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The Lamb of God Image of Christ in Revelation

MA Thesis

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March 2004

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Thesis Statement

The identification of Christ as the Lamb of God provides great potential for comfort to God's people. Although this designation of our Lord Jesus Christ occurs only twice in Holy Scripture,¹ a shortened version, the Lamb, is used extensively in the book of Revelation as one of His titles. While there is much debate as to the origin and precise meaning of this term, there is a significant amount of scriptural background that provides a context for understanding this title of the Lord Jesus.

The prominence of lambs in the sacrificial cultus of the Old Testament² prefigures the presentation and identification of Christ as a pure and innocent sacrificial Lamb. The use of the blood of lambs in the Passover as a means of God delivering His people prefigures the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, as the means by which God delivers all mankind from sin (Exodus 12). This same blood sacrifice imagery, in the Day of Atonement ritual,³ helps Christians to understand the shedding of Christ's blood as the one, final, perfect atonement for the sin of the world.

The use of shepherd imagery to represent God's relationship with His people is fulfilled when the Lamb proclaims, "I AM the Good Shepherd" (Revelation 7.17). Especially important is the description of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah, as a Lamb in Isaiah 52.13-53.12. Certainly, the identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God draws deeply from this description of His vicarious atonement.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore briefly the biblical background of this title and to examine in detail how John not only utilizes this imagery in the Book of

¹ John 1.29, 36.

² For example, Exodus 29.10-30; Leviticus 3.7, 4.32, 35; 5.6-7.

Revelation, but expands it by identifying the Lamb as *Christus Victor*, describing His worthiness, glory, honor, power, majesty and might. In describing all the conquests of the Lamb through the day of His glorious return, John provides the church with a greater understanding of our Savior and greater comfort in the self-sacrificial love and the ultimate victory of the Lamb.

³ Leviticus 16, 17; 23.26-44.

General Introduction

Lambs are enigmatic creatures. They have been hyper-domesticated for thousands of years. Because of this, they are virtually helpless. While lambs can be used as a sign of purity, “without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1.19), lambs are also capable of straying away from their shepherd. Human sin is often compared with this “straying” of sheep (Isaiah 53.6). Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that Jesus would be designated as the Lamb of God, a title that follows Him to His reign of glory in heaven.

It is certain that this title is not used of Jesus to indicate a life of sin, as if He was someone capable of, constantly oriented toward, and engaged in constant straying, in need of a shepherd Himself. He is sinless, though He was “tempted in every way just as we are” (Hebrews 4.15). However, it is of great comfort that, in coming to save us, He became like us – and took the guilt of all our sinful straying upon Himself at the cross. It is of immeasurable consolation, in the depth of our repentance, that Jesus was willing to identify with us so completely.

It is likely that this title is intended to draw our attention to the sacrificial cultus, to qualities of the lamb “without blemish or spot” which was to be offered as a sacrifice to God. Concepts of atonement and reconciliation with God through sacrificial actions help us to understand the crucifixion of Jesus as a sacrifice to God through which all human beings are reconciled to God (Romans 3.24, 25). The Scripture informs us that “by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10.14). It was to this one sacrifice that the whole Old Testament sacrificial system pointed.

It is also likely that this image is used to stimulate a deeper consideration of Christ's remarkable love for us, that He willingly humbled Himself, setting aside the full and complete use of His glory, power, and prerogative (according to His human nature), which are His as the Divine Son of God. He did this in order to save us, allowing Himself to be "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53.7). Further, His exemplary dependence upon God, as a lamb which depends completely upon its shepherd, helps us to see how we too should look to and depend on our great Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God!

There are a variety of Old Testament texts that may provide some insight into this title for Christ. The account of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his "one and only son" Isaac is of interest, but a ram, not a lamb, was ultimately used as the sacrifice.⁴ The Passover account in Exodus 12 also comes to mind, where the blood of the sacrifice placed upon the doorframes provided salvation from death. However, in the Passover both goats and sheep are used (Exodus 12.5). Yet another text, dealing with the Day of Atonement and its scapegoat (Leviticus 16 and 17), comes to mind as a potential source of the lamb imagery of John. This text's significant contribution is in illustrating the value of atonement and the significance of a scapegoat bearing or carrying off the sin of the world. Once again, however, animals other than sheep are used: bulls, goats and rams. The text that provides the greatest direct Old Testament association between the "sacrificial lambs" and the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, is Isaiah 52.13-53.12, the account of the Suffering Servant. Insights from this text will be presented in this paper.

⁴ Genesis 22.2; 22.1-19, respectively.

The New Testament also contains numerous allusions to this figurative title of Jesus. The Evangelist John records the origin of this title for Jesus. Twice he quotes John the Baptist as the one using this phrase to identify Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of the world (John 1.29, 36). The apostle Peter also utilizes the richness of the lamb imagery, reminding his readers of their redemption “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1.19). The book of Hebrews, alluding to the Old Testament sacrificial cultus as well as lamb imagery, speaks of Christ doing away with sin “by the sacrifice of Himself.”⁵ Paul speaks of God presenting Jesus as “a sacrifice of atonement” (Romans 3.25). However, the primary source for understanding Jesus as the Lamb of God is the Book of Revelation.

In the book of Revelation, John shortens the phrase to the Lamb. He uses this designation 28 times to refer to Christ, focusing on Christ’s saving actions for His people. John builds on the Isaianic understanding of The Messiah (The Suffering Servant) as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” However, in Revelation, the Lamb “that was slain from the creation of the world” (13.8) is “the First and the Last, the Living One,” the One who was dead but now is alive forever and ever, the One who holds the keys of death and Hades (1.17-18). The Lamb has become Victor over death by going through death. John’s presentation of this glorious Lamb of God assures all Christians of forgiveness of sins and the defeat of sin, death, and the power of the devil, and provides complete hope for the future.

⁵ Hebrews 9.26. See also Hebrews 1.3; 2.9, 14, 15, 17; 5.1-3; 7.26-28; 9.7, 11-14; 10.1-14, 18-19; 13.11-12.

Lamb Imagery in Scripture Outside of the Book of Revelation

Old Testament

There are four Old Testament texts that are of interest when considering lamb imagery. Three of them are from the Pentateuch; the fourth is from the prophetic literature. The texts from the Pentateuch, unfortunately, refer to animals besides lambs, limiting their value as possible source texts for John's use of lamb imagery in his Gospel and Apocalypse. The text from the Prophetic literature has generated a great deal of controversy, but appears to provide the greatest potential for understanding lamb imagery in the Old Testament.

The earliest text with possible implications for the study of lamb imagery that will be examined in this paper is the account of the Passover in Exodus 12.⁶ The Israelites brushed the blood of the sacrifice on their doorways and the angel of death passed over their dwellings, sparing them while smiting the Egyptians. Again, the primary objection to this text pertains to the animal sacrificed. Both sheep and goats were sacrificed, giving the appearance that a lamb was equal to a goat. This text does, however, demonstrate the "power in the blood" to save.

⁶ The earliest text with possible implications for the study of lamb imagery is Genesis 22.1-19, the account of Abraham and Isaac. God tells Abraham to go and sacrifice Isaac, his "one and only son." On the mountain Abraham binds a trusting Isaac on the altar to slay him, but God provides the sacrifice. In this text, Abraham is a type for God the Father. However, the focus is on God's provision of the sacrifice (divine initiative) rather than Isaac's lamblike qualities (trusting, meek, unresisting). Also, in this text God provides a ram for the sacrifice, not a lamb, and thus this text only provides an indirect association with lamb imagery.

Another text that recalls the “power in the blood” is the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and 17. Annually the Israelites sought God’s forgiveness of their sin on that day. The priest offered a substitute animal to sacrifice for the sin of Israel. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the horns of the altar (16.18). The scapegoat, which bore the sin, was led off into the desert away from the Israelites, carrying away their sin (16.10). However, no sheep were sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, but bulls, rams and goats were (16.3, 5). The Apostle John, however, does call Jesus *hilasmos estin peri ton hamartion hemon ou peri ton hemeteron de monon alla kai peri holou tou cosmou* (1 John 2.2).

The primary Old Testament text that specifically utilizes lamb imagery is the account of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52.13-53.12. The Suffering Servant is described in Isaiah 53.7 as “a Lamb that is led to the slaughter.” The passages surrounding this reference speak of a vicarious expiatory sacrifice of this Lamb, the Suffering Servant. The fact that this text does not specifically identify the Suffering Servant has prompted a great deal of conjecture among scholars. Is the Servant Jesus Christ, Israel or someone else? It is obvious that in the book of Revelation the Lamb is identified as Jesus Christ. If the Suffering Servant is someone other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ, then this Isaianic text is irrelevant to the discussion of the Lamb in Revelation. Therefore, it is important to ascertain, with some degree of certainty, the identity of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52.13-53.12.

One possible source of information to help identify the Suffering Servant is apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature. Although generally written after Old Testament times, this is some of the earliest literature to contain the traditional Christian

view that the fourth servant song (Isaiah 52.13-53.12) is a prophecy of the passion of Christ.⁷ Three of these books contain statements that have provoked scholarly interest.

According to Sydney Page, “of these books the oldest containing an allusion to the Isaianic Servant is the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus).”⁸ Sirach 48.10 RSV describes Elijah as

You who are ready at the appointed time, it is written,
to calm the wrath of God before it breaks out in fury,
to turn the heart of the father to the son,
and to restore the tribes of Jacob.

This verse appears to be a conflation of Malachi 4.5-6 with Isaiah 49.6.⁹ Page points out the limited benefits of this text in determining who the Suffering Servant is: “The author adopted an individual, rather than collective, interpretation of the servant, and saw him as an eschatological, rather than historical, figure.”¹⁰ The Holy Scripture, however, clearly shows that Elijah is not the servant. Acts 8.34-35 directly identifies Jesus as the Suffering Servant when Philip, reading from the Isaianic scroll, tells the eunuch that Jesus is the Suffering Servant.

Another apocryphal wisdom book is the Wisdom of Solomon (2.10-5.23), a text heavily influenced by Hellenism, which abounds in allusions to the servant passages in Isaiah. However, Page fails to support the claims he makes in his statement: “Since ‘the righteous man’ in Wisdom is unquestionably a collective designation, this provides unambiguous evidence of a collective interpretation of the servant which embraces the

⁷ Page, Sydney H. T. “The Suffering Servant between Testaments.” New Testament Studies 31 (1985): 481.

⁸ S. Page, 481.

⁹ S. Page, 482.

¹⁰ S. Page, 482.

notion of suffering.” He does concede that it is not vicarious suffering for atonement that “the righteous man” endures in The Wisdom of Solomon.¹¹ Given that the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52.13-53.12 does suffer vicariously for atonement, it is difficult to agree with any identification of “the righteous man” of The Wisdom of Solomon with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.

The last extra-Biblical text referenced by Page, 1 Enoch 71.14-17, illustrates how inaccurate and unreliable the intertestamental literature can be. Enoch claims that he himself is “the righteous one,” “the son of man,” “his [the LORD’s] anointed,” and “the light of the Gentiles.” Page notes that Enoch “consciously adopted an individual and messianic interpretation of the servant.”¹² That is the one redeeming quality of this extra-Biblical text. However, this extra-Biblical text provides no help in accurately identifying the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12, in that there is no historical or Biblical record of anyone named Enoch being “pierced for our transgressions” or “crushed for our iniquities.”

After surveying the most promising references to the Suffering Servant in apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, it is clear that these texts offer a wide range of speculations as to the identity of the Servant. The majority of these texts do seem to support the proposition that the Servant is a messianic individual. Since, however, these texts provide descriptions which are inconsistent with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12, not to mention that they have no canonical authority, they ultimately are of little value in resolving the issue of the identity of the Suffering Servant.

¹¹ S. Page, 482.

¹² S. Page, 483.

Scholarly investigation of the Holy Scripture regarding the identification of the Suffering Servant also seems to be filled with difficulties. Most scholars identify the Suffering Servant as either the nation of Israel or as Jesus Christ, while a few attempt to identify the Suffering Servant as some individual other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Some envision a dual meaning.

The problem with typology in the account of the Suffering Servant is that *no* type (Old Testament person) can fulfill this description of the Suffering Servant. Those who view this text as rectilinear prophecy note the difficulty in identifying any type, from the time of Isaiah to the coming of Christ.

Among those holding a corporate typological identification of the Suffering Servant is Jorge Pixley, a Latin American theologian who says, "This Servant-Minister must be presumed to be the nation Israel – not an individual."¹³ Furthermore, he says, "The Servant Songs as a whole, and the Fourth song in particular, reflect in quite a strict sense upon resurrection, not as personal life after death, but as national life that derives its power from 'death with a mission.'"¹⁴

H. C. Leupold rebuts the arguments for the nation of Israel being the Suffering Servant: "Let us note already that the Servant is thought of very clearly as distinct from the nation Israel, for in [chapter 41] v.6 he stands over against the nation as the mediator of the covenant and as its light."¹⁵ Hummel, who is open to typological interpretation, points out persuasively the great difficulties with identifying in any way the nation Israel

¹³ Levison, John R., and Priscilla Pope-Levison, eds. Return to Babel: Global Perspectives on the Bible. Louisville: Westminster, 1999. 96.

¹⁴ Levison and Pope-Levison, 97.

