar or Augustus, and whether it should include the so-called interregnum emperors (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, who ruled in the so-called year of the four emperors – 69 AD), or whether it should end with Vespasian (79 AD), Domitian (96 AD) and Nerva (98 AD). The ending of verse 10, which refers to the seven heads of the Beast as seven kings: “five have fallen, one is, and one is yet to come,” does not make the solution any easier. What follows is even more mysterious: “As for the beast that was and is not, it is the eighth [king], and it comes from the seven and goes to destruction” (17:11). There are many hypotheses explaining this statement.

²³ Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Divorce of Israel. A Redemptive-Historical Interpretation of Revelation. Volume II: Revelation 10:1-22:21* (Acworth, GA: Tolle Lege Press–Chalcedon Foundation, 2024), 1273-1274; Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth. An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Washington, DC–Cleveland, OH: Corpus Books, 1968), 239. Alan J. Beagley, *The „Sitz im Leben“ of the Apocalypse with Particular Reference to the Role of the Church's Enemies* (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 93. Beagley notes that Babylon in 17:18 is referred to as a “great city,” which draws parallels to the “great city” mentioned in 11:8. It was the city where the Lord of the two witnesses was crucified. There is no doubt that the “great city” of Babylon is equated to Jerusalem.

²⁴ Josephine Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (New Haven, CT–London: Yale University Press, 2008), 285.

²⁵ It should be added here that if this were indeed about the destruction of Rome, the fulfillment of John's prophecy would be very distant in time. Throughout the first century and the centuries that followed, there were no signs of the fall of Rome. The acclamation “Babylon has fallen” (18:2) itself gives the impression of a prediction of something imminent. This syntactic function is assumed here by the aorist ἔπεσεν, which takes on the role of *perfectum propheticum*, or, as Gerhard Mussies notes in *The Morphology of Koine Greek as Used in the Apocalypse of St.*

author of Revelation perceives his mission as analogous to that of the Old Testament prophets. The author has adopted the literary style and the images and motifs used by the original authors. One of these is the motif of vengeance for the blood of prophets and saints (16:7; 7:6; 18:20,24). Within the context of the Old Testament, this motif alludes to the accusation against Israel that it had turned against its own prophets. Furthermore, Jesus conforms to this tradition when he accuses the chosen people of rebelling against those sent by God (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:33; cf. also Acts 7:52; 1 Thessalonians 2:15). The prophets and saints mentioned in Revelation were not killed by some external aggressors, but by those to whom they were sent. This phenomenon is also evident in the narrative of the two witnesses (Rev. 11). Fourthly, the judgment of Babylon is distinctly separated from that of the Beast and the kings, who are not referenced until 19:19-21.²⁶

The links mentioned by Corsini and Gentry, which can be seen in commentaries on the Apocalypse, also overlook a fundamental issue. This concerns the biblical context, more specifically that of the Old Testament, with regard to prostitution. This assertion is contingent upon two assumptions. Initially, within the context of the Old Testament, the notion of prostitution (particularly in its theological significance) is linked to the act of betraying one's husband. Therefore, the subject under discussion is not an unmarried woman who has become a prostitute (although such women also appear in the Old Testament), but rather a married woman who has abandoned her husband and begun to engage in prostitution. The initial premise is therefore the betrayal of one's husband. Secondly, within the context of the Old Testament, the term is employed in a religious sense, primarily signifying the violation of the covenant with God through the practice of idolatry. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the prophets. In this context, both Jerusalem (cf. Isa 1:21) and the entire people of Israel are frequently referred to as harlots, and their behaviour is likened to prostitution (cf. Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-22; 23:1-49; Hos 4:12-13; 5:3). It is evident that the covenant with YHWH was frequently represented through the metaphor of marriage

John. A Study in Bilingualism (Leiden: Brill 1971), 338, a *perfectum confidentiae*, which emphasizes the certainty of the events described. Such certainty can only be spoken of when events are about to happen (as is the case in Old Testament prophetic literature). Gentry (*The Divorce of Israel*, 2:1273) notes that the turmoil associated with the functioning of Rome can be seen at most in 68-69 AD (the year of the four emperors), but even then it is difficult to speak of the complete destruction of the empire, but only of the confusion associated with the takeover of power.

²⁶ Gentry, *The Divorce of Israel*, 2:1274.

(cf. Hos 2:5; Jer 2:20; 3:1-14; Ezekiel 16:36)²⁷. When referring to Rome as the Great Harlot, commentators must abandon this context, because Rome had no covenant with YHWH, so it is difficult to speak of any betrayal.

