

REVELATION 5, THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS, AND THE RAPTURE:

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Introduction

Revelation 5 continues the chapter 4's scene of the heavenly court. Despite the heavenly setting, the passage starts with a scene of despair (vv 1-4). Revelation 5:1 mentions an unusual scroll, an opisthograph (a scroll written on both sides).¹ John perceives the futility of the search for someone worthy to take and to break its seals. He weeps, until learning that Jesus is worthy.

At the point that John takes heart at Christ being found worthy, a huge heavenly choir convenes and sings a new song to Jesus Christ: the One who is worthy. Despair suddenly is transformed into universal exaltation.

This passage gives some important clues regarding the timing of the Rapture in relation to other important eschatological events. Some clues are prominent; others are not. We will:

1. name the groups comprising the choir,
2. show the *antiphonal* (*give-and-take*) arrangement for singing groups,
3. determine if the ones who sang verse 9 also sang verse 10,
4. consider textual issues in verse 9-10,
5. apply the antiphonal singing arrangement to the words of the song,
6. draw conclusions regarding the chronology of eschatological events.

The Groups Comprising the Choir

There are four groups: All of them sing verse 13b, but only selected groups sing musical selections prior to verse 13 (verses 9b, 10, and 12b).

1. The four living creatures (cherubs?). Revelation 5:8–12 mentions them.
2. The twenty-four elders. Cf. 5:8–12.
3. Many angels. Cf. 5:11–12.
4. Every creature everywhere. Mentioned only in verse 13.

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, "When Did Scribes Begin to Use Writing Desks?" in *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish, and Christian*, NTTS, ed. Bruce Metzger, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 123–34, esp. 123 and 134, notes that "an accumulation of artistic, archaeological, and literary evidence" shows that writing desks arrived late, becoming popular in the eighth or ninth centuries. Cf. also Jaroslav Černý, *Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt* (London: Lewis, 1952), 13–14; George M. Parássoglou, "Δεχλιὰ Ἐεῖρ καὶ Γόνυ: Some Thoughts on the Postures of Ancient Greeks and Romans when Writing on Papyrus Rolls," *Scrittura e Civiltà* 3 (1979): 5–21; and idem, "A Roll upon His Knees," in *Papyrology*, ed. Naphtali Lewis, YCS, ed. Naphtali Lewis, vol. 28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 273–75. E. G. Turner, *The Papyrologist at Work*, GRBM, ed. William H. Willis, vol. 6 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973), 5–6, agrees, other than to say that scribes may have used small lapboards. Cf. idem, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, 2d rev. and enl. ed., ed. P. J. Parsons, *Bulletin Supplement*, ed. J. P. Barron, vol. 46 (London: University of London Institute of Classical Studies, 1987), 5–6. Kenneth W. Clark, "The Posture of the Ancient Scribe," *Biblical Archaeologist* 26 (June 1963): 63–72, demonstrates that scribes at Qumran did not use writing desks. [This note comes from my dissertation: John H. Niemelä, "The Infrequency of Twin Departures: An End to Synoptic Reversibility?" (Ph.D. dissertation: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000): 404-5, and n. 11 on page 405.

The Antiphonal (*Give-and-Take*) Arrangement

Not all musical arrangements involve everyone singing exactly the same words as every other singer. A common antiphonal arrangement involves men singing one part with the women singing a response. The Song of Moses in Exodus 15 had such an arrangement. Notice that Miriam sang an antiphonal response (bottom of page):

¹ Then **Moses and the children of Israel** sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying:

I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! ² The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. ³ The LORD is a man of war; The LORD is His name. ⁴ Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea. ⁵ The depths have covered them; They sank to the bottom like a stone. ⁶ Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces. ⁷ And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble. ⁸ And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the heart of the sea. ⁹ The enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them." ¹⁰ You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. ¹¹ Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders? ¹² You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them. ¹³ You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength To Your holy habitation. ¹⁴ The people will hear and be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. ¹⁵ Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. ¹⁶ Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be as still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O LORD, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased. ¹⁷ You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, In the place, O LORD, which You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established. ¹⁸ The LORD shall reign forever and ever. ¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

²⁰ **Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron,** took the timbrel in her hand; **and all the women** went out after her with timbrels and with dances. ²¹ **And Miriam answered them:**

Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!²

Miriam and the women sang their answer to the accompaniment of timbrels. Antiphonal arrangements were a part of the musical repertoire of the Bible.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from the *New King James Version* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).

Psalm 136 also manifests an antiphonal arrangement. Group A would sing the *a*-portion of each verse, while Group B would respond with the *b*-refrain.

