Prime evil and its many faces
in the Book of Revelation

Pieter G R de Villiers

ABSTRACT
This article investigates the description and names of the dragon in Revelation 20:1–3 and 7–10. The context and composition of Revelation 20 are analysed. The relationship with Revelation 12 is explored and the prominence and function of the names of the dragon pointed out. The names are then investigated on their own, especially in the light of the role of names generally and names of evil characters in the rest of the book. It is, finally, also indicated how the names and descriptions of the dragon are closely related to and determined in meaning by the seven letters. Some typical features of the author's understanding of evil and its many faces, are offered by way of conclusion.

1 INTRODUCTION
In his commentary on Revelation, Caird wrote concerning Revelation 20, 'We now come to a passage which, more than any other in the book, has been the paradise of cranks and fanatics on the one hand and literalists on the other. It bristles with questions. Why, once Satan had been securely sealed in the abyss, must he be let loose to wreak further havoc? And what claim does he have on God, that God is bound to give the Devil his due? Why the millennium? And what blessings does it confer on the martyrs that make it worth their while to wait a thousand years for the greater bliss of heaven? Who or what are Gog and Magog, and what part do they play in John's theology of history?'

Since Caird wrote these words more than three decades ago, important new insights have been developed on this passage about the binding and unbinding of Satan. This development was partly the result of the greater sensitivity for John's creative skills, which include his intricate and sophisticated use of symbols, his close links with especially the prophets of Hebrew Scriptures and the framing of his text with materials from the Graeco-Roman world. The text is seen as so dense in its internal

1 Caird 1966:249. This classic commentary remains one of the few that engages in a careful and meticulous way with the symbolism of the book of Revelation and that understands the decisive hermeneutical key that is given to the reader by the configuration of symbols in this book.

2 The literary study of Biblical texts, the analysis of Graeco-Roman perspectives on Biblical texts and the integration of several methods of research (e.g. archaeological, anthropological and sociological approaches) contributed decisively to this development.
links and in its intertextual sophistication, that Bauckham recently wrote, 'The Apocalypse of John is a work of immense learning, astonishingly meticulous literary artistry, remarkable creative imagination, radical political critique, and profound theology.' The author created a text that, at least to him (if not to us) and in terms of his own literary conventions, was a carefully constructed and integrated text.

Among New Testament authors, John was perhaps the most consistent 'artist' whose text was meant to speak symbolically about the gospel and its meaning in a new, complex and dangerous situation. John also lived in a world deeply influenced by prophecy. His disciples and fellow believers had been exposed to both the Graeco-Roman institutions of prophecy, while their Jewish heritage made them aware of Hebrew prophecy as a pillar of the religious tradition from which Christianity emanated. Not only his contemporary situation, but certainly also the prophetic, apocalyptic and oracular traditions of his time, influenced him deeply and contributed to the intricacies of his text. There are many indications of a 'bookish' character of the text, which is, to my mind, an indication that the author purposefully created a text by reacting to other existing literary traditions and by extracting building blocks for his own creation. The intertextuality of the book, its links with many other literary traditions, is perhaps one of its most outstanding features and one of the reasons for its complexity and sophistication. Exactly because he managed to speak in such a complex and intricate manner, his text took on those poetic qualities that made Christian communities want to reread and to include it among their sacred Scriptures.

In this essay I shall illustrate this literary creativity by investigating the passage of the binding and unbinding of Satan from a literary point of view. I shall focus on the the naming of Satan in Revelation 20 and the similar list of names in Revelation 12, which up to now received relatively little attention in research on Revelation. I chose this passage also because of the way in which scholarly research, when it comes to the portrayal of evil in Revelation, tends to focus more on the two beasts and Babylon, thereby neglecting the character and actions of the dragon, which is ultimately the 'prime evil' and protagonist of evil in the book. It is revealing how much information and significant links to other parts of the texts are yielded by the text once one starts teasing out the clues about the names given in our passage. I shall investigate his portrayal of evil through the character of the dragon, first of all in terms of its own inherent structure in this unit (Rv 20:1-3, 7-10) and then in terms of its place in the

3 Bauckham 1993:ix. He adds, 'Yet, among the major works of early Christianity included in the New Testament, it remains the Cinderella. It has received only the fraction of the amount of scholarly attention which has been lavished on the Gospels and the major Pauline letters.' Aune (1998:xc), despite his reservations about the unity of the final text, and his reservations about the literary coherence of the text, recently wrote that the literary structure 'suggests that Revelation was not written over a period of a few days, weeks, or even months, but rather was the product of years of apocalyptic-prophetic proclamation, writing, and reflection.'

4 I have begun to analyse the link between the Revelation of John and oracles of his time. Cf De Villiers 1997.
book as a whole. I shall focus on the names given to the dragon in Revelation 20:1-3 and 4-10 because they illustrate the literary prowess of the author and give an insight into his theology, especially in terms of the role and function of evil in the world.

2 THE DEMISE OF THE DRAGON

The final chapters of Revelation (19-21) describe the end of the present world and its replacement by a new heaven and earth. In these end time events the demise of the dragon forms an important part. Literary markers indicate quite strongly that these chapters represent a radical new moment in the plot of the book and that they were designed as a separate unit which forms a coherent conclusion to the book.

In the second half of his book, the author of Revelation introduced several faces of evil: the dragon appears first (Rv 12), followed by the two beasts (Rv 13) and the prostitute (Rv 17). They are then removed in the inverse order in which they appeared on the scene (prostitute—two beasts—dragon). Although the prostitute is the first of several evil characters to be removed, her demise is separated from the demise of the two beasts and the dragon. This is made abundantly clear from the configuration of characters introduced in the narrative in Revelation 18 and from the new characters that appear from Revelation 19:11 onwards. Whilst the prostitute is destroyed by the other characters of evil (Rv 17:16-17), the Rider on the White Horse with his followers conquer the two beasts. Two very different scenarios describe the ultimate fate of these characters of evil. This evidence is corroborated by the literary marker in Revelation 19:11, which stresses that a unique moment in the development of the text is being described.5

In this description of the demise of the remaining characters of evil, the story about the end of the dragon stands out in several ways. He is firstly the last evil character to disappear from the scene. Being first on the scene (Rv 12) and disappearing last of all the evil characters, the dragon 'frames' and dominates the second half of the book. His end is, secondly, related in a highly unusual way. Unlike the simple removal of the others, the dragon is eliminated progressively in two phases. He is first bound in the underworldly prison for a thousand years, and then unbound for a short period.6 Thirdly the two parts of the story are separated, in a sandwich effect, by the

---

5 The Greek phrase Kai ζωήν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἡμερών in Rv 19:11 is a significant literary marker. It is similar to a phrase by which the important new phase of the throne vision was introduced in Revelation 4:1. Here in 19:11 it is heaven that is open, and not only a door in heaven. It obtains its significance from Ezek 1:1. Ruiz 1989 discusses the transformation of prophetic language in Rv 16:17-19:10, on the symbol of the opened door in heaven, cf :146-147. His interesting remarks do not include any reference to Rv 19:11, which, to my mind, is decisive in interpreting this symbolic reference. Rv 19:1-10 is a transitory passage, ending the previous section and forming the transition to the following. It does not really belong to this final passage.

6 It has been aptly and convincingly illustrated by Mealy 1992 that this two phase process is the result of the influence of Is 24:21-22 in which heavenly and human forces are kept in a
famous passage of the millennial reign of the saints (20:7–10). From this it becomes clear how special the story about the binding and unbinding of the dragon and, by implication, the character of the dragon, is. The description of his demise emphasises the special place he has in the book.

2.1 The first part: the chaining of the dragon

In the introductory 20:1-3 the dragon is locked up and chained in the abyss in order not to deceive the nations for a thousand years. The focus in this part is on the act of locking up and chaining and the reason for it. This is abundantly clear from the many verbs, describing the action, that are placed at the beginning of each of the phrases.7

1. KEY (A) AND CHAIN (B)

20.1 Καὶ τὸν Δάβδον ἐγκλεσάν
καταβαίνοντα εκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ,
διόντα

τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβυσσοῦ
καὶ ἄλοιπον μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χειρά αὐτοῦ.

