



THE BOOK OF REVELATION

5: HEROES and VILLAINS JESUS – the Lamb of God

The most common description of Jesus in the Book of Revelation, is perhaps one that we do not expect. In the midst of all the chaos and carnage, problems and persecution, is One who is revealed as, *'a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain...'* (5v6). (5v6-8,12-13; 6v1,3,5,7,16; 7v9-10,14,17; 12v11;14v1,4; 15v3; 17v14; 19v7,9; 21v9,14,22-23,27); 22v1,3).

'THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD...'

That Jesus should be understood as the Lamb of God, was clearly important to John but even more so was clearly important to Jesus. As Revelation is His Self-revelation, there is something about this particular attribute and title that He wants us to engage with and something about this particular attribute and title that is particularly relevant to a time of persecution and suffering and a time of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The first time that Jesus is explicitly described as a 'Lamb' is in the opening chapter of John's Gospel, where John the Baptist twice so describes Him (Jn.1v29,36). Again this is significant as it comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry and reveals what John the Baptist understood about Jesus as Messiah and about what He had come to do and about himself the as the herald and forerunner of that sort of Messiah and of that sort of work.

To his hearers the phrase 'Lamb of God' would resonate in four areas, all of which have relevance to an understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

- 1. The Sacrifices offered in the Temple.**
- 2. The Passover Lamb.**
- 3. The Scapegoat on the Day of Atonement.**
- 4. The Suffering servant of Isaiah.**

1. The Sacrifices offered in the Temple.

Burnt offerings and sacrifices were made both daily and on especial occasions to atone for sin and to cleanse the people, whether as a whole or individually (Lev.9v3; Num.15v1-7). For example a lamb was used in the ceremonial cleansing and reintegration into society of lepers (Lev.14v1,10). The daily offering of sacrificial animals included the idea of atonement for sin (Lev.1v4; Ex.29v38-46).

2. The Passover Lamb.

We know from the Gospels that Jesus was crucified at Passover and the Last Supper was undoubtedly a Passover Meal. The key element of this annual festival was the slaying and consumption of a lamb as a reminder of the people's deliverance from slavery in Egypt all those years ago.

On the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah both speak with Jesus about His *'departure'* (literally His *'exodus'* Lk.9v31) and in 1 Cor.5v7 Paul describes Jesus as *'our Passover lamb'* who has been sacrificed.

The blood of the lamb applied to the doorframes and lintels of their houses protected the Israelites from judgement and from death and the Scriptures tell us that *'wages of sin is death'* and that we are only saved by the blood of Christ (Rom.6v23; 3v25). The Passover lamb's death also protected God's people from the last plague

falling on Egypt (Ex.12v13), even as the Lamb of Revelation saves His people from the forthcoming world-wide 'plagues' of chapters 6 onwards (7v3). And as Satan is judged and cast down by the death of the Lamb of God, so too were the deities of Egypt 'judged' by the death of the Passover lamb (Ex.12v12; Jn.12v31; 16v11; Rev.12v11).

However, the offering of the lamb at Passover was about deliverance from slavery in Egypt and about the beginning of the new identity of Israel as being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex.19v6). It was never about atonement for sin. Yet Jesus is the Lamb of God *'who takes away the sin of the world...'*

3. The Scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16).

By the time of Jesus, two identical animals were offered as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. One was slain and its blood sprinkled in the Most Holy Place and the other was led away into the desert to be slain, symbolising the people's sin being taken away from them – the scapegoat.

By the time of Jesus these two animals, as the name suggests, were goats, not lambs. However the path along which the scapegoat was taken out into the desert, led towards the Jordan and to the area where John the Baptist was baptising. Is it too fanciful to suppose that John was (among other things) deliberately referencing the scapegoat in an area associated with it, when he spoke about Jesus as being a sacrificial animal who took away the sin of the world? Certainly the Day of Atonement was all about atonement for sin and the N.T. tells us that it was Jesus' death that procured this atonement not just for Israel but for the world (Rom.3v23-25).

