

Revelation as Trilogy
The Fellowship of the King
Chapter 5: Meeting the Hero

Introduction: In literature both ancient and modern, there has always been the image of the hero. The hero is the one who is willing and able to accomplish what appears to be an impossible task. Here the task is to open the scroll in order that God's future might play itself out...that justice and righteousness would triumph over the forces of Satan. As in most hero quest stories the people give up hope because a hero cannot be found. Yet, in the moment of despair there steps forward one who has already proved he is able to accomplish the quest and now accepts the challenge which only he can fulfill. And as with all conquering heroes the people will praise him. This is the pattern for conquering Roman heroes who return home to great acclamation. Since the events in this chapter take place in the "real throne room" in heaven, then this Lamb must be the real hero...as opposed to those counterfeit heroes of the Roman Empire.

The Story: We are once again in the throne room of heaven. At the center of the throne room is the throne on which the God of heaven and earth sits. Around the throne are the seven spirits of God (meaning the Holy Spirit is present) and the twenty-four elders (representing the twelve disciples and the twelve tribes of Israel...or the totality of God's old and new people) and the four living creatures (representing God's ability to see and know all). John's attention moves from the praise being given by the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures to a scroll in the right hand of God. At first there is no indication what is written on the scroll. The fact that it is sealed with seven seals indicates that it is God's will (Roman wills had seven seals), meaning perhaps it is what God intends to do in the future. Unfortunately, no one "in heaven or on earth" can open it, which implies that God's future work will remain secret. It is into this impossible situation that we discover that there is a hero who is indeed worthy to open the scroll.

One of the elders approaches John and informs him that the one known as "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the root of David" is worthy because he has "conquered." The early church clearly understood that this hero is Jesus. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah and thus of the root of David. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke make this association. The early church also knows that Jesus has conquered. He has conquered death by rising from the grave after his crucifixion, or as the letter puts it, he appears as "a lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered." The Lamb's status as the hero becomes even more pronounced when he is said to have seven horns (horns representing perfect power), seven eyes (representing perfect seeing) and then by taking the scroll directly from the hand of God.

This action by the hero leads to another round of praise from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. This is a remarkable moment because it implies that the hero is as deserving as is God of receiving praise. The praise this time though is for the work accomplished by the Lamb/Jesus. In his crucifixion Jesus had not only ransomed people from every tribe, language and nation, but had made them into members of a new kingdom where they will serve as priests and rulers. All of this is very Pauline in nature. The praise for the lamb continues to escalate from the elders and creatures to angels and then to all creation in order to show the universal nature of the hero's victory.

Reflection: as of the writing of this series on Revelation, the highest grossing movies in the country, and perhaps the world, are super-hero movies from the Marvel universe. There is something about difficult times that seems to call forth humanity's desire for heroes; those who have the power to save us when we cannot save ourselves. This need for a hero is what makes the Lamb/Jesus so appealing and so necessary. The early church cannot save itself, but the Lamb/Jesus can.

Questions:

1. Who was your favorite hero growing up? Why?
2. Do you see Jesus as a superhero? Why or why not?
3. What most confuses you about this chapter?