2. CHAIN (B)

20.2 καὶ ἐκάθαρσαν
τὸν δράκοντα

ὁ διής ὁ ἀρχαῖος,

ὃς ἔστιν

Διάβολος
καὶ ὁ ἁτάνας,

καὶ ἔδρασεν αὐτὸν χίλια ξυνια,

20.3 καὶ έβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἁβυσσον

prison until the final judgment. Only then are they judged and given their ultimate punishment. The notion of a prison for evil forces until the final judgment is also found in 1 Enoch.

The following arrangement of the text depends partially on the insight of discourse analysis that aims to isolate constitutive elements in a text. At the same time it tries to capture some of the insights of David Hellholm, who strove to reveal the hierarchical structuring of a text. I have found that throughout the text of Revelation the author reveals a consistent style, especially in the way in which phrases are presented, combined and listed. Some of my findings are presented in the following diagram. A full description and close reading of the Book of Revelation will be done elsewhere.

The literary skills of John is once again clear in the subtle way in which he interprets the abyss as a prison in Rv 20:7 where he places εκ τῆς ψυλαχῆς in the focal position. Prison terminology dominates this section on the chaining and reminds one forcefully of John’s own position in Rv 1:9, but especially the church in Smyrna (Rv 2:10).
3. KEY (A)

καὶ ἔδειλεν
καὶ ἐφηράγατον ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ

γιὰ μὴ πλευτηριάν ἐπὶ τὰ ἐθνη ἔχοι τελευθαί τὰ γένεα ἔτη:
μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ 

The first part, like the larger story, is to be divided into two subsections relating to the two objects in the hand of the angel. In the first subsection, expressed with two verbs, the dragon is seized and bound (20:2). The seizing and binding relates to the chain. He is then, in a second subsection, locked up and sealed in the abyss. These two verbs of locking up and sealing are grouped together with the phrase ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ (20:3b) and indicate the action in this second part which focuses on the motif of the key.

There is a chiastic construction in 20:1 where the key (A) and chain (B) is followed by the chaining (B) and then the locking (A). In this section, therefore, the action of chaining (B-B0) is framed by the locking up (A-A). After an initial description of the angel with the chain and the key follows the action, expressed quite intensively with five different verbs. The dragon is portrayed as the object of the action, with no resistance or response from his side. In the above diagram, this can be observed easily by noting the personal pronoun that is printed in bold and that reveals him consistently in the state of the object. The initiative is completely in the hands of the angel. This is striking, since the opposite is true of the story about the dragon in

9 Cf the notes in Aune 1998:654 (note 9c-c) who translates it here anarthrously (‘who is called Devil’), but leaves the possibility open that it may be articular because of the phrase ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος. He opts for it being anarthrous in 12:9 because it is also anarthrous in 20:2 (quoting the well-known study by Mussies in support). In Rv 20:10, however, there is an article before διάβολος. In 20:2 and 10 the same character is described, so that one should assume that it is used articulare in verse 2. Aune finds that in 2:10, where it is articular, it is used as a title. It is clear that John assumes this articular use of 2:10 here in Rv 20:2 and in other instances where he uses the name Devil.

10 Lohmeyer (1953:101) points out that the article before Satan reflects Semitic use.

11 It is interesting to note how often John uses pairs here: two verbs describe the angel (καταβαλόντα and ἔχοντα); the angel has two objects (τὴν κλεῖν and the ἀλωνία); dragon and snake form a pair, as well as Devil and Satan. These pairs have been indicated in the above diagram by placing them underneath each other. A close reading of the above section reveals many other examples.

12 The verb ‘to chain’ (here ἔδειλεν) is used together with ἀλωνία.

13 Swete comments about the adjective μεγάλην that was added to the noun: ‘The letter is of great size, being intended to hold a prisoner of no ordinary strength—one stronger than Samson (Jud.xvii.6ff.), stronger than the ‘Legion’ who tore asunder the chains that secured the Gerasene’ (Swete 1909:260). That chaining was an important way of preventing prisoners from escaping is evident from Acts 12:6–7; 21:30; 22:30; 26:29; 28:20 where Paul is chained with two chains. There may be an even more direct explanation than one finds in Swete’s remarks: the dragon, according to Rv 12:3 is μέγας παραγός. A great chain is needed to bind such a great dragon. Once again John’s creative skills become clear.
Revelation 12:7–9. The extensive description of the chaining of the dragon finds its culmination in the deepest embedded phrase in 20:3 where it is stated that he is chained and locked away so that he would not deceive the nations.

A last note needs to be made concerning the motif of the thousand years, which is mentioned twice in rather seminal places. The importance of the motif is evident from its repetition and place in these two sections. It is first mentioned after the description of how the dragon is conquered and bound, and for the second time after he is locked up in the abyss (20:3). That the thousand years is meant to be experienced and seen as a long period of time by the readers of the book, is stressed by the final phrase in this section, μετὰ ταῦτα δὲι λυθήναι αὐτὸν μισθὸν χρόνων. Without pre-empting the later remarks on the function of evil in Revelation, it should be mentioned here briefly that the episode of the chaining of the dragon reveals his powerlessness. He is so powerless that an angel locks him up. In addition, the term of his imprisonment and even his release is arranged. He cannot break out of prison on his own. This will be confirmed in the following section on the unchaining where the passive in the phrase (δὲι) λυθήναι (Rv 20:3) reappears in the passive verb λυθήσεται (Rv 20:7).

2.2 The unchaining of the dragon

After the episode on the chaining of the dragon, follows a description of the millennium in Revelation 20:4–6. The millennium is deliberately framed by the chaining of the dragon and his unchaining which follows in Revelation 20:7–10.

The Greek text in which the unchaining of the dragon is described, is once again intricate and complex. The section in Revelation 20:7–10 contains three smaller units. It is introduced by a description of the unchaining of the dragon and is ended by the story about his punishment. These two moments in the text frame the attack by the nations on the people of God.

---

14 Lohmeyer (1953:101) writes about the description of the dragon in Rev 12, 'alle Aktion liegt bei dem Drachen, von dem deshalb in 7c allein ein ἐξολόθρησεν aufgesagt wird, und sie ist deshalb zum Scheitem verurteilt.'

15 It is worthwhile to keep in mind how Jesus is depicted as the One who has the keys to Death and Hades (in 1:18) and the unlocking and locking of Rv 3:7. Many features of the Dragon in Revelation can be understood as ironical contrasts to and parodies on features attributed to the Lamb.

16 This is confirmed by the telling remark in the letter to Smyrna that the devil will throw them in prison and they will experience affliction for ten days.

17 The impact of this passive is heightened by the contrast evoked by the following verb ἔξελθσεται.
A. THE UNBINDING OF SATAN
20.7 καὶ ὀπαῖ τὰ χύλα ἐτη,  
λυθήσεται ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦ,  
20.8 καὶ ἐξελέφθησαι  
πλανήσαι  
τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρεις γωνίαις τῆς γῆς,  
τὸν Γάγγη καὶ Μαγγη,  
συμμετέχοντες αὐτοῦς ἐκ τὸν πόλεμον,  
ὅν ὁ ἀρχιμόδος αὐτῶν ὡς ἡ ἀμος τῆς θαλάσσης.

B. THE NATIONS ATTACK
20.9 καὶ ἀνέβησαν ἐπὶ τὸ σέλατος τῆς γῆς  
καὶ ἐκώλυθησαν  
τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἄγιων  
καὶ τὴν δύνα τὴν ἡγαθημένην.

καὶ κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ  
καὶ κατέψυχεν αὐτοῦς.  

C. THE PUNISHMENT OF THE DRAGON WITH THE BEASTS
20.10 καὶ ὁ διάβολος  
ὁ πλάνων αὐτοῦς ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην  
τοῦ πυρὸς  
καὶ θείον,  
ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον καὶ ὁ φευγόφρινης,  
καὶ βασανισθησαντι  
ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς  
eis tois aiónąs tōn aióñan.

