



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 17

Text: Rev. 5:8-14

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1 Αποκαλύψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν ἡμέραις ταύταις. 2 καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἁὐτὸν ὁ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ λέγων· ἄνοιξον τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ βιβλίου, 3 καὶ εἶπεν μοι· μὴ σφραγίσῃς τὸν λόγον τῆς προφητείας τῆς βιβλίου τούτου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάριος ὁ ποιῶν τὰς ἐνταύθις ἐπιταγὰς καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οὐκ ἐπιταγὰς αὐτοῦ ἡ γεγραμμένα.

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2. What the text means.

**Worshiping the LAMB**

### Greek NT

8 Καὶ ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον, τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάραν καὶ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, αἱ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, 9 καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες· ἅγιος εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἱματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους 10 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

11 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων 12 λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἅξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

13 καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας· τῷ καθήμενῷ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ

### La Biblia de las Américas

8 Cuando tomó el libro, los cuatro seres vivientes y los veinticuatro ancianos se postraron delante del Cordero; cada uno tenía un arpa y copas de oro llenas de incienso, que son las oraciones de los santos. 9 Y cantaban un cántico nuevo, diciendo: Digno eres de tomar el libro y de abrir sus sellos, porque tú fuiste inmolado, y con tu sangre compraste para Dios a gente de toda tribu, lengua, pueblo y nación. 10 Y los has hecho un reino y sacerdotes para nuestro Dios; y reinarán sobre la tierra. 11 Y miré, y oí la voz de muchos ángeles alrededor del trono y de los seres vivientes y de los ancianos; y el número de ellos era miradas de miradas, y millares de millares, 12 que decían a gran voz: El Cordero que fue inmolado digno es de recibir el poder, las riquezas, la sabiduría, la fortaleza, el honor, la gloria y la alabanza.

13 Y a toda cosa creada que está en el cielo, sobre la tierra, debajo de la tierra y en el mar, y a todas las cosas que en ellos hay, oí decir: Al que está sentado en el trono, y al Cordero, sea la alabanza, la honra, la gloria y el dominio por los siglos de los siglos. 14

### NRSV

8 When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 They sing a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints and people and nation; 10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and honor and glory and blessing!"

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and

### NLT

8 And as he took the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense -- the prayers of God's people! 9 And they sang a new song with these words: "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were killed, and your blood has ransomed every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 And you have caused them to become God's Kingdom and his priests. And they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked again, and I heard the singing of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and the living beings and the elders. 12 And they sang in a mighty chorus: "The Lamb is worthy -- the Lamb who was killed. He is worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing."

13 And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea. They also sang: "Blessing and honor

τῶ ἀρνίῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων. Y los cuatro seres vivientes decían: Amén. Y los ancianos se postraron y adoraron .

14 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἔλεγον· ἀμήν· καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν.



## INTRODUCTION

After the dramatic introduction of the Lamb into the heavenly scene, the second half of chapter five focuses on the worship of the Lamb who takes the scroll from the hand of God on the throne. All of those in heaven before the throne of God respond in worshipful praise of the Lamb who is now going to disclose the eternal will of God by opening the scroll one segment at a time. Angels now join in the worship, along with all creatures on earth as well as in heaven.

The depiction signals both the idealized response to the worthiness of the Lamb, along with the ultimate response to be given to Him. Out of this comes a challenging example of Christian worship as it should be always when God's people gather in worshipful praise of Christ, the Lamb of God. These early believers in the seven churches of Asia found renewed inspiration from this heavenly scene to worship Christ with vigor and passion. And so can we in the modern world!

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Again background issues will play key roles in correct interpretation of this text. Historically, the model of worship in the Jerusalem temple stands in the background here as the heavenly pattern for worship. Thus comprehending clearly how Christ was worshiped -- and will be worshiped -- in heaven grows out of greater understanding of how covenant Israel worshiped God in the Jerusalem temple.

Both the poetic nature of each of the three songs analyzed by literary structural analysis along and the historical pattern of chanting praises to God in temple worship will throw considerably greater light on our understanding of what takes place in this heavenly scene. This then points to contemporary relevancy and application of this text to our day.

### Historical Aspects:

The history behind and contained inside this text is important to understand.

**External History.** In the history of the hand copying of this passage from the second century

honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

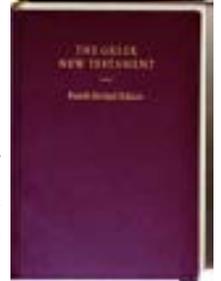
14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever."

14 And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped God and the Lamb.

through the middle ages, several variations of wording surface in these verses.

In the text apparatus of *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed), three places containing variations are considered important enough to be included in their listing. Remember that the criterion for inclusion is that the variation reflects a shifting of idea significantly that it would impact the translation of the passage into various modern languages. These three variations surface in verses nine and ten.



First in verse nine, ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου, **you ransomed for God with your blood**, is modified by several copyists.<sup>1</sup> The variations center around the inclusion and then the positioning of the personal pronoun ἡμᾶς, **us**. Even though the external manuscript evidence is spread out across the variations, the internal evidence strongly favors leaving out the personal pronoun ἡμᾶς, **us**.<sup>2</sup>

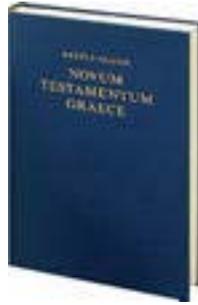
Second in verse ten, ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ

<sup>1</sup>{A} τῷ θεῷ A eth // ἡμᾶς 1 vg<sup>ms</sup> // τῷ θεῷ ἡμᾶς x 209 1006 1611 1841 2053 2329 2351 Byz [046] cop<sup>bo</sup> Andrew // ἡμᾶς τῷ θεῷ 2050 2344 it<sup>ar</sup>, sig<sup>vg</sup> vg syr<sup>ph</sup>, h arm Hippolytus; Cyprian Maternus Augustine Varimadum Fulgentius Primasius Beatus // τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν (see 5.10) 205 (cop<sup>sa</sup>) [Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>"Although the evidence for τῷ θεῷ is slight (A eth), this reading best accounts for the origin of the others. Wishing to provide ἡγόρασας with a more exactly determined object than is found in the words ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς κ.τ.λ., some scribes introduced ἡμᾶς either before τῷ θεῷ (94 2344 al) or after τῷ θεῷ (x 046 1006 1611 2053 al), while others replaced τῷ θεῷ with ἡμᾶς (1 2065\* Cyprian al). Those who made the emendations, however, overlooked the unsuitability of ἡμᾶς with αὐτοὺς in the following verse (where, indeed, the Textus Receptus reads ἡμᾶς, but with quite inadequate authority). See also the following comment." [[Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 666.]

ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, *you have made them to our God a kingdom and priests*, contains variations over the personal pronoun αὐτοὺς, *them*.<sup>3</sup> The alternative ἡμᾶς, *us*, is used instead in parallel to ἡμᾶς in the above variation in verse nine.<sup>4</sup> But the evidence is substantially in favor of the third person reference instead of the first person. Thus the editors give both places an ‘A’ rating reflecting the highest confidence in the accuracy of the adopted reading of the text.

But these two places are not the only parts of the text where alternative wordings shows up in the now existing manuscript copies available to us today. The text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) lists some 22 places where reading differences are present.<sup>5</sup> But as is generally true,,



<sup>3</sup>{A} αὐτοὺς κ A 205 209 1006 1611 1841 2050 2053 2344 2351 Byz [046] vg<sup>ww, st</sup> syrph, h cop<sup>bo</sup> arm (eth) Andrew; Cyprian Maternus // ἡμᾶς (see 5.9) it<sup>ar, gic</sup> vg<sup>cl</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> (Hippolytus); Varimadum Fulgentius Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>4</sup>“The third person pronoun, which is overwhelmingly supported, was replaced by ἡμᾶς in several versional and patristic witnesses, followed by the Textus Receptus.” [Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 666.]

### <sup>5</sup>Offenbarung 5,8

\* -ας M<sup>A</sup> (alternative spelling for κιθάραν as κιθάρας)

\* α κ 046. 1006. 1841. 2050. 2344 pc (αί is replaced with ᾱ)

\* κ\* 1854. 2329. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> (the second αi is omitted)

### Offenbarung 5,9

\* ημας I pc vg<sup>ms</sup>; Ir<sup>lat vid</sup> (τῷ θεῷ is omitted by some while ἡμᾶς is inserted)

| τ. θ. ημ. κ (°2050. 2344 sy; Hipp Cyp) M (lat)

| txt A

### Offenbarung 5,10

\* ημας pc gig vg<sup>cl</sup> sa; Prim Bea (αὐτοὺς is replaced with ἡμᾶς)

| -Hipp

\* A sa<sup>ms</sup> (τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν is omitted)

\* -λεις m sy<sup>h</sup> (βασιλείαν is replaced with βασιλείς)

| txt κ A 1611\*. 1854. 2050. 2329. 2344 pc latt sy<sup>ph, hmg</sup> co

\*<sup>1</sup> ιερατειαν κ 2344 (ιερεῖς is replaced with ιερατεῖαν)

\*<sup>2</sup> -εουσιν A 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329 M<sup>K</sup> (βασιλεύσουσιν is replaced with βασιλεύουσιν)

| txt κ 1854. 2050. 2053. 2344. 2351 M<sup>A</sup> lat co; Hipp Cyp

### Offenbarung 5,11

\* ως κ 046c. 1006. 1611c. 1841. 1854. 2050. 2344 M<sup>K</sup> sy sa (ὡς is inserted before φωνῆν)

| txt A 046\*. 1611\*. 2053. 2329. 2351 M<sup>A</sup> latt bo

### Offenbarung 5,12

\*<sup>†</sup> -ος A (ἄξιόν is replaced with ἄξιός)

| txt κ M

\* τον 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> (τὸν is inserted before

what careful analysis of each of the variations reveals is a variety of efforts to either improve the style of the Greek writing or to clarify perceived meaning of the text since subsequent centuries produced alternative ways of expressing ideas that had been written several centuries earlier. None of the alternatives change the meaning of the text as it had been written originally.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of this passage in the original language in full confidence of it being the words originally written by John.

**Internal History.** Again the internal history of vv. 8-14 raises minimal historical questions since this is apocalyptic visionary depiction that by nature is ‘supra historical’ language. But spacial terms do abound here that have first century antecedents, such as κιθάραν (harp), φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων (golden bowls full of incense) etc. These terms are better treated in the exegesis section of our study than here.

One must not forget that the background image of worship depicted here remains the same as in 4:6b-11, the temple in Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 AD. The actions of worship by the different groups in heaven put before us here reflect actions of the priests and the Levites in the earthly temple practices. Or, put more correctly theologically the temple practices were intended to mirror heavenly practices.

### Literary Aspects:

Critical here is the recognition of the continuation of the apocalyptic vision of John. As he progresses with his depiction, the genre form is extended to

πλοῦτον)

### Offenbarung 5,13

\* εστιν 1611. 2050 M<sup>A</sup> vg sy<sup>h</sup>; Prim (ἔστιν is inserted after ὀ)

\* κ 1854. 2050. 2053. 2329. 2344 pc ar vg<sup>ww</sup> bo (καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς is omitted by these manuscripts)

\*<sup>†</sup> εστιν A 1006. 1611c. 1841. 1854. 2329. 2344 M<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h</sup> (Ei-ther ἐστιν or ἄ ἐστιν is inserted after θαλάσσης)

| α εστιν 046. 2050. (2053. 2351) M<sup>A</sup> vg

| txt κ 1611\* pc ar gig sy<sup>h</sup>

\* , παντας (046). 1006. 1841. 2351 M<sup>K</sup> vg (πάντα is replaced with πάντας)

\*<sup>1</sup> και κ 1611. 2344 pc gig sy bo<sup>pl</sup> (καὶ is inserted after αὐτοῖς)

\* -ντα A M<sup>A</sup> (alternatives spellings of λέγοντας)

| -ντος (°1611). 1854

\* του -νου κ 1006. 1611. 1841. (2053) M<sup>A</sup> (τῷ θρόνῳ is replaced with alternative spelling τοῦ θρόνου)

\*<sup>†</sup> A 1611. 2344 pc (καὶ is omitted before τῷ ἄρνιῳ)

\*<sup>2</sup> αμην M (ἀμήν is inserted after αἰώνων)

| txt κ A P 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2050. 2053. 2344. 2351 pc latt sy co

### Offenbarung 5,14

\* λεγοντα το (2344) M<sup>K</sup> sa<sup>ms</sup> bo (ἔλεγον is replaced by λέγοντα)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 642–643]

include the variety of scenes that describe the successive events taking place in heaven. Again we are not looking a chronology but logical sequencing of events that are inner dependent and build off one another in order to create the large picture.