Group A Singers	Group B Singers
^{1a} Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!	^{1b} For His mercy endures forever.
^{2a} Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!	^{2b} For His mercy endures forever.
^{3a} Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!	^{3b} For His mercy endures forever:
^{4a} To Him who alone does great wonders,	^{4b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{5a} To Him who by wisdom made the heavens,	^{5b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{6a} To Him who laid out the earth above the waters,	^{6b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{7a} To Him who made great lights,	^{7b} For His mercy endures forever—
^{8a} The sun to rule by day,	^{8b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{9a} The moon and stars to rule by night,	^{9b} For His mercy endures forever.
^{10a} To Him who struck Egypt in their firstborn,	^{10b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{11a} And brought out Israel from among them,	^{11b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{12a} With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm,	^{12b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{13a} To Him who divided the Red Sea in two,	^{13b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{14a} And made Israel pass through the midst of it,	^{14b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{15a} But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,	^{15b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{16a} To Him who led His people through the wilderness,	^{16b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{17a} To Him who struck down great kings,	^{17b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{18a} And slew famous kings,	^{18b} For His mercy endures forever—
^{19a} Sihon king of the Amorites,	^{19b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{20a} And Og king of Bashan,	^{20b} For His mercy endures forever—
^{21a} And gave their land as a heritage,	^{21b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{22a} A heritage to Israel His servant,	^{22b} For His mercy endures forever.
^{23a} Who remembered us in our lowly state,	^{23b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{24a} And rescued us from our enemies,	^{24b} For His mercy endures forever;
^{25a} Who gives food to all flesh,	^{25b} For His mercy endures forever.
^{26a} Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven!	^{26b} For His mercy endures forever.

Now, let us imagine a family of Levites. The father is Jonathan, the wife is Elizabeth. Their two adult sons, Hezekiah and Uzziah, are Temple singers. Hezekiah is in Group A, while Uzziah is in Group B. Imagine that Elizabeth said to Jonathan, “Did you know that **our sons will sing Psalm 136** in the Temple next week?” His response to her was, “Yes, **they will sing Psalm 136**. When I talked to Jonathan, he told me that **he will sing Psalm 136** next week.” Please observe: saying “Uzziah sang Psalm 136,” “Jonathan sang Psalm 136,” and “Jonathan and Uzziah sang Psalm 136” are true statements. Each singer sang his portions of the psalm.

Likewise, we say that Moses and Miriam sang the Song of Moses without stipulating that either sang every word of the song. We must allow for the distributive usage of third person forms (pronouns alone or nouns in apposition to (expressed or implied) third person pronouns).³

³ An example of a distributive usage of *they* follows: *They* were husbands and wives. This does not imagine that anyone is a husband-wife. The distributive use of *they* would convert into the following: Some of them were husbands and others of them were wives. The distributive usage is one of the features at work which allows us to say that Jonathan and Uzziah sang Psalm 136, even though neither sang the entire psalm. Both were singers and what they sang actually came from Psalm 136. This is within normal usage of language.

Revelation 5 also has an antiphonal arrangement. Within verses 9–10 three textual variants relate to the issue. For now, we will list each of those options without stating a preference on any of them. (At a later point in the paper, we will reach textual decisions.) Narration is unboxed. Boxes represent the words which are sung. Words enclosed in brackets are not sung. “[A-1] —” means that the first variant reading for textual problem A has no word there [—];” “[A-2] *us*” means that *us* is the second variant reading for A.

⁸ Now when He had taken the scroll, **the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders** fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And **they sang a new song**, saying:

<i>You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed</i>		
[A-1] —	to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,	
[A-2] <i>us</i>		

¹⁰ <i>And You have made</i>	[B-1] <i>them</i>	<i>kings and priests to our God;</i>
	[B-2] <i>us</i>	
<i>And</i>	[C-1] <i>they</i>	<i>shall reign on the earth.</i>
	[C-2] <i>we</i>	

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of **many angels** around the throne, **the living creatures, and the elders**; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice:

<i>Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!</i>
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¹³ And **every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them**, I heard saying:

<i>Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!</i>
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¹⁴ Then **the four living creatures** said,

<i>Amen!</i>

And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

<i>[Unspecified words of worship, very likely involving singing by the elders]</i>
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The following page will simplify this chart by omitting the narrative introducing each of the stanzas. (This page is here to show how the chart on the following page was derived).

