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What is the function of the lamb in Revelation 5?

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Introduction

> *"It is that Lamb, slaughtered for our sins and risen for our salvation, who is in control of the events that sweep and swirl around us, clouding with the dust of history in our vision of that final goal."*[1]

The book of Revelation is a mysterious text, and the response to the book varies greatly for those in the church and academic institutions. Unfortunately these sacred texts are often misunderstood, abused, or altogether ignored. Many congregations can go years without engaging these texts, foregoing personal or group study, or teaching from the pulpit. On the other hand, some writers and preachers misrepresent the book of Revelation as a text that predicts future events, portrays the violent end of the world, or presents a picture of God's narrative that undermines the beauty and hope of the text. The work undertaken in this project is an opportunity to engage in the ongoing conversation with scholars, church leaders, and others who study John's apocalypse.

The goal of this project is multileveled. First, it is an exercise in how to thoughtfully engage biblical texts from the first century social setting. One will not be able to understand the meaning of John's message by simply reading the words on the pages. Misunderstandings often occur in regard to the prophetic nature, violent language, and unclear imagery of the book of Revelation. The process of researching and writing this thesis is a great lesson in how to approach ancient texts found in scripture—taking into account the context, use of metaphor and imagery, and past research. Second, it provides the opportunity to approach the book of Revelation within the context of

[1] Paul J. Achtemeier, "Revelation 5:1-14," *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (1986): 288.

ministry in the local church. There is often a gap between those in the pews and those in the academic institution—a gap that is seemingly apparent in the study of John's Apocalypse. One aspiration of this work is that those in the church who are not involved in academic research can engage the beautiful themes of worship and hope in John's apocalypse. Admittedly, one element of this thesis is to undo some of what has been done by church leaders and teachers in my own past. Therefore, this project allows me the opportunity to converse with and teach these texts to those in the local church who seek the hope offered in the message of the revelation of Jesus Christ (1:1).

Thesis Topic and Project Goal

The goal of this project is to explore the role of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. The function of the lamb is the key to unlock the layers of imagery and meaning of the message in John's Apocalypse. In brief, the function of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 is to reveal the nature of God and the way God achieves victory over evil—most clearly portrayed in the worthiness of the lamb, which is understood to be the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. John transformed the messianic expectations of his first century audience by utilizing an unexpected metaphor—the lamb rather than the lion. Through this surprising switch, John transformed the notion of victory (*nike*). God's victory over evil does not come through the military force, violence, or exploitation that is characteristic of the emperor and the Roman Empire—characteristics often associated with the power and ferocity of the lion metaphor. Rather, true victory is demonstrated through God's sacrificial love in Jesus the messiah, a slaughtered lamb.

By utilizing the lamb metaphor, John not only transformed the messianic expectations of his audience, he undermined the ideology that defined the Roman Empire—power, coercion, and worship of the emperor. For those under Roman rule during the first century *nike* occurred through brutal military might and coercion. If John had used the lion metaphor, the narrative would have taken on a different form. God's victory would be achieved through the same means as that of Rome—power, force, and ferocity. By employing the vulnerable, non-violent lamb, not only did John portray the sacrificial nature of God's love, he also raised a figure that stood in opposition of the empire. Therefore, the function of the lamb revealed the true nature of God's love. But it also showed a new way for the followers of the lamb, an alternate way than that of caesar and the dominant empire.

Chapter Organization

To support the thesis above, my investigation is organized in four chapters. Chapter 1 is a general outline of the cultural setting and context of John's apocalypse. When did John write, and how did that culture affect his use of language and imagery? After the authorship and dating of the composition are discussed, the central thrust of chapter 1 covers the apocalyptic literary genre, and the form, content, and function of this movement. In this section, I will rely heavily on the scholarship of John J. Collins, Adela Yarbro Collins, and David Aune. In particular, I will reference their works on apocalyptic thought, early Christian apocalypticism, and the issues of genre that shaped John's apocalypse. Reconstructing historical context has proven to be a difficult undertaking. However, if one is to engage the message of Revelation, the lamb in Revelation 5 in particular, he or she must have a solid understanding of the type of literary devices that

were common in ancient Mediterranean literature, the movement of apocalypticism, and the cultural realities that shaped the author's message, themes, and purpose. The setting and context of first century Rome and early Christian apocalyptic was the literary "air" that John breathed. In order to fully comprehend his use of the lamb in Revelation 5, we must first root the study in that cultural context.

Chapter 2 is a survey of recent scholarship on Revelation 5, in particular the lamb metaphor. The sections of chapter 2 are organized by the names of scholars that have contributed to the on-going dialogue and study of Revelation 5—through books, articles, lectures, and/or commentaries. The amount of scholarship and research that has been conducted on this topic is considerable, and much of it is beyond the limits of this study. Therefore, the works referenced in the survey of scholarship reflect the direction of this thesis. While all of the works referred to in this chapter contributed to this thesis, the most notable works that supported this project are Loren L. Johns's *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John,*[2] David Aune's three-volume work on *Revelation,*[3] and Russell S. Morton's *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5*.[4] The survey of recent scholarship lays a foundation to engage in the ongoing dialogue on chapter 5 of John's apocalypse.

Chapter 3 sets the stage for the method utilized in this project to support the overall thesis: a study of metaphor. This chapter is an overview of metaphor theory that helps shape our understanding of John's use of the lamb metaphor and the rhetorical

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[2] Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tubigen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

[3] David Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols., WBC; Dallas , Texas: Word Books, 1997-98).

[4] Russell S. Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 10.

force of the metaphor in Revelation 5. To be clear, this is a study of the metaphor of the lamb, rather than an exegetical study of Revelation 5. This section will outline past and current scholarship on metaphor theory and the use of metaphor in the Bible. While there were no theories of metaphor during the time John composed his apocalypse, metaphors were certainly employed by John and other authors. The key feature of this section is to review the work of scholars such as Max Black, George Lakoff, and Peter Macky. By doing so, I hope to better define metaphor and understand the use of metaphor in the biblical texts, focusing particularly on Peter Macky's work on metaphor in biblical settings. John's use of metaphor is extensive, and chapter 3 helps us lay a foundation to study the function of the lamb metaphor.

Lastly, chapter 4 is a description of the central argument of the project, the function of the lamb in Revelation 5. The lamb was not a typical metaphor utilized in apocalyptic literature; John's use of this vulnerable figure was a surprising, if not shocking, change in the narrative. The rhetorical force of John's message is centered in his use of the lamb metaphor that transformed the way his first century audience understood the nature of God's victory over evil. This chapter is focused on the lamb metaphor, the unlikely messianic figure, and the worthiness of the lamb to open the scroll and reshape human history. The lamb is worthy because he was slaughtered, which reveals the nature of God's sacrificial love. This is a fundamental redefinition of power and triumph, which undermined the values of the Rome and upheld the sacrificial love of God as the true power in the world.

Chapter 1: Authorship, Dating, and Setting

In the first passage of Revelation, the author gives readers his name: John. We know nothing about this "John" except what can be inferred from the book—he was an early Christian prophet who stood in the rich tradition of Old Testament prophecy and apocalyptic literature.[5] Many scholars agree that the author of Revelation was not the same John who wrote the Gospel of John. John was a common name in the first century; therefore, the author could have been a pastor or leader in the community who had that name, or an author who wrote using John's name. Pseudonymity, writing under the name of a revered figure from the past (e.g., Moses, Enoch, Isaiah), was common during this time. Writing under a familiar name was a standard feature of apocalyptic literature and this could also be the case with the authorship of the book of Revelation. Like most ancient texts, the book of Revelation provides no explicit date for its composition. However, the cultural references within the text allow us to confidently date it in the late first century, a date that corresponds well with Irenaeus's dating of the text "at the close of Domitian's reign" [90-95 CE].[6] Generally scholars agree that John composed his apocalypse while exiled on the Island of Patmos, just off the coast of Asia Minor.[7]

Apocalypticism and Apocalyptic Genre

John's apocalypse is a historically conditioned document, and its message should be understood in light of its original social setting. Despite the sophistication of research and the considerable amount of information on the subject, the efforts to reconstruct the

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[5] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

[6] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," *Semeia* 14 (1979: 70.

[7] Robert W. Wall, *New International Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 18; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 4.

historical context of first century Asia Minor have been difficult.[8] In order to fully grasp this multilayered text, readers should strive to have a firm understanding of the type of literary devices that were common in ancient Mediterranean literature, which the author skillfully utilized as he developed message, themes, and purpose of the text. The present study on Revelation, specifically on the lamb in chapter 5, gives careful attention to the literary genre implemented by John: apocalyptic.

For the past two thousand years, the biblical texts have been subjected to diverse readings and interpretations, but Revelation has held a special claim in this regard. The message and authority of Revelation has been a point of contention for interpreters since the second century.[9] Already in the fifth century, St. Jerome stated, "The Apocalypse [of John] has as many mysteries as it does words."[10] The form and significance of Revelation remains the subject of considerable debate among academics, pastoral leaders and contemporary writers, as well as those in church congregations.[11] One of the stumbling blocks for most contemporary readers of Revelation is the harsh and violent language utilized by the writer.[12] However, this is not the only barrier for many contemporary readers; other obstacles to engaging and understanding this text are the ambiguous symbolism, confusing structure, and the strange characters of the book. Much of the ambiguity and confusion can be clarified when interpreters have a firm understanding of the apocalyptic genre that John and his audience would have been familiar with.

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[8] Christopher C. Rowland, "Revelation," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 12: 509.

[9] Bernard McGinn, "Turning Points in Early Christian Apocalypse Exegesis," *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (ed. Robert J. Daly; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2009), 83.

[10] Quotation from Bernard McGinn, "Turning Points", 83.

[11] Brian E. Daley, "Faithful and True: Early Christian Apocalypse and the Person of Christ," *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (ed. Robert J. Daly; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2009), 107.

[12] Wall, *Revelation*, 2.

Ancient Mediterranean Literature

In "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre,"[13] David Aune is correct to draw attention to the special features of ancient Mediterranean literature, and how modern readers should approach these texts. He notes, "When an entire period in the history of the Greco-Roman literary culture (the first and second century A.D.), can be labeled 'mediocre' and 'decadent', it is readily apparent that modern tastes and perspectives have precluded a sympathetic understanding and evaluation of ancient literature."[14] Models and approaches based on modern assumptions often mask particular characteristics of language, life, and thought in the ancient world. Ancient literary genres must be studied in a manner sensitive to the ancient cultural settings, contexts, and systems that the literature reflects.[15] This manner of sensitive review should be the goal of any survey that is focused on the apocalyptic texts. The goal of this chapter is, therefore, to locate Revelation 5 in its proper literary genre through a focused analysis and review of first century apocalypticism.

Apocalypse Defined

John utilized specific literary devices from the apocalyptic genre to write the book of Revelation. This section of the current thesis will describe the literary genre and those devices that John utilized to write his apocalypse.[16] Simply defined, a *literary genre* is a

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[13] David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65-96.

[14] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 76.

[15] Ibid., 77.

[16] For clarification purposes of terminology: *Apocalypticism* is a movement that was present leading up to, and during the first century. Apocalyptic literature is a genre of writing during the era that John composed the Book of Revelation. Apocalyptic is an adjective that describes persons, ideas, movements and literature that embody the ideas of the apocalypticism. *The apocalypse* is the event that brought overlapped the present evil age and the good/ideal age to come. I will discuss this further in the final chapter of this thesis.

category of compositions that are marked by distinctive features of form, content, and function.[17] The particular type of writing that pertains to this study is the genre *apocalypse*. This genre generally refers to a particular literature that embodied the ideas, texts, and movements that were widespread at the turn of the first century in Palestine and are connected to ancient Jewish texts and early Christianity.[18] Apocalypticism would have been "the literary air that John breathed," and would certainly would have shaped the form and content of his apocalypse. A resurgence of research in the area of apocalyptic genre took place in the latter part of the twentieth century, in which the work of John J. Collins played a key role. His definition proposed that:

> Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[19]

Collins argued that no apocalyptic text could be understood without reference to a master paradigm, which he divided into categories of form, content, and function.[20] He was sure to note that in order for a complete study of the genre to be successful, it must also include all three elements in its definition. As we will see below, John's apocalypse was shaped by the form, function, and content of this literary genre.

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17 J.J. Collins, "Towards Morphology of Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1.
18 J.J. Collins, "Towards Morphology," 1.
19 Ibid., 9.
20 Ibid., 2.

Key Elements: Form, Content, & Function

Following Collins's work, David Aune, in his article "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," agrees that any definition of genre should be expressed in these three terms.[21] The *form* is the way that a message is communicated to an audience. An apocalypse is an autobiographical narrative that describes the revelation experienced by the writer (or *seer*) and is structured in a way that conveys the meaning of the message that is revealed. The *content* is what is being communicated to the audience. Typically this is a "transcendent, often eschatological perspective on the nature of human existence."[22] An eschatological perspective on the nature of human existence plays a key role in the interpretation of apocalyptic texts, and will be significant in the study of the lamb in Revelation 5 below.

The *function* is what the message accomplishes for the community for which it was written.[23] The key questions are *why* the author writes to his audience, and *what* he hopes to accomplish through his correspondence. Apocalypticism in the 2nd temple period was concerned with ethical issues—how the people of God behaved.[24] The goal of an apocalyptic text is to communicate a message that has multiple layers. The character of the genre is difficult to decipher, especially for those who encounter it outside of its specific context. This is especially true for a modern reader—therefore further clarification is needed.

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21 Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 86.
22 Ibid, 66.
23 Ibid., 67.
24 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 10.

Reveal/Conceal Elements of the Genre

Before proceeding to the details of form, content, and function of the apocalyptic genre, two elements need to be clarified: *orality* and the *reveal/conceal* nature of the texts. Literature and rhetoric were intimately connected in the ancient world. In the Jewish and early Christian era, texts were written for presentation as one large narrative in an oral public performance.[25] These texts were almost always read aloud, and authors knew that what they wrote would be performed publically, which shaped the manner in which the literary devices were designed. In the case of Revelation, the texts have a cultic ring to them, and were associated with communal worship.[26] The spoken nature of the text played a significant role in what and how it was written.[27] This is a unique feature of compositions like the apocalypse of John, and it should not be overlooked when studying and interpreting these texts. This is a significant element of the form, content, and function of John's apocalypse—offering a hint to the importance of the oral nature. This apocalyptic text was not written to convey data or fill in gaps for a sequence in the prediction of future events. It was written to inspire hope in the hearers in public worship.

Another element that should be clarified is called the "reveal and conceal" device, a dialectic function that was pervasive in ancient Mediterranean literature. A message is communicated, but it is hidden. The concealed message is not accessible through human knowledge, so it is imparted through a revelation from the divine. The message that is being revealed is expressed in obscure ways so that the revelation is not completely

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[25] M. Eugene Boring, Revelation, *Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 1.

[26] Gerard Luttikhuizen, "The Poetic Character of Revelation 4 and 5," *Early Christian Poetry* (Leiden: EJ Brill), 1993: 15. For further study also see Barr, D.L. "The Apocalypse of John as oral enactment," *Interpretation*, 38 (1984), 39-50.