¹⁵ Leupold, H. C. Exposition of Isaiah. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968. 60.

as the Suffering Servant. Hummel identifies four main “types” of interpretation: “1. autobiographical, 2. biographical or historical, 3. collective or corporate, and 4. Messianic or Christological.”¹⁶ However, after quickly dismissing the first two “types” of interpretation, Hummel concludes, “On the same principle, it does not take long to decide that the fourth alternative is ultimately the only one compatible with the New Testament.”¹⁷

Many commentators and expositors agree with Hummel in identifying the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12 as Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Edward J. Young, for example, writes, “Who is the Servant? The answer, we believe, is that He is the redeeming Messiah whom God had long ago promised to His people as the Deliverer from sin. In other words, the Servant is Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ According to Hummel, “traditional Christian understandings have been quite unanimously Messianic.”²⁰ Leupold emphasizes this: “the person under consideration is none less than the one who in the New Testament goes under the name of Jesus the Christ. Other views . . . are quite unsatisfactory.”²¹ Braun says, “This great servant is none other than Jesus Christ.” Furthermore, he says, “When we identify the Servant as Jesus Christ, we tie the entire Scriptures together.”²²

¹⁶ Hummel, 222-223.

¹⁷ Hummel, 223.

¹⁸ See also John M. Oswalt (NICOT: Isaiah Chapters 40-66, 378-379); John A. Braun (The People’s Bible: Isaiah 40-66, 220, 231, 232, 237, 238); and William G. Thompson (Concordia Theological Quarterly 46.326-327), in particular.

¹⁹ Young, Edward J. “The Origin of the Suffering Servant Idea.” Westminster Theological Journal 13 (1950): 19-33 (21).

²⁰ Hummel, 223.

²¹ Leupold, 59.

²² Braun, 238.

After investigating the scholarly views of the Suffering Servant, it is clear that there is no fatal objection to identifying the Suffering Servant as Jesus Christ. In fact, the most powerful and compelling argumentation points to Him as ultimately the One that Isaiah describes as the Suffering Servant.

A third way of evaluating the identity of the Suffering Servant is to examine the qualities attributed to Him in the text and to examine just who might possess those attributes. Isaiah 52.13 describes the Servant as being “high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.” In what respect was the nation of Israel ever deserving of such honor and exaltation? The prophetic record is virtually a constant castigation of the wretchedness of the nation of Israel (Amos 5.12, Hosea 4.1-3, Isaiah 1.1-5, and Jeremiah 3.6-10, for example). On the other hand, there are frequent references regarding the exaltation, honor and glory that Christ deserves.²³ The Servant is described in Isaiah 53.7 as “oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth.” Israel suffered oppression and affliction, but was not known for a willingness to suffer (Exodus 15.22-26, 16.2-7, and 17.1-7). Christ, however, displays the attribute of humility that the nation Israel never showed.²⁴ Isaiah 53.9 NASB describes the Servant as having “done no violence,” displaying His peacefulness and gentleness. The children of Israel, however, are described as murdering and crucifying the prophets, scourging and persecuting them from city to city, and being guilty of “all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah” (Matthew 23.29-35). Jesus, on the other hand, is described as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9.6). Further, the

²³ Isaiah 6.1, 33.15, 57.10; Philippians 2.9-11, Ephesians 1.1-3, Galatians 1.3-5, and Revelation 5.9, for example.

Servant is described as being without deceit (“Nor was there any deceit in His mouth”). The Servant possesses the attributes of honesty and integrity. Israel and her citizens frequently were dishonest; they especially often lied to God (i.e., Psalm 78, Jeremiah 5.12). Christ, on the other hand, never was dishonest (John 14.6, 18.37).

Another way to investigate the identity of the Servant entails comparing the behavior of the Servant in Isaiah 52.13-53.12 with the behavior of those set forth as being the Servant. Isaiah 52.15 tells the reader that “He will sprinkle many nations.” Israel has nothing to sprinkle on any country. However, the blood of the Lamb was sprinkled on the nations (Ezekiel 36.25). Isaiah 53.5 says, “He was pierced for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities... by His scourging we are healed.” Israel experienced temporal punishment for her own transgressions, but is never described as having suffered for any other nation’s transgressions. Nor does Scripture attribute the healing of any nation to some scourging suffered by Israel. Jesus, on the other hand, is described as being handed over to death for our sin (Romans 3; 4.25; 5.6, 8). In Isaiah 53.6a, our sin is laid upon the Suffering Servant. According to 2 Corinthians 5.21, God so thoroughly placed our sin upon Jesus that “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Israel, once again, did not bear anyone else’s sin, nor would she, nor could she. Isaiah 53.7 states that He “was oppressed and afflicted... yet He did not open his mouth... like a Lamb that is led to slaughter.” Israel did not willingly follow God and do His will. Furthermore, she complained bitterly even when she was oppressed as a result of God’s discipline (Jeremiah 31.18, 29; Judges 4.2-3, 6.6-10, 10.6-10). Isaiah 53.12 is the decisive verse

²⁴ Philippians 2.5-8.

that describes the vicarious atonement: “Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” Israel might have born discipline for her own sin, but she never bore anyone else’s sin. Only Christ could bear the sin of many.

In conclusion, one’s identification of the account of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12 as either typological or rectilinear prophecy is of critical importance. Hummel, previously noted for leaving the door open for some typological interpretation, writes: “We would argue that typology and prophecy-fulfillment are two sides of the same coin.”²⁵ Identifying potential typological fulfillments without affirming the rectilinear fulfillment of the prophecy is incomplete, inadequate, and incorrect.²⁶ The Suffering Servant *is* the Messiah. Isaiah drew a vivid word picture in Isaiah 52.13-53.12 of what the Messiah, the Lamb of God, would actually suffer.

The remainder of this paper assumes that the Suffering Servant is Jesus Christ. Since lamb imagery is used to describe the Suffering Servant, to express and clarify the love that He has for us, Isaiah 52.13-53.12 will be accepted as the primary Old Testament context for understanding the Lamb of God in John 1.29, 36, and the Lamb in Revelation. Isaiah’s depiction of the work of the Suffering Servant, especially his portrayal of the Suffering Servant as a Lamb, adds a great deal to our understanding of the titles *the Lamb of God* and *the Lamb* as attributed to Christ in the New Testament.

A major theme in the book of Isaiah is atonement effected by the suffering of the Servant. This atoning work begins with God, not human beings. No one in history fulfills the role of the Servant in this atoning work other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

²⁵ Hummel, 17.

²⁶ Hummel, 17.

Only He is adequate to effect the atonement of the entire world. This goes against the prevalent democratic notions in western societies today, where criminal justice systems go to great lengths to make sure innocent people are not punished for crimes they have not committed. Such societies would rather see a guilty person go free than punish the innocent for a crime they did not commit.²⁷ God's economy of salvation, however, is just the opposite. The Suffering Servant, though without sin or guilt, will suffer as all of fallen humanity does. Furthermore, His suffering will be much greater than that of any mere human being. He is bearing the grief and sorrows, the sin and guilt, of the entire human race. The description of the self-sacrifice of the Suffering Servant contains many similarities to the sacrifice of atonement. As Catherine Cook put it, "Isaiah had written, 'By his sufferings shall my servant justify many.' This is the ugly task that Jesus embraced."²⁸

As shown above, the Old Testament background of the use of lamb imagery to describe Jesus Christ draws primarily on the account of the Suffering Servant. Other texts that possibly explicate the lamb imagery of John 1 include the accounts of Abraham and Isaac, the Passover and the Day of Atonement. While these texts mention animals other than lambs, it is apparent that the New Testament writers utilized these passages in discussing Christ's sacrifice. They also used the explicit lamb imagery in Isaiah 52.13-53.12. Correctly identifying the Suffering Servant is critical for the proper understanding of this Messianic text and its fulfillment in the New Testament. Extra-Biblical literature is not helpful in identifying the Suffering Servant. After examining different theories as

²⁷ Thompson, William G. "Good Friday: Isaiah 53.4-12." Concordia Theological Quarterly 46 (1982): 327.

to the identification of the Suffering Servant (Jesus, Israel, Enoch, Elijah, etc.), this paper will assume the identification of Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12. The work of the Suffering Servant is vicarious atonement, and no one can do this but Jesus Christ. When one looks at how the New Testament writers utilize Old Testament lamb imagery, it is apparent that they are drawing on all of these Old Testament passages while contemplating and proclaiming the life, suffering, and death of the Lamb of God.

²⁸ Cook, L. Catherine. "To Be Suffering Servants." Christian Ministry 16 (1985): 4.20

New Testament

The Gospel of John is the first place in the New Testament that utilizes lamb imagery to describe Jesus Christ. This gospel attributes the origin of the phrase the Lamb of God to John the Baptist. Given his familiarity with the Old Testament sacrificial system, the Passover, the Day of Atonement and especially Isaiah 52.13-53.12, it appears that John the Baptist intended to use lamb imagery as a profound way to describe Jesus of Nazareth and what He was about to do for humanity. The point of his identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God was to identify Him as the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12, the One sent by God to provide vicarious atonement and eternal salvation for all people.

The early Christians interpreted Christ's vicarious, substitutionary death and resurrection in light of, and as fulfillment of, the Hebrew Scriptures. John 1.29 and 36 are the only verses in the New Testament that use the phrase the Lamb of God. The statement, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world," is loaded with theological meaning. It seems that there are as many nuances of meaning in this phrase as there are commentators and exegetes.

Commentator Leon Morris supports this paper's contention that there are multiple nuances of meaning to the Lamb of God, listing nine options. Some of his suggestions include the Passover Lamb or the "Lamb that is led to the slaughter," the Servant of the Lord, the Lamb of the daily sacrifices, the Scapegoat, a Guilt-offering, and the God-

provided Lamb in Genesis 22. There are other nuances that Morris lists but dismisses as specious.²⁹

C. K. Barrett is another exegete supporting the proposition that there are multiple nuances of meaning to the Lamb of God. Barrett states that there is no simple explanation of the term and that no single Old Testament allusion alone can account for it.³⁰ He suggests that the phrase has three primary nuances of meaning: (1) lambs used in cultic and sacrificial rites, including the daily Tamid offering and the Day of Atonement; (2) the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52.13-53.12 as the Lamb; (3) the apocalyptic/eschatological Lamb [of Revelation]. Barrett feels that the Passover element is primary, but that it has been fused with the idea of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 52.13-53.12.³¹ E. W. Burrows has also suggested that the title could have multiple nuances of meaning, including paschal, Isaianic or apocalyptic meanings that may overlap.³²

There are some scholars who assume that John the Evangelist created this title. Prominent among these scholars is Lightfoot, who lays out three premises regarding the origin and meaning of the Lamb of God: (1) John was drawing upon the Old Testament, referring to the sacrificial language used there; (2) John was greatly influenced by the Passover and Christ's self-oblation; (3) the early church, commemorating Christ's death in the Eucharist, compared Him to the lambs slain for the Paschal feast. He notes, "In the

²⁹ Morris, Leon. The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John. Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995. 144.

³⁰ Barrett, Charles K. "The Lamb of God." New Testament Studies 1 (1955): 210-218.

³¹ Burrows, E. W. "Did John the Baptist Call Jesus the Lamb of God?" Expository Times 85 (1974): 248.

³² Burrows, 247.

Baptist's reference to the Lamb of God taking away the (collective) sin of the world we may be right to see a contrast between the universal redemptive work of the true paschal lamb and that of the Passover lambs, whose death benefited the children of Israel only." Lightfoot notes that John, while using Old Testament thoughts and phrases, goes beyond them.³³ Barrett, who also attributes the origin of this title to John the Evangelist, has argued that many of John's most characteristic Christological terms have a three-fold background: Judaism, Hellenism, and Christianity. According to Barrett, this three-fold way of writing is essential to and indicative of John's purpose, and this could also apply to his use of the title the Lamb of God.³⁴

Commentator R. C. H. Lenski notes the multiple nuances of meaning in this phrase in his comment about John the Baptist's words: "They are deathless words, after all those years that intervened before John places them in his Gospel still freighted with meaning infinitely richer than the mind of John grasped at the moment when these words first fell upon his ears and penetrated his heart."³⁵ Within the context of the sacrificial system and the Passover, the word lamb includes the concepts of sacrifice and of the shedding of blood. It also includes the idea of being without blemish, with the implication of being sinless. Joined with the divine purpose and the aims of substitution, expiation and redemption, these concepts contribute to the powerful, freight-packed phrase the Lamb of God.³⁶ Lenski quotes Trench in Westminster Sermons, who says it

³³ Lightfoot, R. H. St. John's Gospel: A Commentary. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957. 96-97.

³⁴ Barrett, 212.

³⁵ Lenski, R. C. H. Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel. Hendrickson, 1998. 126.

³⁶ Lenski, John 126.

well: "The Baptist's title for Jesus should not be referred back to this or that particular 'lamb' mentioned in the Old Testament rituals, but rather to all of them, since each could typify and illustrate prophetically only some part of the stupendous work God's own Lamb would perform."³⁷

The scholars seem to agree that John the Evangelist uses general words and phrases to evoke detailed images in his readers' minds (synecdoche). It also appears that he implies multiple nuances of meaning when he uses a word or phrase. John must have been profoundly impressed when John the Baptist used the phrase the Lamb of God to identify Jesus as the Messiah, evoking all of these images from the Old Testament. With this one short phrase, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as God's Son who came to take away the sin of the world in His one-time act of dying on the cross as the Lamb of God. Though the Lamb in Revelation is of great eschatological significance when the Lamb slain is presented as the Lamb victorious, in the Gospel of John the title the Lamb of God seems to have only a slight eschatological significance.

In the Parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus also uses lamb imagery to describe the relationship between Himself as the Good Shepherd and His followers as the sheep (John 10.1-18). In the book of Revelation, the Lamb is described as shepherding His people. This discussion will continue later in the paper.³⁸ Both lamb and shepherd imagery are utilized by Jesus to explain what He came to do and why He came to do it. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, proclaims Himself to be the fulfillment of the sacrificial cultus (with all

³⁷ Lenski, John 126-127.

³⁸ See p. 43ff., Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

of the implications of vicarious atonement), thus identifying the Good Shepherd as the Lamb of God.

