

The Stone-Campbell Journal Conference: Parallel Session (April 16-17, 2021)

Dr. Walter D. Zorn, Professor Emeritus, Lincoln Christian University

The Violence of the Lamb: Revelation's Imagery

The December edition of *Imprimis* published by Hillsdale College offered part of a speech by their president, Larry P. Arnn, entitled “Orwell’s 1984 and Today.” In that article Dr. Arnn mentioned four books he used for a course on “totalitarian novels”: George Orwell’s *1984*, Arthur Koestler’s *Darkness at Noon*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and C.S. Lewis’ *That Hideous Strength*. I determined to read all four, two of them again. Having recently finished my work on Revelation in my book, *The Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, I became aware that the same theme of “totalitarianism” was a major theme in that last New Testament letter. The deceptions of the two beasts (Rev 13:14; cf. 13:5–8) doing the bidding of the “Dragon” is uttering the same theme. Indeed, it was a *cancel culture* where “no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name” (Rev 13:17). All who wish to be prosperous and “get along” with the authorities must have this mark: “Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead” (Rev 13:16).

In contrast to this “brave new world” where “that hideous strength” is exercised over every aspect of human life bringing “darkness at noon,” there stands a Lamb with his army of 144,000 who have his name and the Father’s name written on their foreheads (Rev 14:1). In defiance against the totalitarian regime above, these people “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4c). They are declared “blameless” (Rev 14:5b). So, at that point in the book of Revelation the *violence of the Lamb* is revealed in unmistakable imagery as judgment against the machinations of evil governments and powers that seek to destroy mankind:

And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”—Rev 14:9–11.

For the first time I noticed that “the Lamb” is present with the holy angels observing this ultimate judgment of fire and sulfur, a lake of torment forever! What violence! No wonder that when the sixth seal was broken and judgment was poured out upon those in charge of their totalitarian government, the great crowd hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”—Rev 6:12–17.

Immediately after this picture of judgment, John *heard* the number of the ones who are *sealed* from such judgment: the 144,000 (the army of the Lamb).¹ What John *saw* was “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation [Victory!] belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:9–10, my translation of “salvation”). The *victory* of God and the Lamb comes at a great cost, however, for the question was asked: “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” The answer is: “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:13–14, 17).

What an ironic statement: “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The old robes are robes that sinned by being seduced by the surrounding culture in its myriad corruptions, and by bowing down to the economic privileges of those in charge, and by cowardly denouncing the Messiah in the face of persecution. These “dirty” robes can be made white by “the blood of the Lamb.” This is a clear reference to the atoning effect of Jesus’ death on the cross as celebrated at the beginning of the unfolding drama of Revelation. Only a “Lamb standing as slain” (literal translation of Rev 5:6b) is worthy to open the seals. Thus, a “new song” is sung by the Church and the heavenly beings:

Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth—Rev 5:9–10.²

The initial benediction to the greeting at the beginning of Revelation is a clear statement of the “new song” above: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5b–6).

Now is the time to address the use of “lamb” (*ἀρνίον*, *arnion*) in Revelation. It is used 29 times, but once it is in reference to the “beast” (Rev 13:11): Rev 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4², 10; 15:3; 17:14²; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3. These 28 times indicate this is the most used “title” for Jesus in Revelation. But why? And how does this relate to *the violence of the Lamb*?

¹ See G. K. Beale’s *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 422. He gives four reasons for this interpretation. Beale cites Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 217–29 for this same view. Also, the 144,000 as an army is presented concisely in Joseph L. Mangina, *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010) 112. He also cites Bauckham but in his *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 76–80.

² A “new song” usually celebrated a great victory by Yahweh God as observed in the Psalms: 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; and 149:1. See also Isa 42:10 and in Revelation, 5:9; 14:3. The “new song” was always “a response by God’s people to God’s revelation and the experience of a new act of deliverance.” See Pieter A. Verhoeven, article on שׁירה in *NIDOTTE*, Vol. 2, gen. ed., Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 36.