2.2.1 The relationship between the chaining and unchaining
The second part of the narrative about the dragon's release (7–10) is closely linked to and contrasted with the previous section (1–3) in several ways. Firstly the two parts form a whole in terms of contents. The dragon was bound, now he is released. He was on the receiving end, now he becomes active once again. The greater thread is also clear: the dragon was bound for a thousand years and had to be released for a short while according to 20:1–3. Now the temporary release is described. The contents of the two parts fit neatly and logically. Secondly certain linguistic motifs from the first part are repeated here, e.g., the motif of the chaining, which is formulated by the λυθήσαν (3) and λυθήσεται (7). In Revelation 20:3 it was stated clearly that the dragon had to be released for a short while. In Revelation 20:7 the δει of 20:3 is interpreted by οὖν τελεσθη τὰ χύλα ἐτη.

18 This passage reveals many assonances—of which John is very fond.
19 Note again, like in the previous section, how John repeatedly uses pairs of phrases and verbs—even by reinforcing the pairing through assonance (e.g. κατέβη and κατέψυχεν).
There is a subtle, and often unnoticed link between the chaining and unchaining. When his final punishment is described at the end of the section in 20:10, the dragon is delineated as ὁ πλανῶν. He will come out to deceive the nations (in order) to gather them to wage war. He resumes his role that he could not fulfil for a thousand years. His name, the deceiver, is an important description of the dragon in Revelation 12:9, but is not mentioned in the list of descriptions of the dragon in Revelation 20:3. The creative skills of John are impressive: By mentioning the names of the dragon at the beginning of the description in Revelation 20:3 and this name at the end in Revelation 20:10, the two parts on the chaining and the unchaining are given further coherence. At the same time John develops names as an important part of the code which he employs in his narrative. His readers by now will realise that the decoding of this episode must be sought in the names which are so prominently and carefully worked into the narrative. Evil can be understood and withstood only if the readers know who he really is. The names will guide them to an answer.

2.2.2 The attack on the saints

The story of the unchaining is not simple. It is a story that begins with his release as a first part of the description and ends with his punishment as a final part. In this final conclusion, the Satan is thrown into the pool of fire where the other two beasts are and where the three of them will be tormented day and night, forever and ever. In between the description of his release and his ultimate fate, a middle part about the attack on the camp and city of the saints is inserted. There is the following structure: The devil is released (A), the nations attack (B), the devil is punished (C).

The deepest embedded phrase in the first part of the unchaining, ὃν ὁ ἀρχιμός αὐτῶν ὡς ἡ ἀμοις τῆς θαλάσσης presupposes the following subsection in 20:9 where the attack of these nations on the saints is described. In the first part of the unchaining the nations are merely objects of the deception of the dragon—as the accusatives and pronouns that are marked in bold in the above diagram prove. In this middle section, though, they become the active ones. The actions of these nations are described prominently: the two verbs in the third person plural are placed in the sentence initial position. They marched up to and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. At the end of this subsection, two verbs, in the initial position and both beginning with κατ-, describe the punishment of the nations. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them. This story thus forms a smaller unit on its own. At the end of

---

20 This will be discussed further below.
21 There is an interesting antithesis with the previous ἀνέβησαν.
22 Note the prominence of the pronoun. The punishment is as strong as in 19:21. In Rev 20:20 the reference to the history of Sodom is obvious. In Rev 14:18 reference is made to an angel who has authority over fire (14:18). In 11:5 fire pours from the mouths of the witnesses and consumes their foes. Giblin (1991:183) refers to Gen 19:24, but also to the killing of the fourth beast in Daniel 7:11.
Revelation 20:8 the perspective of the story therefore deliberately moves away from the dragon to the attacking nations who now become the focal point in the text.

It is the link between the attack and the unchaining of the dragon that provides a key to the understanding of this part. The author wants to stress the waging of war against the saints as a result of the deception of the dragon. The story of the unchaining of the dragon and the story in the story about the attack of the nations, are linked by the motif of deception. Deception is a significant (if not the most significant) feature of the characters of evil, as Revelation 12 and 13 with the history of the two beasts prove adequately. John wishes to stress that there are deeper structures behind the evil actions of people against God and the people of God.23 Evil never functions on its own and isolated from other forms of evil. There is an intricate link in the deeds of all those who oppose God’s people.

3 THE NAMES OF THE DRAGON

Within the story of the binding and the unbinding of the dragon, which is a story about his final moments, many motifs have been singled out for further study (e.g. the thousand years and the Gog and Magog-motif). In comments on these verses, the names of the dragon at the beginning of the unbinding are mostly treated only briefly or are merely noted with reference to Revelation 12:9, where they appear for the first time. A study of the names as they appear in these passages and in so far as they are mutually determinative, will yield useful insights into the literary nature of the text and the creative prowess of the author.24

The descriptions and names given to the dragon in Revelation 20:2 are τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ δησὶν ὁ ἄρχων, ὁ μετὰ τοῦ Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.25 Before these are investigated more closely, some general remarks about names in Revelation may be in order.

3.1 Names in Revelation

There can be little doubt that the extensive naming of the dragon must be significant because of the role and function of names in the Book of Revelation generally. Some examples will illustrate this.

In Rv 12 the dragon is described as the accuser. Allowing him to deceive people, reminds one of the episode in Job where Satan is allowed to afflict Job. The name deceiver needs separate discussion.

The importance of the names is illustrated by the apt observation of Aune (1998:696) that, in contrast to the woman and the child who are not identified, the dragon is carefully named. This remark needs some relativising, since it is striking that the Rider on the White Horse in Rv 19:11ff is given even more names than the dragon.

Note that some manuscripts omit the article to bring it in line with the anarthrous use of the previous name.

Many witnesses changes the nominative to τὸν δησὶν τὸν ἄρχων (e.g. K 046 051 and most minuscules). Revelation uses the nominative for a proper name in apposition to a noun in an oblique case (e.g. Rv 9:11; 17:5; 19:11).
3.1.1 The names of evil ones

Evil characters are given names at quite prominent places in the Book of Revelation. The name of the beast, marked on the right hand of his followers (Rv 13:17-18), is very powerful. No one is able to buy or sell without the mark, 'that is, the name of the beast or its number' (13:17). It is this name which is numerologically spelled out as 666 in the next verse. The prostitute also has a name written on her forehead, which is described as 'a mystery: Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations' (Rv 17:5-6).27

Readers of the text are reminded in both these cases that they must avail themselves of the knowledge of these names. It is decisive that they know them. This is why, for example, it is said that the name of the beast requires wisdom. The reader with insight will calculate the number (13:18). The section with the explanation of the mystery of the prostitute (17:1ff.), is also accompanied by a similar Weckruf-formula (ώθε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἐχών σοφίαν) as in 13:18. Not only is the dragon, like the other evil characters in the second half of Revelation named, but the many names that he is given would then indicate that of all the evil characters he is the one who is known by many names and, therefore, should be regarded as the most important of them all.

3.1.2 The names of the Rider on the White Horse

The final phase of Revelation (19-21) is introduced by the appearance and action of the powerful Rider on the White Horse (Rv 19:11-21). The Rider is given several names. He is first of all called Faithful and True. According to verse 12 he has a second, secret, name. In verse 13 his name is The Word of God, while the following group of verses (14-16) ends with two further names that are inscribed on his robe and thigh, namely King of Kings and Lord of Lords.28 These names express seminal features of his identity and work.

The many names of the Rider on the White Horse reflect the interest of the author in names. To John names reveal status, and many names indicate special status. It is noteworthy that, unlike the dragon, the Rider on the White Horse has a secret name that no one knows, except himself. Unlike the two beasts and Babylon his name cannot be discerned. No one therefore has power over him.

27 Bousset (1906:404) notes 'Der Ausruf μυστήριον enthält die Aufforderung aufzumerken und den folgenden Namen nicht buchstäblich, sondern πραγματικάς zu deuten.' In the light of verse 7, the phrase with the names itself must be understood as a mystery that needs interpretation, so that 'mystery' is not a name for the whore. This would make the reader aware that Babylon is meant to be read symbolically, like e.g Sodom and Egypt in Rv 11:8. For further examples of names, cf Harmageddon in Rv 16:16 and Patmos in 1:9.

