

# Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

# 2020

## MAY

## Revelation- Victory Book Chapters 1-11

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is worthy of highest praise

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*Revelation 4:3*





## THE LAMB SLAIN FOR SINNERS AT CALVARY IS WORTHY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH'S HIGHEST PRAISE

Three times in our study passage we read of the slain Lamb (vv. 6, 9, 12) in expressions that convey the eternal freshness, extent and value of our Saviour's death, yet remind us of the vileness of human sin He had to deal with. That was seen in the callousness, cruelty and brutality meted out to Him on the cross by hostile and venomous cries from the general populace of His own nation, and the political machinations of the Jewish religious hierarchy as well as the military might of the imperial power of the day, viz. Rome.

More than the cumulative effect of the foregoing was the imposition on Jesus, the Son of God,

the sin-bearing responsibility of the iniquity of the whole human race, necessitating His forsaking and bruising by His God and Father. This involved the agony of His soul in being made an offering for sin, which was greater and fuller in depth than the excruciating pain inflicted on His body (Is. 53:6, 10; Mat. 27:46).

Is it any wonder then, that the Lord is acclaimed as the Lion of Judah, the kingly tribe, who has triumphed magnificently in His conquest over sin, Satan, and death, and thereby evokes the praise and adulation of millions of the heavenly and earthly host?

*R.B.F.*

## From Study Groups . . .

### THE LION AND THE LAMB (Revelation 5)

**From Aberdeen:** John saw a vision which conveyed spiritual things to his mind and heart. He was so affected by the lack of response to the strong angel's question that he 'wept much'. Here we have John writing about a strong 'angel' and then immediately writing about one of the 'elders' (Rev. 5:2-5 RV). Might this indicate that the 'elders' represent angels? We make three points that closely follow the view set out in John Miller's *Notes* (Hayes Press, 1986, p.661f.). Firstly, in the matter of crowns (Gk. *stephanos*) the wreath is not always associated with victory—the *stephanos* may also be given as a mark of honour. Secondly, in the

heavenly realm we read about ‘thrones,’ ‘dominions,’ ‘principalities’ and ‘powers’ (Col. 1:16). This would indicate an angelic order in heaven. Thirdly, since the Revised Version text omits the word *us* (Rev. 5:9) this might suggest that the ‘elders’ were not speaking as *representatives* of earthly saints but as *observers* of such saints, quite possibly angelic observers.

In the disputed text of Revelation 5:9-10 the Authorised Version includes the pronoun ‘us’ (Gk. *hemas*) thus giving the impression that the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures of the vision are classed as ‘kings and priests’ who shall reign upon the earth. However, the Revised Version wording is more coherent – ‘didst purchase unto God with thy blood ... of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest *them*...unto our God a kingdom and priests: and *they* reign upon the earth’ [italics not in original]. Since the Greek word for ‘them’ in verse 10 is *autous* (the soundest Greek text) this must differentiate the elders in the vision as distinct from saints on earth. John Miller succinctly summarises: the weight of grammatical evidence in the passage is for the omission of *hemas* in verse 9, for you cannot have *hemas* in verse 9, and *autous* in verse 10 (*Notes* as above). In other words, ‘them’ signifies purchased saints, saved by grace. It is encouraging and humbling to know, that surrounding God’s throne there are heavenly worshippers who have golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints [Comment 1].

*James Johnson*

**From Aberkenfig:** In some ways it is a pity that the division into separate chapters exists, because John is not seeing another vision, but a continuation of the scene in chapter 4. It increases in intensity. We’re not surprised that John wept much; the elders and living creatures falling down, so majestic was the scene words fail us!

He observes that the One who sat on the throne had a strange object in His right hand: a seven-sealed scroll (book) written on both sides (which meant nothing more could be added to it); it was complete and final. He perhaps identified this document from the ancient world as a title deed or last will and testament, to be opened only by the legal and rightful owner, where globs of wax were pressed onto the end of the scroll to seal the rolled document. (See G.L. Keown ‘Locust’ in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol.3: p358). Ezekiel 2:9-10 had a similar scroll presented to him. No-one is found to answer the angel’s strong cry ‘Who is worthy to open the book ...’ (v.2) [Comment 2].

John’s tears proved too hasty when one of the twenty-four elders could comfort him with the words, ‘stop weeping ... the Lion ... hath overcome ... to open the book ...’ John saw through tear-filled eyes, not a Lion, but a Lamb (5:6) ... ‘as if it were newly slain...’ ‘the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29; cp. Is. 53:6-7). He must have been mystified looking for the Lion of

the tribe of Judah and beholding the Lamb of God, who 'takes the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne'. It is perhaps no surprise that the elders and living creatures fall down before the Lamb and worship the Lamb, and we should too because of who He is—the One who bears unique titles (5:5-7) [see Comment 8].

