

## REVELATION 5 AND 19 AS LITERARY RECIPROCAL

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My colleague Kenneth A. Strand and I have published previously in *AUSS* two studies on the literary form of Rev 18.<sup>1</sup> In those two studies, that chapter was found to be a discrete literary unit consisting of seven hymns of judgment upon the impure woman of the prophecy, called "Babylon the Great." These seven hymns are distributed in chiasmic order according to both their *form* (Shea) and their *theological content* (Strand). I take that conclusion about Rev 18 as the starting point for the following discussion of Rev 19.

### 1. *The Hymns of Rev 19:1-8 and Those in Rev 18*

With the seven brief hymnic statements of Rev 18 constituting a discrete literary unit, how do the hymns which follow in Rev 19 relate to them and to the book of Revelation as a whole? Rev 19 begins with a hymn in praise of God for his just judgments, especially upon the symbolic woman discussed in the two preceding chapters. This hymn (in vss. 1-3) is cried out with a mighty voice by a great multitude in heaven. Next (in vs. 4), the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bow down and worship God with their exclamation, "Amen! Hallelujah!" Thirdly, there comes a voice from the throne which exhorts all of God's servants to praise Him (vs. 5). And finally, the great multitude is heard again rejoicing because the Lord God Almighty reigns and the "Marriage of the Lamb" has come (vss. 6-8). At that point, the passage shifts to another topic: namely, instructions to the prophet to write down what he has seen and heard (vss. 9-10).

<sup>1</sup>K. A. Strand, "Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment as Portrayed in Revelation 18," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 53-59. W. H. Shea, "Chiasm in Theme and by Form in Revelation 18," *AUSS* 20 (1982): 249-255.

That there are four hymnic statements in Rev 19:1-8 is clear not only from their differing content, but also from the statements which introduce them and the source from which they issue—the great multitude, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, the voice from the throne, and again the great multitude. If these four hymns of Rev 19 were added to the seven in Rev 18, we would have a total of eleven hymnic statements to outline and organize by form and content. Do all eleven of these belong together, or should the latter four be separated off from the previous seven as a separate literary unit? Several considerations suggest that the four hymns of Rev 19 belong together as a separate literary unit.

In the first place, only the first of these four is related to the hymns of the previous chapter by content, and that as a transitional summary statement. Basically, these four hymns of Rev 19 are addressed to God, in praise of him, whereas those of the previous chapter are addressed against the woman, Babylon, who suffers from the judgments she justly receives.

In the second place, the scene of action in Rev 19 is considerably different from that in Rev 18. In the earlier chapter, it is on earth; in Rev 19 it is in heaven: In Rev 18 the parties proclaiming the justice of the judgments upon the woman include the kings, merchants, and seamen of earth, an angel who comes down to earth, and an angel who casts a millstone into the sea, which is on earth. By way of contrast, the action in the case of the four hymns with which Rev 19 begins is focused in heaven. The great multitude who cry out the first and last of these exclamations are said to be "in heaven" (19:1). The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders who utter the second of these exclamations are always seen to be before God's throne in heaven (19:2; cf. 4:2-6). The third charge is uttered by a voice from the throne of God itself (19:5). No reference is made in any of the headings of these hymns to any proclamation of them on earth; rather, they are all sung in heaven.

Thus, from a study of their internal contents and their labels, there is good reason to separate the hymns of Rev 19 from those of Rev 18. However, there is also a third reason why the four hymns of Rev 19 should be separated from the seven hymns of Rev 18: namely, their location in the chiasmic structure of the book of Revelation. This structure has been elucidated by Strand in his

studies on the book.<sup>2</sup> In his outline, the seven trumpets and the seven plagues are seen to balance each other towards the center of the book. This is true both in terms of their location within that structure and through the similar phraseology they employ.<sup>3</sup> Further towards the commencement and conclusion of this outline, one encounters the "Church Militant" in this present Earth (Rev 1-3) and the "Church Triumphant" in the New Earth (Rev 21-22).

