

## The Paradoxical Lamb and the Christology of John's Apocalypse

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With the exception of a few chapters, the book of Revelation is the written record of a magnificent vision beheld by a man identified only as “his servant John” (Revelation 1:1). Over the course of this vision, John is taken to the throne room of God, witnesses a series of bizarre events as the earth descends into chaos, and finally sees the creation of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1). Central to the book of Revelation's theological project is the introduction and development of its central protagonist, Jesus Christ. While Jesus appears briefly in the very first chapter, over the course of John's lengthy vision Jesus is most often symbolized by a *lamb*, a figure that appears twenty-eight times before the conclusion of the vision. This lamb, in the words of one scholar, is “the leading Christological expression of the book, central for understanding John's rhetorical argument and theology.”<sup>1</sup> But this is no ordinary lamb. John's lamb is both victim and leader, one who conquers through his own death and

overcomes evil through his own suffering. Achieving victory through vulnerability, the lamb is simultaneously *conquered* and *conqueror*.

The lamb, then, is a paradoxical image brimming with tension, a tension that is not easily resolved but itself leads to a series of questions: What christological understanding is John (and his audience) expected to glean from this lamb imagery? How does John's vision speak to the fundamental nature of Jesus Christ and his mission? What elements of the lamb must we as his disciples develop if we are truly to become his sons and daughters?

It's important to remember that "the book of Revelation is notoriously difficult to interpret, and it is an impossible book to interpret completely."<sup>2</sup> All that readers of the book of Revelation can successfully do is study and analyze John's vision with an eye toward *possible* answers, since the book of Revelation seems almost intended to provoke questions rather than provide answers. With this in mind, exploring the paradox of John's lamb Christology and attempting to alleviate some of its tensions through a close examination of the lamb imagery makes clear the remarkable portrait of Jesus in John's vision. The focus of the paper will be on the sections of Revelation that present the heaviest christological emphasis—namely, chapters 5, 7, 12, 19, and 21.

At this point, it may be useful to further explore how the figure of a lamb was used in Jewish and Christian literature prior to John's writing. The Greek word John uses that is translated in the King James Bible as "lamb" is the Greek term *arnion*, a diminutive of *arēn*.<sup>3</sup> While Jesus is called a "lamb" by other New Testament authors, John the Revelator is the only one to use *arnion*. In 1 Corinthians 5:7, Paul refers to Jesus as "our passover lamb" (Greek, *to pascha hēmōn*), while John the Baptist twice calls Jesus "the Lamb of God" (*ho amnos tou theou*; John 1:29, 36). Notably, the only other place where the Greek term *arnion* appears outside the book of Revelation is in reference to those who believe in Jesus, as in John 21:15 when Jesus tells Peter to feed "my lambs" (*ta arnia mou*). If we look earlier into the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), the Hebrew word *kebeś* appears 130 times,

making it the most common Hebrew word referring to lamb.<sup>4</sup> The majority of these references to lamb are in a sacrificial context, specifically the lamb as a burnt offering. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, *kebeś* is normally rendered as *amnos*. When *arnion* (or *arēn*) does appear in the Septuagint, it is primarily in a symbolic or metaphorical context.<sup>5</sup> While semantic discussions are usually hazy and difficult to derive conclusions from, it can safely be said that the book of Revelation is applying to Jesus a christological title unique from other New Testament authors and one that is often applied in symbolic or metaphorical discussions.

## Jesus as the “Conquering” Lamb

With this background in mind, let us now turn our attention to the text of John’s vision. Revelation 5 finds John the Revelator in the throne room of God, observing a scene that unfolds, as much of the book of Revelation does, rather curiously. God holds in his hand a scroll and seeks one that is worthy to take the scroll and open it.<sup>6</sup> John begins to weep because the book is sealed with seven seals, and “no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon” (Revelation 5:3).<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, John is assured that someone—a figure described as “the Lion of the tribe of Juda” and “the Root of David” (5:5)— has successfully opened the scroll.