Consequently, the identification of the Great Harlot with Jerusalem (as the personification of first-century Israel) should be reconsidered. This perspective is not a novel one, as it was already espoused by the Church Fathers. For instance, Cyprian of Carthage (Letter 63:12) offers a commentary on the motif of the waters over which the Harlot sits, suggesting that they symbolise the pagan nations that have entered the Church. Conversely, the Church, as the Bride of Christ, was regarded as a replacement for the Jews due to their perceived involvement in prostitution. In recent decades, this interpretation has been revived by scholars such as Massyngberde Ford, Beagley, Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, Margaret Barker, Rick van de Water, Gordon Campbell, and especially Kenneth L. Gentry.²⁸

In considering the woman depicted in Revelation 17-18 as a metaphor for rebellious Israel, it is essential to ascertain the nature of this alleged rebellion. In response to this question, it can be stated in the broadest of terms that the rejection of God's plan by the Jewish people, which was centred on the coming of the Messiah and the invitation extended to all nations, was the cause. This invitation signified a loss of privilege for Israel, although the assertion that "salvation begins with the Jews" (cf. Jn 4:22) remains in place. This did not entail the withdrawal of God's love; rather, it signified that all nations were entitled to experience that love equally. The invitation to believe in Jesus is now extended to all nations. It also includes Israel, but no longer as a nation of exceptional character, but as one of many nations (cf. Gal 3:28). This perspective does not contradict Old Testament theology, wherein numerous texts address the adoption of faith in God by various nations (e.g., the Book of Jonah or Trito-Isaiah). However, when discussing Israel's role in the history of salvation at the end of time, it is important to

²⁷ Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 671.

²⁸ Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*; Beagley, *The "Sitz im Leben" of the Apocalypse*; Bruce J. Malina, John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 213-224; Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 279-284; Gordon Campbell, "Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation", *Tyndale Bulletin* 55(2004), 81-108; Rick van de Water, "Reconsidering the Beast from the Sea (Rev 13,1)", *New Testament Studies* 46(2000), 257: "There are indications that in the early Christian period, the oracles of Isaiah and Jeremiah against 'Babylon' were interpreted allegorically in terms of Israel's rejection of God's revelation (...) These indications of an allegorical reading of the name 'Babylon' argue for an early understanding of 'Babylon' as unfaithful Jerusalem, rather than Rome."

note that this subject is not explicitly addressed in Revelation. Furthermore, a thorough examination of the Book of Revelation reveals no explicit accusation against the Jewish people for the killing of Jesus. In Rev 1:7, where this event is mentioned, the author makes no connection to Israel. It is evident that all nations on Earth are expressing profound sorrow and lamentation in response to this matter. Additionally, in 11:8, where the crucifixion of Jesus is mentioned, it is expressed in such a manner (using the passive voice ἐσταυρώθη) that the culprits are not mentioned.

However, further examples of this rebellion are revealed in Revelation 17–18. The initial manifestation of this insurrection is evident in the utilisation of Jewish influence against Christians. In Revelation 17:1, the term “Great Harlot” is employed to denote a figure who is depicted as “sitting on many waters”²⁹. In verse 15, the waters are interpreted as signifying “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages” (λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσιν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλῶσσαι). The utilisation of this motif by scholars has frequently served to substantiate the assertion that it is indeed a reference to Rome.³⁰ However, as Rick van de Water has demonstrated, this perspective is more appropriate when considering Jerusalem and its influence on the Jewish diaspora across different nations.³¹ In addition, the Great Harlot is referred to as a “great city” (17:18; 18:10-21), the place where the Lord was crucified (11:8). During the reign of Herod the Great, Jerusalem boasted a level of opulence and grandeur that could be considered on par with any other major city in the Roman Empire.³² The city of Jerusalem experienced significant economic growth and development due to its extensive trade relations with the Jewish diaspora, which comprised millions of individuals.³³ This trade facilitated the accumulation of substantial wealth within the city, contributing to its prosperity and growth. It is evident that a similar phenomenon occurred in the context of the Temple. The Temple amassed substantial wealth through the contributions of Jews and proselytes, who were recruited in significant

²⁹ In the Apocalypse, “sitting” denotes the exercise of authority (cf. 3:21; 4:2-3; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 11:16; 14:15-16; 19:4; 20:4; 21:5).

³⁰ So e.g. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John. Studies in Introduction with Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 692; George B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 213; Boring, *Revelation*, 180; Mayo, “*Those who calls themselves Jews*”, 20.

³¹ This also includes proselytes from other nations as well as those who are “God-fearing.”

³² Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Jesus Party* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1974), 61.

