

# Revelation 5:6-7 in the Navajo Bible

Copyright (c) 2009 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

Bikáá'dóó nahat'áii áádóó ha'át'í shíí dahináanii dí'ígíí índa hastóí danilíinii bitahgi, Dibé Yázhí nilíinii seesyíí nít'ée' nahalingo sizíigo yíiłtsá, éi bidee' tsosts'id, bináá' ałdó' tsosts'id, anáá' tsosts'idígíí éi Diyin God biNíłch'i tsosts'idgoígíí nahasdzáán bikáá'góó t'áá nítééł nít'ée' tadabi'doos'a'ígíí ádaat'é. <sup>7</sup> Dibé Yázhí nilíinii éi bikáá'dóó nahat'áii bikáá'dóó dah sidáii yich'í' dah diiyáago nish'náájigo bíłák'eedóó naaltsoos néidii'á. (Revelation 5:6-7)<sup>1</sup>

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. (Revelation 5:6-7)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In this scene the throne of God is at the center of everything. The question is whether the Lamb is at the center of the throne. NIV implies that He is; the Navajo implies He is not. Which translation is right? The issue, of course, does not only involve two versions. There are others which line up with NIV, and others in turn with which the Navajo agrees. We examine some of them below.

## Two Groups of Translations

I now quote from eight representative English versions, which fall into two groups. On the one hand we have words like "center," or "midst," or "middle," thus, "in the **midst** of the throne and of the four beasts" (KJV), "in the **center** of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders" (NIV), "in the **middle** of the throne with its four living creatures and the circle of the elders" (NJB), and "in the **midst** of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the **midst** of the elders" (NKJV).

On the other hand, we have the word "between," thus, "**between** the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders" (CSB, ESV, NRSV), "**between** the throne and the four living beings and among the twenty-four elders" (NLT).

At issue is how to interpret the Greek expression *en mesō*, which some take to mean "in the midst" (KJV, NKJV), "in the center" (NIV), or "in the middle" (NJB), and others take to mean "between" (CSB, ESV, NLT, NRSV). In English, "center" is generally the center of one thing; "between" is generally between two things. So it's not just different words; it's different ideas as

---

<sup>1</sup> Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> English Bible quotations not otherwise marked are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

well. In Greek, however, the words *en mesō*, in isolation from the present context, could be used and interpreted either way.

## The Text

A number of facts about the text of the passage – in its context, not in isolation from context – suggest that the Navajo translation is right in this case, although support among the versions is about equally divided.

### Location at the center

The first problem with placing the Son at the center of the throne in Revelation 4-5 has to do with the Father's location. There is no theological problem with the Son of God sharing His Father's throne (see Revelation 3:21; 19:4). The problem is that, if the Son is not just on the throne, but at its center, what is the Father's location relative to the Son? I do have a theological problem with saying that the Son displaces the Father on His throne.

When everything has been subjected to him, then the Son himself will be subjected to the One who has subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:28)

One could argue that, at the time John has in view, not everything has been subjected to the Father yet, so the above passage from 1 Corinthians does not apply, but I still have a problem with saying, in any age of history, that the Son takes precedence over the Father. There's something wrong with that picture.

### Standing posture

Notice that in vs. 6 the Lamb is standing. Whether the Lamb is "in the center" of the throne or "between" the throne and the four living creatures, by all accounts He is "standing" (NIV, ESV). A throne is something one sits on. The idea of someone standing on a throne would be unusual.

### Coming

The deciding bit of contextual information, however, at least to my mind, is that in vs. 7 the Lamb has to "come" to where the Father is seated on the throne in order to take the scroll from His hand. If the Lamb has to go somewhere in order to get to the throne, He's not already there.

### Discussion

Taking the above three items together, I would say that CSB, ESV, NLT, and NRSV (the "between" group) give us a clearer idea of how the scene is depicted than do KJV, NKJV, NIV, and NJB (the "center" group). The Navajo includes the throne, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders within the scope of the word *bitahgi* ("among them," "between them"). As such it joins the rest of its group in coming closer to the intended meaning than does NIV.

## Discussion

Where do the events occur?

This might seem like a small thing to discuss at length, and yet important implications follow from getting this either right or wrong. Consider two graphics that seek to capture the main ideas behind the two groups of translations mentioned above.

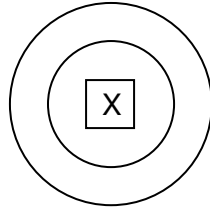


Fig. 1. The throne (shown as a square) encircled by the four living creatures (the inner circle) and the twenty-four living creatures (the outer circle). Let the "X" show where Christ is – at the center of the throne.

