

Blessings and Curses in the Book of Revelation: A Study of the Seven *makarioi* Oracles and their Corresponding Curses

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Introduction

That we cannot run away from the themes of blessings and curses in the bible is underscored by the fact that all over the Hebrew Bible, for example, the fortune or otherwise of persons, families, generations, nations, and humanity, rested on their relationship to one form or the other of blessings and curses. As Anderson notes: “The entire Pentateuch takes up the promise of the blessing and the challenge of the curse as a recurring refrain”.¹ He further notes that: “Life in the believing community is lived between threat and promise, curse and blessing...one’s choices are genuinely real and give birth to life-impacting consequences”.² Quite frankly then, people’s relationship to God and to one another is very much tied into the blessing/curse phenomenon.

One of the main problems one faces in this discussion concerns the relationship of curses to the nature and character of God, and in particular, the doctrines of divine providence and election”.³

The other problem envisaged in this essay is the identity of what is considered blessings or curses in the bible because of the distinction in the Hebrew and Greek words used to identify them (all of which have

¹ See more examples of the prevalence of the theme in other parts of the bible listed by Jeff S. Anderson (*The Blessing and the Curse: Trajectories in the Theology of the Old Testament* [Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014], 21-22). Following his list of the places where the theme of blessing and curse determine the story line, he concludes: “From these examples, one can see that the theme of blessings and curses is pervasive in the Old Testament. More important, the theme appears at some important seams in the biblical narrative, such as the beginning of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and the Christian bible, as well as the end of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament and the Christian Bible”.

² Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 24.

³ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 24.

been translated the same way in the English versions). So, for example, are *makarisms* blessings? In his concluding chapter on the “Challenges of Old Testament Theology”, Jeff Anderson ignores this distinction as he presents the last makarism in Revelation as well as what followed (Rev 22:14-19) as blessings that conclude the New Testament.⁴ Yet, Anderson does affirm that blessings and curses (*bārūkôt wəqālēlôt*) are different from *makarisms*, that are usually uttered with phrases like, “how honoured is/are...”, *šry*. But, he notes that, for many scholars, the semantic field of the root *brk* is so broad that the closest synonym to “*brk* is *šry* (Jer 17:7-8; Psa 1:1-3), which is typically translated “happy”.⁵

There are a variety of definitions for blessings and curses. Put simply:

A blessing is a potent way to invoke, distribute, or celebrate the wellbeing that comes from divine favour. In the Old Testament, blessings primarily invoked fertility, authority and dominion, wholeness, peace and rest. Therefore, these blessings might proceed from God to humans, from humans to other humans, and even from humans toward God. But almost rarely does the Old Testament show someone blessing an inanimate object... Conversely, curses are expressions of misfortune, calamity, and evil. They, like blessings, are not mere wishes but are powerful and effective performatives that have potency when uttered, but only in appropriate contexts by appropriate individuals. A curse is an illocution. It is intended to do something by its invocation.⁶

Blessings and Curses in Religious Texts

“Blessings and curses are speech arts”.⁷ They are either bestowed freely and benevolently on the object of such speech or in response to a request by the object or as reactions to certain traits, accomplishments,

⁴ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 24-25.

⁵ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 29.

⁶ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 26. William J. Urbrock espouses these same views in his article on biblical blessings and curses. See “Blessings and Curses”, in David Noel Freedman *et al*(eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 755-61. He notes that: “the course of human events is experienced as neither accidental nor self-directed but as depended, wholly or in part, on the will of these divine powers. In this setting, blessing or curse, deriving ultimately from the disposition and ability of the gods to further or thwart the ‘good life,’ are of critical importance to human welfare”.

⁷ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 20.

manifestations, or betrayal on the part of the object of that speech. "Blessings and curses are activities of pronouncement, or "performative" utterances. They are wishes but much more than wishes. They are prayers but are more than prayers..."⁸They are intended to positively or negatively shape the course of future events in the lives of individuals or whole peoples.

