

ESCHATOLOGY OF REVELATION FIVE

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In my previous article (*EndTime Issues...*, vol. 5, No. 8, p. 14), we identified the introductory visions to each of the five, sevenfold, prophetic outlines of Revelation. Revelation uses just nine verses (1:12-20) to introduce the seven churches, five verses (8:2-6) for the seven trumpets, three verses (10:1-3) to lay the ground work for the seven thunders, and eight verses (5:1-8) to set the stage for the seven last plagues. However, the book utilizes a full twenty-five verses (4:1-11 and 5:1-14) to prepare us for the seven seals.

This is a colossal amount of verses to devote merely to an introduction. It makes the introductory scene carry an immense amount of importance, and we who study Revelation should take note of this. Ellen White also indicates the importance of this material. She says: "The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied."^[1]

Three Basic Interpretations

To what point in time does the scene of these two chapters refer? Some Adventists maintain that the vision is a timeless, highly symbolic portrayal of the victory of Christ and has no specific event at all in mind. We can summarily dismiss this possibility by noting the statement of the Biblical account that the things John was about to see represented "... what must take place after these things." Revelation 4:1 (NASB). This tells us that what the vision will deal with are specific events, rather than just ideas or concepts.

Most Adventist scholars take the position that the vision portrays the coronation of Christ at His ascension to heaven in A.D. 31. There are others who see in this vision a depiction of events following the investigative judgment scene in heaven, begun in A.D. 1844.

Which position is right? If a definite, heavenly event is indeed portrayed, which event is it? Is this introductory vision apostolic, or eschatological in nature? Is it a 31 A.D. event, or an 1844 A.D. related event? Did it occur in John's day, or in our day? Is it a coronation scene, or a judgment scene? To find the answer to these questions is to discover a vital key that will help us unlock the mysteries of the seven seals. It is the purpose of this article to explore this issue and give the Biblical reasons supporting the eschatological significance of this impressive vision. In the next article, we shall study the impact this interpretation has on the entire book of Revelation.

No. 1: After, Not Before, the Vision

This introductory vision begins with a clear time statement: "After this I looked, and, behold, a door [was] opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard [was] as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter." Revelation 4:1 (KJV).

The operative word in this text is "hereafter." John is told that the things he is about to see would take place in a certain era of time. This word, "hereafter," (which in Greek is actually a phrase, "after these things") absolutely prevents us from concluding that the following scene is the coronation, or the inauguration, of Christ in 31 A.D., as that event happened about 60 years before John saw this vision. John is told plainly that what he is about to see is not a past event, but a future one. This disqualifies the arrival of Christ in heaven at His ascension as a possible interpretation.

No. 2: The Opened Door

The very first thing John was shown in this introductory passage was "a door standing open in heaven." Revelation 4:1 (NIV). This door was not a door into heaven, but a door in heaven. This door is not a meaningless prop for the new vision. It had some bearing on the events of the seven seals John was about to see, because he was told that he had to come up through that door in order to see "what would take place after" the things of his previous vision (the seven churches).

It does not do violence to the text to assume that the door just mentioned is referring to the door spoken of a few verses before: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: ..." Revelation 3:7,8 (KJV)

Some expositors would interpret this newly opened door to the Philadelphians as a "door of opportunity" to preach the gospel, citing such usage in I Cor. 16:9 and II Co. 2:12. On the surface, this meaning of the opened door as the dawning of a new day to preach the gospel would fit the Philadelphian experience, but Ellen White assigns a different meaning. She states, on the authority of a vision given her, that this door was not a door on earth, but the sanctuary door in heaven: "I saw that Jesus had shut the door in the Holy Place and no man can open it, and that He had opened the door in the Most Holy Place and no man can shut it (Rev. 3:7,8) ..." [2]

Therefore, this door standing ajar in heaven was a kind of "time machine" for John. Once he stepped through it, he was catapulted into the post-1844 era of time, in the very era of the history of the world when the seven seal events would unfold.

No. 3: Enthroned Elders

Surrounding the throne were 24 other thrones, and seated on them were 24 elders. Revelation 4:4 (NIV). There is no Biblical or Spirit of Prophecy evidence that the saints taken captive to heaven with Christ at His ascension were actually enthroned at the time. There is Biblical information, however, that the enthronement of these saved human beings took place at the end-time, judgment event: "As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the ancient of Days took his seat.... The court was seated and the books were opened." Daniel 7:9, 10 (NIV). In Daniel's description, empty thrones came into existence, but without occupants. The narrative describes others being seated on surrounding thrones after, not before, God was seated on

His throne, and that the seating would take place at the opening session of the heavenly judgment. It was clear to Daniel that this was a judicial, rather than an inaugural, ceremony.