The titles of “Lion of the tribe of Juda” and “Root of David” are familiar from the Hebrew Bible and are titles charged with Jewish messianic expectation. Jacob had likened Judah to a lion (“Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up?”) and had declared that the “scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Genesis 49:9–10). The latter proved to be true, as the Davidic kings came through Judah’s line, as did Jesus. The description of the lion as “the Root of David” alludes to Isaiah 11, where Isaiah prophesies that “a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall

grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). Isaiah's language further links the tribe of Judah with Davidic kingship and points to a future, messianic figure.<sup>8</sup> The choice of the word *conquer* (*enikēsen*) to describe the lion's actions serves to prepare John and his readers for a regal, military figure.

However, what John then sees is something strikingly different. When John looks around for this lion, he sees only a lamb,<sup>9</sup> and not just any lamb, but a lamb that has been slaughtered as a sacrifice (*esphagmenon*).<sup>10</sup> This juxtaposition is potent and forces readers to ask the critical question: Did the elder err in describing the lamb as a lion, or did we as readers err in expecting that Judah's most powerful representative would be anything other than a conquered, bloody, and apparently (previously) dead lamb? As mentioned earlier, in the Hebrew Bible the image of a lamb was often used metaphorically to connote vulnerability.<sup>11</sup> For example, Jeremiah states that "I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (Jeremiah 11:19) and prophesies that at the arrival of Babylon "the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away" (Jeremiah 50:45). In a passage that may lay behind the application of the lamb imagery to Jesus, Isaiah speaks of the suffering servant as "a lamb that is led to the slaughter." A further possible origin for the usage of lamb imagery in Revelation 5 is that it is meant to evoke the Passover lamb, an image Paul utilizes in 1 Corinthians 5:7.<sup>12</sup> Whether John has in mind Jeremiah's imagery, Isaiah's suffering servant, or the Passover lamb, by promising a lion and then introducing a lamb the throne-room scene in Revelation 5 suggests a critical reversal in Jewish messianic expectations. Rather than a militaristic, warrior messiah (a lion) who will restore the glory of Israel through a physical conquest,<sup>13</sup> the true redemption of Israel will be obtained only through the blood of the lamb, an ultimate victory won through a temporary defeat.<sup>14</sup> It is at this point, then, that readers are introduced to John's "paradoxical lamb," a figure that is at once both dead and alive, victim and victor, one who finds the ultimate expression of life only in death. As one scholar has noted, John employs the image of the lamb in order to "emphasize that it was in an ironic

manner that Jesus began to fulfill the OT prophecies of the Messiah's kingdom. Wherever the OT predicts the Messiah's final victory and reign, John's readers are to realize that these goals can begin to be achieved only by the suffering of the cross."<sup>15</sup>

The irony of this scene is further developed through the attribution of "seven horns" and "seven eyes" to the lamb. In Hebrew Bible passages such as Deuteronomy 2:3; Daniel 7:20–21; 1 Samuel 2:1; and Psalm 89:17, "horn" tended to symbolize power and strength.<sup>16</sup> The image appears throughout the Psalms, in passages such as this: "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My buckler, and *the horn of my salvation*, and my high tower" (Psalm 18:2; emphasis added; compare Psalms 75:10; 89:17, 24; 92:10; 112:9).<sup>17</sup> Physically, a horn is typically associated with a ram rather than a sheep, adding an additional level to John's already-complex paradox.<sup>18</sup> The description of the lamb having "seven eyes" is likely an allusion to the lamps of the temple menorah in Zechariah 4:10 (compare Revelation 4:6), while eyes themselves can be viewed as symbolic of knowledge or wisdom.<sup>19</sup> Combined with the presence of the number seven, an indicator of "fullness" elsewhere in the book of Revelation and in biblical literature,<sup>20</sup> John's lamb emerges as a figure who is both *omnipotent* and *omniscient*, qualities one would expect from the Davidic Messiah, the lion from the tribe of Judah. The attribution of these two divine traits to a "slaughtered lamb" only serves to heighten the paradoxical imagery of John's throne-room scene.