Other New Testament writers also utilized lamb imagery in their writings. There are implied references to the Lamb of God in four New Testament epistles and a direct reference in one. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, implies lamb imagery while discussing justification: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiatory sacrifice (*hilasterion*) in His blood through faith” (Romans 3.23-25 NASB). As previously mentioned, the Apostle John in his first Epistle calls Jesus the *hilasmos* “for our sins” (2.2). In both of these references, it is obvious that the work of Christ, the Lamb of God “who takes away the sin of the world,” is being described.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5 verse 7, Paul identifies Christ as the Passover Lamb.³⁹ The word *Pascha*, implying all the rich lamb imagery from the Passover celebration, is used without explanation, as it was not unusual for Christ to be associated with the Passover in the early church.⁴⁰ However, the focus here is on sanctification, not justification. The main thrust of Paul’s admonition focuses on the church as the “unleavened bread” of the Passover, rather than upon Christ as the Passover Lamb. Nonetheless, Paul explicitly reminds the Corinthians that “Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.” Obviously, Paul was quite comfortable using the imagery of

³⁹ Lockwood, Gregory J. Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians. St. Louis: Concordia, 2000. 171.

⁴⁰ Lightfoot, 96-97

Christ as the Lamb of God to remind the church of the redemption that He accomplished for them, thus encouraging them to practice a sanctified lifestyle.

Peter, in his first Epistle, also explicitly employs lamb imagery in 1.17-21, illustrating that the price paid for our redemption serves as the primary motivation for a lifestyle of purity and love: “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1.18-19). B. Reicke writes these comments:

Here the illustration of redemption rests on ancient custom. Private philanthropists or temples might redeem slaves from their masters and let them...live as free men. God has in a similar way redeemed his followers from their earlier slavery in inherited heathenism and corruption. And what constituted his payment for this deliverance? ...not silver or gold, or any perishable substance. But it was something of eternal value, vs. 19: the precious blood of nothing less than the blameless and stainless lamb Christ. Here the sacrifice was Christ himself who, according to the Christian understanding of the prophecy of the Suffering Servant... was to be brought forth and slaughtered like a lamb.⁴¹

Peter directs his readers to contemplate the incalculable price that was paid for their redemption by the Lamb of God when considering how they were to live their lives in this world. These verses demonstrate how deeply Peter was influenced by his contemplation of the sacrifice of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

The book of Hebrews extensively refers to the Old Testament sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement, indirectly referring to lamb imagery, particularly in 10.1-18. The text notes that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (10.5). However, “By this will [Jesus Christ coming to do God’s will] we have been

⁴¹ Reicke, Bo. The Anchor Bible: The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude. Doubleday: Garden City, 1964. 85.

sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10.10). The text then contrasts the inability of the sacrifices offered daily by the priests to take away sin with the effectiveness of Christ’s sacrifice: “But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God” (10.11,12). The sacrificial system, which demanded constant sacrifice of animals, could not effect the total forgiveness of sins (and the resulting freedom and salvation) that Christ accomplished in His one-time act of sacrificing Himself for the sin of the world. “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin” (10.18). Christ, as the Lamb of God, fulfills completely the sacrificial cultus!

In conclusion, there are four New Testament writers that utilize (directly or indirectly) lamb imagery. John the Evangelist, recording the words of John the Baptist, is the only author to use the title the Lamb of God to describe Jesus Christ. Paul implies lamb imagery in a discussion of justification in his letter to the Romans, and he uses *Pascha* without explanation to describe Christ while discussing sanctification in his first letter to the church in Corinth. Peter uses explicit lamb imagery in his first letter, describing the price Christ paid for our redemption. Lastly, Hebrews 10 indirectly refers to lamb imagery in a discussion of atonement for sins.

By drawing on the Old Testament, the New Testament writers directly and indirectly used lamb imagery to remind their readers of what Jesus Christ has done for them. These authors plumb the depths of meaning that are bound up in the title the Lamb of God. These nuances are drawn from the Passover, the Suffering Servant, and the Day of Atonement. This rich imagery is presupposed and incorporated in the Apocalypse

where John expands the meaning of the title by using it to refer to the victorious Lamb of the *eschaton*.

Christ the Lamb in Revelation: Lamb Imagery Expanded To Present *Christus Victor*

Lamb imagery is used in the Old Testament and in the New Testament to signify how God provides the forgiveness of sin through blood sacrifice and how Jesus, in His state of humiliation, is the ultimate sacrifice for sin. The Apocalypse then builds on this by showing that the same Jesus who was sacrificed is also victorious in His state of exaltation. Thus, lamb imagery is used in a paradoxical way in Revelation to proclaim that the humiliated and sacrificed Christ, the Lamb of God, is none other than the Lamb, the glorified King of creation. This paper will now show how the book of Revelation uses lamb imagery to develop this paradox, especially in its presentation of Christ as the Lamb.

Usage of *amnos*, *arnion*, and *probaton* in Revelation

Revelation is the main place in the New Testament that the word lamb is used. There are three Greek words for lamb: *amnos*, *arnion*, and *probaton*. The only occurrences of the word *amnos* in the New Testament are in John's Gospel (1.29, 36), Acts 8.32 and 1 Peter 1.19. *Amnos* is also used in 93 verses in the LXX and Apocrypha, primarily to refer to lambs being used in sacrifices. In Revelation, John uses the word *arnion* 29 times. The only other place that *arnion* appears in the New Testament is in John 21.15. It also appears in 5 verses in the LXX and Apocrypha. John uses the word *probaton* 16 times in his Gospel but only once in Revelation. It is used 22 times elsewhere in the New Testament and appears in 269 verses in the LXX and Apocrypha.⁴²

⁴² Bibleworks Hermeneutica version 3.5.

The word *amnos*, in both occurrences in John's Gospel, is the sacrificial Lamb "who takes away the sin of the world."⁴³ The lamb's quality of meekness is a nuance that is captured in this word, and Norman Hillyer states that this quality of meekness is explained in a sacrificial sense⁴⁴ (Acts 8.32; 1 Peter 1.18-19; Revelation 5.6, 12). Hillyer writes:

We may agree that *amnos*, the sacrificial lamb, is an insufficient term for the glorified Christ; the note of submission and substitution is inappropriate in the Apocalypse. The same title is required to express the sacrificial basis of Christ's work, but a different Greek word is chosen to include the idea of authority and triumph.⁴⁵

The shorter phrase the Lamb is used in Revelation instead of the longer phrase the Lamb of God, used in John's Gospel. The word *arnion*, used exclusively in Revelation, was used as a diminutive (i.e., little lamb) before New Testament times, but had lost that force by the time of Christ and of the Apocalypse. The word could be used to emphasize innocence or as a term of endearment, "precious Lamb."⁴⁶

The rich nuances of meaning of the word *amnos*, apparent from the Old Testament texts referenced previously, are not necessarily excluded from *arnion*. It is evident that although John utilizes *arnion* in the book of Revelation, he makes every effort to identify the Lamb of Revelation with the Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world." Furthermore, according to Barrett, the Lamb is practically a technical term

⁴³ Though the occurrence in verse 36 does not include "who takes away the sin of the world," there is nothing in the context to indicate that John was not giving the same witness to Jesus given more fully in verse 29.

⁴⁴ Hillyer, Norman. "The Lamb in the Apocalypse." Evangelical Quarterly 39 (1967): 231.

⁴⁵ Hillyer, "Lamb", 229.

⁴⁶ Hillyer, "Lamb", 229.

for the Messiah in Revelation.⁴⁷ John expands our understanding of the Lamb (*amnos* and *arnion*) in describing Him as the Messianic conqueror who leads His followers to triumph over the powers of evil.

Christ the Lamb's Activities in Revelation as the Apocalypse Unfolds

When considering the work of the Lamb in Revelation, it is important to keep in mind all of the nuances of meaning from the Lamb of God in John's Gospel and the term's Old Testament origins. The roles and actions ascribed to the Lamb in Revelation build on and expand our understanding of Christ's love for and ministry to His people. In studying the book of Revelation, it becomes apparent that John the Evangelist is capable of substantially modifying the imagery and traditions he inherited.⁴⁸ Losing sight of the connection of the Lamb in Revelation to the Lamb of God, or of John's capacity for innovation, will result in a truncated understanding of the meaning and significance of the Lamb and a diminishing of the comfort and encouragement that the Holy Spirit intends to provide Christ's people through this imagery.

Revelation describes the Lamb as victor over death who won His victory by going through death. While in the Gospels the Lamb of God is revealed in His state of humiliation, in Revelation, the Lamb is depicted in His state of exaltation, including that exaltation which is accorded to Him as a result of His humiliation (Philippians 2.8-11). Old Testament messianic prophecy sometimes describes Jesus in His state of humiliation (Psalm 22.1, 7, 8, 14-18; Isaiah 53.3-10) and sometimes in His state of exaltation (Isaiah 63.1-6; Jeremiah 23.5-6). Many of the people of Jesus' day misunderstood these

⁴⁷ Barrett, 216.

prophecies and were anticipating a mighty earthly king.⁴⁹ Even today some Christians continue to be confused regarding messianic prophecy (including the book of Revelation) and are anticipating Christ's return as an earthly king (millennialism). However, during the millennium, the Lamb reigns over a kingdom "not of this world" and He reigns at "the right hand of God the Father Almighty" (John 18.37 and Luke 22.69).

Revelation 4 describes the scene of the Lamb's first appearance, which occurs in Revelation 5. In this scene, John focuses on the One he sees in heaven. This helps to focus the reader on the Lamb as the center of attention.⁵⁰

Revelation 5: The Lamb is Worthy; Supreme Object of Worship and Adoration

The Lamb first appears in Revelation 5.5. In this heavenly scene John sees the One on the throne holding a scroll, sealed with seven seals, in His right hand. An angel asks, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" No one in heaven, on the earth or under the earth is able to open the scroll. John weeps because no one is found worthy to open the scroll and read it. However, one of the elders tells John to dry his tears because "the Lion who is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" has won the victory and is able to break the seals and read the scroll. Then John sees the Lamb standing near the throne in the midst of the 24 elders and the four living creatures. The Lamb is described as "having been slain"⁵¹ and has seven horns and seven eyes (5.6).

⁴⁸ Hurtado, L. W. "Rev 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies." Journal for the Study of the New Testament 25 (1985): 111.

⁴⁹ Brighton, Louis. Concordia Commentary: Revelation. St. Louis: Concordia, 1999. 136.

⁵⁰ Hurtado, 111.

⁵¹ The Greek text according to Nestle-Aland 27 is *esphagmenon*, Perfect Passive Participle, Nominative Singular Masculine of the verb *sphadzō*.

Then He (the Lamb) takes the scroll and the elders and creatures worship Him, carrying bowls of incense (the prayers of the saints).

The Lamb in Revelation 5.5 is first “the Messianic root of David, the lion of Judah.”⁵² He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah 11.1-10: “A shoot shall grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Second, He is “The Lion of the tribe of Judah,” the fulfillment of another Old Testament prophecy (Genesis 49.9-10). In Revelation 5.7-10, the Lamb is worthy to receive the scroll. The Lamb has the authority to reveal to John and the church the prophetic message of the scroll because He is worthy. He is worthy because of what He has done, dying on the cross to take away the sin of the world.

It is important for the readers not to focus on trying to visualize the Lamb in Revelation 5 because His appearance is beyond the limits of human conception and comprehension. No one has ever seen a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes. The seven eyes and seven horns of the Lamb, however, do have definite meanings. The seven horns symbolize the Lamb’s exercising supreme power over all life, human and spiritual, and the seven eyes symbolize the Exalted Lamb’s knowing and seeing all things, as exercised through the sevenfold presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵³

The scene continues in Revelation 5.9-14 as the elders and creatures sing a new song of good news in worshiping the Lamb: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to break its seals; because You were slaughtered and bought us for God with Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and You made them a kingdom and

⁵² Brighton, 137.

⁵³ Brighton, 137-138.

temple for our God, and they reign over the earth.” Then innumerable angels join in the singing and adoration of God and the Lamb: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” Then everything created joins in the worship and adoration of God and the Lamb: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever.” The song concludes with the four creatures saying “Amen,” and the elders fall down and worship.

The Lamb is Lord and has authority to control and dominate everything described in the message of the scroll. He has authority to judge humanity and authority over the events revealed. This is the coronation of the Lamb as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.⁵⁴ The worship of the Lamb by the entire heavenly host is significant. The censers are the prayers of the saints rising to the throne of God. The heavenly host begins a new song, a hymn of praise to the Lamb. It is through this true, faith-filled worship of the Lord Christ that the heavenly Father receives His highest glory from His saints.⁵⁵

This description of the heavenly ascent of the Lamb emphasizes the utter exaltation of God over all other metaphysical powers and religious systems.⁵⁶ The number and kinds of heavenly inhabitants have the purpose of emphasizing how awesome and formidable God is, to have such a vast and powerful company of servants and courtiers.⁵⁷ Since the Lamb is God, these attributes apply to Him also. The simple description of heaven serves to encourage the readers to focus their attention upon the

⁵⁴ Brighton, 140.

⁵⁵ Brighton, 140-141.

⁵⁶ Hurtado, 107.

⁵⁷ Hurtado, 108.

Lamb and God rather than the other glorious details of the vision. The presence of the twenty-four elders, who represent the church triumphant, the people of God past and present⁵⁸ who now dwell in the Lamb's glory, provides hope and encouragement to the church militant. This glorious Lamb is their Savior.