**Genre:** What we are looking at here is a continuation of the apocalyptic vision, part two, that begun with 4:1. John's visionary experience of eternity that lies beyond this earthly world is depicted in earthly comparisons largely centered in religious experience at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem prior to its destruction in 70 AD. For John, writing at the end of the first Christian century to readers in the Roman province of Asia, this provided him with the necessary linguistic comparisons for setting forth in writing his observations gained mentally while in his visionary travel to heaven. Using temple worship at Jerusalem as his communication vehicle placed him in the tradition of other Jewish apocalyptic writers during that general period of time. This was supplemented also by the prophetic visionary experiences of many of the Israelite prophets beginning with Isaiah in the eighth century before Christ. Their visionary encounters with God always left them on earth looking from a distance at heaven, while John was given the privilege of traveling to heaven in his vision as indicated in 4:1-2.

One of his observations was on the experience of worshiping God in heaven by a variety of creatures existing in heaven. The first of the worship scene is in 4:6b-11 and subsequent worship scenes will surface periodically in the remainder of the document.

A particular contour of the worship scene here is that chapter five in general reflects the investiture of the Lamb based on the literary foundations of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1-2. It is a celebration of the accomplishments of the Lamb that qualify Him to unroll the heavenly scroll.

In a limited way it is a apocalyptic version of the ascension of Christ from earth to heaven that is depicted in non-apocalyptic language elsewhere in the New Testament such as Luke 24:51 (also cf. 9:51) and Acts 1:9-11 (cf. also 2:33, 38 with Psalm 110:1 in the background).<sup>6</sup> Even these depictions play off Dan. 7:13.

<sup>6</sup>“Acts further presents Jesus’ ascension as an exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), an allusion to Ps. 110:1 (‘sit at my right hand’), and as an act of empowerment by which Jesus dispenses the Spirit and is recognized as “both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:33, 38). This portrayal is in keeping with the early Chris-

**Literary Setting:** The context of 5:8-14 is relatively clear. First, it completes the heavenly scene in 5:1-14 that introduces the Lamb who will play a dominant role in the unfolding scenes in the remainder of the book. Rev. 1-14 is a continuation of 4:1-11 that is framed by the repeated καὶ εἶδον, *then I saw*, in 5:1 and 6:1 which begins with Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, *after this I saw*, in 4:1. Consequently 5:1-14 sets up the visionary scenes that follow in chapters six and seven with the untying of the seven seals so that full disclosure of the heavenly scroll takes place.

**Literary Structure:** In internal arrangement of ideas within vv. 8-14 are visually depicted below in the block diagram of the Greek text as reflected in the rather literalistic English translation in the diagram.

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tian tradition that Jesus would be seated at God’s right hand (Mark 14:62 par.). Acts 2:34–35 explicitly connects Jesus’ ascension to a messianic interpretation of Ps. 110 which predicts the Messiah’s enthronement over his enemies. Jesus’ ascension and glorification in Acts is thus similar to the Enoch ascension traditions, Moses’ enthronement in Ezekiel the Tragedian (2nd century B.C.E.), the enthronement claim of 4Q491, and Rabbi Akiba’s belief in the enthronement of the Messiah (b. Hag. 14a).

“Other NT writings either refer to Jesus’ ascension as a future event or assume its occurrence. In John Jesus refers to his future ascension (John 3:13; 6:62; 20:17), and the ascension is alluded to on numerous occasions (7:33; 8:14, 21; 13:3; 14:2–3, 28; 16:5, 10, 28). John’s references to ascension are used to teach Jesus’ heavenly origin and his special relationship to God the Father. He is the one who descended from heaven and then ascended to heaven. This theme calls to mind Tobit and Joseph and Aseneth, where heavenly beings descend only to ascend (return) to their heavenly abode.

“The Epistles and Revelation share Acts’ view that Jesus’ ascension resulted in enthronement at God’s side and empowerment (Eph. 1:20–21; Rev. 1:12–20; 3:21; cf. 1 Pet. 3:22). Paul associates Jesus’ ascension with the Passion events (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 3:16 preserves what appears to be an early Christian hymn that alludes to Jesus’ ascension in connection with other events from his life). The description in Phil. 2:9–10 of Jesus’ exaltation by means of being given a name above every name and being paid homage alludes to his ascension-glorification (cf. 3 En. 10:1; 12:5; 14:1–5).

“Hebrews refers to Jesus’ ascension in the context of Jesus’ role as a heavenly priest who ascended in order to enter the heavenly temple and make purification for human sin (Heb. 1:3; 4:14; 6:19–20; 9:11–12). In later Jewish tradition Metatron is not a priest offering sacrifice like Jesus, but he is appointed to liturgical service and is stationed in heaven in order to ‘serve the throne of glory day by day’ (3 En. 7:1).”

[Phillip Munoa, “Ascension,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 110.]

<sup>5,8</sup>

And

167

the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down

when he took the scroll

before the Lamb

each one holding a harp

and

Page 4

/-----|  
golden  
full of incense  
which are the prayers of the saints,

5.9  
168 and  
**they chant a new song**  
saying,

"Worthy are you  
to take the scroll  
and  
to open its seals  
because you were slaughtered  
| and  
you ransomed to God (saints)  
| by your blood  
| out of every tribe  
| and  
| tongue  
| and  
| people  
| and  
| nation  
| and  
you made them to our God  
| a kingdom  
| and  
| priests,  
| and  
they are reigning  
upon the earth.

5.11  
169 And  
**I saw**  
and  
170 **I heard a voice of angels**

many  
in a circle around the throne  
and  
the living creatures  
and  
the elders,

171 and  
**the number of them was myriads of myriads**

| and  
| **thousands of thousands**

5.12  
saying  
in a loud voice,

Worthy is the Lamb  
| which was slaughtered  
to receive the power  
and  
riches  
and  
wisdom  
and  
might  
and  
honor  
and

glory  
and  
blessing!

5.13

And

**every creature**

in heaven  
and  
on earth  
and  
under the earth  
and  
upon the sea

and

**all the things in them**

172

| **I heard**

saying,

"to the One sitting on the throne

and

to the Lamb (be) blessing

| and

| honor

| and

| glory

| and

| might

forever and ever!

5.14

And

173

**the four living creatures were saying,**

Amen!

And

174

**the elders fell down**

and

175

--- ----- worshipped.

### Structural Analysis of the Text

The text divides itself into a series of worship expressions by various groups of creatures in heaven, and combinations of these groups: the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (#s 167-168); the angels (#s 169-171); all creatures with living creatures (#s 172-173); and the elders (174-175). These responses are triggered when the Lamb takes the scroll from God's right hand.

The creatures and the elders (#s 167-168) have both a harp and bowls of incense in their hands as they offer their chant (ἄδουσιν ὠδὴν καινὴν) up to the Lamb, which is defined as a ὠδὴν καινὴν. These are functioning in a priestly manner.

Next John introduces a numberless host of angels who are chanting a song of the worthiness of the Lamb to take the scroll and untie the seals (#s 169-171). They are introduced by John both seeing (εἶδον) and hearing (ἤκουσα) them.

Thirdly, every creature in both heaven and in the earthly creation of God (# 172) offer praise to both God and the Lamb, while the four living creatures (# 173)

offer the tradition response of ἀμήν.

Finally, the elders (#s 174-175) fall down and worship. The informal chiasmic sequential pattern here centers emphasis on the worship of the angels and all creatures who are introduced for the first time:

A Four living creatures and elders

B Angels

C All creatures in heaven and earth

A' Four living creatures and elders

The action of the Lamb taking the scroll from the hand of the One sitting on the throne (v. 7) is the central point of this scene of investiture. His qualifications are first asserted in vv. 1-6, and with His action of taking it, then celebrated in vv. 8-14. The royal dignity out of ancient culture permeates this scene thoroughly.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The most nature approach to exegeting the passage is thus around the internal structural arrangement of ideas, as presented about in the diagram. These four segments each contain distinctives, but col-

lectively also present a larger picture of worship. There are lessons to be learned about worship in modern Christianity from this pattern depicted as taking place in heaven.

### A. A New Praise, vv. 8-10

8 Καὶ ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον, τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάραν καὶ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, αἱ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, 9 καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες· ἅγιος εἶ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους 10 καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτούς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

8 When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 They sing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; 10 you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.”

The scene here is of these two groups of heavenly beings on their knees and holding both a harp and bowls of incense while they express their chant to the Lamb. The four living creatures are no longer standing as previously (cf. 4:6b-9). Neither are the twenty-four elders still seated on their thrones (cf. 4:4). Just as they fell on their knees in their praise to God (cf. 4:10-11, πεσοῦνται οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἐνώπιον τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου, καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν) so they and the creatures here are on their knees before the Lamb (τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου).

The decisive signal for worship is given in the secondary temporal dependent clause ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον, when He took the scroll.<sup>7</sup> Alluding back to verse seven that describes the Lamb taking the scroll from God’s right hand, this action signals the immediate response of the living creatures and the elders -- the two

<sup>7</sup>“καὶ ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον, τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου,” And when he took the scroll, the four cherubim and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.’ The instantaneous adoration of the heavenly court underscores the significance of the Lamb’s action in taking the scroll from God. This verse introduces a section consisting of vv 8–12, which, more than any other passage in Revelation (or in the NT generally), centers on the worship of Christ as the Lamb (Swete, 127; Bauckham, “The Worship of Jesus,” 118–49; id., “Jesus, Worship of,” ABD 3:812–19; id., Theology, 58–63).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 355.]

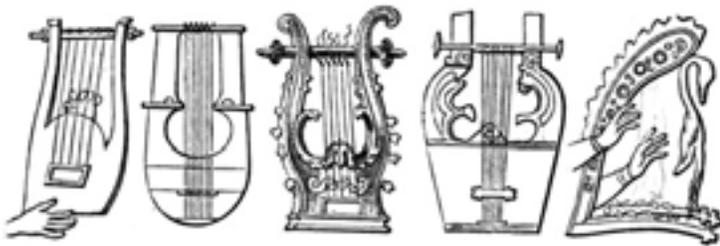
groups already introduced into the heavenly scene in chapter four.

In the two main clauses of the compound sentence in vv. 8-10, the core actions are ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, fell before the Lamb, and καὶ ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν, chanted a new song. Not until the end of the picture in v. 14 do we get a definition of what this is: προσεκύνησαν, they worshiped. This is one of several scenes depicting worship in Revelation.<sup>8</sup>

First the significance of ἔπεσαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου. Those taking this action were τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα καὶ οἱ εἴκοσι τέσσαρες πρεσβύτεροι, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Together these symbolize God’s creation and His covenant people represented before His throne. The verb πίπτω as an expression of worship shows up in Revelation at 1:17; 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4; 22:8. The bold print references allude to the four creatures and/or the twenty-four elders. In 1:17 and 22:8, John falls down to worship. For these two sets of heavenly creatures worship takes place while they are on their knees before God and the Lamb. This is consistently the picture throughout Revelation; cf. 4:10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4. The background meaning is that of showing homage to God as the superior person. A similar pattern followed coming into the presence of kings and other dignitaries in ancient culture.

Two distinctives surface here. First, ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, before the Lamb. This scene is the only one where these creatures fall down before the Lamb; everywhere else it is before God sitting on His throne. Second and more significantly, ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάραν καὶ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, αἱ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, each one possessing a lyre and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Ironically, the picture is of the elders on their knees before the Lamb with a lyre in one hand and a bowl of incense in the other while chanting praise. How they both hold and play the lyre with one hand is not explained. The musical instrument here is the κιθάρα, which is translat-

<sup>8</sup>“There are several scenes of worship in which the initial action involves falling down before God and worshipping him (using the two verbs πίπτειν and προσκυνεῖν), but always varying somewhat in phraseology (4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). Rev 5:8, however, is the only scene in Revelation in which members of the heavenly court fall down before the Lamb, though the term προσκυνεῖν, as already noted above, is conspicuously absent, thus suggesting a degree of subordination (Beskow, *Rex Gloriam*, 140–41). Irenaeus paraphrases Rev 5:3–7 and seems to interpret the taking of the sealed scroll from the hand of God as ‘receiving power over all things from the same God who made all things by the Word’ (Adv. Haer. 4.20.2); i.e., the βιβλίον is construed as a symbol of Christ’s sovereignty (Stefanovič, “Background,” 9–10).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 355.]



ed as harp, lyre, zither, cither etc.<sup>9</sup> These instruments ranged from two strings to ten strings with the larger instruments being played with a 'pick.'<sup>10</sup> The background image here is very likely Hebrew from כנור (kinnôr).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>κιθάρα, -ας, ἡ, [in LXX chiefly for כנור, freq. in Pss (32 (33):2, al.); and in Da (3:5, al.) for קיתרס, itself a transliteration of κίθαρς, the Homeric form of κ. (cf. CB, Dn., Iviii);] a lyre, harp: 1 Co 14:7, Re 5:8; 14:2; 15:2.†

κιθαρίζω, [in LXX: Is 23:16 (גן pi)\*;] to play upon the lyre or harp: 1 Co 14:7, Re 14:2.†

[G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 247].