There are at least 200 references to “lamb” in the Bible. “Lambs are associated with gentleness, innocence and dependence.”³ Lambs were used extensively in Israel’s sacrificial system (80 times “lambs” are referenced in Ex, Lev, and Num). They are referred to as “led to the slaughter” (Isa 53:7; cf. Jer 51:40). To describe the future reign of God over a new earth and its peaceful existence, lambs are juxtaposed to wolves (see Isa 11:6; 65:25). At the present time, however, wolves are enemies of lambs (Luke 10:3). The identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God” comes early in his ministry when John the Baptist calls out: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, 36). The Apostle Paul states of Jesus: “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7b). Peter the Apostle does the same in a different manner: “but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot,” making reference to the sacrificial requirement of a “lamb . . . without blemish” (1 Pet 1:19; Exod 12:5). Jesus, indeed, was sinless in his life (see Heb 4:15; 5:9; 7:26; and 9:14).

What are we to make of the fact that one of the elders in the heavenly scene announces that the worthy one to open the scrolls sealed with the seven seals is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” (Gen 49:8–10; Isa 11:1, 10) and that he “has conquered” (Rev 5:5)? The “Lion of Judah” came to be understood as the ruling tribe over all the other tribes when King David ascended the throne over a united Israel. David is a victorious warrior-king. “Naturally we expect a powerful, resplendent, and fear-inducing figure to step forth.”⁴ And so the worthy one is introduced as such—that is what John *heard!* But what he *saw* was “a Lamb standing as slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (my translation but close to ESV deleting “as though it had been”). What can this mean?

Craig Keener has given this background information:

Whereas a lion was the ultimate symbol of power in ancient views of the animal kingdom (cf. also, e.g., Is 35:9; 65:25), a lamb was considered powerless (cf. Is 40:11); a slaughtered lamb was a dramatic contrast with a reigning lion (cf. Is 53:7) . . . in Revelation this figure especially represents the Passover Lamb, who delivers God’s people from the plagues of the following chapters (cf. Ex 12:12–13).⁵

Mangina writes: “What John hears is a Lion, what he sees is a Lamb. What he hears is strength, what he sees is weakness. What he hears is a conqueror, what he sees is the quintessential victim—the Lamb. . . . If what John hears is life, what he sees is death. And yet not so, because the Lamb is *standing*, so that the slaughter is the mark of his victory; he has passed through death and now stands somehow beyond it.”⁶ We could interpret this as Christ is masking himself as a Lamb even though he is a Lion. Or Christ willingly gives up his warrior position in favor of the loving self-sacrifice position. In other words, the violence of the Old Testament God is replaced by the New Testament God of love. These first two interpretations are woefully inadequate if not heretical. A third interpretation is best and one which Revelation seems to unfold: “Christ really is and never ceases to be the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is

³ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, gen. eds., LeLand Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 484.

⁴ Mangina, *Revelation*, 87.

⁵ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1993) 778.

⁶ Mangina, *Revelation*, 87.

indeed a figure of power, but his power is realized precisely in the self-giving love he displays at the cross.”⁷

G. K. Beale offers insightful commentary on this point:

The slain Lamb thus represents the image of a conqueror who was mortally wounded while defeating an enemy. Christ’s death, the end-time sacrifice of the messianic Lamb, becomes interpreted as a sacrifice that not only redeems but also conquers. The idea of conquering is evoked by Genesis 49, Isaiah 11, and the “horns” of the lamb.⁸

Christ as a Lion overcame by being slaughtered as a Lamb, which is the critical event in ch. 5.⁹

The Lamb is the one who not only conquered death but will conquer all of the persecutors of his people through historical punishments and the final judgment (6:1, 16; 17:14).¹⁰

The importance of the “blood of the Lamb” being applied to the people of God cannot be overestimated. Sinful people become pure and white by applying Jesus’ blood to their lives, presumably by confession of faith, repentance, and baptism (Rev 7:14b—“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”) But it can also mean *martyrdom* by following the Lamb (Rev 14:4) to death which is considered a conquering of sorts: “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11). The “slain Lamb” (Rev 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8) will have followers who are also “slain” (Rev 6:9; 13:15 “killed”; 18:24; cp. Rev 11:7; 12:11; 13:7). People will slay one another (Rev 6:4), but, even worse, the beast out of the sea will mimic the “Lamb standing as slain” (Rev 13:3—“mortal wound” ESV).