John "heard"⁵⁹ that the One found worthy is The Lion of Judah, but instead of seeing a roaring, powerful lion, he saw the Lamb, the very Lamb whose crucifixion he witnessed! The Lamb is the One who is worthy to break the seals of the scroll because He overcame death by going through it. So great is His love for us, He voluntarily "humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross," in order to redeem us, His people (Philippians 2.8). It is this great demonstration of His love for us that makes Him worthy. However, this worthy Lamb of God is not only the humble and meek sacrificial lamb, but truly the Lion of Judah, the very Son of God. As a result, all of creation joins in worshiping the Lamb. He is the One who is worthy to break the seals and He has the authority to orchestrate the last events on earth, the beginning of which are described in chapter 6.

Revelation 6: The Lamb Opens the First Four Seals; Authority and Power; Judge

The Lamb, who was found to be worthy of breaking the seals of the scroll in chapter 5, initiates the first sequence of eschatological events by breaking the first four seals. The breaking of the seals of the scroll is John's first vision of the last events. Four different horsemen come out riding to conquer on earth, unleashing various trials and

⁵⁸ Brighton, 116-120.

⁵⁹ According to Nestle-Aland 27, the verb form of *akouō* is *ēkousa* (Aorist Indicative Active 3rd Singular).

tribulations, at the beckoning of one of the four living creatures.⁶⁰ When the Lamb breaks the fifth seal (6.9), John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar. They ask in 6.10, “How long O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” The martyrs are given white robes and are told, “Rest for a little while longer,” until the remainder of the martyrs join them (6.11). The Lamb then breaks the sixth seal and there is a great earthquake. All people on earth, particularly the kings, “great men,” commanders, the rich, the strong, slaves and free men, hide in the rocks and caves. They beg the rocks and mountains to fall on them because they are afraid of “the day of the wrath” of the Lamb and the One sitting on the throne (6.16-17). Consider their ignorance of the Lamb’s great love for them, and the wickedness of their stubborn impenitence and unbelief. Although God wills for even these people to be saved, they refuse. In continued rebellion, refusing to be embraced by the Lamb’s great love, they would rather be buried alive than face the wrath of the Lamb!

Regardless of the fears and desires of sinful humanity, the Lamb commands all the riders, “Go,” that is, to do His will.⁶¹ It should be noted that God’s punitive will includes the dynamic that mankind’s wretched wickedness should intensify. The second horseman removes peace from the earth, with the result that the unregenerate “should slay one another” (6.4). Frederick J. Murphy notes that the verb *sphadzō* (I slay, slaughter) which is used to describe what the people do to each other, was also used to describe what was done to the Lamb in 5.6 and to the martyrs in 7.9. Murphy says, “The

⁶⁰ The commentaries by Aune and Beale offer the most comprehensive discussion of the horsemen and what they represent.

⁶¹ Lenski, R. C. H. Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation. Hendrickson, 1998. 225.

punishment of humanity fits the crime, since those implicated in the slaughter of Christ and the martyrs are themselves slaughtered.”⁶²

At first glance it seems that nothing positive and encouraging is happening during the opening of the scroll. The Lamb, however, has a word of encouragement for His saints when the fifth seal is opened: “Rest a little while longer.” Only those who are against the Lamb have anything to fear. Those hiding in the caves and rocks very much fear the wrath of the One on the throne and the Lamb, and rightly so, because of their rebellion against the one true God. However, those who belong to the Lamb, who know His love and rejoice in His salvation, are assured that He remains in control, that even martyrdom is limited by God’s power and wisdom (6.11). They only need to rest and leave all things in God’s hands.

The white robe given to each of the martyrs (6.11) is significant, for it represents the righteousness of Christ which is the gracious gift of God’s love accounted to all believers in Christ. His love is further exemplified by His patience toward the enemies of the church. Becker says, “God thus reminds them that the God of justice who punishes sin is also the God of grace who forgives sin. Therefore God’s delay in punishing their persecutors is a sign of his grace and mercy according to which he gives even the enemies of the church time for repentance.”⁶³

Thus the Lamb in Revelation, though He has power to administer all judgment, is still “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus

⁶² Murphy, Frederick J. Fallen Is Babylon: The Revelation to John. Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998. 206.

34.6-7). While the events unleashed by the opening of the seals intensify human suffering and create terror, the Lamb continues to comfort His people even as He dominates and controls history. They are assured that they are accounted righteous in the sight of God and that they will not come under the Lamb's condemnation. Further, the Lamb encourages them simply to leave things in His hands and to rest as He brings about the culmination of human history. The church militant, all those who truly know the Lamb, are invited to take hold of these same assurances even as these events transpire.

Revelation 7: The Lamb is Redeemer and Pastor; Supreme Object of Worship

After the Lamb opens the first six seals in chapter 6, Revelation 7 introduces an interlude between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals. This interlude starts with the appearance of four angels who have authority to harm the earth. However, they are told by another angel, "Do not harm anything on the earth until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (7.3). 144,000 (12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel) are sealed (7.4-8). Then John sees "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" standing before the throne and the Lamb in white robes holding palm branches (7.9). They cry out, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb" (7.10). The angels, creatures and elders join the great multitude in worshipping God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen" (7.12 NASB). An elder asks John, "Who are these in the white robes and where did they come from?" (7.13). John says, "My lord, you know." The elder says:

⁶³ Becker, 113.

“These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation, who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God. They serve Him in His temple and He will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger and thirst no more; nor will the sun nor heat beat down on them. For the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (7.14-17).

The comforting words of the elder bring to mind Psalm 121. Verses 5 and 6 say, “The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand; the sun will not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.” The Lamb protects His people. They are in His care. “He will not allow your foot to slip” (121.3a). Even when the journey of our lives during these last days seems like climbing a steep mountain, we have assurance that the Lamb will be protecting us. “He who keeps you will not slumber” (121.3b). The Lamb will not sleep or rest, for He does not need to. The Lamb, our Good Shepherd, is watching over us now and will continue to watch over us as we go through trials, temptations and tribulation in our walk of faith. Despite Satan’s efforts to defeat us, the Lamb will protect us from all evil (121.7a). The Lamb protects us from all physical danger and He will even keep our souls (121.7b). He not only does these things for us now, He will also do them for us in the future. “The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever” (121.8). Even when evil touches us, He still works all things together for His purposes and our good (Romans 8.28). Even when it appears that evil overcomes us, the cover, shelter and protection of the Lamb preserves us. What the world sees as our defeat, even if it be martyrdom, is really the beginning of our participation in the victory of the Lamb in heaven. The Lamb is always there for us to dry our tears.

The 144,000 and the Multitude

Commentators disagree on the identity of the 144,000. Beale lists five general identifications.⁶⁴ He concludes that the 144,000 are “the totality of the redeemed, formed as an army to conduct ironic holy war.”⁶⁵ Brighton more explicitly says:

The majority, however, believe that the number 144,000 is symbolical and refers to the whole body of Christians, Jews and Gentiles, on earth throughout the time period covered by Revelation.... Since John sees them in the context of a vision of events *on earth* (7.1-3), they are the church militant on earth.... The number is a multiple of twelve: twelve times twelve thousand. It suggests a total completeness. It gives a numerical picture of God’s people on earth in perfect marching order, in perfect step. It suggests that God’s Israel, the church of Jesus Christ, as it advances to battle in the mission given it, is a perfect and complete army, fully equipped and ready to do God’s work.⁶⁶

Becker further buttresses this position. He comments regarding the interpretation of the 144,000 as being only converted Jews, “this ... is impossible.”⁶⁷ He notes that Paul in Galatians called the church, including uncircumcised believers, “the Israel of God,” and thus, “Those who have become new creatures through regeneration and conversion are the true Israelites in God’s sight.”⁶⁸

Commentators also disagree on the identity of the multitude. The more commonly accepted view identifies the multitude as the church in heaven.⁶⁹ Becker notes that the multitude is not on earth, but consists of those who have passed through the great tribulation by their death. However, he notes that they have not been “raptured.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Beale, G. K. The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 416-423.

⁶⁵ Beale, 422.

⁶⁶ Brighton, 189-190.

⁶⁷ Becker, 121.

⁶⁸ Becker, 121.

⁶⁹ Becker, 122.

⁷⁰ Becker, 124-127.

Brighton says: “The great multitude of people before the heavenly throne of God is at rest and peace, celebrating the results of the mission of the church on earth.... And this crowd standing around before God’s throne is not only from the ethnic people of Israel, but from every ethnic group of people on earth.”⁷¹ Beale concurs with this: “Although they are a saved remnant, they are also those who have been gathered from all over the earth and have lived throughout the entire period of the church age.”⁷² The multitude of saints is so great that it cannot be numbered. It is not just the 144,000 of the previous vision, but “all the faithful of every age.” Some were martyred for their faith, but all were prepared to pay the price for their fidelity to God.⁷³

There is a key difference in this vision between the 144,000 and the multitude: the 144,000 are sealed for the impending persecution while the multitude is said to have come out of the great tribulation.⁷⁴ The Lamb saved the multitude. He will save the 144,000. The multitude gives praise to God and to the Lamb, to Whom they owe their salvation. The Lamb provided His blood for them to wash their robes in and to make them clean. The 144,000 are assured that, even if persecuted, they remain sealed as the Lamb’s people. Satan cannot take that away from them. Nor can he take away the power of the blood of the Lamb. This applies even to us. Of what consequence is it that we must enter the kingdom through much tribulation? Look what is waiting for us: eternal life with God and the Lamb, which is better than life on earth! All of this is freely and graciously provided by the Lamb.

⁷¹ Brighton, 193.

⁷² Beale, 424.

⁷³ Mounce, Robert H. The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Revelation. Revised ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. 161.

Mounce notes that the scene of the multitude wearing white, waving branches and crying out is similar to the Transfiguration, revealing the glory of God and of the Lamb. When Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17.1-13, Mark 9.1-13, Luke 9.28-36) only a few people saw Him in His glory: His disciples Peter, James and John (Matthew 17.1). Though the church militant is blessed to see the glory of God in Christ Jesus, “now we see in a mirror dimly.” The promise remains that when we join the multitude, then we shall see Him “face to face.” The church militant’s vision of Christ’s glory ought not be minimized, however, for the Apostle Paul asserts, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3.18 NIV). Paul further explains that the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ: “For God, who said, ‘light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4.6). Matthew wrote regarding the transfiguration, “His face shone like the sun, and His garment became as white as light” (Matthew 17.2).

One cannot see the glory of the Lamb apart from the glory of His cross. When the world sees the church looking at the cross, it wonders what all the fuss is about. It finds nothing in the cross to marvel at. Just the opposite, the world sees the cross as a symbol of shame and injustice. Christians, when they look at the cross of Christ, however, see the glory of the Lamb (John 12.23-33). So the Apostle Paul notes this contrast: “For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified,

⁷⁴ Mounce, NICNT, 161.

to the Jew a stumbling block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

(1 Corinthians 1.22-24).

One sees from the vision of the multitude that in heaven everyone will see Jesus and they will know that “This is my Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 17.15). The Evangelist John, in comforting God’s people, asserts: “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3.1-2). Though the church militant does not at present see Christ and His glory except through the cross, she experiences His glory and sees it in the coverings under which the Lamb comes to her (Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and His Word). We receive comfort and strength from these means of grace even as they bid us look forward to their fulfillment in heaven with the Lamb.

The cry of the multitude is an acknowledgement that their deliverance is due to the sovereign will of God and the redemptive work of the Lamb. Weymouth says this best in his translation: “To our God... and to the Lamb, we owe our salvation!”⁷⁵ The Lamb is continuing his role of Redeemer in Chapter 7. It is by His blood that was shed that this great multitude is able to wash their robes and make them white (7.14).⁷⁶ The multitude is exulting in the fact that the Lamb has done everything that is necessary for

⁷⁵ Mounce, *NICNT*, 162-163.

⁷⁶ Hillyer, “Lamb”, 232.

their salvation; they did not have to do anything for their salvation. They also behold the glory of the Lamb, and this description is intended to fill the church militant with fevered expectation of the blessings to come, even as she trudges through the tribulations of this troubled life. This is our comfort, that our salvation is certain because of God's will and the work of the Lamb. Our salvation does not depend upon us in the least, for it has already been attained for us by the Lamb! We too shall experience the beatific vision of the Lamb in all His glory when we shall see Him face to face and will become like Him.

The Lamb as the Good Shepherd in Revelation 7

In Revelation 7, one observes the Lamb also functioning as Pastor. Revelation 7.17 states that the Lamb shall shepherd them-- sustain, watch over, provide for and lead them. Norman Hillyer says, "Even in heaven all the blessed are dependent on the Lamb for life."⁷⁷ He points out the following sequence of thought in John's writings that connects the Old Testament and the New Testament: the voice in the wilderness (Isaiah 40.3) proclaims that the divine shepherd (Isaiah 40.11) will open the waters (Isaiah 41.18) to his flock (Isaiah 49.10) through his servant (Isaiah 41.8-20; 49.1-3) who is the sin-bearing Lamb who was slain. In Revelation the reader sees the Lamb-Shepherd paradox of John 10 coming into focus.⁷⁸ Jesus is both the Lamb slain for redemption and also the Shepherd who leads His people to living waters.⁷⁹ The same could be said of Psalm 23, where the LORD (the Lamb) is described as our Good Shepherd.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Hillyer, "Lamb", 235.

⁷⁸ See Appendix 1.

⁷⁹ Hillyer, "Lamb", 235.

⁸⁰ See Appendix 2.

The Lamb in Revelation 7 is also the supreme object of worship. In Revelation 7.9-10 the elders, the living creatures and the redeemed all bow down and worship the Lamb as the One who is worthy. Everything ascribed to Him by the multitude (power, wisdom, strength, glory, honor and might) is His because of all that He has done, is doing and shall do for His people. Hillyer notes that the Lamb is both sanctuary and sacrifice. A sanctuary exists for sacrifice and for communion. "The sacrificed God is not only the ground of our communion with God, but also the sphere in which that communion takes place."⁸¹ The church militant when at the Lord's Table has fellowship with God and the Lamb, a foretaste of the feast to come in heaven. God and the Lamb are glorified in the worship and communion of the church militant here on earth, just as they are glorified by the church triumphant in the worship and communion of heaven (7.9-12). While the church triumphant praises the Lamb in the heavenly reward of redemptive rest, the church militant praises the Lamb for His promise that she too will inherit this same blessedness (7.15-17).