<sup>10</sup>“The ancient kithára (or lyre) was without a neck and the strings were open like the modern harp (1 Cor. 14:7; Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2; see Sept.: Gen. 31:27; 2 Chr. 9:11). Josephus describes the Hebrew harp as having ten strings and being struck with a key.” [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000)].

<sup>11</sup>כנור (kinnôr). Harp. (ASV and RSV similar.) A musical instrument having strings and a wooden frame. Commonly associated with joy and gladness. The word seems to be of Indian derivation, there being an Indian stringed instrument called a *kinnāra*. The word itself, if not the entire instrument, seems to have come into the Hebrew vocabulary via Hittite (cf. KB, in loc). Probably the *kinnôr* was a lyre rather than a true harp. Lyres are pictured in a number of ancient paintings and sculptures.

Although most of the references to harps depict them in a cultic context, about six references indicate that it was a general accompaniment for recreation and relaxation. Its accompaniment was common in feasts (Gen 31:27), presumably played by dancing girls (Isa 23:16). The *kinnôr* is the first musical instrument mentioned in the Bible.

Both Job (21:12) and Isa (5:12) declare that it is the wicked who have times of rejoicing and gladness, and both contemplate the injustice of this.

Most of the references show the harp in a religious setting. It and other instruments characterized the sons of the prophets (I Sam 10:5; Ps 49:4 [H 5]; cf. I Sam 16:23). After the prevalence of the harp and other instruments in the rejoicing over the ark's return (II Sam 6:5; I Chr 13:8), instrumental music seems to have come into its own in Israel's worship (I Chr 25:1, 3, 6). Study of the joyous psalms associated with harps shows that the steadfast

The precise reference cannot be determined because the one Greek word covers all shapes and sizes.<sup>12</sup>

Also in the other hand the elders held φιάλας<sup>13</sup> χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων, golden bowls full of incense.<sup>14</sup> love, faithfulness and justice of the Creator-Redeemer were central to Israel's rejoicing.

[John N. Oswalt, “1004 בנר,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 447.

<sup>12</sup>“In Greek tradition the kithara (κιθάρα) is a more elaborate form of the lyre (λύρα) and had strings of equal length (harps have strings of unequal length), which are played by plucking. In the Greek world, the lyre and the flute were the only instruments used in serious music. The sound box was made from the carapace of a tortoise (cf. Hom. *Hymn to Hermes* 39–61) or a wooden box of similar shape with ox hide stretched over the concave side.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 356.]

<sup>13</sup>Strictly speaking the precise language of the Greek text requires the image of each elder (ἔχοντες ἕκαστος) holding a κιθάραν καὶ φιάλας, a lyre and bowls (plural). Most commentators ignore this feature of the Greek text. Such an image would not be humanly possible with only two hands. This is further signaling of the apocalyptic nature of the picture being painted by John.

<sup>14</sup>“The word φιάλη, usually translated ‘bowl’ (RSV; NRSV; NEB; REB; NIV; Louw-Nida, § 6.124), must be understood in this context as a cultic utensil and is therefore translated ‘bowl used in offerings’ by BAGD, 858, and Opferschale, ‘offering dish,’ by Bauer-Aland, 1711. The term φιάλη occurs twelve times in Revelation (5:8; 15:7; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1; 21:9). The meaning of φιάλη in 5:8, however, appears to be slightly different from the meaning of φιάλη in the other eleven references. Here the φιάλαι are filled with incense and are used in a positive, beneficial way, while in the other references the φιάλαι are said to contain the wrath of God and are used to inflict punishments on the earth and its inhabitants. The problem in understanding the significance of these ‘offering bowls’ or ‘incense pans’ lies in determining whether the author intentionally modeled them after Israelite cultic utensils (which presumably were also used in the second temple until its

In the Old Testament descriptions of cultic vessels to be used in the temple, nothing corresponds exactly to this φιάλα here with incense. But Jewish writers in the first centuries of the Christian era speak of bowls and incense being in the temple practice as a part of the later interpretive tradition.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, φιάλαι are commonly used in description of temple vessels in the Greco-Roman pagan religious traditions, thus providing John's non-Jewish initial readers with a clear frame of reference for the term.<sup>16</sup>

destruction in A.D. 70) or he based these 'offering bowls' on more general conceptions of cultic usage and sacrificial practice common to Greeks and Romans as well as Jews. Here we are certainly dealing with the early Jewish conception that angelic beings function as the heavenly priests of God, so that cultic furnishings (e.g., the altar of incense, the ark of the covenant), cultic utensils (e.g., incense pans, censers, libation bowls), places of worship (e.g., the tabernacle, the temple), and cultic liturgies (the sanctus, doxologies, hymns) are all part of the heavenly worship of God presided over and accomplished by angelic beings." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 356.]

<sup>15</sup>"The מִנְחָה *mēnaqqiygā*, or κύαθος, was a bowl into which the libation was poured (Kelso, *Ceramic*, 24, no. 54). Ep. Arist. 33 (cf. Jos. Ant. 12.40) mentions three rather than four types of vessels: 'mixing bowls, bowls, a table, and libation bowls of gold' (κρατήρων τε καὶ φιαλῶν καὶ τραπέζης καὶ σπονδειῶν χρυσίου). It is noteworthy that Josephus uses the Greek terminology of the Epistle of Aristeas, which has no relationship to the terminology of the LXX. The longer description in Ep. Arist. 42 (which Josephus abbreviates) reports that twenty gold and thirty silver bowls (φιάλαι) were constructed, as well as five mixing bowls (κρατήραι), while closer descriptions of the gold and silver mixing bowls (κρατήραι) and the golden bowls (χρυσῆς φιάλας) are found in Ep. Arist. 73–79 (cf. Jos. Ant. 12.78–82). Josephus makes no attempt to harmonize either the number or the names of the vessels used in connection with the table of the presence he found in the Epistle of Aristeas with his earlier account in Ant. 3.143 (where he was dependent on Exod 25:29, which mentions four utensils); he mentions only two kinds of objects on the table of the presence, the bread of the presence and two bowls of gold filled with incense (φιάλαι δύο χρύσειαι λιβάνου πλήρεις), in apparent continuity with Lev 24:5–7 and in agreement with m. Menah 11:5–8. In Ant. 3.256, however, he speaks of 'two golden plates filled with frankincense' (δύο δὲ χρυσέων ... πινάκων λιβανωτοῦ γεμόντων). The ritual procedure was that after the old loaves of the presence and the bowls of incense were replaced, the incense was burned (on the golden altar) and the loaves were eaten by the priests (m. Menah 11:7). Therefore, since the φιάλαι in Rev 5:8 are used not to pour libations but simply to contain incense, they correspond most closely to the incense pans (כַּפֹּת *kappōt*) of Exod 25:29; 37:16, the only vessels used in connection with the table of the presence according to Josephus Ant. 3.143 and m. Menah 11:5–8. Three iron incense shovels from the eighth century B.C. have been excavated at Tel Dan (pictured and described in BARev 15 [1989] 31). That the twenty-four elders have harps and incense pans suggests their angelic status." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 357–358.]

<sup>16</sup>"The religious use of cultic utensils such as the φιάλη, how-

This temple vessel for worship is interpreted for us by John as αἱ εἰσὶν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, **which are the prayers of the saints**. Clearly the golden bowls are symbols rather than literal objects.<sup>17</sup> Incense as a symbol of prayers is common in the Old Testament. Thus the image of a material object, φιάλαι, actually is the immaterial object of αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων. Primarily the picture is of the incense flowing out of the φιάλαι upward to heaven as the prayers of the saints.<sup>18</sup> An im-

ever, is not restricted to ancient Israel or Judaism. The φιάλη is attested in Greek religion (Diodorus 4.49.8), where it was used primarily to pour libations of wine. The term is also used in an entirely different context in connection with revelatory magic ceremonies, where visions are reflected on the surface of a liquid contained in a bowl (PGM IV.224, 3210; LXII.44, 48). The equivalent Latin term is *patera*, meaning a shallow, broad dish used in libation offerings (OLD, 1308; see Varro *De lingua Latina* 5.122 [LCL tr.], 'it is this kind of cup that the magistrate uses in sacrificing to the gods, when he gives wine to the god'). Vergil *Georgics* 2.192 mentions offering wine from golden *pateras* (*qualem pateris libamus et auro*). A particularly relevant use of incense took place in Roman imperial ceremonial in which officiants carried incense in *turibula* and burned it in the sacred fire in the presence of the emperor (Alföldi, *MDAIRA* 49 [1934] 111–13)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 358.]

<sup>17</sup>"This phrase, like that in v 6, is an interpretive gloss or parenthetical explanation added by the author (Spitta, 67). Although Rev 8:3–4 distinguishes between incense and prayer and does not treat the former as a metaphor for the latter, here incense is clearly understood metaphorically. The origin of this metaphorical interpretation is found in Ps 141:2 (MT 141:3), 'Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice' (H.J. Hermisson, *Sprache und Ritus im altisraelitischen Kult: Zur "Spiritualisierung" der Kultbegriffe im AT*, WMANT 19 [Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1965] 154; W. Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994] 318)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 358.]

<sup>18</sup>"Although Rev 8:3–4 distinguishes between incense and prayer and does not treat the former as a metaphor for the latter, here incense is clearly understood metaphorically. The origin of this metaphorical interpretation is found in Ps 141:2 (MT 141:3), 'Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice' (H.J. Hermisson, *Sprache und Ritus im altisraelitischen Kult: Zur "Spiritualisierung" der Kultbegriffe im AT*, WMANT 19 [Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1965] 154; W. Zwickel, *Der Tempelkult in Kanaan und Israel* [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1994] 318). Here both מִנְחָה *minhā*, 'sacrifice,' and קֶטֶר *qēṭoret*, 'incense offering,' are spiritualized (Rendtorff, *Opfers*, 65); for a critique of sacrifice in the OT, see Pss 40:6; 51:16–17. This spiritualization is particularly evident in Ps 51:17, 'the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit,' which in the context of vv 15–17 refers to prayer (cf. Heb 13:15; Barn. 2:10). The metaphorical understanding of incense and sacrifice is also reflected in Justin *Dial.* 118.2, 'Do not think that Isaiah or the other prophets speak of blood sacrifices or libations being presented at the altar on the occasion of his coming again, but of true and spiritual praises and thanksgivings.' Origen links the metaphorical interpretation of incense in Rev 5:8 with that found in Ps 141:2 (*Contra Cels.* 8.17; Page 9

portant clue to the nature of John's depiction of these heavenly items and actions.

In the background imagery of the Jerusalem temple practices to this heavenly picture stands the role of prayer in temple worship. In the second temple period that includes the first century to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, prayer played an important secondary role behind that of the offering of sacrifices. Later in post-temple emerging Judaism prayer found a greater role in Jewish worship as a symbolical, spiritual sacrificial offering placed before God.<sup>19</sup> The elders by holding the φιάλας before the throne of God signal that the prayers of God's people back on earth do indeed reach heaven and are acknowledged in heaven as important to God.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly the αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων are coming from God's people on earth. The term τῶν ἁγίων, of the [saints](#), is unquestionably a Christian reference.<sup>21</sup> Here

tr. H. Chadwick, Origen: *Contra Celsum* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1953]:

Our altars are the mind of each righteous man, from which true and intelligible incense with a sweet savour is sent up, prayers from a pure conscience. That is why it is said by John in the Apocalypse "And the incense is the prayers of the saints," and by the Psalmist "Let my prayers be as incense before thee."

David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 358–359.

