

Shayla: Doesn't Revelation 5:1 and 7 contradict your view that every time God is "seated" on the throne or is otherwise embodied it must be Jesus?

Intro to the problem

For those who are not familiar with the doctrines of immanence and transcendence and their application to the doctrine of theophanies, allow me to explain the problem.

On one hand, no one is ever supposed to see God.¹ This is not because He is like the wizard of Oz, hiding behind a curtain and protesting loudly when we draw it back. It is because He is a transcendent being. To see a transcendent being is to leave the material universe, e.g. to be destroyed. On the other hand, we have plenty accounts of people who are startled into the realization that they have seen God and yet live!²

The solution to this conundrum is to differentiate between the transcendent Father and the immanent Son.

- **Colossians 1:15 HCSB** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation;

Therefore, I teach that seeing Jesus is the closest we will ever get to seeing the invisible, unapproachable Father.

- **John 14:8-9 HCSB** "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time without your knowing Me, Philip? The one who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Conceptual background

Allow me to lead up to the question. Let's examine some biblical concepts that are crucial to a proper *derash* of these challenging verses.

One of the first times we see the important term "right hand" is in the very first book of the Bible. Here, by the fact that Israel laid his right hand of blessing on Ephraim, Joseph discovers that this younger of his two sons would have preeminence over his older brother, Manasseh.³

The practice of extending the "right hand" was not limited to the Old Covenant, for we see it still practiced by the early Church. When Paul's authority was questioned by others, James, Cephas and John extended the "right hand of fellowship" to him after due examination in order to affirm Paul's authority.⁴

This "right hand" business was such a common idiom that when someone said God did such and such by His right hand, it was generally understood that they meant by His own power; by His own authority; without asking (or needing) anyone's permission or help.

Whether it stems from this practice or not, we don't know, but the phrase "right hand of the throne" became known to refer to a position of favor and increased influence or authority.⁵

Apparently, this practice is also followed in Heaven's throne room. How do we know this? First, we know that there is a physical place where God interacts with the angelic host and they are generally arrayed to the left and right of His throne.⁶ As it is in the human realm, the throne seems to be a focal point of attention.

Second, we see this explicitly in the position of the Son of God in heaven as witnessed by the Church's first martyr, Stephen.

¹ Exodus 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Timothy 6:16

² Genesis 32:30; Exodus 24:9-11; Deuteronomy 5:24; Judges 6:22-23; 13:20-23; Isaiah 6:5; 1 John 1:1-3; 3:2; Revelation 1:16-17

³ Genesis 48:13-14, 17-20

⁴ Galatians 2:7-9

⁵ 1 Kings 2:19

⁶ 1 Kings 22:19 cp 2 Chronicles 18:18

- [Acts 7:55-56 HCSB](#) But Stephen, filled by the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven. He saw God's glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, (56) "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

The practice is further emphasized and associated with authority and favor throughout the New Covenant.⁷ The association of the "right hand of the throne" with authority and power cannot be any clearer than it is in the following verses:

- [Ephesians 1:20-23 HCSB](#) He demonstrated *this power* in the Messiah by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavens-- (21) far above every ruler and authority, power and dominion, and every title given, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (22) And **He put everything under His feet** and appointed Him as head over everything for the church, (23) which is His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way.
- [1 Peter 3:22 HCSB](#) Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God's right hand, with angels, authorities, and powers subjected to Him.

Midrash

This brings us to the two verses in Revelation 5:

- [Revelation 5:1 HCSB](#) Then I saw in the right hand of the One seated on the throne a scroll with writing on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals.
- [Revelation 5:7 HCSB](#) He came and took *the scroll* out of the right hand of the One seated on the throne.

The context is way too clear on the identity of the Lamb to allow for any ambiguity. The fact that He is the victorious Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David (v.5), described as the "slaughtered lamb" (v.6) who "redeemed people for God" by His blood (v.9), and who is worthy of worship (v.14) will allow neither any equivocation as to His identity nor a lexical break that one could use to say these are two different events or two different topics.

Therefore, the answer to the problem must lie in our understanding of the phrase "right hand of the One seated on the throne" that is actually mentioned three times (see v.13).

First, the term "right hand" (in Greek *dexios*; pronounced dex-ee-aws), particularly in association with the throne or authority is to be seen as a sign of blessing or empowerment, not as a literal hand.

Second, the term "seated" is the Greek word *kathemai* (pronounced kah-thay-my) which does not necessarily imply physical contact with a seat because it is used in the sense of abiding, dwelling, or occupying.

The passage is obviously metaphorical. Surely, no one believes that Jesus is literally an *ovus aries*, a sheep! I humbly believe there is sufficient lexical support to contend that receiving the scroll from the "right hand of the One seated on the throne" does not contradict the doctrine that God the Father does not take physical form. Instead, we should understand the passage to mean that Jesus was authorized to open the scroll by the abiding presence of the Godhead.

At this stage of my theological development, I continue to hold that if God is given some discrete, concrete, explicit physical description in the Scriptures, it must be the Son of God that is being described. If the language is metaphorical (as it is in this case) and can be interpreted another way, I believe we should.

⁷ Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2