Following are the singing parts with the singers listed:

1. The four living creatures and/or the twenty-four elders (5:9b)

<i>You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed</i>		
[A-1] —	to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,	
[A-2] us		

2. The four living creatures and/or the twenty-four elders (5:10)

<i>And You have made</i>	[B-1] them	<i>kings and priests to our God;</i>
	[B-2] us	
<i>And</i>	[C-1] they	<i>shall reign on the earth.</i>
	[C-2] we	

3. Tens of thousands of angels, the four living creatures, and the elders (Verse 12b)

<i>Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!</i>
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4. Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them [including angels, the living creatures, and the elders] (5:13b)

<i>Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!</i>
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5. The four living creatures (Verse 14b):

<i>Amen!</i>

6. The twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped (5:14c)

<i>[Unspecified words of worship, very likely involving singing by the elders]</i>
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Observe how the choir grows and shrinks:

- | | | |
|---|-------|--------|
| 1. Less than twenty-nine singers in verse 9b, | small | |
| 2. Less than twenty-nine singers in verse 10, | small | |
| 3. Tens of thousands of singers in verse 12b, | | large |
| 4. All of creation in verse 13b. | | larger |
| 5. Four singers in verse 14b. | small | |
| 6. Twenty-four worshippers in verse 14c. | small | |

Not all of the singers sing every word of the song. Furthermore, John did not quote what the twenty-four elders said [sang?] as they worshipped in verse 14c. The fact that the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders begin and close the worship is a manifest demonstration that an overall antiphonal arrangement is at work here. Now, the question is whether an antiphonal interchange of singers occurs between verses 9b and 10.

Verses 9b–10 Describe Humans, Not Angels

This is true, regardless of which variant readings are selected.

Verse 9b

<i>You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed</i>		
[A-1] —	<i>to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,</i>	
[A-2] <i>us</i>		

Verse 9b consists of words that will be sung about Christ and about people of every ethnicity that He redeemed by His blood. Jesus did not redeem any angels by His blood. The idea of being *out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation* only applies to people.

Verse 10

<i>And You have made</i>	[B-1] <i>them</i>	<i>kings and priests to our God;</i>
	[B-2] <i>us</i>	
<i>And</i>	[C-1] <i>they</i>	<i>shall reign on the earth.</i>
	[C-2] <i>we</i>	

Verse 10 speaks about Christ and about people who will reign in the Millennium. It does not speak about angels, because it will be redeemed humans that will reign, not angels.

Therefore, verses 9b–10 describe humans, not angels. By itself this fact does not tell us who sings each of the verses. However, this observation is important in identifying the singers.

Variant Readings in Relation to the Identity of the Singers

Verses 9b–10 have three pertinent variants. The simplest description of the translational difference between the variants would say:

1. A-1, B-1, and C-1 all have explicit or implicit third person pronouns: *they* or *them*.

A-1: You have redeemed [*them*] from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

B-1: You have made *them* kings and priests to our God.

C-1: *They* will reign upon the earth.

A-1, B-1, and C-1 would be appropriate words for angelic singers.

2. A-2, B-2, and C-2 all have explicit first person pronouns: *we* or *us*.

A-2: You have redeemed *us* from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

B-2: You have made *us* kings and priests to our God.

C-2: *We* will reign upon the earth.

A-2, B-2, and C-2 would be appropriate words for human singers.

Among published Greek texts, three preference patterns emerge:

1. A-1 [*them*], + B-1 *them*, + C-1 *they* = angelic singers in both verses,
2. A-2 *us*, + B-2 *us*, + C-2 *we* = human singers in both verses,
3. A-2 *us*, + B-1 *them*, + C-1 *they* = human singers in 9b; angelic singers in 10.

The third option is antiphonal; the others are not. Textual criticism must decide.

Implications of the Three Variants

If either verse uses a first person pronoun (*we* or *us*), then some of the singers of verses 9b–10 are human. Specifically, it would be inappropriate for anyone other than human believers to say any of the following:

A-2: *You have redeemed us to God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

B-2: *You have made us kings and priests to our God.*

C-2: *We shall reign on the earth.*

At this point, it is probably wise for me to indicate that this paper argues for A-2, but rejects both B-2 and C-2. In other words, the author's preference (based on manuscript evidence) is for an antiphonal arrangement:

A-2: *You have redeemed us to God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

B-1: *You have made them kings and priests to our God.*

C-1: *They shall reign on the earth.*

Note that the important issue is that anyone who accepts A-2, B-2, or C-2 will find the idea that the twenty-four elders will be human. It is hardly conceivable for the four living creatures to be human. Thus, the only way humans could be involved in singing verse 9b and/or verse 10 would be for the twenty-four elders to be human.