³³ Max Radin, *The Jews among the Greeks and Romans* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society in America, 1915), 254-255.

numbers during that period.³⁴ The fact that Babylon is “sitting on many waters” symbolises the political influence of Jerusalem, exerted through the diaspora, on other nations. It is evident that Christians were frequently subjected to this influence. Evidence of this can be found in the Acts of the Apostles (13:45, 50; 14:2, 19; 17:13), which describe anti-Christian riots that were supported by local Jewish communities.³⁵ Moreover, the expulsion of Christians from the synagogue by the Jews effectively “exposed” them to the Roman authorities, thereby depriving them of the protection that had previously been afforded to Christians, who were considered part of Judaism. In Acts 17:6-7, the text provides an account of the actions of the Jews, who are depicted as inciting the authorities and inhabitants of Thessalonica. It was asserted that Christians were responsible for the disruption of the Roman legal order, on account of the challenges posed to Caesar’s authority in their preaching of the Gospel.³⁶

The author of Revelation also acknowledges these actions, which encompass the shedding of Christian blood. The most significant transgression of the Great Harlot is precisely this active opposition to Christians, as evidenced by the reference in 17:6 to the drinking of the blood of the saints and witnesses of Jesus. This is reiterated in the reasoning provided for the judgement on the Great Harlot in 18:24 (καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα προφητῶν³⁷ καὶ ἁγίων εὐρέθη καὶ πάντων τῶν εσφαγμένων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).³⁸ The expression “drinking someone’s blood” is indicative of a significant act of bloodshed. It

³⁴ Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 14.110–11; *De Bello Iudaico* 5.212; Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, 68. Louis H. Feldman, “Palestinian and Diaspora Judaism in the First Century,” in *Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development*, edited by Hershel Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1993), 4-5. On proselytes: Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico*, 7.45.

³⁵ James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue. A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Cleveland–New York: The World Publishing Company–The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 11.

³⁶ Gentry, *The Divorce of Israel*, 2:1281-1282; Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, 62-64.

³⁷ The mention of prophets confirms the identification of the Great Harlot as a metaphor for Jerusalem. Israel was repeatedly accused of fighting against the prophets sent by God (cf. 1 Kings 18:33; 19:1, 10, 14; Neh 9:26; cf. also Matt 21:35-36; 23:37; Luke 11:47; Acts 7:52).

³⁸ In 17:4, the Woman holds a cup full of abominations (βδελύγματα) and impurities (ἀκάθαρτα). In some Old Testament texts (Prov 6:16-17 LXX; 1 Sam 25:31 LXX), these terms refer to the shedding of innocent blood. Prov 17:15 states that whoever acquits the wicked and condemns the righteous arouses special disgust in the Lord (βδελυκτός παρὰ θεῶ). In Rev 19:2, the debauchery of the Great Harlot is juxtaposed with her shedding of the blood of God’s servants. Cf. Gentry, *The Divorce of Israel*, 2:1301.

is used metaphorically to describe a large-scale, violent persecution.³⁹ It has been posited by numerous commentators that this expression refers to the persecution of Christians by Rome. However, it should be noted that in the first century, such oppression was only occasional, with the majority of persecution occurring under Nero. In order to resolve the issue under discussion, it is claimed that John was able to foresee not only a future intensification of the persecution, but also that this escalation had already begun.⁴⁰

However, F. Gerald Downing states categorically: "There was no large-scale action against Christians in the courts of those parts of Asia Minor addressed in Revelation and 1 Peter before the cases heard by Pliny and referred to in his letter."⁴¹ In the first and early second centuries, there is no extant evidence of organised action by the Roman authorities to discourage Christians from believing in Christ. The Acts of the Apostles suggest that the Romans initially (in the first century) did not demonstrate any interest in this matter. The existence of such practices among the Roman populace is only attested to by Pliny's letter to Trajan and Caesar's reply. However, prior to this, the Romans regarded the conflict between the Church and the Synagogue as an internal disagreement within Judaism (cf. Acts 25:19). In contrast, it is argued that the synagogue, utilising its agreements with the Roman authorities, deliberately sought to dissuade people from their Christian faith. This is clearly evident in the Fourth Gospel (whoever confesses faith in Jesus will be ἀποσυνάγωγος – cf. John 9:22) and is even more pronounced in the Acts of the Apostles (4:1-3, 15-18; 5:27-33; 6:12; 8:1). Paul also alludes to the suffering of local churches at the hands of the Jews (e.g., in 1 Thessalonians 2:14), emphasising that his mission to the Jews encountered serious problems because of this. This notion is elaborated upon repeatedly in the Epistle to the Romans (e.g., 9:32; 10:16-21; 11:7, 11-15, 20, 25, 28), while the author continues to express hope for Israel's acceptance (Rom 11:15). It is evident that the phenomenon under discussion can occur when Israel turns away from unbelief (Rom 11:23). The role of Jewish religious authorities in these anti-Christian activities should be emphasised. This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in the Acts of the Apostles, where the actions of the high priests and Sadducees (i.e., the Jewish religious elite – cf.

³⁹ Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico* 5, 343-344.

⁴⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 29. Beckwith, *the Apocalypse of John*, 693-694; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 174; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 225; Boring, *Revelation*, 180; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 158.

⁴¹ F. Gerald Downing, "Pliny's prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter," *Journal for the Study on the New Testament* 34(1988), 105.