The paradoxical juxtaposition of the "messianic lamb" is accentuated through the scene of praise that follows the appearance of the lamb. After the lamb approaches the throne of God and takes the book sealed with seven seals from God's right hand, the four beasts and the twenty-four elders who had been gathered around the throne fall down and begin to praise the lamb. Significantly, the focus of their praise is not the power or knowledge of the lamb, but the fact that the lamb had been slaughtered: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: *for thou wast slain*, and hast redeemed us

to God *by thy blood* out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9; emphasis added). The literal meaning of "redeemed" as "to buy back" appears to be intended here, with the lamb's blood being the "currency" used in the "purchase."<sup>21</sup> The result of this divine transaction is that the lamb "hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (5:10).<sup>22</sup> While the "power" and "sight" of the lamb are certainly impressive and noteworthy, John emphasizes that the lamb's worthiness and redemption come through its *vulnerability* and *sacrifice*. Significantly, no mention is made of the lamb *conquering death*—the resurrection is not mentioned as part of the lamb's worthiness. Rather, the focus is upon the lamb's conquering *through* death, an important distinction for John to make.

## Jesus as the "Redemptive" Lamb

The blood that flows from the conquering lamb becomes a critical theme in Revelation 7, where John describes what might be termed the "redemptive" lamb. In Revelation 5:9, John had introduced the idea that the blood of the slaughtered lamb acts as a redemptive element for those who follow the lamb. In Revelation 7:14, John further develops the redemptive nature of the lamb's blood through an additional paradoxical image. Here, in Revelation 7, John witnesses the sealing of the 144,000 (12,000 from each tribe). Following the sealing, John notices "a great multitude" standing before God's throne, each "clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Revelation 7:9). When asked by one of the elders for the identity of this party, John responds that he does not know. The elder answers, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). The idea that "blood" can wash an article of clothing and render it white presents a striking paradox and an additional ironic image for John's readers to grapple with. In the ancient world, one washed one's clothes to remove the dirt, after which a fuller would often bleach the clothing

white to remove stains, such as blood. However, the elder's answer is paradoxical, for, as Craig Koester has noted, "even though blood normally stains, here it cleanses."<sup>23</sup> John's imagery of cleansing through blood again highlights Jesus's power. As we sin and thus accumulate spiritual "dirt" or "stain," Jesus offers his cleansing power to those who will receive it.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, we cannot perform this act of cleansing by ourselves—it is his blood, and only he can offer it to us. Understood in this sense, cleansing through blood becomes an act of grace, offered freely to those who have made and kept their covenants and thus "[stand] before the throne" (7:9).<sup>25</sup> Notably, John will return to this imagery later in Revelation, as readers are informed that the devil is overcome "by the blood of the Lamb" (12:11), and the climactic encounter between Jesus Christ and the beasts finds Jesus clothed "with a vesture dipped in blood" (19:13).

The challenge presented by the image of the lamb, particularly throughout the book of Revelation, is how to interpret it. What does the New Testament want us to understand about Jesus and his sacrifice? Front and center is the idea of Jesus Christ as the high priest who offers himself willingly as the true Passover lamb, whose sacrifice will "take away the sin of the world." This conquest of death comes about through slaughtering of the lamb on the cross, as victory over death comes only through submission to it. It is through the violently shed blood of the slaughtered lamb that "sin" is taken away and the "clothing" of those who have faith in his name is made "white."<sup>26</sup> All this leads readers of the New Testament to encounter what one author has termed "the great Christian paradox"—namely, that in order for there to be life, the Son of God must die.<sup>27</sup>

## Jesus and the "Parodied" Lamb

At this point in John's vision, the lamb moves to the periphery of events as the focus shifts to other dramatic events and enigmatic characters: the opening of the seventh seal (Revelation 8–9), John's eating of a book (Revelation 10), the slain witnesses (Revelation 11), and the

introduction of an unholy trinity, a dragon and two beasts (one from the sea and one from the wilderness). The dragon is identified as the “Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), and may also be representative for the chaos that arises as the vision builds toward the creation of a new heaven and earth.<sup>28</sup> The second beast, the one from the land, is described as a prophet who speaks for the beast and promotes worship of the beast (compare Revelation 19:20).<sup>29</sup> It is the first beast, the beast from the sea, that interests us here. Here is how John describes it:

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? (Revelation 13:1–4)

Like the lamb, the beast receives power and authority from a higher source (God and the dragon). Like the lamb, this beast was wounded in a manner that should have resulted in death, yet miraculously the beast is healed. Like the lamb, the beast receives worship from those who witness it. This beast from the sea, then, represents a *parody* of the true lamb: “Where God’s Messiah is Jesus, the slain and living lamb (Rev 5:6), the dragon’s . . . vicegerent is the slain and living beast (13:3). Where the death and resurrection of the lamb convey the redemptive power of sacrifice, the purported death and healing of the beast disclose the resilient power of evil. The question for readers is which form of power and authority will claim their loyalty.”<sup>30</sup> In this fashion, the book of Revelation sets up its final denouement as being



between the potency of the paradoxical lamb and the dragon with his parodied lamb.