*(a)The Lion of the tribe of Judah* Reference here is to Genesis 49:8-12 where Jacob, in his blessing of his sons shortly before he departed this life, made Judah the tribe of kings. (Saul, their first king was of the tribe of Benjamin, used by God to discipline Israel when they asked for a king; then God gave them David, of the tribe of Judah.)

*(b)The Root of David* Humanly speaking Jesus has His roots in David (Is.11:1,10), whereas as far as His deity is concerned, we see that He is the Root of David, speaking of His pre-existence, which was a problem to the Sadducees and Pharisees (Mat. 22). He also is the 'The Ancient of Days', further proof of His eternity.

We should also worship Jesus Christ because of where He is—in heaven, not in the manger, nor in Jerusalem, nor on the cross or in the tomb, but on the throne in heaven itself. Where? In the midst (5:6): the centre of all that transpires in heaven.

Further, we are told what He does (5:8-10). When the weeping ended, the praise began—a new song of praise, a chorus never heard before (5:9)—fresh lyrics ... a fresh melody... and a fresh experience of worship ... none out of key, and why? It is in heaven where nothing but perfection exists. In chapter 4 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders praised God for His work of creation; but here it is praise to Christ for His work of redemption.

Finally, it is because of what He has (5:11-14). He became the poorest of the poor (2 Cor. 8:9). He experienced humiliation and shame as sinners ridiculed and reviled Him, laughed at His kingship, attiring Him in a mock robe, crown and sceptre, anointing Him with spittle. All that has changed: it is all power, riches, honour, blessing, glory and dominion for ever and ever (5:12-13).

He (The Lamb) has taken the scroll from the Father's hand. God's great eternal plan would now be set in motion and the Lamb will break open the seven seals. Amen.

*Bill Paterson*

**From Buckhaven:** Moses wrote the immortal song of Israel's deliverance from bondage, but we have known redemption 'from bondage worse than theirs by far.' Israel's redemption foreshadowed our deliverance through the blood of 'the Lamb'. In Revelation 5 we view a scene by the crystal sea, a multitude of

multiplied millions singing a new song of praise to the Lamb (v.9). Our deliverance from sin celebrates the great conquest of Christ through the cross.

The glorious theme of the Lamb flows across the divine page like a silver cord. We trace it from Abel's lamb (Gen. 4:4) to Abraham's words to Isaac: 'God will provide Himself the lamb' (Gen. 22:8 RV), to the Passover lambs, those offered on Jewish altars; Isaiah's 'lamb led to the slaughter' (Is. 53:7); and finally through John the Baptist, the revealing of 'the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). The apostle John had the privilege of writing the last book of the Bible—'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'. Here we see the majestic presence of the Son of God, 'the Alpha and the Omega', who alone holds the title 'the Amen' (Rev. 3:14)

In Revelation the Lamb is mentioned more than twenty times. In the words of the hymnwriter, 'The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's land'. Revelation 13:8 (KJV) takes us back to the earliest ages: 'The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world'. In chapter 5 John's vision of the eternal future presents us with an 'as though newly slain' Lamb (v. 6). His wounds yet visible, have a beauty through eternal days and will remind us that we have been redeemed 'with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ' (1 Pet. 1:19).

The Lamb is one with the Lion of the royal tribe of Judah. John looked, expecting to see a lion, but saw a lamb. Judah's lion is David's 'root and offspring' (Rev. 22:16), the Jew of Nazareth, the Lamb of God. Judah's name (Heb: 'praise') was engraved on the first stone of the breastplate worn by Israel's high priest, bright red in colour like the sardius. When Jacob blessed his sons, Judah was singled out for praise (Gen. 49:8f). Here, all the praise flows back to David's son and David's Lord - from the outer parts of this great heavenly circle, praise is drawn to the Lamb on the throne; the Lamb in all His glory. Verses 8 -14 describe the universal worship of the Lamb. We, the redeemed, owe our salvation from sin's penalty and our victory from its presence, to the blood of the Lamb.

The Lamb also is the lamp of the heavenly city (Rev. 21:23). Paradise, lost in Eden through sin, is regained through the victory of the Lamb! Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor. 2:9).

*Martin Notman*

**From Cromer:** *How is this relevant to us?* The scripture describes in apocalyptic language God's full knowledge of future events. Thus, it encourages us to recognise that God is in control of the future so that we can trust Him for events beyond our knowledge.

*What was the book like?* The older versions of Scripture have ‘a book’ here, but it was not a book as we understand it, with bound pages. It was a papyrus scroll which consisted of two layers of papyrus at right angles to each other. It was usual to write just on the side where the writing was parallel to the top layer, as the lines then matched the ‘grain’ of the papyrus; but if the amount of text was very large then the reverse side of the papyrus could be used as well. In this case the book contained all the things that were recorded about the future events of the world, so it was appropriate to have a double-sided scroll (5:1) [cp. Comment 2].

