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Numbers 5:11–31 as the Old Testament Background for Revelation 8:11

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Abstract: The article examines possible links between the ritual of bitter water, described in Numbers 5:11–31, and one of the aspects of the plague, described as the event following the third trumpet in the Book of Revelation (Rev 8:11). Such a connection has not been analysed by scholars so far. The ritual described in Numbers 5 not only has a legal meaning but it is also the starting point for a theological tradition of understanding adultery as a metaphor for Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH. The prophetic texts of the OT use motifs taken from Num 5 to depict the lawsuit that YHWH brings against the unfaithful people. According to the author of this article, the use of the motif of drinking bitter water in Rev 8:11 falls into a similar pattern. This is a ritual performed to reveal the guilt of the sinners described in Rev as *hoi anthrōpoi*.

Keywords: Revelation of John, Book of Numbers, Sotah ritual, bitter water, idolatry, adultery

In contemporary research on the Revelation of John, an important trend is the exploration of possible links between that book and the Old Testament. Indeed, there is no doubt that such connections exist. However, since John does not quote the Old Testament anywhere in his book in an explicit way, there remains a large space for exegetes to work. The purpose of the study is not only to demonstrate such connections but also to show what impact such links have on the message of Revelation. The present study follows the trend and is an attempt to demonstrate the connection between the ritual described in Num 5:11–31 and the motif of drinking bitter water in Rev 8:11. The objective is accomplished in several steps. First, the state of research on the topic in question is presented. This is necessary in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of our study. Next, the motif of bitter water in Num 5:11–31 is analysed and the elements that would justify the link between Num 5 and Rev 8:11 are emphasised. Finally, theological implications related to the interpretation of Rev 8:11 that result from considering Num 5:12–31 as a background for John's text are pointed out.

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1. *Status quaestionis*

The starting point for presenting the state of research on the allusions in the Old Testament to the motif of drinking bitter water in Rev 8:11 is the reference to the monograph by Jon Paulien *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets. Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7–12* (1987). While examining the OT references to the text of Rev 8:11, Paulien distinguishes twenty-four possible links[1] and divides these links into several categories: "probable allusion," "possible allusion," "uncertain allusion," "non-allusion." In addition, he introduces the category of "echo." The author also recognises a certain difficulty in his research, which consists in the fact that the Apocalypse does not quote the OT at any place explicitly but uses paraphrases and allusions instead, so that searching for links to specific texts in the OT alone carries a considerable risk of error. This difficulty is also related to the search for a precise source for the OT references. Did John use the Hebrew text or the Greek version of the OT (LXX or another translation)? Did he have access to textual traditions that are presently unknown or did he simply recall certain texts from his own memory, often paraphrasing them? Furthermore, many allusions may simply be involuntary. In his study, Paulien refers to several selected commentators and editors of the Bible.[2] The following presentation of the state of the research will take into account some of the above-mentioned twenty-four proposals of connections between Rev 8:10–11 and the OT, specifically those relating to the motif of bitter water. In the study, the most important, in our opinion, commentators of Revelation from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will be referred to. Already at the beginning, it is interesting to note that after 1987 scholars did not introduce (with the exception of one case, however poorly documented) new possible connections between the OT and Rev 8:10–11. Moreover, some of these connections did not appear again in the exegetical literature after the publication of Paulien's monograph.[3]

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1 Cf. J. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets. Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7–12* (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press 1987) 100–106.

2 In his research Jon Paulien mentions: Robert H. Charles, Willhelm Dittmar, Eugen Hühn, Heinrich Kraft, Josephine Massyngberde Ford, Eberhard Nestle, Pierre Prigent, and editons UBS and Westscott. We will also mention other scholars (including those publishing their works after 1987), although we will retain some Paulien's suggestions. When citing the opinion of scholars, it is interesting to remember that it is an open question to what extent their postulates concerning particular allusions are the results of their own research and to what extent it is a matter of using other commentaries. Moreover, in very few commentaries one can find a more extensive presentation of the theological conclusions that emerge from the recognised links to the OT. Very rarely exegetes acknowledge the existence of such links without posing a question of the impact of these links on the theology of Revelation.

3 This is particularly the case of the proposals presented in the commentary by J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB 38; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 1974).

In connection with the motif of bitter water, scholars distinguish the following possible allusions to the OT:

1) Exod 15:22–25. This connection is noted by many scholars.[4] In Exod 15:22–25 there is a description of an event that took place immediately after the exodus from Egypt, at a place called Mara. The bitter waters that were a threat to the people are "healed." Therefore the situation is opposite to the one described in Rev 8:11.[5]
2) Many commentators[6] point out that the third trumpet is an allusion to Deut 29:17, 18. Though no verbal parallels are apparent when a comparison between the Greek texts of Deut and Rev is made; it should be noted that the Masoretic text links the word

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4 Cf. H.B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John. The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan 1911) 112; R.L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22. An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press 1995) 22; E. Lohse, *Offenbarung des Johannes* (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1993) 58; R.W. Wall, *Revelation* (Understanding the Bible Commentary Series; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 1991) 124; H. Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Pustet 1997) 214; W.J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP 16; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1993) 106; J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation* (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series 20; Downers Grove, IL – Leicester: InterVarsity 1997) 122; E. Lupieri, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni* (Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla – Mondadori 1999) 162; S. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Commentary 20; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2007) 276; J.R. Yeatts, *Revelation* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA – Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press 2003) 162; G.R. Osborne, *Revelation* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2002) 355 ("the parallel is obvious, though it is difficult to prove that John had this in mind"); C.S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zonvervan 2000) 257; I. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Black's New Testament Commentary; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2006) 139; R.H. Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation* (Commentary on the New Testament 19; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2011) loc. 1502; J.C. Thomas – F.D. Macchia, *Revelation* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2016) 181; P. Leithart, *Revelation 1–11* (ITC; London *et al.*: Bloomsbury Clark 2018) 370; I. Paul, *Revelation. An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2018) 173; F.J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2020) 137.

5 Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 264–265. Gerhard A. Krodel (*Revelation* [ACNT; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg 1989] 198) states: "the third plague has no parallel in Exodus," although he later notes: "this third plague is the miracle of Marah in reverse."

