

Study 6: Revelation Chapter 5

Introduction

“...Jesus Christ the hereditary Lord of all creation, the one who is both God and Man. Only he can qualify to solve the riddle of our existence.”

“...the picture is: God is on the Throne, Christ is alive and all is well with the world”

Body of the Study

The Sealed Scroll

He Who Is Worthy

The Heavenly Beings Worship the Lamb

The New Song

The Fifth Hymn

Homework and preparation for next week:

Re-read chapter 5

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 6 in preparation for the next study

We are left in suspense about the content of the scroll. But there is no doubt about who the central character is! How do you reconcile Jesus' character as both a Lion and a Lamb?

How does the vision in chapters 4 and 5 help us to understand the true meaning of life?

Notes for study 6: Revelation Chapter 5

“...Jesus Christ the hereditary Lord of all creation, the one who is both God and Man. Only he can qualify to solve the riddle of our existence.¹” “...the picture is: God is on the Throne, Christ is alive and all is well with the world.²”

The Sealed Scroll

The Throne Room scene continues, as John adds some details omitted from the previous chapter, and then further develops the vision through to the opening of the seven seals (chapters 6 & 7). “...Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals...” (5:1 NIV). Normally, scrolls had writing on the inside only, so there is a particular message about this scroll

In ancient times, papyrus rolls were used for public and private documents. Usually the writing was on one side only--the inside part, arranged in vertical columns. Occasionally a scroll was written on both sides; such double-sided writing was for private, nonsalable use in contrast to the usual scrolls written on only one side, which were sold. In the context of ch. 5, a double-sided scroll would signify a scroll full of words. A scroll could be opened only after all the seals were broken. (NIVBC)

Not only is this scroll laden with information, because it was written on both sides, there was no room for further material to be added, which suggests that the scroll was *complete*. Seals were added to documents to guarantee that it had not been opened or interfered with. The seal was usually sealing wax, and was then imprinted with the signet ring of the King. In this case, it was *sealed with seven seals*, which suggests *completeness* and perfectly sealed and preserved.

The scroll’s content has been the subject of much speculation (and depends largely on the “view” of Revelation that is taken). We are not specifically told what the content is, but the scroll and the seals are central to the visions as they unfold. Some understanding of where this is all heading is helpful as we study the book – although John did not have that benefit when he saw the visions, and what he is doing is relaying those visions to us! The contents of the book were sealed and hidden until the Lamb revealed them. This is what happened with God’s plan of salvation. God’s original purpose was sealed – not tampered with – and was hidden in mysteries which were not understood by man until they were revealed through Jesus (c/f Eph 1:9-10; 1 Pet 1:10-12).

In conclusion, then, the scroll is not only about judgment or about the inheritance of the kingdom. Rather, it contains the announcement of the consummation of all history--how things will ultimately end for all people: judgment for the world and the final reward of the saints (11:18). Christ alone, as the Messiah, is the executor of the purposes of God and the heir of the inheritance of the world. He obtained this by his substitutionary and propitiatory death on the cross (5:9). (NIVBC).

Hailey Notes³:

Christ had now provided the acceptable sacrifice, defeated Satan, conquered sin and death, and fulfilled the purpose of God. Now He was in a position to take the purpose or plan of God out of His hand, send forth the Holy Spirit to reveal this truth, and Himself carry out the purpose to its ultimate consummation. This concept of “the book” (*GO*: “*the scroll*”) is in harmony with the entire New Testament and is confirmed by the remainder of Revelation.