[27] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 77.

clarified. “Rather, it becomes a vehicle capable of providing new revelations to the audience (when the apocalypse is orally performed), or for the individual reader (when studied).”[28] In other words, the literary structures and images employed in John’s apocalypse were designed to conceal the message that is actually revealed through the form of the text—which occurs in public oration. This serves as a way for the seer to communicate to the audience what God has given to him; it is a glimpse into that which is otherwise inaccessible for the hearers.[29] This element highlights the multilayered depth of the apocalyptic genre and the skill with which these writers engaged in the composition of the texts. This is often a confusing element of the apocalypse genre, but it is one of the more transforming elements for those who participated in the public services where it was orally performed.

Genre Form

The form of apocalyptic texts has two main features. First, they are often pseudo-autobiographical in nature, often written anonymously or under another person who is known to the audience. This strategy is implemented to give credibility to the work and to offer continuity with the religious tradition.[30] As stated above, these texts were used in public worship ceremonies to inspire and offer hope in their present circumstances. The first person style in the oral performances enabled listeners to better identify with the seer’s message because it became their narrative. The public oration of the message would take on a deeper meaning—the message was applicable for the hearers in their

[28] Aune, “The Problem of Genre,” 85.
[29] Brian E. Daley, “Faithful and True: Early Christian Apocalypse and the Person of Christ,” *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity* (ed. Robert J. Daly; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2009), 109.
[30] Daley, “Faithful and True,” 108.

present situation.[31] These features of John's apocalypse will be discussed in more detail below.

The second element of form in the apocalyptic genre is that the literary climax parallels the central message of the writer. This is a frequently confusing facet of the genre. A skilled writer can successfully structure the meaning of his message so the central elements of the revelatory visions come to a literary climax within the experience.[32] In the case of Revelation, John implored two key techniques: (1) segmentation and (2) the device known as the *otherworldly journey*. Segmentation is the use of visions that are kept apart while the central report dominates the body. An example of this is the episodic nature of John's apocalypse. The text is broken down into segments (e.g., Revelation 1-3, 4-5, and 6-22), with chapters 6-22 as the dominant section of the narrative. The vision in the later chapters is kept separate from the introduction of the text and the throne scene in 4-5. The *otherworldly journey* device describes the experience of the seer who travels in and out of various levels of the heavenly realm—ending up at the climax of the vision, the vision of God.[33] The clearest example of this is Revelation 4-5. In the throne room scene, God is mentioned only through vague imagery—*the one on the throne with a scroll in hand.* The writer skillfully delayed the climactic vision of God until chapter 21, where God finally speaks. The implementation of these formal structures helps the apocalyptic authors highlight the central message, which is identified in the content.

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[31] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 87.
[32] Ibid., 86.
[33] Ibid., 88.

Genre Content

The content of the apocalyptic genre is much like other ancient revelatory texts—the communication of a transcendent perspective on the human experience. The narrative illustrates the difference between the apparent realities of the present versus the ideal existence. In the vision, there is a discrepancy between reality and the ideal, and the seer communicates this incongruity between the two to the audience. The seer reveals the present discrepancy and incongruity to the audience through a vision. The message ultimately climaxes in an eschatological vision of restoration between the present and the ideal. It should be noted that both Jewish and early Christian apocalypses include an eschatological experience—on a cosmic and individual level.[34] For the seer and the audience, this vital message is skillfully told through the vision narratives of the form. Amazingly, there is a method to what can otherwise seem confusing and chaotic.

In general, apocalyptic texts contain a message communicated through dramatic religious stories that often describe a journey or experience beyond the world of ordinary reality. God gives the writer a glimpse into the depths of the human and even cosmic experience—past, present, and future. The narrative—the movement from reality to the ideal—is often told in the form of a dream where the journey described is very grandiose, with larger-than-life characters that are caught in a battle between good and evil, and where both the world's history its and future are at stake. At the heart of the narrative is the human situation (or experience).[35]

[34] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 89.
[35] Daley, "Faithful and True," 108.

In apocalyptic literature, God is at the center of the narrative, inspiring hope in the readers/hearers. The message is simple: God is in control, God keeps God's promises, and God will save God's followers from danger (i.e. punishment). The brokenness of reality will soon be redeemed to align with the ideal. The intended audience is usually marginalized groups or groups who have struggled for survival under the threat of the dominant government of the era (e.g. the congregations of the seven churches addressed in John's letter). The message of hope is, therefore, typically laced with a strong critique of the "evil" structures of the social and political situation under that particular governing power. The critique is often followed by an appeal to believers to remain faithful to God and the moral way that God has laid out for them. The apocalyptic genre was used to communicate a strong sense of privilege, election, and bonding for its readers/hearers. Therefore, the personality and writing style of the author are vital in understanding the formation of these elements for his or her audience.[36]

Genre Function

One of the key elements of the apocalyptic narrative is *transcendence*—the message requires the mediation of an otherworldly being because the vision of the imparted ideal falls outside of human experience. The revelatory message looks beyond this world, and presents a vision of a better reality that reveals the mistaken ideology of this present age. It assumes a world outside of human knowledge, often referring to a "heavenly" realm. The description of salvation, heavenly realms, and a renewed earth involves a radically different type of human existence where the constraints of the current

[36] Daley, "Faithful and True," 109.

human condition, including death, are transcended by a revealed knowledge of salvation and new life orchestrated by God.[37]

The vision of the ideal in apocalyptic literature is essential when attempting to understand the function of the genre. As mentioned earlier, the central question is the discrepancy between the present reality and the perceived ideal. The function of apocalyptic texts is to shift the thinking and behavior of a community from how they currently operate (reality) to the way they should operate and behave (the ideal). This is done by drawing upon the vision that comes from the transcendent (God) in the ideal, to the hearers who are in reality. Ultimately, the goal of the writer is to change the way of the human experience, and call the hearers to a different type of life—a life with different ethics and behavior. The writer calls his audience to live in accordance with a new reality that was breaking into this world.

Genre Literary and Social Functions

The term "function" can have multiple meanings when discussing the apocalyptic genre, so the differences should be noted. Aune agrees with Collins that two central functions should be highlighted: *literary* function and *social* function.[38] Aune states:

> The *literary function* of an apocalypse is concerned only with the implicit and explicit indications within the text itself of the purpose or use of the composition. The *social function* of an apocalypse, from this perspective, would include not only its original (implicit

[37] Collins, "Towards Morphology," 10-11.

[38] John J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Technique: Setting and Function in the Book of Watchers," *CBQ* 44 (1982): 110-111 as quoted in Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre", 89.

> and explicit) purpose (if recoverable), but also the entire history of varied utilization which it (as any other literary text) has experienced.[39]

Both the literary function and the social function play a role in the multi-level communication from the seer to the audience. A skilled writer is able to engage his audience beyond the sending and receiving a message. Apocalyptic writers were accomplished in their genre, and applied these functions creatively and skillfully to their audiences.

The literary function of the apocalypse mediates a new actualization of the revelatory visions. Through the use of structures, images, and literary devices the writer allows the receiving audience to participate in the "decoding" of the message within the oral performance. The readers/hearers participate in the narrative within the framework of worship. The writer does not simply narrate a divine message he has received to an audience who simply hears it; rather, he provides the hearers with a literary vehicle so they can relive and partake in the experience themselves.[40] By participating in the experience, the hearers are able to appropriate the message, which can lead to a shift in the way they think and behave. Their new thought and behavior mirrors the message that is received from the ideal, or transcendent, world.[41] Herein lies the power of the genre. The apocalyptic promise is really a promise of revelation and participation. It is a way of revealing the promise that God's faithful ones would not simply hear the message of their

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[39] Aune, "The Problem of Genre", 89, italics added.
[40] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 90.
[41] Ibid., 91.

rescue from oppression, but that hearers would see, and therefore, share, in God's transformation of reality into the ideal.[42]

Early Christian authors wrote during a time when this type of literature was a prominent genre of the era. The apocalyptic genre provided the ethos through which John wrote Revelation. Apocalyptic shaped the backdrop against which he wrote, and helped him describe a profound message to an audience who could hear it and be transformed by it. The goal of the next section is to understand the form, content, and function of the apocalyptic genre within the early Christian writings. Once the early Christian apocalyptic writings are clarified, the details of John's apocalypse will come into focus.

Early Christian Apocalyptic Writings

The definition of apocalypse, offered earlier by John J. Collins, is broad and can be a bit ambiguous. Our discussion of John's apocalypse will be more understandable if we narrow the boundaries of the apocalyptic genre as a whole, and define the genre within the body of early Christian writings that are apocalyptic in nature. In her article "The Early Christian Apocalypses,"[43] Adela Yarbro Collins builds on J.J. Collins's definition. She argues that in order to define the genre "apocalypse" within the body or canon of early Christian writings, researchers must look at the form and content to see which reoccurring features exist in works from the same period.[44] A.Y. Collins describes the types of apocalypse within the early Christian writings and the variations in the eschatological content of the genre applied by the early Christian writers.

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[42] Daley, "Faithful and True," 125.
[43] Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," *Semeia* (1979): 61.
[44] A.Y. Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," 62.

Categories in Early Christian Apocalypses

Twenty-four early Christian texts fit within the definition offered by John J. Collins, and of those texts, fourteen are entire works. Collins divides these early Christian apocalypses into two groups. The first (Type 1) are the texts where the primary revelation is given through vision or audition *without* an otherworldly journey. The second (Type 2) are the texts where the primary revelation is presented *with* the narrative of an otherworldly journey.[45] A.Y. Collins takes J.J. Collins' work a step further by dividing these two groups into sub-categories according to variations in the eschatological content found within the texts.

Simply stated, *eschatology* is a theological term that refers to the final events of the world and human history. In her categories, A.Y. Collins mentions three specific types of eschatology: personal, political, and cosmic. *Personal* eschatology pertains to what will occur to an individual after the end of his or her life. This often leads to an "end times" theology that is fascinated with the separation of the soul from the body. *Cosmic* eschatology goes beyond the span of the individual or humanity, referring to the end of the entire created order or cosmos. Here questions emerge in regard to God's eventual plan for all God has created. *Political* eschatology is not as easily defined. It deals with the fate of the kingdoms of this earth in the present age. The phrase *realized eschatology* is the belief in the events Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection the benefits of the eschaton are already being realized in the present age; in fact, it is the manifestation of the kingdom of God currently in creation. The great eschatological event is experienced

[45] Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 68.

in the present, but it will occur "to the full" at an unknown time in the future at the parousia of Jesus.[46]

Working with these different variations of eschatological content, A.Y. Collins offers six types of early Christian apocalypses: two overall categories, with three sub-categories in each. These are the sub-categories: (a) apocalypses with a historical review, (b) apocalypses that include a cosmic and/or political eschatology, and (c) apocalypses with only a personal eschatology.[47] Through this grid, Collins organizes the groupings with examples of early Christian apocalypses in each:

- Type 1a: Apocalypses with a historical review and no otherworldly journey. Example: *The Ladder of Jacob.*
- Type 1b: Apocalypses with cosmic and or political eschatology with neither a historical review nor otherworldly journey. Examples: *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Shepherd of Hermas, The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian*, and *the Book of Elchasai*.
- Type 1c: Apocalypses with only personal eschatology. Examples: *5 Ezra*, *The Testament of Isaac 2-3a*, *The Testament of Jacob 1-3a*, and *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* by Bartholomew the Apostle.
- Type 2a: Apocalypses with a historical review with an otherworldly journey. Example: There is no existent Christian text, only the Jewish text *The Apocalypse of Abraham.*

[46] Hans Schwartz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 26.
[47] R.A. Bullard, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *The Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. Watson E. Mills; Macon, Georgia: Macon University Press, 1990), 37.

- Type 2b: Apocalypses with an otherworldly journey with a cosmic and/or political eschatology. Examples: *The Ascension of Isaiah 6-11*, *The Apocalypse of Paul*, *4 Ezra*, and *The Apocalypse of the Virgin Mary*.
- Type 2c: Apocalypses with an otherworldly journey and only a personal eschatology. Examples: *The Testament of Isaiah 5-6*, *The Testament of Jacob 5*, *The Story of Zosimus*, *The Apocalypse of the Holy Mother of God Concerning the Punishments*, *The Apocalypse of James*, *The Mysteries of St. John the Apostle and the Holy Virgin*, *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (by Bartholomew the Apostle) *17c-19b*, and *The Apocalypse of Sedrach*.[48]

A few key elements should be noted in these early Christian apocalyptic texts. All of them contain a heavenly revelation that is communicated by a mediator. Within the revelatory message there are both temporal elements and spatial elements, particularly in the eschatological vision. Lastly, most of the texts contain a dialogue between the mediator and the seer.[49] The details and categories in A.Y. Collins' work show that the early Christian apocalyptic texts were expansive and diverse, and the apocalyptic genre was widely engaged by writers in that era. When one is reading and interpreting John's apocalypse, he or she must do so with this literary backdrop in mind.

Revelation: John's Apocalypse

In what sense does Revelation belong to the apocalyptic genre? As stated above, *apocalypse* is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework in which a

[48] The categories are taken from Collins , "The Early Christian Apocalypses", 65, and the examples taken from Bullard, "Apocalyptic Literature," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, 37.
[49] A.Y. Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses", 66.

revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient. From the outset of the book (1:1), John gives his readers cues as to what kind of book this is—an *apokalypsis*. What John wrote belongs to this particular classification of literature, of which the primary intent was to reveal the "mysteries of God" to those who experienced oppression, suffering, and struggles with what it meant to remain faithful within their cultural context. Those first century readers were familiar with this type of literature, imagery, and conventions within that genre, and they would have made sense of what he wrote.[50]

The definition of John's apocalypse should be formulated in the terms set above: form, content, and function. John's apocalypse is a narrative, autobiographical in nature, which describes revelatory visions experienced by the seer (form).[51] The message he received concerned God's activity in history to achieve God's eschatological purposes in the world—both personal and cosmic.[52] The visions are structured so the central message brings a literary climax that is framed by the visionary experience. John communicates a transcendent, often eschatological, perspective on the human experience (content). I want to suggest that the purpose of John's apocalypse is threefold: (1) the book gave authority to the revelation experience (2) by mediating a new actualization of the message through literary devices that "concealed" the message that was "revealed" in the text (3) so that ultimately the readers/hearers would be encouraged to change their view of reality and behavior to conform to the perspective of the new reality.[53] According to J.J. Collins's

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[50] Wall, *Revelation*, 12.
[51] Aune, "The Problem of Genre", 86.
[52] Bauckham, *Revelation*, 5.
[53] Aune, "The Problem of Genre", 87.

definition above, and the categories and types of apocalyptic texts above, the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature and should be regarded as such.

Because Revelation was written in the form of a letter, some scholars and interpreters argue that it is not apocalyptic literature. In order to determine the genre of the book of Revelation, however, one must look at the most dominant literary form of the text. Certainly this text was a letter addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor. The letter format enabled John to specify to whom he was writing, and to address their situation as he saw fit.[54] A.Y. Collins argues that the letter format of the book is not the most dominant literary vehicle—the revelatory character of the text is too strong for that claim.[55] The book does not open in the form of a letter; rather, the author describes the character of the book in the prologue as an *apokalypsis*.[56] The revelatory vision is introduced in 1:9, which sets the stage for an apocalyptic interpretation that dictates the form, content, and function of the book.