*Why could no one open the book?* John was distressed because no one in the entire creation was able to open the scroll. This inability was not a matter of strength, but of worth (5:4). Every creature is tainted with sin except the one described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who was sinless and hence was worthy to open the scroll. John looked to see the lion but instead saw a lamb. The lion is a symbol of strength, whereas the lamb would seem to be the opposite, but John was told that the Lion had overcome. What is particularly significant about the Lamb is not only that it has been put to death as a sacrifice, but that it is ‘a Lamb standing, *as though* it had been slain’ (5:6). That is, the Lamb is standing, living, but bearing the marks of being put to death. This corresponds to the death and resurrection of Christ, who is both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God. He is worthy, both because of what He is and because of what He has done.

*Universal praise* All the denizens of heaven and earth acknowledged the worth of the Lamb; it is noteworthy that part of the paean was ‘golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints’ (5:8). This is probably retrospective, including saints of this present era. The non-human creation worships God by virtue of its existence, but we would not think that 5:13 would justify us in making any positive declaration about the place of animals in the world to come.

*Peter Hickling*

**From Greenock:** Most of the events of later Revelation chapters 6-19 take place during the second half of Daniel’s 70th week. The antichrist, the false prophet and their minions will be too busy in the first half of the seven-year Tribulation period deluding the people on earth with a false peace. In the second half of the week they will unleash upon the unsuspecting world the most terrible persecution that there has ever been on earth. Why did the sovereign, omniscient God Elohim create Satan whom he knew would be His nemesis, and would fall from heaven through his exalted pride, and would cause endless strife on earth until he is shut up in the bottomless pit for ever? We may as well ask why He planned salvation before He created humankind on earth who, like Satan, would also fall through sin. Why also would God choose the elect in Christ before the foundation of the world? (Eph. 1:4) [Comment 3].

Each day we are drawing closer to the Rapture. When that blessed time comes the Lord will take the living and dead believers home to heaven. Then the Lord who has waited so patiently for His bride will see the fruit of all His pain, the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied, His joy overflowing and complete. As believers in the Lord Jesus we have been travelling towards heaven a day at a time, as pilgrims and strangers, yet we know so little about that glorious place. Heaven must be as immense as the universe, with over 100 million angels, and the innumerable hosts of the redeemed. It would be conveniently easy to believe, as some Bible scholars do, in the gematria of the numbers 4, 7, 12 and 24 which feature so prominently in Revelation. Some believe that the 24 elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and the 12 apostles. That view has great appeal, but their true identity may be that they are heavenly beings.

When the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem to visit king Solomon and saw the magnificent splendour of his palace and his court, and the manner in which his servants served him, and the way in which he entered the house of the LORD, she was so awestruck that there was no more spirit left in her. That is only a very faint picture of the Lord Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, and the indescribable splendour of His throne, and His temple in heaven, and of the way in which innumerable hosts of angels, and all the hosts of heaven serve Him. When we get to heaven and see its magnificent splendour we will be awestruck too.

*John Peddie*

**From Halifax:** John saw a powerful angel proclaiming, 'Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?' (Rev. 5:2 KJV). This scroll or 'opisthograph' (a scroll written on both sides), was in the right hand of the One who sat upon the throne set in heaven (4:2-3; 5:1). 'Weep not', one of the elders said to John, 'behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book ...' (v. 5). John looked and saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain. He took the scroll and, having taken it, He sat upon the throne. The scroll was taken by the Lamb, and as Matthew Henry stresses, 'not by violence, nor by fraud, but he prevailed to do it, he prevailed by his merit and worthiness, he did it by authority and by the Father's appointment' (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*). As the mighty Lion of Judah, the Root of David (Gen. 49:9-10; Is. 11:1,10; Jer. 23:5; Rev. 22:16), He has conquered Satan, and sacrificed as the Lamb of God (Ex. 12:5; Is. 53:7; John 1:29,36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19) He has satisfied the justice of God

*A new song* When Christ took the scroll and had sat upon the throne, the four living creatures (Rev. 4:6-8 RV; cp. Is. 6:2-3; Ezek. 1:5-25; 10:1-22) and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him (Rev. 5:8). They sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast

slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation' (v.9). Called 'new' (Gk. *kainos*, 'fresh'), the song is 'New in the sense that it is a song consequent on redemption' (A. Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*); a song in distinction from the song of 'Moses the servant of God' (see 15:3) [Comment 4].

*Robert J. Butler*

**From Ibadan (Alawaye):** We are encouraged in 5:9 that Christ is not for the Jews alone but for all nations. Since our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed, the kingdom of God has been established among men on earth. He has made us kings and priests. Whenever we come to worship the Lord on the first day of the week we enter into the presence of Almighty God, where also there are innumerable number of angels (Heb. 12:22-24). Revelation 5:3 shows that there was no way for man but condemnation. 'No man is worthy.' So John wept because of the state of this hopelessness. But Jesus has triumphed. When we remember this, we need to be courageous and be reassured that we are more than conquerors [Comment 5].