Conversely, the only way to exclude humans from verses 9b–10 would be to accept A-1, B-1, and C-1. Rejection of *any* of these three readings would demand that the elders be human.

Implications of Viewing the Elders as Human

If the twenty-four elders are human, then this passage is a formidable argument in favor of rapture preceding Daniel's seventieth week. If they are human, the passage narrows down the timing of the Bema Seat, which necessarily follows the rapture. On the other hand, if the twenty-four elders are angelic, those who reject a pre-seventieth week date for the rapture can assert that the passage would not establish a firm timetable for the Bema Seat. Those who imagine the rapture to happen during the seventieth week can find a convenient mouse-hole in the angelic-elder view. The human-elder view plugs up this mouse-hole.

How so? The passage sets up a sequence of events: Verse 10 pronounces that Christ *has made* the twenty-four elders *kings and priests*. It also declares that the twenty-four elders *will reign on earth*. Singing about such pronouncements in regard to twenty-four humans would require that the Bema Seat has already occurred. For the Bema Seat to have occurred requires that the Rapture had occurred even earlier. Furthermore, just before the elders sang these words, Revelation 5:4 says that John wept much because no one was found worthy to open the opisthograph and to break its seals. The elders sing (in verse 9) that Christ is worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals. Revelation 6:1 is where Christ opens the first seal. Thus, if the elders are human, the sequence into which Revelation 5:9–10 fits is this:

1. Rapture: Revelation 4:1,
2. The Bema (after 4:1, but before the twenty-four are called elders: 4:4),
3. Singing about the declaration at the Bema that the elders will rule as kings (5:10),
4. Christ opens the first seal (6:1).

That chronology has an interesting effect that has not often been noticed. The Bema Seat would occur between the rapture and the opening of the first seal. That is, it would occur during the interval between the rapture and the start of Daniel's seventieth week.

Evaluating Implications of Viewing the Elders as Angelic

On the other hand, if the twenty-four elders were angelic, a mouse-hole exists for opponents of the pre-seventieth week rapture to escape. They can say that Revelation 5:9 speaks in generic terms about people who were redeemed by Christ's blood. Therefore, Revelation 5:10 would not stipulate that a select group (the twenty-four elders) will reign as kings and priests. Thus, rather than presupposing that the Bema Seat has already occurred, the angels might be seen as only affirming that no unredeemed people would be kings and priests in the Millennium.

It is with pleasure that this paper argues that the external and internal arguments for Revelation 5:9 containing the word *us* are overwhelming. Under any textual theory, the arguments against the inclusion of *us* are dreadfully weak.

Overview of Textual Issues

Most modern English versions of the New Testament have a decided preference for the Greek texts of Nestle-Aland and/or the United Bible Society.⁴ This is not to say that English Bibles never choose a variant that differs with the preferences of the NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ texts. English translations that generally favor these Greek texts, sometimes go their own way.

However, Revelation 5:9 is a point where allegiance to Nestle-Aland or to the United Bible Society text is inadvisable. This is a most unfortunate point for translations to have gone the way of those Greek texts. It is a place where the external evidence (under any theory of manuscript history) is indefensible. It is also a point where internal evidence strongly argues against Nestle-Aland. We will examine both external and internal evidence.

External Evidence for the Inclusion/Exclusion of *Hēmas* (5:9)

Although textual critics do not have a reputation for being excitable, it is interesting to note what happens when the external evidence is poor. There is a tendency follow the old dictum, "Argument weak. Pound the pulpit harder. Raise lots of red herrings. Pretend evidence is strong." Those favoring Nestle-Aland's text in verse 9 must resort to all of the above.

Before considering the manuscript evidence, it may be interesting to note what various critical Greek texts (other than Nestle-Aland and the UBS). Nestle-Aland²⁷'s "Editionum Differentiae," shows that other critical texts have not agreed with the approach taken by Nestle-Aland, "[5,]9 ' S V [M] B ut κ."⁵ What they mean is that the critical texts of S (von Soden), V (Vogels), and B (Bover) agreed with κ in accepting τῶ θεῶ ἡμᾶς. In addition, [M] means that Merk's text read τῶ θεῶ [ἡμᾶς]. The Alexandrian evidence for accepting ἡμᾶς is strong enough that several editions have accepted the difficult reading (first person in verse 9, but third person in verse 10). In addition, the Majority family evidence is strong enough that both the Hodges-Farstad and Robinson-Pierpont texts accept it.

