



## Revelation 5

### How to read Revelation

The book of Revelation is a drama told in images, pictures, and symbols. John entered another dimension of reality while on the island of Patmos. He was exiled for the gospel of Christ. In Revelation 1-3, he recorded messages to seven churches in what is now Western Turkey. These were seven historic churches and John wrote to them in a style meant to encourage and to challenge. The Apostle John's style of writing was called "apocalyptic." This style (which doesn't exist today) used prophecy, narration, and poetry. *The way you communicate a message says something about the importance of the message itself.* For instance, "if the President were to give next year's State of the Union address using smoke signals and tom-toms, we would wonder why. Next week, if you heard a sermon that was presented as opera, you'd wonder why" (Arthurs 2007, 180-181). Why does John use these exotic images and pictures in Revelation? The answer is that he's trying to get a message across to Christians (1900 years removed from us), who are suffering sporadic persecution that's going to get worse! It appears that God is not in control! Christians are frightened! They need a dramatic, image-saturated message from God that will communicate what reality looks like from His perspective! Things are not what they seem! To the world, the Laodicean church was wealthy and successful. To Christ, it was poor, blind, and naked. To the world, the Roman Empire was the light; to Jesus, it was a beast given power by Satan himself. To citizens of the Empire, the goddess *Roma* (i.e., Roman culture; the Roman way of life) was worshiped as deity; to God, she was the mother of whores (Revelation 17). Things are not what they seem!

We commit cultural arrogance when we refuse to figure out why a particular book of the Bible was delivered in particular way. You can say, "I don't get it; the Bible doesn't make sense; I'm going golfing!" Or you can say, "This was written this way for a reason. Maybe I should figure it out." We need to stop trying to decode Revelation for the "countdown to Armageddon"; and instead overhear how these images were received by those who first received them. What was God's message to them? What is God's "competing version of reality?" God battles the images of Rome with His own images. The battle still rages today. Image-saturated American culture is idolized and it woos us to its ways; but God wants to know where our loyalties lie. Are we willing to face persecution for refusing to bow to the Empire? One day Jesus will return to settle accounts. When He comes, what will He find?

### Revelation 5 shows why Jesus is most worthy of worship!

After these messages to the churches in Revelation 1-3, John is transported in Revelation 4-5 to the realm of the Spirit where he beholds the throne room of heaven; the "Oval Office of the Universe." Dr. Don Carson once said that Revelation 4 is the stage upon which the drama of Revelation 5 is played out. It's all about worship! Make no mistake: you become what you worship! When you worship Jesus, you become like

Him—a king who reigns and a priest who serves! Worship anything else, and you become a slave who suffers. Let's unpack the symbolism of Revelation 5

*v. 1—A scroll with writing on both sides sealed with seven seals . . . .* The scroll is the playbook! It is the book of God's decrees which contain the full account of what God in His sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world. It's written on the front and back to indicate how extensive and comprehensive the decrees of God are. John's readers would recognize the scroll and its seven seals as a contract or a Last Will and Testament. When unsealed the contents would be put into play. (Reinecker)

*v. 4—*Is there anyone qualified to unseal the contents of God's decrees AND put them into play? Who is worthy to do this? Who is able?

*vv. 5-7—*The Lion conquers by suffering as a slain Lamb! "John sees a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, bearing the wounds of sacrificial slaughter, yet standing in readiness for action. In one brilliant stroke John portrays his central theme of NT revelation—victory through sacrifice. The horn is the proverbial symbol of courage, strength, and might." Seven is the number of completeness; fullness. The seven eyes = the sevenfold Spirit; the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father sent the Son into the world; the Son sent the Spirit into the world. Our Three in One God is pictured in this chapter.

*v. 8—*each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls. The harp was the instrument of joy, praise, and celebration! (Ps. 33:2); the bowls represented prayers of the saints, prayers that God would right the wrongs and injustices of this evil world! "This is startling: the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are in part God's answers to the prayers of the saints!" (Osborne 2002, 259)

*vv. 9-10—*why is the Lamb worthy? Because He conquered through His sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus is not declared worthy because He is God; He is declared worthy because He suffered a violent death for the sins of the world in order to purchase a people who are a kingdom of priests. Corporately, God's people reign—we are a kingdom! Individually, God's people serve—each is a priest. Just like Jesus, the priest-king.

The commission to ethnic Israel in Exodus 19:6 has now been fulfilled in Christ and expanded to every tribe, nation, language, and people group. God's people are those who belong to Christ, no matter what race. "The picture of God's people at the climax of history portrays a multi-ethnic congregation from every tribe, language, people, and nation, all gathered together around God's throne" (Hays 2003, 205).

*vv. 11-14—*the explosion of worship that concludes this chapter parallels what John saw in Revelation 4. The meaning is inescapable: What is true of the Father is true of the Son. As Jesus himself declared, "I and my Father are one!"

### **Worship Jesus and you will become like Jesus!**

If others in my life are not seeing Jesus in my life, is Jesus in my life? Are they seeing victory through sacrifice in my life?

The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I shall die, and the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, shall be raised on the Last Day. Our salvation is 'external to ourselves.' I find no salvation in my life story, but only in the history of Jesus Christ. Only he who allows himself to be found in Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, his Cross, and his resurrection, is with God and God with him. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)