

CHAPTER 5

"And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (5:1).

The word βιβλίον itself permits of a great many interpretations, but for the readers of that time it was designated by the seven seals on its back beyond the possibility of mistake. . . . so the most simple member of the Asiatic Churches knew that a βιβλίον made fast with seven seals was a *testament*. . . . the document fastened with seven seals is an easily understood symbol of the promise and assurance by God to His Church of the future βασιλεία.¹

A more detailed description of this scroll is given by Smith:

A wrong sense is given by placing a comma in the passage, where it does not belong. . . . the true reading is as follows: "written *within*, and on the back side sealed with seven seals." The whole account shows this to be the true reading; for the book was sealed, and no part of its writing could have been designed to be seen, till its seal was broken, and its leaf unrolled by a person able to accomplish it.²

In verses 2-4 we find that no one was found worthy to open the scroll. Then in verse 5 we read, "*But one of the elders said to me, Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.*"

Two figurative titles are used of the one who is worthy--"the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the Root of David." Both are familiar OT messianic titles . . . But they are linked together only here and in the Qumran literature. . . .

As John looked to see the mighty Lion (the conquering warrior-Messiah from the Root of David), he saw instead the striking figure of a "Lamb" . . . as if it had been slaughtered, standing in the center of the throne court. This new figure portrays sacrificial death and links the Messiah to the OT passover lamb . . . Here John joins the OT royal Davidic Messiah with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (Isa. 42-53).³

I found Frost's comments on the word "Lamb" of special interest.

The word "Lamb," which is introduced in the fifth and sixth chapters (5:6, 8, 12; 6:1, 16), is a most interesting one. There are three words in the Greek which signify a lamb; the first *amnos*, the second *aren*, and the third *arnion*. The first of these words is a primitive one, meaning simply a lamb, and is used in the New Testament four times (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet. 1:19); the second means a

1 Zahn, *Introduction*, Vol. III, pp. 393-394.

2 Smith, *Key*, p. 73.

3 Johnson, *Revelation*, pp. 467-468.

male lamb and is used once (Luke 10:3); the third is a diminutive of the second meaning a little male lamb, or a lambkin, and is used thirty times (John 21:15; Rev. 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4(2), 10; 15:3; 17:14(2); 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). It will be seen by the references last given that this lambkin word, with one exception, is only found in the Revelation; and it will also be seen that in this book no other word for lamb finds place. There is, of course, a reason for this. And it seems to be found in connection with the following considerations. The Revelation sets forth Jesus as the coming One. All through its pages He is manifested as the One who is about to enter into His recompense of glory, when He will be seen by "every eye" (1:7) and will be acknowledged by "every tongue" (Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 15:3; 17:14; 19:16). This is the joy which was set before Christ (Heb. 12:2), and for which He has waited (1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 10:13). Above all, it is the supremely anticipated rapture which God, the Father, has had in mind, when He will demonstrate beyond question and for all eternity the infinite fact that His Christ is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Heb. 1:13; 1 Tim. 6:15), and when He will crown Him with the glory and honor which are His most just due (Heb.2:9; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:12). With such thoughts in mind the Holy Spirit, in writing the Revelation, evidently seeks for a word which will express what Christ is in the Father's view. And manifestly, He finds it in this diminutive word *arnion*, or male lambkin. For the word signifies that Christ is the destined male head of the flock; that He is spotlessly clean and innocently righteous; that He became the Lion of the tribe of Judah by being the yielding, suffering and dying Lamb of God; and, in consequence, that He is and ever will be the Son of the Father's tender love. All this, and much more, is expressed by God calling Christ in this book of consummation and compensation His precious "lambkin."⁴

The elders and four living creatures bow down and sing a new song (5:8-10). The translation "redeemed us," "made us," and "we shall" appear in the King James Version (Authorized Version):

9 And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And has made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (Underscoring added)

However, the American Standard Version has "redeemed men," "made them," and "they will".

9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and did purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation,

10 and made them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth. (Underscoring added; italics original)

4 Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 164-165.

Each of these three variations represent textual variants in the extant Greek texts and ancient versions. It is one of the more difficult textual issues in the Book of Revelation.