<sup>19</sup>"In the ritual of the second temple, prayer was increasingly used, yet was never considered equal to the sacrifices (Heinemann, *Prayer*, 123). On the rabbinic conception that prayer can take the place of sacrifice, see G. F. Moore, *Judaism 2:217–19*. According to Tg. Neb. Mal 1:12, 'your prayer is like a pure offering before me' (tr. Cathcart-Gordon, Targum). Pagan Greek philosophy developed the notion of the λογικὴ θυσία, 'rational or spiritual sacrifice,' which rejected bloody sacrifices as well as the formal liturgical features of cultic worship and emphasized instead the inner disposition of the human spirit (Casel, *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* 4 [1924] 37ff.)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 359.]

<sup>20</sup>Here is one place where our Catholic friends have an advantage over us Protestant Christians, because of the extensive use of incense in the Catholic Mass as a symbol of prayers being offered up to God.

<sup>21</sup>"The term ἅγιοι, 'the holy ones, saints,' is used here of Christians and so should be translated 'God's people,' since the term emphasizes their relationship to God, not their sanctity (see Louw-Nida, § 11.27). The term occurs twelve times elsewhere in Revelation (8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9) and frequently in early Christian literature (Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 8:27; 12:13; 15:26; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 6:1–2; 14:33; 2 Cor 1:1; 13:12; Eph 1:15; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 4:22; Col 1:4; 1 Tim 5:10; Philem 5, 7; Heb 6:10; 13:24; Jude 3; Ignatius Smyrn. 1:2; Justin Dial. 139.4). The term 'holy ones' or 'saints' is derived from Jewish tradition, where it can refer to both the people of God and angels (Dequeker, *OTS* 18 [1973] 108–87). Ps 34:9 (MT 34:10) is the only undisputed passage in the Hebrew OT in which the term קְדוֹשִׁים *qəḏōšīm*, 'holy ones,' is used of Israelites (Deut 33:3 is problematic; the Fragmentary Targum interprets 'ho-

the best sense of the term is "God's people" redeemed by the Lamb. In no sense of the term does this refer to an elite class of super Christians as some traditions twist to meaning into. Consistent with universal New Testament usage, it designates the people on earth who have come to God through the sacrificed Lamb, Jesus Christ. What a powerful affirmation to the believers in the seven churches of Asia being castigated by both the Jewish synagogue and often by the local Roman government.

How they could play the lyre while holding the bowls of incense is rather difficult to imagine.<sup>22</sup> But as numerous first century pagan images of heavenly beings worshiping deities while holding a lyre in one hand and an incense pan in the other suggests, the point of the conflicting image is not literal but symbolic of different aspects of adoration of the divine. John's initial readers would have clearly understood his depiction this way. Our much later difficulties in grasping the meaning of the image comes largely from our inability to read apocalyptic imagery clearly and easily. But once the true meaning of the picture begins sinking in, the picture takes on a powerful and marvelous meaning of true worship of Almighty God in heaven.

Thus with these two items in either hand, the crea-

ly ones' as 'holy angels'; see M. L. Klein, *Fragment-Targums* 2:87, 188); in Aramaic portions of the OT, the corresponding term קְדוֹשִׁין *qaddišin* is used of Israelites in Dan 7:21–22, 25, 27; 8:24. In early Jewish literature 'holy ones' is often used of righteous Jews (1 Enoch 38:4, 5; 41:2; 43:4; 48:1; 50:1; 51:2; 58:3, 5; 62:8; 65:12; 99:16; 100:5; 1QM 6:6; 10:10; 12:1b; 16:1). Perhaps even more commonly, however, ἅγιοι or its equivalent is frequently used in early Jewish literature of angels (see LXX Ps 82:4; LXX Dan 7:8, 21, 22; 8:24; Wis 18:9; Tob 12:15 [MSS B A]; 1 Macc 1:46 [though here the Latin *sancta*, 'holy things,' may be preferable to the Greek ἅγιους, 'holy ones'; see J. A. Goldstein, 1 Maccabees, AB 41 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976) 221–22]; Jub. 17:11; 31:14; T. Levi 18:11; T. Iss. 5:4; T. Dan 5:11–12; 3 Macc 6:9 [MS A]; 1 Enoch 47:2; 57:2; 60:4; 61:8, 10; 69:13; 71:4; 2 Apoc. Bar. 66:2; see Sib. Or. 5.161, 432; 1QM 10:12; 12:1a; 1QSb 1:5; 1QS 11:7–8; 1QH 4:25), a usage carried over into early Christianity (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; Col 1:12; Eph 1:18; see Benoit, "Ἄγιοι," 83–99)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 359.]

<sup>22</sup>"Since each of the twenty-four elders holds both a *kithara* and a golden incense pan, it is difficult to imagine how the author thought that they could play the former without first disposing of the latter (see Apoc. Mos. 38.2, where some angels have censers [θυμιατήρια], while others have *kitharas*, and bowls and trumpets [κιθάρας καὶ φιάλας καὶ σάλπιγγας]). Yet the scene is not as awkward as it appears, for several Attic red-figured vases depict a libation scene with Apollo holding a *kithara* in his left hand and a φιάλη, or wide shallow drinking dish, in his right (Maas-Snyder, *Stringed Instruments*, 71, plate 1; 77, plate 16; 78, plate 19; 100, plate 2), suggesting that this represents a typical way in which a worship scene can be visualized." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 355.]

tures and the elders fall on their knees before the Lamb and began chanting (λέγοντες) their praise of Him.

Here the introduction to the song is unique to the other songs in chapters four and five: ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν λέγοντες. Although in both modern English as well as in ancient Greek the use of a verb and a direct object from the same root stem is not generally considered proper grammar, we find Koine Greek writers doing this kind of thing with some frequency.<sup>23</sup> The New Testament writers tend even more toward this due to its frequent use in both Hebrew and Aramaic, which was their 'mother' tongue even though writing in Greek.

The verb ᾄδουσιν from ᾄδω is used five times in the entire New Testament: Rev. 5:9 (ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν); 14:3 (ᾄδουσιν [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν); 15:3 (ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως); Eph. 5:19 (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ); Col. 3:16 (ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ).

In Col. 3:16 the participle is linked to the regular verb Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐνοικεῖτω ἐν ὑμῖν πλουσίως, *Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly*. One of the ways of getting Christ's words deep into our lives is by ᾄδοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ, *chanting in our hearts to God with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs in gratitude*.<sup>24</sup> Thus the use of praise is a vehicle for incorporating the words of Christ (not our composed words) em-

<sup>23</sup>Called a Cognate Accusative in Greek Grammar, the classical writers considered it inferior expression and a sign of ignorance of the language.

<sup>24</sup>Although the English translations suggest distinct differences between ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, the reality is that no real distinction in meaning or specification among these three Greek words is legitimately possible with present modern understanding of the role of music and musical terminology in the ancient Greco-Roman world. This is true despite the exaggerated attempts of many modern commentators to find distinctions -- something that represents reading modern categories back into the ancient world where such categories did not exist.

"In the NT there is still no precise differentiation between ᾠδή, ψαλμός, and ὕμνος, e.g., in Col. 3:16 or Eph. 5:19, in contrast to a later time, when ᾠδή (*canticum*) came to be used only for biblical songs (apart from the Psalms) used in the liturgy. From the NT passages we may gather the following elements in the concept of the Christian ᾠδή as also illustrated and confirmed from other sources." [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:165]

Consequently in the context of Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 the praises that were ψαλμοῖς would most likely have referenced those considered as Messianic Psalms by early Christians. But ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς would have most likely referenced poetical words of praise composed by early Christians for the adoration of God and Christ in public worship. Very possibly they were seen as originating directly from words that Christ had spoken during His earthly teaching ministry. Paul does not give us a sample in either Colossians or Ephesians. Perhaps the nearest thing are his uses of Christological poems of praise in places like Phil. 2:5-11 etc. But these may have only served as 'confessions of faith' to be repeated in unison by the assembled believers in worship, rather than musical oriented praises.

bedded deeply into our life. Central to the Jewish use of the psalms in temple worship along with early Christian use of ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς was to embed the very words of God into the interior life and consciousness of the worshiper. This came out of the belief in the spiritually nourishing impact of sacred scripture upon the inner life of the one devoted to God. Getting those words buried into the consciousness of the worshiper played an important role in the spiritual development of the individual.

In the somewhat related passage in Eph. 5:19, the participle phrase ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ, *chanting and praising in your heart to the Lord*, is linked to πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, *be being filled with the Spirit*. Also linked is λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς [ἐν] ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς, *speaking to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. In both Colossians and Ephesians the location of these praising activities is τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν, *in your heart*. The heart in the ancient world was not the location for emotion and feeling, but rather for the choosing and deciding part of us, the volitional side.

Thus the point of Paul in both passages is the inward praise of God should be of a nature to prepare us to ingest the word of Christ or the presence of the Spirit into our life via deliberate surrender to Him.<sup>25</sup> For the Christian communities of Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea and other cities in the province of Asia some forty years plus before John's depiction here in Revelation five, the point was that praise of God done properly should be a training tool to bring us through deliberate surrender to Christ into deeper awareness of both Christ's teaching and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Then John later on addresses those same congregations and others with the similar emphasis on heavenly worship that defines ᾠδὴν καινὴν, *a new praise*, sung in heaven and thus then on earth by God's people following the heavenly model. Both here in 5:9 and in 14:3 the living creatures and the elders (5:9) and the 144,000 (14:3) chant ᾠδὴν καινὴν. The latter sang ᾠδὴν καινὴν which no one else could learn (14:3-5) before the living creatures and the elders. But in 5:9 the living creatures and the elders sing ᾠδὴν καινὴν before the Lamb. Clearly these are two separate songs presented by different groups before God in heaven. We are not given the content of the second new song,

<sup>25</sup>This is not the modern thinking that music gets the congregation ready for the sermon. Instead, the chanting of these words of Christ in praise to God bring them deep into the awareness of the believer and thus nourish and transform the individual's life. The chanting of such words of praise τῇ καρδίᾳ also conditions the individual to more fully accept the leadership of the Holy Spirit over the life of the believer. What Paul describes in these two texts is something typically far more profound than just singing some Christian songs prior to the preacher delivering the sermon.

but in chapter five the content of this first new song is provided in vv. 9b-10. The idea of a ‘new song,’ ὦδὴν καινὴν, is found only here and in 14:3. The Hebrew background of this phrase suggests that it is a new composition created to celebrate the accomplishments of the Lamb and His worthiness.<sup>26</sup> The tendency to read eschatological implications into the phrase is highly questionable.

The first line of the praise is ἄξιός εἰ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγιδας αὐτοῦ, *worthy are you to receive (or, take) the book and to open its seals*. Thus their beginning words underscore the central theme of the entire scene in vv. 1-14. This theme of the Lamb being ἄξιός permeates the entire scene (cf. vv. 2, 4, 9, 12). Additionally this is the second of three praises to begin with ἄξιός εἰ, *worthy are you...* (4:11; 5:9; 5:12).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>“The Hebrew phrase שִׁיר הַדָּשָׁן *šir hādāš*, ‘new song,’ occurs seven times in the OT (Pss 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10) and simply refers to the introduction of a new composition for the purpose of celebrating a very special occasion, or the introduction of a new composition into a setting in which many songs have been used traditionally for a very long time. In the OT the phrase is used in formulaic clauses (R. C. Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967] 58) and is thought by some (without convincing evidence) to have eschatological overtones (H.-J. Kraus, *Theologie der Psalmen* [Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1979] 1:410). The Syriac phrase *tsbwht. hdt.*, ‘new song,’ occurs twice in Odes Sol. 31:3; 41:6. Similarly Pss. Sol. 15:3 speaks of ‘a new psalm with song in gladness of heart’ (ψαλμὸν καινὸν μετὰ ὠδῆς ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ καρδίας). Philo, Mos. 1.255 refers to the song sung by the Israelites in Num 21:17–18 as an ἄσμα καινόν, ‘new song.’ In all these cases the ‘new song’ celebrates a saving action on the part of God (Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus*, 52; Jörns, *Evangelium*, 48–49). See the references in Str-B, 3:801–2. The *Mek. de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Shirata 1 (Lauterbach, *Mekilta* 2:2–6) refers to the Song of Moses in Exod 15 as one of ten songs, in the tenth of which the biblical term ‘new song’ is clearly understood eschatologically:

The tenth song will be recited in the future, as it is said: “Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth” (Isa 42:10). And it also says: “Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of the saints” (Ps 149:1).