Acts 4:5ff; 5:17; 7:1), as well as the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:15; 5:21, 27, 34, 41; 6:12, 15) are documented.⁴²

Israel's actions towards Christians were not limited to overt hostility; there was also an attempt to encourage other nations to adopt a similar attitude. Accordingly, in Revelation 17:2, the concept of "kings and inhabitants of the earth infected with fornication" is employed, which can be interpreted as a reference to the act of rebelling against God, manifesting in the persecution of His new people. Gregory K. Beale observes that the author of Revelation utilises the imagery of Great Babylon as a harlot to underscore its seductive nature, which engenders a state of vulnerability, prompting individuals to stray from their faith in Christ.⁴³

3. THE THEOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ISRAEL'S REBELLION

It is evident that two theological consequences arise from the act of Israel's rebellion. Firstly, the people of the first choice lost the right to self-identify as Israel. Secondly, a new chosen people appeared, who adopted the titles and terms previously used for Israel. The primary terms in question are one hundred and forty-four thousand and the Bride.

With regard to the first issue, it is important to mention two thematically related texts: Rev 2:9 and 3:9. The first of these is found in the letter addressed to the church in Smyrna. The following words are attributed to Jesus when addressing this community: οἶδά (...) τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους καὶ οὐκ εἰσιν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ. The second is found in the letter to the church in Philadelphia: ἰδοὺ διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τοῦ σατανᾶ τῶν λεγόντων ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι, καὶ οὐκ εἰσιν ἀλλὰ ψεύδονται. ἰδοὺ ποιήσω αὐτοὺς ἵνα ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου καὶ γνῶσιν ὅτι ἐγὼ ἡγάπησα σε. In order to understand the statements under discussion, it is necessary to determine what the author

⁴² Ed P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 285: "The one actor who remains involved throughout is the high priest. The enmity of the chief priesthood is clear also in Josephus's story about the execution of James. Further, it is evident in all this that the Romans were not involved. The passages in the synoptics sometimes mention Gentiles and their rulers (Matt. 10.18; Mark 13.9; Luke 21.12); but, at least in Judea, the Romans played no role in the persecution of the movement after the death of Jesus. The evidence from Josephus confirms the view of Acts. The results point in the same direction: had the Romans wished to eliminate all the leaders of the new movement, Peter, John and James could not have remained active in Jerusalem."

⁴³ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 848.

means by the term “blasphemy” (βλασφημία), because it is this very act that characterizes those who belong to the synagogue of Satan. Furthermore, it is important to pay close attention to the very concept of the so-called “synagogue of Satan”.

The term “blasphemy” is understood to have two meanings: a religious sense, and a secular one. In the former instance, it is defined as the act of showing disrespect towards a deity, while in the latter, it is used to describe the act of accusing or slandering an individual.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that the Jewish community in Smyrna exhibited a notable degree of animosity towards Christians, as evidenced by the sentencing of Polycarp to death. After his confession of faith, he encountered profound animosity from both pagan and Jewish communities.⁴⁵ Robert H. Mounce has observed that the hostility exhibited by Jews towards Christians was rooted in two primary factors. Firstly, Jews perceived the worship of a Galilean who died as a rebel while claiming to be the Son of God as a form of blasphemy. Secondly, the influence of Christian missionary activities on both Jews and Greeks was a significant contributing factor (Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to Smyrna, 1:2). This belief prompted the Jewish population to take concrete action, as evidenced by their denunciation of Christians to the Roman authorities (a detail that may shed light on the motif of the prostitute sitting on the Beast). In an urban centre such as Smyrna, it was a relatively simple matter to persuade the Roman authorities to initiate action.⁴⁶ The allusion to Roman persecution in

⁴⁴ This situation occurs when the complement (explicit or implied) of the verb βλασφημέω is a man. Otfried Hofius, “βλασφημέω,” in *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, herausgegeben von Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 2011), 1:528.

⁴⁵ *The Martyrdom of St. Polycarp*, chapter 12 (In: *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique, and Gerald G. Walsh (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 157.

⁴⁶ Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 46-47: “The text doesn’t specify what kind of slander this was, but it probably consisted of false accusations made by their enemies for the purpose of getting them into trouble with the Roman authorities. The noun translated here as *slander* appears also in 13:1, 5, 6; 17:3. Its related Greek verb, “to blaspheme,” “to curse” (13:6; 16:9, 11, 21) always has God as object. In translating this phrase it should be made clear that these false accusations were directed against the believers in Smyrna”. David E. Aune (*Revelation 1-5* [Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997], 163-164) notes that the Jews in Smyrna were very strong and maintained their position as a separate nation, distinct from the rest of the citizens, until the reign of Hadrian, as inscriptions show, although they legally ceased to be so in 70 AD. On the significance of the Jewish diaspora in Sardis: Carsten Claußen, *Die Identität antik-jüdischer Gemeinden in Kleinasien im Spiegel von Rechtstexten. Das Beispiel Sardes*, In *Juden – Heiden – Christen? Religiöse Inklusion und Exklusion in Kleinasien bis Decius*, herausgegeben von Stefan Alkier, Hartmut Leppin (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 275-299.

