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THE THRONE THE LAMB AND THE BOOK

Introduction: Revelation is a book of symbols. These symbols express the reality found in the rest of Scripture. The throne, the Lamb and the book (Rev. 4:2-11) are merely symbols of the reality found in both the Old and New Testament. In this article we use them to illustrate some important principles, often neglected by those who purport to be theologians and teachers of the scriptures, absent from the modern pulpits today and unknown by the average pew sitter in the modern church.

THE THRONE: In the book of Revelation before there is any description of the wrath of God being revealed by the opening of the seven seals (6:1), before there is any warning of this coming wrath by the seven trumpets (8:6), and before there is any description of the anger and wrath upon evil described in the pouring out of the bowls of His wrath (16:1), there is revealed a description of the throne of God in Heaven (chapters 4 & 5). The throne of God is mentioned countless times in the Old Testament. To cite a few: I Kings 22:19: "I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him." Psalm 47:8: "God sits on the throne of His holiness." Isaiah 6:1: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." The throne of God is mentioned many times in the New Testament, concluding by using the term 42 times in the book of Revelation (mentioned in every chapter except 2, 8, and 9). William Barclay states in his *Daily Study Bible Series*: "The throne of God stands for the majesty of God, the king of the universe, God in His might, majesty and power." That which is symbolized by the throne is that God is the determiner of all things. A right understanding of the word must begin from the right understanding of the centrality of the throne of God. Every event that happens upon earth falls with the exact precision of the unfolding of His eternal plan. Nothing however small, large, or misunderstood occurs without His ordering. The throne symbolizes the absolute control and authority of the God of heaven and earth. "The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all" (Psalm 103:19). "God reigns over the nations, God has taken His seat on His holy throne" (Psalm 47:8). The throne is more than a seat to sit upon, it represents authority, rule, and dominion. The central fact of heaven is not angelic bliss, or walking on streets of gold, but the absolute authority of God over heaven and earth.

"The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying 'Hallelujah!' And a voice came out from the throne saying, 'Give praise to our God all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great'" (Rev. 19:4,5). The twenty-four elders, a symbol based on the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, representative of the true Israel of God, the church, (Gal. 6:16, Phil. 3:3) and the four living creatures representing the host of heaven, worship the sovereign God and call for all, small and great to give Him praise. The modern church's affliction with the modern contemporary craze, not to mention the engrained legalism of some, has resulted in an all-too-casual approach to the Most High God. Our worship

should be one that corresponds to the godly fear and reverence which is appropriate to those who are privileged to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" which is an audience with God who sits on the throne.

THE LAMB: John says "And I saw between the throne and the elders a Lamb standing, as if it was slain...(5:6). Verse 5 identifies the Lamb as "the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David." The Lamb, of course, is Christ, represented here as a lamb instead of a lion because of its sacrificial death, but the slain Lamb is now risen and seen as the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah to deliver his people from their oppressors. From this moment on it is *God and the Lamb* (22:1). There are two words in the N.T translated "lamb" both always referring to Jesus. The word *amnos* occurs four times (Jn. 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32, I Pet.1:19) and is always applied to Jesus who suffers and dies as a blood sacrifice for sin. The word *arnion* is found only in Revelation and occurs 29 times. The statements in Revelation always pictures Christ as Redeemer, Ruler, and Deliverer. He is shown to be the one who takes over the governments of the world by opening the sealed book (5:7-9). He stands with the redeemed on Mt. Zion, and exercises judgment against the beast (14:1, 10). He overcomes the power of demons and is proclaimed as "Lord of lords and King of kings" (17:14). All this refers to the fact that Christ, as mediator, at his ascension received authority to rule the universe according to God's eternal decree. This does not mean that God, the Father, leaves the throne. Rather he remains seated upon the throne. It means Christ is seated upon the throne together with his Father (Psalm 2 and 110). The Apostle Paul stated it in these words: "This is in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised him from the dead and seated him on His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the one to come. He put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:19-22).