Ancient near Eastern Background

Blessings and curses are not special preserves of the Hebrew or Christian scriptures. They are present in most religious literature and point to the fact that we are dealing with universal religious and human phenomena. "The chief concepts and practices of blessings and curses are also deeply rooted in the broad cultural environment of ancient Near East".⁹The power invested in such speech to effect its performative impact is derived either from a supernatural initiator, drawn from or attributed to one, or generated from the presumed special powers of a human initiator. Long before Africans knew about the bible and up until this day, the universality of these phenomena has been also been greatly attested in various African cultural and religious practices and contexts, where blessings and curses play a very significant role in the life and fate of individuals, families and communities. Little wonder they continue to feature prominently in religious ministries of all faiths, including various Christian, Islamic and Traditional religious sects/groups.

Blessings and Curses in the Bible

The bible has a fair share of such blessings and curses. There is also the common knowledge that there are credible originators of such speech, in which case one who is not authorized to carry out such speech-act may be ineffective and even cursed. As Anderson points out, "theologically, both blessings and curses grow out of two important biblical doctrines: divine providence and election. Divine providence is the idea that God can influence the life and destiny of individuals or peoples. Understood

⁸ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 26.

⁹ Anderson, *Blessings and the Curses*, 20.

narrowly, election is the concept that God chooses particular individuals and peoples for covenant blessing or for curse”.¹⁰

While there are an abundance of blessings (*brk*)¹¹ and curses (*'rr*, *'lh*, and *qll*)¹² in the OT and these are well attested across board, we cannot say the same of the NT. That may be primarily due to the cause-effect relationship between the speech event and the consequences on the receiver that pervaded the Hebrew/Israelite religious worldview. The do-well-fair-well theological mindset of the OT times also accounts for the preponderance of such blessings and curses. If you keep God’s commandments, you will be blessed. If you do not, you are accursed (Deut 30:15-20).

Etymologically, the closest Greek equivalents to these Hebrew cognates (blessings [*brk*] and curses [*'rr*, *'lh*, and *qll*]) that reflect that mindset are *eulogeō*, *eulogia*, and *eulogētos* for blessings, and *katarasthai*, *katara*, and *kataraomai* for curses. While these LXX translations for the Hebrew cognates are carried over to the NT, as for example in Luke 24:50f.; Heb 7:1, 6; 12:17 and many more texts in the case of blessing, the same is not true of curses (Mark 11:21 cursing of the fig tree, Gal 3:10; Luke 6:28; James 3:9; Matt 25:41).¹³

¹⁰ Anderson, *Blessing and the Curse*, 28.

¹¹ For *brk*, there are generally over 400 occurrences in the Old Testament in different forms. “Genesis and Psalms alone account for nearly half of these occurrences, and Deuteronomy adds an additional 51 examples. The root *brk* occurs 160 times in the Torah, 88 times in the Prophets, and 148 times in the Writings”. See Anderson, *Blessings and Curses*, 29, citing, Christopher Wright Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK “to bless” in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 95 (Atlanta: SBL, 1987), 185.

¹² Statistics of the *'rr* root for curse, “generally recognized as the strongest example of curse language in the Old Testament”, is as follows: 63 occurrences as verb, 19 of which are in Deuteronomy 27–28; while *qll* appears in its various verb forms, 40 times in the OT and additional 33 times as a noun; and *'lh* has 6 occurrences as a verb and 37 as a noun. For details, see Anderson, *Blessing and Curses*, 31-37.

¹³ See F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979; trans. and adapt. of Walter Bauer’s *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur* [fifth edition, Berlin, 1958]), 322-23, 416-17.

The Old Testament and Makarisms

Beyond the notions of blessings and curses discussed in the last paragraph, examples of *makarisms* also abound in the OT, especially in Hebrew Wisdom Literature (at least 45 occurrences) and in the apocryphal writings, especially the apocalyptic writings like *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, *Sib. Or.*, *Psalms of Solomon* and *4 Maccabees*. There are also some examples of the use of *makarisms* in rabbinic literature ("Blessed are thou Aqiba, because thou wast arrested for words of Torah" [*Ber.* 61b]).¹⁴ It does seem, though, that as time went on, there was less use of the speech events that commanded existential consequences. There emerged a shift to blessings that were based on the *makarism* form of speech. Together with this shift is the movement from expected existential consequences to more eschatological and spiritual consequences. The value of such consequences became less quantitative and more qualitative. This shift is noticeable as one moves from the historical books into Prophetic and Wisdom literature.