Based upon the categories described by A.Y. Collins, John's apocalypse belongs to "type 1" of the groupings, but with some variations in the sub-categories. It is an apocalyptic text with cosmic and/or political eschatology and does not contain a historical review. However, according to A.Y. Collins, it only hints at the otherworldly journey (chapters 4-5). A.Y. Collins is correct to acknowledge the otherworldly journey, but in John's Apocalypse it seems to be much more than a "hint." In 4:1, the scene shifts to the heavens when the door is open and the seer is told to "Come up here" (NRSV). The revelation is given to the seer as he travels from region to region in chapters 4-5, which

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54 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 13.
55 A.Y. Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," 70.
56 Ibid., 71.

aligns John's text with the ones that contain the otherworldly journey. From chapter 6 through 22 the content of the revelatory message is primarily eschatological, ending with cosmic transformation—a New Heaven and New Earth in chapter 21.[57]

Revelation 5 and the Lamb as Apocalyptic Literature

A more in-depth study of the lamb, metaphor, and function of the lamb will take place below. However, a brief description must be given in regard to the image of the lamb and chapter 5 within John's apocalypse. It is likely that John's depiction of the heavenly journey where he encounters the messianic figure in Revelation 5 was birthed in a combination of Jewish apocalyptic literature and early Christian apocalypticism. The *lamb* imagery and descriptive statements such as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the Root of David" in 5:5 is ancient Jewish language.[58] Similarly, the portrayal of John's encounter with the victorious messianic figure, which has defeated the powers of evil through the vulnerability of his sacrificial death, is markedly early Christian verbiage. This should not come as a surprise, since Christianity emerged out of Jewish apocalypticism and the traditions of ancient Judaism.[59] As a result, John's reference to these themes and traditions seem intentional as he communicated his prophetic Christian message to the churches in Asia Minor.

For the purposes of this thesis, the otherworldly journey and the throne room scene in chapter 5 are central. John's apocalypse is a collection of powerful apocalyptic scenes and images from earlier Jewish traditions (i.e., Daniel 7-12 and Ezekiel 40-48). But in his revelatory text the culmination appears in chapter 5 with the revealing of the

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[57] A.Y. Collins, "The Early Christian Apocalypses," 72.
[58] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 160.
[59] Ibid., 167.

central figure, the lamb, as the crucified and risen messiah.[60] The central and essential revelation of God is Jesus, "the lamb that was slaughtered (Revelation 5:6, 12; 13:8)—now standing in the place of honor before the gloriously enthroned God of Israel's prophetic visions."[61] In this section of text, John addressed issues facing in his audience (i.e., the seven churches). The way John seeks resolution is "hidden" in the many forms, images, and symbols of apocalyptic literature.[62] But Jesus Christ, the lamb is the source of the moral call that the seer communicates to the seven churches in Asia Minor—which is aligned with the purpose of apocalyptic and prophetic genres of the era. It is the lamb who stands in the tradition of Israel's prophetic visions and who unveils the secrets of God's purpose in history.[63] The climax of John's narrative is rooted and shaped by ancient Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism. Therefore, this thesis on the lamb in Revelation 5 must be studied with this cultural, historical, and literary backdrop in mind.

Conclusion

John's apocalypse is the only full example of apocalyptic literature in the New Testament. This text brings to life a fascinating world of giant beasts, battle imagery, a powerful exhortation of Christian morality, and a reassuring hope in the salvific power of the lamb. All of these are characteristics that are rooted in the apocalyptic genre.[64] In Revelation, John alludes to and draws upon numerous apocalyptic themes, symbols, and texts from this genre. "It [Revelation] weaves into its narrative a multitude of texts and

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60 Daley, "Faithful and True," 108.
61 Ibid, 109.
62 Wall, *Revelation*, 98.
63 Daley, "Faithful and True," 109.
64 Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108.

allusions from those sections of earlier Jewish canon that paved the way for this form of literature, especially Daniel 7-12; Ezekiel 40-48; and sections of the book of Isaiah and the Psalter."[65] One of the key elements to this thesis is to locate the book of Revelation within this literary genre.

The vision of the world illustrated in apocalyptic literature is ideological. The hope of the writers—which certainly seems true for John—was to shift thinking and behavior by developing a vision of the transcendent to hearers and readers who are in this present reality.[66] The nature of John's apocalypse, and the eschatological climax of the narrative, points beyond this current reality to a revealed knowledge of salvation and new life that aligns with the ideal reality. The goal is a fundamental shift in the human experience.[67] The apocalyptic vision of Revelation 5 ultimately changes the portrait of what it means to be human; it describes Christian identity according to the way of the lamb. By abiding by the way of the lamb, followers of the messiah avoid the path that leads to destruction and instead experience true victory.

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65 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 109.

66 Aune, "The Problem of Genre," 91.

67 J.J. Collins, "Towards Morphology," 11.

Chapter 2: Survey of Recent Scholarship

From the end of the first century to the present day, John's apocalypse has captured the imagination of Christians and non-Christians, provoked intense debate, and sparked considerable amounts of study. The amount of research on the lamb in Revelation 5 in particular is extensive and diverse—reaching well beyond the boundaries of this thesis project. While it is the goal of this chapter to present a survey of recent scholarship, it is by no means exhaustive; and it is not intended to cover all of the studies that have taken place in recent decades. The overarching question of this thesis concerns the function of the lamb in Revelation 5, a focus that is shaped by John's use of lion and lamb images. The objective of this section is to provide a brief review of some scholars who have focused on Revelation 5 and the function of the lamb in order to utilize these preceding studies to help shape the direction of this project.

Scholarly opinions vary widely regarding the role of Revelation 5, the function of the lamb, and how chapter 5 fits into the larger work of John's apocalypse.[68] John capitalized on a sense of awe by utilizing powerful and evocative imagery that was available from ancient Hebrew traditions, the apocalyptic literary genre, and the Greco-Roman environment of first century Asia Minor. Generally, past studies on Revelation 5 have tended to lean in two different directions. One interpretive tradition has emphasized references to the traditional Jewish elements contained in the chapter and how the throne room scene is derived from the scenes of Daniel 7, Isaiah 6, and Ezekiel 1-3. This tradition emphasized how John's image is shaped by Jewish apocalyptic literature. Other interpreters focus on parallels between the imagery of Revelation 5 and images from

[68] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb,* 10.

ancient Near Eastern mythology. This tradition emphasizes the non-Jewish influences upon the symbolism and metaphor in this text.[69] The studies outlined below differ in how they have explored this text, but each interpretive tradition highlights different aspects of Revelation 5 and the importance of the imagery therein.

Steve Moyise

Author and scholar Steve Moyise is most concerned with the methodological precision of understanding the way John used the Hebrew Bible and traditions in Revelation. Moyise compares Revelation to other New Testament texts that made references to the Hebrew Bible, but notes that the number of allusions to the Hebrew Bible is significantly larger in Revelation.[70] This approach is most prominent in how John links the lion and lamb images in Revelation 5:5-6. Moyise notes that John was able to juxtapose contrasting images of lion and lamb, seemingly without contradiction. It is Moyise's opinion that John did this in an effort to strike an emotional response from his first century hearers and readers. In a similar way, he was able to utilize apocalyptic military language, but not in a militaristic sense—once again portraying contrasting images without contradiction.[71] However, at the heart of Moyise's research is John's theological agenda and how John utilized the Hebrew Bible in his Revelation.

According to Moyise, John utilized two methods of implementing the Hebrew Bible: imitation and dialogue.[72] John reproduced elements like poetry, but also entered

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69 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 1-2.
70 Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 115.
71 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 7.
72 Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 118.

into text imitation by employing themes or images in his apocalypse from the Old Testament texts. Moyise suggests that John employed two different ideas or themes from different works and set them in contradiction to each other, but the tension is not really resolved in the text itself. The best example of this "dialogic imitation" is the description of the victorious Christ in 5:5-6. Here Christ is described two seemingly contradictory images of lion and the lamb.[73] While these images appear to oppose each other, according to the method that John employed, they are not.

The approach that Moyise suggests often leads to two different readings of Revelation 5. Some scholars, such as G.B. Caird,[74] have understood the lamb to include the lion. In this case, when interpreters see the image of the conquering lion in the text, he or she should read *lamb*, who was victorious through sacrifice. Other scholars, such as J.M. Ford,[75] argue that the lamb of Revelation is a figure of power and military might, not sacrifice, thereby implying that the two images in Revelation 5 are not at odds. In both cases, there is nothing contradictory in the juxtaposed images of the lion and lamb in 5:5-6.[76] However, whether or not the lion and lamb images are contradictory or complementary is not Moyise's primary focus. Rather, he is most concerned with John's theological agenda. The text contains a tension between John's Jewish heritage and devotion to the Jewish scriptures on the one hand, and John's struggle with his Christian understanding on the other. According to Moyise, the lion and lamb images in 5:5-6 represent that theological tension for John. He certainly has a focus on John's tension

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[73] Morton, *One on the Throne and the Lamb*, 6-7.
[74] G.B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 75.
[75] J.M. Ford, *Revelation* (AB; Garden City, New York: Double Day Press, 1975), 30-31.
[76] Morton, *One on the Throne and the Lamb*, 7.

between his Jewish and Christian heritage, but in his review of John's apocalypse he omitted dialogue that John had with the Greco-Roman culture of Asia Minor.[77]

Loren L. Johns

The work of Loren Johns is central to the thesis of this study. In his *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John,*[78] he takes a different approach from Moyise in regard to the lion and lamb imagery. His central argument is that the lion and lamb images do not coexist in some peaceful juxtaposition; rather, the ethical force of John's message lies within the differing images. His thesis is this: "The lamb Christology of the Apocalypse has an ethical force: the seer sees in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ both the decisive victory over evil in history and the pattern for Christians' nonviolent resistance to evil."[79] It is important to note that Johns's approach is slightly different from many researchers on Revelation. Often researchers (e.g., Moyise) focus on John's use of particular Hebrew Bible authors to develop the vision of his experience. However, Johns is less focused on the Revelator's use of the Hebrew Bible and first century cultural traditions. His focus is instead on Revelation 5 and the theological and ethical power of the lamb imagery in that text.[80]

Johns places a significant focus on the role of lambs in the Greco-Roman setting and culture, rather than connecting lamb imagery to a leader figure rooted in the earlier Jewish writings. For example, in some cultures the lamb signified a violent and powerful animal (e.g., ram); in others, such as the Egyptian religions, lambs were symbols of

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77 Morton, *One on the Throne and the Lamb,* 7.
78 Johns, *Lamb Christology, 19.*
79 Ibid., 20.
80 Ibid.,19-20.

vulnerability.[81] Johns notes that the setting for John's apocalypse is the imperial cult of Rome, and this shapes the manner in which he develops his lamb imagery. He argues that the character of the lamb in Revelation 5, one who conquered through sacrifice, does not mirror the paschal sacrifice lambs and is inconsistent with lamb imagery throughout the Hebrew Bible.[82] Because the conceptual background is the imperial cult of Rome, it is vital to note that John positions the sacrificial lamb image in contrast to the powerful emperor. By doing so, the author reflects a larger tension of who is the real king and, therefore, who has real power and victory.

According to Johns, this is where the unique nature of the lamb imagery lies. The seer develops an ethic of faithful, sacrificial, and nonviolent resistance to the violent military power of the Roman Empire.[83] As a result, the lamb of Revelation 5 redefines victory. "Rather than a sacrificial victim, the image of the Lamb in Rev. 5:5-6, 9 is described as a victorious figure. Yet, this victory is accomplished through a reversal of expectations."[84] Johns's goal is to highlight the manner in which John's apocalypse portrays a redefinition of power and victory through the author's theology of the cross. In this context, John's use of lamb imagery challenges his audience to follow the lamb, who overcomes through sacrifice.

The central element of Johns's study on the lamb imagery of Revelation 5 is the nature of God's decisive victory over evil. The victory is won by the messianic lamb at

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81 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 27.
82 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 148-149.
83 Ibid., 127.
84 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 27.

the cross, not through the violent means of the empire.[85] Johns notes that it is significant that an actual battle or war is not narrated in the book of Revelation—not even between the beast and the lamb.[86] The only conflict portrayed occurs in the death and resurrection of Christ, which are intimately connected in John's apocalypse. Where a reader might expect a great battle to take place, one finds the rider approaching the scene, dressed in a robe of blood (19:13). No real war or combat takes place because the decisive battle is over before it begins—through the vulnerable, self-giving sacrifice of the lamb.[87] Johns is most interested the ethical force of the sacrificial lamb imagery, and how it stands in opposition to that of the imperial cult of the empire.

David E. Aune

David Aune continues to be a great contributor to the study and research of the New Testament, ancient languages, and the book of Revelation. He offers one of the most equitable discussions on the imagery in John's apocalypse. His scholarship on the topic is extensive and cannot be comprehensively covered in this brief survey of his recent scholarship. This short summary of his research will focus on his work in regards to Revelation 4-5 and lamb imagery. The most significant research he has contributed in this area is a three-volume biblical commentary on Revelation.[88] He understands Revelation 5 in both the context of the Greco-Roman culture in Asia Minor as well as through John's

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85 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 28.

86 While there is war and battle imagery in Revelation (e.g., 14:20, 16:14, 18:21), a physical battle does not take place in text. The lamb wages war with the sword out of it mouth, through words only (1:16; 2:16; 19:15-21), not through violent acts.

87 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 20-21.

88 David Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols.; WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1997-98).

use of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition.[89] Aune focuses much of his research on the throne room report in Revelation 4-5, and compares the throne scenes from various ancient sources. He labels the throne room scene in Revelation 5 as a vision that functioned as a literary tool, where the throne room event served as commentary on the events of a larger narrative that took place (1 Kings 12 and Revelation 4-6).[90]

Aune's analysis of chapter 5 emphasizes the nature of the scene as an investiture event—the crowning of new royalty.[91] The chapter is dominated by two heavenly hymns of praise for the lamb (4:2, 9-11; 5:12-14) that was coronated.[92] Aune notes similar imagery in other traditions, even though the language of John's apocalypse displays a stronger parallel to Daniel 7:14, 18, which relied heavily on ancient traditions such as Babylonian myth texts.[93] The character of the investiture scene in Revelation 5 is significant due to the imagery utilized in the scene. The imagery of the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (5:5) who becomes the lamb in 5:6 is of particular importance. Aune notes the two balancing metaphors seen in the figure of the lamb: (1) lamb is a metaphor for ruler, and (2) the lamb as sacrifice. In regard to the lamb as ruler, Russell Morton agrees with Aune; he states,

> The image of the lamb also figures in Revelation as a mighty figure, who is enthroned (7:17), or shares in the divine throne as in Rev. 22:1, 3. He is a figure whose wrath terrifies the inhabitants of

89 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 24.
90 Aune, *Revelation*, 277-278.
91 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 25.
92 Aune, *Revelation*, 331.
93 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 25.

> the earth (6:16), wages war (17:14) and summons his bride, the church, to his marriage (19:7, 9).[94]

This type of ruler, in conjunction with the use of military language, is powerful throughout the book of Revelation. However, Aune notes a strong tension between this imagery that takes place in John's apocalypse.

Although the presentation of the lamb as a ruler and conquering military leader is a powerful expression, Aune also notes the sacrificial language that accompanies the lamb. Despite the strong military language, no battle scenes are ever described in the book of Revelation. If the lamb is a military ruler, it is atypical. The power and victory of the lamb is accomplished by being slain (5:5, 12)—*nike* through sacrifice.[95] This type of sacrificial language is rooted in ancient Hebrew language (paschal lamb) and early Christian traditions (atonement for sin). "The metaphor of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb whose blood (i.e., death) has atoning significance is based on the confluence of two traditions: Jesus the (Passover) lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29, 36) and the concept of the death of Jesus as atoning."[96] Aune understands the function of the lamb as fulfilling two seemingly complementary and contradictory roles, drawing from Jewish traditions and Jewish apocalypticism, as well as themes from the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern culture of first century Asia Minor.