4. The Suffering servant of Isaiah 53v7.

For the first time John the Baptist states that this 'lamb' is a human being, fulfilling the function of a sacrificial animal. Moreover Jesus is not simply like a lamb but He *is* the Lamb who does this. Somewhat surprisingly, the other Gospels make little mention of Jesus as this particular 'Lamb', the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and Matthew alone refers back to Isa.53 but to a different verse and links it to Jesus' healing ministry (Mt.8v16-17). Yet clearly the 'lamb' of Isaiah 53 is a person who bears and takes away not his own sin but the sin of others. It is this passage from Isaiah that Philip uses in his conversation with and conversion of the Ethiopian official and where Philip, *'began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.'* Moreover Peter also explicitly links redemption and forgiveness of sins with Jesus as the sacrificial lamb (1 Ptr.1v18-19).

So maybe John the Baptist is not trying to be specific about which lamb or sacrificial animal Jesus is and is instead, by using a multiplicity of sources, wanting to draw our attention to the fact that Jesus as the sacrificial 'Lamb of God', will make atonement for the penalty of sin and will deliver from the power of sin.

THE LAMB OF GOD IN REVELATION

We are used to thinking of Jesus as the suffering 'Lamb' who, *'...was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away.'* (Isa.53v7-8). In other words as the Victim, *'despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain'* (Isa.53v3), of Good Friday.

Now undoubtedly that element of suffering and sacrifice is retained in the image of Jesus as the 'Lamb of God' in the Book of Revelation. He is the Lamb, *'looking as if it had been slain'*, who because of His shed blood has purchased people for God to make them a kingdom and priests to serve God (Rev.5v6,9-10). Interestingly in verses 9 and 10, we are thus given both an allusion to the Day of Atonement and to the Passover.

BUT that this particular Lamb of God is also the Lion of Judah reminds us that this Lamb can bite! This is the Lamb of God seen from the perspective of Easter and of the Ascension!

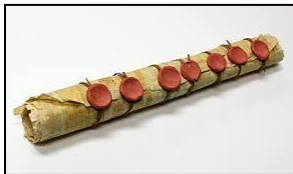
WHAT THE LAMB LOOKS LIKE (Rev.5v5-6).

- He looks as if He has been slain, the atoning sacrifice made for the sins of the world.
- He looks like a lion, a common Messianic title, both Biblically and in late BC, early AD Jewish religious writings (Gn.49v9-10; the Testament of Judah 24v5). *'And as for the lion... this is the Messiah whom the Most High has kept until the end of days, who will arise from the offspring of David...'* (2 Esdras 12v31-32). The imagery speaks of majesty and of might.
- He has seven horns and seven eyes. These two images speak of power (a common O.T. metaphor for strength and power is the horn e.g. Ps.18v2; 89v17-18). Significantly the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth and the mount of the scarlet woman, all also have horns (Rev.12v3; 13v1,11; 17v3). The eyes, which are the seven spirits or the seven-fold spirit of God, look out and explore every corner of the earth. This speaks of the Lamb's omniscience (Zech.4v10; 1 Enoch 90v9,37). In the same way that twice attention is drawn to Jesus' eyes (Rev.1v14; 19v12).

WHAT THE LAMB HAS DONE

- He has brought salvation by His atoning death. This is one of the opening statements in the Book of Revelation (Rev.1v5) and is restated by the lips of the redeemed, who have washed their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb. The clothes of the martyrs who have come out of the 'great tribulation', are not stained by their own shed blood but cleansed by the Lamb's blood (7v10,14). So profound and established from long ago was this atoning death that He can be described as, *'the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.'* (Rev.13v8).

The souls of those who have suffered and died for their faith are seen under the altar, which was where the blood of the sacrifice was poured in the Temple (6v9). Their martyrdom, the offering of their own lives, freely given, is their unique and immeasurably precious offering to the Lord.



- He is worthy to take and to open the scrolls (5v2-5).