## Jesus as the “Providing” Lamb

The actual encounter between the lamb and the dragon finally occurs in Revelation 19, but not before John narrates a wedding feast celebrating the union of the lamb and the church. This union introduces a further dimension to the paradoxical lamb—namely, the lamb as “caretaker” or “provider.” Typically, sheep require a shepherd to feed and manage the flock. In return, the sheep obey the shepherd and hearken to his voice. Yet in Revelation 19 the lamb is described as a bridegroom ready to wed his bride. In the Hebrew Bible, Hosea speaks of the “marriage” between God and Israel in a very poignant manner: “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; Yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: And thou shalt know the Lord” (Hosea 2:19–20).<sup>31</sup> In this sense, it is God (Jehovah) who provides for and loves Israel. The realization of this wedding feast, then, provides a beautiful complexity to the book of Revelation’s Christology. Jesus functions as the lamb because he followed the will of his own Shepherd, his Father. But as the lamb takes his place as the Bridegroom, ready to join his bride, who is “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (Revelation 19:8), the lamb now becomes the Shepherd, and he will protect and care for those who respond to his name and follow him as if they were his own bride.

## The Revelation of the Lamb

It is, finally, at this point that the lamb appears in his true form. The book of Revelation had begun with the promise that what would be revealed was “Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:1). Until this point, this “unveiling” of Jesus has largely been through paradoxical symbols,

but here, finally, readers encounter the revealed Jesus Christ. In a visually impressive description, John states,

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords. (Revelation 19:11–16)

One of the striking characteristics of this description is that John mentions three titles or names for Jesus: “Faithful and True,” the “Word of God,” and “King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

The first, “faithful and true,” could refer to Jesus’s role as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectations.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the Hebrew Bible, prophets such as Isaiah promised that the Lord of Hosts would descend from Mt. Zion and defeat and judge Israel’s enemies.<sup>33</sup> In the descent of Jesus from heaven, this promise has been fulfilled; Jesus has been “faithful and true” to his promise.

The title the “Word of God” may suggest to readers a connection with the Gospel of John, which also speaks of Jesus being “the word” (John 1:1). For this reason, this title could be a reference to Jesus’s close association with the Father. Jesus is the Logos because he is the Father’s agent; the Father expresses his will that an action be brought to pass, and the Logos is the one who fulfills the Father’s “words.” However, based upon the context, this title is likely describing Jesus’s role as judge, since “the rider will judge by means of God’s word.”<sup>34</sup>

The association of the title the Word of God with judgment is supported by the weapon that Jesus carries. According to Revelation 19:21, Jesus slays his enemies with a sword, specifically a sword that “proceeded out of his mouth.” In other words, Jesus’s foes are defeated by the weapon of his words—that is, the judgment that he brings upon the wicked.<sup>35</sup>

The final title, “King of kings, and Lord of lords,”<sup>36</sup> is written in a very visible location, on Jesus’s “vesture and on his thigh.”<sup>37</sup> In verse 12, John had said that Jesus’s name was one “that no man knew,” but here, in a movement “from concealment to disclosure,”<sup>38</sup> Jesus chooses to reveal his name to everyone.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the three names, Jesus is also described as having eyes that were “as a flame of fire,” a head with “many crowns,” and a robe “dipped in blood.” The presence of fire speaks directly to Jesus’s mission; just as fire both destroys and cleanses, Jesus has arrived to destroy the wicked and cleanse the earth (compare Revelation 1:14; 2:18). The image of a crown carries with it a sense of rule or authority. While kings and monarchs currently upon the earth may have an individual crown, Jesus has “many crowns,” suggesting that his authority trumps theirs. Additionally, the dragon and the beast wear a specified number of crowns, but the number of Jesus’s crowns remains unspecified. He has authority over not only the human rulers of the earth, but the forces of evil as well.<sup>40</sup> The implication of Revelation 19:12 is that Jesus’s name may have been written on the crowns. This would serve as a parallel to both the blasphemous names written on the beast’s crowns but also the appearance of the name of the Lord on the Jewish high priest’s forehead. Finally, while the robe “dipped in blood” could refer to the blood of Jesus’s vanquished enemies,<sup>41</sup> the fact that the robe is dipped in blood prior to the commencement of the battle indicates that the robe was bloody prior to Jesus’s arrival. In that case, the presence of blood on his robe would likely be due to his redemptive actions during his mortal ministry—namely, the atonement and crucifixion.<sup>42</sup> Just as those who follow Jesus have their