How does Revelation portray the “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16)? From the very beginning of Revelation we can see this developing theme. At the close of the trinitarian blessing of Rev 1:4–6, Jesus the Messiah’s second coming in victory is announced: “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (Rev 1:7). The word “wail” can also mean “mourn” (ESV note). The Greek word is *κόπτω*, *koptō*, which literally means “to beat,” perhaps to beat one’s breast in wailing and mourning, for all is lost!

The vision of Jesus is patterned after visions of God in the Hebrew Scriptures (Rev 1:12–16). It states that “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword” (Rev 1:16b). In other words, Jesus’ mouth is used as a “weapon” (Isa 49:2). Messiah’s just decrees of judgment are weapons of his mouth (Isa 11:4). The wicked should tremble at this! But so should the saints!

The “son of man” states: “I have the keys of Death and Hades.” Indeed, he has as we shall see (Rev 20:14). This should encourage all who follow Jesus, but it should also prompt reverent fear (Rev 20:15). Having such “keys” carries with it great power (see Isa 22:21–22 and

⁷ Mangina, *Revelation*, 88.

⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 351.

⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 352.

¹⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 353.

Wisd of Sol 16:13). The fact that Jesus is risen from the dead (Rev 1:18a) would encourage his followers now facing possible death.

Thus, we see the “wrath of the Lamb” as he comes at his second coming in judgment against the evil of this world using his mouth “as a sword” and having the “keys of Death and Hades.” But the Lamb’s wrath can be seen in his judgment of the seven churches in Rev 2—3.

Without going into great detail, we simply list the “violence” of Jesus in judgment against certain churches, some of whom have lifted up the ire of the Lord. This is what Jesus, the Lamb of God, will do:

Ephesus—“remove your lampstand,” thus removing the Holy Spirit because they have left their first love.

Pergamum—“war against them with the sword of Messiah’s mouth” because of their false teaching or at least tolerating false teaching.

Thyatira—“each given as their works deserve,” caused by their lack of discernment and toleration of heresy.

Sardis—“Messiah will come like a thief” because of their dead works.

Laodicea—“spit out of Messiah’s mouth” because of their spiritual blindness being bankrupt, naked, and lukewarm in spirituality and maturity.

In Revelation 4—5, the throne-room scene of God and the “son of man,” who is now called the “Lamb standing as slain” (Rev 5:6), we find this Lamb to be all powerful (“seven horns,” Dan 8) and filled with God’s Spirit (“seven eyes,” Zech 3:9; 4:10). He is the only one worthy to open the seals of the scroll in God’s right hand, written front and back. His worthiness will be expressed later when the scene of his second coming is prophetically revealed and he is called “Faithful [or Trustworthy] and True” (Rev 19:11). John heard myriad and myriad of angels shouting: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

By opening the seven seals, Jesus is considered the Lord of history. History is an instrument of judgment employed by the Lamb to bring his enemies to justice (seals 1-4, conquests, wars, famine, and death). This type of judgment comes in the form as we see it in Rom 1:24, 26, 28 where “God gave them up” to their own sins and their consequences (Rom 1:29–32). The fifth seal is the rationale for the Lamb’s righteous wrath (the martyrs of the faith). The sixth seal is the climax of judgment with the wicked crying out to be hidden from God’s face and “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16). Their wrath has come and who can stand? (Rev 6:17). The only ones who can stand in such judgment are God’s people (Rev 7).

My take on this chapter seven is that the only people who will stand on judgment day to welcome the Messiah are the people who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14b). They have come out of a great tribulation. In life or in death, Jesus will be with them: “For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17; cp. Ps 23:2; Isa 25:8).

The seventh seal opens up the seven trumpets of judgments (Rev 8:7, 8, 10, 12; 9:1, 13; 11:15). A third of everything is destroyed. The last three judgments are “woes” (Rev 8:13). In spite of these “judgments,” Christians will be slaughtered just as certainly as the Lamb was slaughtered (Rev 11:7–10). But to counteract these evil acts, God will raise the slaughtered ones from death and bring them into his presence (Rev 11:11–12). The seventh trumpet will sound the

end when “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). The Church (“twenty-four elders”) worships God in song (Rev 11:16–18). In that song two lines are significant: “The nations raged but your wrath came” (Rev 11:18a). The nations were *enraged* (*όργιζω, orgizo*) but so was God and the Lamb, for “your wrath came” (*όργή, orgē*).¹¹ This was a “tit for tat,” punishment fitting the crime so to speak, for God through the Lamb is “destroying the destroyers of the earth” (Rev 11:18d; cp. Ps 2:1).