The passage with which we are dealing here, Rev 19, is located in the section intermediate in position between these central and peripheral blocs. Strand has labelled this general section of Rev 19:1-21:4 as the "Judgmental Finale by God."<sup>4</sup> The balancing intermediate section in the first half of the book (Rev 4:1-8:1) he has identified as the "Ongoing Activity of God." Within these intermediate sections I have previously suggested that the seven seals can be seen as balanced by the seven hymns of judgment in Rev 18.<sup>5</sup>

Since the Millennium is a somewhat different topic, Rev 20 can be excluded from consideration here. On the other hand, Rev 4 and 5 come together as a pair of related passages, so they can be considered together. In a chiasmic structure, however, the last part of the first section should be considered in comparison to the first part of the last section. This means that we have narrowed down our comparison to one between the end of Rev 5 and the beginning of Rev 19. What do we find of a similar nature in these two sections?

## 2. *A Comparison of the Hymns in Rev 5:8-14 and 19:1-8*

Rev 5 concludes with a series of four hymns (vss. 8-14). Following the Lamb's taking the scroll from the hand of God (vs. 7)

<sup>2</sup>K. A. Strand, *Perspectives in the Book of Revelation* (Worthington, Ohio, 1975); idem, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Naples, Florida, 1979); idem, "Chiasmic Structure and Some Motifs in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 16 (1978): 401-408. See especially the chart on p. 52 in the second work listed in this note.

<sup>3</sup>Strand, *Interpreting*, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup>Shea, "Chiasm in Theme," p. 250.

this series of four hymns is sung in praise to the Lamb for his having redeemed mankind by his blood.

### *Structural Parallels*

The first of the four hymns in Rev 5 is sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (vss. 8-10). The next hymn is sung by the heavenly host of angels (vss. 11-12). Then all of the animate universe joins in on a grand chorus of praise (vs. 13). Finally, the scene shifts back to the group with whom this set of hymns began, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. They utter the final word, "Amen!" (vs. 14).

In terms of balance, therefore, we find that Rev 5 ends with four hymns and Rev 19 begins with four hymns. The same number of songs sung in each case suggests that this relationship is not just accidental, but that it is by design. Both of these sets of four hymns are also sung in the same context, heaven. Beyond that, these two passages contain a certain similarity of order for the different choruses that sing these songs; but when they are compared in detail with each other, that order is found to be *reciprocal* in nature. This can be demonstrated best by an outline of the headings for the groups involved (Outline 1, below).

#### OUTLINE 1: RECIPROCAL NATURE OF THE HYMNS IN REV 5 AND 19

##### *Rev 5:8-14*

##### *Rev 19:1-8*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| A. Four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell                                       | B. I heard what seemed to be the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,                     |
| B. The voice of many angels, 10,000 × 10,000 and 1000s of 1000s saying with a loud voice,  | A. Twenty-four elders and four living creatures fell down and worshiped . . . saying, "Amen! Hallelujah!" |
| C. Every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea, saying,            | D. From the throne a voice, saying,   |
| A. The four living creatures said, "Amen!" the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped. | B'. I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, saying,                                     |

The four hymns of Rev 5 begin and end with the same group, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. The four hymns of Rev 19 begin and end with the same group, the great multitude in

heaven. It is this same group of the multitude of heavenly angels that occupies second position in the series of Rev 5. In turn, the group with which the series of Rev 5 begins, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, occupies second position in the series of Rev 19. There is also a difference, however, in that the order of the components has been reversed. In Rev 5, the order is "the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders," while in Rev 19:4 it is "the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures." Just as the book of Revelation itself is chiastic, and as these passages are chiastic, so this phraseology has been turned around into a chiastic order when its occurrences in these two passages are compared.