⁴ Prior to the release of the NA²⁷ and UBS⁴ texts there were about half a dozen places where these two texts did not agree in wording. Furthermore, there were a number of punctuation differences. With the current editions of these texts, their wording and punctuation became identical.

⁵ Nestle-Aland²⁷, "Editionum Differentiae," 768.

Bruce Metzger, in the first edition of his *Textual Commentary*, assigns a {C} grade to his acceptance of *hēmas*. Certainly, this does not exude confidence in the reading. Note that he starts out by apologizing for external evidence being, as he puts it, *slight*. He attempts to rescue himself by appealing to an internal argument (which we will critique later).

5.9 τῶ θεῶ {C}

Although the evidence for τῶ θεῶ is **slight** (A eth) [A = manuscript Alexandrinus; eth = the Ethiopic version], this reading best accounts for the origin of the others. Wishing to provide ἡγόρασας with a more exactly determined object than is found in the words ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς κ.τ.λ. [e.g., *etc.*], some scribes introduced ἡμᾶς either before τῶ θεῶ (94 2344 *al*) or after τῶ θεῶ (⋈ 046 1006 1611 2053 *al*), while others replaced τῶ θεῶ with ἡμᾶς (1 2065* Cyprian *al*). Those who made the emendations, however, overlooked the unsuitability of ἡμᾶς with αὐτούς in the following verse [verse 10] (where, indeed, the Textus Receptus reads ἡμᾶς, but with **quite inadequate authority**) [Bold added].⁶

With regard to an irrelevant red herring, Metzger castigated the Textus Receptus in verse 10 for following “quite inadequate [external] authority.” It is true that the TR of verse 10 relies upon only a few manuscripts. It is also true that those couple of manuscripts constitute “quite inadequate [external] authority,” but people in glass houses should not throw stones. Remember that Metzger admitted that “the evidence for τῶ θεῶ is slight.” He could have added that he accepts his reading in verse 9 “with quite inadequate authority.” This looks like a case of falling in love with a reading, despite the fact that *slight* evidence constitutes *quite inadequate authority*.

Grant Osborne tried to put the best face on the external evidence, by saying, “Although there is not a lot of manuscript evidence. . . .” Evidence is weak, so he pounds the pulpit harder.

5:9. The text-critical problem here is essential for the identification of the elders in chapters 4-5. If the text should read ἡγόρασας τῶ θεῶ ἡμᾶς with ⋈ 046 1006 1611 et al. (94 2344 et al. place ἡμᾶς before τῶ θεῶ), then the twenty-four elders (5:8) are indeed human rather than angels. There are several problems with this, however, and most prefer to omit “us.” Although there is not a lot of manuscript evidence for “purchased for God” (A eth), Metzger (1994: 666) is probably correct in asserting that the shorter reading best explains the longer. Later scribes provided an object to tell the reader who was “purchased for God.” Moreover, if “us” is part of the text, then the four living creatures as well as the elders (5:8) would have been redeemed, and the living creatures are certainly celestial beings.⁷

⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Third Edition)*, (N.p.: United Bible Societies, 1971), 738. Note that Metzger rated this reading as “{C}” in 1971, indicating division within the UBS committee. The reading τῶ θεῶ ἡμῶν has far stronger Alexandrian (as well as Byzantine) manuscript support than τῶ θεῶ, so some members of the committee preferred that reading. Since then, Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, (N.p.: United Bible Societies, 1994), 666, has revised this problem to an “{A},” despite listing the same scant evidence.

⁷ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 268.

What is interesting is that Kurt Aland, Bruce Metzger, and Grant Osborne follow what is often called the *reasoned eclectic* school of textual criticism. That is an approach which emphasizes a balance between external and internal criticism in reaching textual decisions. It is a school known for its critiques of the thorough-going eclecticism of George Kilpatrick and J.K. Elliott. The latter school argues that any reading supported by two Greek manuscripts is fair game. In other words, thorough-going eclectics would say that any reading supported by at least two manuscripts has a possibility of being the original text, even if every manuscript other than those two supported it. The reason they require two manuscripts is because they regard solecisms (any reading supported by only one manuscript) as probable scribal blunders.

What do reasoned eclectics say about thorough-going eclectics? They regard them as radical, alleging (correctly) that thorough-going eclectics approach textual emendation. That is, they minimize external evidence to such a point that it is almost as if they were writing their own text, rather than relying on manuscript authority.

The odd thing is that Aland, Metzger, and Osborne rely upon only one manuscript in Revelation 5:9, which is even more radical than what the thorough-going eclectics would do.