Finally the Lamb breaks the seventh seal and there is an odd half-hour of silence (8.1). What is the significance of this period of silence? There may be some parallels between this half-hour of silence and "the eternal rest of the heavenly Sabbath," the "seventh day of rest after the first creation," or the "silence which preceded God's original creation."⁸² Perhaps of greater significance is the parallel between this silence and the Old Testament injunction to "keep silent before the LORD" (Zechariah 2.13).⁸³ When we compare this silence to the command uttered in Psalm 46.10, "Be still and

⁸¹ Hillyer, "Lamb", 233.

⁸² Brighton, 212.

know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth,” and especially when we note that it is Yahweh, the Lamb, who utters this command, it seems apparent that the reader’s attention in Revelation 8.1 is being drawn to the exalted deity of the Lamb and His absolute sovereign power over all things. The Lamb’s children who are awaiting the fulfillment of all these things are invited to join the inhabitants of heaven in this “silence of awe and mystery as the exalted Son of God made ready to unfold the remainder of the message of Revelation (involving the acts of the judgment of God upon the earth), which would be revealed by the seven angels. All these acts are for the glory of the exalted Lord Christ and for the assistance of His church on earth.”⁸⁴ The church on earth takes comfort in the Lamb’s divine power and authority even in this period of awesome silence.

At the beginning of chapter 7, the 144,000, all the members of the church militant, were sealed for the impending tribulation. The great multitude, the church triumphant, enjoys the reward of their faith-- life forever in heaven with the Lamb, their Good Shepherd. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This blood, the blood of Jesus Christ, “cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1.7). The Lamb as the Good Shepherd provides everything His people need for earthly life and to battle Satan. These blessings of the Lamb are greatly appreciated by His people, and stimulate their thanksgiving and praise. Upon joining the multitude in heaven, the Lamb will wipe every tear from their eyes. The Lamb as the Good Shepherd is the ultimate Pastor of His people. Thus, the Lamb as described in chapter 7 gives the church militant great comfort.

⁸³ Brighton, 213.

⁸⁴ Brighton, 213.

She is fully prepared for the awful events to come on earth, as described starting in chapter 8 until the victory in chapter 17.

Revelation 12 and 13: The Lamb as Martyr is Conqueror; There is Power in the Blood of the Lamb. The Lamb is the One slain from the Creation of the World; The Faithful are in the Lamb's Book of Life

Chapter 12 begins with the woman who is about to give birth. After she gives birth to a baby boy (12.1-2), Michael and his angels wage war with and defeat "the great dragon" and his angels, who are thrown down to the earth (12.7-9). John hears a loud voice saying:

Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God has come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony and they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he only has a short time (12.10-12).

Three effective causes are asserted for the church's victory over the devil and his evil angels (12.11). The essential cause is "the blood of the Lamb." The other two flow from and are effects of this primary cause. "The word of their testimony" is nothing other than the ministry of the great Good News that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1.7). Enraptured by this great Good News, the members of the church militant "did not love their lives when faced with death." Fellowship with the Lamb is more precious and valuable than life itself. There is great comfort in this assurance that we too will share in the victory of the Lamb. Mounce comments, "The

great redemptive act that freed them from their sins (1.5) and established their right to reign (5.9) is the basis for their victory.”⁸⁵

The concept of the blood of the Lamb as the cause of the church’s victory over the devil and his angels brings to mind Exodus 12. Rather than painting lamb’s blood on doorframes, God’s people have taken their robes and “made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The effect, however, is much the same – the people are delivered from death and destruction. Satan’s ability to accuse us is taken away by the sacrifice of the Lamb. As Paul writes, “He that spared not His Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Romans 8.32-34). Though the devil may preach the law ever so effectively in accusing children of God of sin, they constantly destroy his accusations by asserting the power of the blood of the Lamb.

Those who know and believe God’s love as revealed in the Lamb “cannot but speak the things which they have seen and heard” (Acts 4.20). They know that “the gospel of Christ ... is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1.16). They have been born again “not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, by the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1.23). They have grasped the promise “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10.9). Therefore in their struggle “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this

⁸⁵ Mounce, NICNT, 239.

darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places,” they have heeded the apostolic admonition to put on the whole armor of God:

Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6.12-17).

Since “the word of their testimony” is nothing other than the wondrous Gospel of the Lamb, the Word of God, they are enabled to overcome the wicked adversary and gain the victory with the Lamb.

All those who have experienced God’s great love in the Lamb also love God. As they drink of and are nourished by the Lamb’s great love for them, they grow in willingness and desire to follow Him. They recall Him saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there my servant will be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12.24-26). They understand that this means taking up one’s cross and following the Lamb, for He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16.24-25). The Lamb’s example of superlative love in laying down His life inspires and strengthens His followers to gain the victory by remaining firm even in the face of death.

Chapter 12 continues to develop the theme of spiritual conflict between the church and the world. This part of the war is fought in heaven. Satan is attempting to

regain his position of being in the presence of God. Mounce calls this scene “the heavenly counterpart to the victory of Christ [the Lamb] in his death and resurrection. The triumph of the Messiah (v. 5) is expressed in terms of the Holy War.”⁸⁶ In John 12.31-32 Jesus refers to Satan: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.” Though Michael and his angels are described as the agents of Satan’s expulsion, it is actually the crucifixion of the Lamb that effects this outcome. It is of great comfort to the church militant which is still battling these spiritual powers (Ephesians 6.12) to see that the Lamb’s passion is powerful enough to gain the victory over Satan. Though we cannot see Him, we know and believe that He is leading the way, and that through His victory our victory is coming.

When Christ is the subject of the verb *nikao* it means that He conquered through death, through the innocent shedding of His blood.⁸⁷ However, this is not to discount the victory that the Lamb accomplished in His resurrection. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s great resurrection discourse, we find this statement: “But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is the resurrection victory of the Lamb which guarantees and will power our own resurrection victory when “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15.55). Whether emphasizing the Lamb’s death or His resurrection, the bottom line is that He achieved the victory and His victory guarantees our own victory. Therefore all of God’s children give all worship and praise exclusively to the Lamb, the only true and living God.

⁸⁶ Mounce, NICNT, 235-236.

The Lamb is mentioned again in Revelation 13.8 in reference to “the book of life of the Lamb.” It is observed that “all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it [the beast], every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered” (NRSV). Mounce notes:

The NRSV translation ‘every one’ represents an unexpected change in the Greek text from the plural to the singular. The *pantes* in the first clause is followed by the relative *hou*, which calls for an implied *hekastos* to distribute the collective *pantes*. This shift is perhaps intended to emphasize the individual responsibility of each one who worships the beast.⁸⁸

As a result, their names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life. This is in stark contrast to those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, who delight in God’s love revealed in the Lamb, who worship and praise the Lamb alone and who enjoy eternal life through the blessed work of the Lamb.

The original reference to a divine register goes back to Moses’ encounter with God in Exodus 32.33. In New Testament times, Paul speaks of his fellow workers as those whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4.3).⁸⁹ The book of life is mentioned six times in Revelation, and it refers to a register of all the names of those who belong to God.⁹⁰ The book of life belongs to the Lamb (13.8, 21.27) with good reason: each entry is written with the blood of His sacrifice.

Those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are cognizant of the Lamb’s stern warnings against false prophets who “come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7.15). They have been warned against the

⁸⁷ Aune, David E. Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation. 3 vols. Nashville: Nelson, 1997-1998. b.702.

⁸⁸ Mounce, NICNT, 251

⁸⁹ Mounce, NICNT, 251-252.

clever machinations of Satan, who “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11.14). Though the beast “coming up out of the earth” is described in 13.11 as having “two horns like a lamb” (perhaps in an effort to look like the Lamb in order to deceive as many as possible), the elect are not fooled. The Lamb gave warning that “there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, who will show great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24.24). The Lamb has written the names of the elect in His book of life, and He insures that they are not deceived. For this, the children of God give eternal thanks and praise to the Lamb.

Chapters 12 and 13 are filled with the cosmic conflict between good and evil, God and the devil, God’s seed and the devil’s seed. Horrible things happen on earth as Satan tries to deceive as many as possible. He persecutes the Lamb and the church. He attempts to lure people into following him. He tries to dominate commerce so that survival seems to be dependent upon loyalty to him (receiving his mark). All of these things are attempts to induce people to worship him rather than God and the Lamb, but for the church, the Lamb remains victorious, conquering by the shedding of His blood for all. He has won the victory, and that victory is certain because the names of His people have been written in the Lamb’s book of life since the creation of the world. Their salvation is assured. It was determined and is guaranteed by the Lamb and God Himself. Because the elect are already predestined to eternal life, no clever plots of Satan can ever succeed in causing their names to be removed from the Lamb’s book of life. In the midst of this great cosmic contest, the Lamb continues to strengthen and preserve His people.

⁹⁰ Mounce, NICNT, 251-252.

Revelation 14 and 15: The Lamb as the Son of Man is Judge; Deliverer

In chapter 14, the scene shifts to Mount Zion, where John sees the Lamb with the 144,000. The 144,000 have His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads (14.1). John hears a voice from heaven, “like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder” (14.2). The voice also sounds like harpists playing on their harps. They (the 144,000) sing a new song before the throne and the creatures and the elders. Further, no one can learn this song except for the 144,000 “who had been purchased from the earth” (14.3). These are the ones who “have kept themselves chaste.” They follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14.4). “These have been purchased from among men as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (14.4).

The Location of Mount Zion in Revelation 14

Mount Zion is a sacred place long associated with divine deliverance. The prophet Joel foretold that those on Mount Zion would escape the great and terrible day of the Lord (Joel 2.32). An extra-Biblical parallel is in 2 Esdras 2.42-47 where Ezra sees a great crowd singing hymns of praise to the Lord on Mount Zion. In their midst is a tall young man who places crowns on their heads. Ezra inquires and learns that this Man is the Son of God whom they acknowledged during their mortal lives. God’s people living in the region of Judah expected the Messiah to appear on Mount Zion with a great multitude (Micah 4.6-8; Joel 2.32; Isaiah 11.9-12; 2 Esdras 13.35, 39-40).⁹¹

The issue of the location of Mount Zion has caused considerable controversy among the commentators. Some, including Brighton and Walvoord, think that the Mount Zion described in chapter 14 is on earth, while others, including Becker and Mounce,

think that it is in heaven. Beale and Aune each have their own differing views. The identification of the 144,000 in this chapter may be affected by one's understanding of Mount Zion. If Mount Zion is on earth, it would seem the 144,000 is the church militant. If Mount Zion is in heaven, it would seem the 144,000 must be the church triumphant.

Brighton contends that Mount Zion in chapter 14 is located on earth. He says, "They [the 144,000] are, for the moment, still the church militant on earth (on Mt. Zion), but now their warfare is over and they are about to join the church triumphant in heaven."⁹² Walvoord agrees that Mount Zion is on earth, but states that it is the site of a millennial reign.⁹³ However, Walvoord erroneously identifies the figurative language in the Apocalypse as literal language, thus concluding that a millennial reign will occur on Mount Zion.

Becker, however, contends that Mount Zion is located in heaven. He says, "It would be possible to see in this verse only a symbolic representation of the Savior's presence with his people, but verse 3 places the 144,000 around the throne and in the presence of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders whom we already met at the beginning of John's vision of the future. Here we are dealing with the church triumphant. Mt. Zion is in this passage a name for the heavenly Jerusalem, where God's people are forever free from the dangers that threaten them at the hands of the unholy trinity."⁹⁴ Mounce also argues that Mount Zion is in heaven in Revelation 14. He says,

⁹¹ Mounce, NICNT, 263-265.

⁹² Brighton, 368.

⁹³ Mounce, NICNT, 264-265.

⁹⁴ Becker, 216-217.

“John moves quickly beyond the storm about to break to the bright morning of eternity when the Lamb and his followers stand on the heavenly Mount Zion.”⁹⁵

Beale, while listing arguments for the earthly and heavenly Mount Zion, proposes a third possibility:

that Zion is identical to the new Jerusalem (chap. 21), which ‘comes down out of heaven’ and becomes part of the new creation after the destruction of the old creation. Probably the most balanced assessment is that an ‘already-and-not-yet’ end-time view of Zion is in mind, which would be consistent with 7.9-17, since that vision blends past, present, and future.⁹⁶

Aune observes an interesting phenomenon about this passage (verses 1-5): “The setting for this vision exhibits an oscillating ABA pattern between the *earth* (v 1) and *heaven* (vv. 2-3) and then the *earth* again (vv. 4-5).”⁹⁷ It appears to Aune that John is using this scenario in a metaphorical way, juxtaposing the earthly struggle of God’s people with their scene of heavenly triumph. Aune further states that in 14.1-5 the 144,000 are depicted as ready to battle and win, but the notion of “victory” means that they, like their Lord, must be killed. Aune interprets the passage as saying, “So while the Lamb is not literally in their midst, he will be in their midst in the heavenly Mount Zion when they have conquered the Beast by laying down their lives.”⁹⁸ However, 14.1 clearly states that “a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000.” It seems inconsistent to view the presence of the 144,000 literally but the presence of the Lamb with them figuratively, or to view the 144,000 as the church militant while restricting the

⁹⁵ Mounce, NICNT, 263.

⁹⁶ Beale, 732.