In the ancient world legal documents typically had seven seals, one for each of seven witnesses. Each would press their signet rings into the seals of hot wax which overlay the seven threads that were tied around the document. Thus it remained secure,

confidential and authoritative for the moment when it was opened by the proper authority (cf Dan.12v4).

As each seal is broken there is a new revelation, accompanied by thunder and the sounding of trumpets. The Lamb alone is worthy to open the seals that will bring about the culmination of the whole of human history. The judgements themselves have been described as typical 'covenant judgements' i.e. the punishment that falls on those who disobey the Lord and have strong O.T. parallels, perhaps most especially in Ezekiel ch.5-7 and Ezek. 4v16 with Rev.6v5-6 and Ezek. 14v21 with Rev. 6v8) and also with the book of Jeremiah.

The seals suggest this is a legal document and if this sealed document is intended to be understood as a will, then of course it could only be opened on the death of the testator (cf Heb.9v16-17). If this document with its seven seals is Jesus 'will', then only when He takes His seat upon the throne can the will be opened and its contents revealed and acted upon (Rev.3v21; 5v6; 7v17; 22v1,3; Heb.1v3 etc). The 'will' involves catastrophic judgements upon the wicked but may also be what John means by the 'Book of Life', which although not technically a legal document does contain the names of those who will inherit eternal life. The Book of Life is a common motif in both O.T. and N.T. (Rev.3v5; 13v8; 17v8; 20v12,15; 21v27; Ex.32v32; Ps.69v28; Lk.10v20; Phil.4v3).

- He is the Judge, whose righteous wrath is outpoured upon the rebellious and the wicked (6v16); whose death and resurrection has overthrown Satan and cast him down (12v11); in whose presence those who

have worshipped the beast and his image and who have received his mark, will be tormented forever (14v10-11).

- He is both Bridegroom to His Church and Shepherd to His flock. In one of His parables, Jesus uses the imagery of bride and groom to describe His second coming (Mt.25v1f). Paul describes the Church in a similar vein as being betrothed to Jesus (2 Cor.11v2). In Revelation both the Church and the new Jerusalem are described in bridal and marriage terms (Rev.19v7-9; 21v2,9ff).

Happily mixing metaphors, the lamb of God is also the Shepherd of His flock (Rev.7v17), the One who brings His people to the place where, *'... God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'* (Rev.21v3-4). Who better than a lamb to know how to shepherd other lambs (cf Heb.4v15-16)?

- He is the One who is the Temple in the new Jerusalem. The Person around whom the redeemed come to worship and who with the Father is the object and focal point of worship (21v22).
- And He is the Lamp who illuminates the new Jerusalem (21v23-27). His light fills the city, more glorious and splendid than the moon or even the sun. In every sense He truly now is the Light of the world and darkness is fully and finally banished: *'In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'* (Jn.1v4-5).
- He is thus the Victim who overwhelmingly conquers through His suffering and death. Which is surely why the 'Lamb' is so relevant as a picture of Jesus to a suffering and persecuted Church. The worst sin & Satan can do, God turns to the best. Powerlessness becomes power. Death is swallowed up in victory!

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE LAMB?

Worship

The revelation of the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God provokes a universal outpouring of adoration. *'Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"'* (Rev.5v13).

It is a 'new song' (5v9), sung by those who are intimately united with their Lord (Rev.14v1-5), a song described as being the 'Song of the Lamb' (Rev.15v1-4). This song is also referred to as the Song of Moses. The deliverance at the Red Sea that Moses sang about in Ex.15v1-18 and which was the beginning of God taking to Himself a people to be a kingdom of priests in Ex.19v6, finds its culmination in this heavenly song (Rev.5v9-10).

And the Lamb is praised for three specific things (Rev.5v9-10):

'And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

- They praise the Lamb, because *'...you were slain'*. An historical event.
- They praise the Lamb because, *'you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.'* This is what this historical event means.
- They praise the Lamb because, *'You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.'* This is the result of this historical event.