

Introduction to Revelation
Session II – The Lamb and the Throne (Rev 4-5)
June-July 2012

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We saw last week that the genre of apocalyptic is less about predicting the future and more about drawing back a curtain so you can see what's going on behind. In Revelation 4-5, John is invited to see the inner workings of heaven, which then equips him to understand the events of Earth.

4:1 Heaven is not primarily to be thought of as a distant place in the sky, or a place we go when we die, but God's sphere of reality.

These chapters draw heavily from Ezekiel 1 and Daniel 7.

The phrase 'what must happen after this' isn't used in a strictly chronological way, meaning that the events of chapters 4-5 take place sequentially after the events of 1-3. Rather 'after these things' probably refers to the order of the *visions* rather than the *events* (See 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

4:2 The 'throne' is one of the major pictures in the book, occurring 38 times in chapters 4-22, 17 of which are in chapters 4-5.

4:3 John likens the one on the throne to shining, coloured stones, drawing imagery from Exodus 28:17-20 and Ezekiel 1; 9-10; 28. He lists precious stones: Jasper, Carnelian and Emerald, which according to Exodus 28:13 were associated with the garden of Eden, and in Revelation 21 are part of the beautiful structure of the New Creation.

Around the throne is a rainbow like emerald. It's not clear why this rainbow is a single colour: green, but the rainbow represents covenant, which reminds us of God's faithfulness and mercy. This coupling of Eden jewels and a rainbow tell us that just as a new world emerged out of the flooded one, so too God's new world will emerge from his judgment of this one.

4:4 Around the throne are 24 elders on thrones. The thrones symbolise that they have a degree of power. Angels are regularly depicted as surrounding the throne in apocalyptic pictures (Ezek 1; Dan 7; Is 6). 24 is two sets of 12. So it is likely that these are angelic figures who represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles: i.e. the whole people of God in the OT and the NT (see 15:3-4).

4:5 Lightning, rumblings and thunder demonstrate God's might, like on Sinai (Ex 19:16). More specifically, the phrase is repeated at the conclusion of each of the sets of judgments later in the book (8:5; 11:19; 16:18), which indicates that the source of those judgments is the throne of God.

4:6 In Jewish literature the sea represented chaos and evil. In Exodus 14 the Red Sea separated the people from the Promised Land, when the enemies were advancing (see Revelation 15:2-4). In the prophets, the Red Sea is described as the place where sea beasts dwell (Isaiah 51:9-11; Ps 74:12-15; Ezek 32:2) and in Daniel 7:2-3 the beasts came out of the sea (cf. Rev 13:1). In Rev 21:1 we are told that in the New Creation the sea is no more, which means there will be no more separation, chaos, or hostility.

4:6-7 On each side of the throne are four beasts (cf. Ezek 1). They refer to the whole created order. Each is the 'king' of its species:

Lion: King of the wild beasts
Ox: King of the tamed beasts

Eagle: King of the birds
Man: Pinnacle of creation

Each of them has six wings, alluding to Isaiah 6:1-7.

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4:8 The creatures are covered with eyes, in front and behind (v7), all around and within (v8). In other words, there is nothing that they do not see. Their song is similar to that of Isaiah 6:8. This is the song that the angels have always sung throughout history and will continue to.

4:9-11 When the creatures worship, then the elders worship too. There is an extending ripple of praise that emanates from the throne: the four creatures represent creation and the elders represent the rescued people of God's special creation.

These verses stress the eternity of God: He was and is to come (v8), He lives for ever (v9, 10) and He created everything (v11).

5:1 The one seated on the throne has a scroll or book in his right hand. This scroll seems to contain God's plan for all things, but not only *information* about, but also the *enactment* of that plan. (See Daniel 7; Ezek 1-3).

How do we understand the language of judgment in Revelation?

The scroll is sealed with seven seals. Seals were used in the ancient world to protect the contents of important documents from people seeing it, or altering it. But in the case of legal documents, the opening of a seal not only allowed the contents to be seen, but represented the enforcement of the contents.

5:5 This verse combines two OT prophecies.

'Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.' (Gen 49:9-10)

Jacob prophesies that a King will come from Judah's line, having authority and power. The Lion became a key Messianic picture in apocalyptic literature (cf. 2 Esdras 11-12), although as we shall see, John uses it differently here.