The New Testament and Makarisms

As far as the NT is concerned, the beatitudes in Matt 5:1-12 popularized the understanding of *makarisms*. Whenever anyone mentioned beatitudes, Matthew 5 came to mind, then the Lukan parallel in Luke 6, before any others. R. Collins notes that there are at least 37 beatitudes in the NT, seven of which are in the book of Revelation. Some of them are sayings of Jesus, especially in the gospels (17 times). Three of the Lukan *makarisms* are attributed to spokespersons other than Jesus, Luke being the only evangelist to do that (Luke 1:45; 11:27; 14:15). The proclamations attributed to Jesus (esp. Matt 5:1-11) mostly relate to his proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven and have definite eschatological overtones to them as well,¹⁵ without completely eliminating the existential consequences.

¹⁴ See Raymond F. Collins, "Beatitudes", David Noel Freedman *et al* (eds.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, 629-30.

¹⁵ Collins, "Beatitudes", 1:630.

Blessings and Curses and the Two Ways

The two ways, life and death, introduced in the Torah, in the persuasion of God's elect to make a fundamental option for the path of righteousness, form the foundation for Israelite spirituality and ethics. The choice is between life and death (Deut 30:15-20). To choose life is to commit to walking in the way of the Lord. To do otherwise is to choose death. The one, who chooses the way of the Lord will be blessed and will prosper. The one who chooses evil is accursed and his path leads to doom. This two-way phenomenon that is signified in the Torah took deep root in Israel's history. Its entrenchment is underscored by its popular representation in wisdom literature, especially in the psalms (see Psalm 1).

Blessings and Curses in the Book of Revelation

One of the initial difficulties faced in this paper, which has already been broached, was dealing with *makarisms* as blessings. But, a review of the two ways and the character of the blessings and curses we have in many OT texts erase the sharp distinction between blessings and *makarisms*. Psalm 1 is a very vivid example of how blurry the distinctions could be since the structure of that psalm, which is programmatically at the head of the Psalter and, therefore, shapes the reflection of the two ways in the Psalter, is not distinct from the *makarisms* and woes that we have in Luke 6:20-26. These, in turn, reflect the character and the structure of the *makarisms* we have in the book of Revelation, with the accompanying woes, either implied or spread out in the context of the *makarisms*. In a certain sense, one can say that there evolved a gradual coming together of *brk* and *'šr* (*'ašrê*, happy) in Wisdom and Apocalyptic literature, as these works from later era seem to show preference for the latter than the former. What we have in Psalm 1, which begins with the *'ašrê*, and in the entire Psalter to which Psalm 1 is an overture as it "introduces themes which culminate in the praise at the end of Book five", has the same content and intent with the blessings and curses that we have in the Pentateuch.¹⁶ Raymond F. Collins notes that, "the specifically religious

¹⁶ The commentaries on Psalm 1 underscore this idea. See Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, the Liturgical Press, 2001), 3-8. See also, John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1: Psalms 1-41,

beatitude is typically found in apocalyptic literature...these religious beatitudes frequently assume eschatological overtones. Typically, a seer pronounces beatitude because of a visionary experience".¹⁷ Although, Collins' remarks concerned literature from the intertestamental period, what he said here is also very true of the *makarisms* in the book of Revelation. The same notion is found in David E. Garland's note that: "Blessed" *makarioi* was familiar ascription in the Greek world that usually ascribed to those who had the things that were judged to make for earthly happiness. The emphasis was on the worldly wellbeing. Beatitudes that appear in intertestamental literature reflect a change in focus from how to be happy in this life to how to be happy in the life to come.¹⁸

***Makarioi* in Biblical Parlance**

The noun, *makarioi*, comes from the verb *makarizō*, which has a variety of meanings "call or consider blessed, happy, fortunate", all found in the varied English translations of the bible. The noun *makarios* is rendered as one who is "blessed, fortunate, happy", usually in the sense of a "privileged recipient of divine favour".¹⁹

In form, "the makarisms begin with the adjective *makarios*, followed by a relative or personal pronoun introducing a clause, which describes a particular conduct or quality, which prompted the praise of the person who is pronounced blessed".²⁰ They are declarative to the extent that they make pronouncements on existential characteristics, either actual or preferred, whose consequential wishes or outcomes may or may not be this-worldly – often eschatological in character.

Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2006), 79-91.

¹⁷ Collins, "Beatitudes", 1:629.

¹⁸ David E. Garland, *Luke: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 275.

¹⁹ Gingrich and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 486–87.