“In Greek literature, there is a topos that new songs are the best songs. Pindar praises old wine but the flowers of new songs (ἄνθεα ὕμνων νεωτέρων; Athenaeus Deipn. 1.25e; Pindar Olymp. 9.48–49). According to Odyssey 1.351–52, ‘people praise that song which comes newest to their ears,’ and Lucian alludes to that same passage when he observes that ‘a new song [τὴν νέαν ὠδὴν] is agreeable to the hearers’ (Zeuxis 2). Plato, also quoting Odyssey 1.351, suggests that Homer means not ‘new songs [ἄσματα νέα]’ but a ‘new way of song τρόπων ὠδῆς νέων’ (Rep. 4.424b–c).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 359–360.]

<sup>27</sup>“Three hymns in Revelation begin with the adjective ἄξιός, “worthy” (4:11; 5:9, 12), all within 4:1–5:14. The first ἄξιός εἰ, in the second-person singular du-Stil, ‘thou style’ (Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 143–63), introduces a hymn to God in 4:11, while the second ἄξιός εἰ introduces a hymn to the Lamb in 5:9. There is then a switch to the third person, the so-called er-Stil, ‘he style’ (Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 163–66), and the phrase ἄξιός ἐστιν in 5:12

The sense of ἄξιός is that of validated qualification. Embedded in the Jewish heritage was the principle of a divine testing of an individual in the harshness of life experience in order to determine ἄξιός. An early expression surfaces in the OT Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 3:5:

καὶ ὀλίγα παιδευθέντες μεγάλα εὐεργετηθήσονται,  
ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐπείρασεν αὐτοὺς καὶ εὗρεν αὐτοὺς ἀξίους  
ἑαυτοῦ·†

*Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;*

That John is working off this principle becomes evident by the causal dependent clause introduced by ὅτι in verse nine. By Christ being slaughtered as the Lamb of God, he demonstrated His worthiness in a manner that God validates through turning that slaughter into redemption for His people worldwide. Thus the praise to the Lamb celebrates and affirms this worthiness by Christ from the outset.

This ἄξιός allows Christ to do two things: λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγιδας αὐτοῦ, *to take the scroll and to open its seals*. The 2 Aorist infinitive λαβεῖν, from the verb λαμβάνω contains both the perspective of taking something and also of receiving something. But several other Greek verbs express the idea of grabbing hold of something aggressively, and this is not contained in λαμβάνω. What is then celebrated is the receiving of the scroll from the hand of God by the Lamb. God graciously gave it to the Lamb out of the Lamb’s ἄξιός which He Himself had validated from the Lamb’s death.

introduces a second hymn to the Lamb. Hymns directed toward Christ in heaven are mentioned in Ap. Jas. 14.29–30; 15.19–22. This hymn in vv 9–10 is addressed to the Lamb, and so might appropriately be designated “the Song of the Lamb” (see Comment on 15:3). Van Unnik (“Worthy,” 445–61) has collected numerous texts in which the ascription of worthiness is linked to divine revelations that can only be received by those who are considered ‘worthy’ (Philo, Cher. 42; Jos. J. W. 2.138; 5.378; Barn. 9:9; 14:1, 4; Ps.-Clement Hom. Ep. Petri 1.2; 3.1 [Rehm, Pseudoklementinen 1:1–2]; Ps.-Clement Hom. Diamart. 2.2 [Rehm, 1:3]; Second Book of Jeu 43; Pistis Sophia 106). He goes on to argue that the status of ‘worthiness’ is not a quality that entitles a person to have access to divine revelation but the right inner attitude combined with right behavior (van Unnik, “Worthy,” 457–58). This can be made evident by a severe test, as Wis 3:5 speaks of the righteous: ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἐπείρασεν αὐτοὺς καὶ εὗρεν αὐτοὺς ἀξίους ἑαυτοῦ, ‘because God tested them and found them worthy of himself.’ The connection of ‘testing’ with ‘worthiness’ is therefore found before the first century A.D. in a context that has nothing to do with the mystery cults or with imagery drawn from such cults, as do several of the passages cited above. The conquest of the Lamb that reveals that he is worthy is the death he suffered, which became a means of redemption for people everywhere on earth, as v 9 explains.”[David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 360.]

But also important is authorization to untie the strings of the seal in order to expose the contents of the scroll. Up to this point, its contents were known only to God. But now the Lamb has the authorization to make those contents known to God's people -- something to be described in chapters six and seven.

This disclosure will come first to John and then through him to all of God's people who read this document. To the first century Roman censors who most likely examined this document before allowing it to leave the island of Patmos, the scroll and its contents seemed to be nothing but religious gibberish. But to those believers in the seven churches who heard the contents being read in the house church assemblies, these words were marvelous declarations of the absolute supremacy of Almighty God over their lives and their world.

Again this is a realization of a fundamental principle set forth by the earthly Jesus in His use of parables: ὑμῖν δέδοται γνῶναι τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἐκείνοις δὲ οὐ δέδοται, *To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to these it has not been given* (Mt. 13:10 with parallels in Mark 4:10 and Luke 8:10). The cautious sharing of divine revelation by disciples is advocated by Jesus within the same principle in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 7:6, Μὴ δῶτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσὶν μηδὲ βάλητε τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων, *Do not give the holy thing to dogs, nor throw your pearls to the pigs.*

The second line of the praise provides the foundation for the first line: ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους. This is the first of three foundation declarations: ἐσφάγης καὶ ἡγόρασας... καὶ ἐποίησας.... *You were slaughtered and you sanctified...and you made....*<sup>28</sup> This is a beautiful liturgy of the meaning of the cross of Jesus Christ, using the passive voice first and followed by two active voice verbs. Sinful humanity slaughtered Christ horribly on the cross, but out of that being done to Him Christ then used it to make holy and to create a kingdom of people devoted to God Almighty.

The beautiful liturgy, introduced by ἐσφάγης, summarizes eloquently the cross of Christ as the foundation for Christ's ἄξιος before God. The full emotive as well as cognitive force of ἐσφάγης is the slaughtering of the person Christ as a 'human sacrifice' on the cross.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>“The ὅτι clause introduces the basis for the worthiness ascribed to the Lamb in v 9b, by emphasizing three actions, all expressed with aorist verbs, that express the saving death of Christ with its salvific effects: ἐσφάγης, ‘you were slaughtered,’ ἡγόρασας, ‘you redeemed,’ and ἐποίησας, ‘you made.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 361.]

<sup>29</sup>“The term σφάζειν, ‘to slaughter,’ is a term with implications of violence and mercilessness (Louw-Nida, § 20.72); this term is used of the execution of Jesus only in Revelation (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8;

Although justified in the evil minds of the Jewish leaders, and with the Romans fully indifferent to killing another Jew, the death of Christ on the cross was a brutal slaughtering of a human being completely unjustly and in the most dehumanizing manner imaginable. The verb ἐσφάγης captures this far more graphically than the other terms often used in reference to Christ dying on the cross. Were one to have watched the priests in the Jerusalem temple kill and carve up the carcass of the sacrificial lambs for Passover an indelible image of the brutality of such actions would be drilled into our minds forever. For John's readers, some of whom had witnessed such actions, and others who had witnessed similar actions in the pagan temples of Asia Minor, the verb conveyed the horror of a human being so executed as a sacrifice.

That such was even necessary -- and it profoundly was -- only highlights the utter sinfulness of human sin and depravity. Only such an action by Christ could successfully produce the cleansing of such sinfulness from the human life. And Christ willingly went to the slaughter for your sake and mine! Truly He is indeed worthy to disclose to us the eternal will and plan of God. We owe such celebration and affirmation of our appreciation to Him for this. The worshipful actions of the creatures and the elders profoundly challenge us to follow their example in worshipful praise and adoration! We dare never trivialize this work of Christ in any way.

Wonderfully amazing is that out of this brutal slaughtering comes the redeeming consequences that Christ generates in the lives of people responding in faith surrender to Him: καὶ ἡγόρασας...καὶ ἐποίησας.

First, He ransoms a new people of God: ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους, *and by your blood you ransomed to God those out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.* The image of ἡγόρασας would have been all too clear to John's first readers who were clearly aware of the sale of humans in the local slave markets.<sup>30</sup> The

θεῖν, which belongs to the same semantic domain [Louw-Nida, § 20.72] is used of the death of Christ as a Passover lamb in 1 Cor 5:7 and of slaughtering Passover lambs in Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7) and of Christians in Rev 6:9; 18:24.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 361.]

<sup>30</sup>“The term ἀγοράζειν, literally ‘to buy, purchase,’ is used here and in 14:3 with the figurative meaning (based on the terminology of the slave market) ‘to cause the release of someone by paying a price.’ ἀγοράζειν is used in this sense in 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23, where the phrase ἠγοράσθητε τιμῆς, ‘you were redeemed for a price,’ is used, and in 2 Pet 2:1, where the subject of the verb ἀγοράζειν is δεσπότης, ‘master.’ The passive suggests that God is the one who did the purchasing (the passive of divine activity), though the price is not specified. In Rev 5:9c, of course, the price is ‘by your blood,’ i.e., by your death. The intensive form ἐξαγοράζειν occurs in Gal 3:13; 4:5. The parallelism between v 9 and 1 Pet 1:18–19 is clear

verb ἀγοράζω with the meaning to buy or purchase references slaves when humans are the object of the verb. That Christ ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου, *by your blood*, purchased us away from the slavery in sin that enveloped our lives shouts celebration and adoration to Him who paid such a price for us.

Those Christ redeemed come from everywhere: ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους.<sup>31</sup>

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in this comparison; note that 1 Pet 1:18 designates Christ under the metaphor of ἄμνος ‘lamb.’” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 361.]

<sup>31</sup>“ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους, ‘People from every tribe and tongue / and people and nation.’ This polysyndetic list of four ethnic units, which cumulatively emphasize universality, is probably based on the frequent mention of the three ethnic groups of ‘peoples, nations, and languages’ in Daniel (3:4 [LXX has four ethnic units], 7, 29[LXX v 96]; 5:19; 6:25[LXX v 26]; 7:14; cf. Jdt 3:8, ‘nations, languages, and tribes’). The LXX expands the threefold Danielic phrase into a fourfold phrase in Dan 3:4, ἔθνη καὶ χῶραι, λαοὶ καὶ γλώσσαι, ‘nations and lands, peoples and languages.’ The Tg. Esth I. 1:1 has a similar enumeration of four synonymous nouns: כּל עַמִּים אוּמִים וּלְשׁוֹנֵי וְאֶרְצוֹתָם, ‘all peoples, nations, languages, and provinces’ (see Grossfeld, *Esther*, 5, 40; id., *Two Targums*, 28), while the Tg. Neb. Joel 2:25 has ‘you were pillaged by peoples, tongues, governments, and kingdoms’ (tr. Cathcart-Gordon, *Targum*). Bauckham points out that Gen 10:5, 20, 31, in the context of the table of nations, contains the only list of four ethnic units in the OT, e.g., v 31, ‘These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations,’ while another fourfold phrase is used in 4 Ezra 3:7 to describe the descendants of Adam: ‘nations and tribes, peoples and clans’ p 362 (“Conversion,” 328). The number seventy, used in Judaism for the total number of nations of the world, is derived from the total number of nations mentioned in the Table of Nations in Gen 10. Similar lists of three or (more frequently) four ethnic groups are found in six other passages in Revelation, always in a polysyndetic list, but always in a different order (see Bauckham, “Conversion,” 326–37): (1) Rev 7:9, nations, tribes, peoples, tongues; (2) Rev 10:11, peoples, nations, tongues, kings; (3) Rev 11:9, peoples, tribes, tongues, nations; (4) Rev 13:7, tribe, people, language, nation; (5) Rev 14:6, nation, tribe, tongue, people; (6) Rev 17:15, peoples, crowds, nations, tongues. The terms ‘people,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘tribe’ are used in Josephus Ant. 7.356 as synonyms for Israel or parts of Israel. Isa 66:18 predicts the gathering of ‘all nations and languages,’ while Zech 8:22 expects ‘many peoples and strong nations ... to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem.’ Shorter lists are more frequent, e.g., ‘peoples and nations’ (Pss. Sol. 17:29). These lists are meant to emphasize universality. The fact that Christians were drawn from many ethnic groups in the Roman empire but did not (unlike most Hellenistic religions) constitute an ethnic group themselves led early Christian authors to refer to Christianity as a new people or a *tertium genus*, ‘third race,’ in contrast to Jews and Greeks (Origen Contra Cels. 8.2; Justin Dial. 119; Diogn. 5–6; Tertullian Ad nat. M 1.8). Paul referred to ‘Jews, Greeks, and the Church of God’ (1 Cor 10:32), and Christians also regarded themselves as aliens whose true citizenship was in heaven (Phil 3:20; 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; see Elliott, 1 Peter, 21–58). Ignatius claimed that Christianity (Χριστιανισμός, the first use of that term) was made up of people from *πᾶσα γλῶσσα*, ‘every language’ (Magn. 10:3). A similar series of two social groups is found in a decree of the

The fourfold listing of ethnic groups here underscores the universality of believers coming from everywhere into the family of God. Most likely this listing follows the model of three ethnic groups in Daniel and other Jewish apocalyptic sources for defining all of humanity. John’s use of four groups instead may very well reflect the earlier Table of Nations in Genesis that divides humanity into four groups with a total of seventy nations. The point is that those redeemed by Christ are not just Jews. Instead, they come out of all of humanity.