Consult the final page of this paper for a presentation of the external evidence. Remember that neither Metzger nor Osborne were bragging about their external evidence. Reasoned eclectics like Metzger normally scoff at anyone considering a reading supported by two manuscripts. Here he is trying to convince people that one manuscript is sufficient. In the same paragraph, he critiques the TR for its acceptance of a reading with a few manuscripts supporting it.

The Internal Argument that Metzger Avoids

Since Metzger abandons external evidence as the basis for deciding Revelation 5:9, one would expect the internal evidence to be compelling. Oddly enough, he avoids mentioning Hoskier's observation about manuscript Alexandrinus (published in 1929). His two volume work is a standard reference work on Revelation. Hoskier says,

But what shall we do in this doctrinal and important verse [Revelation 5:9] in the matter of the omission of ἡμᾶς by A only? 'Who hast redeemed *us*.'

The Alexandrine MS. [A, Alexandrinus] **drops the word between two columns.** Nevertheless Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, and the Revisers follow suit with this authority only. No cursives [e.g., minuscules], not Ⲙ, B [Hoskier's name for 046], or P [*hiat* C], no Versions but *aeth* [e.g., Ethiopic] which is unreliable in such a matter, frequently balking at any difficulty [such as juxtaposing first person (v 9) with third person (v 10)].⁸

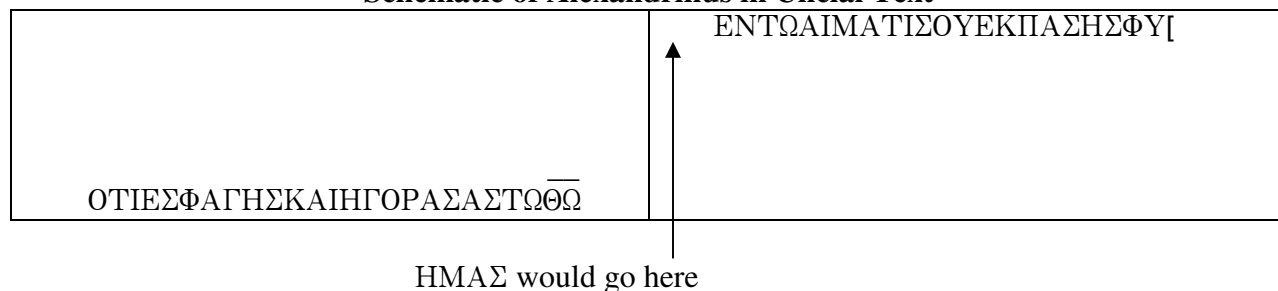
The key assertion is that Alexandrinus "drops the word [*hēmas*] between columns." In other words, the scribe ended a line of text on the bottom of one column. Then, he started at the top of the next column. The word *hēmas* should have been the first word on the top of the second column, but the scribe suffered a mental lapse.

The likelihood of a scribal lapse is so great that Alexandrinus cannot be trusted here. The fact that no other Greek manuscript supports it reinforces the impression that the scribe just blundered.

⁸ H.C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (London: Quartitch, 1929; reprint, n.p.: Good Books, n.d.), 1:xxvi.

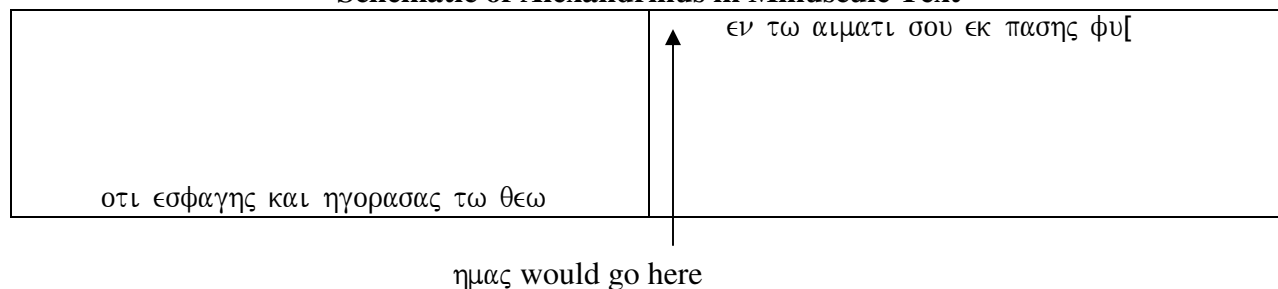
Consider the layout of Alexandrinus. Although there are fifty lines of text on each column of the page in question, this text will only give the last line of the first column and the first line of the other. The letters are all uncials (capitals). No word-spacing or punctuation is present. The letters to the right of the bracket “[“ have been damaged beyond recognition.