²⁰ Collins, "Beatitudes", 1:629.

A General Overview of the Background to the Oracles in Revelation

The book of Revelation has seven *makarisms* in all (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). They are mostly presented as isolated sayings, without any two in sequence, and often without direct literary connections to their immediate contexts. They are, however, thematically related to the surrounding material. The first and the last of these, 1:3 and 22:14 form a “distinct pair” and are located as an *inclusio* around the book, as they laud those who keep the words of the prophecy. As *inclusio*, Collins remarks that they unify “Revelation’s collection of disparate materials”. Not surprisingly, the others, according to him, “bear the mark of a distinctively eschatological stamp”.²¹ This eschatological flavour is underscored by Robert Wall, who notes that they are proclamations of eschatological reality.²² Apart from the *inclusio*, Edmundo Lupieri notes that the sevenfold presentation of the *makarisms* has no determinant structural impact on the entire book.²³

The Book of Revelation and the Two Ways

Nowhere in the NT is the teaching of the two ways better typified than in the book of Revelation, where choices are clear, and individuals or whole groups are defined by their identification either with the One seated on the throne and with the Lamb, or with Satan, the dragon, the beast and their agents. Each, according to their chosen path, either bears the mark or insignia of the Lamb or the mark of the beast. Evil simulates good in order to deceive and attract followers and force others into followership. People are warned to be vigilant so that they may not fall victims to such deceptions. It is against that background that the church is presented as

²¹ Collins, “Beatitudes”, 1:631. He further notes: “Those formulated in the plural praise those who die in the Lord (Rev 14:13, with pertinent commentary in v. 13b) and those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), while those formulated in the singular laud the vigilant (Rev 16:15), and those who share in the first resurrection (Rev 20:6). Their literary form is clearly that of the religious beatitude”.

²² Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 53.

²³ Edmundo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, Italian Texts and Studies on Religion and Society (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006 [first published in Italian in 1999]), 99. See also, Charles Giblin’s discussion of the internal structure (chiastic) of the seven *makarisms*, a chiasm, which has no structural impact on the entire work (*Book of Revelation*, 217-18).

an embattled and persecuted pilgrim Church that is called to holiness, perseverance and forthrightness. As such, these *makarisms* wisely invite the Christian community to make faith-filled and life-giving choices amidst its present struggles.

The Makarioi Oracles in the Book of Revelation

The *Makarioi* Oracles in their Literary Context and Analyses of the Text Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14

Each *makarism* expresses a consequent blessing on the one/ones blessed. Each is a solemn divine proclamation that is either spoken directly or through an angel, and once by the prophet.

Revelation 1:3

Makarios ho anaginōskōn kai hoi akouontes tous logous tēs prophēteias kai tērountes ta en autē gegrammena, ho gar kairos eggus

NRSV “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and *blessed* are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.

This *makarism* has no accompanying curse. It is, however, implied that those who hear and do not observe faithfully, or those who do neither would be subject to the negative impact of the judgment that accompanies the fullness of time. Such lack of hearing and keeping is oblivious of the signs of the times and their consequences, either inadvertently or intentionally.

This first *makarism* is a blessing for the one who proclaims or reads (*anaginōskōn*) and those who hear/listen (*akouontes*) to the proclamation and keep/observe (*tērountes*) them. These three participles describe faithful discipleship, especially in critical times. *Ho gar kairos eggus* provides a “motive for obedience”.²⁴ This nearness of the time (end) signals the fact that Christians already live in the end times, hence the

²⁴ Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (eds), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible NRSV*, Completely Revised and Enlarged (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 365

urgency to be good hearers and effective keepers of God's word.²⁵ The nearness of the time is reminiscent of the eschatological reminders in the synoptic gospels that urge disciples to vigilance and persistence in discipleship as they await the glorious return of Jesus.²⁶ Here, there is a strong connection between the ethics of discipleship, the reason they are pronounced blessed, and eschatology, with its focus on the ultimate goal of discipleship. On a more general note, Robert Wall remarks that: "the beatitudes of Revelation share a common perspective with the beatitudes found elsewhere in the NT: They assure the hearers of their future participation in God's promised salvation".²⁷