John saw the same arrangement in his Patmos vision. John counted the number of thrones. Daniel did not. John recognized the occupants on the throne as saved "elders." Daniel did not. These two visions are the only Bible pictures of God's throne with additional thrones surrounding it, in some type of ceremony, or event. If we let the Bible interpret itself, we can only conclude that these two visions depict the same event – an end-time, investigative judgment scene, rather than a special ceremony installing Christ on a throne, or initiating Him into an intercessory ministry.

There are some who reject the idea that these two visions, one by Daniel and the other by John, are identical, investigative judgment scenes, citing the differences in the details of the visions. But all these differences can be explained by understanding that Daniel witnessed the investigative judgment at its beginning ("The court was seated, and the books were opened." [NIV]), while John witnessed the court already in session (the door had already been opened when his vision began). Daniel watched the opening moments when the thrones were set up and the books made ready, while John walked in on the scene sometime after the opening ceremonies were completed because the thrones were already in place and occupied. Daniel witnessed a very dramatic approach of Christ to the throne (Daniel 7:13), while John noticed that Christ was already at the throne, standing "in the midst" of it (Revelation 5:6). Daniel notices the bringing out of "books." These are records needed to judge dead people whose lives were over. John did not notice the use of any books being used, except for the one book sealed with seven seals in the Father's hand. Could it be that John was witnessing the closing scenes of the judgment, and that the focus of the session was about to change from the judgment of the dead to the judgment of the living? Naturally, the present and future experience of the living, not their past experience, would be the vital criteria for this phase of the judgment. The book in the hand of the Father contained future events, and this is the reason the attention of the judgment was on it, rather than on records of past events, involving those already dead.

No. 4: The Location of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is mentioned twice in the vision – once in each chapter. Each time He is represented, His location is given: "... and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Revelation 4:5 (KJV).

"And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth." Revelation 5:6 (NASB).

In the latter verse there are two divine individuals mentioned, and their relative locations given by two different participles. Christ the Lamb is standing (a present participle indicating present on-going action). The seven-fold Spirit is said to have been sent (a present perfect participle indicating already completed action. Greek: "having been sent."). In other words, this text is saying that while Jesus was standing before the throne in heaven in this scene, the Holy Spirit was at that very moment on this earth, having been previously sent there, obviously on a

mission. Joel 2:28-31 pictures this sending of God's Spirit "upon all flesh" as the last-day outpouring we call the latter rain.

This brings us to the conclusion that the latter rain upon earth has already begun while the events of Chapter 5 are going on in heaven.

No. 5: The Proclaiming Angel

"And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon." Revelation 5:2, 3 (KJV)

Seventh-day Adventists have long believed that when in revelation a strong angel proclaims with a loud voice a message to earth's inhabitants, that angel represents a religious awakening among God's people, centered around the specific message the angel is proclaiming. Examples of this are the "mighty angel" crying with a loud voice in Chapter 10; the angel "having great power" in Chapter 18; and the three angels of Chapter 14, who "... say with a loud voice ..." their special message "... unto them that dwell on the earth." This was the meaning Ellen White saw in such angels of Revelation.

"The angels are represented as flying in the midst of heaven, proclaiming to the world a message of warning, and having a direct bearing upon the people living in the last days of this earth's history. No one hears the voice of these angels, for they are a symbol to represent the people of God who are working in harmony with the universe of heaven. Men and women, enlightened by the Spirit of God and sanctified through the truth, proclaim the three messages in their order."^[3]

Chapter 5 of Revelation pictures "a strong angel," calling the attention of the world to the seven-sealed book "with a loud voice," just prior to, or in connection with, the Holy Spirit being sent into all the earth. Since no spiritual awakening among men in the past has been energized by a study of the seven seals, it is safe to say that the matters of Revelation 5 are yet future. This is a powerful impetus for us to reexamine closely this most unique, prophetic outline today.

No. 6: An End-time Chapter

Ellen White had a specific comment to make concerning Chapter 5 of Revelation: "The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for these last days. There are some who are deceived. They do not realize what is coming on the earth."^[4]

Although this is not a time clue directly from the Biblical passage itself, it brings an enormous weight of evidence to our study. Ellen White saw great significance for the last days in this chapter. The proposal that Chapter 5 is a 31 A.D. scene in which Christ is inaugurated in heaven at His ascension removes this scene a long way from any association with matters dealing with the work of God for these last days. Her unusual commentary on this chapter of

Revelation places the time frame for it squarely in the last days, precisely as does the overwhelming weight of Biblical evidence in the introductory scene.

[These six persuasive points convincingly suggest the eschatological setting of chapter 5 and, therefore, an end-time motif of what follows. ed.]

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References (emphases added unless otherwise noted):

[1] Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 267.

[2] Early Writings, p. 42.

[3] Selected Messages, bk 2, p. 387.

[4] Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 267.