Schematic of Alexandrinus in Uncial Text



In lower case text with word-spacing, the letters appear as below (with *θεω* spelled out, rather than abbreviated as one of the *nomina sacra*).

Schematic of Alexandrinus in Minuscule Text



Not only is Alexandrinus unreliable at this point, but Hoskier argues that the Ethiopic had difficulty reconciling a first-person form in verse 9 with two third-person forms in verse 10. In other words, he argues that the Ethiopic intentionally omitted *ημας* in verse 9, because of not understanding that the song is antiphonal (give-and-take). Hoskier has deftly taken away any hope of the internal arguments suggested by Metzger or Osborne from explaining what really happened.

Internal Arguments Suggested by Metzger, *et al.*

By ignoring what Hoskier said back in 1929, Metzger and Osborne attempt to bolster inherently weak arguments. Their bravado fails to overcome Hoskier.

5.9 τῶ θεῶ {C}

Although the evidence for τῶ θεῶ is slight (A eth) [A = manuscript Alexandrinus; eth = the Ethiopic version], this reading best accounts for the origin of the others. Wishing to provide ἡγόρασας with **a more exactly determined object** than is found in the words ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς κ.τ.λ.[e.g., *etc.*], some scribes introduced ἡμᾶς either before τῶ θεῶ (94 2344 *al*) or after τῶ θεῶ (⊗ 046 1006 1611 2053 *al*), while others replaced τῶ θεῶ with ἡμᾶς (1 2065* Cyprian *al*). **Those who made the emendations, however, overlooked the unsuitability of ἡμᾶς with αὐτούς in the following verse** [verse 10] (where, indeed, the Textus Receptus reads ἡμᾶς, but with quite inadequate authority) [Bold added].⁹

Metzger tries to put forward the idea that the scribes added ἡμᾶς (“us”), because they wanted an explicit direct object in verse 9. However, he then asserts that they created a contradiction between verse 9 and verse 10. Let us pretend that his theory is correct. In that case, why is it that almost no Greek manuscripts replace the third person forms in verse 10 with first person forms. Observe that Metzger himself testifies to how few did so, when he says, “indeed, the Textus Receptus reads ἡμᾶς, but with quite inadequate authority.” Dr. Metzger seems unaware that there is no unsuitability, because the passage is antiphonal. The first person forms work quite well in verse 9, where humans (the twenty-four elders) are singing. The third person forms are appropriate to verse 10, where the four living creatures are singing about the future reign of the twenty-four elders.

Grant Osborne is quite wrong in asserting that the presence of us in verse 9 would require that both the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders be human. He is oblivious to the distributive use of plurals. He assumes that all twenty-eight beings sing every word of the song. As we argued earlier, verses 9–10 are antiphonal.

5:9. The text-critical problem here is essential for the identification of the elders in chapters 4-5. If the text should read ἡγόρασας τῶ θεῶ ἡμᾶς with ⊗ 046 1006 1611 et al. (94 2344 et al. place ἡμᾶς before τῶ θεῶ), then the twenty-four elders (5:8) are indeed human rather than angels. There are several problems with this, however, and most prefer to omit “us.” Although there is not a lot of manuscript evidence for “purchased for God” (A eth), Metzger (1994: 666) is probably correct in asserting that the shorter reading best explains the longer. Later scribes provided an object to tell the reader who was “purchased for God.” Moreover, **if “us” is part of the text, then the four living creatures as well as the elders (5:8) would have been redeemed, and the living creatures are certainly celestial beings.**¹⁰

He is unaware that an antiphonal arrangement overcomes his objections.

⁹ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 1971, 738.

¹⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 268.

Robert Mounce clearly overstates the evidence when he says, “The most accurate texts omit the first italicized pronoun [ἡμᾶς in verse 9],” How can he say *texts*, when Alexandrinus is the only Greek text to support the reading that he accepts for verse 9. Clearly, he offers a snow job on verse 9. This paper concurs with the reading that he accepts for verse 10, but how can he classify ἡμᾶς in verse 9 among “inferior variants”?

The idea that the *elders* were the ones purchased by Christ’s death stems from inferior variants that make the text read, “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed *us* to God . . . and hast made *us* unto our God kings and priests: and *we* shall reign on the earth” (AV, italics added). **The most accurate texts omit the first italicized pronoun and read “them” and “they” for the other two (cf. NRSV margin) [Bold added].¹¹**

Of course, Mounce needs to omit the *us*, because its presence would be fatal to his post-seventieth-week view of the rapture.