robes “washed white” though his blood (Alma 5:21), Jesus’s own robe remains bloodstained.

All these images prepare readers for an additional element of the book of Revelation’s Christology—namely, Jesus’s function as warrior. The forces of the dragon—namely, the two beasts and the rulers of the earthly kingdoms who have been swayed by the promises of the dragon—have been gathering since chapter 16 in preparation for the battle of Armageddon, which finally takes place in chapter 19. The battle itself, however, unfolds differently than some readers might think. In actuality, there is little that could be termed a battle. Rather, Jesus arrives on the scene and promptly casts the two beasts into “a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20). Those who foolishly aligned themselves with the dragon are subsequently slain with the sword of Jesus, a sword that “proceeded out of his mouth” and thus likely refers to an act of preaching and spreading the message of Jesus Christ rather than a literal slaying. While the dragon had boasted of his power and might, all that remains of his forces is a feast for the crows, who “were filled with their flesh” (19:21).

## A New Paradox—Jesus as “God”

The remaining chapters, those describing the millennial reign of Jesus and the eventual establishment of a celestial earth, provide the final piece of the book of Revelation’s Christology. While Jesus’s power and abilities have been alluded to in previous chapters, such as the lamb with seven horns and the seven eyes or the rider upon the white horse, it is in this climactic section that Jesus’s association with the Father comes through most vividly. Consider the following passages:

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation 21:22)

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. (Revelation 21:23)

And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.  
(Revelation 22:1)

And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. (Revelation 22:3–4)

These statements imply a relationship where the Father and the Son exist as *one* being. Together the Lord God Almighty and the lamb form *one* temple. Both God and the lamb are the “light” of the city. Both God and the lamb share *one* throne. Significantly, those who serve “God and the Lamb” serve “him.” Referring specifically to Revelation 22:3, G. K. Beale writes, “That ‘they will serve *him*’ likely does not refer only to God or only to the Lamb. The two are conceived so much as a unity that the singular pronoun can refer to both. . . . That both are sitting on only one throne and together form one temple (21:22) enhances their perceived unity.”<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that Jesus hadn’t shared divinity with the Father prior to the creation of the “new heaven and the new earth” or that his divinity was a result of his conquest in Revelation 19, only that this divinity is made explicit through the enthronement scene narrated in Revelation 22. Curiously, the paradoxical Christology of Revelation that appeared to have been resolved in chapter 19 has now returned. How can two beings be one? How can two deities share one throne? These questions have troubled Christian thinkers for two thousand years, and ascertaining exactly what John has in mind in using this language remains a challenge for readers of his text. Perhaps the simplest way to understand these closing chapters is not to try to resolve the paradox but to embrace it, remembering that, ultimately, John leaves little doubt as to who Jesus is—he is God himself.