The Lion, as we all know, is the king of the jungle. This shows the kingship, leadership and supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially after His death and resurrection. On the other hand, the sheep is a very quiet animal, easy-going and submissive, and even at the point of death it is usually dumb. This portrays the total submission of our Lord to the will of His Father. It shows His humility. Altogether, Jesus is both merciful and compassionate. He is the sacrifice and the High Priest; He is the Master and Lord of all. The lion is an animal that is often fearful. If He had come to this world in His majesty, who would dare touch Him or crucify Him? Now, He is no more to be sacrificed. He is the judge of both the living and the dead, though once He had suffered a lot like us (Heb. 2:14) yet without sin.

*Samson Ogunleye*

**From Mount Forest:** *The golden bowls and altar* The disciples' prayer (Mat. 6:10) includes a request that as the will of God is done in heaven, there should be a corresponding fulfilment of His will on earth. To this thought we can link the pattern given to Moses, and subsequently to David, for the erection of a physical structure on earth that corresponds to the real thing in heaven (Heb. 8:5). Part of that pattern provided for the offering of incense, and prayer is seen in association with that offering (Ex. 30:7-8; Luke 1:10; Ps. 141:2). The golden altar of incense and its censers, and the composition and use of the incense, are instructive for God's privileged people (see G. Prasher: *The Tabernacle*, pp. 69-74), exercising 'reverence and awe' (cp Lev. 10; Num. 16; 1 Sam. 2:28). There is a glorious heavenly reality to all this. Revelation 5 involves that reality, the antitype. John

could still only describe the vision using words like 'incense', a physical thing, even though the setting in this chapter is in the spiritual centre of heavenly worship, the throne of God. Likewise, the true 'golden altar' is there. Another altar, answering in heaven to the altar of burnt offering, is presumably the source of the 'fire' for the golden altar (Rev. 14:18 cp. Is. 6:6). There Christ, as a priest in heaven, would have 'something to offer' (Heb. 8:3; 9:11-14; 10:11-14), i.e. something spiritually and superlatively corresponding to His physical shed blood. That is now the altar for God's gathered people (Heb. 13:10; 1 Pet. 2:5). Even heavenly altars in turn surely depict Christ (cp. *Young Men's Corner* 1926 p.146-147/*Bible Studies* 1983, p.143 Comment 5) [Comment 6].

John, in Revelation 5 sees prayers in 'golden bowls' holding prepared incense; surely having nothing extraneous or inappropriate, prayers awaiting answer but aligned to God's will. It is as though they are securely entrusted there until ready for fulfilment, hence only when we get to chapter 8 do we see the necessary 'fire' added to produce the smoke of the incense, indicating that those prayers can then rise acceptably to God from the golden altar. That fire presumably came from the heavenly brazen altar, a unique place of divine satisfaction with Christ's accomplishment. Revelation 8:3 distinguishes between the prayers of the saints and the incense offered with them (in Rev. 5:8 both are combined). The specific 'saints' in these passages are most likely the saints martyred in the ongoing Great Tribulation, whom John will later see 'under the altar' (the place foreshadowed in Lev. 4:25,30 etc.). The prayers are made after the saints reach heaven, not just while suffering on earth. They are appeals for vindication, to the glory of God (Rev. 6:9-10), in contrast to the earthly prayer of Stephen (Acts 7:60) in the day of grace, for forgiveness of God's enemies [Comment 7].

John's loud lament would be very understandable if he had some appreciation, perhaps from an awareness of Daniel 12, that the fulfilment of God's purpose to vindicate His saints is tied to opening the scroll.

Were his tears triggered by a shared Revelation 6:10-type apprehension of untold delay in God finally righting wrongs done? [See Cromer paper, para. 3]. For good reason he is told 'Weep no more!' [See Comment 8.]

*Geoff Hydon*

**From Podagatlapalli:** *The Lion and the Lamb* In John's day writing was done on scrolls. Pieces of papyrus or vellum up to 30 feet long were rolled up and sealed with wax. The scroll John sees contains the full account of what God has in store for the world, and only Christ can open it. The seven seals indicate the importance of its contents. They are placed throughout the scroll so that as each one is broken more of the scroll can be read to reveal another phase of God's plan for the end of the world (5:5) [cp Comment 2].

The Lion, Jesus, has proved Himself worthy to break the seals and open the scroll by living a perfect life of obedience to God, dying on the cross for the sins of the world and rising from the dead to show His power and authority over evil and death. Christ conquered sin, death, hell and Satan himself, so only He can be trusted with the world's future.