Revelation 12—14 is a “free hand” of the same story of judgment and victory over evil by the Lamb. We have already seen the “last judgment” described to some degree at Rev 6:16–17 and 11:15–18. Now in the “free hand” version the final judgment is described at Rev 14:14–20. This is what is called “recapitulation” of the same story of judgment and redemption. It is in these chapters that the real enemies of the Lamb are spelled out: the red Dragon (Rev 12:3) and the two beasts (Rev 13:1, 11, the second of which is called a “false prophet” (Rev 16:13).

While there is the “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16), there is also the “great wrath” of the Dragon (Rev 12:12). In a most powerful way, Revelation reveals how the satan (adversary) *mimics* the Lamb in important aspects:

<u>The Satan (Adversary)</u>	vs.	<u>The Slain Lamb Standing</u>
Wrath (12:12, <i>thumos</i>)	vs.	Wrath (6:16; <i>orgē</i>)
Dragon/Beast/False Prophet (16:13; 20:10)	vs.	Father/Son/Spirit (1:4–5)
Beast with <i>mortal wound-healed</i> (13:3)	vs.	Lamb, <i>standing as slain</i> (5:6)
Mark of the beast (13:16–18)	vs.	Sealing of the saints (7:2–3; 9:4)
Prostitute in purple and scarlet (17:1–6)	vs.	Bride in white (19:7–8)
Beast of the earth-two horns like a lamb but spoke like a Dragon (False Prophet) (13:11)	vs.	Lamb standing as slain-seven horns (5:6)

We have now come full circle from our beginning. The true enemies of the Lamb are revealed in no uncertain terms and in imagery: the revealing of the red Dragon and the two beasts. The Dragon cannot destroy God’s plan for the redemption of human beings and the earth. Even the earth, nature herself, thwarts the adversary’s “flood” (Rev 12:15–16). The Dragon frustrated at not being able to destroy Israel and her Messiah, the text reveals what happens next: “Then the dragon became furious (*orgizō*) with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). In other words, powerful forces of the government and institutions are persecuting Christians, but the real powers behind it are demonic and evil through and through. “And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” (Rev 13:4). Well, the

¹¹ “Wrath” in Revelation is used to translate two Greek words that are synonymous: *όργη* and *θυμός*. The first is found at Rev 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; and 19:15. The verb form is found at Rev 11:18 and 12:17. The second word is found at Rev 12:12; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 18:3; 19:15. They essentially mean the same: anger, wrath, or rage.

Lamb standing as slain will fight against these fierce enemies. In fact, his wrath will be severe and violent to the extreme! Notice the reframe:

He (the one who follows the Dragon and beasts) also will drink the wine of God's wrath (*thumos*), poured full strength into the cup of his anger (*orgē*), and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev 14:10).

So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath (*thumos*) of God (Rev 14:19).

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath (*thumos*) of God is finished (Rev 15:1).

And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath (*thumos*) of God who lives forever and ever (Rev 15:7).

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath (*thumos*) of God" (Rev 16:1).

The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury (*thumos*) of his wrath (*orgē*). (Rev 16:19).

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury (*thumos*) of the wrath (*orgē*) of God the Almighty (Rev 19:15).

Because of this coming violent battle, a key exhortation is given to the readers of Revelation: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faithfulness of Jesus" (Rev 14:12).¹² The seven bowls of God's wrath are the last of the four recapitulations of the unfolding drama of history leading up to the final day of judgment and redemption (see Rev 6—7; 8—11; 14; and 16). The intensity of these judgments and plagues move from 1/4 to 1/3 and finally with the bowls to completeness. But just before the unfolding of these seven bowls of wrath, a song of victory¹³ is sung by the victors (Christians, perhaps martyred) called "the song of Moses" (see Exod 15) and "the song of the Lamb" (Rev 15:3). While the Babylonians taunted the Hebrews by asking them to sing a song (of victory! see Ps 137), this time the victors (martyred saints!?) sing a taunting song of victory over Babylon (Rome):

¹² My book, *The Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah*, published by Wipf & Stock, 2020 addresses the issue of the "subjective/objective genitive" debate as well as a word study on *pistis* (verb, noun, and adjective) throughout the New Testament. My work on "Revelation" is especially relevant for this paper.