2:10 (ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν), immediately following the mention of Jewish slander, is consistent with historical reports of Jews allying themselves with Romans and pagans and encouraging them to persecute Christians (e.g., Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2-7, 19; 17:5-9; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12:1-2; 13:1). The precise allegations made by the Jews to the government authorities are not fully known, but are thought to have concerned the disturbance of the status quo by Christians, their non-affiliation with any Jewish sect, and their refusal to worship Caesar as Lord.⁴⁷

The actions of the Jews revealed their identity as false Israel, that is, a community that only pretends to be God's people. Consequently, they were designated the "synagogue of Satan." The role of the true Israel is assumed by the Church. As Gregory K. Beale asserts, the identification of the Church with the true Israel is substantiated not only by the overarching context of the entire Apocalypse (e.g., 1:6,7,9,12; 2:17; 3:9,12; 5:9-10; 7:4-9, 15-17; 11:1-4), but also by the fact that in the immediate context of Revelation 2:9, the Church is regarded as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning Israel (see 1:17; 2:10). This identification is further reinforced by the comparison of the Church's trial with that of Daniel and his three friends (2:10). Consequently, the false accusations made against Christians, which resulted in their oppression, have led to the association of Jews with "Satan" ("the false accuser"). This is due to the fact that, in other texts of Revelation, the persecutor of God's people – the Church – is identified as the Beast (it is the subject of blasphemy in 13:1,5-6; 17:3-6; cf. Jn 8:44). Such cooperation could result in various economic sanctions being imposed by the Roman authorities on Christians. These sanctions could take the form of prohibitions on practising certain professions (e.g. exclusion from craft guilds, hence the mention of poverty in 2:9) and often also through imprisonment.⁴⁸

The expression συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ does not appear anywhere in either biblical or extra-biblical literature, but it has its analogy in the Qumran texts, where the assembly of Belial appears (1 QH 2:22). In this particular instance, reference was made to apostate Jews, that is to say, those who were not part of the Qumran community. Those who were part of that community considered themselves to be the true Israel (cf. 1 QH 7:34).⁴⁹ The term

⁴⁷ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 240.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 241.

⁴⁹ Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 392. William W. Tarn, *Hellenistic Civilization* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1952), 225 believes that Jewish synagogues in Mysia and Delos in fact

συναγωγή τοῦ σατανᾶ shows a marked similarity to John 8:31-47, which describes Jesus' dispute with the Jews who claimed to be Abraham's offspring, but in reality their father was the devil. The impetus for this dispute was the Jews' rejection of the revelation brought by Jesus. Consequently, Jesus disregards their ethnic kinship with Abraham, instead emphasising the existence of another, spiritual kinship – with the devil. Irrespective of their national provenance, these people became a synagogue gathering in the name of God's supreme adversary, Satan, through their fierce opposition, first to Jesus and subsequently to the Church and its mission.⁵⁰ Despite the Jewish community's ongoing self-perception as the legitimate successor to the pledges made to Old Testament Israel (λεγόντες ἑαυτοὺς Ἰουδαίους εἶναι), this notion is, in reality, an illusion (οὐκ εἰσίν). In verse 3:9, the Jews' self-perception is characterised as a "lie" (ψεύδονται). Consequently, the Jews assert their identity as God's chosen people. However, their rejection of the Messiah and persecution of His followers has led to their designation as "liars" (cf. 1 John 1:10; 2:4), divesting them of their former status as His true people and aligning them more closely with Satan (cf. John 8:44; 2 Cor 11:13–15). This is analogous to the assertion made by Paul in Rom 2:28–29, which states that a genuine Jew is one who is "inwardly, in the heart".⁵¹

The second issue under consideration pertains to the transfer of literary motifs from the Old Testament era, which were originally designated for the people of Israel, to Christians. The primary concern pertains to the great multitude, which is symbolically referred to as 144,000.⁵² Throughout the history of exegesis, there have been various attempts to identify the group referred to as 144,000. It is also noteworthy to mention the perspectives positing that the 144,000 denote: 1) Jews (or possibly Judaeo-Christians);⁵³

worshipped Zeus. He suggests that the term "synagogue of Satan" in Smyrna and Philadelphia may indicate a kind of syncretic cult.

⁵⁰ Some researchers believe that statements of this kind are historically biased and even anti-Semitic. Aune (*Revelation 1-5*, 161) argues that the author of Revelation condemns only certain Jews from the local communities in Sardis and Philadelphia. However, it should be noted here that, apart from obvious historical references, each group of people in Revelation should be considered as representative of model attitudes.

⁵¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 190.

⁵² A detailed description of all these proposals is provided by Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 440-445.

⁵³ Jonathan A. Draper, "The Heavenly Feast of Tabernacles: Revelation 7:1-17," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19(1983), 136.