¹ Bewes p. 48

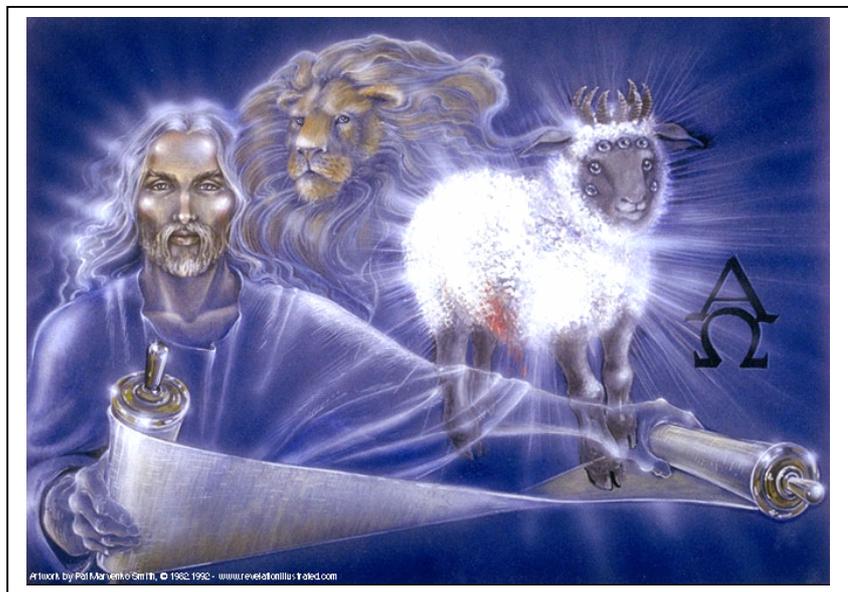
² Rogers. p. 14

³ Hailey, p. 180

The scroll is held in the hand of the Almighty God, but its significance is soon announced by an angel "...And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"..." (5:2 NIV). The scroll was there, and ready to be opened, but the circumstances were not quite right. The angel who made the proclamation was a *mighty angel* (a strong angel – KJV), which suggests that he might have been a special angel. His announcement was an invitation for the scroll to be opened, and its contents revealed. The only qualifier was to find someone who was *worthy*. But, the task was not answered "...And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it..." (5:3 NKJV). Looking at the scroll encompasses more than just seeing it – and the idea is to look at the *contents* after the scroll is opened. The key to the statement here is that no-one *anywhere* was worthy – no-one in heaven, no-one on the earth, and no-one under the earth – no-one in either the physical realm or the spiritual realm was worthy (able) to open the scroll.

He Who Is Worthy

The circumstances must have seemed hopeless! Here was an important document in the right hand of God, and there was no-one anywhere who had the ability to open it, to read it, and see what it said. John's tour-guide (one of the elders) provided him with an explanation of the circumstances "...Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."..." (5:5 NIV). Both the *Lion of Judah* and the *Root of David* are Messianic descriptions that looked to the Messiah ruling over the people with the strength of a lion, and bringing peace.



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Two figurative titles are linked together of the one who is worthy: "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" and "the Root of David." Both are familiar OT messianic titles (Ge 49:9-10; cf. Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5; 33:5; Rev 22:16). Jewish apocalyptic literature used the figure of a lion to designate the conquering Messiah who would destroy Rome. John's understanding of the role and function of the Messiah is both similar to and different from the Jewish understanding of the Messiah. (NIVBC)

Jesus came from the tribe of Judah (Heb 7:14; Lk 3:33), and was also a direct descendent of David (Rom 15:12; Lk 20:41-44; Lk 3:23-32). Through Jesus' sinless life and His redemptive sacrifice He became worthy to open the book. "...And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain..." (5:6 NKJV). The image is clearly directed to Jesus as the Lamb who was slain. John was expecting to see a Lion, but instead sees a Lamb. But this is no ordinary Lamb – it is a Lamb that has been sacrificed, and is now standing and living. It had been dead, but has been made alive again. The Lamb is *in the midst* – in the central place – He is not relegated to the sidelines, but to the position nearest to the Almighty.

Wallace notes⁴:

“...Christ (is) here represented as a lamb instead of a lion because of his having been sacrificially slain; but the slain lamb was now risen and is seen as the conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah to deliver his people from their foes and oppressors.”

The Lamb is described, not as the weak and helpless creature we might think of, but as one with power “...*having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth...*” (5:6 NKJV). Once again, the number seven indicates completeness. Hailey notes⁵:

...“Horn” was used metaphorically by the Hebrews for power; prophetically, “horn” described the strength of Joseph’s sons among the tribes of Israel (Duet. 33:17), and that of Jehovah’s king (1 Sam. 2:10). Zedekiah, the false prophet, symbolised power by iron horns which he used as if to push the enemy (II Chron. 18:10), and the psalmists and prophets used the term repeatedly to express the idea of power. The seven horns of the Lamb symbolize the fullness and perfection of His power, for “All authority (power) hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18).

So, the Lamb is both all-powerful, and also sees everything (has perfect knowledge) because He is described as having *seven eyes*. These are the *seven Spirits of God* which means the Holy Spirit, which was sent out into all of the world – the comforter, who lives within every christian.

The Lamb was the only one who was found to be worthy “...*Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne...*” (5:7 NKJV). The meaning of this act again depends on the view taken of the book. However, most writers view the action as having already been accomplished by Jesus redemptive action. Hailey notes⁶:

This was not something done whilst John watched, but rather it had taken place at His ascension, when the Savior sat down at the right hand of God and was given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), “angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him” (I Peter 3:21f.).

The Heavenly Beings Worship the Lamb

In the previous chapter, the Almighty was worshipped, but the scene progresses, and after taking the scroll, the Lamb is also worshipped. “...*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...*” (5:8 NKJV). Jesus’ deity is shown by their act of worship. The harp is a symbol of praise and was used to worship God under the Old Covenant. [As an aside, we have no record of it being used in worship under the New Covenant, and we have no authority to add it to our worship. He heart is where our worship is made, and we are commanded to *sing and make melody in our hearts unto the Lord* (Eph 5:19)].

Also under the Old Covenant, incense and prayers went together (Ps 141:2; Lk 1:10). In the vision, these symbolise worship and prayer.