6 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John* (Edinburgh: Clark 1920) I, 235; E. Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16; Tübingen: Mohr 1953) 76; H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (HNT 16a; Tübingen: Mohr 1974) 137; U.B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19; Gütersloh: Mohn 1984) 190; J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (trans. J.E. Alsup) (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis, MA: Fortress 1993) 111; H. Ritt, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (NEchtB 21; Würzburg: Echter 1986) 53; P. Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (trans. W. Pradels) (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 308; C.H. Giblin, *The Book of Revelation. The Open Book of Prophecy* (GNS 34; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1991) 98; B.J. Malina – J.J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2000) 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; R. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ. Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press 2009) 292; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; J.L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John. A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2009) loc. 3139; C.R. Koester, *Revelation. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Yale Bible 38a; New Haven, CT – London: Yale University Press 2014) 453; G. Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes. Kapitel 1–11* (Historisch Theologische Auslegung Neues Testament; Witten – Giessen: SCM Brockhaus – Brunnen Verlag 2015) 395; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; Paul, *Revelation*, 173.

used for "bitter herbs" or "poisonous fruit" (רֹאשׁ) with another Hebrew word meaning "wormwood" (לַעֲנָה). Wormwood in Deut 29 is associated with idolatry, a theme raised in Rev 9:20, 21 in relation to those who are afflicted by the plagues of the trumpets. Although the events described in Deuteronomy are removed in time and space from the Egyptian plagues, the events of the Exodus still remain in the memory of the people, which provides some structural context for seeing Rev 8:10–11 as a reference to Deuteronomy.[7]

3) Prov 5:3–4. The link between Rev 8:10–11 and Prov 5:3–4 has been noticed by many scholars.[8] There are no verbal parallels with the LXX but they are evident in the translation of the Proverbs according to Aquila, where terms such as ἀψίνθιον and πικρότερον appear. It can be juxtaposed with the noun ἄψινθος and the verb ἐπικράνθησαν in Revelation. Evaluating this view, Paulien describes it as an uncertain allusion, while Simon J. Kistemaker notes that in the OT the bitterness "points to illicit sexual acts."[9]
4) Several scholars suggest the reference of Rev 8:10–11 to Jer 8:14, where it reads that God uses poisoned water as an instrument of punishment for sins.[10]
5) Numerous commentators propose to link Rev 8:10–11 with Jer 9:14–15 (according to the MT and the LXX, these are verses 13 and 14). Verbal parallels are perceptible in Aquila's translation, which follows the Hebrew text more closely than the Septuagint does. Here, wormwood is seen as an instrument of punishment for idolatry. This punishment causes suffering.[11]

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7 Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 266–267.

8 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Krodel, *Revelation*, 198; D.E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (WBC 52b; Dallas, TX: Word Books 1998) 521; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 213; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1999) 479; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; Koester, *Revelation*, 450; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; Paul, *Revelation*, 173.

9 Cf. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275.

10 Cf. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 522; Lupieri, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, 162; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292; A. Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (KEK 16; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008) 243; Keener, *Revelation*, 257.

11 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; E.-B. Allo, *Saint Jean Apocalypse* (Paris: Gabalda 1921) 108; M. Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (Moffatt New Testament Commentary; New York – London: Harper 1940) 152; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; A. Wikenhauser, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT 9; Regensburg: Pustet 1959) 74; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 308; G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1976) loc. 1523; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137; G.B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Black 1966) 115; G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants 1974) 158; I.T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John. Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan 1919) 557–558; Krodel, *Revelation*, 198; Wall, *Revelation*, 124; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 190; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 21–22; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 98; Lohse, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 58; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 111; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 522; Ritt, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 53; Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, 123; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 213; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275;

6) Also, many exegetes recognise a connection between Rev 8:10–11 and Jer 23:15.[12] Scholars agree that John referred to Jer 23:15 when he wrote Rev 8:11. In Aquila's translation, one can find ἀψίνθιον (in the LXX it is ὕδωρ πικρόν). Wormwood poisons the waters because the people committed idolatry, adultery and because they listened to false prophets. There is no doubt that wormwood was a symbol of the Babylonian invasion that was to bring bitterness to Judah. Here, Paulien speaks of a possible allusion. This is confirmed by Tremper Longman, pointing to a similar context – the context of judgment – of these two texts.[13]
7) An allusion to Lam 3:15 is also seen by a large group of scholars. However, according to Paulien, no significant parallels are evident between the texts of Lam and Rev. It is only evident between the Hebrew terms "bitterness" (מְרוֹרִים) and "wormwood" (לַעֲנָה) in relation to the Babylonian exile treated as a punishment. Hence, as Paulien concludes, the allusion is uncertain.[14]

Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292; B. Witherington III, *Revelation* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009) 149; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 243; T. Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (ed. K.-W. Niebuhr) (NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2008) 75; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; Lupieri, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, 162; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg 1963) 280; B.K. Blount, *Revelation. A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 2013) 169; L. Morris, *Revelation. An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Nottingham: InverVarsity 2009) 123; Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, loc. 1494; P. Patterson, *Revelation* (NAC 39; Nashville, TN: B&H 2012) 211; Koester, *Revelation*, 450; H. Lichtenberger, *Die Apokalypse* (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 23; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2014) 155; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Thomas – Macchia, *Revelation*, 181; U. Vanni, *Apocalisse di Giovanni*. II. *Introduzione generale, Commento* (ed. L. Pedroli) (Assisi: Cittadella 2018) 344; R.D. Phillips, *Revelation* (Reformed Expository Commentaries; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R 2017) 280; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 137.

12 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 557–558; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, 152; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 158; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, loc. 1523; Witherington, *Revelation*, 149; Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 115; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 557; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 190; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 22; Lohse, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 58; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 111; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Krodel, *Revelation*, 198; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 522; Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 213; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, 123; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479 (Beale refers to the Targum to Jer 9:15 and 23:15); Ritt, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 53; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, 308; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 243; Holtz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 75; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292; Lupieri, *L'Apocalisse di Giovanni*, 162; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 280; Blount, *Revelation*, 169; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, loc. 3139; Gundry, *Commentary on Revelation*, loc. 1494; Patterson, *Revelation*, 211; Koester, *Revelation*, 450; Lichtenberger, *Die Apokalypse*, 155; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Thomas – Macchia, *Revelation*, 181; Vanni, *Apocalisse di Giovanni*, 344; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; T. Longman III, *Revelation through Old Testament Eyes* (Through Old Testament Eyes; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic 2022) 136; Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 137.