Jesus Christ is pictured as both a Lion (in His authority and power) and the Lamb (in His humble submission to God's will). But it is the Lamb, not the Lion, that becomes the focus in his vision. Christ the Lamb was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humankind, therefore, only He can save us from the terrible events revealed by the scroll. Christ the Lamb won the greatest battle of all, defeating all the forces of evil and death by submitting humbly to God's will and dying on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sins. Christ the Lion is victorious in battle against Satan (Rev. 19:19-21). Christ the Lion is victorious because of what Christ the Lamb has already done. We will enjoy the rewards of victory, not because of our power and might but through our humble submission to God's will.

The Lamb's wounds are those inflicted on Jesus' body during His trial and crucifixion (see John 20:24-31). In the Old Testament, lambs were sacrificed to cover sins. The Lamb of God died as the final sacrifice for all sins (see Is. 53:7; Heb. 10:1-12,18). The horns (5:6) symbolized strength and power (1 Kin. 22:11; Zech. 1:18). Although Christ is the sacrificial Lamb, He is in no way weak. He was slain but now He lives in God's strength and power.

The song of the living beings and elders (5:9-10) recounts the work of Christ, for which they praise Him. He was slain, bought individuals of every tribe, and tongue, and people and nation with His blood; gathered them into a kingdom, made them priests and appointed them to reign upon the earth. He is now gathering us into His kingdom and making us priests, and in future we will reign with Him, worship God and praise Him for what He has done, what He is doing and what He will do for all who trust in Him.

*B. V. Prasada Rao*

**From Ravulapalem:** *The golden bowls* These are being carried by the twenty-four elders bowed down before the Lamb, our Lord. The bowls themselves are symbols of God's valuing the prayers and supplications of the saints on earth. The prayers are like incense of sweet aroma that was filled into the bowls by various people (Ex. 30:1,7,34-38—Aaron; Ps. 141:2—David; Luke 1:10—Zacharias).

God loves the prayers of His own. They offer them to God in heaven (8:3). Here the mention of them shows the importance of opening the scroll of seven seals to some extent [cp. the link in 8:3-5— *Eds.*]. At the time of the sin offering Aaron made atonement for himself and for his house with his hands full of incense

beaten small and brought within the veil: 'and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat' (Lev. 16:13).

As there is importance in the opening of the seals of the scroll through prayers there is prominence in the sounding of trumpets by angels (8:3). The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints ascended before God (8:4). Matthew 6:4,6 ,9 shows the importance of prayer, and James tells us the prayer of faith shall save the sick and fervent prayer will have more power (5:15-18). So let us pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17).

*S.J.M. Edward*

**From Surulere:** *Significance of the Lion and the Lamb* The Almighty God never ceases to amaze and dazzle His adoring saints, with the richness and fullness of His imagery and contrasts. The One who calls those things that do not exist as though they did (Rom. 4:17 NKJV); who asks the weak to say they are strong (Joel 3:10), who made the weak strong (Heb. 11:34), astonished the apostle John and ourselves with the awesome imagery of a Lion and a Lamb.

A contrast of extremities: the lion stands majestic, imperious and all conquering; the lamb, weak, fearful and submissive. A deep and refreshing truth, though, is that in the Lion and the Lamb we can circle the incomprehensible mystery of the Incarnation: 'And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh' (1 Tim. 3:16).

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is descriptive of the Lord Jesus Christ in His divinity and Godhead. For although it was of Him Jacob spoke in his oracular blessing of his son, Judah: 'the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes and to Him shall be the obedience of people' (Gen. 49: 10); yet Judah is only a lion's whelp. Judah's son and Judah's Lord, his true progenitor, is the atypical Lion of the tribe of Judah. And just as the finest of the kings of Israel and Judah's pride, king David declared: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"' (Ps. 110:1).

It is worth noting also the perception as John is shown the scene in heaven. As he wept over the absence of a worthy person to open and read the scroll, or to look at it, one of the consoling 24 elders declared: 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals' (Rev. 5:4-5). It is more intriguing that as John looked to see the One referred to as the Lion of Judah, his gaze was fixed on a rather humbling sight: 'And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain,

having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth' (v.6).

The weakness, fearfulness and submissiveness of a lamb, notwithstanding, the Lamb of God still occupies centre stage in the throne - room of God, as He stands amid it. For, 'who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation...' (Phil. 2:6). 'He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him' (Is. 53:2). 'He was led like a lamb to the slaughter' (Is. 53:7).

John the Baptist saw the Lord Jesus and declared: 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). We are reassured to know that He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

*Frederick F. Ntido*

## COMMENTS

**1. (Aberdeen):** The absence of 'us' in the original language of verse 9 of this month's study chapter is shown correctly in RV, NIV, and ESV, though inserted in NKJV following King James version / AV. It certainly favours the view you express that the elders are of a high angelic order being observers and participators as opposed to representatives of human beings / saints.