Out of Christ redeeming this new humanity then comes a new kingdom of people serving God as priests: καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, *and you have made them to our God a kingdom and priests and they will reign upon the earth*.<sup>32</sup> Note that this new people of God were not turned into kings (βασιλεῖς) but instead a kingdom (βασιλείαν). The new people of God represents the sphere where God reigns supremely in the lives of these who are fully committed to Him and His control.

This statement echoes the earlier one in 1:6 καὶ ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν, ἱερεῖς τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ, *and He made us into a kingdom, priests to God even His Father*. Both these declarations in Revelation come out of Exodus 19:6 (LXX): ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι *βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα* καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον, *and you will be to me royal priests and a holy nation*.

The second privilege derived from the redeeming work of the Lamb is that He has made us into ἱερεῖς, *priests*. Ancient Israel had priests chosen out of the people who served God through officiating over the liturgies in the Jerusalem temple. But in God’s original intention for the nation as stated to Moses (Exod. 19:6), the Israelite nation was intended to function a priests of God as King. This was in the sense of mediating God’s revelation to the nations of the world by being the chosen people of God. Now God is more fully realizing that original plan through the redeeming work of His Lamb who has created a new people as priests to God. The image of ‘priest’ underscores both the full commitment of the individual to God in service and also the respon-

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κοινωνία of Asia from the first century B.C. (Reynolds, *Aphrodisias*, document 5, line 24, τοῖς [ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ π]ᾶσιν δῆμοις τε καὶ ἔθνεσιν, ‘to every people and nation in Asia’).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 361–362.]

<sup>32</sup>“This statement is an allusion to Exod 19:6; see Comment on 1:6. Here it is clear that the people of God possess two privileges: they constitute a kingdom, and they are priests. The plural noun ἱερεῖς, ‘priests,’ could be either a nominative or an accusative plural, though here it must be taken as an accusative and therefore helps to understand the more ambiguous phrase βασιλείαν ἱερεῖς, ‘a kingdom, priests,’ in 1:6 as referring to two privileges rather than one.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 362.]

sibility to share the revelation of God with the rest of the world, in this latter case, the Gospel of Christ.

The third privilege that grows out of the first two is καὶ βασιλεύουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, **and they reign upon the earth**. First, one must settle the textual variant issue here between the present and future tense spellings that surface in the manuscript copies.<sup>33</sup> Just one letter makes the difference; the addition of sigma, σ, to the stem βασιλεύ and before the ending ουσιν is the difference in tense forms. The external evidence is equally divided and the internal factors are not definitive either. Very likely the present tense should be understood here, although the future tense properly understood comes out with a similar meaning.<sup>34</sup> The

<sup>33</sup>{A} βασιλεύουσιν κ P 205 209 1854 2050 2053 2344 2351 it<sup>gig</sup> vg<sup>ww, st</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> Hippolytus Andrew; Cyprian Maternus Fulgentius // βασιλεύουσιν A 1006 1611 1841 2329 Byz [046] (it<sup>ar</sup>) // βασιλεύομεν 2432 vg<sup>cl</sup> Primasius Beatus

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

<sup>34</sup>“Since both the future and present tense of βασιλεύω (‘reign’) in Rev. 5:10 are supported by good textual evidence, which is original must be decided on the basis of the context in ch. 5 and in the whole Apocalypse. The UBS and NA Greek texts together with a number of commentators favor the future because of the context in ch. 5. In particular, the decision of the UBS editorial committee was based primarily on their observation that codex A mistakenly reads the present for the future tense of the same verb in 20:6.182

“Nevertheless, the present tense should be preferred, since, in view of 20:4–6 and later scribes with millennial concerns, it is the more difficult reading.<sup>183</sup> In addition, ‘it is easier to imagine a scribe altering the present to a future (in awareness that believers are not yet [physically] ruling the earth) than to conceive of his substituting a present for the future.’<sup>184</sup> This would be supported by our understanding of 5:7–10a as describing an inaugurated fulfillment of the prophesied kingdom of the saints and ‘son of man’ in Daniel 7 and by the fact that 1:5b–6a, which views the saints as a present kingdom, is developed in 5:9b–10a.

“However, even some who grant the possibility of the present tense understand it as a futuristic present, which serves as a basis of assurance for the future kingdom referred to in 20:4–6.185 But the connection with 1:5–6 and, especially, the immediately preceding statement about the saints’ already being ‘a kingdom’ render such an exclusively futuristic idea of the verb improbable.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, both 1:5–6 and 5:9–10 make explicit that the creating of saints as a kingdom is a direct result of Christ’s redemptive death, so that it is probable that this kingdom began immediately after this death.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, the ‘new song,’ which encompasses ‘already-and-not-yet’ redemptive truths, includes reference to Christ’s present authority (‘opening the book’), so that the saints’ reign, also a part of the song, likely includes reference to an inaugurated event.<sup>188</sup>

“On the other hand, if a scribe were very conscious of the immediate context of the present reality of the kingdom in v 10a, he could be motivated to change an original future tense to a present in v 10b. Whichever is the best reading, it is apparent that 5:10a speaks of the saints already reigning in a present kingdom. Although some might want to view ἐποίησα αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν

sequential listing of actions signals that the reigning began upon Christ making His new people in the redemption achieved upon the cross, not that in some future time they would begin to reign.

This latter futuristic understanding robs the statement of nearly all of its profoundly rich and wonderful meaning. As I write this commentary, the world is mourning the death of Nelson Mandela. In so many ways through his focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, he epitomized the principle of reigning on earth through the Kingdom of God. The disciple who is under the reign of God in this world is at the same time then reigning over life and his enemies. The vastly superior power of love and devotion to Christ over the human passions of power and control, themselves stained and marred by human depravity, is clearly evident in the lives of the saints of God living in surrender to God through Christ. The frequently persecuted believers of Asia in the seven churches needed to be reminded of this precious truth in the face of the greater brutal physical force of their persecutors. Beautifully that present reign over opposing forces through the Kingdom of God extends itself endlessly into the future, unlike human force over others which never lasts for very long and is never certain or stabilizing of one’s life.

Wow! This is some kind of a praise affirmation lifted up to the Lamb of God. It models for us the kind of praise we should be lifting up to Christ as well.

## B. Angelic Praise, vv. 11-12

11 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων 12 λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχύον καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

The second scene of praise comes from the angels in heaven. Their praise has a different angle to it, since the work of the Lamb has not directly touched βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς (‘he made them to our God a kingdom and priests’) from a prophetic perfect perspective, the analogy with 1:5–6 and its continuation of the inaugurated context of 5:9 make this improbable (see further on 1:6, 9).”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 362–363.]

their lives.

The narrative introduction to the praise chant has some extra aspects beyond the previous ones. Not only did John see -- Καὶ εἶδον -- but also he heard a sound -- ἤκουσα φωνήν. The hearing of a voice speaking to him first surfaces in 1:10 (ἤκουσα ὀπίσω μου φωνήν μεγάλην ὡς σάλπιγγος) and 4:1 (ἡ φωνή ἡ πρώτη ἦν ἡκουσα ὡς σάλπιγγος λαλούσης μετ' ἐμοῦ λέγων). Now it will surface twice in chapter five: first with the angels (ἤκουσα φωνήν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν) and then everyone and everything in all the universe (πᾶν κτίσμα...ἤκουσα λέγοντας) in 5:13. From this scene forward John's hearing different voices speak will become very prominent in the unfolding vision.

John made no mention of angels in the initial scene of heaven in chapter four. And this is rather unusual for ancient Hebrew visionary texts.<sup>35</sup> But from this scene in chapter five onward angels will surface regularly, often in groups of three, five, seven etc.: 7:1, 2, 11; 8:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13; 9:1, 11, 13, 14, 15; 10:1, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10; 11:15; 12:7, 9; 14:8, 9, 10, 15, 17, 18, 19; 15:1, 6, 7, 8; 16:1, 5; 17:1, 7; 18:1, 21; 19:17; 20:1; 21:9, 12, 17; 22:6, 8, 16.

Here in this initial referencing of angels in chapter five, John describes an incalculable number of them: ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων, which stands as an elaboration of ἀγγέλων πολλῶν, of many angels. The elaboration is clearly an adaptation of Daniel 7:10,<sup>36</sup> "where reference is made to the innumerable heavenly beings that surround the Ancient of Days: 'a thousand thousands [עֶלְפִּים אֶלְפִּים] served him, and ten thousand ten thousands [עֶלְפִּים אֶלְפִּים] stood before him'.<sup>37</sup> John changes the Daniel reference around but utilizes the essential concept.<sup>38</sup> Their location in the heavenly

<sup>35</sup>It is unusual that the throne vision in Rev 4, unlike similar heavenly throne scenes, does not mention angels (1 Kgs 22:19; Dan 7:10; 1 Enoch 47:3; see Gruenwald, Apocalyptic, 31); here that omission is rectified. Peterson (Εἰς Θεός, 148) suggests that φωνή here may be a technical term for 'acclamation.' The angels encircling the throne are mentioned again in 7:11, and the same feature is mentioned in Apoc. Abr. (Rec. B) 8:5, 7." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 363.]

<sup>36</sup>**Dan. 7:10.** καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ποταμὸς πυρός, χίλια χιλιάδες ἐθεράπευον αὐτὸν καὶ μύρια μυριάδες παρείστηκεισαν αὐτῷ· καὶ κριτήριον ἐκάθισε καὶ βίβλοι ἠνεῶχθησαν.†

A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

<sup>37</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 363.

<sup>38</sup>There has been, however, a transposition of clauses since

arrange is also given by John: κύκλω τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders. Also arranged in a complete circle around the throne of God, they also stood behind the living creatures and the elders forming the last concentric circle in the scene. Thus the scene works its way outward from God's throne in the center. The Lamb stands in front of the throne, while the elders sit on thrones in a circle around the throne and the four living creatures are positioned north/south/east/west in a larger circle around the throne. And now finally this huge number of angels form the outer circle furthest

χίλια precedes μύρια in both the Theodotianic and LXX version of Dan 7:10. The order μύρια-χίλια in Rev 5:11 is also found in 1 Clem 34:6 (see D.A. Hagner, *The Use of the Old and New Testaments in Clement of Rome*, NovTSup 34 [Leiden: Brill, 1973] 62–63). While both the LXX and Theodotion translate the Aramaic phrases with χίλια χιλιάδες and μύρια μυριάδες, the author of Revelation avoids using χίλια and μύρια, which for him meant 1,000 and 10,000, respectively (Mussies, *Morphology*, 223; see Notes and Comment on Rev 9:16). Dan 7:10 is also alluded to in 1 Enoch 14:22 (where the extant Greek version reads μύρια μυριάδες, 'myriads upon myriads,' or 'ten thousand times ten thousand') and in a longer form even more clearly from Daniel, 'thousands upon thousands, and myriads upon myriads' (see 1 Enoch 14:22; 40:1; 60:1; 71:8); see the Greek text of 1 Enoch 1:9 (tr. Black, *Apocalypse*, 19), ὅτι ἔρχεται σὺν ταῖς μυριάσιν αὐτοῦ, 'Because he comes with his ten thousands.' Aramaic fragments of this text were found at Qumran: רבין קדישו [rbw].t qdyšw, 'myriads of his holy ones' (Milik, *Enoch*, 184–85). This text is also quoted in Jude 14, ἰδοὺ ἦλθεν κύριος ἐν ἀγίαις μυριάσιν αὐτοῦ, 'Behold the Lord came with his holy myriads.' In Jos. As. 16:17c, Dan 7:10 is alluded to in a context referring to the many cells of a honeycomb (tr. Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:229–30): 'And the man said to the comb, 'Come.' And bees rose from the cells of that comb, and the cells were innumerable, ten thousand (times) ten thousand and thousands upon thousands [ἀναρίθμηται μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων].' 1 Clem 34:6 contains a conflation of quotations from Dan 7:10 and Isa 6:3 (see Comment on 4:11): 'For the Scripture says, 'Ten thousand ten thousands stood before him, and a thousand thousands worshiped him, and they cried 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Sabaoth, all creation is full of his glory.' ' The quotation of Dan 7:10, however, though differing from both the LXX and the MT, is in agreement with Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 2.7.4. Since the innumerable heavenly multitude described in Dan 7:10 has no speaking part in that text, the author of 1 Clement has supplied them with the *trisagion*. Did he create this liturgical scene himself, or was he dependent on earlier traditions? Again in dependence upon Dan 7:10, the Apoc. Zeph., in 4:1; 8:1, speaks of 'thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels.' According to 2 Apoc. Bar. 48:10, 'innumerable hosts' stand before God. In the latter passage they give praise, and Zephaniah himself puts on an angelic garment. The notion of the innumerable multitude can be construed as a spiritualization of the promise to Abraham (Gen 22:17; 32:12; 2 Sam 7:11; 1 Kgs 4:2; Isa 10:22; Hos 1:10; Rom 9:27 [quoting Isa 10:22]; Pr Azar 1:13). In addition to Dan 7:10, there are several texts in the OT in which the angelic host is referred to as virtually innumerable (Deut 33:2; Job 19:11–12; 25:2–3; Ps 68:18)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 363–364.]