The “bowls full of incense” represent the “prayers of the saints” (8:3-4). Prayer (GK G4666) in this scene is not praise but petition. Why do the saints on earth petition God? In 6:10 the martyrs are seen as calling to God for his judgment on those who killed them, and in 8:3-4 the prayers of the saints are immediately connected with the trumpets of God’s judgment. These prayers, then, are evidently for God’s vindication of the martyred saints. And since v. 10 refers to the coming kingdom, it may be that the prayers are petitions for God to judge the world and to extend his kingdom throughout the earth (Lk 18:7-8). “Saints” (GK G41) is

⁴ Wallace, p. 133

⁵ Hailey, p. 178

⁶ Hailey, p. 179

simply the normal term for the rank and file of Christians, i.e., those set apart for God's purposes (2Co 1:1; Php 1:1; Rev 11:18; 13:7, 19; 19:8; 22:21). (NIVBC)

The New Song

Three hymns are presented in this chapter, to add to the two previous ones. The previous hymns were in worship to God. The first hymn by the four creatures, the second hymn by the twenty-four elders. This third hymn is by the four creatures and the twenty-four elders, and is directed to Jesus rather than to the Almighty. "...*And they sang a new song, saying:*

*You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals;
For You were slain, And You have redeemed us to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth...*" (5:9-10 NKJV)

Christ's redemption is all encompassing, and is directed to everyone *from all tribes and people and nations*. We have also been made kings and priests, which is the fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy of God's kingdom being established in the time of the fourth world empire (Dan 2:44), which was the Roman Empire. Christ now reigns in Heaven, and the Christians are endowed with kingly power on earth, and so we are said to *reign with Him upon the earth* in this present time.

John realises that the voices worshipping the Lamb have increased "...*And 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...*" (5:11 NKJV). The numbers should not be taken literally, but signify an indefinitely great number (c/f the Hebrew writers description of *an innumerable company of angels* – Heb 12:22).

In this fourth hymn (ie the second to the Lamb) they were "...*saying with a loud voice:*

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" ...*" (5:12 NKJV)

The image is the same thing described by both Peter and Paul, with the plan of salvation (pictured in the vision as the words on the scroll) hidden from the angels (the myriads of angels are around Christ, and are wanting to see the scroll, but no one was worthy to open it). Peter describes the scene as "...*the things which have now been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into...*" (1 Pet 1:12 NKJV). Paul describes it "...*now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...*" (Eph 3:10-11 NKJV).

The imagery suggests the infinite honor and power of the One who is at the center of it all. The angels shout out their song of praise to the Lamb who was slain (cf. Heb 1:6). Their sevenfold shout rings out like the sound from a huge bell--"power . . . wealth . . . wisdom . . . strength . . . honor . . . glory . . . praise." All these are intrinsic qualities of Christ, except the last, which is the expression of the creatures' worship. Elsewhere the same qualities are ascribed to God himself (v. 13; 7:12). (NIVBC)

The seven aspects of the hymn (power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory, and praise) suggests perfect (complete) worship.

The Fifth Hymn

The circle of praise increases beyond the innumerable number of angles “...*And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying,*

*“Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” ...”* (5:13 NKJV)

The worshippers have increased to the whole of creation, and the worship extends to both the Almighty (He who sits on the throne) and to Christ (the Lamb). Missing from both the NKJV and the NIV translations is the definite article concerning the worship which is offered. This should read “...*the* blessing, and *the* honour, and *the* glory and *the* power be to Him...” which shows the totality of the four attributes of worship – with all worship offered to *both* the Almighty and to Jesus.

The four creatures and the elders respond to the praise from the world (which shows their support and approval of the action of praise to both Almighty God and to Jesus the Lamb). “...*The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped....”* (5:14 NIV).

At the close of the chapter, John brings us *back to earth* in a real sense. We have seen what is going on in heaven, but how does that relate to what’s going on here? We can see the link between our worship and what is going on in heaven as a response! The message to the christians in Asia who were suffering under the threat of Emperor worship is clear – when we worship Christ and honour Him, the heavenly hosts respond in shouts of accolades. There is no such response, and indeed no place, for worship of Caesar. Harkrider notes⁷:

This vision of the throne would prepare God’s people for suffering and death. It does so by showing them the heavenly majesty that gives assurance that victory will ultimately be theirs through the Lamb who died for them ... Politicians and economists are busy about current world events, but their lack of concern for the scroll of God in which is found history’s real meaning, as well as that of the future, leaves them without the peace and spiritual understanding that the saints of God possess (John 14:27-29).

There is a real message here for us (and all who suffer persecution as Christians). Our worship resonates in heaven, and both the Lamb of God and the Father are to be worshipped. Despite the things that we might suffer (or have to endure through the trials and tribulations of life), God is in control. He is the One who is at the centre of things, and our worship through our lives needs to be directed to Him and to Jesus who suffered for us.

Alternate Views of the Text

Allphin (p.61) notes: “Nearly everyone says the “book” was an outline of “the future” – the future of the church or of the Israelites or both; or that it contained a forecast of the destiny of the church and the world, or was a religious history written in advance. In any case, the belief that it was and is prophetic of future times and scenes is quite general. But whether the evidence, internal or otherwise, supports that idea or not, is still a question; in fact, it is the dominant question of this entire series of notes. And the answer to it must be sought in whatever fundamental truths are made manifest in these or other similar studies...”

⁷ Harkrider, p. 77