⁹⁷ Aune, Revelation b.803.

⁹⁸ Aune, David E. “Following the Lamb: Discipleship in the Apocalypse.” Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament. Ed. Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. 269-284. 272.

Lamb's presence to the church triumphant. Such a view strips the church militant of the comforting assurance that the Lamb is with them "always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28.20).

The discipleship of the redeemed is stressed in Revelation 14.4. There are three characteristics that describe the 144,000, the most important one being that they are followers of the Lamb wherever He goes. Mounce states that they follow His earthly life and instructions "as opposed to following Him around as He strolls around heaven."⁹⁹ Mounce's concern, however, might be addressed more reasonably by understanding that the language in this section is figurative, not literal. The 144,000 follow the Lamb throughout their earthly lives. Several New Testament passages are echoed here including Mark 8.34, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

The scene of the redeemed and the Lamb on Mount Zion is important for the church. This interlude provides comfort and strength to the church, which may be distressed after the vision of the two beasts. It is a great comfort to the followers of the Lamb to hear of harps and a new song on Mount Zion in the midst of a people of purity, decency and honor, all worshiping the Lamb, their Savior. Regardless of the smoky torment thrust upon the unbelievers, the Lamb's people have peace and joy because He is with them on Mount Zion now.

In Revelation 14.6-20, the reader gets a glimpse of the judgement on earth. The context for verse 10 goes back to verse 9 and earlier. The third angel announces that those who have worshiped the beast, namely, those who have its mark on their hand or

forehead, will drink the cup of God's fury and wrath. They will also be tormented in the presence of the angels and the Lamb. The intention of the author in verses 9-11, according to Mounce, is "to startle readers into the realization of the eternal consequences of denying their faith in Christ and worshiping the beast."¹⁰⁰ Jesus says in Luke 12.9 that those who disown Him before others will be disowned by Him before God's angels. Suffering in front of the heavenly host is more grievous than the suffering caused by the beast.¹⁰¹

The Lamb as the Son of Man

Following the gruesome description of the suffering of those who worship the beast and then drink the wine of God's wrath "in the presence of the Lamb" is a brief interlude of comfort regarding the blessedness of those who "die in the Lord."

Remarkably, the text then introduces another appearance of the One "like a Son of Man."¹⁰² The shift from lamb imagery in describing the Lord Jesus to the more literal description of the incarnate Son of God is puzzling. Though the text continues utilizing imagery (that of grain harvest and grape gathering), the actions described, those of the gathering of the elect to God and the Lamb at the end of time and the sending of the wicked into everlasting fire, seem more concrete. This more literal depiction of Jesus jars us back to the reality that judgment is imminent for all, including the elect, and intensifies the repeated admonitions in the Apocalypse to persevere in our faith.

⁹⁹ Mounce, NICNT, 268.

¹⁰⁰ Mounce, NICNT, 273.

¹⁰¹ Mounce, NICNT, 274.

¹⁰² The first appearance in Revelation of One "like a son of man" is in Revelation 1.13. Despite some debate, it is obvious that the Son of Man is none other than Jesus Christ. See Beale, 770-771.

Both Brighton and Lenski understand this section as describing the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus Christ. Brighton comments that the *parousia* “is the conclusion to the interregnum (12.1-14.20) depicting the startling and breathtaking war between God and the dragon, and between the beasts and the church. It culminates in the great harvest, which is the judgment of God.”¹⁰³ The entire human race is gathered up before God to be judged (14.15-20). The elect are gathered in the granary of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 24.31), while the unbelievers (the grapes of wrath) are cast into the great “winepress of the wrath of God.” The time for this judgment is known only by God (Matthew 24.36, Mark 13.32).

It is evident that the Son of Man is the same Person as the Lamb.¹⁰⁴ According to Rowland, this title refers to a heavenly agent of judgment.¹⁰⁵ Rowland says, “The Son of Man is in fact the embodiment of the person of the Ancient of Days. The vice-regent, the Son of Man, takes for himself the form and character of God himself.”¹⁰⁶ E. Fiorenza states that the title *Son of Man* “is a conflation of Zechariah 12.10 and Daniel 7.13.”¹⁰⁷ She continues, “The text in Revelation refers not to the death of Jesus but to his *parousia*.”¹⁰⁸ Mounce writes, “The Son of Man comes with the clouds of heaven to receive universal and everlasting dominion,” and, “The title Son of Man sets him apart

¹⁰³ Brighton, 388.

¹⁰⁴ Beale, 770-771.

¹⁰⁵ Rowland, Christopher. The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity. New York: Crossroad, 1982. 178.

¹⁰⁶ Rowland, Open Heaven, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. 102.

¹⁰⁸ Fiorenza, 102.

from the six angels.”¹⁰⁹ Lastly Mounce affirms, “The context of Revelation indicates that he is the Messiah returning in Judgment.”¹¹⁰ Jesus is often recorded in the Synoptic Gospels as predicting the coming of the Son of Man in His state of exaltation to judge (Matthew 24.29-31, Mark 13.26, Luke 21.27).

The description of the Son of Man in His state of exaltation, however, should not diminish our appreciation of the purpose of His incarnation nor our gratitude for His willingness to enter into the state of humiliation. The purpose of His incarnation was that He might be “led like a lamb to slaughter” in order to “take away the sin of the world.” However, it was literally a real human being that was crucified, not a lamb. Ironically, all of this humiliation and suffering is precisely what enhances and legitimizes the exaltation and glory accorded the Son of Man who is the Lamb.

In chapter 15, after the comforting and strengthening description of the *parousia* and the judgment executed by the Son of Man, both His gracious judgment for the elect as well as His righteous judgment against the unbelievers, John receives “the third and last vision of events on earth.” This vision consists of the seven angels who pour out the seven bowls of God’s divine wrath, which completes God’s judgment on the wicked.¹¹¹ In verses 2-4 the angels are singing the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:¹¹² “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty [*ho pantokrator*]; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear,

¹⁰⁹ Mounce, *NICNT*, 277.

¹¹⁰ Mounce, *NICNT*, 278.

¹¹¹ Brighton, vi, 398.

¹¹² Mounce, *NICNT*, 283.

O Lord, and glorify your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed” (15.3-4).

After this song ends, John observes a significant event: “The temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven” is opened (15.5). Brighton posits, “This sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony appears to be a reference not to Solomon’s temple but to the tabernacle, the tent of witness.”¹¹³ He goes on to note that “this tabernacle was sometimes called ‘the tent of the testimony,’ because the Ark of the Covenant containing the testimony of the Law was placed within the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, of the tabernacle.”¹¹⁴ The lid of the ark of the covenant, of course, is the mercy seat (Exodus 37.6), where the blood of atonement was sprinkled (Leviticus 16), prefiguring the shedding of the blood of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Brighton notes, “The earthly tabernacle was a type of ‘a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made of human hands’ – the heavenly one, which the exalted Christ entered as high priest into the very presence of God with his own blood as the ransom price for the sins of God’s people (Hebrews 9.11-12).”¹¹⁵ Surely this vision was intended to remind the church militant once again that the exalted Lamb who is the object of all worship, praise and adoration, is the same One whose blood was shed for our salvation.

While the opening of the temple that occurred when Jesus cried out His last and yielded His spirit, the rending of the veil of the temple, signaled great blessing for God’s people, it appears that the opening of the temple in chapter 15 has a dark and dismal purpose. As soon as the temple is opened, the seven angels having the seven plagues

¹¹³ Brighton, 404.

¹¹⁴ Brighton, 404.

come out of it. These seven angels are then given “seven golden bowls of the wrath of God” (15.7). Though the temple is opened, no one is able to enter it until the seven angels are finished pouring the seven plagues of the wrath of God (15.8). It is ironic that John sees into the temple where the exalted Lamb “entered as High Priest into the presence of God with His own blood as a ransom price for the sin of God’s people,”¹¹⁶ but that this temple is immediately filled with smoke from the glory of God, allowing no one to enter it until “the seven plagues of the seven angels” are finished. This contrast between the Lamb as Redeemer of the world and the One who is imposing the final plagues is striking. For those who know and believe the love of the Lamb, however, even this contrast is comforting, for they know that His wrath will not fall upon them. When the plagues are fulfilled, those who have taken their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb will take their rightful places in this very temple of God and the Lamb.

Therefore the scene of the Lamb and His followers on Mount Zion (chapter 14) and the scene of the church triumphant singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (chapter 15) are a comforting interlude in the midst of the horrifying events happening on earth. The comfort focuses on the positive, the actions of the Lamb on behalf of the faithful, rather than on the negative consequences to be suffered by those with the mark of the beast, who worshipped it instead of God. The hymn being sung by the church triumphant gives this comfort, reminding all the faithful of what great things God did so long ago, and that the greatness of what He will do in the future will eclipse even those things. The Lamb who paid the price for the world’s sin is now reigning victorious from on high. He

¹¹⁵ Brighton, 404-405.

¹¹⁶ Brighton, 404-405.

provides those who follow Him “everywhere He goes” with strength and encouragement to endure the persecution by the beast, so that they attain the reward of victory, eternal life with Him.

Revelation 17: The Lamb is Conqueror, King of Kings and Lord of Lords; Ruler

After the seven angels pour their seven bowls of wrath on the earth (16.1-17.13), “These [the ten kings] will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with Him are the called and chosen and faithful” (17.14). The Lamb wins the victory over Satan and all of his minions, all of the rebellious, wicked, impenitent and unbelieving humans who utilize all of their political and military resources against the Lamb and His kingdom! The Lamb conquers all of them. John’s description of the glory of the Lamb is intensifying with the application of these new titles, Lord of Lords and King of Kings. What blessedness belongs to those who are “with Him,” those who are the called and chosen and faithful!

This conflict has always been between the dragon (Satan) and God. Brighton comments, “Since the ascension of Christ, the warfare between the dragon and God is now confined to that which takes place between Satan and God’s saints *on earth*.”¹¹⁷ Although the target of this war is the church, the war is actually against the Lamb because He is the champion and defender of the church militant. The Lamb faces them not like a Lamb being led to slaughter in humility and weakness (Isaiah 53.7; Acts 8.32, 33), but as the almighty God who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. These titles, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, explain the inevitability of the Lamb’s victory. The church

¹¹⁷ Brighton, 452.

militant always faces the enemy with the conquering Lamb before it. Through it all, the Lamb defends His bride, the church, and conquers her enemies. After the Lamb's return the beast will never again rise in any form to threaten God's people.¹¹⁸

Aune claims that 17.14 appears to be a secondary redactional addition. He says: "This brief interpolation appears to be a succinct summary of 19.11-21, where the essential features of 17.14 are described with greater detail, though the Lamb is not mentioned there (another indication of the relative lateness of the interpolation in 17.14)."¹¹⁹ This viewpoint diminishes the main thrust of the message of Revelation, primarily because it weakens the importance of the role of the Lamb, the One slain for our sin, as the great Master of all creation and human history, and as a result minimizes the comfort the Holy Spirit is trying to provide. It is precisely because of who the Lamb is, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, that He (the Lamb) gains the victory. For it is by the power of the conquering Lamb alone that the church is saved and preserved from the onslaught of her enemies.

Beale notes that the language by which the beast apparently defeats the saints (Daniel 7.21, Revelation 11.7, and 13.7a) is now applied to the Lamb in overcoming the forces of the beast and his allies. He comments:

The reversal of language is not a result of random Scripture twisting but is intended to express irony. The prediction of the beast's victory over the saints in Daniel 7.21 becomes an ironic type of his own final defeat. His defeat must occur fittingly according to the same warlike method by which he has attempted to oppress. The reversed portrayal shows that he must be punished by means of his own sin.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Brighton, 450-453.

¹¹⁹ Aune, WBC, c.953.

¹²⁰ Beale, 880.

In this chapter the Lamb continues His saving activity on behalf of the saints. The Lamb successfully defends Himself against the onslaught of the ten kings and overcomes them because *He* is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In so doing, the Lamb provides safety and deliverance for those who are with Him, “the called and chosen and faithful.” Regardless of the combined political and military power of the whole world focused against the Lamb, His kingdom and His people, the Lamb prevails and the devil fails. This is the comfort and encouragement that the Lamb forever provides for His people.

Revelation 19: The Lamb is Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church; The Elect Join in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb

After the victory of the Lamb is assured in chapter 17 and a description of the wretchedness and fall of “Babylon the great” is provided in chapter 18, a “fourfold Hallelujah” is heard (19.1-6), followed by the description of the marriage feast of the Lamb (19.7-10). John hears the voice of a great crowd saying, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready” (19.7). The bride is clothed in fine clean white linen, which is “the righteous deeds of the saints” (19.8). An angel makes pronouncement to John: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb” (19.9).

Verse 7 is in the second part of the victorious celebration, the marriage feast of the Lamb.¹²¹ David Carnegie writes, “Not only do the hymns in Revelation show the Lamb as the worthy recipient of homage due to God, but they also show how this homage

¹²¹ Brighton, vii.

is forthcoming from every quarter.”¹²² He also notes that “the hymns represent an expanding circle of praise to God and Christ.”¹²³ Carnegie concludes:

The hymns in Revelation are an essential part of the structure of a book whose message is that all events past, present and future revolve around the Lamb, the historical Jesus who died and is alive for evermore. Fittingly the Lamb is worshiped on terms equal to God, with language reserved for God. The hymns give expression to the highest devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹²⁴

The only other place in Scripture (besides Revelation 21.7) where the two verbs *chairō* and *agalliaō* (“Let us rejoice and be glad”) are used together is Matthew 5.12: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.” That reward is now pictured as a great wedding feast in which the Lamb and His bride celebrate their union. All who have followed the Lamb “wherever He goes,” who have been reviled, persecuted, spoken evil of, all for the sake of the Lamb (Matthew 5.11), who have followed Him even into martyrdom, now eagerly embrace the invitation to “rejoice and be glad” that “the wedding feast of the Lamb has come.” There is no more suffering nor shame, for “blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” This reality is guaranteed by the angel who states, “These are true words of God.”