Aune's work will be helpful in the discussion in chapter four of this thesis in regard to the function of the lamb and the redefinition of victory. One area of weakness

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94 Morton, *one Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 25-26.
95 Ibid., 26.
96 Aune, *Revelation*, 373.

that Morton notes is Aune's insufficient attention to the theological significance of John's lamb imagery.[97] Aune is correct to point out the sacrificial nature of the lamb in Revelation 5, and how the portrait of the lamb redefines *nike*, specifically for those under the rule of the Roman Empire in the first century. His argument supports the direction of this study on the function of the lamb. However, Morton's critique is noted. John's apocalypse is a deeply theological composition, with real theological concerns. The lamb imagery is at the center of John's theological interests, and will be discussed in greater depth at a later time in this study.

G.K. Beale

Similar to David Aune, G.K. Beale has produced a sizable amount of research on the book of Revelation. Most notable are his monographs on the language John implemented in his writing and a significant commentary on the book of Revelation. In his commentary *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in St. John's Revelation,*[98] Beale focuses mainly on John's dependence on allusions from the Hebrew Bible as he described his heavenly vision and, in particular, on John's use of Daniel. Beale determined three ways in which John used imagery that corresponds to the Hebrew Bible. First, John used *clear allusions*, where the words or phrases used in Revelation 5 directly correspond with those from the Hebrew Bible. Second, Beale detects *probable allusions*, words and phrases that are traceable to the original Hebrew text but not directly connected to a specific Hebrew Bible text. Lastly, Beale identifies *possible allusions*,

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97 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 26-27.

98 G.K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

where John echoed the text by retaining a basic meaning or theme found in the Hebrew Bible but did not attempt to connect directly to the text.[99]

One significant element of Beale's work is to determine John's exegetical method. He notices that John does use a specific Hebrew Bible quotation formula, as seen in other New Testament texts (e.g., Matthew). However, Revelation contains more references to the Hebrew Bible than any other New Testament text. Often John references Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the Psalms, but most of all he cites Daniel. The method that John utilizes is a central question for Beale. In light of John's numerous references to the Hebrew texts, did he consider historical context and social setting, and/or literary genre—or did he ignore context to create new meanings that contradicted earlier writers?[100] Beale explains that John wrote within a specific historical context, social setting, and implemented the apocalyptic genre. John relied heavily on earlier traditions and employed them through use of themes, analogies, and fulfilled prophecies.[101] While there is notable criticism of Beale's heavy reliance on Revelation as fulfillment of Daniel 7, it is the goal of this particular thesis to understand how that shaped John's throne room and lamb imagery in Revelation 5.[102]

Given the information above, it is of no surprise that Beale's analysis of Revelation 5 is based on John's use of the Hebrew Bible. The book of Daniel is particularly important for Beale's understanding of John's use of the lamb metaphor.

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[99] Beale, *Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,* 62.
[100] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb,* 10.
[101] G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on Greek Text.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 90.
[102] For a more comprehensive critique of Beale's work on Daniel and Revelation see J-P Ruiz and A.Y. Collins' critique in Morton, *The One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 13-14.

Beale suggests that the outline of the throne room scene in Revelation 5 is intimately connected to Daniel 2 and 7—where Revelation 5 replicates fourteen components of Daniel 7.[103] However, he also recognizes other allusions from the Hebrew texts: Ezekiel 1, Zechariah 4, and Isaiah 6.[104] The most significant connection that Beale makes is the divine messianic figure's approach to the throne in order to receive authority from God. In the case of Daniel 7:13-14, it is to receive authority over a kingdom; for Revelation 5, it is to receive the authority to open the scrolls. It is important to note that Beale understands this scene as an allusion to the one in Daniel 7. Most important for this thesis is that the lamb is the one on the throne and is worthy to receive the scroll.

Grant Osborne

In related research, Grant Osborne also emphasizes John's reliance on the Hebrew Bible as a source for the imagery in Revelation 5. In his *Revelation*,[105] Osborne notes that the Hebrew Bible is the primary source of the imagery in the throne room scene in Revelation 5. However, he differs from Beale in his suggestion that most of the imagery is rooted in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. Specifically, he argues that the lion and lamb images come from Isaiah 11:1 and 10, where the portrait in the text is understood in the Jewish wisdom literature as a conquering Messiah.[106] However, the references to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish apocalyptic literature are not the only allusions in Revelation 5. Morton

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[103] Beale, *Revelation*, 317. For a detailed outline of Beale's connections in Revelation 4:1-5:14 and Daniel 7 see Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 12.

[104] Beale, *Revelation*, 314-338.

[105] Grant Osborne, *Revelation: An Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic Press, 2002).

[106] Osborne, *Revelation*, 25-27.

notes that Osborne is more successful than Beale in contextualizing Revelation within the social setting of first century Asia Minor.[107]

Osborne recognizes the strong metaphorical allusions to the Roman imperial cult during the reign of Domitian, and the chief focus of what John wrote in Revelation was in opposition to that cult.[108] In this case, John's approach was to present his audience with a reality that stands opposed to the way of the Roman Empire. As noted in the description of the apocalypticism earlier in this thesis, by using the comparison of two-realities, this places John's work firmly in the first century apocalyptic literary genre. The imagery of the lamb in the throne room of Revelation 5:5-6 is held in contrast with the imperial courtroom of Rome. Thus, the way of the lamb is pitted against the way of the empire—the nature of God's way pitted against the way of the emperor. Rather than making use of Greco-Roman symbolism, Osborne suggests that John utilized Hebrew Bible imagery, but simply applied the imagery to the new social situation.[109]

For Osborne, what emerges here is a comparison of the two dominant images: the powerful culture of Rome and its military might in comparison with the universal reign of God and the sacrificial lamb.[110] John envisions an alternate reality—one that is opposed to the rule of Caesar and the empire. According to Osborne, "John has taken the original context of OT passages and applied it via typology to the visions God has sent him."[111] Osborne suggests that John relied on the context of the imperial cult in Asia Minor, but the majority of the imagery he used was from the Hebrew Bible—specifically Ezekiel 1,

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107 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 17.
108 Osborne, *Revelation*, 7.
109 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 17.
110 Ibid., 17-18.
111 Osborne, *Revelation*, 26.

10, and Isaiah 6. The lamb imagery in Revelation 5 is key to what Osborne suggests: readers and hearers in the first century would reconsider their allegiance to Rome and embrace the way of the lamb and God's Kingdom established on earth.[112] For Osborne, the entire throne room scene is a contrast between the lure of Roman power and might, and the splendor of God and the way of the lamb.

Russell Morton

Russell Morton has also contributed significant work to the dialogue on Revelation 5 and John's use of lamb imagery. His work *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4-5* is central in the development of this survey of recent scholarship; it also serves as a strategic study that illuminates John's theological purposes for writing Revelation. Morton highlights John's use of traditions, specifically how John's approach transformed them, which represented a new literary expression in Revelation. This method is especially true for John's depiction of the throne room scene in Revelation 5.[113] Morton arranges his study by reviewing Revelation 4-5 within the greater context of John's apocalypse: How does Revelation 4-5 relate to John's apocalypse as a whole, and what is the role of the lamb within John's apocalypse?

Morton suggests that an important theme in Revelation 4-5 is the "epiphany"—visions in the throne room scene that parallel other passages in Revelation and other texts from Hebrew traditions.[114] As a resourceful writer, John utilized traditions creatively and

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[112] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 18.
[113] Ibid., 39.
[114] Ibid., 70.

transformed them in order to present his vision of the heavenly throne room scene. He was able to make use of imagery that his audience would recognize, and adapted it to communicate his vision. By doing so, John was able to communicate to his audience a deeper meaning of the symbols that gave the message power.[115] For example, John did not invent the lamb imagery in Revelation 5, nor did he simply take the image from one text and place it in his apocalypse. "Rather, he was utilizing traditions of animal imagery found in Jewish apocalypticism."[116] One example of this is the lamb's appearance, specifically, how John described the lamb with seven horns. In the Hebrew Bible, the "horn" represented power. In Daniel, for instance, it was a symbol of kingship (7:7, 24; 8:5, 8a, 9, 21). The combination of the symbol of power and animal imagery is rooted in Jewish apocalyptic literature. John creatively utilized apocalyptic images that were familiar to his audience to communicate the power and authority given to the lamb.[117] The throne room scene, specifically the lamb imagery, described by John was key to the description of the seer's overall experience and message.

Ultimately, Morton believes that Revelation 4-5 prepared the way for a new phase in the vision of John's experience described in the Book of Revelation.[118] Morton combines theological and historical methodologies to understand John's vision. John used both historical traditions and theological convictions to convey the power of his message. By recognizing John's approach, the power of his apocalypse becomes an authoritative call for Christians of his own era, and for Christians of later ages. If the lamb receives power and authority through sacrifice, then how does that shape the

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115 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 196-197.
116 Ibid., 158.
117 Ibid., 158-159.
118 Ibid., 75.

mission of the followers of the lamb? According to Morton, John utilized traditions, and transformed them, so that hearers/readers would be able to look beyond the surface level of the text and see the God's triumph in the sacrificial lamb.[119]

Conclusion

This survey of recent scholarship does not attempt to be comprehensive of the authors covered, or of the research offered by each individual. The sheer amount of research on the topic of Revelation 5 and the lamb imagery utilized by John is recorded in volumes of work that fall beyond the boundaries of this thesis. It should be noted that there are scholars who will be referenced in this study who are not reviewed in this chapter on current research (e.g., Richard Bauckham, Adela Yarbro Collins, Robert Wall, and David L. Barr, to name a few). The goal of this section is to simply set the stage for the current thesis on the lamb in Revelation 5. An attempt to cover all the relevant scholarship would stretch the length of this thesis and become repetitive. Rather, those referenced above are a helpful aid to shape the ideas and proposals of this study, and lay the groundwork for the hypothesis on the function of the lamb in chapter 4 of this study.

One of the key elements to note in the survey above is that most of the scholars tend to highlight particular features of imagery utilized in John's apocalypse. Some focus attention on John's use of the Hebrew texts and his process of alluding to those texts. On the other hand, some scholars emphasize how John drew upon the surrounding Greco-Roman culture of first century Asia Minor. In the case of Russell Morton, for example, the focus was on John's ability to implement and creatively transform familiar language

[119] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 197-198.

in order to offer a theological message to his audience. The goal of this project is to master the material on the subject of Revelation 5 and the lamb imagery. In the following chapters, the imagery and traditions utilized by John will be discussed—and the writers mentioned above will play an important role in the development of the thesis.

Chapter 3: Metaphor Theory

It [Revelation] doesn't tell, it shows, over and over again, its images unfolding, pushing hard against the limits of language and metaphor, engaging the listener in a tale that has the satisfying yet unsettling logic of a dream.[120]

The study of metaphor has been revitalized among critics, scholars, and theologians in the last 50 years.[121] Metaphor theory provides an orienting methodology for studying lamb imagery in John's apocalypse. While both the scope and development of metaphor theory are diverse and complex, this theory contributes important insights into the rhetorical force of the lamb metaphor and its role in John's message in Revelation. The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of metaphor theory, a working definition of *metaphor*, a survey of metaphor in the biblical texts, and a description of John's use of the lion and lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. While John utilized many metaphors in his apocalypse, the focus of this study will be the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5.

Metaphor Defined

The use of metaphor has become commonplace in our daily conversation; people often casually use metaphors without recognizing that they are doing so. Some studies have shown that English speakers use an average of 3,000 metaphors per week.[122] Because the use of metaphor is so prevalent and studies on metaphor theory span such a wide range of research, there is no consensus on how metaphors are identified, how the

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120 Kathleen Norris, *Introduction to Revelation* (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 11.

121 Max Black, "More about Metaphor," *Metaphor and Thought* (2nd ed.; ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20.

122 Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 127.

use of metaphor communicates to an audience, or how a metaphor is defined within a specific text.[123] Therefore, it is appropriate to begin by offering a working definition of *metaphor*.

Most studies on metaphor and their subsequent definitions of metaphor ("to carry over") can be traced back to Aristotle. Brad Kelle offers a concise review of metaphor theory in his work on Hosea 2. He notes that the central issue of metaphor for Aristotle is the differentiation between literal and figurative speech. Aristotle limited the use of metaphor by placing the stress on the *transference of meaning*. Simply stated, the transference of meaning occurs when the sense and associations of one word or idea are transferred to another.[124] Speaking in general terms, *metaphor* is the conveyance of a word, idea, or meaning from one thing to another.[125] Kelle's concise overview provides a starting point to define metaphor, but metaphor theory is extensive, and must be narrowed for this study and John's use of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5.

According to Max Black, there is an implied mystery in the use of metaphor.[126] In his widely referenced article, "More about Metaphor," Black argues, "a metaphorical statement appears to be perversely asserting something to be what it is plainly known not to be."[127] Simply stated, it is an occasion where a person simply uses one thing to give meaning to another. However, Black suggests that in order to truly capture the meaning of a metaphor, one needs to approach the topic with the innocence of someone who could attempt to interpret a metaphor literally. He argues that assuming the user really does

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123 Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 34.
124 Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 35.
125 Ibid., 34.
126 Black, "More about Metaphor," 21.
127 Ibid., 21-22.

intend to say one thing while meaning another is to accept a misleading view of the proper use of metaphor.[128] The process of defining metaphor is not that clear-cut. The transfer of meaning from one object (the thing being spoken) to another (the thing begin described) is never completely conveyed from speaker to hearer; the process is too complex for that.[129] Therefore, we must avoid the pitfall of assuming that the process of defining the metaphor and its meaning is a clear process.

In classical theory, metaphor was defined as a novel or poetic expression where a word or group of words was used outside of its literal use to express a similar concept. Therefore, metaphorical language was thought to be mutually exclusive with the realm of everyday language.[130] According to George Lakoff, this is false, and can be misleading. In his article "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," Lakoff shifts the focus from language to the way thoughts are conceptualized. This change results in a metaphor that is central to ordinary language. The study of metaphor is basically an extension of the natural, everyday, and metaphorical use of language.[131] Lakoff, in cooperation with Mark Johnson, suggests: "The essence of metaphor is understanding the experiencing of one kind of thing in terms of another."[132] However, this is a broad definition, and not specific enough to differentiate metaphor from other uses of language.[133]

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128 Black, "More about Metaphor," 22

129 Peter Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought: A Method for Interpreting the Bible* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 31.

130 George Lakoff, "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor,"' *Metaphor and Thought* (2nd ed.; ed. Andrew Ortony; Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1993), 202.

131 Lakoff, "Contemporary Theory of Metaphor," 203.

132 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago Univeristy Press, 1980), 5.

133 Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 45.

Daniel Chandler defines metaphor in terms of a type of signifier: the use of a metaphorical word or phrase involves a signified subject acting as a signifier that refers to a different signified subject.[134] In other words, a metaphor consists of a primary subject (literal) that is expressed in terms of a secondary subject (figurative). The primary subject is the *tenor* and the secondary subject is the *vehicle.* The user links a tenor and vehicle where an imaginative hurdle must be crossed in order to recognize the meaning that the metaphor describes. Chandler notes that while the imaginative leap is required for the initial use of metaphorical phrases, because the use of metaphor has become such a regular part of language, they are often not perceived as metaphors at all. The natural, everyday use of metaphor is significant because people use metaphor so often, without giving thought to any theory behind their use. The same could be said for people in the first century who also used metaphorical words or phrases (e.g., lamb) to denote a deeper meaning.