13 Cf. Longman, *Revelation through Old Testament Eyes*, 136.

14 Cf. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 557; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, 152; Lohse, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 58; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 111; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 22; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Aune, *Revelation 6–16,* 522; Giesen,

8) The situation is similar with Lam 3:19, which is seen by a number of scholars (often the same ones who see a link with Lam 3:15).[15]
9) The allusion to Amos 5:6–7 is recognised by many scholars. Here, wormwood is contrasted with righteousness. However, there are no parallels as far as the Greek text of Amos is concerned (the LXX does not mention wormwood at all).[16]
10) Amos 6:12. This allusion is also noticed by a considerable number of commentators. Most of them are the ones who see the connections with Amos 5:6–7.[17]

At this point, it should be noted that scholars, in addition to the allusions in the OT, find links to extra-biblical texts in Rev 8:11. First of all, it is necessary to mention those which we classify as the so-called intertestamental literature. In particular, we can mention *4 Ezra* 5:9 (motif of the transformation of fresh water into salty water in the time of the end); 6:24 (motif of springs of water); *4 Bar.* (*Paraleipomena Jeremiou*) 9:18 (the transformation of fresh water into salty water).[18] In addition, references to other Hellenistic literature are indicated: to Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 2,22,90; 2,25,96), Artemidorus

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Die Offenbarung des Johannes, 213; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Ritt, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 53; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 243; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; Patterson, *Revelation*, 211; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Phillips, *Revelation*, 280; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; Paul, *Revelation*, 173.

15 Cf. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 557; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, 152; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 190; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 22; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 111; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479; Ritt, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 53; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Yeatts, *Revelation*, 162; Satake, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 243; Osborne, *Revelation*, 354; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Morris, *Revelation*, 123; Patterson, *Revelation*, 211; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Phillips, *Revelation*, 280; Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, 370; Paul, *Revelation*, 173.

16 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Krodel, *Revelation*, 198; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 98; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 522; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 275; Koester, *Revelation*, 453; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395; Longman, *Revelation through Old Testament Eyes*, 136.

17 Cf. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St John*, 112; Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; Krodel, *Revelation*, 198; Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 98; Harrington, *Revelation*, 106; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 522; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 479; Keener, *Revelation*, 257; Malina – Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 127; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 292; Maier, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 395.

18 Cf. Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 76; Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 190; Lohse, *Offenbarung des Johannes*, 58; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 520–521; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 478–480; K. Berger, *Die Apokalypse des Johannes*. I. *Apk 1–10* (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder 2017) 673. Here it should be noted that the most important problem while trying to find links between Revelation and intertestamental literature is that we do not always know even the approximate dates of the sources. Consequently, it is difficult to know whether John actually used them or whether he used motifs that were simply functioning in the circles when he wrote his text.

(*Oneirocritica* 2,36; 5,23), Theophrastus (*Historia plantarum* 1,12,1),[19] Lucan (*Pharsalia* 1,526) and also to literature from other cultural circles, e.g. Persian.[20]

On this background, a new insight related to the search for the allusions in the Old Testament to the text of Rev 8:10–11 appears in Buist M. Fanning, however, it is only a slight hint, without any deeper elaboration. He notes that in the OT, there is a relationship between the punishment for sins and drinking a bitter drink, or the bitterness that leads to death. Fanning gives several examples of reference to the Old Testament here: in addition to the previously mentioned texts as Deut 29:18; Jer 9:15; 23:15; Lam 3:19, a new reference also appears, namely Num 5:24, 27. Because this issue has not been developed, it is difficult to say whether Fanning believes that a direct connection between Num 5:24–27 and Rev 8:11c exists.[21]

The above analysis of the *status quaestionis* shows that it has yet been overlooked to treat the text of Num 5:11–31 as the Old Testament background for Rev 8:10–11. The proposal discussed below has already been mentioned in my book *Teologiczna rola „ludzi" (*οἱ ἄνθρωποι*) w Apokalipsie Janowej* (The Theological Role of the "People" [οἱ ἄνθρωποι] in the Apocalypse of John) as one of the possibilities; however it has not been further argued there.[22] In particular, the text of Num 5:11–31 and its relevance when it comes to understanding Rev 8:11 was not examined in detail there. For this reason, it seems reasonable to elaborate on this issue.

2. "Water of bitterness" in Num 5:11–31

When proceeding to justify our proposal regarding the connections between Num 5:11–31[23] and Rev 8:10–11, the question of whether the aforementioned text really refers to "bitter water"/"water of bitterness" needs to be answered first. This question arises

19 Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 520–522. Franz Boll (*Aus der Offenbarung Johannis* [Stoicheia 1; Leipzig – Berlin: Teubner 1914] 41–42) speaks here of the Stoic ἀπόρροια – the impact of the stars on the Earth.

20 Cf. W. Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1906) 286; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 557; E. Böklen, *Die Verwandtschaft der jüdisch-christlichen mit der parsischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1902) 87, 90; D. Völter, *Die Offenbarung Johannis. Keine ursprünglich jüdische Apokalypse* (Tübingen: Heckenhauer 1886) 30; Koester, *Revelation*, 450. Stephen S. Smalley (*The Revelation to John. A Commentary on the Greek Text of Apocalypse* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2005] 221) rejects this view when he notes: "parallels with Persian eschatology are difficult to establish."

21 Cf. B.M. Fanning, *Revelation* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2020) 287.

22 Cf. T. Siemieniec, *Teologiczna rola „ludzi" (*οἱ ἄνθρωποι*) w Apokalipsie Janowej* (Biblioteka Kieleckich Studiów Teologicznych 16; Kielce: Jedność 2018) 168–169.

