

# Revelation Five (vv.6-14)

## The Slain Lamb [vv.6-10]

**v.6.** This verse presents a portrait of the Lamb. Imagine John's surprise when, commanded to "behold" the *Lion*, instead he sees a *Lamb* as it had been slain. Victory has been won on the basis of sacrifice.

- His **position** – "in the midst of the throne". The word 'midst' describes the location of something being surrounded by other things. So, the Lamb stands in the centre of the heavenly throne room, probably in the vacant space before the throne. He is encircled by the living creatures and elders. This is the location of highest honour.
- His **posture** – "stood", or "a Lamb standing, as slain" [JND]. His 'standing' shows He is resurrected and triumphant.
- His **presentation** – "a Lamb [*arnion*]" . *arnion* is diminutive and used consistently in Revelation (x29, also John 21.15). Elsewhere, the term *amnos* is used of Christ (John 1.29, 36). Though there is no real difference in meaning, *arnion* could be used for lambs less than a year old. It could emphasise the vigour of youth or a sense of humility.
- His **passion** – "as it had been slain". The Lamb bears the marks of violent slaughter (see Isaiah 53.7, LXX), the word "slain" pointing to the wound left by the knife. It is the sacrificial work of Calvary that fits the Lamb for universal dominion. The word "slain" is used *three* times in the chapter. Once it is *aorist* (v.9), describing the *fact* of Calvary, once and for all. Twice it is in the *perfect* tense (v.6, 12) describing a completed act with present results, the *continuing effect* of Calvary. His work on the cross is just as fresh as if it had happened that day. Calvary will never lose its efficacy.
- His **power** – "having seven horns". Indicates perfect and infinite power. The Lamb once slain is now the executor of the throne. Lambs do not have horns, but this Lamb is an all-powerful warrior and king.
- His **perception** – "seven eyes". Indicates perfect knowledge, wisdom, and perception (cf. Zechariah 4.10). Nothing escapes the notice of the Lamb. These eyes "are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth" – thus, all the Lord Jesus does is in the plenitude and fulness of the power of the Spirit. Another reference to Isaiah 11 seems obvious here (v.5). The Spirit and Son work in perfect harmony to provide righteous judgment and justice for all the earth.

**v.7.** The Lamb steps forward to take the scroll from the right hand of the divine throne-sitter. Jim Allen describes the verb "took" as a dramatic perfect, which could be rendered as 'He went up and took it and now has it'. The scroll is his abiding possession. The Lamb has been divinely authorised to execute God's redemptive programme for planet earth. This seems to be a parallel scene to Daniel 7.13-14, "*Behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*" **v.8.** Having "taken the book" the whole of heaven bursts into a paean of universal praise and worship. It begins with the living creatures and elders (vv.8-10), extending to the whole angelic realm (vv.11-12) and all of creation (v.13). The living creatures and elders "fell down" before the Lamb (bowing with one's face to the ground or assuming a completely prostrate position) – giving the same worship to Christ as they did to God (4.10; cp. 1.17). Each of the elders had a "harp" [*kithara*] and "golden vial". The phrase "having every one of them" is a *masculine* participle which, grammatically, *could* also include the living beings (neuter) but more likely refers to the elders alone. In addition, the harps and golden vials involve priestly function that is distinctive to the elders. The "harp" or lyre was an instrument with 8-10 strings of equal length used in temple worship to accompany the singing of psalms (Psalm 149.3). In Revelation, the harp seems to be associated with the praises of the redeemed (14.2; 15.2). The "golden vials" were broad, shallow bowls filled with incense which represent the prayers of the saints (cf. 8.3-4). David says, "*Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense*" (Psalm 141.2). These prayers were not wasted or lost – the elders held them before God, attending on their fulfilment. The particular prayers in view here are likely those of tribulation saints who have fervently prayed for vindication and the establishment of the coming kingdom (Matthew 6.9). All this prayer is about to be answered, not least David's great request of Psalm 72, "*let the whole earth be filled with his glory!*"

**v.9.** This verse presents textual difficulties. First, **who** are singing the new song? The living creatures *and* the elders, *or* the elders alone? Second, **what** exactly do they sing? The AV retains the word "us", including the singers amongst the redeemed. Many other versions do not include the word "us" making the statement much more general, "*you have purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation,*" [NET]. See also JND, RV.

- As to **who**, "they sung" most naturally takes the same subject as those who "fell" (v.8), thus including *both* the living creatures and the elders. Alternatively, the song *could* be antiphonal (containing or using alternating responses). Then, the elders would sing *first* (v.9), followed by the living creatures (v.10). The grammar is not conclusive either way.
- As to **what**, most reliable textual scholars do not retain the word "us" in v.9. The main reason is that the most important and reliable manuscript of Revelation (*Alexandrinus*, fifth century) does contain the word 'us'. However, *many* other manuscripts do (including several ancient versions). The major obstacle to its inclusion is the necessity of then having to identify the living creatures as amongst the redeemed, but this has been answered by the antiphonal

alternative (above). The full textual arguments are complicated, and not reproduced here. The whole matter is well, but unhelpfully summarised by Greek scholar GK Beale, “the better part of wisdom is to acknowledge the equal possibility of *both* readings.” There is also an interrelated textual conundrum in v.10 which seems easier to unravel. Though the AV (following Textus Receptus) reads “and hast made us”, the vast majority of witnesses have “them” here. Most textual scholars say there is no question that this is the original text. So JND reads, “and made **them** to our God kings and priests; and **they** shall reign over the earth.”