The use of marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between God and His people, originates in the Pentateuch in Deuteronomy 22.23-24, and is found in prophetic literature as well (Hosea 2.19 and Isaiah 54.5-7). Israel is described as Yahweh’s wife with the assumption that the original marriage took place at the Exodus (Hosea 2.14-16

¹²² Carnegie, David. “Worthy is the Lamb.” *Christ the Lord*. Ed. H. H. Rowdon. Downers Grove: IVP, 1982. 243-256. 252.

¹²³ Carnegie, 253.

¹²⁴ Carnegie, 256.

and Ezekiel 16.8). The book of Hosea demonstrates Yahweh's faithfulness to His people despite the spiritual adultery of His bride. Ezekiel 16.4-14 describes Yahweh raising, wooing and wedding His people.

Marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His church is used also in the New Testament in Matthew 22.2-14, 2 Corinthians 11.2 and Ephesians 5.25-32. Aune notes that the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, described in Ephesians 5 is the archetype for the appropriate relationship between husbands and wives: self-sacrificing love on the husband's part like that which Christ shows to the church, and submission in everything on the wife's part, as the church submits to Christ. By His death Christ cleansed the church so that He could present her to Himself as a pure bride upon His return.¹²⁵ In Mark 2.20, Matthew 9.15b and Luke 5.35, Christ clearly identifies Himself as the Bridegroom.

According to Mounce, weddings in biblical times consisted of two major events--the betrothal and the wedding. The wedding itself began with a procession to the bride's house, followed by a return to the groom's house for the marriage feast. Mounce notes, "By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia of the heavenly Groom for His bride and the return to heaven for the eternal marriage feast."¹²⁶ This is precisely what is being described in 19.7.

To participate properly in this joyous occasion, the bride is clothed in fine linen (19.8). This fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Believers are created for divinely prepared good works (Ephesians 2.10). Swete says, "*Corporately* the whole

¹²⁵ Aune, WBC, c.1029-1030.

¹²⁶ Mounce, NICNT, 347.

church is seen to be attired in the dazzling whiteness of their collective purity.”¹²⁷

Brighton clarifies what the righteous deeds are. They are “good works of Christian piety and sanctification” and “are as much a gift of God’s grace in Christ as is the saving status of righteousness merited by his sacrificial work.”¹²⁸ The text is clear that “it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean” (19.8). The Lamb not only provides the church with the white robes of justification, but He is also working within the members of the church that they may both will and work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2.13).

Verse 7b lists the reason for rejoicing and giving glory to God-- the marriage of the Lamb has come. God gives to the church triumphant the honor of announcing the marriage of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb. The church is accompanied antiphonally by the angelic hosts. This announcement is introduced by the “fourth Hallelujah.”¹²⁹

Brighton comments:

Because this marriage of the Lamb with his bride is the occasion by which Yahweh, the Almighty God, openly enters his reign and receives his kingdom, the real and actual purpose of the rejoicing and celebrating is to ‘give the glory to him’ (19.7). The marriage of the Lamb causes and motivates the celebration, but its purpose and result is to glorify Yahweh, God Almighty.¹³⁰

Revelation 19.9 contains assurances of the certainty of these things. In all of the sorrows of this earthly life, the anticipation of the happiness that awaits the faithful helps them to bear adversity with patience and to trust in God. God and the Lamb will surely

¹²⁷ Mounce, *NICNT*, 348.

¹²⁸ Brighton, 497.

¹²⁹ Brighton, 492-497.

¹³⁰ Brighton, 494.

do what He has promised.¹³¹ This is emphasized by the angel's words: "These are true words of God" (19.9). As certainly as all of creation continues to exist by virtue of God's almighty and powerful creative word, and as certainly as the Lamb "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1.3), so certain is it that all of these things will soon come to pass.

Beale writes the following regarding the identity of the bride: "Verse 9 presents a different perspective on the wedding metaphor from vv. 7-8. There the bride, the corporate church, was viewed as about to wed the Lamb, but now individual Christians are portrayed as guests at the marriage banquet. Both pictures portray the intimate communion of Christ with believers, but the first focuses on the corporate church and the second on individual members of the church. The same alteration of focus can be seen in ch.12 with the woman and her seed (e.g., 12.17). Therefore, 19.7-9 does not speak of two different groups of the redeemed."¹³² Mounce shares similar views on the identity of the bride and the guests: "Note that in vv. 7-9 the church is pictured both as the bride and as the guests who are invited to the wedding. Far from constituting a contradiction, this sort of freedom is a normal characteristic of apocalyptic writing."¹³³ It is a common trait of John's writing style to use words, images and metaphors with freedom in order to communicate in a more meaningful way.

About the feast, Mounce says: "This great feast is prefigured in Isa 25.6-8, where the Lord prepares on Mt. Zion a great banquet, removes the reproach of his people, and 'swallows up death forever.' The concept of a sacred meal shared by Israel and the

¹³¹ Becker, 286.

¹³² Beale, 945.

Messiah is common in Jewish thought. In Luke 13.29 Jesus speaks of those from all points of the compass who will come and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Later in his ministry, he foretells a day when he will drink the fruit of the vine anew with his disciples in the kingdom of his Father (Matthew 26.29). Such promises cause the believer to anticipate with joy the great messianic banquet that will celebrate the long-awaited marriage of the Lamb and his bride the church.”¹³⁴

In verses 7-9, the focus is on the joy of the bride and the guests, that the marriage feast of the Lamb has finally come. This is the long-awaited consummation of the marriage of Christ, the Lamb, and His bride, the church, who is clothed in a dress of righteousness. “To her was granted” to be clothed in the fine linen which is “the righteous acts of the saints.” Consider the bride’s brilliant glory, that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God has before ordained that we should be walking in them” (Ephesians 2.10). For the Lamb’s sake, God has granted the church to be thus arrayed, for “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1.30). The Lamb is everything to His bride and for His bride. Everything that she is, that she has, and that she enjoys comes from the Lamb. There is nothing left for her to do but to give herself fully to her husband, the Lamb, submitting completely to Him in euphoric praise and thanksgiving. The entire church, even as it passes through the great tribulation of this valley of sorrow, waits in eager and joyful anticipation for the day that it will join Christ the Lamb at His marriage feast.

¹³³ Mounce, NICNT, 348-349.

¹³⁴ Mounce, NICNT, 348.

Revelation 21: The Lamb is the Temple and the Light of the New Jerusalem

After the wedding feast of the Lamb in chapter 19 and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire and judgment at the throne of God in chapter 20, John sees the first views of the New Jerusalem (chapter 21). The first scene is the vision of the bride. In 21.9, the angel shows John the bride of the Lamb. The bride is displayed as the holy city of Jerusalem (21.2). The angel points out the bride of the Lamb in all her godly beauty to John (21.9). Mounce notes that the same angel showing the bride to John also showed the judgment of the harlot to him. Mounce writes, “It also draws attention to the contrast between the great prostitute (the wicked city of Babylon), and the bride of the Lamb (the holy city Jerusalem). One is of the earth, symbolizing the unbridled passion of evil, and the other descends from heaven, the epitome of all that is pure and beautiful.”¹³⁵ The true woman of God, the church triumphant, is the bride of the Lamb. Mounce also notes that “As bride the church is pure and lovely, and as wife she enjoys the intimacy of the Lamb.”¹³⁶

About the mountain Brighton comments:

Here in 21.10 he [John] is taken in the Spirit to ‘a large and high mountain’ to see the bride of the Lamb. From this ‘mountain’ John sees ‘the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.’ Perhaps this mountaintop experience ... reminded John of the mountaintop experience of the transfiguration (Luke 9.28-36), except that here it is not Christ who is transfigured, but Christ’s church, adorned in the glory of the exalted Christ. Here in 21.11, John sees that adornment as ‘the glory of God,’ which is her radiance (*phōstēr*). The church on earth bears ‘the glory of God’ because of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3.18 and Revelation 12.1), but it is unseen to the human eye. Now, after the resurrection and the restoration of heaven and earth, the church is adorned with this glory for all to see.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Mounce, *NICNT*, 388-389.

¹³⁶ Mounce, *NICNT*, 388-389.

¹³⁷ Brighton, 609-610.

It is a great comfort to know that the Lamb is not selfish with His glory. It is the Lamb's giving, unselfish, loving nature to bestow His very glory upon His people, His bride. Though the church militant, continuing its struggle to crucify the flesh, is not able to fully grasp what it will be, this graphic description of her glory in heaven assures her that when her husband, the Lamb, appears, she will indeed be like Him, seeing Him as He is (1 John 3.2).

Revelation 22: The Lamb is the Source of the Stream of Life Flowing to the Tree of Life; Supreme Object of Worship

The imagery of the magnificent city, which started in chapter 21, continues in chapter 22. The people of God are depicted in the glorious age to come, their eternal habitation portrayed as "Eden restored" and even more gloriously recreated. The Bible begins with the despoiling of God's original magnificent garden and concludes with the restoration and improvement of it, thus "book ending" the Bible.¹³⁸ "We now see redeemed humanity back in the garden, able to eat the bountiful fruit of the tree of life (22.1-2). The curse has been removed (cf. 22.3 with Gen 3.14-24), and God's people are again privileged to 'see his face' (cf. 22.4 with Gen 3.8) and serve him. No greater good or more joyous truth could be imagined than eternal fellowship with God and the Lamb!"¹³⁹

Mounce has assembled a variety of insightful comments regarding this chapter. The "springs of waters of life," also mentioned elsewhere in Revelation (7.17, 21.6, and 22.17) are a significant part of the eternal blessings. Swete sees a reference to the Holy

¹³⁸ Mounce, NICNT, 398.

¹³⁹ Mounce, NICNT, 398.

Spirit (Ezekiel 36.25-27; John 3.5, 4.10-24; and 1 John 5.7-8). Ladd finds the promise of immortality. Barclay sees a reference to the abundant life God now gives His people. This image has special appeal in hot and arid areas like Palestine. Mounce says these points are valid, but “the central affirmation of the verse is that in the eternal state the faithful will live at the source of the life-giving stream that proceeds from the very presence of God.”¹⁴⁰ The “water of life” is described as flowing from the throne. The throne is identified as “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Thus the Lamb is identified, along with God, as the source of the river. All of God’s people whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are privileged to enjoy the life-giving and life-sustaining benefits of the river of life in the holy city.

Verses 3-5 summarize several points about the eternal life that the church, as the holy city Jerusalem, will have. No curses exist anymore. The throne of God and the Lamb is located within this New Jerusalem. God’s people will live in the new and improved Eden and their very actions and words will be worship of God and the Lamb. They are “slaves” of God because they have been captured by the love of the Lamb, have seen Him as He truly is (in all His glory), have been transformed by that beatific vision, and now are truly like Him. They will never again be slaves of sin and death, or even tempted to return to such wretchedness (Romans 6.12-23).

In these verses (3-5) the worship life in heaven is also described. According to Brighton:

Earlier John had seen and heard the saints singing before God’s throne (Rev 7.9-17), and he had seen and heard the 24 elders, who represent all the saints, worshiping the Father and the Lamb with the singing of the great Te

¹⁴⁰ Mounce, NICNT, 398.

Deum. Now he sees the people of God in the new Eden after the resurrection, praising and worshiping God not only with their voices, but also in deeds, for their every action and work is also a great Te Deum.¹⁴¹

The promise that God's people would see His face in righteousness in Psalm 17.15 is fulfilled in the new Eden (22.4). They belong to God and the Lamb as citizens of the New Jerusalem. "Their entire lives are consecrated to God as those who have been named and identified as his through the redemption wrought by the Lamb."¹⁴² They no longer need the physical sun for life or light, because the Lord God and the Lamb "is"¹⁴³ their light (21.23, 22.5). God's people will reign forever as worshiping servants in the Lamb's eternal rule.¹⁴⁴

Concerning the phrase "they will serve Him," Beale notes that "Him" most likely refers to both God and the Lamb.¹⁴⁵ According to Aune, however, "this phrase is somewhat redundant since 'the throne of God and of the Lamb' has already been mentioned . . . in 22.1."¹⁴⁶

Repetition, however, is used here by John the Evangelist for emphasis. Beale says:

There are not two thrones but only one, as is clear from 3.21. . . . 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 them both. That both are sitting on only one throne and together form one temple (21.22) enhances their perceived unity. Also, this unity is highlighted by both having the titles 'Alpha and Omega' (1.8; 21.6; 22.13).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ Brighton, 629.

¹⁴² Brighton, 630.

¹⁴³ The word in Nestle-Aland 27 here is *estin*, part of the mystery of the Trinity, and a typical illustration of Greek plural subjects having singular verbs.

¹⁴⁴ Brighton, 629-630.

¹⁴⁵ Beale, 1113.

¹⁴⁶ Aune, *WBC*, c.1179.

¹⁴⁷ Beale, 1113.

What the Lamb does, God does. Where the Lamb goes, God goes.

The Lamb's last appearance in Revelation also gives the faithful hope and encouragement to remain faithful to Him. Revelation 21 and 22, in depicting the new city of Jerusalem, show the radiance of God's people as the Bride of Jesus Christ the Lamb. They will live in a city that does not need walls to keep intruders out because God and the Lamb is her wall. They will not worship in a temple building because God and the Lamb is her temple. They will not need sunlight for physical survival because God and the Lamb is her light. The source of the tree of life is the waters of the river of life which flows out of the throne of God and the Lamb. God's people's every need will be provided for. The people's very lives and actions are acts of worship to God and the Lamb as they rule with Him forever. The redeemed, as the bride of the Lamb, enjoy intimate fellowship with God and the Lamb. They have the mark of the Lamb on their foreheads, signifying that they belong to God and the Lamb. No one can ever snatch them away from God's hand. They will reign forever in the eternal rule of God and the Lamb as His worshipful servants. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out. . . . For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11.33, 36).