23 The identification of the ritual described in Num 5:11–31 as an ordeal is a matter of debate. Since it is not directly relevant to our research problem, we refer to other studies on this subject here: R. Preß, "Das Ordal im alten Israel," *ZAW* 51 (1933) 121–140, 227–255; T.R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1993) 123–124; J. Morgenstern, "Trial by Ordeal among the Semites and in Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 2a (1925) 113–143; W. McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," *VT* 30/4 (1980) 474–492; R.P. Knierim – G.W. Coats, *Numbers* (FOTL 4; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 2005) 81–83.

because in the Septuagint, the equivalent of the Hebrew expression מֵי הַמָּרִים is the phrase τὸ ὕδωρ τοῦ ἐλεγμοῦ ("water of proof or trial"). In contrast, there are no terms associated with the idea of bitterness in the immediate context (e.g. the noun πικρία, the adjective πικρός, or the verb πικραίνω).[24]

In the traditional exegesis, the aforementioned term הַמָּרִים was derived from the root מרר ("to be bitter"). However, from the beginning, there were other proposals for its translation. This was the case for two reasons. Firstly, because of the aforementioned Septuagint translation. Secondly, because of the difficulty in associating the bitterness with the dust from the floor of the sanctuary (or, alternatively, with the ink with which the scripture mentioned in 5:23 was written).[25]

Thus, G.R. Driver suggests referring to the stem מרה (מרי), which expresses the idea of rebellion, questioning something or doubt. He notes that, although from a grammatical point of view it seems justified to use the translation "the water of bitterness"/"bitter water," such a meaning is not satisfactory since the addition of dust to water does not make it bitter. Driver recognises the Vulgate translation *aquae amarissimae* but contrasts it with the Septuagint version τὸ ὕδωρ τοῦ ἐλεγμοῦ (or in other variants: τὸ ὕδωρ τοῦ ἐμφανισμοῦ). The Samaritan version also mentiones the water of trial suggesting a different meaning, which seems to suit the whole context.[26] In support of his proposal, Driver refers to the parallels in Syriac and Arabic and states that the Hebrew מָרֶה means "a matter under discussion" and the *plurale abstractum* – מָרִים denotes "trial, examination, doubt." For these reasons, he proposes that מֵי הַמָּרִים should mean the water of trial.[27] Norman H. Snaith, on the other hand, refers to the Arabic terms *mārar* ("to pass by") and *marmara* ("to cause to flow"), suggesting that in Num 5:11–31, the waters in question were the ones leading to the removal of a sinfully conceived foetus.[28] There is no evidence, however, that this ritual was used for pregnant women exclusively. Herbert C. Brichto derives מָרֶה from the root ירה ("to throw") and proposes the translation "waters of the oracle."[29] This proposal is also supported by Tikva Frymer Kensky. This interpretation, however, raises grammatical difficulties.[30]

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24 Here, it could be proposed that the absence of such terminological links rules out *a priori* the possibility of examining the influence of Num 5:11–31 on Rev 8:10–11. Such a claim does not seem valid, for the reason that it is not certain that the only text used by John was the Septuagint. The term ὁ ἄψινθος itself has no parallel in the LXX either, and it appears only in the translation of Aquila. The author of Revelation uses the OT in a manner different from that of other authors of the NT. He does not quote any text directly. Instead, he uses many allusions to motifs found in the texts of the OT, and he also refers to the symbolism in the OT. This has already been noted by J. Paulien when he introduces various terms for the links that he has found (see footnote 1).

25 So e.g. J.M. Sasson, "Numbers 5 and the 'Waters of Judgement'," *BZ* NF 16 (1972) 250.

26 Cf. F. Field (ed.), *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt; sive Veterum interpretum graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* (Hildesheim: Olms 1964) I, 231–232.

27 Cf. G.R. Driver, "Two Problems in the Old Testament Examined in the Light of Assyriology," *Syria* 33 (1956) 73–74.

28 Cf. N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (The Century Bible; London: Nelson 1967) 202.

29 Cf. H.C. Brichto, "The Case of the *śōṭā* and a Reconsideration of Biblical 'Law'," *HUCA* 46 (1975) 59.

30 Cf. T. Frymer-Kensky, "The Strange Case of the Suspected Sotah (Numbers V 11–31)," *VT* 34/1 (1984) 26. Brichto ("The Case of the śōṭā," 59) believes that the phrase "bitter waters" should be "majim marim" in Hebrew,

Also Philip J. Budd goes in a similar direction as he believes that the expression מֵי הַמָּרִים means the water of testing, although the reference to the stem מרר in the sense of "to be bitter" may still remain in its background. Budd believes that bitter water could have been often used in rituals of this kind but it is not the mere fact of the appearance of a bitter taste that is most relevant here.[31] George B. Gray thinks that the expression מֵי הַמָּרִים should refer to the noxious character of this concoction, while the effect of the bitter taste itself, although not the most relevant here, was obtained by adding some ingredients (such as the רֹאשׁ mentioned in Jer 8:14 and 23:15).[32] In a similar way, William McKane argues by drawing attention to the expression הַמַּיִם הַמְאָרְרִים לְמָרִים occurring in verses 24 and 27. He notes that מָרִים, in this context, must mean something more than "bitterness," that is, it must have the meaning of "poisonous." The whole phrase should therefore be translated as follows: "water that carries a curse as poison." This water contains a curse and if the woman is guilty of adultery it will manifest its poisonous effects and cause a miscarriage. The water, as McKane notes, is inherently harmless and only becomes harmful if the woman is guilty, and this is due to the curse contained in it. McKane also notes that, theoretically, a different point of view could be taken: the drink is poisonous from the very outset but the woman is protected from the effects of the poison if she is innocent.[33] Jack M. Sasson, on the other hand, has found the Ugaritic root *mrr* ("to bless"), so he proposes the translation: "waters that bless and bring a curse." The expression would then be a merism meaning "waters of judgment." The problem with this interpretation is that this Ugaritic stem leaves no trace of a parallel in Hebrew, hence the solution must remain conjectural.[34]

In spite of the multiplicity of proposals that have been given, in recent years, the traditional interpretation of the expression מֵי הַמָּרִים is being revived. The starting point for this interpretation is to note that an important characteristic of bitter water is that it is not only bitter in taste but, above all, bitter in terms of the effect caused by drinking it (vv. 24 and 27). As Eve L. Feinstein notes, in Num 5:11–31, in the case of the term מָר, we encounter a shift from a literal to a metaphorical meaning. Thus, the adjective in question would indicate something negative, unpleasant and painful.[35]

Such a metaphorical meaning is also discernible in the prophetic literature. E.g. Jer 2:19 and 4:18 speak of Israel's "bitter apostasy" (מָר עָזְבֵךְ אֶת־יְהוָה). In contrast, Amos 8:10

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while the use of the form מֵי (*status constructus*) would indicate that "marim" is a noun and not an adjective here. Eve L. Feinstein ("The 'Bitter Waters' of Numbers 5:11–31," *VT* 62 [2012] 302) notes, however, that although adjectives normally specify nouns that occur in *status absolutus*, several examples can be given of adjectives accompanying nouns that are in *status constructus* – e.g. חֵיל כָּבֵד – "a mighty force" (2 Kgs 18:17; Isa 36:2), which is analogous to חֵיל כָּבֵד in 1 Kgs 10:2. Both expressions indicate "a magnificent entourage." There does not seem to be any difference in meaning between the noun form in *status absolutus* and in *status constructus*.