*R.B.F.*

Insertion of 'us' in 5:9 appears in only one of the oldest manuscripts, and in some much later ones. The reading without 'us' is given rating A out of A-D, i.e. most sound of the variants, by the United Bible Society's Greek text (4th edition). If the twenty-four elders are human, their number must at various points have been incomplete. See also April issue, p.62, Comment 2.

**2. (Aberkenfig and others):** *The writing and sealing* Two possibilities have been most favoured by commentators for the writing. (1) A legal document from Jeremiah's times to the Roman empire had the first section sealed to preserve it, while the next was a summary of its contents, either written on the back, and an outer seal applied, or on a second section folded up (not rolled) for quicker reference. (2) Both sides of the roll were filled with writing. This was normally done for economy if on papyrus, since one side had horizontal strips, those on the other being vertical, so less smooth, or for overflow (see e.g. *Revelation 1-5, Word Biblical Commentary*, D.E. Aune, 1997, pp.338-343).

In this setting, however, there is no thought of sparing resources, and overflow

does not sound fitting for the foresight of God; so the point would be the comprehensiveness of divine judgement. There is no need for a heavenly book to resemble human practice, except to be recognisable to humans, and the sealing is much more important, being impressed with the authority of the author, so (2) seems preferable, and with it the theme of divine and final justice. Vellum (skin from sheep or goat) was used for copies of Scriptures in N.T. times, and seems more appropriate than papyrus for a book of divine judgement. I have not found evidence for sealing seven successive parts, each with one seal, though an attractive idea.

M.A.

**3. (Greenock):** The word 'nemesis', defined in the dictionary as 'retributive justice', or 'an opponent or rival whom a person cannot best or overcome', does not adequately describe God's relationship to Satan. 'Arch-enemy' or 'implacable foe' would be more appropriate terms for Satan, since God is stronger than His foes. As to your very pertinent 'Why?' questions, we can only look to our Sovereign and Just God to supply the answers 'in the ages to come' (Eph. 2:7).

J.J.

**4. (Halifax):** We are not told that the Lamb sat down and distinction is made in 5:13 and 6:16 between 'him that sits on the throne' and the Lamb. I agree with the Surelere contribution which states that 'the Lamb of God still occupies centre stage in the throne-room of God, as He stands amid it'

P.D.

**5. (Ibadan, Alawaye):** *Kingdom and reigning in Rev. 1:6 and 5:10* The phrase 'kings and priests' comes from KJV translators of 1:6 working with the late manuscripts available in 1611. When the earliest manuscripts were found, the RV and major versions from RSV forwards translated the changed text as 'kingdom and priests'. The truth thus revealed is reinforced in 5:10, where the heavenly beings sing that those who were purchased by the blood of the Lamb were made to be a kingdom and priests to God, and will reign upon the earth. There KJV again has 'kings', and the present tense 'reign'.

The point for today is that the idea that believers are kings and could presently reign has no support in Scripture elsewhere, and is far from the experience of even the most godly. Elders indeed have rule in churches of God, but the old version and NKJV make a far wider claim. Comparison of 5:10 with 1 Corinthians 6:2 points to *faithful* saints reigning with Christ in the Millennium (and cp. Luke 19:16-26, 2 Tim. 2:12, Rev. 2:26). Those who wish to study this further will see the differences acknowledged in the NKJV footnotes. On nine other NKJV late-manuscript renderings, see *B.S.* 1998, pp. 10-12.

**6. (Mount Forest):** *The significance of the altar and fire in heaven* We have space only to mention some pointers in this subject, so sacred that we tread carefully. (a) Earthly articles of divine service, being only shadows of the heavenly, can be vivid and clear, yet also have limits: no one part could express all the substance we find in Christ, the Son over God's house. (b) Even the true furniture in the sanctuary above is mediated by how it looks to John's human eye, albeit with perception tutored by the Spirit of God. Thus our offerings which our great priest places on that altar above must speak of more than His blood, foreshadowed by more than the blood sprinkled there in earthly courts. (c) Our altar to which we bring our sacrifices of appreciation of Christ (Heb. 13:10f.) expresses His act of self-sacrifice, and the altar is intimately associated with the offering upon it, for He is both of these. There we also feed by communion with the earthly life, death and endless life of the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:13, 10:16-18), for we are before the Lord's table, and as we give our praise into His hands, He also gives in return, and we go away built up. (d) I suggest the fire that consumes the offerings above depicts the intensity of divine holiness. Such fire also destroys impurities. We hope to enjoy more about the golden altar when studying Chapter 8, D.V.

**7. (Mount Forest):** Surely we cannot restrict 'the prayers of all the saints' (8:3) to those that reach the altar during the future judgements from Chapter 6 forwards? I believe God has the same regard and reception for the prayers of the saints from Pentecost till the end of this earth.