As for the two sets of singers, the one real difference lies in the fact that whereas all of the animate chorus of the universe joins in the anthem in Rev 5, only a voice is heard from the throne in Rev 19. However, a certain balance is involved here, too, since in the place where all of God's creatures appear in one instance, God himself appears in the other.

The "great multitude in heaven" from whom the voice is heard twice in the latter series has been identified here with the "many angels" whose voice is heard in the first series. The word "voice" is used twice in 5:11 and once each in 19:1 and 19:6, so that the number of its occurrences is the same between the two passages. The number of angels in 5:11 is given as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands," which parallels the number of angels gathered before the throne in the heavenly court scene of Dan 7:10. The number is the same, but the order between 1000s and 10,000s has been reversed between Daniel and Revelation. This is one of a number of links between these two passages. In the outline above, I have paraphrased the OT passage for use here with this NT passage, in order to emphasize the numerical link. Rev 5:11 is the only passage in Revelation where the angelic host is numbered, and Dan 7:10 is the only passage in Daniel where that host is numbered.

### *The Addresses of the Hymns*

As far as the messages of the hymns of Rev 5 and 19 are concerned, one fact stands out from a comparison between these two passages. The hymns of the former chapter are directed to Christ as

the Lamb and give praise to him for the redemption he has worked out; and in Rev 19, it is God the Father who is addressed by the hymns, with his judgment and rule being emphasized. But there are common elements in this. In the first and third hymns of the latter passage, although the address is given simply as "God," in the fourth hymn he is identified as "Lord God Almighty." This is the same title used for God the Father in Rev 4:8, the God from whom the Lamb receives the scroll in chap. 5.

There is also a crossover in the address of the hymns themselves in each set. The next to the last hymn of Rev 5 is addressed to both "him who sits upon the throne" and "the Lamb," and the last of the four hymns in Rev 19 refers to both the "Lord God Almighty" and "the Lamb" whose bride is ready for the marriage.

### *Other Considerations*

The length of the hymns varies in the two passages. Rev 5 begins with its longer hymn, it continues with two medium-length hymns, and it concludes with its separate "Amen." Rev 19 begins and ends with its longer hymns, and a medium-length hymn and a separate "Amen" occur between them.

Three out of four of the hymns in Rev 19 begin with the word "Hallelujah." The exception is the second one, the one that is uttered by the elders and the living creatures. They say "Amen" there, the same thing they say at the end of the series of hymns in Rev 5. Having repeated this "Amen" in Rev 19, they then add "Hallelujah" to it. This "Amen" in the series of Rev 19 appears to serve the purpose of adding emphasis to the preceding hymn, which extols the justice of God in his judgments.

### *Summary*

The parallels between these two sets of hymns can be seen from a number of points of view. First, the number of four in each series is the same. Second, the hymns are distributed in the same pattern as far as their participants are concerned—A:B:C:A' in both cases (in Outline 1, above, the Rev 19 series is given as B:A:D:B' to highlight the links between the two sets of hymns). Third, there is a crossover between the participants in these two sets of hymns, and this crossover follows a pattern of A/A' being utilized for B in the opposite series (again, highlighted in Outline 1). Fourth, there

is a pattern in terms of the persons being addressed. In the first instance it is A:A:A + B:A, while in the second it is B:B:B:B + A. Fifth, the fourth hymn in the first series is essentially the same in content as the second hymn in the second series, and it is sung by the same group. Sixth, there are seven different words or phrases that are common to both sets of hymns.

The foregoing lines of evidence appear to be sufficient to illustrate the point that the two sets of hymns in Rev 5:8-14 and 19:1-8 are closely related to each other. One by-product of this fact is the isolation, as well, of the set of four hymns at the beginning of Rev 19 from the set of seven hymns on a different topic in Rev 18.