31 Cf. P.J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5; Dallas, TX; Word Books 1984) 64.

32 Cf. G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (Edinburgh: Clark 1903) 52.

33 Cf. McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," 476–478.

34 Cf. Sasson, "Numbers 5," 250; a contrary opinion: Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 129–130.

35 It has already been noticed by Martin Noth (*Numbers. A Commentary* [trans. J.D. Martin] [OTL; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1968] 50–51), when he speaks of the "bitterness of death," although in Numbers 5, there is no explicit reference to the lethal effect of drinking.

and Zeph 1:14 speak of "the bitter day of the Lord" (יוֹם יְהוָה מַר). Thus, the translation "the water of bitterness"/ "bitter water" is as legitimate as possible, especially given the immediate context. This can be seen, above all, where it has been highlighted that the water has a bitter effect only in the case of an adulterous woman, while an innocent woman does not feel it. If it were a question of the bitter taste of water in the physical sense, it would be difficult to explain why the innocent woman does not react to this taste. Thus, it is not so much a matter of describing the water as bitter but it seems that the text emphasises the punitive nature of the whole ritual in the case of a guilty person.

This emphasis is also highlighted in Num 5 by the description of the waters as הַמְאָרְרִים – "carrying a curse" – and by the description of the sacrifice being offered (v. 15). The effect of bitterness is only manifested in the case of the woman's guilt and the existence of this guilt is somehow assumed throughout the rite. At the beginning of the chapter, the description of a potential act of adultery spans over three and a half verses (vv. 12–14a), while the possibility of innocence is only mentioned in the middle of verse 14(14b). The ritual itself seems to suggest the commitment of adultery (loose hair and humiliating appearance). The negative symptoms are described several times (v. 21, 22, 27), while the positive effect only once (v. 28). Also verse 31 assumes the woman's guilt. For this reason, the water that the woman drinks is referred to מֵי הַמָּרִים הַמְאָרְרִים, since the primary function of the rite is to produce a curse effect.[36] This effect is a selective one – the cursed woman is guilty and will therefore be filled with bitterness.[37]

In view of the analysis above, we therefore conclude that there are no grounds for questioning the translation of the expression מֵי הַמָּרִים as "water of bitterness"/"bitter water," with the restriction; however, that what is at issue here is not the bitter taste of the water but its effect of filling the guilty person with bitterness.

The next stage of our analysis is to find an answer to the question of the meaning of the ritual described in Num 5:11–31. This question is justified because if this text were merely a legal regulation, it would be difficult to find links between a statement of a legal nature (which, by its nature, must be applied to a literal interpretation) and the text of Revelation, which is based primarily on the symbolism of certain terms.

In proceeding to this stage, it is necessary to emphasise what Michael Fishbane has already pointed out when he says that the Bible, in giving various kinds of legal provisions, subordinates them to theology. In other words, the law is always the starting point for the presentation of theological thought.[38] The fact that the regulation described in Num 5:11–31 is

36 Cf. Feinstein, "The 'Bitter Waters' of Numbers 5:11–31," 303. Feinstein notes that the Hebrew Bible has only two adjectives to describe taste: מר – "bitter" and מתוק – "sweet." In reality, however, there are two "types" of taste at issue: a pleasant one and an unpleasant one. The unpleasant one is the bitter taste, while the pleasant one is the sweet taste. The traditional translation is also supported by Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 130.

37 For the meaning of the term מר in relation to emotions see: H.-J. Fabry – H. Ringgren, "מרר," *TDOT* IX, 16–18.

38 Cf. M. Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery: A Study of Law and Scribal Practice in Numbers 5:11–31," *HUCA* 45 (1974) 40.

important from a theological and not just a legal point of view is also evidenced by the fact that it was the subject of reflection by the rabbis, despite the fact that, as the Mishnah notes (*Sotah* 9:9), its execution in Israel was suspended in practice. We can only speculate when it occurred but the fact that the "dead" rite was left in the collection of laws is significant.[39]

The first thing to note in this regard is that the description of the ritual contained in Num 5:11–31 appears in a particular place in this book.[40] The provision does not appear among the laws relating to marital life, where it would be expected. Instead, it appears in the context of the law relating to impurity and to the cultic area. As Rolf P. Knierim and George W. Coats note, this provision is most likely included in the present context of the Book of Numbers because the authors, coming from a priestly background, considered this type of transgression as something that brought uncleanness to the whole community. This fact was far more important than the issue of the individual relationship between a husband and a wife. Such transgressions were very dangerous to the functioning of the community and needed the involvement of divine authority to be exposed and removed. This was done through a ritual led by a priest. Therefore, the provision referred rather to the issue of chastity or impurity than to the issue of marital fidelity or adultery.[41] Whoever violated the law in the area of marital life brought uncleanness on the Israelite community and on the land which that community inhabited. This was a very serious situation, even endangering the possession of the promised land. This is confirmed by the statement in Lev 18:24–30, the people of Canaan had previously lost their land to Israel exactly because of the widespread sins of this kind.[42]

Therefore, one may ask what theological idea was contained in the ritual described in Num 5:11–31. This question is all the more justified because, from the very beginning, the aforementioned regulation became the object of many interpretations carried out by the rabbis. The theological significance of this ritual was already pointed out by Jacob Milgrom. He noted that the Hebrew text uses the noun (5:12) מָעַל to describe the offence committed by a woman against her husband. This is the only case where this term refers to an offence against a husband and is used in reference to the "secular" sphere. Usually מָעַל denotes a transgression against YHWH (Lev 5:6; Josh 22:16, 22, 31; 1 Kgs 5:25; 9:1;

39 M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness. The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) 171. The Mishnah includes the enigmatic expression: "When adulterers became many, the ordeal of the bitter water was cancelled." For the possible reasons for the suspension of this ritual, see A. Destro, *The Law of Jealousy. Anthropology of Sotah* (BJS; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 2020) 2–24. It is very possible that this took place in the first century after Chr. Adriana Destro explains that the ritual was preserved in the Mishnah because of its symbolic value (*ibidem*, 12).