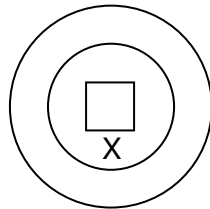


Fig. 2. The throne (shown as a square) encircled by the four living creatures (the inner circle) and the twenty-four living creatures (the outer circle). Let the "X" show where Christ is – before the throne, but inside the circle of living creatures and the circle of elders.

Why is this important? Because of the idea of centrality that runs through this entire description. It is important because this in turn makes clear the place where the events occur. The whole scene described in Revelation 4-5 takes place in the context of the sanctuary. The ancient sanctuary – and the later temples of Solomon and of Herod – were organized in a very specific way. There was a courtyard and inside that a building. In the wilderness this building was a tent, but what the walls were made of need not concern us here. Inside the building were two rooms. The first room was a rectangle twice as long as it was wide. The second room was a square, i.e., its length was the same as its width.

The first room had three items of furniture, while the second room had one. In the first room were a table for consecrated bread, an altar for incense, and a candlestick with seven branches. These three items were arranged around the wall of the room with the table to the north, the altar to the west, and the candlestick to the south. In the second room was a wooden box that contained the written law of God and certain other things. On top it had a figure of angels with wings which met in the middle. This box was in the center of the room.

Notice what we have just said. In the first room three items of furniture were placed around the sides of the room, while in the second room one item of furniture was placed at the center. The organizing principle for the second room was that things were moved to the center, while in the first room things were moved away from the center against the walls.

So where does the scene depicted in Revelation 4-5 occur? Assuming it has something to do with the sanctuary, in which room do the events take place? Is the organizing principle of this scene toward or away from the center? It is toward the center. The scene therefore takes place in the second room – the one that was square when Moses made a model of it in the desert.

When do the events occur?

We're not through yet, because the sanctuary had not only a very specific design, but a very specific calendar of events. Any worshiper could enter the sanctuary's courtyard, but only priests could enter the building. Recall, however, that the building had two parts. There were different rules for the two rooms and there were two kinds of priests. There were many common priests and one high priest. They could all enter the first room any time they needed to.

But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. (Hebrews 9:7)

The one day a year that the high priest could enter the sanctuary's second room had a special name. It was called the "day of atonement." So now, if the events of Revelation 4-5 take place in the second room of the sanctuary in heaven (see Hebrews 8:1), when do they occur? We just said that the high priest could only enter the second room on one day – the day of atonement. The symbolism of the passage, therefore, is that the events depicted take place on the great antitypical day of atonement – the real one at the end of the age, the one that takes place in heaven, not on earth, the one where Christ ministers personally, not a human priest who merely represents Christ.

## Discussion

In view of the way the sanctuary was built anciently, and the way its calendar of events was organized, if something happened in the sanctuary's second room we can be sure that it took place on the day of atonement. That was the only day the high priest could go there. To know when is to know where; to know where is to know when.

In the present case we can be sure that the scene takes place in heaven during the real day of atonement at the end of the age, because it's depicted as taking place in the second room of the sanctuary there. We know it was the second room because of the scene's overall organizing principle of centrality. Everyone encircles the throne. The throne is at the center. This is the second room. And if it's in the second room, we can be very sure that it takes place on the day of atonement.

What took place on earth anciently has its counterpart in heaven, with Christ Himself instead of human priests, and prophecy tells us that the great antitypical day of atonement began in 1844. It's not purpose to prove that right here. That's part of another discussion. So a lot of information comes out when we examine this scene carefully. NIV's slip in placing Christ at

the center of the throne is unfortunate, but it does help to illustrate that the idea of centrality is an important part of the story. This in turn takes us to the sanctuary's design, its calendar of events, and the prophecies that describe what all those things on earth represented about the real events which would one day take place in heaven. It's a connected web. That's the way the Bible works. One thing connects to another and Christ brings the whole system of truth together in His own person.

## Conclusion

In terms of the Greek words *en mesō* (vs. 6), there is some latitude on how to translate them. But in the context of the scene John describes, I think it's pretty clear that one way is better than the other. In Revelation 5:6 these words must be translated "between." The Lamb is standing before the throne, closest to the throne. Next after Him there is a circle of four living creatures. Next after them is a circle of twenty-four elders. And beyond them, out in the gallery of this huge hall, is an innumerable number of angels – all of these groups encircling the throne. The throne is at the center of everything here.

All eyes are on the throne and on the One seated on the throne. All ears are tuned to hear what He says. Unfortunately we are not told what that is, although we can be sure He is saying something because of the responses of the four living creatures and twenty-four elders that are given to us in great detail (see Revelation 4:9-11). I think it's possible to know what God says on this occasion, along with the prophetic framework for thinking so, but that again is part of another discussion.