2) Christians (both of Jewish and pagan origin);⁵⁴ 3) Christian martyrs.⁵⁵ This group is mentioned once more in the text of the Apocalypse itself, in 14:1-5. In this section, the term is defined with greater precision. This group comprises individuals who bear the names of the Lamb and His Father inscribed upon their foreheads. They have been redeemed from the earth, and they have not defiled themselves with women – they are virgins, and they accompany the Lamb. They have been redeemed as first fruits. Ruben Zimmermann has conducted a thorough examination of passage 14:1-5.⁵⁶ This exegete concluded that the vision in 14:1-5 anticipates the marriage of the Lamb described in 19:6-9 and 21:2.9, and that the 144,000 should be understood collectively as the Bride of the Lamb. It can thus be concluded that the group under discussion functions as a symbolic representation of the Church.⁵⁷ The fact that this group is not exclusively formed of Judaeo-Christians is also indicated by the fact that these people gathered around the Lamb on Mount Zion, as mentioned in Rev 14:1. This is the only place in the entire Book of Revelation where this mountain is mentioned. This can be interpreted as a reference to Psalm 87[86], in which Zion is depicted as a place where people from various nations will be gathered (the psalmist

⁵⁴ Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 193; Beagley, *The „Sitz im Leben“ of the Apocalypse*, 47.

⁵⁵ So e.g. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1970), 70.

⁵⁶ Ruben Zimmermann, „Die Virginitäts-Metapher in Apk 14,1-5 im Horizont von Befleckung, Loskauf und Erstlingsfrucht“, *Novum Testamentum* 45 (2003), 45-70.

⁵⁷ „Die unterschiedlichen Elemente der komplexen Bilderwelt von Apk 14,1-5, sie es Jungfräulichkeit, Makellosigkeit, Nachfolgeversprechen sowie Loskauf und Erstlingsfrucht, finden in der Geschlechtsmetaphorik eine Schnittmenge. Die 144 000 Erwählten werden dabei in den Horizont einer Braut gerückt, so dass die Vision in Apk 14,1-5 als Prolepse der Hochzeit des Lammes gesehen werden kann, die dann in Apk 19,6-9 bzw. Apk 21,2.9 näher entfaltet wird. Wenn die 144 000 dabei kollektiv als ‘Braut des Lammes’ verstanden werden, bleibt die metaphorische Rede ganz Denkwelt der jüdischen Bildfeldtradition verpflichtet, in der seit Hosea die Gottesbeziehung Israels im Bild von Hochzeit und Ehe beschrieben wurde. Vor allem im prophetisch-apokalyptischen Zweig dieses Bildfeldes wird die Braut stets als kollektive Größe wie Land, Volk oder Gottesstadt und nie individualistisch aufgefasst. Auch die Jungfräulichkeit der 144 000 von Apk 14,4-5 darf deshalb nicht individualetisch verengt werden, sondern bezieht sich – wie Apk 7,4-8 nahelegt – auf das eschatologische Gottesvolk in seiner Gesamtheit und beschreibt dessen Treue und exklusive Zugehörigkeit zum Lamm als künftigem Bräutigam“ (*Die Virginitäts-Metapher*, 70). A similar interpretation is given by Aune: „the 144 000 of Rev 7,4-8 represent that particular group of Christians (including all ages and both genders) who have been specially protected by God from both divine plagues and human persecution just before the final eschatological tribulation begins and who consequently survive that tribulation and the great eschatological battle that is the culmination of that tribulation“ (*Revelation 6-16*, 443).

mentions Rahab, Babylon, the Philistines, Tyre, and Kush).⁵⁸ Thus, the most plausible interpretation of the group of 144,000 is that it symbolises the Church as an earthly community comprising members from diverse nations. The Church's fidelity has led it to adopt the role of the authentic Israel, as evidenced by the references to the provenance of those sealed from the individual tribes of Israel. Nevertheless, the order of ranking was peculiar, with the tribe of Judah at the top and the tribe of Dan omitted. This suggests that the text is not concerned with the concept of ethnic Israel.⁵⁹ Consequently, the number 144,000 is purely symbolic. The image in question depicts the earthly Church as a community that is capable of being counted. This is the fundamental difference between the subject under discussion and the triumphant Church (depicted in 7:9-17), the number of members of which will be revealed at the end of time.⁶⁰ This is further highlighted by the observation that the group depicted in Revelation 7:4-8 appears to be in opposition to the "great multitude" portrayed in Revelation 7:9-17. It is evident that the number of those sealed is 144,000 (v. 4a), which is contrasted with the expression "a great multitude that no one could count" (v. 9a). In the passage under consideration, the origin of the 144,000 individuals from all the tribes of the sons of Israel is contrasted with the origin of the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language. Finally, the group of 144,000 is on earth, as can be inferred from the fact that they are threatened by plagues (7:1-3), while the great multitude is in heaven, before the divine throne (7:9). It is evident that, despite the considerable commonalities shared by the two groups (particularly their association with God and the Lamb), significant disparities exist between them. In this regard, it can be concluded that by employing the image of the 144,000 and the references to the Old Testament people of Israel, the author of Revelation sought to demonstrate a new community. The Church assumes the role of the chosen people, that is to say, Israel.