- Overall, the interpretation is not easy. Those who see the elders as redeemed human beings are best to follow the antiphonal explanation. Alternatively, those who see the elders as celestial beings must follow critical renderings and take the living creatures and elders as making a general statement about redemption.

In the OT, a “new [*kainos*] song” was sung when God intervened and delivered His people (Psalm 40.1-3; Isaiah 42.10). The word *kainos* means new in *quality* – this song of redemption by the blood of the Lamb is *better* than any of the old songs! This is praise that is freshly inspired by the Lamb’s victory at Calvary, and His worthiness to take the book and complete the programme of redemption. Christ is acclaimed as “worthy” (cf. 4.11), a title used in Rome at state banquets and festivals to salute Domitian the emperor. He is “worthy” because He was “slain” – Calvary establishes the righteous basis and inherent sufficiency of the Lamb to claim the book. By His “blood” (the ransom), He has “redeemed” [*agorazō*] for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation. *agorazō* is often translated ‘buy’ (cf. Matthew 13.44, 46) and means to acquire by means of a financial transaction – it was used of buying slaves in the marketplace. NET translates as, “at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God persons from every tribe...” The purchase price bought the whole world and everything in it (cf. 2 Peter 2.1; Hebrews 2.9), but here, only the saints are in view for they are redeemed “out of” the mass of humanity. “There is not a culture, nor a country, nor a class of men where the value of this redemptive work will not be effective” (Allen). **v.10.** The redeemed have been established as a ‘kingdom (royal status) and priests’ (privilege of access) to serve God (cf. 1.6; 20.6). The reference to priests in 20.6 suggests that *all* the redeemed that have part in the *first resurrection* are in view here, not merely the church. This company of redeemed *will* reign (future tense) “on [*epi*] the earth”. The preposition *epi* does two things: **1.** It declares the *authority* of the rule as it means ‘to exert power and control over’. **2.** It describes the *geographical* sphere of the rule as *epi* must be translated ‘on’ in v.1, 7. It may be fairly deduced from this verse that Christ in His millennial reign on the earth will share that rule with His saints (cf. 3.21; 20.4, 6). The home of the church will be the heavenly Jerusalem, but we will have administrative duties on earth.

#### The Singing Universe [vv.11-14]

**v.11.** The symphony of praise is swelled by an innumerable company of angels (cf. Daniel 7.10; Hebrews 12.22). “Ten thousand times ten thousand” is literally ‘myriads [*myrias*] of myriads’. The word *myriad* usually represents a very large number, not precisely defined. The combination of language here simply indicates an incalculable number. **v.12.** The angels do not praise the Lamb for redeeming them – no angel will ever know the wonder of redemption (cf. 1 Peter 1.12). This ascription of virtues is a form of doxology – the angels are glorifying the Lamb by stating and acknowledging various perfections He owns. There are *seven* virtues, governed by one article. All seven qualities belong inherently to Christ. The angels were “saying [*legontes*] with a loud voice” – a word which includes *singing* as well as *chanting* (see v.9). “Power” [*dynamis*], “honour” [*timē*], and “glory” [*doxa*] have been mentioned before (see notes on 4.9, 11). “Riches” [*ploutos*] has the basic sense of *wealth* and celebrates the vast resources that belong to an all-sufficient God. “Wisdom” [*sophia*] is the possession and application of knowledge, understanding and skill. “Strength” [*ischys*] is ‘might’ – the Lion has the power to exert His perfect will. “Blessing” [*eulogia*], praiseworthiness – Christ is deserving of being well spoken of. All these characteristics will be on full display at the second coming and during the millennial reign of Christ.

**v.13.** Now “every creature” in the universe acclaims the worth of the Lamb. The word “creature” refers to any created thing – especially, here, the intelligent animated creation. The threefold division of v.3 is now expanded to include “such as are in the sea” – the worship is exhaustive, not one creature being omitted. It is possible the worship includes even unbelievers for there will come a time when “every knee” shall bow, and “every tongue” confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2.9-11). However, this worship does seem more glad than grudging. One word is added to the worship of v.12 – “power” [*kratos*], referring to strength, specifically, the exercise of rule and sovereignty (dominion). The worship is directed to the One who “sits on the throne” (the Father) *and* the Lamb. **Both** are placed on equality for the Lamb shares the prerogatives of deity. Deity will possess and exercise these qualities “for ever and ever”, literally, ‘unto the ages of the ages’. **v.14.** The worship ends where it began, with the living creatures and elders (vv.8-9). The living creatures ‘were saying’ Amen [NET], the tense indicating repetition – it is possible they add their affirmation after each attribute of the doxologies is spoken. The elders, for the *third* time (cf. 4.10; 5.8), ‘prostrate’ themselves before God in worship. God is worthy of the deepest reverence, homage and devotion from our hearts simply because of the mighty, eternal person that He is – as well as the works of creation and redemption He has performed.