40 Mary Douglas (*In the Wilderness*, 170) emphasises the necessity of referring to the structure of the Book of Numbers, which is not a collection of randomly arranged rules but a precise composition subordinated to theology.

41 Cf. Knierim – Coats, *Numbers*, 83. Similarly: Douglas, *In the Wilderness*, 161.

42 B.A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4a; New York *et al.*: Doubleday 1993) 207; D.T. Olson, *Numbers* (IBC; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox 1996) 39; D.R. Cole, *Numbers* (NAC 3b; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman 2000) 113; Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 124.

10:13; 2 Kgs 29:6; 36:14; Ezek 14:13; 15:8; 17:20; 18:24; 20:27; 39:23, 26), i.e. simply breaking of the covenant with him (Hos 2:4–22; Jer 3:8f; Ezek 23:37). In prophetic literature, this breaking of the covenant was often portrayed metaphorically as a betrayal committed by a wife (the people of Israel) against her husband (YHWH).[43] In some texts from the priestly tradition, מָעַל denotes a particular type of transgression, which is idolatry (Lev 26:40; Num 31:16). Since the noun מָעַל appears in its theological meaning in the immediate context (Num 5:6), there is no doubt that it suggests a direction for the theological interpretation of the entire ritual.[44]

Apart from the term מָעַל, crucial to the understanding of the theological meaning of the entire scene, there is the term "jealousy" (root קנא), which appears at the beginning (5,14 – twice) and at the end of the legal regulation (5,30), while the entire prescription is described as "the law of jealousy" (v. 29: תּוֹרַת הַקְּנָאֹת) and the sacrifice that accompanies it as "the sacrifice of jealousy" (v. 25: מִנְחַת הַקְּנָאֹת). The jealousy of the husband alludes to the jealousy of God, which is revealed in the context of Israel committing the sin of idolatry (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 32:12).[45]

Accordingly, the accusations of unfaithfulness to the Covenant, which appear especially in the Prophets, employ motifs alluding to Num 5:11–31. Israel is caught, as it were, in the act (*in flagrante delicto*). God's jealousy and suspicion are therefore not illegitimate. To demonstrate this theological idea, the biblical authors use motifs from the ritual in Num 5 in various forms, although sometimes the context seems to be changed. E.g., this is distinct where Israel's adultery is evident and does not need to be proven in any way. On the other hand; however, the elements of the ritual described in Num 5 are detached from their judicial function, i.e., they are no longer used to discover alleged adultery but become symbolic elements of the description of God's judgment. Despite this, the original context of the ritual has not been completely removed.[46]

Hos 1–2 shows Israel's unfaithfulness to YHWH and his love to Baal (2:10, 15, 18–19) using the symbolism of a married harlot (1:2; cf. 3:1). With this imagery, YHWH puts the Woman – Israel on trial (ריב – 2:4) for adultery (נאף – 2:4) and threatens to strip her of her garments (פשׁט) and kill her (2:5), as well as divorce her (1:6, 9; 2:4). We find similar ideas in Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah and especially in Ezekiel (Ezek 16 and 23). A certain new feature; however, is that in all these prophetic texts, the punishment on the part of YHWH is not definitive, and ultimately God – motivated by his mercy – forgives the unfaithful spouse (Hos 2:18–25; Jer 3:11–25; 31:13; Isa 54:7–8; Ezek 16:59–63).[47] Thus, although

43 Cf. H. Ringgren, "מָעַל," *TDOT* VIII, 461–463.

44 Cf. J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia, PA – New York: Jewish Publication Society 1989) 37.

45 Cf. Olson, *Numbers*, 37–38; Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery," 36; R.S. Briggs, "Reading the *Sotah* Text (Numbers 5:11–31): Holiness and a Hermeneutic Fit for Suspicion," *BibInt* 17 (2009) 294.

46 Cf. Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery," 40. William McKane in his study ("Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath") links the ritual described in Num 5:11–31 to the "cup of wrath" or "poison to drink" motif in Jeremiah.

47 Cf. Fishbane, "Accusations of Adultery," 41–43.

the ritual described in Num 5:11–31 appears to be very cruel, the theological tradition that originated from it takes on a much milder dimension in the prophetic texts. Although, there is an unfaithful Israel who likes the adulterous woman, the final word of God is a word of forgiveness and a portent of the restoration of a relationship of love.[48]

3. Reading Rev 8:11 in the light of Num 5:11–31

The results of the analyses carried out above make it possible to put forward a proposal for a fuller understanding of the final part of the verse Rev 8:11: καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων ὅτι ἐπικράνθησαν. It is primarily about the interpretation of the verb ἐπικράνθησαν. The most popular translations assume that the verb refers to waters;[49] however, as Stephen S. Smalley notes, one can only infer this on the basis of context because, strictly speaking, the subject is implicit.[50] Considering the text of Num 5:11–31, it is possible to propose a link between the verb ἐπικράνθησαν and the noun οἱ ἄνθρωποι which would be its subject, and the whole phrase would mean people who "filled themselves with bitterness."

The verb πικραίνω in the *passivum*, in addition to the meaning of "becoming bitter," often has also a metaphorical meaning: "become angry, become bitter, become resentful." This is most evident in the Book of Ruth (according to the LXX), where Noemi says that YHWH filled her with bitterness (1:13: ἐπικράνθη μοι; 1:20: ἐπικράνθη ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ ἱκανὸς σφόδρα). In the Greek text of Ruth, the verb πικραίνω is the equivalent of the Hebrew root מרר in *hiphil*, and there are many forms derived from the same root in Num 5:11–31. One can see a similar meaning in Lam 1:4, where reference is made to Zion being filled with bitterness (TM: מַר; LXX: πικραινομένη). Here, of course, the question can be raised whether or not it is possible for the spiritual effect of bitterness to produce such a physical effect as the death of the people mentioned in Rev 8:11. It is most certainly possible. Already in Num 5:11–31, there is a similar situation. The water is called "water of bitterness" not because of its taste but because of the effect it produces. However, ultimately the effect it has on the adulterous woman is physical in nature (5:21–22, 27).[51]

48 Cf. Olson, *Numbers*, 37–38.

49 Cf. English translations: Revised Standard Version: "because it was made bitter"; English Standard Version: "because it had been made bitter"; The New American Bible: "because it was made bitter"; New International Version: "the waters that had become bitter"; New King James Version: "because it was made bitter"; The New Jerusalem Bible: "the water had become so bitter." Cf. also German translations: Einheitsübersetzung: "weil es bitter geworden war"; Lutherbibel (revidiert 2017): "weil sie bitter geworden waren"; Zürcher Bibel: "weil das Wasser bitter geworden war"; and an Italian translation: La Sacra Bibbia della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana (2008): "acque, che erano divenute amare." Cf. Vulgata: "de aquis quia amarae factae sunt."