Metaphor in Biblical Thought

While the biblical writers used metaphors and were well aware of figures of speech, they did not call them "metaphors" and certainly did not have anything approaching a modern theory for their use.[135] Macky proposes a working definition for studying metaphor in the biblical texts that will help shape this study of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. Macky derived his research on the theoretical work of William P. Alston and Paul Ricoeur. Alston described metaphor as "that sort of figurative use in

134 Chandler, *Semiotics*, 127.
135 Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 88.

which the extension is on the basis of similarity."[136] The key element is that the basis of the metaphorical use is similar between the vehicle and subject. Ricoeur takes us one step closer to a workable definition. He states, "Metaphor consists in speaking of one thing in terms of another that resembles it."[137] Both of these help shape the proposed definition by Macky that aligns with this study.

One important element of a working definition for this thesis is the definition's usefulness for studying metaphors in the Bible, specifically the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. This proposed working definition is taken from Macky's work: *"Metaphor is that figurative way of speaking (and meaning) in which one reality, the subject, is depicted in terms that are more commonly associated with a different reality, the symbol, which is related to it by analogy."*[138] The metaphor is the word picture where the subject is spoken of and thought of in terms of the symbol, and the symbol communicates the meaning of picture. Macky notes that there is a wide range of metaphors in the Bible. The prototypical metaphors in the Bible propose well-known symbols as a way to convey meaning to symbols that are often mysterious and difficult to understand.[139] In regard to the definition of metaphor, two words in Macky's definition need to be clarified: symbol and analogy.

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[136] William P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964), 102.

[137] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (Toronto: Univeristy of Toronto Press, 1977), 53-55.

[138] Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 49, italics added.

[139] For a deeper study on these types of metaphors see Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 57-63 on metaphors that evoke physical symbols, non-physical symbols, one-way, and dual-direction metaphors. Most metaphors employ the use of physical symbols. These are typically one-way symbols where the meaning is reflected on the subject, but not back on the symbol. The biblical writers also utilized non-physical symbols, where the meaning is also reflected back on the symbol. An often-quoted passage is "God is Love" (1 John 4:8). This is a reference to *agape* love. However, in the metaphorical sense, the meaning that is cast on the symbol (*agape* love) also illuminates the divine, which includes God's behaviors and attitudes as portrayed in the biblical story—it is all given meaning that would eventually shift how the believers understand love.

There is considerable debate as to how *analogy* can be used in relation to metaphor. According to Macky, the term is used in biblical thought through *realities related*: when two realities, objects, events, or ideas have commonalities, but differ in small details, there is an analogy between them (e.g., Christ and light in John 8:12). Realities that are "only" related provide a middle ground in metaphorical use; they are neither identical realities nor completely different realities.[140] Macky refers to this type of analogy in his definition above.[141] However, one must take note that the uses of these analogies are dependent on one's interest and context at the given moment.

The *symbol* is a reality that represents and gives analogical insight into a more mysterious reality or realities. It is also referred to as the "vehicle" or the "subsidiary subject."[142] Symbol can be used in a variety of senses, so Macky highlights two ways that it is utilized in the biblical texts: *conventional* symbols and *insight* symbols. Conventional symbols are "visible objects or sounds which stand for something of which we already have direct knowledge."[143] There are numerous examples of this type of symbol in the biblical texts. What is most notable for this study is how the writer uses the metaphor of a lamb in Revelation 5. Insight symbols are objects or sounds where there is a small connection between the symbol and the subject. The Bible is full of such

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140 Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 50.

141 Macky goes on to note two types of analogies: *propositional* and *linguistic*. Propositional analogies are mathematically related: two is related to four in the same way that three is related to six. The analogy is simply that the smaller number is exactly half of the larger number. There are a few distinctions to make with linguistic analogies. (1) Using an analogy in a literal sense (i.e., to use the word "moon" to describe orbiting satellites of other planets). (2) Adding a new sense of word through analogy (i.e., "to run" used to talk about running, but the term is also used to describe running for office—the same term used with difference senses). (3) Using a term in order to understand a subject by using a more basic sense of the term (i.e., "to run" used by Paul in 1 Cor 9:24-27 to denote the process of living our entire lives). Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 51-52.

142 Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 54.

143 Ibid., 53.

symbols. For instance, in John's Gospel he refers to Jesus as birth (3:3), water (4:14), bread (6:35), light (8:12), shepherd (10:1-18), and vine (15:1-8).[144]

For the context of this study, the one-way, physical metaphor is evoked. John used the term *lamb* as a reference to Christ the messiah. John used this slain lamb metaphor in order to challenge and transform his readers' thinking about the true identity of the Christ and the nature of God's way to achieve victory rather than the way of caesar and the empire. This transformation in the thinking among John's first century Christian community in Asia Minor is at the heart of this study on the function of the lamb.

Prototypical Metaphor in Biblical Thought

Several types of metaphors were utilized in the Bible.[145] Macky describes the prototypical metaphors, which propose well-known symbols as a way to illuminate a deeper meaning of more mysterious symbols. Most often this occurs through the use of physical symbols. Typically these are one-way symbols where the meaning is reflected onto the subject, but not back on the symbol. This is the type of metaphor (the one-way, physical metaphor) that John utilized in the book of Revelation. The term *lamb* in reference to Christ the messiah is a way to illuminate God's victory through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Therefore, meaning is given to the victorious messiah through the characteristics of a lamb. However, meaning is not reflected back on an actual lamb.

The qualities and features of a slain lamb shed light on how the community is to understand how the messiah attains victory. The lamb metaphor was employed by John to

144 Macky, *Centrality of Metaphors*, 54.

145 For a deeper study of the following metaphors, see Macky, *Centrality of Metaphor*, 57-63. He offers a lengthy discussion of metaphors that evoke physical symbols, non-physical symbols, one-way metaphors, and dual-direction metaphors.

shift the communal understanding of victory (*nike)*. The attributes of the lamb metaphor describe the attitudes and behaviors of the messiah: humility, nonviolence, sacrifice, etc. The use of lamb underscores Jesus's vulnerability and suffering on the cross, and links the story of Jesus to the Passover lamb in the exodus story.[146] John's use of this metaphor is at the heart of the function of the lamb in Revelation 5. This will be discussed in further detail later, but for now, the essential point is to understand that John utilized the physical, one-way metaphor in Revelation 5.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Another important theory for the study of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 is the *conceptual* theory of metaphor developed by Lakoff and Johnson. They argue that metaphorical expressions are rooted within a given culture—and therefore should be understood through the knowledge of a specific context. This theory argues that the setting and language are essential to understanding metaphorical expressions.[147] An example of this theory in practice is John's use of the lion and lamb metaphors in Revelation 5. "Revelation summons us into an apocalyptic world to be confronted by, infused with, and perhaps empowered by its images."[148] The conceptual theory suggests that the interplay of the lion and lamb metaphors must be understood within the broader historical and cultural location of Christianity in first century Asia Minor where the use of such images shaped how John approached his apocalypse: Jewish and ancient Near Eastern rhetorical settings.

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[146] Rossing, *Rapture Exposed*, 96.
[147] Kelle, *Hosea 2*, 38.
[148] M. Eugene Boring, "Revelation in *The New Interpreter's Bible: Revelation*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 512.

The apocalyptic movement was widespread during the period John wrote Revelation, and in that era the use of the lion metaphor was common in apocalyptic thought and writings. As a result, readers easily recognized that image. However, John transformed metaphorical use by using a new metaphor (lamb) that gave shape to emerging values of the first century Christian church. John used metaphors that were familiar to readers and hearers in his day (e.g. lamb and lion), but he used them in a manner that reshaped how his audience understood the victory of the risen Christ. In the case of John's Apocalypse, he defied the cultural expectations of the lion metaphor through the switch to the lamb that takes place in Revelation 5:5-6. As described in the section below, the surprise of the lamb standing on the throne, and not a lion, is central to the force of John's message in Revelation.

Lion and Lamb Metaphors

When John first introduces the messianic figure, he employs the lion metaphor. A hearer or reader would think that in a text with such a large amount of imagery, and one that deals with judgment, consequences of sin, and the superior power of God, the lion would be the dominant metaphor and would therefore be the preferred title for the messiah. This would be especially true given the language in a passage such as Genesis 49, where the messiah is described as a great lion.[149] However, John sees the Messiah take the scroll, not as a lion, but as a slaughtered lamb. This striking and unexpected contrast shifted the meaning of John's message. John wrote within the cultural expectations of his era, but defies them with this sudden and surprising use of the lamb

[149] Donald Guthrie, "The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Vox Evangelica* 12 (1981): 64.

metaphor. This is seemingly a transformative moment in the narrative. In previous passages, the messiah is seen as a glorious, king-like figure, whose eyes flash like fire and whose words were like a sharp sword—characteristics that are more consistent with the ferocity of a lion image than with the lamb.[150] This unanticipated introduction of the messiah as a lamb is significant for the text, a radical shift that should be explored through the lens of the cultural landscape that shaped the meaning of the metaphor.

Lion

The lion and lamb symbols must be considered in the context of John's apocalypse, and the pivotal point is the connection between the two images. Does one wipe out the other? Does one (the lamb) reinterpret the other?[151] Does the lion "lie down with the lamb?"[152] Regardless, the relationship between the two images is complicated, and both play a major role in the meaning and message of the John's apocalypse. The image of lion has a long history and tradition in Jewish apocalyptic literature, particularly in relation to messianic speculation.[153] The place to begin studies on lion imagery is in the Hebrew Bible. The trajectory of lion symbols can be traced throughout the prophetic tradition, in the emergence of the Christian faith, and into the second century and beyond.[154] Given the considerable number of references to lion imagery in the Old Testament, only a cursory overview is possible at this point.

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150 Guthrie, "Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation," 65.

151 Thomas Doyle and R. Skaggs, "Lion/Lamb in Revelation," *Currents in Biblical Research* 7 (2009): 366.

152 Steve Moyise, "Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb?," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 2001), 181-194, here 194.

153 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 151.

154 Brent A. Strawn, "Why Does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5?: Leonine Imagery in early Jewish and Christian Literatures," *Journal for the Study of Psuedepigrpaha* 1, no. 17 (2007): 42.

Brent Strawn suggests four metaphorical uses of the lion image in the main text of the Hebrew Bible: descriptions of the self or the righteous, of the enemy, of the monarch/mighty one, and of the deity.[155] The lion metaphor is used positively when it describes the *self* or the *righteous* (e.g., Gen. 49:9; Num 23:24; 24:9; Deut 33:20, 22; Mic 5:7; Prov. 28:1; cf. Ps. 111:5); when it describes the *enemy* or the *wicked*, it is used negatively (e.g., Isa. 5:29-30; Jer. 2:15; 4:7; 51:38; Joel 1:6; Nah. 2:12-3:1; Ps. 7:3; 10:8-9; 17:12; 22:14, 17, 22; 34:11; 35:17; 57:5; 58:7; 74:4; 91:13; 124:6; Job 4:10-11; 29:17); and when it is used for *monarch/mighty one*, it can be positively (e.g., 2 Sam. 1:23; 17:10; 1 Chron. 12:9) or negatively employed (e.g., Jer. 50:17; Ezek. 19:2-9; 22:25; 32:2-3; Zeph. 3:3; Prov. 28:15). The same is said for the lion metaphor used for *deity*. However, in this use, the connotation is dependent on one's relationship to Yahweh. Yahweh is either protector (e.g., Isa. 31:4; Hos. 11:10; Joel 4:16) or a threat (e.g., Ps. 50:22; Job 10:16; 16:9; Lam. 3:4, 10; Isa. 38:13; Jer. 25:30, 38; 49:19; 50:44; Hos. 5:14; 6:1; 13:7-8; Amos 1:2; 3:8). In each of these cases, lion imagery represents threat and power.[156]

Lion imagery appears nine times in the New Testament, and six of those references are in the book of Revelation. In apocalyptic literature, the lion is clearly a symbol for compelling strength and ferocity.[157] The lion metaphor appears in John's apocalypse in two key passages. First, it is described in terms of one of the four creatures in the throne room in 4:7. Second, the figure appears as the lion of the tribe of Judah in

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[155] For an exhaustive survey on the language and imagery used to describe God, in particular the volumes of texts in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East writings that utilized the lion metaphor, see Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion?: Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

[156] Strawn, "Why Does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5," 42-43.

[157] Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion/Lamb in Revelation," 366.

5:5 and the description of the angel's voice as a thunderous lion in 10:3. The use of lion as a title for Jesus only appears once, in 5:5, as the lion of the tribe of Judah, the "root of David." Most scholars agree that the use of lion in this passage is linked to Gen. 49:9 and Isa. 11:1.[158] Both of these passages characterize the messiah as a conquering warrior who will destroy the enemies of Israel. In Jewish apocalyptic texts such as 4 Ezra 11-12, the image of lion is powerful and destructive, and also represents the power of the Torah—destructive, yet salvific (from Israel's enemies).[159] The point is that when lion imagery is used in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, it represents power and threat. However, John replaces that expectation with the use of the lamb metaphor to describe the messiah in Revelation.

Why a Lamb and Not a Lion?

Why did the author choose to defy cultural expectations by using the lamb metaphor in the place of lion? Strawn offers an interesting study, which helps bring clarity to the discussion of lion and lamb.[160] Lion imagery is used predominantly in relation to notions of power, dominance, and threat. Lion symbols utilized by writers in the Hebrew Bible, Old Testament Apocrypha, the New Testament, New Testament Apocrypha, and Pseudepigrapha render ambiguous connotations of the lion symbol.[161] In these texts, the lion represents positive and negative attributes, and is linked to a range of figures and entities: Yahweh the protector, divine punishment, kings, the righteous, as

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158 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion/Lamb in Revelation," 367.

159 Richard Bauchham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1998), 182.

160 Strawn, "Why does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5?," 40-74.

161 Strawn offers a more detailed survey in "Why does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5?," 42-65.

well as enemies, evil beings (some physical and some super natural), and even the devil (1 Peter 5:8).[162]

Strawn suggests that by using the lion image, John certainly capitalized on a historical use of the symbol. However, though it is capable of positive valuation, it was a metaphor with multiple possible meanings. The ambiguity of the image could have caused confusion that would have undermined the force and function of the message in Revelation 5. The lion, "while capable of exceedingly positive connotations, was apparently too polyvalent or ambivalent of an image to be used without creating unnecessary ambiguity in the Apocalypse."[163] By avoiding the lion image, John prevents any "collateral damage" due to the different associations in ancient texts. Essentially John builds a natural safeguard into the text. The central question is, what kind of power, dominance, and threat is John communicating to his audience by transforming the metaphor in Revelation 5?