In summary, what can be said about the Christology of the book of Revelation? Many of the christological elements we would expect as Latter-day Saints are present. First and foremost, Jesus Christ is

God; he is *one* with the Father. He is described as having seven horns and seven eyes, images that suggest a high degree of *power* and *knowledge*. Further, he is a *warrior*. It is he who rides down from heaven and with his sword dispenses justice to the unrepentant. He is also the rightful *ruler* of the earth, the only one who bears the name “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

However, one of the most significant messages of the book of Revelation is that Jesus is one with the Father not simply because Jesus is, by nature, divine (although he may be). Rather, the book of Revelation suggests that Jesus’s eventual status should be attributed to the personal qualities he demonstrated in the previous chapters. The twenty-four elders do not bow down to the lamb because he is God, but because he is *worthy*. This worth comes through Jesus’s *submissiveness* in accepting the book offered by the Father, even though the result was that he became the slaughtered lamb. He suffered and bled and was ultimately crucified. In this action, Jesus also demonstrated a degree of *loyalty*; what the Father asked, he would do, no matter how much anguish he was forced to endure. The result of these experiences was that Jesus became our *Redeemer*; it is his blood that washes our garments white, our sins and pains that leave his garment red. This union between sinner and savior is characterized through the wedding supper of the lamb, where Jesus, as *caretaker*, unites with his bride.

It is this confluence of qualities that perhaps accounts for John’s paradoxical Christology. Jesus may now sit enthroned as God, but only because he submitted himself to mortality. Jesus can boast of conquest, but the true sign of his victory was his own vulnerability. As the author of Hebrews poignantly observed, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16; compare Alma 7:11–12). Jesus is the “great high priest” of Hebrews precisely because of the experiences highlighted in the book of Revelation.<sup>44</sup> As

Latter-day Saint readers of the book of Revelation, it is critical that we don't forget or ignore this fundamental element of John's vision—namely, that he has endured our pains and our sufferings *for us*, so that in him we can find the peace, the redemption, and ultimately the salvation that so gracefully he offers us.

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## Notes

1. Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 142.
2. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David Rolph Seely, *My Father's House: Temple Worship and Symbolism in the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 209.
3. ἀρνίον is technically the diminutive form of ἀρνῆν, though it is unlikely that such detail would have been recognizable enough to carry theological weight by the first century CE. See discussion in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), s.v. "Lamb."
4. According to one scholar, the word *sheep* appears a total of 742 times in the Old Testament. Roy Pinney, *The Animals of the Bible: The Identity and Natural History of All the Animals Mentioned in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books: Philadelphia, 1964), 108. See also the lengthy discussion in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 7:43–52.
5. See discussion in Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 28–32.
6. According to D&C 77:6, the scroll contains "the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this

earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence.”

7. According to D&C 77:7, the seven seals represent temporal periods of the earth’s history: “We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.”
8. “The emphases on the tribe of Judah and on Davidic descent together underline one of the crucial qualifications of the Jewish royal Messiah: he must be a descendant of the royal house of David (*Psalms of Solomon* 17:21; Mark 12:35–37; John 7:42), sometimes conceived as David *redivivus* (Jer 23:5; 30:9).” David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 350.
9. It should be noted that the lamb “stood” (ἕστηκός). In other words, it did not lie down or limp, as one would expect an animal to do that was wounded. The lamb clearly bears the marks of its wounds but not the effects.
10. “The perfect participle ἐσφαγμένον (“having been slain”) expresses an abiding condition as a result of the past act of being slain,” with the result that not only does the lamb stand before the throne, he “continues to exist as a *slaughtered* lamb.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 352.
11. This vulnerability should not, however, be interpreted as weakness. As Ekkehardt Mueller points out, “The servant of God does not defend himself. No evil is found in him. In him truth resides. He is righteous and yet lives for others and is willing to bear their sin and guilt. *However, the Lamb is not a symbol of weakness. It is a symbol of strength in suffering.* In spite of its vulnerability it is victorious.” Ekkehardt Mueller, “Christological Concepts in the Book of Revelation—Part 3: The Lamb Christology,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (2011): 45; emphasis added.
12. “There are two different proposals for the background of the ‘slain Lamb.’ Some prefer to see it as a reference to the OT Passover lamb, while others favor Isa. 53:7: ‘he was led as a sheep to the slaughter’ (cf. Isa. 53:8ff.). However, neither should be excluded, since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Rev. 5:6 the central function and significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for



God's people. The Isaiah 53 background especially highlights the atoning aspect of the lamb's sacrificial death, as well as applying the metaphors of both 'root' (ρίζα; cf. Isa. 52:2 and Rev. 5:5) and 'lamb' (ἄμνος, LXX) to the sacrificial victim. In fact, 'root' occurs also in Isa. 11:1, 10, alluded to in Rev. 5:5, which may have inspired attraction to the same metaphor in 53:2. The Passover/Isaiah 53 backgrounds are also suggested by the use of ἀρνίον ("lamb"), behind which could lie Aramaic *ṯalia*, which means not only 'lamb,' but also 'servant' and 'boy.' If that is the case, then ἀρνίον would be a most suitable word to combine the Passover lamb with the servant lamb of Isaiah 53." Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 351.