The second motif, which was associated with Israel in the Old Testament but is transferred to the Church in Revelation, is the Bride. This bride, elucidated in greater detail in 21:9-22:11, is presented as the antithesis of the

⁵⁸ More extensively on Zion, which brings together different nations, writes Ignace de la Potterie. *Mary in the Mystery of Covenant*, trans. Bertrand Buby (New York, NY: Alba House 1992) XXIV-XXXVII.

⁵⁹ Furthermore, it should be added that at the time when the Apocalypse was written, the division into tribes in Israel was no longer in actual use.

⁶⁰ Tomasz Siemienieć, *Teologiczna rola "ludzi" (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) w Apokalipsie Janowej* (Kielce: Jedność, 2018), 202.

Great Harlot (17:1-19:10). The author employs the motif of the city in order to illustrate this point. One of them is aesthetically pleasing, while the other is visually unappealing.⁶¹ The former is New Jerusalem, the latter is First Jerusalem, and is symbolically depicted as Great Babylon. This depiction of the holy city is one of great irony, as it involves a complete reversal of roles. The concept of New Jerusalem is predicated on the destruction of the old (or first) Jerusalem. This assumption is based on the statement in 21:1, which states that the appearance of a new sea and a new earth indicates that the first heaven and the first earth have passed away. In the Book of Revelation 17, Jerusalem is depicted as a symbol of the collapsing old order. This collapse is described in detail in Revelation 18. As indicated at 18:21, it is explicitly stated that the destruction will be total (οὐ μὴ εὐρεθῇ ἔτι). The use of the metaphorical term “prostitute” in reference to Jerusalem, juxtaposed with the description of God’s actions towards her as “judgment and sentence” (19:2), serves to underscore the notion that the Book of Revelation is predicated on the ultimate dissolution of this marital relationship between God and Jerusalem, a consequence that is viewed as inevitable. In its place, a new bride will appear – who will always be faithful. This is evident, for instance, in the motif of the nuptial relationship, which the Bible frequently employs to illustrate the relationship between God and the people. It is to be noted that there is only one Bride. It is not possible to enter into a new marriage without first divorcing the previous spouse. It is indeed the case that there are instances in the Old Testament in which a husband has two wives (e.g. Jacob – Lea and Rachel, and their maidens). However, it should be noted that this was not God’s original intention.⁶²

4. CONCLUSION

The analyses conducted in this article sought to provide an answer to the question of the theological role of Israel in the history of salvation according to the Apocalypse of John. The results of the analyses can be summarised as follows:

⁶¹ Witherington, *Revelation*, 19.

⁶² Hosea, indeed, says that the Lord again marries an unfaithful wife who at one point became a prostitute. However, this action of the Lord refers to the time of the Old Testament. But if this wife betrays her husband again, is it possible for him to take her back? The image of the collapse shown in Revelation 18 shows that the wife who became a prostitute will receive the greatest punishment.

1. The role of Israel in the history of salvation is indicated by the image of a woman in Revelation 12. This woman is representative of Israel, the people that will give birth to the Messiah. This event is considered a pivotal moment in the overall history of salvation, as evidenced by the motif of the woman's labor pains. Within the context of the Old Testament tradition, this motif is employed to metaphorically express the arrival of a decisive moment – that is, a turning point. It is evident that at the moment of the birth of the Messiah, the role of the Woman – Israel, resulting from her election, is completed. The Apocalypse employs the image of the Woman's departure into the desert, which can be compared to Hagar's departure in Genesis after the birth of Abraham's lawful heir, Isaac. Nevertheless, the termination of the role for which the people of Israel was chosen does not imply the rejection of this people. The rationale behind the nation's election has become extinct, as the mission has been successfully executed. Nevertheless, the divine offer of salvation remains valid. Israel is not deprived of God's love, and the promise of protection still applies, but to the same extent as the invitation extended to other nations. Consequently, members of the Israelite community are not rejected, but rather invited to join the community of those who bear testimony to Christ and observe God's commandments (12:17). The focus of the author of Revelation is now on this group. It is noteworthy, however, that God's invitation is linked to Israel's recognition that it is no longer superior to other nations, but has been placed on an equal footing with them. That is to say, it must, like other nations, accept the Messiah, that is, join the community referred to as "the rest of the offspring of the Woman."