¹³ Psalm 137 is a good example of a dominating Babylon asking captive Israel to sing one of their "victory songs," an ironic and sarcastic request. In Hebrew it is called a **סִמְחָה**, *simchā*, a "mocking song" of victory over an enemy. See my commentary on Psalms: *The College Press NIV Commentary: Psalms Volume 2* (Joplin: College Press, 2004) 469.

Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O Lord,
And glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
And worship you,
For your righteous acts have been revealed
(Rev 15:3–4)

We must remember that Jesus, *the Lamb standing as slain*, is the one opening the seals, leading to the blowing of the seven trumpets and the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath. It is a Holy of Holies revelation (Rev 15:8).

The bowls are full of the wrath of God (Rev 15:7). The plagues mimic the plagues of Egypt, only on steroids! The violence of the Lamb is depicted in the consequences of what these plagues do:

#1—“harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image” (Rev 16:2).

#2—“it (the sea) became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea” (Rev 16:3).

#3—“they (“the rivers and the springs of water”) became blood” (Rev 16:4). This particular plague has an ironic twist to it, for “they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!” Tit for tat! (Rev 16:6).

#4—“it (“sun”) was allowed to scorch people with fire” (Rev 16:8). With this plague it is reported that “they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory” (Rev 16:9).

#5—“the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores” (Rev 16:10–11). Again, they did not repent!

#6—“on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up” (Rev 16:12). Apparently, this is a reference to Rome’s feared enemy, the Parthians, who were vicious warriors who had at one time defeated the Roman army arrayed against them. The great battle takes place at Armageddon (Rev 16:16). The implication is that the “unclean spirits” of the dragon, beast, and false prophet will be defeated shortly and completely.

#7—The seventh bowl is poured into the air. “And great hailstones about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe” (Rev 16:21). A loud voice (angel? The Lamb? God?) came out of the temple and throne and said: “It is done!” (Rev 16:17c). “The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury (*thumos*) of his wrath (*orgē*)” (Rev 16:19).

With these seven bowls poured out, the only thing remaining is to show how the Lamb conquers these enemies (end of world judgment—Rev 17—20) and how God restores creation

and all who followed the Lamb (new heaven and new earth—Rev 21—22). This is done in reverse order in which they were revealed.

A “tacky” prostitute sits on a scarlet beast (red dragon). “And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:6). This section clearly is referring to Rome and her kings (Caesars), whatever else it means. “They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful” (Rev 17:14). “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! . . . For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion (*thumos*) of her sexual immorality” (Rev 18:2a, 3a). Rome will be “no more” (Rev 18:21–24).

At this point judgment is interrupted with the rejoicing and celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb: “for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his Bride (the Church) has made herself ready” (Rev 19:7b). The Lamb is then presented as the warrior-king (Lion of Judah?) who is sitting on a white horse who comes as conqueror. It is well worthwhile to read his description in full:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury (*thumos*) of the wrath (*orgē*) of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11–16).

Three things I want to point out about this text. First, it seems to be a reflection of the Anointed Warrior of Isa 59—63, particularly Isa 59:17–19 and 63:1–6. As would be normal in Isaiah’s day to depict the Anointed Warrior as having the blood of his enemies splattered on his garments (Isa 63:3), here in Revelation the Warrior on the white horse has his “robe dipped in blood,” his own blood, for he is the Lamb standing *as slain!* That is how he has conquered. The Messiah’s sacrificial death belongs to the way God rules the world!¹⁴ Tonstad concluded: “In Revelation the faithfulness of Jesus in the form of the slaughtered Lamb is the means by which God wins the war that began in heaven and the means by which believers must prevail through the climax of the cosmic conflict.”¹⁵ I am pleased to know that the young scholars who give a pictorial overview of bible books called “The Bible Project” agrees with me that the “blood” is Jesus’ own blood!