28 Giblin (1991:182) writes, 'leaving out the 'and,' by which John tells us to add the two parts of the title.' He refers to the work of Skehan who finds that its Aramaic equivalent adds up to 777 'which is the victorious counterpart of the number of the beast.' But note how devil and satan are joined in 20:3.
This contrast between the Rider on the White Horse and the dragon reiterates that the dragon, although his many names may indicate his power, is not on equal footing with the Rider on the White Horse. His power is limited. The list of names once again emphasises the basic message of Revelation 20:1-10 that the dragon is powerless.

3.1.3 The believers and the Name

Not only the main characters of good and evil are linked with names or named in Revelation, but believers and unbelievers are often related to names as well. In the letter to Pergamum in Revelation 2:12-17, the church is commended for 'holding fast to my name' (2:13). John reinforces this remark by noting the promise at the end of the letter that the conquering believer will receive a white stone with a name on it that no one knows except the one who receives it (Rv 2:17). The link with the Rider on the White Horse who has a secret name is clear. In the letter to Philadelphia the church is similarly commended because they have kept 'my word and have not denied my name' (Rv 3:8). Similar, also to the letter to Pergamum is the promise at the end of the letter in Revelation 3:12, 'I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.' In the seminal description of the faithful in Revelation 14:1ff, the 144,000 are described as the ones who have the name of Jesus and the Father written on their foreheads (cf Rv 22:4). Having these names, the faithful are the property of God and Christ and are therefore protected by Him. The unbelievers, on the other hand, are described as those who follow the beast and have his name on their foreheads (Rv 13:17) and those 'whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world' (Rv 17:8; cf 20:4).

These examples illustrate the role of names in the text and theology of the book of Revelation. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of this is that the knowledge of a

---

29 This letter is written in the name of the one who has the sharp two-edged sword. It refers to the judgement of Jesus, cf Rv 1:16. It reappears in the story about the Rider on the White Horse, cf Rv 19:15.

30 This is the letter sent in the name of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens' (3:7). Note the links with the names of the Rider.

31 Aune (1983:190) writes about the remark in 3:16, The Pergamume Christians are urged to repent; otherwise Christ threatens to come to them in judgment. This 'coming' does not refer to the Parousia (though that event is presented from a juridical rather than a salvific perspective; see 19:11-16.) But if one sees the presence of the motif of the double-edged sword in the selfpresentation in this letter (2:12), together with the new name that no one knows (cf 19:12), the links between this letter and the episode in 19 are too strong to ignore. There must be a reference to the parousia here.

32 The practice of exorcisms in the name of Jesus in early Christianity is widely attested. Cf Aune (1997:190-191) for a discussion of the function of names in magic. It is a moot point whether God or the recipient has a new name. On magical amulets there is an image on the one side with a magical text, often with secret names, on the reverse.
name imparts power. If one knows someone's name, one is prepared and one can counter the effects of her or his behaviour and actions.

3.2 The names of the dragon in Revelation 12:9

In the light of the previous remarks, the names of the dragon in Revelation 20:2 demand closer scrutiny. This passage is not the first one that contains information about the dragon's names. In fact, Revelation 20:2 repeats almost the same descriptions and names given previously to the dragon in Revelation 12:9. An understanding of Revelation 20:2 is therefore inextricably linked to the list of names in Revelation 12:9. The Greek passage in which the names appear, has two obvious parts.

A. WAR IN HEAVEN
7 Kai ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ,
οὗ Μιχαήλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολέμου μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος,
καὶ οἱ δράκων ἐπολέμησαν καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ,
8 καὶ οὐκ ἦχυσαν,
οὐδὲ τόπος εὑρέθη αὐτῶν ἐπὶ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.

B. THROWN DOWN
9 καὶ ἐβλήθη
ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας,
ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας,
ὁ καλομόσιος Διαβόλος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,
ὁ πλατύν ἐν τὴν οἰκουμένην δῆλον
ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν,
καὶ οἱ ἁγγέλοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν.

3.2.1 The names and the downfall of the dragon

The (Rv 12:7–9) in which the names of the dragon appear and are mentioned for the first time in the book, is divided into two parts, with the first part focusing on the war between the dragon and Michael, and the second part describing the consequences of this war when the dragon is thrown down from heaven. Both parts focus on his removal from heaven, as is clear from the threefold and dominating repetition of the ἐβλήθη and the climactic note in verse 8 that the dragon succumbed and lost his place in heaven.33 The insertion of the names in the part that repeatedly speaks of his being thrown down to earth increases the dramatic quality of the narrative. The one that is being thrown down is prime evil, the one with many evil faces.

33 Verse 9 and verse 7 have a parallel structure. Verse 7 has a threefold repetition of the motif of war, while verse 9 repeats the thrown down motif three times. The prominent placing of these words in the verses reiterates their importance. There is also a striking antithesis between heaven (verse 7) and earth (verse 9), marked by a transition in verse 8 (note the parallelism). cf also Lohmeyer 1953:100.
With this downfall an important context for the understanding of the character of the dragon, and, by implication, of his names, is provided. The author of Revelation links the dragon with a continuous downfall. In the very first moment of his appearance on the scene in Revelation 12 he is described in terms of a downfall as he is thrown from heaven. Where his final demise is portrayed, it is done in terms of a downfall. Even here an intensification of the motif takes place. The final story contains a double downfall. In Revelation 20:1–3 he is thrown into the abyss (ἦλθεν) and in Revelation 20:6 he is thrown into the pool of fire (cf Rv 20:10, ἐβλήθη). In all cases the same verb is used.

3.2.2 The structure of the list of the names

The names in 12:9 are carefully structured. The similarities between them are striking when the names are written out and compared as in the above table. The first two names are parallel and of equal length, with a consistent repetition of ὅ. Their parallelism is confirmed by their meaning. Both refer to a wild serpentlike animal. The third and fourth descriptions are also parallels, both starting with ὅ and followed by a participle. They are also close in terms of meaning.

3.2.3 The names in Revelation 20:2 and 12:9

Superficially Revelation 20:2 seems to be a repetition of Revelation 12:9. There are, however, small but revealing differences between the version of the names in Revelation 12:9 and in Revelation 20:2.

The first difference is to be found in the omissions made in Revelation 20:2. The dragon is described in 12:9 as ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας. The appearance of the dragon is described carefully at the beginning of the vision (12:3) as δράκων πωτερός μέγας. Although the size is not mentioned again, the chain with which the dragon has been bound, is said to be large, thereby assuming the information of Revelation 12:9. In the second place the καλούμενος34 is left out before Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.35 It could be argued that the readers by now know the names of the dragon, so ὁ καλούμενος need not be repeated. It is also possible, though, that John omits this phrase in order to create a (new) pair from the two names. This would be in line with the third difference. A last description is added in Revelation 12:9, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν ὁδούμενην ὀλίγον, which does not appear in the list in Revelation 20:2.36 Although the name is left out, the motif of deception appears in the part on the unchaining of the dragon (cf the discussion in the next section below). The description in Revelation 20:2 is therefore

34 Note that this is a (dubious) reading before the names of the Rider in Rv 19:11. For a discussion of this very common way of allocating names, cf Horsley 1977:90–96.
35 Note that the πωτερός of 12:3 is also left out in 12:9.
36 It is interesting that some minuscules insert this last phrase in 20:2. Ancient readers were aware of these differences.
abbreviated or modified, which can only mean that the author is assuming the knowledge of that chapter here in Revelation 20 where he returns to the dragon. This indicates that he wants his readers to read the two passages together. He carefully ‘balances’ the two stories by the names which he repeats, supporting the link with some assumed knowledge.