13. This is not to suggest that all Jewish Messianic expectation centered upon a militant figure. See John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995).
14. "This scene lies at the theological heart of the Apocalypse. It is specifically designed to communicate the shock, irony, and ethical import of his message that the *Conquering One conquers by being a slain lamb*, not a devouring lion" (Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 159). Of the expectation of seeing a lion and the actual realization of seeing a lamb, David L. Barr writes, "A more complete reversal of value would be hard to imagine." David L. Barr, "Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis," *Interpretation* 38 (January 1984): 41.
15. Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 353–54.
16. "The horn was a symbol of power and honor (Pss 89:17, 24; 92:10; 112:9; 1 Sam 2:1; 1QM I, 4) and the ability to save (Ps 18:2; 2 Sam 22:3)." Craig Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 377.
17. The attribution of horns to a messianic figure does appear in literature from outside the Hebrew Bible, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (1Q28b Col. V:26) and the Pseudepigrapha (1 *Enoch* 90:37). What impact passages such as these may have had upon John's lamb is unknown. Craig Koester writes, "The imagery in Revelation both affirms and transforms earlier connotations. The seven horns affirm Jesus' messianic identity, yet as the Lamb, he saves through his own self-sacrifice" (Koester, *Revelation*, 377). The key

difference, however, is that “the Messiah is never symbolized as a lamb in Judaism, and the special attributes of seven horns and seven eyes together suggest that this composite image is the creation of the author, though the elements are drawn from traditional imagery” (Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 353–54).

18. “But this lamb had horns, and so we have a fusion of sacrificial lamb and ram features, conveying a deliberate paradox.” Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 121.
19. “God was understood to see all things, so no one was exempt from his scrutiny” (Koester, *Revelation*, 377). Witherington calls the eyes “symbols of omniscience” (Witherington, *Revelation*, 120). Compare Revelation 4:5–6, where the four beasts were themselves “full of eyes.”
20. “Seven is a symbolic number, denoting wholeness and completeness.” Jay A. Parry and Donald W. Parry, *Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 14.
21. “The verb ‘purchase’ (*agorazein*) has connotations of the marketplace (Rev 13:17; 18:11), where some people purchased others to be their slaves (*Vita Aesopi* 15; 20). In the divine economy, however, Jesus purchases people for God, which is a redemptive action” (Koester, *Revelation*, 379–80). Compare 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23, where the same verb is used in a similar sense.
22. Technically, “kings and priests” (βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς) should be translated “a kingdom and priests,” likely an allusion to Exodus 19:6.
23. Koester, *Revelation*, 422. Additionally, the book of Revelation may be drawing upon the Old Testament imagery of sacrifice with this imagery. Psalm 51:7 contains the injunction “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Isaiah, in a similar fashion, promises that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).
24. John may have in mind Isaiah 1:18 or Exodus 19:10–14 here.
25. When John describes the group standing before God’s throne who receive “white robes” (Revelation 7:9), he may well have the Abrahamic covenant specifically in mind. As G. K. Beale observes, the phrase “a great multitude, which no man could number,” possibly “evokes the promise to Abraham and Jacob that God would multiply their descendants. . . . Therefore, the multitudes in Rev. 7:9 are the consummate fulfillment of the Abrahamic