The last three words that give the motive for obedience end the prologue to the entire book with a concept that is repeated frequently throughout the book of Revelation. While end-time messages are quite prevalent in the NT (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 1 Cor 15:22-23; Rom 13:12; 16:20; 1 Thess 5:2-8; 1 Pet 4:7), the call here is an invitation to be ready at all times, no matter what the delay factors are. As Peterson insightfully puts it:

Whatever the prophets, other biblical authors, and John may have understood when they wrote "soon", centuries later it is clear that the Holy Spirit, who inspired them, was not speaking literally in the way that human beings reckon time. Rather, it seems the Holy Spirit's intention was to stir people to action now for the sake of God's salvation and judgment that just might come to pass in their lives sooner than they expect.²⁸

This first *makarism* also delineates the genre of the entire book as prophecy, without prejudice to its apocalyptic tag.²⁹

²⁵ Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, Good News Studies, 34 (Collegeville, M: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 39-41.

²⁶ See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Rev. ed.), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), 43.

²⁷ Wall, *Revelation*, 53.

²⁸ Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 41.

²⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation*, Everyday Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1996), 18; see also Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary*, Revised and Updated (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, © 1997, 2013), 79;

Revelation 14:13

Kai ēkousa phones ek tou ouranou legousēs Grapson: Makarioi hoi nekroi hoi en kuriō apothnēskontes ap' arti. Nai, legei to pneuma, hina anapaēsontai ek tōn kopōn autōn, ta gar erga autōn akolouthei met' autōn

NRSV “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them’.”

The voice from heaven, usually God's voice or the “angel that speaks on behalf of Jesus”, utters this *makarism* at the end of the word of judgment on the devotees of the beast and on Babylon, the symbol of spiritual rebellion (Rev 14:6-11). The focus here is on those who persist on the path of righteousness to the end – tested fidelity is rewarded by the Lord of Life. The angel declares the faithful-dead blessed, who endured the great trials and were sustained by their obedience to the “commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12). The imperative to write this (*grapson*) indicates the official and authoritative nature of this pronouncement as well as the enduring validity of what is written. These faithful dead are blessed because “they will find rest from their labours”, unlike the followers of the beast, who will have “no relief” (Rev 14:11). The second part of the blessing is the reward they will receive for their good deeds and faithful testimony, a reward that “continues beyond the grave”. This *makarism* thus remains a source of encouragement for Christians of all time, who must remain faithful and persevere through the challenges that come their way because of their faith in Christ. The Lord remembers and rewards such faithfulness and loyalty,³⁰ in fulfilment of the ancient prophetic promises (Isa 57:1-2; Jer 46:27; 50:34). Their good works are not “temporary actions, but endowments,

and R. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to the New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books House, 1992), 31.

³⁰ Williamson, *Revelation*, 245-49. See also, Ryrie, *Revelation*, 125, who notes that the truth about their witness by a martyr's death “follows them into heaven”. Cf. A. Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse*, New Testament Message, 22 (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1979), 103.

which remain with them in heaven, even before the last day of earthly time”.³¹

This beatitude further underlines the eschatological nature of the blessings.³² Like the previous *makarism*, the curse factor is implied for those who do not die in the Lord. Hence, what should be the corresponding woe or curse to this *makarism* is actually uttered in the preceding verse, 14:11. With more judgment following in 14:14-20, using the imagery of harvest, the *makarism* that is sandwiched between what came before and came after it takes on a more prominent note of encouragement for believers.

Revelation 16:15

Idou erchomai hōs kleptēs. Makarios ho grēgorōn kai tērōn ta himatia autou, hina mē gumnos peripatē kai blepōsin tēn aschēmosunēn autou

NRSV “See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame”.

This *makarism* comes immediately after the sixth libation bowl of judgment on the earth (all seven being bowls of the wrath of God) and before the seventh libation bowl and the ultimate decimation of the kingdom of evil (managed by the dragon, the beast and their agents), with a concern and a blessing for those who have remained faithfully vigilant and persevering throughout the terrible times. The surprise factor of the Lord’s coming that forms the setting for the *makarism* with the use of *kleptēs* must not be missed. It is a First Century Christian phenomenon that we find in the gospels and in Paul’s letters, especially, 1 Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:1-11). Their Lord, at his coming, shall be their clothing with the “garment of upright conduct” even as the punishment that comes with judgment would strip the unfaithful bare and disgraced publicly. This *makarism* re-echoes the urgent call for faithful and prayerful vigilance found in Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:34-37. This call for purity and watchfulness is an offer of grace “even in the face of persistent and shameless rejection”.³³ Like the previous *makarism*, this

³¹ Giblin, *Revelation*, 142, further notes: “beatitudes are models for others”.