**8. (General):** *John's tenses and tears* Part of Revelation's unique style is John's use of tenses, distinctive to this book. NIV catches the imperfect, i.e. past continuous, in 5:4, 'I wept and wept', and 'could open' (v.3), both registering the remarkable search for one qualified for the task. We thus sense John's dismay that *there was no one* worthy, among those august beings, and hence the prolonged tears of the man who had learned compassion from His Lord—until he was helped to focus on the Lamb before the throne, and was told who He is. We also humbly realise His rich identity, as title by title spells out to us the excellencies of Christ our Saviour. But why could there be such a problem in that place of power and authority? The effect is certainly to build up expectancy, to raise us by degrees to the greatness of the victorious Lamb, whom John first saw as one who humbled Himself even to death on a cross.

'One of the elders said' (v.5 ESV), however, is in the present tense—'says', giving the immediacy of hearing him speak. As the narrative unfolds, we shall find more of this vivid on-site reporting.

M.A.

# *Feature*

The following article was requested from an esteemed former editor, to whom we are indebted for this lucid and concise outline.

## COMPETING APPROACHES TO PROPHECY IN REVELATION

Of all the books which compose the New Testament, Revelation is unquestionably the most difficult to interpret. While questions of application may arise from the narratives and Letters, in Revelation it is the plain meaning of the content which provides the first hurdle to understanding. This in part results from its unique literary composition, with constant allusions to the Old Testament adding a layer of intricacy. In view of these difficulties, a number of schemes have been developed with the aim of assisting the reader to gain an interpretative foothold. These schemes can be distinguished by the time at which fulfilment is understood to occur: in the past, present, future or outside of time altogether.

### Principal Schemes of Interpretation

(1.) *Fulfilled in the past (the preterist interpretation)* The preterist interpretation views all (or at least the majority) of Revelation as having already been fulfilled. Central to this understanding are the time indicators which punctuate the book. Since John and the angel confirmed that 'the time is near' (1:3; 22:10), and the Lord promised to 'come soon' (22:12,20), preterists reason that the book must represent events which were fulfilled within the lifetimes of its first recipients. Revelation is therefore interpreted as encouraging saints in the early church to overcome the tribulation of their own day in the certain knowledge of impending judgment on its two oppressors: Israel at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and Rome at the fall of its empire in AD 476.

(2.) *Fulfilled in the present (the historicist interpretation)* The historicist interpretation identifies chapters 4-19 as a prophetic unfolding of church history from the time of the apostles until the return of the Lord. It therefore places Revelation in the present, as a book currently being fulfilled. This interpretation has its origin with Joachim of Fiore who, in the twelfth century, professed to have seen a vision in which the 1,260 days (or 42 months) specified in Revelation (11:3; 12:6,14; 13:5) were revealed to mean 1,260 years. The reformers seized on this approach, identifying Babylon as the Roman Catholic church, and modern proponents continue to identify within world conditions of their own day the ongoing fulfilment of Revelation, leading inexorably to the return of the Lord.

**(3.) *Fulfilled in the future (the futurist interpretation)*** To futurists, one of the keys to interpretation lies in 1:19 in which John is commanded to ‘write ... the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this’ (ESV). Answering the command, John recoded those things which he saw (principally a reference to his vision in chapter 1, but encompassing the fact that the revelation given to John was visual (see 1:12; 4:1; 6:2, etc)). He then wrote to the seven churches in Asia of the contemporary conditions which affected them (chs. 2-3), and of the things which God shall bring to pass in the consummation of His eternal purposes (chs. 4-22). Chapter 4 itself confirms this progression as future events become the subject (4:1), both in heaven (e.g. 19:1-10) and on earth (e.g. 8:7-13). In this interpretation, the visions are seen as cumulative with specific meanings, each having a future counterpart in world history.

**(4.) *A timeless fulfilment (the idealist interpretation)*** A fourth scheme of interpretation takes the book outside of time by allegorising its content. By this scheme, John’s visions are not cumulative explanations of specific events, but repeated illustrations of timeless principles by which God has always acted: the triumph of good and the judgment of evil, the rule of God from heaven and through the church (depicted symbolically in the millennium of Revelation 20).

### **Evaluating these Approaches**

It has long been the teaching of this magazine that the seven churches of chapters 2-3 were literal churches of God in Asia who received John’s letter as an encouragement to contend earnestly for the faith. Letters were written and sent to known cities (1:11), headed with a form of address which was normal at the time (1:4-5). Nothing in the text gives licence to contort the plain meaning of those letters into a prophetic scheme. Chapters 4-22 however can only be understood to describe the future purposes of God in bringing about the end: the submission of all things to the rule of Christ, and Christ to God, that He may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28). In support of this conclusion, we propose the following points:

**(a) The imminence of Christ’s return** The preterist approach misunderstands the concept of the imminence of Christ’s return. ‘Soon’ and ‘at hand’ are not intended to convey shortness of time in an earthly sense. Instead they describe the immediacy conferred by certainty—these things must come about and, viewed from an eternal standpoint, will occur imminently. It is in this sense that we already occupy ‘the last days’ (Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:1) which began with the coming of the Lord in the flesh (Heb. 9:26).