- promise and appear to be another of the manifold ways in which John refers to Christians as Israel" (Beale, *Revelation*, 427).
26. Other New Testament passages add to this imagery. John declares in 1 John 1:7 that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." In two places Paul alludes to this, in Romans 3:25, where he speaks of Jesus's "sacrifice of atonement by his blood" (NRSV), and in Ephesians 1:7, where Paul declares that through his grace we have "redemption through his blood." Finally, the author of Hebrews asserts "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:22 NRSV).
  27. Grant R. Osbourne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 254.
  28. As Koester notes, "In Revelation the dragon has the qualities of a mythic monster. The LXX calls sea monsters (Hebrew, *taninim*) and Leviathan 'dragons' (Ps 74:13–14 [73:13–14 LXX]). Such dragons represented the chaotic forces that needed divine control (Job 7:12; 26:13; 41:1; Ezek 32:2 LXX)" (Koester, *Revelation*, 544).
  29. This second beast also hints at the chaos that precedes the new creation through its allusion to Behemoth, another monster described in the Hebrew Bible (compare Job 40:15–24; Revelation 13:11).
  30. Koester, *Revelation*, 581. Beale adds, "The expression of Satanic incomparability is an ironic use of OT phraseology applied to Yahweh (cf. esp. Exod. 8:10; 15:11; Deut. 3:24; Isa. 40:18, 25; 44:7; 46:5; Pss. 35:10; 71:19; 86:8; 89:8; 113:5; Mic. 7:18). This is a further attempt at Satanic imitation of God. In all these OT texts Yahweh's incomparability is contrasted polemically with false gods and idols" (Beale, *Revelation*, 694).
  31. In the Hebrew Bible, it was common to speak of the covenant as a marriage between God and Israel (compare Ezekiel 16:8; Jeremiah 31:32; Isaiah 54:5). However, the relationship between the Messiah and the Church was rarely, if ever, described in this fashion. In Christian texts, such as Matthew 19:15; John 3:29; and Ephesians 5:28–32, the application of the marriage imagery to the Messiah and the Church became the norm, as reflected here in Revelation 19.
  32. "This dual name occurs in Greek only in 3 *Macc.* 2:11 (πιστὸς εἶ καὶ ἀληθινός), where it refers to a hope in God's faithfulness, namely that in

answering Israel's prayer God will defend the honor of his name by judging Israel's persecutor (cf. 3 *Macc.* 2:9–14). The verbal identity and similarity of contextual theme indicate that John is probably alluding to 3 *Maccabees* here, and this strengthens the contextual theme of Christ as a divine figure and as the one who executes a just and vindicating judgment" (Beale, *Revelation*, 950).

33. Compare Isaiah 24:21–23; 31:4–5; 34:12.
34. Beale, *Revelation*, 957. Compare Wisdom of Solomon 18:15–16.
35. "To be slain by the sword that projected from the mouth of the warrior on the white steed certainly invites metaphorical interpretation; i.e., the 'sword' must be the words spoken by the warrior." David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), 1067.
36. "These titles were ordinarily reserved for God but here are given to Christ, who acts on God's behalf" (Koester, *Revelation*, 766).
37. It is more likely that the name is only written once, on the cloak, with the reference to "his thigh" being appositional or exegetical, introduced by "and." Understood in this way, the name would have appeared on the cloak but on the part of the cloak that covers the thigh, in other words, where a soldier would carry his sword. See discussion in Koester, *Revelation*, 758. Additionally, in the Old Testament one typically made an oath by placing one's hand underneath the thigh (compare Genesis 24:2; 47:29), an idea that may allude back to the "faithful and true" title in verse 11.
38. Koester, *Revelation*, 754.
39. Concealed names play an important role in the book of Revelation. Believers are given a white stone with a name written on it that remains secret to all but the believer (Revelation 2:17), while the whore in Revelation 17 has a name written that is supposed to remain a mystery, but John reveals it anyway (Revelation 17:5).
40. Coincidentally or not, earlier in the book of Revelation Christians are promised that they will obtain a "crown of life" as a reward for their endurance, while the twenty-four elders who surround the throne of God are also described as wearing "golden crowns." Compare Revelation 2:10; 4:4.
41. This seems to be the implication of Isaiah 63:2–3: "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?"

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: For I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.”

42. As Koester notes, “There are two principal interpretations concerning the source of the blood. The most probable is that this is Christ’s own blood” (Koester, *Revelation*, 755).
43. Beale, *Revelation*, 1113. Aune adds, “By sharing the throne of God, the Lamb also shares the sovereignty of God” (Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1177).
44. Jesus does appear in language reminiscent of the Jewish high priest in Revelation 1:11–20. Here Jesus is described as being “in the midst of the seven candlesticks,” likely implying that he has entered the holy place of the temple.