³² Wall, *Revelation*, 53, 187.

³³ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 134.

one does not also have an accompanying curse. The curses are foiled in the exposure to shame. The one who is without vigilance will suffer that fate. The absence of vigilance leads to reckless living. Those who live recklessly and undermine the word of God experience these plagues as surprises that strip them of all that life meant to them. They become naked and helpless.

Revelation 19:9

Kai legei moi: Grapson. Makarioi hoi eis to deipnon tou gamou tou arniou keklēmenoi. Kai legei moi: houtoi hoi logoi alēthinoi tou theou eisin.

NRSV “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God’”.

This *makarism* is in the immediate context of the announcement of the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride. Taking a cue for existing NT themes that locate Jesus as the groom (Matt 9:15; John 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Rom 7:4) and his church as his bride, one may safely conclude here that the church, represented by the New Jerusalem, is the bride (Eph 5:25-27; cf. Isa 62, esp. v. 5; Hos 2:16-25; Ezek 16:6-14) referred to in the text, despite the shift to individual Christians as the beneficiaries of the elected invitation to the wedding feast in the *makarism*. The eschatological nature of the church as a pilgrim church that renews herself daily on its way to being the perfectly adorned bride of Christ is, therefore, also in view here. As Wall notes, the invitation is a divine election, since the blessing is for those who are called.³⁴ While gladness and rejoicing (19:1-8) characterize the lot of those who are chosen (called), the ones who are not invited lament and groan under the impact of the judgment that is executed (Revelation 18), thus a corresponding curse to the *makarism*.

This *makarism*, uttered again by an angel of the Lord, begins with the imperative *grapson*. It definitely indicates that the beneficiaries here are those divinely elected as guests at the Lamb's wedding feast as indicated in the perfect participle, *keklēmenoi*. The authority and trustworthiness of

³⁴ Wall, *Revelation*, 223.

the proclamation are signalled in the words of the angel to the seer: “These are true words of God”.³⁵ Those called are those “who have accepted the gospel of Christ (2 Thess 2:14)”. Together with Matt 8:8, it is important to note that this *makarism* has been absolved into the Eucharistic liturgy, the mass, the celebration of the supper of the Lamb, to which faithful Christians are invited to partake in anticipation of the messianic banquet of God’s kingdom in heaven.³⁶

Revelation 20:6

Makarios kai hagios go echōn meros en tē anastasei tē prōtē; epi toutōn ho deuterios thanatos ouk echei exousian, all’ esontai hiereis tou theou kai tou christou, kai basileusousin met’ autou chilia etē.

NRSV “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years”.

This *makarism* is presented in the context of the defeat of the dragon and the final judgment: here Satan and all his agents are destroyed definitively, and even death is put to death, all in the fire of sulphur. The beneficiaries of this *makarism* are not just blessed but sanctified (by their association with God) as they will not be liable to further torture and death from the menace of evil because they have, by virtue of their faithful and enduring witness through martyrdom, experienced the first resurrection. They reign with God and the Lamb and are in their service as priests in the interim (*chilia etē*) before the final judgment, where their righteousness will be publicly acclaimed and they will reign forever in communion with the One seated on the throne and with the Lamb.³⁷ The gruesome fate of those who do not share in the first resurrection is, of course, like that of their masters, ultimate destruction by the second death (for those who worshipped the beast and its image and received their mark [implied corresponding curse]). Just as the interim binding of the devil and Satan (20:1-3) proleptically points to the final decimation of evil in 20:11-15, so also the interim reign of the righteous with the

³⁵ See Ryrie, *Revelation*, 153.

³⁶ Williamson, *Revelation*, 307-309. Cf. John 1:29, 36.

³⁷ Williamson, *Revelation*, 323-27. For more on the first resurrection and the second death and their eschatological imports, see Wall, *Revelation*, 239.

Lamb in this *makarism* prefigures their participation in the eternal celebration of the victory and reign of the One seated on the throne and Lamb in Revelation 21–22.

Revelation 22:7

Kai idou erchomai tachu; makarios ho tērōn tous logous tēs prophēteias tou bibliou toutou

NRSV “See, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book”.