G.K. Beale offers a far-more balanced view, although he underestimates the strength of the internal and external argument for ἡμᾶς in verse 9.

External evidence clearly favors the inclusion of ἡμᾶς (“us”) either before (94 2344 *al*), after (⊗ [S 2050 2344] Ⓜ [lat] sy), or instead of (1 2065* Cypr *al*) τῷ θεῷ (“to God”) as a more specific direct object than (“every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.” Although only A and eth completely exclude ἡμᾶς (“us”), many interpreters (including NA²⁶) still argue that these two mss. [sic: eth is not a ms., but a version] preserve the original (“he redeemed to God”). They do so, first, because the shorter reading is more difficult, not having as precise an object. It is more likely that a scribe would attempt to clarify the direct object rather than the opposite. This stylistic abruptness is another expression of the Semitic influence that is characteristic of Revelation (e.g., note especially other partitive expressions with ἐκ [“from”] introduced like that of v 9b: 2:10; 3:9; 5:7; 11:9; in all these cases the ancient versions and even modern translations supply a more specific direct object). Secondly, ἡμᾶς (“us”) is not consistent with αὐτοὺς (“them”) in what follows in v 10 (“he made *them* to God” [only the TR has the improbable variant “us” instead of (“them”) in v 10]; nor is “us” in v 9 harmonious with the third person plural βασιλεύσουσιν [“reign”] in v 10).

It is usually thought that “us” both here and in v 10 is not original, and since “them” in v 10 is less disputed both on external and internal grounds, the “us” of v 9 is likely secondary. On the other hand, it may not be so improbable that “us” in v 9 and “them” in v 10 could both be original, since this would also be a difficult reading, but not impossibly difficult because the liturgical atmosphere could justify the change in person between v 9 and v 10. Also the parallelism of “he made *them* to God” (v 10) with “he redeemed to God” (v 9) might point to the presence of a specific object in the latter phrase. In addition, there is the possibility that the scribe of codex A accidentally dropped the “us” when he went from the bottom of one column of the page to begin writing at the top of the next column (one column concludes with ΗΓΟΡΑΣΑΣ ΤΩ ΘΕΩ and EN ΤΩ ΑΙΜΑΤΙ ΣΟΥ).

The better part of wisdom is to acknowledge the equal possibility of both readings (even UBS registers a high degree of doubt in v 9). In this light, “us” in v 9 should not serve as a strong argument for identifying the twenty-four elders as saints or representatives of

¹¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998), 136.

saints, nor should the omission of “us” be an absolute argument against such an identification.¹²

Conclusion

Revelation 5:8–14 shows a choir that starts out small, becomes huge, but ends with worship by the small groups (the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures) that began the singing. The passage manifests an antiphonal arrangement, just as do the Song of Moses and Psalm 136.

We argued that verses 9–10 also display an antiphonal arrangement. The Nestle-Aland and UBS texts follow a solecism of one manuscript, which is a practice that reasoned eclectics normally reject. In fact, they commonly argue that following a pair of manuscripts (the practice of thorough-going eclectics) is extreme and should be avoided. However, in Revelation 5:9, reasoned-eclecticism is abandoned in favor of something more radical than thorough-going eclecticism.

One would imagine that the internal arguments that would be adduced would be powerful. Instead, Metzger and others seem to have totally neglected the antiphonal arrangement that characterizes the singing in Revelation 5. The fact that Metzger regards the use of third person forms in verse 10 while verse 9 has a first person form to evidence *unsuitability*. The question arises as to why only a handful of scribes would replace the third person forms in verse 10 with first person forms. Maybe the idea of unsuitability only convinces those who overlook the antiphonal arrangement of the passage.

Furthermore, they conveniently forget to mention that the scribe who copied Alexandrinus could easily have drifted mentally as he finished one column and started another. He left a word out of his text.

Internal and external evidence leads to the conclusion that the passage is antiphonal.

Elders sing:

*You have redeemed **us** to God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

Living Creatures respond:

*You have made **them** kings and priests to our God. **They** shall reign on the earth.*

With this understanding, the passage teaches the following eschatological sequence:

1. Rapture: Revelation 4:1,
2. The Bema (after 4:1, but before the twenty-four are called elders: 4:4),
3. Singing about the declaration at the Bema that the elders will rule as kings (5:10),
4. Christ opens the first seal (6:1).

Revelation 5:9–10 is a wonderful demonstration that the rapture precedes Daniel’s seventieth week. The twenty-four elders will be rewardable church-age believers, who will reign as kings and priests in the Millennium.

¹² G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 360.