2. At this stage in history, which forms the historical context for John's Apocalypse, God's invitation was rejected by Israel. The Apocalypse interprets this event as a rejection of God, i.e. a breaking of the covenant relationship. This notion is emphasized in Revelation 17-18, where the Woman is referred to as the Great Harlot. As demonstrated by analyses of the text, the metaphor in question pertains not to the historical city of Rome, but rather to the historical city of Jerusalem. The presence of a woman seated upon the Beast is indicative of a relationship between Jerusalem and Rome. This relationship became evident when Jewish circles, predominantly those in the diaspora, made false accusations against Christians. The exclusion of Christians from the synagogue by the Jews resulted in their exposure to sanctions from the Roman authorities. This marked a shift from the previous status quo, in which Christians had been considered a sect of Judaism and thus

enjoyed protection under Rome. These actions ultimately resulted in the martyrdom of numerous witnesses of Christ, a phenomenon elucidated by Revelation 17-18 through the metaphor of “drinking the blood of the saints”. The Jewish people did not merely engage in antagonistic behaviour towards Christians; they sought to instigate similar hostility among other nations. In this sense, the Book of Revelation 17:2 employs the metaphorical depiction of kings and inhabitants of the earth “infected” with fornication by the woman. The author of Revelation interprets these actions as a betrayal of God and describes them as fornication, and the primary character is referred to as the Great Harlot.

3. The actions of the Great Harlot resulted in a shift in perspective regarding the people of Israel. The Apocalypse makes two references to this transformation (2:9 and 3:9), highlighting their subsequent identification with Satan’s synagogue and the consequent loss of their right to self-identify as Israel. It should be noted that the use of the term “Israel” in this context refers to a theological category, as opposed to an ethnic one. This approach to the issue does not permit the exclusion of ethnic Jews from God’s offer of salvation. Consequently, it is not possible to assert that they have been subjected to divine retribution or disapproval. However, this signifies that they are obligated to fulfill precisely the same conditions as individuals belonging to other nations. It is imperative that individuals accept the testimony of Christ and act accordingly. The new community, comprising the witnesses of Christ, is depicted in the Apocalypse using motifs that in the Old Testament referred to ethnic Israel. This notion is further elaborated upon in the description of this community as one hundred and forty-four thousand (Rev 7; 14) from the various tribes of Israel, and in the use of the metaphor of the Bride (Rev 21-22), which previously emphasized the unique bond that existed between YHWH and His people.

4. The conclusions drawn in this study do not conflict with the teachings of the Apostle Paul, particularly as articulated in his Letter to the Romans. In order to provide a more comprehensive analysis, it is necessary to compare Paul’s statement that God has not rejected His people (Rom 11:1) with other statements found in the same letter. In this passage, the author expounds upon the concept of the faithful Remnant, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of upholding and fulfilling God’s promises (11:5). Furthermore, he expounds on the hardness of heart of the rest, who do not belong to the remnant (11:7). He expresses hope for their complete conversion (11:12) and their readmission (11:15, 23). This constitutes the fundamental tenet of God’s

perpetual offer of salvation. If the final rejection of Israel by God was indeed a factual event, it would imply that all prior offers had been retracted. However, this is not the case. There are no impediments to those of the ethnic Israeli community becoming part of the collective that bears witness to Christ.

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CZY NADAL SĄ NARODEM WYBRANYM?
TEOLOGICZNE ZNACZENIE NARODU IZRAELSKIEGO
W HISTORII ZBAWIENIA WEDŁUG APOKALIPSY ŚW. JANA

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie dotyczące teologicznej roli narodu wybranego w historii zbawienia na podstawie Apokalipsy św. Jana. Autor, analizując tekst Apokalipsy, dochodzi do wniosku, że głównym zadaniem Izraela było sprowadzenie Mesjasza na świat. Wraz z Jego nadejściem rola narodu izraelskiego jako narodu wybranego dobiega końca. Jednak nie oznacza to odrzucenia Izraela. Chociaż powód, dla którego stał się on narodem wybranym, przestaje istnieć, oferta zbawienia ze strony Boga jest nadal aktualna, a obietnica ochrony pozostaje w mocy, ale w takim samym zakresie jak oferta skierowana do innych narodów. Według Apokalipsy Izrael odrzucił zaproszenie Boga, co znalazło wyraz w prześladowaniu świadków Chrystusa we współpracy z Rzymem. Św. Jan uważa to działanie za równoznaczne z odrzuceniem Boga, w wyniku czego Jerozolima (która uosabia Izrael) została nazwana Wielką Nierządnicą. Z tego powodu lud, który wcześniej był wybrany, utracił prawo do nazywania się prawdziwym Izraelem (Ap 2:9; 3:9). Rolę tę przejmują teraz nowi lud, przedstawiony w Apokalipsie za pomocą tych samych obrazów, które odnosiły się do ludu Izraela w Starym Testamencie. Jest to obraz rzeszy 144 000 i motyw Oblubienicy.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Apokalipsy; Izrael; lud wybrany; Wielka Nierządnica; Kościół; historia zbawienia