Lamb

The lamb is introduced in Revelation 5:5-6, and the introduction is significant because it becomes the central image in John's apocalypse.[164] As a metaphor, it startles, questions, and disorients readers and hearers through verbal juxtapositions as it points to a new view of reality.[165] The term *arnion,* or "little lamb," a young sheep or lamb, is used twenty-nine times in the Book of Revelation. This use is significant because this term is

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[162] Strawn, "Why does the Lion Disappear in Revelation 5?," 43-64.
[163] Ibid., 41.
[164] Ibid., 179.
[165] Rowland, *Revelation*, 506.

used more often than any other to describe Jesus.[166] Below is a chart that considers where the word occurs in Revelation 5 and its association:[167]

Associated with God/Throne	5.7	He stands near (or on) the throne
	5.8	He receives adoration/praise associated w/ God
The special role of the lamb	5.7	He takes the scroll from the one on the throne
	5.10	He has made people a kingdom of priests
Association w/ death/victory	5.6	Slain lamb; worthy to open the scroll
	5.9, 12	He has been slain
	5.9	He has bought people by his blood

What does the figure of the lamb signify? Most scholars associate the lamb with "slain"—from the Passover lamb in Isaiah 53:7 and 53:8. Aune notes that the lamb certainly should be seen at least partially within the sacrificial ritual (connected to the "bought people by his blood" language). Aune argues that the association of lamb with death is significant.[168] In the New Testament the term refers to "slaughter" (Revelation 6:4; 13:3), martyrdom (Revelation 6:7; 18:24), and fratricide (1 John 3:12).[169] Ford argues that apocalyptic use of the lamb and ram imagery is important for understanding John's use of lamb. In ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings, the lamb is actually a ram, a description of strength of the messiah. In this context the slain lamb should be understood in terms of martyrdom (i.e., death in a battle) rather than sacrifice.[170]

Bauckham offers a more full description of John's use of the slain lamb in Revelation. He argues that even though the lamb in apocalyptic literature is often associated with leadership, the idea of lambs as conquerors would have been a new

166 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion/Lamb in Revelation," 363.
167 Ibid., 363-364.
168 Aune, *Revelation*, 372.
169 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion/Lamb in Revelation," 365.
170 Ford, *Revelation*, 89.

concept. “The novelty of John’s symbol lies in its representation of the sacrificial death as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes of the messianic conqueror.”[171] Aune and Bauckham agree that in Revelation 5 John synthesizes the ideas of lamb as leader and the lamb as sacrificial. John’s metaphorical change comes into sharp focus through the change of lion to lamb metaphor. John’s use of the lamb metaphor “flies in the face” of the cultural expectations of the messiah. The key issue here is to remember that in a culture shaped by apocalyptic writings, the lamb is a shocking metaphor—not what a first century hearer/reader would have expected. A new concept for the messiah is now present; however, this does not imply a defeated victim. The lamb clearly appears victorious.[172]

This leads to another important question: Where does John get his lamb metaphor in Revelation 5? It is unlikely that the seer invented this image of a sacrificial and victorious lamb on his own. Russell Morton suggests the likely origin of this imagery is a combination of the ancient Jewish apocalypticism combined with imagery that emerged from the early Christian movement.[173] The symbolic use of lamb/sheep is broadly rooted in these traditions. “Sheep” is mentioned 742 times in the scriptures, and it played a vital role in Hebrew culture and the religious life of Israel.[174] “Lamb” appears 196 times in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint, and two-thirds of those references are from the Pentateuch—referring to literal animals. It is impossible to state what the symbolism of each communicates, but most of the references communicate the vulnerability of the “lamb,” either in the presence of a potential enemy, or as a symbol of eschatological

171 Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 184.
172 Doyle and Skaggs, “Lion/Lamb in Revelation,” 365.
173 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 158.
174 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 28.

peace.[175] Within the sacrificial system, lambs were not associated with purification offerings: bulls and/or goats were. Lambs also played no role in atonement sacrifices.[176] No strong correlation seems to exist between the Hebrew words for lamb and the way in which lambs functioned. It could be translated literally or symbolically as a paschal lamb or as a farm animal.[177]

L.L. Johns suggests that identifiable correspondences appear to be stronger in the Greek than in Hebrew. From the outset, the term lamb (*arnion*) denoted "young sheep," typically a one-year-old lamb. These were lambs that were used for sacrifice in cultic occasions.[178] The lamb metaphor symbolized tenderness or vulnerability.[179] However, a long-standing issue in Revelation is that the word *lamb* does not seem to fit the apocalyptic context. The image of *lamb* is one of vulnerability and powerlessness (slain), as well as power and majesty (the only one worthy to open the scroll). Johns proposes that the author of Revelation used lamb to convey the vulnerability of one who resists evil consistently and nonviolently.[180] This concept of vulnerability is central to the thesis of this study of the function of the lamb in Revelation 5. The image of *nike* through vulnerability and sacrifice is at the heart of the author's message. Readers of Revelation should be open to the possibility that victory comes through a sacrificial lamb—a message that offered great meaning to the seven churches in first century Asia Minor.[181]

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175 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 29.
176 Ibid., 30.
177 Ibid., 31.
178 Ibid., 32.
179 Ibid., 33.
180 Ibid., 25
181 Ibid., 38.

Lion to Lamb: The Transformation

What should interpreters make of "the switch" from lion to lamb in 5:5-6? This continues to be a debated topic in biblical studies. Does the lamb completely replace the lion? Do characteristics of the lion remain with the lamb? Does the lamb lie down with the lion? What did John want to communicate by switching from lion to lamb? Most scholars agree that the slain lamb reinterprets the traditional messianic expectation of a warrior conqueror that exhibits the characteristics of a lion. However, God's power and victory lie in the self-sacrifice of the lamb.[182] This is a radical move by the writer, one that creates ambiguous tension in the text, and as mentioned previously, it certainly would have been a shocking move to his first century audience.

Some interpreters, such as G.K. Beale, suggest that the shift is more about emphasis than reinterpretation. He notes that "the juxtaposition shows that John is emphasizing Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the messianic kingdom—victory and reign—not through expected military might but through death."[183] The use of the lamb metaphor in 5:5-6 explains how the *lamb* conquers through the death and resurrection of Jesus. A.Y. Collins and E. Boring interpret the lion and lamb imagery through the context of a courtroom—the conqueror has a legal connotation, indicating an acquittal in a court of law. In this scenario, John redefines victory through the slain lamb.[184]

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182 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion and Lamb in Revelation," 368.
183 G.K. Beale, *Revelation*, 353.
184 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion and Lamb in Revelation," 368.

Another group of interpreters explains the lion and lamb relationship by applying the two methods above. Aune suggests that both images are connected to the person of Jesus. Bauckham agrees, adding that the differing images are John's way of reinterpreting Jewish messianic hopes through the lens of Christian experience.[185] He furthers the argument by proposing a thesis that is at the heart of this study of the lamb metaphor. By the juxtaposition of the two metaphors John did not dismiss the Jewish titles of "*Lion* of the tribe of Judah" and "Root of David," nor does he combine the two metaphors. Rather, Bauckham suggests that John merged the two metaphors to create a new way of describing the conquering messiah: victory through sacrificial death.[186]

David Barr approaches the switch from lion to lamb differently. He explains the juxtaposition as an inversion of the narrative, which leads to a moral inversion of the hearers/readers of the narrative.[187] The metaphorical transformation was a way for John to change behavior. The inversion occurs as the notion of power is turned upside down in the sacrificial death of the messianic lamb. A new narrative emerges in the switch from the lion to lamb metaphor. "The story inverts the image of violence, so that what first appears to be coercive power (Jesus slays all his enemies) turns out on closer examination to be something else (Jesus slays them with the sword of his mouth)… Renewal comes after violence, but not through violence."[188] While Barr's explanation tells the story of the metaphorical value of the lamb, he does not hold the two metaphors in tension.

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185 Doyle and Skaggs, "Lion and Lamb in Revelation," 368-369.

186 Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 183.

187 David L. Barr, "The Reality of the Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation," *SBLSymS* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 218.

188 Barr, "Reality of the Apocalypse," 215.

Steve Moyise offers a more complex interpretation that embraces the tension in John's use of the two metaphors. He agrees that there is a juxtaposition of the two images, but points out an inherent danger in the interpretation that favors the disappearance of the lion metaphor. The text of Revelation is too complicated and the concept of evil is too complex to offer an interpretation where the lamb simply replaces the lion.[189] Moyise proposes a "dialogical tension in the juxtaposition of the terms."[190] He suggests the possibility that the reader is encouraged to struggle with the two images, rather than simply to replace one with the other. The text preserves the tension, rather than offering an easy solution to the juxtaposition.[191] This interplay of the two metaphors leads to three key considerations. First, the lion/lamb imagery in Revelation 5 is central to understanding the message of John's apocalypse. Second, the relationship between the two images is at the heart of the message of hope. Third, there is little consensus as to the nature of the relationship between the lion and lamb metaphors—so the discussion, which includes this study, will continue.

Conclusion

The lamb is one of the most provocative metaphors in the biblical texts. John aligned his use of the lamb metaphor with the traditions of Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic writings. Peter Macky provides the model with which to integrate biblical metaphor in this study—John utilized one thing to highlight and describe another, the lamb to describe the messiah. As described above, Macky was sure to note that this was a

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189 Moyise, "Does the Lion lay down with the Lamb," 370.

190 Ibid., 371.

191 Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 132.

prototypical metaphor in biblical thought. The "conceptual theory" developed by Lakoff and Johnson provides the proper model through which to engage John's use of metaphor. John utilized metaphors that would have been familiar within first century apocalypticism, in a way that illuminated the message communicated through the metaphors to his audience. John's use of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 was transformational of first century expectations of the messiah and the ultimate victory of God over evil.

In Revelation 5:5-6 John sees a slaughtered lamb standing on the throne. The image of a *slaughtered and standing lamb* was a break from the cultural expectations, a break that transformed the narrative. The shift from a powerful lion to the slain lamb is a switch that the hearer/reader would have been unprepared for. The first chapters of Revelation celebrate the power and authority of Jesus, so there is no hint up to this point that the slain and standing lamb will control the remainder of the narrative. "At the heart of the switch is the author's conviction that Jesus' death and resurrection represent not only the key to the redemption of God's people, but also the key to God's victory over evil within history."[192] The use of the lamb metaphor had enormous implications. The crucial role of the messiah, the climax of God's redemptive narrative, looked less like a lion and more like a lamb—metaphorically speaking.[193] The lamb is the one on the throne, who takes the scroll, and is worshiped by the heavenly beings. The lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 is significant. John described the victory, once and for all, through the messianic conqueror that is a slaughtered lamb.[194] By juxtaposing the two

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192 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 168.
193 Ibid., 169.
194 Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 183.

contrasting images, the rhetorical force of John's message comes into focus, and the narrative is transformed. This provides the backdrop for the final chapter in this study: the function of the lamb.

Chapter 4: Function of the Lamb

The continuing and ultimate victory of God over evil, which the rest of Revelation describes, is no more than the working out of the decisive victory of the Lamb on the cross.[195]

The lamb was not a typical metaphor utilized in apocalyptic literature; it is a figure that threw the anticipated message of Revelation upside down. Rather than utilizing the familiar lion metaphor, John employed the surprising metaphor of lamb in juxtaposition to the apocalyptic image of the beast (i.e. the Roman Empire). By implementing the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5, he shifted the story.[196] The function of the lamb is the key to unlock to layers of depth and imagery in the message of John's apocalypse. The rationale of the lamb imagery is a reminder to readers that God is going to achieve victory through totally unexpected and inappropriate means.[197] The lamb is not a symbol of weakness, but one of strength—strength and power through suffering and sacrifice.[198]

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[195] Bauckham, *Revelation*, 75.

[196] It should be noted that the use of the lamb metaphor does not eliminate the images of violence and military power that exists in the text. The limits of this study is focused on the shift from the lion to lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. However, Barbara Rossing notes that the vision of violence and military force is imagery that should be interpreted in light of the lamb metaphor. For Rossing, the question of lamb power is central. What kind of violence and vengeance does a "little lamb" implement? The violent imagery is in the text; so how should one engage that imagery if the central lamb metaphor is one of non-violent vulnerability? For further study, see chapter 6, "Lamb Power" in Rossing, B. *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation.* New York: Basic Books, 2004; Wengst, Klaus. *The Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*. Translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); and Laws, Sophie. *In the Light of the Lamb: Imagery, Parody, and Theology in the Apocalypse of John* (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1988), to name a few.

[197] Guthrie, *Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation*, 65.

[198] There exists an inherent tension in the text between the vulnerability of the lamb and the power of violence in the text. For example, the "wrath of the lamb" (6:16) is an image that does not mirror the vulnerable, non-violent, character of the lamb. A future study might demonstrate the way one could interpret "the wrath of the lamb" in 6:16 along side the characteristics of the lamb in 5:5-6. It should be

At the heart of the message to John's hearers/readers is the question of divine action. How does God act in the world? Also, who is the God revealed in Christ? Apocalyptic imagery was built on the expectation that God was a fierce and powerful warrior—much like that of a lion. In Revelation, however, John identified the lamb with God, and the work of the lamb establishes God's kingdom on earth.[199] The lamb metaphor in John's apocalypse transformed existing messianic expectations. Therefore the function of the lamb was a way to change those expectations, to offer an alternative the way of the Empire, and ultimately, to reveal the nature and character of God and God's redemptive narrative.[200]

Thus far we have examined apocalypticism and apocalyptic genre, metaphor theory, and the literary setting of the first century in order to truly understand the depth and meaning of John's message, the role that the lamb fulfils, why John implemented the lamb metaphor, and how it reshaped what would have been a familiar story to John's contemporaries and audience. At the heart of John's message is a theology of the cross, the sacrificial metaphor that ultimately reveals God's self and God's plan for all creation. When the lamb appears on the throne, there are multiple layers of meaning in that scene—most notably that the sacrificial death of the lamb "belongs to the way God rules

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noted here that the lamb wages war with the sword out of it mouth, through words only (1:16; 2:16; 19:15-21). Furthermore, the followers of the lamb (i.e. believers) triumph by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony (12:11). The book of Revelation even allows for the possibility of God's people to becoming non-violent victims (13:9-10), but it does not incite lamb followers to commit violence. The acts of violence are actually committed by the enemies of God, not by God or by the lamb. The important point here is that the true power of the lamb seems to be found in sacrificial love (as seen in the death of Jesus on the cross), not through tangible acts of violence by God or the lamb. But this does not eliminate the violent imagery in the text. However, it does shift how one interprets the violence.

[199] Bauckham, *Revelation*, 54.

[200] Ibid., 63.

the world."[201] The victory of God occurs through sacrifice and self-giving love, which is unveiled in the conquering lamb that was slaughtered. While this was a surprising move by John, it would have been understood by his readers/hearers as a commentary on the values of Rome, the emperor, and the revelation of the true God of creation.

Lamb: A Surprising Character in the Narrative

The lamb is the central character in John's apocalypse. The opening line of the text tells us that the narrative is about "the revelation of Jesus Christ," later identified as the lamb. The primary purpose of John's apocalypse is to tell the story of Jesus—the climax of God's ultimate story of victory and redemption. So, who is Jesus, the lamb? In the beginning of John's apocalypse, Jesus is a majestic, human-like being with a sword in his mouth; however, this imagery quickly shifts with the appearance of the lamb in Revelation 5. Once introduced, the lamb figure dominates the action from the outset of the story. This is a surprising turn in the apocalyptic narrative, since a lamb is a disarming figure and a picture of non-violent power. John's vision breaks from traditional apocalyptic metaphors, and it flies in the face of Rome's ideology of victory and power—the one who is slaughtered is pitted against Rome, the one who slaughters.[202] Not only is this revelation of Jesus Christ a portrait of hope for those who would stand non-violently against the Empire, it is a counter-cultural vision of the redemptive power in the universe—a power that is found in the cross where the lamb was slaughtered. By using the lamb metaphor for Jesus the messiah, John goes against the conventional notions of

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201 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 64.