3.2.4 Deception
Special attention needs to be given to the climactic description ὁ πλάνων τὴν οἰκουμένην ὀλὴν that is listed in Revelation 12:9 immediately after the first two descriptions and names of the dragon, almost as a third name. It is not inserted in the list of names and descriptions in Revelation 20:2. The motif of deception, however, is quite prominent in Revelation 20. In Revelation 20:8 it is said that Satan will come out to deceive the nations, while in Revelation 20:10 the story ends with the remark that the Devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire. The phrase ὁ πλάνων is exactly the same in both Revelation 12:9 and 20:10, the difference being that he is depicted in Revelation 20:2 as the one who deceived ‘them’, that is the nations at the four corners of the earth, the Gog and Magog and in 12:9 as the deceiver of the whole world. The object of deception varies slightly in the two sections. They should be read together though, as they explain each other. How important the motif is, is clear from the fact that the deception, though not appearing as a description in the list of names, is mentioned twice in seminal positions in the section on the unchaining of the dragon. It is said in Revelation 20:7 that the dragon emerges to deceive the nations and in Revelation 20:10 that the devil, the deceiver, was thrown down into the lake of fire. The last report on the dragon in the book (Rv 20:10) and the climax of the first list of names in Revelation 12:9 therefore both talk about deception. It is hard to underestimate the importance of this motif in the characterisation of evil in this book.

4 THE DESCRIPTIONS AND NAMES OF THE DRAGON
Having compared the names of the dragon in Revelation 12 and 20 and having situated them in the context of the book, each one of them needs to be analysed on its own.

4.1 The dragon
From the above discussion, it has become clear that the dragon is a dominating character in the second half of Revelation. He appears in Revelation 12 as the main antagonist of Michael. From then onwards, the dragon as character dominates the narrative. It stands behind the characters of the beast and the woman, watching them from the seashore as they deceive the inhabitants of the world.

The name dragon is used only in the second half of the book. It appears 12 times, namely in 12:3, 4, 7 (2x), 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4; (16:13); 20:2.37 In the final scene in
which the dragon appears (Rv 20), the word dragon appears only once in 20:2, whereafter his other names are used. The description is therefore used eight times, predominantly in Revelation 12 in a passage about his 'origins,' but certainly in the rest of the second half of the book in such a way that he remains a constant presence in it.

Bauckham (1993a) wrote extensively about the prehistory of this term and the mythological traditions of the figure of the dragon in the ancient world (Hebrew Scriptures and Judaism included). This extremely rich and powerful symbol would have had many meanings to the readers of this book, both in the time of John and after him. It would, however, be problematic to understand this character in terms of the Umwelt before it is interpreted in terms of its place and role in Revelation.

The dragon represents in the first place a character in the narrative of the second half of the book. It is the protagonist of this part, framing it by its presence at the beginning and end of the story. The development of the narrative reveals that the other characters of evil are instruments and agents of the dragon as prime evil. The dragon is like the music that constantly accompanies scenes in modern films, present everywhere and creating the atmosphere that makes such a film an experience. Without him the narrative would disintegrate and the text would have little impact. The dragon is the constant and continuous binding force in this part of the text. At the right moment though, he becomes more than the ever present character. He then takes over and attracts attention to himself as the prime opponent of God.

4.2 The ancient serpent

In both lists, the expression ὁ ὁρὶς ὁ ἄγχατος is mentioned immediately after the word 'dragon.' It makes sense that these two are 'paired' by John, since it is, as a description of an animal, an obvious companion to the dragon, evoking the same images in the minds of the reader.

57 On the interesting and anomalous sentence of an accusative τῶν ἄγκατων followed by names in the nominative, cf Charles 1920 on 1:5, but especially Swete (1909:6), who refers to 2:13, 20; 3:12 etc. 'Such irregularities may be partly attributable to Semitic habits of thought—a Greek could scarcely have permitted himself to use them; but they are partly due to the character of the book and perhaps are parenthetic rather than solecistic.'

58 The figure of the dragon questions the many attempts to delineate the flow or structure of the text. One of the popular structures is to distinguish Rv 1–3 from 4–22. The character of the dragon is an important marker of the structure. The coherence of Rv 12–20, brought about by the characterisation of the dragon, must be accounted for in any discussion of the structure of Revelation.

59 Charles (1920:325) notes 'The conceptions were originally quite distinct. The old serpent... is manifestly the serpent in Gen iii.1sq. that tempted Eve. The serpent in this passage was distinct from the rest of the animal creation. It stood upright apparently... it possessed supernatural knowledge—the secret of the tree—which none but God besides knew it was opposed to God and calumniated Him. These facts point to a mythological element in the background, and that the serpent was originally a demon of a serpentlike form and hostile to God and man. That supernatural beings had such a form was believed among the Semites, Egyptians, Greeks,
4.2.1 Two versions

The expression 'ancient snake' is used less often than 'dragon,' and, like the dragon symbol, is confined to the second half of Revelation. There is, however, a distinct (and tantalising) variation in its use in this half. In the two lists the word 'ancient' is added to it as a qualification. In Revelation 12:14-15 it is simply called 'the serpent,' without any reference to 'old.' Even if only the word 'serpent' is used here, there is a very close link with the description 'dragon.' This is evident from the fact that both the versions 'ancient serpent' and 'serpent' are consistently used in contexts where the dragon is also mentioned.

In Revelation 12:14-15 it is initially stated that the dragon pursued the woman (12:13) immediately after he was thrown down on earth. The woman is given wings so that she could fly away to the desert. Added to this, at the very end of the section (12:13-14) is the phrase 'away from "the" serpent' (12:14). The same happens in the following section (12:15-16) in which the earth saved the woman. The 'serpent' was the initiator of the attack, casting out a river to kill the woman. According to Revelation 12:16 the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river that the dragon cast from his mouth. With this last phrase the dragon is identified once again with the serpent.

In the light of this close association of (ancient) serpent with dragon, the question is why the serpent symbol is used at all. This question is even more urgent in the light of the fact that in the whole chapter the dragon is mentioned repeatedly as the active enemy of God and his people. It dominates the scene, making the switch to the serpent symbol in these two verses rather striking. This is even more fascinating if one notes how skilfully John uses the description. Note the following pattern in the text:

4.2.2 The text

A close reading of the text will be helpful in understanding the term snake.

12.13 καὶ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενα.
14 καὶ ἔδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ ἄλλο τέρμανσι τοῦ ἁπτοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἐρήμον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἔκει καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμέρας καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ δράκου.
15 καὶ ἐβάλεν ὁ δράκων ἐν τῷ στάματι αὐτοῦ ὀπέω τῆς γυναικός ὑδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὕτην ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ.

Indians, and others.

40 This is illustrated graphically in the analysis of the Greek text that I provide below.
41 The insertion of the ἐβλήθη indicates how important this motif is to the author. Cf the discussion in 3.2.1.
16 καὶ ἔβοηθησεν ἡ γῆ τῇ γυναικί,
kai ήνοιξεν ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς
kai κατέπιε τὸν ποταμὸν
δὲν ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ.

The references to the dragon (A-A) are placed quite strikingly at the beginning (12:13) and end (12:16) of this episode, which represents the third struggle in which the dragon is involved since his appearance (in 12:3). In the middle two references to the serpent (B-B) can be found. Once again a chiastic structure (ABBA) of the names is created.

This further confirms the close link between 'dragon' and 'serpent' in the lists of names in Revelation 12:9 and Revelation 20:2. One could even argue that the two names are practically synonomous, since verse 15 states that the serpent poured water after the woman, while in verse 16 it is clearly stated that the earth swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. This is not the case though, and needs further investigation.

4.2.3 The difference between snake and dragon
More comments need to be made about the exact relationship between the names snake and dragon. In the first instance, snake is a description that appears only here in these few verses in Revelation 12:12-16, while there was more than enough room for its use in the previous parts or for its repetition in other parts.

Its use, secondly, in Revelation 12:12-16 is striking. These verses can be divided into two with verses 13-14 relating the escape of the woman to the desert, while verses 15-16 describe how the earth saved her. The first part (13-14) relates how the dragon pursued the woman. It ends with a reference in 14 to her being fed in the desert away from the face of 'the serpent'. Swete (1909:159) notes, without further commentary, 'δράκων is dropped here and in v.14; the mind of the Seer glancing back at the ὑπὸ τὸ ἀρχαῖον of v.9.' His comment reflects the fact that the use of the word serpent comes as a surprise here, but it does not explain the surprising switch.