This one but last *makarism* repeats the first one, but, in the context of the proclamation of the second coming of the Lord. “Behold I am coming soon” revisits the very conclusion of the verse of the first where the Lord proclaimed that the “time is near” (1:3). The same call to attention to the words of the prophecy contained in that proclamation is also repeated here. Those, who keep (*tērōn*) them, are righteous and holy and their blessedness is in the fruits that righteousness and holiness bear: eternal life with God and the Lamb. In striking a similar note, 1:3 and 22:7 together form an *inclusio* around the entire prophecy that all must heed.³⁸ We must also not miss the canonical import of *tou bibliou toutou* as this positively looks back to all of God’s revealed word before this last book of the biblical canon and there recommends a binding obligation for the observance of God’s word as it is represented in the entire biblical canon.

Revelation 22:14

Makarioi hoi plunontes tas stolas autōn, hina estai hē exousia autōn epi to zulon tēs zōēs kai tois pulōsin eiselhōsin eis tēn polin

NRSV “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates”.

This *makarism* is followed by accompanying curse in the next verse. This is a *makarism* of complete restoration for God’s faithful ones. In them, what was destroyed through human disobedience (Gen 3:22-24) is again restored and the loss of life is ended with the gift of eternal life from Jesus, the tree of life. While they are given entry into the city of

³⁸ See Ryries, *Revelation*, 173; Giblin, *Revelation*, 217.

life, there is no hope for those denied entry and who now belong with those who gave their lives to Satan and his agents. In answering God's call, those blessed here are identified as those who washed their robes clean in the blood of the Lamb (cf. 7:14); because they turned "from evil to God" and received "cleansing and grace from the sacrifice of Christ through baptism (Acts 22:16; Eph 5:25) and ongoing repentance..., they have access to the tree of life, eternal life" and they "enter the new Jerusalem through the gates – they have the right to dwell there as true citizens".³⁹

Revelation 22:15: The Accompanying Curse

exō hoi kunes kai hoi pharmakoi kai hoi pornoi kai hoi phonies kai boi eidoōlolatrai kai pas philōn kai poiōn pseudos

NRSV "Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolater, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood".

The ritually unclean, the wicked and evildoers are the ones classified as outsiders in the description of the corresponding curses to the beatitude in the previous verse. The primary curse here is the absence of the Lamb, the tree of life, in the existence of such persons, tantamount to eternal death.

Interpretation and Theology

Together, "the seven beatitudes sprinkled through the book point readers to their final goal and to the conduct in the present that will lead them there".⁴⁰

The Existential and Eschatological Elements in the Blessings and Curses

The connection between the existential and eschatological elements in these beatitudes is underscored by Peter S. Williamson, who relates the ethics of discipleship to the second coming of Christ. That relationship underscores his recommendation of the same message for contemporary

³⁹ Williamson, *Revelation*, 264-65.

⁴⁰ Williamson, *Revelation*, 249.

Christians, noting: “Despite our different circumstances, we who read, listen to, and heed the message of Revelation today are also ‘blessed’”.⁴¹

Blessings and Curses in Ministry Today: A Craft of Blessings and Curses

We have to bring the existential truth embedded in the *makarisms* in the book of Revelation to bear on today's ministry in order to eliminate lies and pranks by reaffirming the unrealistic expectations from the miracles of blessings and curses.

Conclusion

Makarisms are forms of blessings; a sub-genre of blessings and curses. Although, they do not have the same intent with blessings and curses in ancient Israel, they fully encompassed what blessings and curses evolved into in later Israelite experience. While blessings and curses in earlier biblical books emphasize their performative and existential aspects, *makarisms* are more prescriptive in character, because of their prophetic and eschatological undercurrents. Yet, they are tied to reality. So, their origins may be found in the actual live experiences of people; the reason they are so well embedded in the Wisdom literatures of Israel and other cultures. They belong both in the present age and in the end times. They are eschatological in their intent, yet declarative in nature.

The *makarisms* in the book of Revelation sum up the wisdom that guides and should guide authentic discipleship in the midst of life's challenges, now and through all time. They are timeless gifts that are mediated to us through the great prophet of the Apocalypse. Blessed indeed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. Amen.

⁴¹ Williamson, *Revelation*, 40.