- *"Redeemed us" vs. "did purchase men"*: Many Greek manuscripts and ancient versions do have the first person personal pronoun "us" (Greek, *hēmas*), and the Received Text on which the KJV is based adopted it. However, the textual evidence of the extant Greek manuscripts and ancient versions is difficult to evaluate.⁵ Nevertheless, both modern critical Greek texts, Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies, omit the word. The Greek would then read, ". . . because you were slain and purchased to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. . ." Once it is concluded that *hēmas* was not in the original manuscript that came from the hand of John (often called the "autograph"), then to insert a word for smoother reading in English requires something in the *third person*, such as "some" (Greek, *tinās*) or "men." The NKJV retains "us."
- *"Made us" vs. "made them"*: Again the Received Text on which the KJV is based has the word "us" (Greek, *hēmas*), but the evidence is overwhelming for "them" (Greek, *autous*). This is a strong argument against the presence of "us" (Greek, *hēmas*) in verse 9.
- *"We shall reign" vs. "they reign"*: Here there are actually three variants: (1) first person future ("we shall reign"), (2) third person present ("they reign"), and third person future ("they shall reign"). Again, the evidence for the first person is very weak, thus arguing for the third person option in verse 9. The evidence between the present tense or future tense is about equal.⁶ However, the tense does not directly impact this issue being discussed here--whether the song refers to men or the twenty four elders themselves, making them angelic beings.

In conclusion, the following points should be noted. The four living creatures together with the twenty-four elders are the ones who sing this song. At the time they do, they are all holding bowls of incense *"which are the prayers of the saints."* Since they are the mediators, so to speak, of the prayers which the saints are offering, it would seem likely that they are, in the same manner, also the mediators of the songs which the saints are singing. And since the four living creatures are also singing this song, it would seem probable that the words "men," "them," and "they" are correct. If this is so, it would be further evidence that the twenty-four elders cannot be a symbol of the church in any way, because if they were, then why are the four living creatures singing the same words (redeemed us, made us, we shall)?

When John looks, he hears the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders. The number of them was 10,000 x 10,000, and they said, *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain."* John then hears every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea saying, *"Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"* "Every creature" means the earth with all its inhabitants. This scene, then, would take place at the time of the Second Advent, when Christ has received the kingdom from his Father.

5 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 470 - "It is a difficult question to settle with certainty. . ."

6 *Ibid.*, p. 471.

According to Tregelles, chapters 4 and 5 are anticipatory and give a vision of the heavenly glory of the risen "Church of the firstborn" and the Millennial blessing of the earth, forming the "preface of blessing" to the Revelation as a whole.⁷

If this is the case, then in chapter 5 we have a summary of all that will transpire from the opening of the vision given to John in chapter 4 to the Second Coming of Christ in power and glory. What follows from chapter 6 onward must expand upon this by adding details.

Ethan Smith agrees with a division beginning at chapter 6. It begins with the first seal and closes at the end of chapter 11,

presenting the battle of the great day of God, under the seventh trumpet, and the millennial kingdom of Christ. A second general division then commences, like the first, with a plan peculiar to itself . . . giving, under new figures, some things noted in the first division, and others not there noted. When it reaches the Millennium, where the first division closes, it thence proceeds to give a description of that happy period; of an apostasy at the close of it; of the general judgment; and of heaven.

The truth of these two general divisions is manifest to the eye of the intelligent reader. The seventh trumpet closing the first division, is most manifestly the same even with the seventh vial closing the reign of Antichrist, in the second division. Compare the two passages, chap. xi. 14, to the end, with chap. xvi. 17, to the end, and you will see they give the same event, in figures essentially and almost precisely the same.

There is found in these two general divisions every mark of *duality* of plans. Their events commence in about the same period, and terminate in the same period; and they pursue their objects, each in its own plan, in an independent set of figures. They thus contain every essential mark of two divisions.⁸

7 See Biss' outline of Tregelles' work at the end of this paper.

8 Smith, *Key*, pp. 19,20. He states that Scott and Stuart agreed with this division.