away from the throne. The symbolical significance of this ordering of the position of the different individuals and groups highlights the work of the Lamb in winning access of God's creation symbolized by the elders and creatures to the throne of God. The angels stand to the back 'cheering' on the Lamb in this work. One could not legitimately call them a 'choir' since their number is thousands of times greater than that of the creatures and the elders. They almost become the 'audience' who observe and affirm the actions of the Lamb, elders and creatures taking place in front of them and before God's throne.

Their affirmation comes λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, *chanting with a loud voice*.<sup>39</sup> I can't imagine the volume of this sound with countless thousands upon thousands of angels speaking at the same time in a raised voice.

Their chant is a sevenfold affirmation of the worthiness of the Lamb based upon His being slaughtered as a Passover Lamb: ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν. *Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!* The larger theme of ἄξιόν, *worthiness*, is continued by the chant of the angels: 4:11; 5:2, 4, 9, 12.

The one worthy is the slaughtered Lamb: τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον. Here the earlier language is repeated of Christ as the Passover lamb of sacrifice. His self-sacrifice is the key factor in His worthiness to receive praise.

Unlike the praise of the creatures and the elders who proclaimed Christ's worthiness λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξαι τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, *to receive the scroll and to open its seals*, the angels proclaim Christ's worthiness λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὺν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν, *to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing*. The qualification λαβεῖν to take or receive here both continues the affirmation of Christ's prerogatives in the two previous patterns in verses two and nine, but also turns a new direction. The sevenfold direct object to the Aorist infinitive λαβεῖν specifies taking things reserved exclusively for God alone in the Jewish and early Christian tradition.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>I should think that most modern teenagers would enjoy heaven, since it is a hugely noisy place with different individuals and groups speaking very loudly and often with musical chanting playing a significant role in the activities going on.

<sup>40</sup>Parallels to Christ's reception of prerogatives usually reserved for God alone are found in Matt 28:18 ('All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me [by God]') and Matt 11:27 ('Everything has been given to me by my Father'); cf. A. Jeremias, *Babylonisches*, 14. Here the quality of ἄξιός is generalized as the qualification of the Lamb to be the recipient of a complex list of qualities such as those ascribed to benefactors. Josephus (J.

Several implications flow out of the structuring of the sevenfold ascription of praise to the Lamb. First, it turns the praise of the angels into a doxology form rather than a liturgical hymnic form of praise. Second, this in turn gives confirmation that the lifting of praise to the Lamb by the angels signals that the entire ceremony in chapter five represents the investiture of the Lamb as God in parallel to the New Testament emphasis on the ascension of Jesus as the divine acknowledgment of His divinity. Third, their declarations affirm that Christ as divine is clearly qualified to assume the qualities and rights that only God possesses.

W. 7.71) reports that the newly recognized emperor Vespasian was greeted upon his entrance to Rome by crowds of people calling him τὸν εὐεργέτην καὶ σωτῆρα καὶ μόνον ἄξιον ἡγεμόνα τῆς Ῥώμης, 'benefactor and savior and the only worthy ruler of Rome.' The seven substantives connected by καὶ constitute a rhetorical feature called *polysyndeton* (BDF §460; D. E. Aune, 'De esu carnum orationes I and II (Moralia 933a-999B),' in Plutarch's *Theological Writings and Early Christian Literature*, ed. H. D. Betz, SCHNT 3 [Leiden: Brill, 1975] 309). This 'hymn' lacks the kind of descriptive or narrative content characteristic of hymns and is rather like a doxology in the form of an acclamation (Peterson, Von den Engeln, 340). The article is attached to only the first noun, indicating that all seven substantives form a single notion (Bousset [1906] 261). A similar doxology (addressed to God) is found in 1 Chr 29:11, though each attribute is articular: 'To you, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty.' Two similar doxologies addressed to Christ are found in 1 Clem 65:2, 'through whom [God] be to him [Christ] glory, honor, power, and greatness and eternal sovereignty from eternity to eternity,' and Mart. Pol. 21, 'Jesus Christ reigns for ever, to whom be glory, honor, majesty, and eternal sovereignty from generation to generation.' Perhaps the most relevant parallel, however, is Dan 2:37, where Daniel, in an introduction to a dream interpretation, tells Nebuchadnezzar that his kingship is from God: 'You, O king, the king of kings — to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory....' The LXX version is slightly expanded and has five prerogatives: τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν καὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν δόξαν, 'the rule and the kingdom and the power and the honor and the glory' (Theod Dan 2:37, on the other hand, has reduced the list to three: ἰσχυρὰν καὶ κραταιὰν καὶ ἔντιμον, 'might and power and honor'). All of these prerogatives reflect the royal investiture of the king and strongly suggest that the list of prerogatives in Rev 5:12 reflects the investiture of the Lamb. A list of four prerogatives closely parallel to this list of seven is found in Philo, Ebr. 75 (LCL tr.), 'Nothing else, neither wealth [πλοῦτον], nor glory [δόξαν], nor honour [τιμὴν], nor office, nor beauty, nor strength [ἰσχὺν], deserves our service and honor but God. The similarity between this list and those discussed above suggests that these qualities are considered the highest and most significant qualities to which one could aspire. A comparison between the analogous lists of prerogatives in 1 Chr 29:11 (prerogatives of God) and Dan 2:37 (prerogatives of the king bestowed by God) with Rev 5:11 suggests that the ascription of these prerogatives to the Lamb means not that the Lamb is thereby venerated as God (similar prerogatives could also be ascribed to kings) but that these qualities are bestowed upon the Lamb by virtue of his investiture.' [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 364–365.]

The list of qualities here in coming out of the background heritage of Jewish tradition represent qualities of God that God alone may bestow upon a king in granting him heavenly blessing.<sup>41</sup> The angels then are

<sup>41</sup>“Each of the seven prerogatives is a metaphorical application to Christ of qualities that belong properly to God but may be bestowed on the king by God. Each deserves further comment: (1) ‘power’ (δύναμις) and (4) ‘might’ (ισχύς) are synonyms for ‘strength’ and can be considered together (Brettler, King, 57–68). In other hymnic contexts in Revelation, δύναμις is used four more times of God alone, but never of the Lamb or Christ (4:11; 7:12; 11:17; 19:1); ισχύς is used elsewhere only of God (7:12). There is an apparent reticence in the OT to use the term *צָוָה*, ‘strength,’ for human kings, but when this prerogative is mentioned, it is a privilege given to the king by God (1 Sam 2:10; Ps 28:8). In contrast to the rare mention of this prerogative as characteristic of a king, this quality is frequently ascribed to God as part of the metaphor of kingship (Exod 15:2, 13; Isa 19:4; 45:24; 1 Chr 16:27–28; Pss 62:12; 59:18; 93:1; cf. TWNT 2:292–96; Brettler, King, 63–64). (2) ‘Wealth’ (πλοῦτος) is frequently associated with kingship (cf. Rev 18:17), but in the OT it is never directly attributed to God as part of the kingship metaphor. ‘Wealth’ as a prerogative attributed to the Lamb (or God) occurs only here in Revelation. (3) ‘Wisdom’ (σοφία), used in one other hymnic context of God (7:12), is an attribute that is thought appropriate for an earthly king and is often regarded as a gift the king has received from God (see Kaligula, The Wise King; Brettler, King, 55–56). (5) ‘Honor’ (τιμῆ) is used elsewhere in Revelation twice of God (4:11; 7:12) and once of both God and the Lamb (5:13). τιμῆ denotes the honor, respect, and status that a person enjoys when his position, wealth, and office are appropriately recognized in the community to which he belongs (TDNT 8:169–80; EDNT 3:357–59; NIDNTT 2:48–52). τιμῆ is therefore the prerogative of gods, kings, and people of relatively high social position (including parents and the elderly). τιμῆ is accorded to gods primarily through sacrifice, hymns of praise, and obedience and to kings through rich gifts, acclamations, and a variety of gestures symbolizing subordination, such as standing (when the king is seated), bowing, and prostration. In the LXX, however, τιμῆ, in contrast to δόξα, is rarely used for the honor of God. (6) ‘Glory’ (δόξα) is used elsewhere in Revelation of God alone (4:11; 7:12; 19:1) and once of God and the Lamb together (5:13). The attributes τιμῆ and δόξα are frequently paired in the LXX (Pss 8:6; 28:1; 95:7; Job 40:10; 2 Chr 32:33; 1 Macc 14:21), in a few other Greco-Jewish texts (1 Enoch 5:1; 99:1), and in early Christian literature (1 Tim 1:17; Heb 2:7, 9; 3:3; 2 Pet 1:17; Rev 21:26; 1 Clem 45:8; 61:1, 2; for inscriptional evidence, see J. Schneider, *Doxa* [Gütersloh: Mohn, 1932]) or occur together in longer lists of attributes (1 Pet 1:7; Rev 4:9, 11; 5:13; 1 Clem 65:2; Mart. Pol. 20:2). (7) ‘Praise’ (εὐλογία) is applied to God alone in Rev 4:11; 7:12. The term εὐλογία occurs about sixty times in the LXX as a translation of *בְּרָכָה* *bērākā*, ‘blessing.’ In Revelation εὐλογία occurs three times (5:12, 13; 7:12), always as one of several predicates used of the Lamb (5:12) or God (5:13; 7:12), the last two in the context of a doxology. The term (and cognates) is used of God in a number of Greco-Jewish inscriptions: θεοῦ εὐλογία, ‘blessing of God’ (CIJ 2:1537; JIGRE, 121); εὐλόγει τὸν θεόν, ‘bless God’ (CIJ 2:1538). The LXX translated *בָּרַךְ* *bārak* with εὐλογεῖν (e.g., Pss 102:1; 103:1). According to Dothan there is an epigraphic correspondence between εὐλογία αὐτῷ, ‘blessings on him,’ and the Aramaic phrase *לֵה בִרְכָתָה* *birkātā lēh* (Hammath, 59).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dal-

celebrating the investiture of Christ with these divine blessings.

Again what a powerful challenge to earthly worshipers of Christ in this life. We are inspired by their example to celebrate the heavenly acknowledgment of the divinity of our Christ and Lord.

### C. Universal Praise, v. 13

13 καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας· τῷ καθήμενῷ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἄρνιῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, “To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

The third scene of worship expands the chanting of praise to include all of God’s creation. Here John does not introduce this praise with his standard visionary terminology of εἶδον, I saw. Only ἤκουσα, I heard, is used, and it comes deep into the narrative introductory statement rather than at the beginning. Additionally the reference here to all of creation reaches back to verse three where no one in all of creation was found worthy: οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, no one was able in heaven nor upon the earth or under the earth.<sup>42</sup> The reference here in v. 13 underscores everything in creation raising a united voice of praise and adoration to both God and the Lamb.<sup>43</sup> The repeated designation καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς las: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 365–366.]