Conclusion

God inspired the lamb imagery used in Holy Scripture to provide great comfort for His people. It is used to illuminate the person and the salvific work of Jesus Christ who takes away the sin of the world. Lamb imagery is used in the writings of the Pentateuch and the Prophets to prefigure the coming of our Savior the Lamb and His work of atonement. In the celebration of the Passover, in the sacrificial cultus of the Day of Atonement, and in the prophecy of the Suffering Servant, is the rich redemptive imagery that John and other New Testament writers drew from to describe Jesus Christ and His work as the Lamb of God.

The phrase the Lamb of God is used only twice in the New Testament, exclusively in the Gospel of John. Lamb imagery, however, certainly is used in several epistles. The Lamb of God is loaded with theological meaning, with many nuances of meaning explicated by different commentators and exegetes. John the Baptist used this phrase to identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the One sent to atone for the sin of the world and provide eternal salvation for all believers.

The term as used by John the Baptist certainly draws from the Old Testament sacrificial cultus, the Passover, and the Suffering Servant. The concepts of substitution, expiation and redemption are packed into the meaning of the phrase the Lamb of God. Trench observed that when considering the use of lamb imagery in the New Testament, we have to look back at *all* the Old Testament uses of lamb imagery, lest we miss the full, wonderful picture of the incredible work that the Lamb of God would perform for His flock.

Other New Testament writers utilized lamb imagery in their writings. The Apostle Paul implies lamb imagery while discussing justification in chapter 3 of his epistle to the Romans. Paul identifies Christ as the Paschal Lamb in his first letter to the Corinthians. Peter explicitly utilizes lamb imagery in his first letter while discussing the price paid for our redemption. The book of Hebrews contains many references to the Old Testament sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement, showing how Christ as the Lamb of God completely fulfills all requirements of the cultus. The apostle John also refers to Jesus as the *hilasmos* “for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” These New Testament authors plumb the depths of meaning that are bound up in the title the Lamb of God. John presupposes these meanings in the Apocalypse (where most of the direct usage of lamb imagery occurs) as he expands the meaning of this title to include the victorious Lamb of the *eschaton*.

In the Apocalypse, the Lamb of God is revealed as an even more comforting, theological figure. Christ’s title is shortened to the Lamb. This is partially indicated by the switch from *amnos* to *arnion*, a word used only in Revelation. The title the Lamb of God in Holy Scripture is synonymous with the title the Lamb. In the book of Revelation, John uses this shortened version of the title to expand our understanding of the glory of God’s love.

John uses this title to reveal not only the Lamb’s gracious work in His state of humiliation, but also all that He does for His bride, the church, in His state of exaltation. The Lamb is displayed as continuing the gracious work of salvation initiated in His suffering and death on the cross as the Lamb of God. The Lamb slain becomes the Lamb victorious. Although we are constantly reminded of His vicarious atonement

(accomplished in His state of humiliation), in Revelation, the full glory of the Lamb is revealed.

In Revelation, the Lamb is also a military conqueror who has conquered by the selfless love shown in His death and by His almighty power. He is revealed as the Lamb who is victor over death by going through death. He conquered death and the power of our accuser the devil. Because of this, the Lamb reigns victorious, triumphantly sitting on the throne with God on high. He has risen and leads His followers to conquer all evil. However, the warring Lamb always remains the Paschal Lamb.

The Lamb is the source of comfort for all Christians. His revelation of Himself in the Apocalypse is especially comforting for the church militant, providing assurance of the forgiveness of sins, the defeat of sin, death and the devil, and guaranteeing their hope for the future in the joy and bliss of His wedding feast. John distills several Christological ideas into the Lamb, and at the same time describes the Lamb in a manner that the Hellenistic church of his day could relate to and understand. Jesus Christ as the Lamb is central to Christianity's understanding of God. This revelation of God's gracious love is enhanced by John's use of lamb imagery to describe the Savior's work. John's constant goal is to focus the reader's attention on the Lamb, that Christians be filled with comfort, peace, joy, hope, and strength to persevere.

There are two climactic scenes involving the Lamb in Revelation. The first of these is the appearance of the Lamb in chapter 5. The Lamb appears as One having been slain. He is shown as the only One worthy to open the scroll and read it. This scene is all about the worthiness of the Lamb, which is based upon His voluntary laying down of His life on the cross to make atonement for the world's sin. It must be remembered that the

Lamb is the Almighty Son of God with all the same attributes, powers, and prerogatives of the Father. The atonement required that the Lamb lay aside the full use of this glorious majesty and be slaughtered, suffering the just punishment of sin for every human being. His worthiness now entitles Him to open the seals, initiating the last events of human history. He dominates these events and uses them for His and the Father's purpose. This revelation of the Lamb's worthiness in Chapter 5 reverberates through the whole Apocalypse.

The church triumphant and the whole heavenly host, seeing the Lamb take the scroll, breaks out in a new song of praise and adoration of the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne. Their song of praise centers on this worthiness of the Lamb. Ultimately, all of creation must also break forth in worship of the Lamb because of His worthiness. All of this is intended to provide confidence, courage, peace, hope, joy, and optimism to the church militant, encouraging us to join the saints above in giving glory and honor, praise and thanksgiving, to Jesus Christ, the Lamb. This pattern and dynamic is carried forward throughout the remainder of the book of Revelation: 1) The Lamb's worthiness is presented; 2) The church triumphant responds with appropriate faith and trust, worship and praise of the Lamb; and 3) the church militant is drawn into communion with the church triumphant, being encouraged to join in confident faith and trust, worship and praise of the Lamb. Regardless of the difficulty of all that the church militant must endure as human history progresses towards its culmination, the Lamb remains fully in control.

The second climactic scene involving the Lamb is His appearance in Chapter 14. The Lamb appears with the 144,000, the redeemed, on Mount Zion. Understanding the

144,000 to be the church militant, those who in their earthly lives “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Mark 8.34), this vision provides immense comfort for all Christians living on earth. Though we are still in the midst of our earthly journey through trial and tribulation, the Lamb is with us, and we belong to Him, for His name and the Father’s name are written on our foreheads. Regardless of the smoky torment of God’s wrath which shall be thrust upon the unbelievers, the Lamb’s people have peace and joy because He is with them on Mount Zion even now.

Later in chapter 14 the imagery shifts from describing Christ as the Lamb to Christ as the Son of Man. However, the comfort and strengthening of faith continues. The Son of Man is the heavenly agent of judgment. This abrupt change jars us back to the reality of the utter wretchedness of man’s rebellion against God and rejection of His love. The great Conqueror has come to judge all of creation, including the elect. Throughout the Apocalypse, John admonishes Christians to persevere in their faith lest they be cast into the lake of fire on Judgment Day. The Lamb, the Son of Man, will separate the wheat from the tares, His people of faith from the unbelievers, at His *parousia* on the last day. This description of the Son of Man in His state of exaltation and role of judgment, however, does not diminish our appreciation of the purpose of His incarnation, nor our gratitude for His willingness to enter into the state of humiliation. For all believers retain the comfort and joy of faith, knowing that the Son of Man is always the blessed “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Everything that the Lamb does in Revelation is a result of His love for us. He will protect His people of faith throughout their earthly tribulations and will provide them with the ultimate deliverance when He takes them to be with Him in the New Jerusalem.

In that blessed place, His people no longer need the light of the sun because their light is the Lamb and God. His people no longer need a temple or tabernacle to worship in, because their temple is the Lamb and God. The Lamb's people no longer have to settle for just "a foretaste of the feast to come," for they are fellowshiping with the Lamb at His wedding feast.

This Lamb of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us, is none other than God Himself, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Eternally identified by the humble figure of a lamb, a figure chosen by God to reveal His love for us, the Lamb is forever providing for all the needs of His people, as only God can do. Though once humble in His state of humiliation, the Lamb now always and fully uses His divine power and prerogatives, also according to His human nature, for the greatest benefit and blessedness of His people. As children of God redeemed by the Lamb, we join the eternal song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." To Him be all honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

Appendix 1: The Lamb as Our Good Shepherd

When reading about the Lamb as Shepherd in Revelation, one cannot help but think of Psalm 23. The Lamb is our Shepherd, both now and forever (23.1a). The Lamb insures that we will never “want” (23.1b). He leads us to green pastures, fulfilling all our needs in this life (23.2a) and leading us to the tree of life in heaven (Revelation 22.2). The Lamb leads us beside quiet waters, sustaining our lives in this world (23.2b), and to the “river of the water of life” in heaven (Revelation 22.1). The Lamb restores our souls (23.3a), providing us with the refreshment of His forgiveness, mercy, rest and peace in the new life that is ours in Him. The Lamb’s own blood makes us righteous. Our robes are white here on earth and there in heaven. This new life through faith in the Lamb is eternal life. No one can snatch us away from Him. He guides us in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (23.3b, c), so that throughout our earthly lives we bring glory to God (Matthew 5.16). For all of eternity we will sing His praises, for “He predestined us to the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1.5-6). “Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” even if it be martyrdom, “we will fear no evil, for You are with us” (23.4). The same Shepherd who guides us in this life will also guide us into heaven, for He promises, “I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14.2-3). The Lamb prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies (23.5). His blessing is ever upon His church militant, which feeds on His gracious mercy and love in His Word and Sacraments. An even greater feast awaits us in heaven at the

celebration of the Lamb's marriage (Revelation 19.7). The Lamb's mercy and goodness will be with us the rest of our lives on earth (23.6a) and in heaven we will dwell in the house of the Lamb forever (23.6b).

The Lamb as the great Good Shepherd provides the ultimate model for pastoral ministry. All who seek to serve Him as undershepherds can do nothing more noble than to bring the sheep to this great Good Shepherd. All who belong to the flock of the Lamb are abundantly and richly blessed in this life and for all eternity.

Appendix 2: The Lamb as the Good Shepherd

In John 10 we are identified as sheep, instead of Christ as the Lamb. Christ now identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd. He who enters through the door is the shepherd of the sheep (10.2). The doorkeeper opens the door for the shepherd, the sheep hear his voice, the shepherd calls the sheep by name and leads them out (10.3). The shepherd goes ahead of them and they follow him because they know his voice (10.4). Jesus also identifies Himself as “the Door of the sheep” (10.7, 9). Anyone entering through Him will be saved and find pasture. Those coming before Jesus are bandits and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them (10.8). Jesus has come that His sheep may have life and have it abundantly (10.10). Jesus identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd and states that the Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep (10.11). The hired hand flees when he sees the wolf come, and as a result, the sheep scatter (10.12). The hired hand flees because he is not concerned about the sheep (10.13). The Good Shepherd asserts, “I know My own and they know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep” (10.14-15). Jesus has other sheep to bring into the fold. They will hear His voice and become one flock with one Shepherd (10.16). The Father loves Jesus because, on His own initiative, He lays down His life so that He may take it up again (10.17). He has authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. He received this commandment from His Father (10.18).

This text provides great comfort and assurance to believers. They are depicted as the sheep in this text, while Christ the Lamb of God depicts Himself as the Good Shepherd. In verse 5, the believers know the Good Shepherd’s voice because “they hear

it in His Word.”¹⁴⁸ All who are true under-shepherds of the Lamb of God (pastors, teachers and church leaders) bring the sheep to Him, the one and only Door, feeding them with His Word, and hence, the sheep receive them as shepherds.¹⁴⁹ In verse 8, the sheep do not follow a voice that they do not recognize. In fact, they flee from it! When they do recognize a voice as coming from the Lamb of God, the sheep gladly and trustfully follow.¹⁵⁰ Jesus as the Door is the Mediator of life and its abundant blessings.¹⁵¹

Lenski writes, “Jesus is *the shepherd* absolutely in a class by himself . . . he is excellent with an excellence unique and all his own.”¹⁵² Jesus is the one and only shepherd that saves sheep by laying down His life for them *and* taking it up again. The vicarious substitutionary work of Christ is illustrated here. The Good Shepherd dies in the place of the sheep, and then takes up His life again out of death (Matthew 20.28, Mark 10.45).¹⁵³ Jesus sacrifices Himself for the world and all humanity. Instead of the flock being sacrificed as a blood offering for the shepherd, just the opposite occurs: The Shepherd is sacrificed as a blood offering for the sheep. Instead of being sacrificed and staying dead, the Good Shepherd comes back to life again. No other sacrifice by its death can bestow life on others.¹⁵⁴

The sheep belong to God. They put their faith and trust in the Lamb of God who dies in their place and rises again, and so they belong to Him (10.14-15).¹⁵⁵ Jesus Christ,

¹⁴⁸ Lenski, John 713.

¹⁴⁹ Lenski, John 715.

¹⁵⁰ Lenski, John 716.

¹⁵¹ Lenski, John 720.

¹⁵² Lenski, John 723.

¹⁵³ Lenski, John 725.

¹⁵⁴ Lenski, John 726.

¹⁵⁵ Lenski, John 735.

of His own freewill, laid down His life for the sheep, providing a sacrifice that actually atones for sin and redeems the sheep. “The human body and life [of Jesus Christ], once laid down as a ransom for us, are now enthroned in glory at the Father’s right hand.”¹⁵⁶

Lenski concludes with this statement: “Voluntary in the highest degree is the act of Jesus laying down his life. By his voluntary death, Jesus wins the supreme love of his father.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Lenski, John 743.

¹⁵⁷ Lenski, John 744.

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