Secondly, the phrase, “King of kings and Lord of lords” is in a reversed chiastic arrangement with the earlier phrase: “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev 17:14). That links these two passages together in a meaningful way. Revelation 17 is about the demise of the great prostitute representing Rome while Rev 19 is about the victorious Lamb who fulfills the prophesies of Ps 2:9 and Isa 49:2. Indeed, “he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:15c).

¹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 64.

¹⁵ Sigve Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006) 348.

Thirdly, the “army of God” (the 144,000 as mentioned earlier) is the *martyr church* returning with the Lamb to enjoy the victory of the Lamb and to see the fulfillment of their earlier cry: “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). It is now unfolding! “And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses” (Rev 19:14).

While a heavenly host rejoice over being invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), another “supper” in contrast is a macabre event where birds eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses, their riders, all men, free and slave, small and great (Rev 19:17–21). The vicious slaughter that is about to be accomplished is called: “the great supper of God” (Rev 19:17). God will *eat them up!*

The violence of the Lamb is now depicted in rapid succession in reverse order as they first appeared:

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh (Rev 19:20–21).

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Rev 20:10).

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. (Rev 20:14).

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

The last two chapters of Revelation are as comforting to persecuted Christians as is possible, but there is imbedded in them a warning, a portion of which I quote: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, . . . their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8). The “cowardly” and “the faithless,” I think, were Christians who wilted under the threat of death to say “Caesar is lord!” They were “faithless” in that they did not endure to the end (see Rev 14:12).

Revelation is a theodicy. Its message is that God is righteous, for he has made all things new (again!). The evil of the world is gone. In these two chapters the title “Lamb” is mentioned seven times (Rev 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). After considering Jesus as a *violent Lamb*, we must remember that he is still, at the same time, “the Lion of Judah,” and always will be! In C.S. Lewis’ chronicles of Narnia (“The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”), the question the children ask about Aslan, the Lion (symbol of the Christ) is instructive: Mr. Beaver informs the children about Aslan—

“Aslan is a lion—*the* Lion, the great Lion.”

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver, “if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”¹⁶

We ask the question: “Is the Lamb safe? Is he safe?” The answer is “No, but He is good!” He was *violent* against our enemies, but good to “those who follow Him.” The Lamb is the light of the new City of God, the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:23). “But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27).

In the meantime, we witness totalitarian governments that control their people in all aspects of life or at least attempt to: North Korea, Iran, China, and even Russia. There are others, of course. America is not exempt from this possibility. For the first time science and new technology has enabled such political powers to proceed with their agenda: total control of people’s behavior and thinking by the control of the flow of information. All that matters is the will to power. As Dr. Arnn observed: “We can see today the totalitarian impulse among powerful forces in our politics and culture. We can see it in the rise and imposition of doublethink, and we can see it in the increasing attempt to rewrite our history.”¹⁷

As Christians, we must profess our first allegiance to the King and his kingdom, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb *standing as slain*, and we must “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev 14:4b), keeping “the commandments of God and the faithfulness of Jesus” (Rev 14:12b). As American Christians we must speak truth to power and give hope to the powerless through our testimony to Jesus—“Let the . . . righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy” (Rev 22:11b).

APPENDIX:

My published book, *The Faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah: A Gospel Emphasis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020) is available for 30% off retail of \$36 which would be \$25 plus postage anywhere in the USA for \$3.45, for a total of \$28.45. (316 pages).

All I need is your name, address, and note that you want a signed copy of the book. My address is: Walt Zorn, 7507 Hodges Ferry Road, Knoxville, TN 37920. You may contact me now or text me at 217-671-0702 or send an email to wdzorn@gmail.com. Thanks so much!

The book addresses the issue of the “subjective/objective genitive” debate in Paul’s epistles plus a study of the word *pistis* (verb, noun, and adjective) throughout the New Testament to show how the New Testament presents the gospel emphasis in terms of the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. I will need to order the copies needed, so be patient in terms of time.

Thanks, Walt Zorn

¹⁶ Lyle W. Dorsett, ed., *The Essential C.S. Lewis* (New York: Macmillan, 1988) 93.

¹⁷ Larry P. Arnn, *Imprimis* (Dec 2020, Vol. 49, No. 12) 6.