### 3. *The Hymns in Their Broader Contexts in Rev 5 and 19*

A final point that we should consider here is the fact that the four hymns at the beginning of Rev 19 are found in a context very similar to that in which the four hymns at the end of Rev 5 are found. Aside from the basic setting of the throne surrounded by four living creatures and twenty-four elders, three main elements are especially noteworthy in these contexts. First, there is the appearance of Christ and his direction of motion and function in each case. Second, there is the somewhat parenthetical personal involvement of the prophet with the vision. And third, there are two sets of related hymns that have already been examined in detail above. The intrusion of the prophet and the nature of Christ's appearance in both visions deserve a further word here.

It is indeed a rather striking feature of these two apocalyptic narratives that the prophet intrudes into the scene of action in each vision. In Rev 5, the prophet appears in the vision when he begins to weep because no one was found worthy to open the scroll in the right hand of God. One of the elders in the scene of the vision comforts him by assuring him that Christ as the Lion of the tribe of Judah and as the Root of David has conquered and is thus worthy to open the scroll (5:4-5). In Rev 19, when the four hymns of that chapter were concluded, the angel instructed John to write down the true words of God. John then fell at the feet of the angel in directing his worship towards him, but was instructed not to do that (19:9-10). In each case an imperative in the negative was addressed to the prophet: in the first case he was *not* to weep; in the second, he was *not* to worship the angel.

The views of Christ in these two narratives may also be compared and contrasted. In Rev 5:5-7, Christ is given one set of titles, is described in one way, and carries out one particular type of activity—the taking of the scroll from the hand of God. In Rev 19:11-16, he is given another set of titles, is described in another way, and carries out another type of activity—riding forth from Heaven to take over rule in the earth as King of kings. Although these two views of Christ tell us different things about him, they nonetheless are related in that he and aspects of his activity are the subjects of the two scenes. It is also interesting to notice the reciprocal nature of his motion in these two cases. In the former he comes to the Father to take the scroll, whereas in the latter he rides forth from the Father to take over the rule of the earth.

These three main scenes that we have just noted can also be related to each other in a structural order. In Rev 5 we see the challenge to Christ and his response to that challenge broken up by the prophet's interaction with the vision. This is then followed by the four hymns with which Rev 5 concludes. The order here is thus: A<sub>1</sub>:B:A<sub>2</sub>:C. Rev 19 begins with its set of four hymns or C. It continues with the prophet's interaction with the vision or B. It concludes with a vision of Christ, or A (for purposes of the present discussion I have limited the portion of Rev 19 examined here to vss. 1-16). The order of presentation in Rev 19 is thus a straightforward C:B:A. This is obviously an inversion of the order in chap. 5 (allowing of course for the completion of action denoted by A<sub>2</sub>).

These two larger contexts of the hymns can be compared in outline form (given in Outline 2, on p. 257). From such a comparison it seems reasonable to conclude that the four hymns of Rev 19:1-8 constitute a literary unit of their own—one that is separate from Rev 18—and that they belong more directly to those elements of the literary structure of the book of Revelation which involve the rest of chap. 19. These relations also suggest that chap. 19 may tell us something more about the nature of what is described in the interesting and important scene of Rev 4-5, which itself is a topic that deserves further investigation.

OUTLINE 2: THE CONTEXTS OF THE HYMNS IN REV 5 AND 19

*Rev 5*

*Rev 19*

A<sub>1</sub>. Setting for the Appearance of Christ,  
vss. 1-3

C. Four Hymns, }  
vss. 1-8        b. Angels, vss. 1-3  
                  a. Elders, vs. 4  
                  d. God, vs. 5  
                  b'. Angels, vss. 6-8

B. Prophet's Interjection, vss. 4-5

B. Prophet's Interjection, vss. 9-10

A<sub>2</sub>. Appearance of Christ: Comes to the  
Father as Redeeming Lamb, vss. 6-7

A. Appearance of Christ: Goes from  
the Father as King of kings, vss.  
11-16

C. Four Hymns, }  
vss. 8-14        a. Elders, vss. 8-10  
                  b. Angels, vss. 11-12  
                  c. Universe, vs. 13  
                  a'. Elders, vs. 14