50 Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 223. Smalley notes that in the Apocalypse, the verb in the 3rd person plural quite frequently appears without an identified subject.

51 Cf. W. Michaelis, "πικρός κτλ.," *TDNT* VI, 122–127. The issue to be discussed here is what is meant by the terms referring to the physical description. For more on this subject see, e.g., McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," 474–475; Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, 131–133.

According to our proposal of reading Rev 8:10–11, the subject of the verb ἐπικράνθησαν is the noun οἱ ἄνθρωποι. This noun, which occurs frequently in the main part of the Apocalypse (Rev 4–22) does not denote mankind in general but means, first of all, the unrighteous people, labelled with sin.[52] This is confirmed by the following texts: Rev 8:11; 9:4, 6; 9:10, 15, 18, 20; 13:13; 14:4; 16:2, 8, 9; 16:21, where either οἱ ἄνθρωποι are the object of plagues or the fact of the failure to repent is emphasised.

Thus, the category of οἱ ἄνθρωποι denotes those who do not repent but persist in a destructive relationship with the forces of evil. This relationship reveals itself in various ways. First of all, through idolatry, as indicated by Rev 9:20–21, this sin is often depicted metaphorically as a fornication. Such a way of reading Rev 8:11 is in accordance with the tradition, referring to Num 5:11–31, that the unfaithful people are considered harlots; treating the unfaithful people as a collective harlot. This theme is also present in Revelation, where the verb πορνεύω appears primarily in the context of idolatry. Moreover, the figure of the Great Harlot must be added, whose fundamental sin is the inciting to idolatry. The relationship of sinners (i.e. *de facto* οἱ ἄνθρωποι) and the Great Harlot is expressed in Rev 17:2, where the "inhabitants of the earth" (this category analogously to οἱ ἄνθρωποι means unfaithful idolaters) ἐμεθύσθησαν [...] ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς. Thus, in connection with Rev 8:10–11, one can see a kind of "ritual" revealing unfaithfulness. At that point, it is important to note a certain similarity between the two metaphors: that of sin and that of a ritual revealing sin. The sin in Rev 17:2 is described by the metaphor of drinking the wine of fornication, while the ritual revealing this sin consists of drinking water that brings bitterness. The connection between these metaphors is very likely since both refer to Jeremiah (8:14; 9:14–15; 23:15).[53]

Another element that, in our view, confirms the existence of the above-mentioned connections is the interpretation of the motif of rivers and springs of waters in Rev 8:10. This is because it was the rivers and springs (one third) that were struck by the star called Wormwood. Since we are dealing with a metaphor here, it is necessary to refer to the metaphorical meaning of rivers and springs of waters.[54] In the OT, springs of water were a metaphor for God as the source of life. Such is their meaning in several places, for example in Deut 10:11; 13:14; 14:27; Ps 36:10; 87:7.[55] In this context, committing idolatry, the fundamental sin that destroys the relationship with YHWH means abandoning the spring of living water and turning it into a broken cistern (cf. Jer 2:13; 17:13). In Ezek 47, the river originating in the renewed temple signifies God's blessing. The symbolic significance of

52 The issue here is not so much all the texts in which the noun ἄνθρωπος appears in the Book of Revelation in various forms but the category designated as οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Such a theological category οἱ ἄνθρωποι has also another designation: οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (Rev 2:13; 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 13:14; 17:2, 8).

53 Cf. Siemieniec, *Teologiczna rola "ludzi"*, 500–513. The existence of this relationship is indicated, for example, by McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," *passim*.

54 Cf. Blount, *Revelation*, 169: "Obviously, John is working symbolically here; it would be impossible for a single star literally to land simultaneously on one-third of all the rivers and all the springs on earth."

55 Cf. Osborne, *Revelation*, 354.

the motif of the fountain of waters and rivers was also known to the author of the Apocalypse, as indicated by Rev 21:6 and 22:1, 17, except that there is no mention of punishment but of a reward described as an access to the fountain of the living waters.[56]

The motif of Wormwood is also linked by the OT to the sin of idolatry. The Greek term ὁ ἄψινθος is most likely the equivalent of the Hebrew לַעֲנָה.[57] Since there is no star bearing such a name, it must be interpreted in terms of a metaphor. In Deut 29:17–18 wormwood appears in the context of idolatry. A person who has turned away from YHWH and serves the pagan gods is referred to as "a root yielding poison or wormwood" (Hebrew לַעֲנָה; Greek πικρία).[58] Jer 9:14–15 refers to the punishment that YHWH will send upon the people of Israel for the sin of idolatry. Wormwood and poisoned (bitter) water will be given to the people as food.[59] In Jer 23:15, in a similar way to 9:14–15, the punishment for prophets who proclaim false prophecy is shown: YHWH is to give them wormwood (Masoretic Text: לַעֲנָה; LXX – ὀδύνη) as food and poisoned water (Hebrew: מֵי־רֹאשׁ; LXX: ὕδωρ πικρόν) as a drink.[60] Jer 9:12–13 specifies what the guilt of the People consisted of, namely: forsaking the Law, not listening to the voice of YHWH, acting not according to the voice of YHWH but according to a hardened heart, following the Baals. The guilt of the prophets shown in Jer 23:10–15 includes: fornication, the prophesying in the name of Baal, the deceiving of the people. In this context, the drinking of bitter water and the eating of לַעֲנָה appear, as McKane notes, as actions designed to demonstrate the guilt of the people.[61]

As it was noted earlier, the use of motifs referring to Num 5:11–31 in the prophetic literature highlights the guilt of the people but also invokes the mercy of God. This includes the hope that the punishment sent by YHWH is not ultimate (this is particularly noticeable in Hosea). A similar idea is apparent in Revelation. The filling of bitterness does not become

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56 Cf. J. Schreiner, "עַיִן," *TDOT* XI, 45; H. Ringgren, "מָקוֹר," *TDOT* VIII, 546–547; W. Michaelis, "πηγή," *TDNT* VI, 113–114.