**(b) Discarding Old Testament prophecy** Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 278 are believed to allude to Old Testament prophets. Yet, in seeing Revelation as having been fulfilled in judgment on Israel, the preterist approach abandons the plain

meaning of Old Testament prophecies which foretell the restoration and blessing of Israel. This necessitates the fanciful reinterpretation of the prophets as speaking of the Church the Body of Christ (then unknown to them) as 'spiritual Israel'. Similarly, an idealist approach, which focuses on allegory rather than literal fulfilment, negates Old Testament prophecies which speak very clearly of a national restoration of Israel.

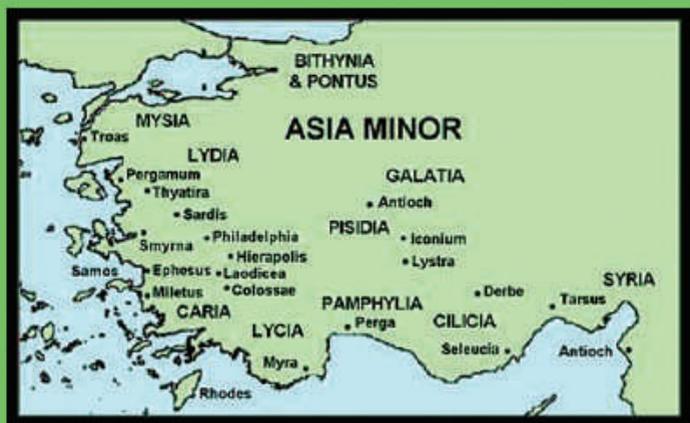
**(c) A licence for eisegesis** Both the preterist and historicist approaches suffer the difficulty of finding historical characters and events which fulfil the details of John's visions. Inevitably, events which seem material in the context of church history are then forced into the narrative, and elements of John's visions which find no convenient counterpart are dismissed as symbolic. Since there are no objective criteria by which to judge whether historical events can be said to fulfil the narrative, too much scope is given to the preconceptions of the interpreter, with details of what John saw being emphasised or neglected depending on the event the interpreter is trying to force upon the record.

**(d) More than allegory** Although an allegorical approach is not prone to the same kind of eisegesis, it misses the fact that Revelation itself confirms that details John saw have specific counterparts. The lampstands correspond to the seven churches, and the seven stars correspond to the angels of those churches (1:20). Similarly, the dragon is identified as Satan (12:3,9) and the seven heads of the beast are seven mountains and seven kings (17:9-10). The opening of the seals and sounding of the trumpets indicate events happening in order, and specific numbers (e.g. 7:4; 13:1) and lengths of time (e.g. 11:3) are recorded. John's own account therefore demands a more literal understanding than is conferred by a set of timeless principles, so that a plain reading of the book requires an interpretation which transcends allegory.

**(e) An explanation of the end** An explanation of the end In seeing all things as having been fulfilled, the preterist approach removes both the coming of Christ to the earth and His ultimate triumph. As a result, Revelation becomes little more than an obscure depiction of events long accomplished. The book is thereby reduced to historical curiosity, and the Scriptures as a whole are deprived of their eschatological position. The historicist and idealist positions also dilute Biblical eschatology, as the intensity of Revelation is seen to be answered in past events which by no means answer its gravity, or by rendering it nothing more than an imaginative explanation of basic principles. So the believer is left without understanding or expectation of what God's purposes might be for the future, and how those purposes might impact or provide comfort for the present.

The usual objection to a futurist interpretation is to question how Revelation could speak to those who first received John's letter. They were saints in seven churches of God undergoing tribulation for their faith (1:9). Their suffering was manifested in exile, slander, imprisonment and death (2:9-11;13) and they suffered attacks from false teachers who threatened their testimony in a deeply corrupt society (2:14-15,20-23). How would obscure visions of the future help them, for John's account was certainly intended to be meaningful to those who were commanded to 'keep what is written in it' (1:3; 22:7)? Surely the answer lies in this—that God's eternal purposes transcend the circumstances of the here and now and shall prevail in His good time. Against the painful backdrop of their suffering and decline, God revealed His Son (1:1) as the ultimate Victor over the ruler of this world. Like them, we are limited by the understanding of our own time; but in Revelation we stand with them and gaze along the prophetic programme, seeing with awe the blazing glory in which God shall defeat His enemies and usher in 'the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (11:15), the eternal rule of the Lamb who is coming, for the time is near.

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*New Testament churches in Asia Minor*

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