202 Rossing, *Rapture Exposed*, 109.

power and might in an era when such apocalyptic writings and expectations were prevalent. This was extremely significant for his first century hearers/readers.

The lamb metaphor, then, is a Christological transformation of traditional apocalyptic imagery. In Revelation 5 the lion metaphor is clear, but the messiah is actually a lamb. John's expected metaphor (lion) is transformed through his Christological perspective. Therefore every event in John's apocalypse is primarily understood through the meaning and vision behind the lamb metaphor.[203] One of the key elements in the throne room scene of Revelation 5 is that the lamb appears slain, standing on the throne. "In other words, the lamb 'overcomes' (5:5) through his death and the conquest of it [death]."[204] The nature and character of God, and what God is doing in this present reality, is identified in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross. This interpretation of the lamb was grounded in early Christianity, and indicates where John combined both Jewish apocalyptic literature and early Christian motifs—which, in essence, make up John's Christological perspective.[205] God's victory is not founded on military might and power. God's victory flows from God's character, which is evident in the slaughtered lamb metaphor—sacrifice and self-giving love through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

[203] Boring, *Revelation*, 113.
[204] Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 160.
[205] Ibid., 161.

Worthiness of the Lamb

The culmination of the throne room scene in Revelation 5 revolves around the following question: *Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*[206] This question deals with the heart of this thesis: What is the function of the lamb in John's apocalypse? In first century apocalypticism, the imagery of "sealed scrolls" was a way of authenticating the one who sent them and to reserve the contents for only the one who was authorized, or *worthy*, to open them.[207] The seal played an important role in both Roman and Jewish culture, and this imagery carried significant meaning. As we will see below, the scroll was a key symbol that identified the divinity of the emperor, as according to the widely held belief at the time, he controlled human history. The seals of a scroll would have likely been wax or clay and imprinted with the symbol of the sender.[208] The one who was typically worthy to open the scroll was caesar; however in John's vision the worthy one is the Root of David, the lion of the tribe of Judah. With that being said, the seer does not see a lion, but a slaughtered lamb, standing in the midst of the throne.[209] This scene is intended to communicate the shock and irony of the message that the conquering one does not do so in the way of the empire, through power and might, like a lion; rather, he does so through being a slain lamb, achieving victory through sacrifice and selflessness.

The conquering lamb enters the narrative as the one who is worthy to break the seals of the mysterious scroll, thus revealing the cosmic sovereignty that emerges in the

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206 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 159.

207 Leonard L. Thompson, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Revelation* (Nashville : Abingdon Press, 1998), 89-90.

208 Thompson, *Revelation*, 93.

209 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 159.

scroll opening. G.K. Beale points out that the notions of the word *conquer* are directly related to the last clause of verse 5: "he has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and the seven seals" (NRSV). The lamb that overcomes the enemy is situated in a sovereign position to affect the divine plan of redemption that is symbolized by the breaking of the seals and opening of the scroll.[210] The distinct feature of the lamb is vulnerability, which would not have been anticipated in the character of the expected messianic figure. The concept of a messiah who operates from a position of weakness is not found in Jewish literature. The worthiness of the lamb is the connection between Jewish apocalyptic literature and early Christian themes that emerged out of John's commitment to the teachings of early Christianity. This is also central in understanding of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross.[211]

The central event of the Revelation 5 narrative, which appears to have been adapted from Daniel 7:9-14, is the recognition of the worthiness of the lamb to receive the scroll from the One on the throne, and to break open the seals. Essentially, John took the framework of Daniel 7 and adapted it for a new purpose and message.[212] Jesus, the lamb, not caesar is worthy to lead the process of redemption in human history. Worthiness comes through the act of sacrificial love, not military might and power. This is extremely significant for the discussion of emperor worship below, as the lamb is juxtaposed against the caesar as the one who is truly worthy to receive and open the scroll.

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210 Beale, *Revelation*, 350.

211 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 160.

212 Aune, *Revelation*, 338.

The purpose of the opening of the scroll was primarily symbolic. Thus, the actual contents of the scroll are not given in Revelation. Rather the opening of the scroll is figurative language that symbolized eschatological events that will take place—the redemption and restoration of creation. What is most important here is the one who is worthy to open the seals on the scroll. *Who is worthy to open the scroll and why is the one worthy?* The remarkable and emotionally disappointing conclusion that no one on, under, or above the earth (the cosmos) is worthy to open the scroll emphasizes that the no one other than Jesus is qualified for the task, including the emperor.[213] The term "worthy" does not simply imply "able" to open the scroll. In this text "worthy" means "qualified": *having the proper qualifications to perform the special task.*[214] The one who is "worthy" (possessing the qualifications) is the one who sets the eschatological events into motion.

Only the lamb is worthy to take the scroll from the One who sits upon the throne, break the seals, and unveil the new reality which includes all creatures on land or in the sea, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. The worthiness of the lamb describes the power of the lamb to have victory over evil.[215] The basis for the worthiness of the lamb is found in two central actions in Revelation 5.

First, the lamb is slaughtered. The term slaughter is the basic term for sacrifice in the Old Testament, which suggests a background in the history of Jewish Passover.[216] The implications of violence and mercilessness used in the execution of Jesus in Revelation belongs to the same semantic domain as the death of Christ as the Passover

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213 Aune, *Revelation*, 348.
214 Ibid., 347.
215 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 186.
216 Aune, *Revelation*, 353.

lamb in 1 Cor. 5:7 and the Passover lambs in Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7.[217] The interpretation of Christ's death is consistent with the exodus typology found throughout Revelation and evokes images of hope for a new exodus from sin and evil, into God's promised new kingdom reality.[218] Again, this sacrificial act is the basis for a new definition of victory and power.

Second, redemption comes through the work of the lamb. Revelation 5 suggests that God has purchased through an unspecified price—by the blood of the lamb (5:9). The process of a redeemed reality occurs through the lamb figure. In the hymn of praise to the lamb in Revelation 5, those in the scene worship the lamb, giving adoration for "what you have done" by making a kingdom of priests who will reign on earth.[219] The lamb has done something great, and it is that act of sacrifice that makes the lamb worthy to be praised, and worthy to open the scrolls. Essentially, the right to open the scroll falls to the lamb by virtue of his messianic credentials, the most essential one being his sacrificial death.[220]

Opening the Scroll

One of the most compelling elements of the throne scene is the ability for the lamb to open the seals of the scroll. While the details of the contents of the scroll, the breaking of the seals, and the imagery surrounding those images is beyond the focus of this thesis, two compelling elements do pertain to the lamb in Revelation 5. First, the contents of the scroll are never described in Revelation. This suggests that the scroll is a

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217 Aune, *Revelation*, 361.
218 Wall, *Revelation*, 103-104.
219 Aune, *Revelation*, 362.
220 Wall, *Revelation*, 99-100.

literary device implemented by the writer to reveal a deeper meaning within the text. Second, the scroll belongs to the One on the throne, and the writer utilized this device to imply something about the One on the throne and the lamb.

The key shift in the text occurs when the lamb takes the scroll; it surely would have evoked images of the scroll in the right hand of caesar. Based upon current research and studies, the contents of the scroll symbolize the secret purposes of God for the establishment of God's kingdom.[221] Thus, the opening of the scroll is a device used to describe the hope of the future restoration of creation—how God plans to establish God's rule on earth.[222] It should not be interpreted as a predictive text that gives clues to contemporary political events. The act of taking the scroll represents the exaltation of the lamb—the one who inaugurates the age to come—and the victory that has already been secured.

Bauckham suggests that the symbol of the scroll is the way that the lamb's victory is effective in establishing God's rule over the world. Only the lamb is worthy to open the scroll because it is through the lamb's victory that the contents of the scroll—that is, God's plan of restoration—can be made possible.[223] He goes on to argue that the contents of the scroll represent the way followers of the lamb can participate in the reign of God—by following the way of the lamb through sacrifice. The followers of the lamb can conquer because the lamb has conquered.[224] God's plan is made possible through the slaughtered lamb. The images of the breaking of the seals and the scroll opened are

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221 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 74.
222 Boring, *Revelation*, 108.
223 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 80.
224 Ibid., 81.

John's way of describing the new reality that has broken into history. The new reality is established by Christ's accomplishments: the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ as the King of kings and Lord of lords—which is the new age where all things will be made new (Revelation 21).[225]

Victory: The way of God vs. the way of the Empire

One of the central messages conveyed in the lamb metaphor is a redefinition of victory, which is a direct ethical critique and denunciation of the emperor cult.[226] "The apocalypse is a subversive resistance manual."[227] At the heart of the message is a new vision of triumph (*nike*/victory). The revelation of Jesus Christ demonstrates that through the faithful witness of the lamb in his death on the cross and his resurrection, the powers of death and evil have been defeated.[228] John wrote the book of Revelation to illustrate a vision and mission that was counter to the ideals of victory and power that were pervasive under first century Roman rule. For the Roman Empire, victory was achieved through military power and violent domination. Rome's victories made their prosperous way of life possible. However, the book of Revelation offers a strong political critique of those values and the vision of caesar as ruler of the world.

The heart of the message and central lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 describes a true victory that undermines the foundational notion of *nike* for the caesar and his empire.[229] Rome's vision of victory was pervasive throughout the culture in Asia Minor

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225 Morton, *One Upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 186.

226 For an extensive study of the emperor cult see Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

227 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 153.

228 Ibid., 175.

229 Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 103.

in the first century. The churches in Asia Minor were intimately familiar with Rome's extensive power, especially as a result of Rome's military victory in the Jewish war in 67-70 A.D.[230] Not only does the author of Revelation shift the story in terms of the expected messiah, but by using the lamb metaphor he turns the social order upside down by presenting new revelation.[231] The true way to *nike* is not through the power and coercive might of the emperor, but through the self-giving love of the lamb that was slaughtered.

The Caesar: A god incarnate?

A key component of John's new vision of *nike*, and the function of the lamb in Revelation 5, was the office of caesar and the worship of the emperor in particular.[232] Emperor worship, practices that emerged from the belief that in some way the caesar was divine, permeated nearly every aspect of life in the Roman Empire.[233] Subjects under the rule of the caesar were expected to operate under the notion of his divinity. Caesars were considered gods—often the language of "god on earth" or "god incarnate" was employed in relation to the worship of the emperors and their ancestors.[234] Emperor worship was reflected through images on coins, in the architecture, and of course through the

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230 Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 107.

231 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 157.

232 Emperors leading to the era of John's Apocalypse: Julius Caesar (ruled to roughly 44 B.C.), Augustus (27 B.C. - A.D. 14), Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Claudius (A.D. 41-54), Nero (A.D. 54-68), Galba/Otho/Vitellius (A.D.68-69), Vespasian (A.D. 69-70), Titus (A.D. 78-81), Domitian (A.D. 81-96), Trajan (A.D. 98-117), and Hadrian (A.D. 117-138). Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1989), iii-xv.

233 As noted above, for an extended study on emperor worship and and its origins see Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion.*

234 The deification and worship of ancestors was an accepted procedure and was well established within the history of Rome. In the case of some caesars (i.e. Domitian) the phrase "son of god" and "master and God" was utilized. Domitian was responsible for the Flavian cult in the Roman world, a practice that would last through the end of the second century. Pat Southern, *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 46.

prominent placement of statues of the ruling caesar.[235] Emperor worship continued as each new caesar rose to power, and the specifics of how each emperor was worshiped changed depending on the one in power during each era.[236] The important point is that emperor worship was a central element to life in first century Rome, including Asia Minor, and would have been a key theme critiqued by John.

Caesar Domitian, who is believed by many scholars to be the caesar that exiled John to Patmos, could be the most significant Roman emperor in regards to the message in John's apocalypse.[237] Domitian ruled from A.D. 81-96, a period that is believed to match the period of the composition of the book of Revelation. As the son of past emperors who were believed to be gods, Domitian was worshiped as the son of god—often equating himself with the supreme god, Jupiter Optimus Maximus.[238] In *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant*, Pat Southern notes, "Domitian took his power very seriously, anxious lest anyone forget it or try to undermine it."[239] Many scholars, including Brian Jones, have accepted the claim that Domitian insisted on being addressed as *Dominus et Deus*, "master and god."[240] As he moved throughout the cities and provinces and was worshiped, the citizens would refer to him with this moniker.[241] He was considered Jupiter's representative on earth, and as he traveled, choirs would follow him, singing

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235 Southern, *Domitian*, IV (Plate 12 and 13).

236 Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 190.

237 Brian W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 116. Jones also notes that John's apocalypse could reference the reign of the emperor Nero. Many scholars agree that the subversive message of Revelation could reference multiple caesars.

238 Southern, *Domitian*, 47.

239 Ibid., 46.

240 Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 108.

241 Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 160.

hymns, "Our lord and our god, you alone are worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise."[242]

A distinct characteristic of emperor rule and worship was the use of architecture in the cities, coinage, and of course, statues. One statue of Domitian, which can be viewed at the Vatican museums, portrays the emperor raising a scroll in his right hand.[243] The scroll represented the key to a caesar's rule. The scrolls would contain writing on both sides with all the divine names of the emperor—the symbolic rights and reasons of the caesar to rule and reign. Only the caesar was worthy to carry the scroll; only he was worthy to rule. Opening the scroll was symbolic for the emperor to declare his divinity and to direct human history. This was a distinct characteristic of emperor worship; Domitian, through military might and power, sat on the throne as a god. John's audience would have been familiar with the symbols and linguistic imagery that was characteristic of Domitian's rule. The reason for noting the characteristics and cultural elements of Domitian's rule is not to argue that John wrote specifically addressing Domitian but rather, to underscore John's use of the lamb as a counter figure to the personification of Roman rule.

The Lamb: God incarnate

The counter-figure introduced by John is the slaughtered lamb, Jesus.[244] John's audience expected a savior, but not in the form of a slain lamb. When first century readers/hearers envisioned the conquering messianic figure, they would have anticipated

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[242] Jones, *Emperor Domitian*, 100-101.

[243] John Donahue, "Titus Flavius Domitianus(A.D. 81-96)," *De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Rulers and their Families*, 1997, http://www.roman-emperors.org/domitian.htm (accessed June 28, 2011).

[244] Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 108.

a character with leonine features, fierce and powerful, undertaking victory through military might—the one who would triumph over the Roman Empire through the same methods that marked its own power and strength. However, in the key moment, the instant when such a victory would finally be at hand, John writes against apocalyptic expectation by flipping the story upside down. In the place of the lion is a slaughtered lamb. Herein lies the power of John's use of the lamb metaphor and the rhetorical force of his message. His use of the lamb metaphor went against the conventional images of power and victory that were common in apocalypticism. Victory is achieved through sacrifice; surely this was an unexpected twist in the narrative to John's first century audience.