<sup>42</sup>“This is a verbal repetition of 5:3, where no one in the entire universe was able to open the scroll (see Comment on 5:3), though here the phrase ‘upon the sea’ is added. Here πᾶν κτίσμα, ‘every created being,’ at first sight appears to refer to intelligent creatures, since they sing a doxology; i.e., ‘every created being in heaven’ seems to refer to angels and not to birds. However, the phrase ‘and every thing in them’ is not only redundant (Bousset [1906] 262), since it does no more than repeat the phrase “every created being,” but it also indicates that all creation singing the praises of God is a metaphor simply because most creatures are not able to sing in human language. On the three-level universe in Revelation, see Comments on 5:3 and 10:6. A three-level cosmos with four sectors, essentially what we find here, encapsulates the ancient Israelite view of the universe: (1) heaven, (2) earth and sea, (3) underworld (Stadelmann, *World*, 37–176). This four-sectored cosmos is mentioned in Job 11:8–9 (heaven, Sheol, earth, sea) and also occurs in the Greek fragment of Jub. 2:16, ‘And he completed ... everything which is in the heavens and the earth and the seas and the depths [ὅσα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐν τῇ γῆ, ἐν ταῖς θαλάσσαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄβύσσοις]’ (Denis, *Fragmenta*, 74).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 366.]

<sup>43</sup>The phrase πᾶν κτίσμα by itself could be taken to refer to every intelligent creature in the created order to things, but the subse-

πάντα, and all things in them, not only confirms the preceding inclusive reference but signals the metaphorical nature of the designation, since animals, insects etc. could not utter human words of praise on their own. In John's apocalyptic experience, he experiences the response of all of God's created order reacting to the investiture of the Lamb as divine and in charge of everything. It also anticipates the eschatological day of universal acknowledgment of both God and the Lamb as supreme.<sup>44</sup>

The praise of creation is directed both τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, to the One sitting upon the throne and to the Lamb,<sup>45</sup> unlike the previous praises targeting only the Lamb.<sup>46</sup> They become together the object of praise and adoration.

The praise gathers up portions of previously uttered praise by the angels: ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ

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quently repeated phrase τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα, all the things in them, rules out such an interpretation by elevating the praise of all of creation to a personification of creation with the human capability of speaking human words of praise.

<sup>44</sup>"If it represents universal praise in an absolute sense, then it issues not only from God's willing subjects but also from his opponents, who will be forced into submission (as in Phil. 2:10–11; Col. 1:20). Rev. 5:9–12 and 5:13 are good examples respectively of the 'already' and 'not yet' time reference of chs. 4–5 in particular and of the Apocalypse in general. The evil rulers and earth-dwellers will be judged because they do not submit to and praise the sovereignty of Christ while they live on earth (cf. 14:7–11; 16:4–11, 21; 1 En. 46:6)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 365.]

<sup>45</sup>"While vv 13b–14 constitute a doxology (Deichgräber, *Gottes hymnus*, 53; Jörns, *Evangelium*, 54), a liturgical form that has parallels elsewhere in Revelation (1:5b–6; 4:9–10; 7:12), this doxology, like those in 4:9–10; 7:12, is given a narrative setting within the liturgy of the heavenly court. The major change that has been introduced by placing such a doxology within a narrative context is that the concluding 'amen' is given a responsory character, for it is attributed to the four cherubim. The two datives of indirect object also function as datives of advantage, τῷ καθημένῳ, 'to the one seated,' and τῷ ἀρνίῳ, 'and to the Lamb.' The latter has the appearance of an editorial addition by the author to the source he has used; see 4:9; 7:12, where equivalents to this phrase are not found." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 366.]

<sup>46</sup>"The conjunction of God and Lamb, which recurs in 7:10; 21:22; 22:1, 3 (see 3:21), represents an advanced Christology: the same worship is offered to God and Lamb, just as the throne of both is one and the same (22:3). This fact undergirds Boring's assertion, which he rightly affirms to be a datum of Christian faith, that 'God is the one definitively revealed through Jesus Christ' (65). These scenes of heavenly worship (chapters 4 and 5 and elsewhere) concern realities which, if heavenly, are part of the world's present structure. The slain Lamb, acclaimed in heaven, belongs to our world, even when not acknowledged here." [Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, vol. 16, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 86.]

δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.<sup>47</sup> Clearly here we have another doxology of praise first uttered by the angels. Additionally Daniel 4:30–31 (LXX) most likely stands in the background here as well.<sup>48</sup>

The distinctive features of this praise expression are found in τὸ κράτος gathering up the concepts of τὴν δύναμιν and ἰσχύν in the words of the angels. Also the adverbial phrase for 'forever' is added: εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. This very Jewish perception of eternity as a continuous progression of forward movement would be appropriate in that it is coming from earth bound creatures, rather than from those permanently existing in heaven. This phrase is ascribed to God in 4:9 as τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, who lives forever and ever. A closer parallel surfaces in 7:12 where the angels ascribe doxological praise to God εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων· ἀμήν.

Another example of worthy praise lifted up to both God and the Lamb here! We are challenged indeed in our worship of our God.

#### D. Worship of the Lamb, v. 14

14 καὶ τὰ τέσσαρα ζῶα ἔλεγον· ἀμήν. καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν.

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

<sup>47</sup>"ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, " 'be praise and honor and glory and power for ever.'" The order of these four elements, (1) ἡ εὐλογία, 'praise,' (2) καὶ ἡ τιμὴ, 'and honor,' (3) καὶ ἡ δόξα, 'and glory,' (4) καὶ τὸ κράτος, 'and power,' can be compared with the order in which these and similar attributes are found in other doxological contexts in Revelation. In 1:5b–6, the only doxology occurring in a non-narrative context, just two attributes of praise are mentioned: δόξα, 'glory,' and κράτος, 'power.' In the doxology found in indirect discourse in 4:9, three attributes of praise occur in the order δόξα, 'glory,' τιμὴ, 'honor,' εὐχαριστία, 'thanksgiving.' The longest doxology occurs in a narrative context in 7:12 and consists of seven attributes: εὐλογία, 'praise,' δόξα, 'glory,' σοφία, 'wisdom,' εὐχαριστία, 'thanksgiving,' τιμὴ, 'honor,' δύναμις, 'power,' and ἰσχὺς, 'might.' These variations fit the author-editor's tendency to vary lists." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 366–367.]

<sup>48</sup>"Three attributes from Dan. 2:37 (LXX) and 4:30 are again included in the background along with Dan. 4:31 (LXX). The wording is traceable more to Dan. 4:30–31 (LXX) because of the combination of δόξα ('glory') and τιμὴ ('honor'), linked this time with κράτος ('dominion') instead of ἰσχὺς ('might'), a combination occurring nowhere else in the LXX. That the phraseology of Dan. 4:30ff. is associated with the hymn in Rev. 5:12–13 provides a noteworthy comparison with the hymn of Rev. 4:11, where we observed influence from Dan. 4:35–37 (cf. also the influence of Daniel in 4:9–10)." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 366.]

One contextual issue here is the role of verse fourteen. It could be -- and possibly should be -- linked to verse thirteen as a liturgical response to the praise of all creation. Clearly the two short sentences bring the entire scene in chapter five to a marvelous climax of praise and worship. A substantial dependency upon Daniel 7:13-27 is reflected here.<sup>49</sup>

The declaration of Amen<sup>50</sup> by the living creatures echoes the same congregational response in Jerusalem temple worship to the chanting of a psalm by the Levitical choir. It was a declaration of agreement and affirmation of the praise of all of creation.<sup>51</sup> Thus the cre-

<sup>49</sup>“What is striking about the concluding section of 5:9–14 in relation to Dan. 7:13–27 is that both present in the same order (1) Christ’s (the ‘son of man’ ’s) reception of sovereignty (Rev. 5:9–14; Dan. 7:13–14) in association with (2) a kingdom including ‘all peoples, nations, and tongues’ (Rev. 5:9b; Dan. 7:14 [MT]); (3) the reign of the saints (Rev. 5:10; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27a [LXX]); and, in conclusion, (4) the reign of God (Rev. 5:13; Dan. 7:27b), though this fourth element is not as emphatic in Daniel as in Revelation.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 366.]

<sup>50</sup>“Amen is used in the Apocalypse in probably four senses. i. The initial amen in which the words of a previous speaker are referred to and adopted as one’s own: 5:14, 7:12, 19:4, 22:20. The earliest instances of this use are found in 1 Kings 1:36; Jer. 28:6, 11:5. ii. ‘The detached Amen, the complementary sentence being suppressed (Deut. 27:15–26; Neh. 5:13).’ Such may be the use in 5:14 of our text. This amen was used liturgically, in the time of the Chronicler, 1 Chron. 16:36 = Ps. 106:48 — though not in the Temple service, when the response was different, but in the services of the synagogue (Schürer, G.J.V. II. ii. 453–454, 458), whence the custom passed over to the Christian Church (cf. 1 Cor. 14:16). This usage is vouched for by Justin Martyr, *Apol.* i. 65, ὁ παρὼν λαὸς ἐπευφημεῖ λέγων Ἀμήν, and later by Jerome. iii. The final amen with no change of speaker, 1:6, 7. This use is frequent from the N.T. onwards, but not found in the O.T. save in the subscriptions to the four divisions of the Psalter, 41:14, 72:18, 89:52, 106:48. iv. See note on 3:14. For other uses of this word see the article in *Encyc. Bib.* i. 136 sq., by Professor Hogg, which I have drawn upon for the above notes; and that in Hastings’ *D.B.* אָמֵן is rendered in the LXX by γένοιτο in the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalter, but by ἀμήν in the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Apocrypha. (See note on ναί, ἀμήν in 1:7.)” [R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 1, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 151–152.]

<sup>51</sup>“It is striking that the responsory ‘amen’ is not uttered by those singing or chanting this hymn but by others (Jörns, *Evangelium*, 55), and therefore ‘amen’ does not appear to function here as an acclamation (against Schlier, *TDNT* 1:336). Similar liturgical responses are regularly used by the author to conclude throne scenes (see 4:9–11; 7:11b–12; 11:16–18; 19:4–8). This reads like a dramatization of the conclusion of the hymn in Phil 2:5–11, where in v 10 it is said that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth’ (cf. the enumeration of these categories of creatures in v 13a).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word,

ated world stands in complete harmony with its heavenly representatives, the four living creatures. These creatures had offered up the first anthem of praise to God in 4:8, and now they affirm the praise of others at the end of the scene in chapter five.

The appropriate response of the elders is καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ἔπεσαν καὶ προσεκύνησαν, and the elders fell forward and bowed their knees in worship. Thus the heavenly scene of worship in chapters four and five conclude with the two central groups of individuals -- the living creatures and the elders who represent God’s creation and God’s people in heaven -- affirming the investiture of the Lamb of God as divine and now in complete command of the will of Almighty God and who is prepared to disclose that divine will to John and then through John ultimately to the people of God.<sup>52</sup>

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

The lessons of this final scene of heavenly worship push our thinking of earthly worship to the limits. The challenge is from the various heavenly groups of individuals -- living creatures, elders, and angels -- in the way they affirm and celebrate the investiture of the Lamb as the all powerful One who now moves to disclose the divine will of all eternity to John. The early Christian communities in their gatherings in house churches scattered all over the eastern Mediterranean world of the first century affirmed and celebrated the exaltation of Christ by the Heavenly Father in His Ascension back to heaven after the resurrection. The Christological hymns in Colossians, Philippians and elsewhere affirm this dramatically, But John’s apocalyptic vision of this worship taking place in heaven as the ultimate model and challenge to these Christian gatherings challenge every worshiper to lift up praise in a manner more worthy of the greatness of Christ who is the object of our worship.

Not just our words of praise but our body movements of reverencing God and Christ are to be a part of this worship experience. May we praise Him worthily!

Incorporated, 1998), 367.]

<sup>52</sup> “Chapter 5 has revealed a central truth that governs the entire book of Revelation. By his sacrificial death the Lamb has taken control of the course of history and guaranteed its future. He alone was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll of destiny. The hosts of heaven break out in jubilant song honoring the redemptive work of the Lion who is the Lamb. His triumphant sacrifice has transformed men and women from every part of the universe into priests in the service of God. Countless angels circle his throne and declare his power and praise. This vision of the grandeur of the triumphant Lamb prepares John to share with his readers the more solemn aspects of the judgments that lie in the future. A vivid portrayal of the one who has won the crucial battle against sin supplies the confidence that in the troubled times to come there remains a hope that is steadfast and sure.” [Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 138.]