Jesus as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" has its basis in Genesis 49:9-10: "You are a lion's cub, O Judah...the scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until *he comes to whom it belongs. And the obedience of the nations is his.*" The *Lion of tribe Judah* has come and conquered, establishing everlasting dominion and opening the new covenant, fulfilling this promise. He is the one "*to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his.*" For that reason, Christ "is the ruler of the kings of the earth. God said to His Son: "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession" (Psalm 2:8). Jesus said: "He who overcomes, and keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of Iron..." (Rev. 2:26, 27). David said: "He will shatter kings in his day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations..." (Psalm 110: 5, 6). The reason for the judgment of the nations is because "to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him"

(Dan. 7:14). Psalm 72:8-11 states: “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow down to Him, and His enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and the isles will bring presents. The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts. Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him. All nations shall serve Him.” When John was shown a vision of “the bride, the wife of the Lamb, the holy city, new Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:9, 10), he states: “And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it...and they (the kings) shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it” (Rev. 21:24, 25). The nations will be healed because “the leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). The entire universe is governed by the throne, that is, by God through the Lamb, who is the “lion of the tribe of Judah.” Jesus’ ministry on earth was characterized by “the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world.” Because of his ascension his ministry now (Heb. 8:1,2) is characterized as “the lion of the tribe of Judah.”

THE BOOK: John sees the Lamb take “the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne” (Rev. 5:7). The “book” was actually a scroll, sealed with seven seals, which signified “no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book (break the seals) or look into it” (5:3). Only the Lamb is able to open the seals and reveal the contents. The breaking of the seals reveals what is to happen in the next chapters of the book, but also represents the reign of Christ throughout the new age. The sealed book and its opening represent what the New Testament reveals as “the *mystery of Christ*, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has *now* been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Eph. 3:4,5). When Revelation 10:7 states “the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets” means all the seals have been opened and all the mysteries of the past have been made known and are no longer mysteries. This shows the truth of Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” There were many “secret things” of which The Old Testament saints had no revelation. For example, God’s purpose and grace in Christ. II Timothy 1:9,10: “...His own purpose and grace was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but *now* has been *revealed* by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.” The Apostle further says: “The Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe, but before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was *later to be revealed*” (Gal. 3:22, 23).

We will now look at some of the “mysteries” that were “hidden from the past ages” that are no longer mysteries because they have been revealed to us. The Lamb has opened the seals.

Matthew 13:11: “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.” This is in response to the disciples asking Jesus why he spoke in parables. The multitude could not understand his teaching concerning the kingdom, to them it was a mystery. Jesus then quoted Isaiah 6:9 describing their hardness of heart. He then said the mystery of the kingdom had been revealed to the Apostles. It is no longer a mystery.

Romans 11:25: “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation...” This

was the mystery of the hardening of Israel and the fullness of the Gentiles. Paul has explained it all in this chapter so they would not be uninformed.

Romans 16:25: “Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested and by the Scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.” Note: the mystery has been revealed by the Scriptures and has been known to all nations and leads to faith.

I Corinthians 2:7: “We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory.” This wisdom of God could be understood but “none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (ver. 8). This part of the wisdom of God was at one time hidden, but now has been made known through the teaching of the Apostles. It is no longer hidden from us and is therefore no longer a mystery. It is in this context that Paul cites Isaiah’s words: “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him. (ver. 9), then he says “For to us God revealed them through the Spirit” (ver. 10). He has given us His Spirit “that we might know the things freely given us by God, which things we speak” (ver. 12, 13).

I Corinthians 15:51,52: “Behold I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet: for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable and we shall be changed.” Paul is here answering two questions: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” His answer is not a mystery that cannot be understood. He tells the Thessalonians “we do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep” (I Thess. 4:13). He tells the Corinthians “Behold I tell you a mystery.” The resurrection of the dead was a mystery in “ages past,” (the one exception to this statement is Daniel 12:2) but it now has been fully revealed. Job asked: “If a man dies shall he live again? (Job 14:14). The Sadducees, who were the priestly party, did not believe in a resurrection (Matt. 22:23, Acts 23:8). Paul has explained this mystery.

Ephesians 3:3-6: “By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been *revealed* to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit, to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” We note the mystery had been made known and could be understood.

Colossians 1:24-28: The preaching of the word of God is “the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now *been manifested* to his saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” This mystery was not known in “ages past” but by the word being manifested among the Gentiles it is now no mystery.

The seals have been broken and the mysteries revealed.