The word *nikao*, or *nike*, could be translated in a few different ways: overcomes, prevails, triumphs, or "wins the right." The verb (*nike*) occurs twenty-three times in Revelation, twice as much in all the other New Testament texts combined. Conquering is what binds the lamb and his followers (3:21) and the conquering is based on the actions of the messiah. In this case, *conquering* means no more or less than dying—conquering through self-giving love and sacrifice. While there are violent images in Revelation no clear acts of military violence or destructive judgement is committed on the enemies of the lamb. The truth that flows out of the mouth of the lamb is portrayed in the actions of Jesus who stood before the Roman court and was faithful unto death on a Roman cross. That is the picture of victory that John envisions in Revelation, chapter 5 in particular.[245]

To ensure clarity—in John's apocalypse, readers/hearers encounter two kinds of power: the empire's oppressive systems of domination enacted by the emperor (the

[245] Boring, *Revelation,* 11.

beast), and the sacrificial, life-giving and healing power of the messiah (the lamb). In the place of the military might and power offered by the empire, John projects an alternate vision. "The high point in the struggle between good and evil will not be reached in the eschatological messianic war; it has *already* been reached in the death and resurrection of Christ."[246] John presents ultimate victory that has already taken place. Rather than violent and coercive power that is the foundation of the empire, John's lamb metaphor reveals true power and victory that will direct the course of all creation. At the heart of this power is Jesus, the one who selflessly gave his life so that evil could be defeated.[247] Deeply embedded in Revelation 5 is a profound and hopeful theology of the cross that stands over and against the notion of power of the caesar and his empire.

Not only did John's use of the lamb metaphor undermine the political system of the first century, it also defied early Christian apocalyptic expectations. No apocalypses during this era envisioned the hero as a lamb. The book of Revelation is unique in this way. By utilizing the lamb metaphor to depict Jesus the messiah, John highlighted his vulnerability—a victim who was crucified at the hands of the empire that the messiah was expected to defeat. The lamb's death on the cross portrayed power through weakness. From beginning to end, the book of Revelation teaches a "theology of the cross."[248] The shift from lion to lamb in Revelation 5 enables John to weave the central theme of lamb theology throughout the message of Revelation, the true God exercising true power. Readers of Revelation (chapter 5 in particular) must look at the subversive meaning at the heart of the text—a fundamental redefinition of victory. Lamb theology is

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246 Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 175. Italics mine.
247 Rossing, *Rapture Exposed*, 108.
248 Ibid., 111.

the way evil is conquered. God's people, then, are called to conquer by remaining faithful, conquering through non-violent self-sacrifice, and as a result, testifying to God's victory of self-giving love.[249]

An interesting feature to this argument is noted in Bauckham's *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*: the actual conquest by the lamb is left undefined at the end of Revelation 5. This leaves the victory boundless in scope. Everything that is opposed to God's rule has been defeated by the lamb, a process of overcoming evil that will be continued into the future. The eschatological fruits of the lamb's victory are expanded so that all of creation joins in worship of both the lamb and the One who sits on the throne (5:13).[250] The lamb's victory is the basis for how this works out in John's apocalypse. "A proper understanding of the function of the lamb in Rev. 5 is that the lamb triumphed in death and resurrection, not that the lamb will triumph in some future state."[251] There is a strong eschatological nature to the text, and to the victory of the slaughtered messiah. The lamb plays a vital role in the establishment of God's kingdom age on earth. The full realization of God's rule has yet to reach its goal, so there is a working-out of the victory already attained by the lamb.[252] This working-out of the lamb's victory is then to be lived out through those who follow the lamb.

It should be noted at this point that modern readers and commentators should be careful when interacting with these texts in John's apocalypse. Interpreters can easily miss the inter-connectedness that is vital for understanding the rhetorical force of John's

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249 Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, 111-112.
250 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 74.
251 Johns, *Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, 161.
252 Bauckham, *Revelation*, 75.

message. While John redefined the nature and meaning of victory, it is not meant to be a secret code to help decipher future historical events. In these multi-layered texts what seems to be victory through military force is actually apocalyptic imagery that describes an eschatological vision of sacrificial victory. Through the lens of the lamb's power violence is actually defeated.[253] Clearly the symbolic military and violent language is in the text, but recognizing John's *use* of apocalyptic imagery and metaphor is vital to understand the violent imagery and the text's overall message. "The most significant battle in John's apocalypse is therefore a battle for *perception* fought on the rhetorical battlefield."[254]

The language of violence and conquering through military means is utilized, but it is part of the strategy of the author, whereby he redefined how victory is claimed through the faithfulness of the lamb.[255] Central to the function of the lamb in Revelation 5 is the forging of a new understanding of how victory is achieved: consistent, nonviolent resistance and self-sacrifice—in other words, faithfulness and allegiance to God and the way of the lamb. The future hope is not determined by the coercion and violence of the Empire, but through the lamb who chose to overcome violence through his own sacrificial death.[256] The lamb functions in part as a way to help the community of believers to reimagine what it means to live in the age of victory—to reinterpret their situation of apparent defeat in light of the lamb that has conquered in Revelation 5.[257]

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[253] Johns, *Lamb Christology*, 180-181.
[254] Ibid., 181.
[255] Ibid., 182.
[256] Ibid., 188.
[257] Boring, *Revelation*, 111.

The Lamb: Revelation of God's Character

The overarching thesis of this project is that the function of the lamb in Revelation 5 is to reveal the character of God and the nature of God's victory over evil. Through the use of creative language and imagery, John subtly communicated this message of hope to his audience in first century Asia Minor. It should be noted that this message was relevant to an audience during a particular period of time; and while the generations to follow are certainly able to glean from the hope of John's letter, it must first be understood within that first century situation. In Revelation, John broke from the traditional apocalyptic metaphor, the expected apocalyptic lion conqueror; instead, he utilized the lamb metaphor to describe a counter message to the empire, caesar in particular. The following examples describe a few of the ways that John utilized symbols and language that were familiar descriptions of the empire and Rome.

First, John opened Revelation 5 with a description of what he saw in the otherworldly throne room scene. He described a throne with a figure seated on it. A first century Roman citizen, under the rule and reign of Rome, would have associated this with the throne of the caesar—the representative of god (Jupiter) here on earth.[258] This is the climax of John's message. *Who is the one on the throne?* As stated earlier, the function of the lamb is to reveal the character of the one true God, the one who has won true victory over evil. John challenged the notion of emperor worship and the claim that the emperors were divine—in particular, the divinity of Domitian. The lamb stands at the center of the throne and is likened to the One who sits on the throne—the true God (5:13). The lamb is clearly identified with the nature and character of God—complete

[258] Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 191.

accord between the lamb and God.[259] The function of the lamb in Revelation 5 is about who God is—and it is the lamb who is the one, true God seated on the throne.

Secondly, John described the right hand of the One on the throne, specifically what is in the One's right hand. John states, "A scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals…" (5:1). As noted above, here John makes a correlation to the scroll that would have been carried by caesar in statues throughout the Roman Empire—and on it would be written (on both sides) all of his divine names. A first century reader/hearer would understand this imagery as a reference to caesar (e.g., Domitian). The one who has the scroll had the rights and reasons to rule and reign. Roman citizens believed that the emperor, god's representative, was worthy to open the scrolls and, therefore, to direct human history. The scroll imagery symbolized the decisions that would determine human life—and according the ideals of the Roman Empire, the scroll was in the right hand of caesar. In John's vision the scroll is intentionally removed from the hand of caesar, and placed in the right hand of the true God: the lamb.

Not only is the scroll removed from the right hand of caesar, but he is also not worthy to open it. The caesars believed that only they, the representatives of the gods on earth, were worthy to open the scroll and direct human history. With the metaphor of the lamb, John undermined this belief as well. He stated, "I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?'" Through public sacrifices at the altar of caesar, surely the name of the emperor would have been

[259] Guthrie, *The Lamb in the Structure of the Book of Revelation*, 65.

praised, "Domitian" (or "Julius Caesar," "Augustus," etc).[260] But in this new vision, opposed to that of the divine emperor, John says, "No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it" (5:3). John's audience, who was accustomed to hearing the name of caesar as the worthy one, would have recognized that, in this statement, John proclaimed that caesar was not the one who was worthy. In fact, the surprise is even greater when John does not replace caesar with the expected messianic figure, the lion. Instead, the only one who is found worthy is the slaughtered lamb. In Revelation 5:5 John turned the infrastructure of Roman dominance and emperor worship upside down—presenting a new vision of the one, true God.

Third, one of the central elements of emperor worship was the singing of hymns in honor and praise of the caesar. These choruses contained statements such as, "Our master and our god, you alone are worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise." Interestingly John closes Revelation 5 with a hymn of praise to the lamb, not to the emperor:

> *[11]Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands, [12]singing with full voice,*
> *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessings."*
> *[13]Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them singing,*
> *"To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever."*
> *[14]And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped* (5:11-14).

[260] Gradel, *Emperor Worship*, 191-192.

John exhorted his readers/hearers to place their hope and praise in the lamb, not caesar. John utilized familiar praise language that would have been reserved for emperors such as Domitian. By doing this, John undermined the office and worship of the pseudo god/emperor, and subversively revealed a victory that was not won by the empire. The one who is truly worthy to open the scroll and be praised was not a wealthy military leader, but a humble, slaughtered lamb, standing on the throne. "The lamb is the 'window' through whom God is revealed."[261] John's message was clear: caesar was not worthy to be praised; only the true God, whose character is revealed through the slain lamb, is worthy to receive praise.

Conclusion

The key element of the function of the lamb is found in the vision report of Revelation 5: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" (5:2). John states, "No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and look into it." This scene conveys who is worthy. Surely the long-awaited lion of the tribe of Judah would be up to the task, but the lamb suddenly appears. The centerpiece of the Revelation 5 narrative is the recognition of the lamb metaphor that symbolized the only one worthy of opening the scroll.[262] The lamb is worthy to receive the scroll because the lamb was slaughtered; henceforth, in the death and resurrection of Christ the true character and identity of God is revealed.[263] Through the worthiness of the lamb, that is, the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ, the nature of God and the nature of God's

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[261] Johns, *Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, 163.
[262] Aune, *Revelation*, 329.
[263] Boring, *Revelation*, 605.

victory are made known. The one who is truly worthy to control human history is the one who is seated on the throne, and that is not caesar.

This text represents a stunning contradiction—even a contradiction within a contradiction. In one respect, John described a lion, the one who was long anticipated, which would assume the responsibility for the destiny of creation—but that lion actually turns out to be a lamb.[264] This is a reflection of the more basic contradiction: at the heart of the power of God is the selflessness of the crucified messiah. Furthermore, in the vulnerability of the slaughtered lamb is a strength more powerful than the might of the Roman Empire. This means that the true victory over evil occurs in God's redemption of the world that took place at the "defeat" on the cross.[265] Still, there is another layer of contradiction in this text: salvation of God's creation occurs through defeat, restoration, and eternal life through death—in essence, victory through sacrifice; the apocalyptic expectations were contradicted through the death and resurrection of the lamb. These layers of contradiction transformed the first century readers/hearers understanding of hope, salvation, and worship. This was the challenge and the hope for John's first century audience, and it continues shape the hope for his contemporary hearers/readers.

[264] Achtemeier, "Revelation," 287.
[265] Ibid., 288.

Thesis Conclusion

The thesis of this study is that the function of the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5 serves to reveal the nature of God and the way God achieves victory over evil. Through John's use of the lamb metaphor, the way of the Roman Empire is revealed as a false ideology, true victory is revealed, and the way of the lamb is made known to his followers. John wrote this document in a particular time period and cultural context. He employed specific literary devices from the apocalyptic genre that shaped the way he described the narrative. The centerpiece of this project is John's use of metaphor, the lion and lamb metaphors in particular. In his throne room scene in Revelation 5, John transformed the expected narrative, thus transforming the nature of God's victory over evil. This thesis is rooted in a study of the first century cultural context, most shaped by the Roman Empire and the literary apocalyptic movement. The document is historically conditioned, and the first century social situation is the backdrop for this thesis in reference to the metaphors John employed and the message in his apocalypse.

John's first century audience would have expected the messianic figure to be described as a lion—a strong, powerful, and fierce conqueror. In his apocalypse, John met this expectation to the point in Revelation 5:5 when one of the elders tells the seer to look and see "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah." Upon hearing/reading this statement, his audience would have been familiar and comfortable with the story—the one who was worthy to open the scroll was *the lion* of the tribe of Judah. This expectation was held throughout the history of God's people, from Old Testament texts such as Genesis, Daniel, and Ezekiel. The apocalyptic movement shaped these texts, just like it shaped the book of Revelation. John was rooted in that cultural context, and his apocalypse reflected

the shape, form, and content of that genre. The metaphor for the messiah was *lion.* This figure would exhibit features such as dominance, strength, and violence. Not so coincidentally, these were the same ways and ideals that described the dominant Roman Empire—whom the messiah came to defeat.

It is difficult to imagine the surprise and shock that hearers/readers would have experienced when they encountered Revelation 5:6: "Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a *lamb* standing as if it had been slaughtered." The slaughtered lamb was a metaphor that exuded vulnerability, weakness, and sacrifice. In John's vision, the messiah conquered evil, but not in the way that was anticipated. John switched the metaphor, and by doing so, he transformed the expectations of the first century audience. The expectation was that evil (in this case, Rome and the emperor) would be defeated by the same means that Rome dominated—the empire overthrown by the fierce and powerful lion messiah. By switching one metaphor for another, John flew against traditional expectations, redefined the ideal of *nike*, and in doing so revealed the true nature of God's victory. God's victory is achieved through love and is revealed in the lamb, slaughtered and standing. Revelation 5 ends with a new hymn of hope, offered in praise to the one who is truly worthy—the lamb, not the emperor.

Areas for Further Study

The amount of research conducted on the book of Revelation is seemingly unlimited, and mostly beyond the focus of this thesis. The quantity of research on the focused topic of Revelation 5, and the lamb, is also substantial. Three areas of further

research have emerged as I have worked through this project. One area of further study is the role of the lamb to bring to completion the final eschaton—does that lead to an ideology of universalism in Revelation? While I have focused here on John's use of the lamb metaphor to transform expectations of God's victory over evil, the next step would be to describe the role that the lamb, who has proven himself worthy, has played to establish the kingdom of God. It is Jesus, the lamb, who brings to completion the final eschaton, where evil is completely destroyed, and the new Jerusalem has come down from heaven, a new heaven and new earth (21:1-2). Because the lamb has truly conquered evil (5:5), and God will ultimately make "everything new," (21:5) then is salvation for *all* of creation? Is salvation universal?

Another potential area of further study, which is footnoted above, would be to demonstrate how the violent imagery portrayed in John's apocalypse is interpreted in light of the knowledge that the lamb has conquered through sacrificial love. One of the areas of tension in the text is the sheer amount of violent imagery that is evident in the book of Revelation. How then does the Christian community understand and interpret the violent imagery of Revelation in light of God's victory through sacrificial love? Often the violent imagery is engaged on a surface level, without an understanding of the first century cultural context, or of the apocalyptic genre in particular. The violent language is in the text, so how do interpreters engage it? A potential area of study is to describe how one should engage the entire book of Revelation with a lens that is shaped by the victory of the vulnerable and slaughtered lamb.

A third possible area of research is to study the implications for those who are lamb followers. What does it mean to follow in the way of the lamb? Another way of

stating it would be to ask, “What does it mean for the church to worship the lamb?” The lamb metaphor was not only counter to the expectations of John’s first century audience, but is also counter-cultural for the American church of the twenty-first century. God has conquered evil through a self-sacrificing love. How do Christians reimagine what it means to follow the lamb in this contemporary context? This has emerged as a central question as I have wrestled with the material of setting, context, apocalyptic, metaphor theory, and the overarching thesis of this study on the lamb metaphor in Revelation 5. It is a question that the church has wrestled with for many centuries, and one that has become more relevant as we follow the lamb in the cultural context of “empires” in the twenty-first century.

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