The names are used quite carefully. The first reference to serpent appears in the last position in the sentence (14). Immediately afterwards verses 15-16 elaborate on the attack by the serpent. The second reference to the serpent appears at the beginning of the sentence. A B-B construction is thus formed. The chiastic pattern (ABBA) is not to be missed, nor the fact that the dragon description forms the outer frame for a section that really talks about the snake. In other words the dragon is acting as the serpent here. The dragon-serpent combination in the two lists of 12:9 and 20:2 is thereby confirmed.

This literary subtlety makes the question of its meaning so much more interesting. What the snake contributes to the meaning of the text, is a moot point. In scholarly research the snake is often explained in terms of literary tradition, especially from Hebrew Scriptures. Two main approaches can be discerned.
On the one hand it is suggested that the serpent is to be understood as in Genesis 3 with the story about the enmity against the woman and her seed. In the struggle between the faithful and the dragon the serpent once again plays a role, like in the first fall. Evil is up to its old games of deception, inciting rebellion against God. He is responsible for the loss of paradise. This is seen as the reason why the image of the serpent functions only in the context of the battle with the woman and does not, like with the other titles, appear elsewhere (e.g. in the seven letters).

On the other hand it is felt that the reference to the situation in paradise may seem forced in the light of the puzzling ‘weapon’ of the snake. Some commentators therefore prefer to link this passage to Psalm 18:5; 32:6 and 124:4-5, with their description of the struggle of the godly with a flood—possibly a reference to the passage through the Red Sea.

A third approach is sometimes followed. Some commentators try to link this story to particular historical events. Mounce (1977:246) writes that it could refer to the attempts in Acts 8:1-3 where the Jewish authorities tried to eliminate the Christians. All these attempts, such as the one by Pseudo-Cyprian to link it to Decian edicts, are unconvincing (cf Sweet 1909:158).

---

42 So many commentators, cf. e.g., Peckes 1994:179.
43 Bauckham (1993:193) writes, 'The serpent of Genesis 3 was certainly already associated or identified with the devil in Jewish interpretation (Wisd 2:23–24; 1 Enoch 69:6; ApAbr 23:7, 11), but for any hint, outside Revelation, of an identification of this serpent with Leviathan we have only two Christian texts. Romans 16:20 assures Paul’s readers that “the God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet”. The use of ‘crush’ (ουπτάλλης) suggests that behind this text may lie an association of Psalm 74:13–14... with Genesis 3:15, perhaps in connexion also with Psalm 91:14... In a later text, Odes of Solomon 22:5, Christ is represented as saying, He who overthrew by my hands the dragon with seven heads, and placed me at his roots that I might destroy his seed... The exegetical basis for identifying Leviathan and the serpent of Genesis 3 is probably Isaiah 27:1... Bauckham also associates the serpent with its role in pagan society. The Dragon is a symbol whose power derives from a variety of associations. He is the ancient serpent who initiated humanity’s estrangement from God with the bait of becoming like gods. He is the symbol of the false gods of Asian paganism, who made the same promise to their worshippers in the mysteries while actually making them as unlike gods as themselves....'
44 Note how fire, smoke and sulphur come from the horses’ mouths, with evil consequences (Rv 9:18). In Rv 1:16 and 19:15ff., the sword also comes from the mouth of one like a Son of Man.
45 Swete (1909:159); Kiddie (1940:405–6), ‘John’s memory may have been affected by an ancient belief that the souls of the drowned were unable to reach the common dwelling-place of the dead... If such a conception dwelt in the suburbs of John’s imagination, it certainly agreed with everything else that he says about the sea, which elsewhere in Revelation symbolizes a power hostile to men, or a place in which evil is native. The Beast rises out of the sea (xiii.1): and the symbol of water as a daemonic obstacle to the Christian is to be found in the ‘flood’ poured from the Dragon’s mouth (xiii.15). The sea in heaven corresponds mysteriously with the sea on earth, for it is represented as an obstacle in the way of man’s approach to the throne of God (see chaps.iv. and xxi.1–3). It must be noted though that the sea and water are much more complex symbols in Revelation, cf. the discussion below.
It is well known how John changes and complexifies his traditional images. The beast from the sea (Rv 13) is perhaps the best example of how separate symbols from Daniel 7 are combined and ascribed to one character. The serpent and the flood from its mouth is a prime example of this radical innovation in symbolism. What stands out in this passage is that the serpent spews out this flood from its mouth. It is, as has been indicated, repeated several times in the passage. Its significance is clear from its repetition in the text. This spewing out of an object is not so singular, since other evil characters also attack believers with objects that come from their mouth. In Revelation 16:13–14 John sees three frogs, demonic spirits, performing signs, coming from the mouths of the unholy triad to assemble the kings for battle at Harmaggedon. In these cases the symbol illustrates the life destroying nature of evil. The action of the snake has the same effect. It threatens to destroy the woman, who needs to be protected from him. 46

Other passages may illustrate the meaning of this flood from the mouth of the snake further. If one takes into consideration another technique of John, that is, that he often uses symbols that stand in contrast with each other, this flood from the snake’s mouth may function in opposition to the image of the Rider on the White Horse. 47 If such subtleties are present in the text, Swete may have offered a viable suggestion that the water from the mouth of the snake be seen as the opposite of the sword from the mouth of the Rider. While the sword signifies judgement and punishment, the snake and its flood signifies the destructive attacks on the faithful.

If the flood from the serpent’s mouth and the contrast to the sword from the mouth of the Rider on the White Horse are linked in the symbol of the serpent, one still needs to draw attention to the fact that this symbol is only really discussed in a context where the woman is mentioned. In the beginning of Revelation 12 the struggle between the woman and the dragon has a particular focus. The dragon wants to kill her offspring, but is prevented from doing so (12:4). In Revelation 12:12–16 the struggle is between the dragon as snake and the woman only. Her child is not mentioned at all. This focus on the woman is supported by the depiction of the dragon as snake. This characterisation inevitably recalls the paradise motif. That John has a special predisposition for this motif, is amply proven by the last chapters of the book.

Revelation 12 indicates that the first two descriptions in Revelation 20:2 form a pair. They refer to the mythological figure that stands behind the many faces of evil in this world. They characterise him as the deceiver and killer, the instigator of the world against God.

46 I note that Aune (1998:707) comes to the same conclusion. "The dragon’s attempt to “wash her away” is, of course, an obvious metaphor for destruction."
47 The images in Isaiah 49:10 portrays how God brings the faithful to the water. This passage forms the background of Revelation 7:16–17. Revelation 15:14 could perhaps refer to ‘the faithful remnant (that) forsake “Babylon”, and after a difficult journey, patterned after the Red Sea and wilderness experiences (15.2–4; 12:14)” enter the New Jerusalem. Fekkes 1994:173.
4.3 Satan and Devil

Two other names for the dragon, Satan and Devil, are added to the list in 12:9 and 20:2. In both lists they form a pair. Once again, the careful work of the author is illustrated by his chiastic pattern: in the list of Revelation 20:2 the name Devil (A) is mentioned before Satan (B). But in the story of 20:7–10, Satan (B) is used first (Rv 20:8) and then devil (A) (Rv 20:10). In the light of the patterns pointed out above, this chiasm cannot be coincidental and needs further explanation.

