

# THE COMING LAMB: JOHN'S APOCALYPTIC INTRODUCTION OF CHRIST AND ITS ESCHATOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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**I. ARGUMENT AND DESIGN:** After perusing several incomplete interpretive options for ἀρνίον, this argument hopes to reach a responsibly robust interpretation of John's humble and glorious Lamb as witnessed in his apocalyptic introduction by means of a contextual-grammatical-canonical-historical hermeneutic that is focused on the authorial intent and what is reflected in the text of Revelation.

## II. INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

A. Options available to John:

1. πάσχα (1 Cor 5:7)
2. ἀμνός (John 1:29)
3. ἀρὴν (Luke 10:3)

B. Possible Referents/Allusions for John's Choice of ἀρνίον:

1. Lamb of sacrifice
2. Lamb of Passover
3. Lamb of Slaughter (Isa 53:7)
4. Lamb as Ram/Goat (Dan 8)
5. Lamb/Aqedah (Gen 22)
6. Lamb of vulnerability (Jer 11:19; 50:45; Ps 114:4, 1 Isa 40:11)

C. Conclusion: Ultimately, each of these choices for their own set of reasons is found wanting. Therefore, an alternative must be pursued that can provide a more robust and altogether more fitting interpretation of Revelation's protagonist—an alternative that allows the text of the Apocalypse to supervene of the meaning of important terms.

## III. THE HUMBLE AND GLORIOUS LAMB OF REVELATION

A. The Context of Rev 5:6-10

B. Toward and Interpretation

1. Much of what this passage has to say is contingent on the understanding ἀρνίον
2. John appears to be intentionally highlighting the antithetical nature of these two images—Lion and Lamb—and their connection to one figure who embodies the connotations of both.
3. In one breath, John depicts the Lamb as slain and in the next he assigns images of dominion and rule to this humble figure. Inasmuch as the OT uses the horn as a symbol of strength and power
4. A tentative interpretation of this passage and its most central term, especially given the context in which it is found, involves Jesus' unique ability to set in motion the *eschaton* and thereby the ultimate salvation (glorification) of his people. This ability is afforded him because he (the Lion of the Tribe of Judah) humiliated himself to the point of

death (a Lamb standing as if slain) and as such has been given all power (seven horns) and perception (seven eyes), to continue to perform God's will. Because of this, he is worthy of worship. The christological statement made here (accentuated by the image of the ἀρνίον) successfully portrays Jesus in his humblest and therefore most glorious light (His passion). This symbol affords Christ equal status with God, the praise of all present in this heavenly spectacle, and the kind of literary capacity necessary to house many other Christological themes within its domain. It is this image in which John decides to cast Jesus throughout the remainder of Revelation.

### C. Canonical and Historical Analysis of the Aforementioned Interpretation

1. Complying with Johannine Literature
2. Compared to New Testament Literature
3. Juxtaposed Alongside Old Testament Literature
4. Considering Extra-biblical Literature

**IV. CONCLUSION:** In Revelation 5:6–10, Jesus is cast as a brilliant paradox that accentuates not only his matchless glory but his uncompromising humility. Augustine reached a similar conclusion regarding this term as connected to this passage when he said,

“Who is this, both Lamb and lion? He endured death as a lamb; he devoured it as a lion. Who is this, both lamb and lion? Gentle and strong, lovable and terrifying, innocent and mighty silent when he was being judged, roaring when he comes to judge” (Augustine, *Sermon* 375).

The words used (particularly ἀρνίον), descriptions offered (seven horns and seven eyes), worship witnessed, precedent given (in both the Old and NTs), and even the extra-biblical usage of the same term support these claims. By employing a peculiar term in this midst of his opening description of Christ, John allows himself the literary freedom to accomplish his goal of describing a humble and therefore glorious God-Man that he calls to mind no less than 28 additional times throughout the remainder of this letter in a variety of contexts (always, following Revelation 5:6, with the definite article of previous reference). Because John endorses a relatively unique term (ἀρνίον) bereft of formal historical connotations, it is malleable enough to be imbued with more general themes like humility and glory. Because of its unique semantic range bookended by the related poles of utter humility and supreme glory, ἀρνίον is not as limited as other more developed terms and can therefore encompass a variety of multivalent christological considerations such as:

- A. The Lamb who is worthy of worship (Rev. 5:9, 12, 13; 7:9-12; 13:8; 15:3-4)
- B. The Lamb who is Judge (Rev. 6:1, 16; 14:10)
- C. The Lamb who leads (as shepherd, general, and host) (Rev. 7:17; 17:14; 19:7-9)
- D. The Lamb of heaven (21:9, 23; 22:1)