57 Cf. McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal and the Cup of Wrath," 478–488. As McKane notes, the reference of the term לַעֲנָה to "wormwood" is not at all certain. More than the specific plant (and the wormwood – *Artemisia absinthium* – is a plant sometimes used in medicine), the idea here is to emphasise the effect on humans, hence in the Septuagint לַעֲנָה is translated not by ἄψινθος, but by other terms: πικρία (Deut 29:17: Lam 3:19; Amos 6:12) or πικρός (Jer 23:15), χολή (Prov 5:4; Jer 9:14; Lam 3:15). It may therefore be a matter of showing "wormwood" as a synonym for bitterness. And indeed, in Jeremiah, it is not so much about pointing to a particular plant but rather about emphasising that it is a metaphor for the tribulation and bitter experience that will come upon the unfaithful people and the false prophets.

58 Cf. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137; Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 133; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 308.

59 In the Masoretic text לַעֲנָה is used for "wormwood," while the bitter water is translated as the phrase מֵי־רֹאשׁ and it is difficult to say which specific poison it is supposed to be. In the LXX, instead of wormwood, there is a reference made to suffering, affliction (ἀνάγκη). Poisoned water is expressed by the phrase ὕδωρ χολῆς.

60 Cf. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation*, 235; Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 137; Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, 133; R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI – Cambridge: Eerdmans 1997) 180; Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 308.

61 *Targum Jonathan* to Jer 8:14 (as well as to 9:14 and 23:15) indicates that there is a connection between the bitter water (מֵי־רֹאשׁ) and the expression הַמַּיִם הַמְאָרְרִים which can be found in Num 5:22. Cf. R. Hayward, *The Targum Jeremiah. Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus and Notes* (ArBib 12; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1990) 74.

the experience of all sinners, as indicated by the expression πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον. Although πολλοί denotes a large number, it does not mean "all." The analogy can be found in the prophetic literature, where the punishment has also a limited extent (the "rest" will be saved). It is, obviously, an open question whether the rest of οἱ ἄνθρωποι would repent.

At the end of our analyses, it is interesting to try to define our proposal using the terminology proposed by J. Paulien. In the Apocalypse, we are dealing primarily with allusions and echoes, not with quotations. Echoes do not depend on the conscious intention of the author but they are used as working in his cultural *milieu*.[62] In our case, we are undoubtedly dealing with an allusion and not an echo, since the author had access to the Book of Numbers and one of the primary criteria for separating an allusion from an echo is exactly the possibility of contact with the source of the allusion. In the case of an echo, the author could take up ideas whose origin was unknown to him. The Book of Numbers, which is part of the Pentateuch, functioned in the environment of the author of Revelation. There is no doubt about this. This is not changed by the fact that John uses different terms from the relevant text of Numbers (according to the LXX). As Paulien notes, by their very nature, allusions do not have to repeat the exact wording of the original. It is sufficient that the allusions to the Old Testament are characterised by similarity of ideas, themes and contexts.[63] This is, as Paulien argues, especially true when it comes to references to the Hebrew or Aramaic text of the OT. This is the case with Rev 8:11, since the idea of bitter water remains present in the Hebrew version of the Numbers, while it disappears from the LXX. In our opinion, in the case of Numbers 5:11–31, we are dealing with an allusion. It is a matter of debate whether it is a probable allusion or a possible one. One should rather tend towards the latter option. In this way, the text of Num 5:11–31 fits into a series of texts such as Jer 9:14, 15; 23:15, and these texts, as our analysis has shown, fit into the theological line (sin of idolatry) referring to Num 5:11–31. A similar theological context is evident in Rev 8:11.

Conclusion

The analyses carried out in this study allow us to make the following conclusions:

1) The analysis of the state of research has shown that the previous studies that have dealt with the issue of the OT being the background for Rev 8:11 have not considered the question of a possible link between the motif of drinking bitter water and Num 5:11–31. Instead, references have been made to other texts in the OT, which contain motifs related to the ritual described in Num 5:11–31.
2) It is possible to notice potential links between Rev 8:11 and Num 5:11–31 because it is still reasonable to translate the Hebrew phrase מֵי הַמָּרִים as "bitter water"/ "water of

62 Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 169–173.
63 Cf. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 182.

bitterness," which is supported by recent research suggesting a return to the traditional translation.

3) The ritual described in Num 5:11–31 is not merely a legal regulation but a starting point for a theology, in accordance with the rule that legal texts in the Bible are always the basis for theological ideas. The aforementioned ritual is also commented on by the rabbis, although *de facto* its implementation was suspended in the first century after Christ. The fact that this "dead" legal provision was left in the midst of existing legislation can be justified only on the grounds that it was relevant to the exposition of theological ideas.
4) Already in the OT literature, there was a theological tradition, based on the ritual described in Numbers 5, of portraying Israel/Judah as an unfaithful wife who was caught committing the sin of fornication (idolatry). The prophets (especially Jeremiah) portray YHWH's actions using motifs that refer to the ritual of bitter water.
5) The conclusions made above entitle us to postulate that the act of drinking bitter water by οἱ ἄνθρωποι in Rev 8:11 can be better understood by referring it to the ritual described in Num 5:11–31. Here, we may be dealing with a specific ritual revealing the sin of these οἱ ἄνθρωποι, which is the fornication (idolatry). This is confirmed by references to other texts of Revelation, where many terms referring to the semantic field of fornication appear.
6) Drinking bitter water in Rev 8:11 produces a fatal effect, which, however, does not affect all οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Therefore, it is possible to see a sign of God's mercy here, who still offers a chance for conversion. This idea is in line with the theological tradition of prophetic literature which refers to Num 5:11–31.
7) The recognised link between Num 5:11–31 and Rev 8:11 does not, of course, exclude other connections already noticed by other scholars. The exceptional nature of the Book of Revelation consists also in the fact that its author refers to many texts in the OT at the same time, which makes the ideas it presents astonishing, considering the variety of meanings.

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