

Chapter Five

We are now introduced to God's redemption plan as seen in the Lamb. He is worthy to take hold of the mysterious book held by the One sitting on the throne. He is worthy to receive praise, glory and honor, along with the Father.

Enter the Lamb

5:1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

This scene and the one in chapter four have their roots in Daniel 7.

The right hand is indicative of God's righteous hand. (See notes on 1:16) It is in this hand of righteous power that a book rests, sealed, unreadable, and therefore, unfulfilled. The righteous work (hand) of God is seen in the redemption plan (book).

Book written inside and on the back: Books as we know them today didn't exist in John's day. Writing was done on scrolls, which were stored rolled up. This scroll speaks of Ezekiel's vision:

Then I looked, behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back; and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. (Ezek 2:9-10)

Two scrolls appear in scripture that contain prophetic messages of doom and warnings. (Ezek 3:1ff; Zech 5:1) Other scrolls written by Isaiah (Isa 30:8) and Jeremiah (Jer 36; 51:60-63) contained similar "bad news" from God. Even the scroll used during the test of an adulteress contained curses. (Num 5:23) The only good scrolls (books) are the Mosaic Law (Deut 17:18) and the book (scroll) of Life. Like those read of the OT prophets, this scroll in Revelation contains portents of doom, each seal releasing a dark prediction unloosed upon men and/or spiritual powers. The seven seals indicate these words of prophecy to be *completely* sealed, or hidden.

5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

Who is worthy to judge? Strength and ability is not required to break these seals. "Not by strength or might, but by My Spirit." (Zech 4:6) The prerequisite is *worthiness*. Who *deserves* to open this book? Who *deserves* to break these seals and therefore judge the world? The loud voice of the messenger indicates a shout loud enough to be heard in heaven, on earth, and even in the grave, as the next verse indicates.

5:3-4 And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it. And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it;

In all of Creation, there was found no one with the credentials to open this book, much less read it. John's agony shows that he knew the book's contents, and to have it remain closed meant a great tragedy. The urgency, the *need* to open this scroll is portrayed in his great weeping, indicative of the cries of the souls under the altar, who cried, "How long, O Lord?" (Rev 6:10) Human redemption is on the line.

What is taking place here is suggestive of the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could enter after he had made an animal sacrifice for the atonement of his own sins. Jesus entered the heavenly veil by making atonement for sin with His own blood. This is what gives Him authority to take the scroll—the New Testament sealed in His precious blood. (Heb 7:26-28; 9:15-17)

5:5 and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

One of the paradoxes of Revelation is that of Time. At first, no one can be found in all of Creation to open this book. Suddenly, one of the elders—a symbol of wisdom and authority—tells John that someone has overcome for the purpose of opening this sealed scroll. We see then how events suddenly shift. The events of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection are not mentioned, only that the Lion has overcome. Those details are illustrated more fully later in the book. Christ has moved from the center of the church, to the throne in heaven to judge the world. He has overcome to claim His rightful inheritance, just as Christians must overcome to receive their inheritance.

Lion: Judah's standard (flag) was the lion. The lion is indicative of power and authority (see notes of 4:7). This is the tribe from which Jesus was born. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David. (1 Kings 12:20) He also rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved. (Psa 78:67, 68) The prophet Joel declared, "The Lord...will roar from Zion." (Joel 3:16)

Root of David: David's offspring or progeny. A plant's root provides stability and nourishment. Most biblical references to 'root' are symbolic, based on the important relationship between it and the rest of the plant. As such, to be rooted means to be established, while being uprooted means to be dispossessed. The highest use of the metaphor comes in the messianic passages referring to Jesus as David's descendant—*In that day there shall be a Root of Jesse who shall stand as a banner to the people.* (Isa 11:10) That banner is the standard under which those who belong to Christ assemble. Revelation speaks both of the Root of David (5:5) and the Root and Offspring of David (22:16), indicating Jesus is both human and divine, both the Offspring and the Origin of the messianic line.

Has overcome:

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2:13)

Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. (1 John 5:4-6)

Christ's overcoming the world, the flesh and the devil gave Him the right to open this scroll of doom, to bring judgment down on men and angels. Since the kingdom of darkness had violated the rules concerning sin and death (Rom 8:2) by crucifying Jesus, He now had the right and privilege of meting out judgment to that kingdom.

5:6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

Once again, we see the difficulty in trying to understand the *position* of actors in this scene. First, there is a Lamb *between* the throne, four living creatures and elders. This would imply that the elders and creatures are somehow united and in perfect harmony. As Christ in the creation worships God, so do the heavenly priests.

Lamb standing: In other words, this Lamb is slain but forever standing, His blood taking away the sins of the world. Jesus is the *continual* sacrifice, depicted here as actively pouring out His blood for our sins. It spans Time and Space, in that *whenever* a person approaches the throne for forgiveness, there is *already* a sacrifice for their atonement. He is the living One, who was dead, and behold, is alive forevermore. (Rev 1:18) Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29), meaning, God's perfect sacrifice.

Seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, seem to imply that both the horns and eyes are the seven Spirits. However, the Greek only identifies the eyes representing the Spirits, not the horns. This Lamb had *seven horns*. Horns are symbolic of power. (See notes on 13:1) Seven horns mean perfect or complete authority. Jesus was called the "horn of salvation." (Psa 132:17; Luke 1:69) Hannah prayed that her "horn was exalted in the Lord." (1 Sam 2:1) In prophecy, the symbol may also refer to a king. (Dan 7:20, 24; 8:20) The first interpretation of this symbol as being a king is found in 1 Sam 2:10—*He will give strength to His king; and will exalt the horn of His anointed.* The horn of the Lord meant protection, refuge, and strength. (2 Sam 22:3; Psa 18:2)

He also had *seven eyes*, explained here as the *seven spirits of God*. In the previous chapter, the seven lamps of fire before the throne represent the seven spirits of God. Now, the symbol is moved to the Sacrificial Lamb, turning from lamps (light~truth) into eyes (sight~wisdom~ knowledge). These eyes (spirits) are *sent out into all the earth*, and may represent certain angels (messengers). In Zechariah's vision of the horses, the angel explained to the prophet, "These are those whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth." (Zech 1:10) Where horses *patrol*, eyes *watch*. Thus, these spirits of God watch the entire earth. Of specific import is their attachment to the Lamb: they watch *for* Him. They are His eyes upon the world of men.

5:7 And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

The following verses indicate, that at this point, Christ had already died and purchased men from the earth with His blood. This transaction of passing the scroll from the Father to the Son is a result of

that sacrifice and redemption. Authority to carry out the judgments written on the scroll is handed to the Son. While on earth, Jesus said, “I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me *has given Me a commandment* as to what to say and what to speak. I know that *His commandment is eternal life*; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (John 12:49-50) The commandment of eternal life points to the Book of Life—the New Testament. It is the Word that gives us this life. (John 6:63) The scroll then, seems to represent the *essence* of the New Covenant.¹

5:8 And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

As the scroll is passed to the Son, so too is the worship transferred to Him.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:25-28)

Mimicking the attributes of a dream, the 24 elders suddenly have harps and incense bowls. The bowls of incense are already explained as being the *prayers of the saints*. In the earthly temple, there were 24 singers and musicians appointed for the purpose of offering praise. (1 Chron 25:1-7)

Golden harps: The harp (or ‘lyre’) is mentioned more than any other musical instrument in the Bible. (2 Chr 29:25; Psa 147:7; Isa 23:16) It was the instrument David used to soothe the “distressing spirit” which troubled King Saul. (1 Sam 16:16, 23) Since these harps are made of gold, they are of great value, in that they provide calm during troubled times. The 24 elders fall down, each with a precious and soothing song (which they will sing in the following verses), and the prayers of the saints (incense). Both of these are offered to Jesus Christ, the Lamb.

Some claim God never authorized instrumental music in the OT temple. They accuse David of added it to the service without God’s consent. The OT is quite clear, however:

(Hezekiah) stationed the Levites in the temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king’s seer and Nathan the prophet; *this was commanded by the Lord through his prophets*. (1 Chron 29:25)

5:9-10 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

This new song is a prelude to the calamities about to fall on the earth and powers of darkness. It is essentially the Gospel, the Good News that Christ died for the world’s sins, purchased people with His

¹ I say *essence*, because many hold to the foolish notion that God’s Truth can only be found in a certain bible translation. Truth has little to do with the poetic use of language and syntax, but much to do with the very nature of God as the source of that Truth. It is therefore, the essence of truth derived from words, not the words themselves.

blood, and established them (in a judicial sense) as a kingdom upon the earth. Note how the OT agrees with the song of praise coming before a time of judgment:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day...Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity..."He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness. (Ps 96:1-13)

O sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him...He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Ps 98:1-9)

Just as the first-born of every family in Egypt who did not have the lamb's blood smeared on the door frames, so also will God's judgment be a fearful thing to those not under the protection of Christ's blood.

Kingdom and priests to our God: (See notes on 1:6.) Note the apostle's words here:

You...as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:5, 9)

The Christian (living stone) is to become part of a family (spiritual house), made up of sons and daughters of God. As a house rests on a foundation of concrete, this house rests upon the everlasting foundation of the Gospel. (1 Cor 3:11) Christ is the Eternal One, and these stones (Christians) are connected to that eternal structure. The occupant of this house is God Himself.

My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. (Ezek 37:27)

They will reign upon the earth: This rule of God takes place then, in the heart of the Christian family. Paul says, "...this church...is the mystery which has been hidden...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col 1:25-27) The new song accurately reflects what the Hebrew writer refers to:

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Heb 8:10)

The reigning upon the earth is not referring to a thousand-year reign with Christ on the earth, a false teaching that we'll look at closer later in the book.

5:11-12 **And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."**

Myriad & myriads & thousands of thousands: A euphemism meaning *countless* or *innumerable*. Note the similarity in Daniel's vision:

A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him; thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened. (Dan 7:10)

Just as the books were opened in Daniel's vision, the Lamb is about to open the sealed book. The problem at the beginning of this chapter was to find someone *worthy* to open the book. The answer here then is, the *Lamb* is worthy. When the Lamb receives the scroll, heaven is moved from the administration of angels to Christ's authority. Angels were mediators of the Law. (Gal 3:19) Angels spoke much of the prophecy seen in Genesis through Judges. They now come together singing, "Worthy is the Lamb." He did not subject to angels the world to come...for in subjecting all things to Him, He left nothing that is not subject to Him. (Heb 2:5-8) Notice the seven things received by Christ. Again, this denotes a *complete* receipt for His redemptive work of salvation.

5:13-14 **And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.**

In complete agreement, the creation honors the Father and the Son, identifying four distinct qualities: blessing, honor, glory, and dominion. The number '4' is indicative of things dealing with the earth (4 winds of heaven, 4 corners of the earth, etc.) Certain cults denying Jesus as God should take note that the Son is given equal worship with "Him who sits on the throne." If Jesus were *not* God, the heavenly assembly would be guilty of practicing and promoting idolatry.