4.3.1 A Greek and Hebrew name

This use of the pair of names is quite surprising. It is common knowledge that devil is the Greek equivalent in the Septuagint for the Hebrew Satan, so that the two names are actually synonymous.48

A short digression on the use of terms from Greek and Hebrew in Revelation will be helpful here. This is not the only time that John actually uses both a Greek and Hebrew name to describe one character in a particular verse. In Revelation 9:11 he lists the Hebrew and Greek names of the angel of the abyss (Abaddon or Apollyon). Aune (1998:534) wrote that the articular form of ἄγγελον in Revelation 9:11 suggests that the figure is known to the readers, i.e. that the angel of the abyss is none other than Satan-Belial.49 Not only is Satan once again named, but it is done with two names in two languages, exactly as in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2. Prime evil is thus given yet another face, and the effect of this naming is suggested by the use of two languages.50

A second example of bilingual terms is found in Revelation 16:16 where John states that Armageddon is the Hebrew name for the site where the last battle was to take place. This is the place where the three unclean spirits who emerged like frogs from the mouth of the dragon and two beasts, gather the kings of the whole world for the last battle. This last battle is described in a different way in Revelation 20:9 as the battle of Gog and Magog.51

48 Already observed by Charles, ad loc.

49 This reading has quite interesting implications for an understanding of the chaining of the dragon. He is locked up in his own prison in Revelation 20:1–3. The guard and ruler of the prison becomes a helpless prisoner himself. Once again the roles are reversed.

50 In this context the Greek and Hebrew names characterise this face of Satan as that of the Destroyer. The Destroyer and his demonic army are released in order to torment people.

51 Swete (1909:268) also draws these links, but feels that it also anticipates 19:11–21. Charles 2, 46, "The sixth Bowl—at all events xvi.12—is related to the second Woe, ix.13–21. In the latter passage we have an account of the demonic horsemen from the Euphrates, whose objective is the heathen unbelieving world. In the present context the river Euphrates is dried up in order that the way may be prepared for the kings coming from the East under Nero redivivus, and their objective is Rome, the throne of the Beast. This forecast reappears in xvii.12–13, 17, 16. The powers of the Beast are therefore at variance. On the other hand, the gathering together of the kings of the earth to Armageddon is a distant echo of the onslaught of the forces of Gog in
Both these sections with their simultaneous use of Greek and Hebrew terms are therefore important for our passage in Revelation 20. The narrative of the onslaught of evil requires enforcement and intensification of language. Adding Hebrew to the Greek serves this function.

4.3.2 Satan and Devil in the seven letters

It was noted that the description of the dragon and serpent appears exclusively in the second half of Revelation. On the other hand, the two names Satan and Devil are found (except for the two lists and once in Rev 12:12) only in the seven letters. Of these two, Satan is used almost exclusively in four of them. The name Devil is found only in Revelation 2:10.

The use of the names in the letters reflect some pattern of its own. Satan or the devil is not mentioned in the first and last letter (the first concentric circle). The synagogue of Satan is mentioned in the second concentric circle which consists of the positive letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia (letters two and six). In the third concentric circle (letters three and five, Pergamum and Sardis) he is mentioned in the letter to Pergamum, but not in the letter to Sardis. The reference is significant, because the death of the martyr Antipas is directly linked to their dwelling at the throne of Satan (2:13). Satan is linked to the killing of Christian martyrs. In the middle letter with its strong attack on Jezebel, the depths of Satan is mooted (2:24). In the important middle letter, the main objection against the prophetess Jezebel is linked with Satan.

In the letters to seven churches who had close relationships with and who themselves predominantly came from Judaism, it makes sense that the author uses the name Satan. This is the name his readers knew from Hebrew Scriptures. The question now is how the author portrays Satan to his readers and for an answer it is helpful to note that Satan is linked to quite diverse groups of people.

Ezekiel on Jerusalem. This expectation has undergone many developments in the interval, and reappears in a duplicated form under the actual designation of Gog and Magog in xx.7–10, where it represents the last uprising of the powers of evil before their final destruction by fire from heaven. But the present context (xvi.13–16) reproduces an earlier form of this expectation, and this form of it is referred to twice elsewhere in the book—in xiv.14, 18–20, and xix.11–21. In these three passages, which refer to a universal insurrection of the heathen nations at the instigation of the demons and the Beast and the False Prophet, before the Messianic Kingdom, the forces of evil are destroyed by the Messiah, and the Beast and the False Prophet cast into the lake of fire, whereas in the final insurrection of the heathen nations due to the direct instigation of Satan at the close of the Messianic Kingdom they are annihilated by fire from heaven, and Satan himself cast into the lake of fire, where already were the Beast and the False Prophet. There is a pattern in the seven letters that has gone unnoticed in research. The fourth letter to Thyatira, the longest and most important one, stands in the middle. Letters two and six are the positive ones, speaking with praise of the two churches to Smyrna and Philadelphia. Letters three and five are mixed letters, while one and seven starts and ends the series of letters.
4.3.2.1 Satan and the Jewish opponents

In the second letter, written to Smyrna (Rv 2:9–10), the two names are also used in close proximity of each other. Revelation 2:9 refers to the blasphemies of those who claim to be Jews, but are not. They are described as a ‘synagogue of Satan.’ Those who should share their faith, their Jewish brothers, are therefore on the side of Satan. Immediately afterwards they are told that ‘the Devil’ is about to throw some of them in prison (2:10). They are then told that they will suffer tribulation for ten days:

\[
\text{Oδά σου}
\text{τὴν θλίψιν}^{53} \text{καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν,}
\text{ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ,}
\text{καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἐαυτοῦς,}
\text{καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν}
\text{ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ.}
\]

10 μηδὲν φοβοῦ ἡ μέλλεις πάσχειν.

\[\text{Ἰδοὺ μέλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε,}
\text{καὶ ἔξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα.}\]

Note that here, as in 20:7 and 10, although the two names are used as a pair, their order differ from the lists. In contrast to the two lists, Satan is mentioned first and the devil last.\(^{54}\)

From the structure of this letter, it is clear that the synagogue has become an instrument in the hands of Satan. Swete (32) commented on this verse, ‘Behind the ‘synagogue of Satan’ was the Devil himself (ὁ διάβολος=ὁ κατήγω σῶν ἀδελφῶν, xii.10 =ὁ Σατανᾶς, xii.9, xx.2), who by means of false charges laid before the magistrates would cast certain members of the Church (ἐξ ὑμῶν) into prison.’ The faithful believers are those who will suffer affliction.

In the sixth letter, the letter to Philadelphia, only the name Satan is used (Rv 3:9), but in a similar context: ‘I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet.’ This means that in the only two consistently positive letters, commending the churches to which they are addressed, the name of Satan is used and then explicitly linked to Jewish opponents of the Christians.

4.3.2.2 Satan and the pagan opponents

In the letter to Pergamum the church is said to live in a place where Satan’s throne is (2:13). This is followed by a reference to Antipas who was killed among them ‘where

\(^{53}\) The importance of this word is clear from 1:9, cf also 2:9, 22 and 7:14.

\(^{54}\) This picture of the synagogue of Satan, of the Jewish opponents, reminds one of the first beast who also speaks arrogantly and blasphemously (13:5), but for 42 months. Rev 2:10 also reminds one of 13:6 where the first beast blasphemes against God and his tent. He also wages war against the saints and conquer them.
Satan dwells' (2:13). Unlike the letter to Smyrna where the devil and satan are used interchangeably, this one contains two references to Satan only.

The reference to Satan is difficult to decipher. Some clues are to be found in a comparison with the description of Satan in the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia. First of all the name of Satan is not linked with Jewish groups or the synagogue. Secondly, the phrase 'throne of Satan' is similar to 'synagogue of Satan.' Both localise Satan in a particular place, although they do so very differently. The presence of the famous temple and altar of Zeus in Pergamum, leads some scholars to understand the reference as meaning pagan opponents of the Christians. This seems to be confirmed by the reference to food for idols (2:14), found later in the letter, that constructs a divide between believers and unbelievers. Whatever the precise referent (and the fact that it is left open, is significant), the point is that the Christians are here facing another type of opposition, other than the Jewish opponents. This opposition is, however, also linked to Satan.

4.3.2.3 Satan and the Christian opponents

In the letter to Thyatire, in Revelation 2:24, which is the middle letter and of great importance in the series of seven, the author commends them for not knowing the depths of Satan. This letter depicts Jezebel the prophetess as opponent of the Christians. Here Satan is associated with Christian opponents of the believers in Thyatire.