'There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.' (Isaiah 11:1)

Kings were typically described in comparison with 'their father David' (e.g. 2 Kings 18:3), but no king is called 'the son of Jesse'; that title is used for David alone (e.g. 1 Sam 20:27-33; 1 Kings 12:16). So the fact that we're promised that the new Messiah will come from *Jesse* rather than from *David* means that we are not expecting just another king in that line, but a brand new David! (cf. Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23-24; Hosea 3:5)

'In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples - of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.' (Isaiah 11:10)

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How can the *shoot* also be a *root*?

In **Revelation 22:16** Jesus combines these two images together and says **‘I am the root and the descendent of David.’**

One of the key things that is said of the root/shoot of Jesse is that he will remake the world.

John combines these two prophecies, demonstrating that Jesus is both the Lion and the Root: the one who restores mankind to their proper place, and also restores creation itself. And this Lion-Root is the only one who is worthy to open the scroll, bringing justice, and restoring this broken creation.

5:6 John is excited to see this victorious Lion, but what he actually sees between the throne and the four creatures is a slaughtered Lamb! This challenges us by redefining our ideas of power and how victory is attained. George Caird puts it like this:

‘This title [The Lamb] is meant to control and interpret all the rest of the symbolism. It is almost as if John were saying to us at one point after another: ‘Wherever the Old Testament says “Lion”, read “Lamb”.’ Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross.’

The Lamb has seven horns which mean complete power, and seven eyes which mean omniscience. The way in which he *uses* his power is unexpected.

The word used for ‘slaughtered’ (*sphazō*) is a verb which refers to a particularly violent form of death. It seems that John wants us to think of Isaiah 53:4-7:

‘Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.’ (Isaiah 53:4-7)

Jesus is the **sacrificial** lamb who takes away our sins. But verse 9 talks about *ransoming* people, which is the language of purchasing them from slavery like in the Exodus. Verse 10 talks about ‘a kingdom of priests’ which also alludes to Exodus 19:5-6. So here Jesus is depicted too as the **passover** lamb.

So in this Lion/Lamb picture, Jesus is depicted in a threefold manner: liberating, atoning and conquering.

There seems to be another reason why *sphazō* is used over alternatives such as *thuō*. This is the same word used to describe the death of martyrs in 6:9 and 18:24.

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The Lamb is standing either *on*, or *by* the sea. If the sea represents the place of chaos and hostility, then the Lamb's standing on or by it represents his victory over the beasts.

5:7-8 The lamb approaches the throne and takes the scroll, and once again worship emanates through the whole order, rippling out from the centre. This seems to draw on Daniel 7:13-14:

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

5:9 In chapter 4 the people they sang an ‘old song.’ Now they sing a ‘new song.’

The phrase ‘new song’ typically occurs in the OT when people either (a) thank God for creation or (b) thank him for victory over an enemy (Ps 33:3; 144:9; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; Is 42:10). Here, both of those are the case: as the Lion, Jesus has won a decisive victory, but as the Root he has also begun the process of new creation.

**“Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”
(Revelation 5:9-10)**

‘Every tribe, language, people and nation’ is fourfold, which indicates that this is a worldwide vision. These people from every nation become not only part of the Kingdom, but Priests.

In the OT Kings were forbidden from acting as Priests. Both Saul and Uzziah disobeyed this command and so were punished by God (1 Sam 13:8-14; 2 Chron 26:16-21). But the Messiah unites both these strands in himself and builds a community that bring together both lines.

5:11 Worship moves even further outward: from the throne to the creatures to the elders, and now to many angels – myriads and myriads and thousands and thousands (cf. Dan 7:10).

5:13 The praise is shared by the one who sits on the throne and the Lamb, which clearly indicates Jesus’ divinity.

Concluding Thoughts:

These chapters don’t depict a future event, but the inner workings of heaven *now*. They give John a framework for understanding God’s authority throughout the church age. The approaching of the Lamb towards the throne depicts the ascension of Jesus and his position of authority (cf. Phil 2:8-11).

In chapter 5 we see the Lamb approaching the throne (v6). The chapter ends with him standing next to the throne, and the people praising ‘him who sits on the throne, and the lamb’ (v13). But in the final chapter of the book, we read twice that the throne is described as ‘the throne of God and the Lamb’ (Rev 22:1, 3). So the whole book documents Jesus’ progression towards the throne in the ascension, to being at the right hand of God throughout the church age, to finally sharing the throne once and for all in the New Creation.

Reading for next week: Chapters 6-11 and 16
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