

Revelation 4:1-5:14: The Heavenly Court and the Lamb

I. Structure of Visions

- The structure of Rev is notoriously difficult to discern once we read past the addresses to the seven churches. However, scholars typically divide the remainder of Rev in two parts, marked by the dual openings of heaven (4:1 and 11:19).
- If we allow these markers to guide our reading of Rev, we see obvious parallels between the structure of the two visions following the openings of heaven.
- These sections of Rev rely heavily on contrast and parallelism (a very Jewish way of structuring literature) in order to either point to differences between the Church and the world, or to emphasize qualities shared by Jesus and the Church.

II. The Influence of Ezekiel and Isaiah

- Rev is structured to parallel exactly the throne room scene that begins the book of Ezekiel, with some small differences, and one very notable difference.
- Rev 4:1-6 parallel Ezek 1:26-28 with an emphasis on precious stones instead of strange animals.
- In the middle of it was something like four living creatures...Ezek 1:5
- “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” Isa 6:3
- “I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.” Ezek 2:9 Ezekiel eats the scroll, more to come on what John does with the scroll in Rev later...

III. The 24?

- While reaching a definitive answer regarding the identity of the 24 is impossible, we can make a few educated guesses.
- The number 24 appears in no other apocalyptic works we know of, but there is a consensus that the 24 elders – interpreted as two groups of twelve – represent the union of the Old Israel and the New Israel in worship of the Lamb.
- Other theories suggest the 24 are OT prophets, including JBap, or that these are simply angels.

IV. The Lamb

- At the heart of Rev’s parallelism is the Lion of Judah, who takes the surprising form of the Lamb who was slain.
- Notice that the contrast is between what John hears and sees, The message that he hears is that the Lion of Judah and Root of David has conquered. What he sees is the Lamb.

- These two titles are nationalistic, militaristic, messianic titles that are reinterpreted in by the Lamb who was slain. What does this reinterpretation mean?
- “By juxtaposing two contrasting images, John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death...Jesus really is the expected Messiah of David. But insofar as the latter was associated with military violence and narrow nationalism, it is reinterpreted by the image of the Lamb. The Messiah has certainly won a victory, but he has done so by sacrifice and for the benefit of people from all nations.” Richard Bauckham

V. Who is worthy to open the scroll? (Axios)

- Here is the notable difference between Ezek and Rev, that the one who is worthy to open the scroll in Ezek is YHWH, in Rev it is the crucified Lamb. This is Rev’s way of making it apparent that the crucified Lamb is the God of Israel.
- “God and the Lamb are being put on virtually the same plane, with one being hailed as the creator and the other as the redeemer.” Raymond Brown
- The actual content of the scrolls does not become apparent until later in Rev.

VI. The Seven Spirits in 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6

- Hebrew Numerical Significance: 4 signifies the world, and 7 is a number of completeness.
- Rev mentions the seven spirits four times, and all the peoples of the earth seven times (5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6, and 17:15), corresponding to 28 (7x4) references to the Lamb. There are 14 references to “the Spirit,” one each at the end of each message to the 7 churches of Asia Minor, and seven elsewhere.
- The message: The Lamb will conquer the world through the Spirit.

VII. The Use of Zechariah 4 in Revelation 5

- Rev’s understanding of the Spirit seems based on Zechariah’s vision from Zechariah 4, which forms the apocalyptic backdrop for Rev 5. Why use such an obscure vision as the basis for his prophecy? Because it parallels the situation of the Churches in the Roman Empire: “He said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” Zech 4:6 How will the Lamb conquer the beast? Through the Spirit.
- “These seven are the eyes of the LORD that range through the whole earth.” Zech 4:10. “Eyes” are an OT symbol for God’s omnipresence and power in the world. The beasts and dragon in Rev also have horns, because horns symbolize power.
- Zechariah’s vision also features two olive trees, which will be used symbolically in Rev 11.