In the seven letters then, Satan seems to have deceived people to oppose Christians and is using them as instruments to imprison, kill or deceive them. Once again the actions against Christians have a root cause in the evil opponent of God.

4.3.3 The devil in Revelation 12:12

As a last example, attention must be given to the other instance where the word Devil is used outside the lists. In Revelation 12:12 three remarks are made about the devil: first of all his casting down is repeated (cf 3.1 and Rv 12:10 and 12). This time, though, it is not said that the 'dragon' is cast down. The casting down is here linked with the name devil. Secondly it is stated that he is angry. Revelation 12:11 explains this anger in terms of the martyrdom of the believers (cf Aune 1998:707-708). If this is correct, there is, thirdly, an interesting link to the letter to Smyrna, where the devil is named as the one who will throw the believers into prison.

From these two examples of the use of the word devil outside of the two lists, the link with persecution and affliction is evident. Like in the case of Job, Satan is the one who opposes the faithful and seeks their downfall. It is the irony of the book that he is finally the one who falls furthest and deepest.
4.3.4 Conclusion

From this evidence, the following picture emerges. The name Satan is used predominantly in the first half of Revelation. In one case the name is linked with the Greek name Devil, the other times only the name Satan is used. When John writes to the seven letters, he prefers the name Satan. He links his Jewish opponents to this name, but seems to use it also for his Christian and pagan opponents. The opposition to the Christians is consistently demonised. Believers are being opposed by evil, by the one who deceives the world and destroys the work of God and who is known as Satan from Hebrew Scriptures. His opposition consists of persecution, in the light of which the exhortation to patient endurance, so prominent in this book, should be understood.

5 THE FUNCTION AND MEANING OF THE NAMES

In the light of the above certain conclusions need to be made.

5.1 The names of the dragon as framing motif

The names in Revelation 20:2 link this story about the demise of the dragon with his appearance on the scene as described in Revelation 12. The names continue and assume the names that are listed in 12:9. In doing so, they frame the second half of the book, bringing these chapters together as the unit in which mostly mythological or even symbolical faces of evil are introduced and then progressively removed from the scene. These names therefore provide the reader with important clues about the structure of the book. Through his two lists, at the beginning and towards the end of the second half of his book, John combines the figure of the dragon, which dominates the second half of the book, with the figure of Satan, which is so prominent in especially the first part of the book.

5.2 The pairing and order of the names

It remains striking how the author pairs the names in the list. His pairing of dragon and serpent is consistent with his exclusive use of these names in the second part of the book in which he narrates the drama of the end in mythological terms.

His pairing of Satan and Devil is, on the other hand, in line with his use of these two names and especially the name of Satan in the seven letters which is the only other part of Revelation where they appear. In the more direct, argumentative style of these letters and in so far as they directly address his audience, John uses the known name of God's adversary in Hebrew Scriptures in the same sense as he uses recognisable names like Ephesus and other well-known cities. It also makes sense that in such a Jewish Christian provenance as those of these churches, a name that finds its provenance in the Hebrew Bible should be used.
5.3 Many faces, one power

The presence of the names indicates how God controls and removes evil at its deepest roots. Behind the many faces of evil that believers see, stands the protagonist and instigator, the one who commands his underlings, the two beasts and the prostitute. It is he, prime evil, who is the last to be removed from the scene. The names illustrate how the many faces of evil in the book can all be traced to a coherent form of opposition to and rejection of God. Behind the many faces of evil stands a kingdom, one force, that opposes and seeks to destroy the work of God. This list illustrates that evil forms a kingdom with many members under a violent, persecuting head. The ultimate message of consolation and hope that this book offers, is that evil in its many powerful forms, evil as a violent power, cannot survive the judgment of God.

One of the most rewarding results of this investigation has been the unmasking of the many faces of evil in Revelation. The author sees a satanic onslaught in much more than the two beasts and the prostitute. The seven letters reveal the same intensity of expression and feeling regarding other expressions of evil. This has significant implications for the interpretation of a book which has too often been forced into the mould of an anti-Roman crusade. The situation is much more complex than this.

5.4 The deceiver

The list of names in Revelation 12:9 ends with the name 'Deceiver.' Although this name is not repeated in the list of Revelation 20:2, the motif of deceit dominates the story about the unchaining of the dragon. This provides good reason to compare the names of the dragon with the names of the Rider in Revelation 19:11ff. The first two names given to the Rider in Revelation 19:11 are Faithful and True. Bauckham wrote about this: 'While the devil and the beast reign, the earth is the sphere of deceit and illusion. Truth is seen first in heaven and then when it comes from heaven to earth. At 19:11, heaven opens and truth himself, the Word of God (19:13), rides to earth. This is the point at which the perspective of heaven prevails on earth, finally dispelling all the lies of the beast.'

Lohmeyer (1934:96) also interpreted the list of names in the light of the totality of the deception, spelled out by the world and the nations as the target of the dragon and the beasts. He remarked, 'Die Ungeheuerlichkeit und der ökumenische Charakter dieses Antichristenthums, zu dem die Verführung hinleitet, erregt den Zorn und den Abscheu des Sehers, darum die

---

55 This confirms John’s apocalyptic view, of which the dualism between good and evil is perhaps most striking.
56 Some preliminary remarks have been made in 3.2 above.
57 Bauckham 1993:105. This motif needs to be worked out more thoroughly. Certainly deceit is a major characteristic of the two beasts.
Häufung des Synonyma in 12,9. He also commented, 'In der Fülle der Namen für den Drachen verrät sich der triumpherende Ingrimm des Sehers; er scheut deshalb auch nicht die Tautologie σατανᾶς und διάβολος (ekivalent LXX) daß er als selbständig neben σατανᾶς empfunden werden kann (s. Ass.Mos.10).'

Much more can be said about the contrast between the names of the Dragon and of the Rider on the White Horse. The point here is that the dragon and his names need to be interpreted in the light of other characters, as well as a parody on the good characters in the narrative. Evil is a parasite. It legitimises its existence by deceiving its followers into believing that it provides the real answer. In trying to do so, it inherits all the evil names of history and it reminds the readers of all the evil forces that from the very beginning tried to usurp the power of God.

5.5 Satan and faith

Perhaps more can be said. The binding and unbinding of the dragon in Revelation 20:2 leads us to several other passages in the book that illuminate its meaning. Perhaps the most significant lead is to the seven letters, which ultimately not only prepare what will follow later on in the book and in these chapters, but provide the building blocks for the contexts of the later narrative as well. With the listing of the names of the Satan, all the activities of Satan, particularly against the faithful ones, described in the seven letters, are recalled. The readers of the text in reading about the chaining and unchaining of the dragon, will remember, for example, the sympathetic and positive letter to Philadelphia in which the words of the holy, true one are quoted, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. They will joyfully experience the fate of Satan who used the Jewish opponents of the faithful against them. They will also recall the letter to Smyrna and the remarks about the imprisonment of the faithful for a short while. This language will make them think of the binding of Satan in his underworldly prison. They will read in that letter of how the believers need to remain faithful to the name of the One like the Son of Man. They will remember the promise to Philadelphia that those from the synagogue of Satan will bow before the faithful. While Satan is bound, they will recognise the fulfilment of that promise in the reign with Christ that is sandwiched between the binding and unbinding of Satan. They will read how they will be kept from the hour of trial ἐπὶ τῆς ὀκουμενῆς ὡλῆς and they will recognise themselves in the camp and beloved city protected from the attack of Satan, the deceiver of the whole world! They celebrate the name of God, his city, and the new name of the One like a Son of Man.

Once this link with the seven letters is understood, the figure of Satan can no longer be associated merely with pagan opposition. In fact, it is to be asked whether Satan is not much closer to and part of the church than we all thought. Not only is he on the side of the pagans, the synagogue, but he is also on the side of Jezebel. He is, after all, the deceiver who looks like a lamb, but whose voice cannot be misunderstood—it is the voice of the dragon (13:11). He deceives, persecutes and accuses the whole world.
WORKS CONSULTED


Prof P G R de Villiers, Faculty of Divinity, Rhodes University, P O Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140 South Africa