

Revelation

*Part Seventeen
Behold the Lion
(Revelation 5:1-14)*

With Study Questions

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And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. ⁴ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it. ⁵ But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals." ⁶ 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, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. 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: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, ¹⁰ And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." 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: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" 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: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" ¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever (Revelation 5:1-14).

Introduction

In chapter four we were giving a vision of the throne room of God and the praise of the heavenly host. The heart of this praise revolved around God as creator. He is worthy to receive praise, glory and honor and power for He created all things and by His will they exist (Revelation 4:11).

But the mere acknowledgement of the existence of a God who created all things is not necessarily good news for the creation. Because of sin there is a great divide. There is a hostility, an enmity (Romans 8:5), a need for reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:20).

We, as sinful creatures are incapable of this in every conceivable way. It is not our natural desire to seek it, and even if it were, it is not within our ability to achieve it. We need help. We need to be delivered, to be redeemed, to be purchased back. In chapter four, John beholds a throne. But in chapter five something happens which causes John to weep.

And I saw in the right *hand* of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. ² Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. ⁴ So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it (Revelation 5:1-4).

"So I wept much" in the Greek it is presented as a continuous wailing. It is a wailing based upon the prospect that no one is able to open a scroll. Similar to the kingdom of God, this inability is not limited to being able to open it, but even **"look at it."** What is so significant about this scroll?

The scroll is in the **"right hand"** of God, indicating His power and priority. Similar to the Ten Commandments, it is written on the **"inside and on the back"** (Exodus 32:15). There is a fulness to what this scroll involves. It's exhaustive. It is **"sealed with seven seals"** telling us that it is already written, yet not already unleashed. Over five hundred years earlier Daniel was told to **"seal the book, until the time of the end"**

(**Daniel 12:4**). Here we are told that the seals are to be opened (Revelation 5:9).

Similar to so much in Revelation, there is a great deal of speculation regarding the nature of this scroll. It most certainly contains the unknown future, being part of **“the things...that are to take place after this”** (**Revelation 1:19**). It has the characteristics of a will. In Rome seals represented witnesses to a legal document. This brings our minds to Hebrews where we are taught of our inheritance by the death of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-22).

Some simplify the scroll to indicate the reign of Christ. Others the Old Testament fulfilled in Christ, as when He read in Isaiah then said to them, **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your presence”** (**Luke 4:21**). Others say (I think with less merit) it's the Lamb's book of life.

The fifth chapter of Revelation bears a strong resemblance to the second chapter of Ezekiel where we read of a scroll written on front and back. Also, similar to what is to come in Revelation, on that scroll were written **“words of lamentation and mourning and woe”** (**Ezekiel 2:10**).

Keeping in mind that in all of creation (which is what is indicated by **“heaven...earth...under the earth”**), there is no one able to open the scroll, and that His worthiness to open the scroll is based upon His redemptive victory on the cross (Revelation 5:9). The scroll is revealing Christ's righteous, authoritative and active role in the course of history, especially as it pertains to judicial and redemptive events that will soon take place (Revelation 1:1, 3).

John, a prisoner for his faith on the rocky, barren island of Patmos, is weeping at the prospect of a course of history with no aim, no victory, where no one is able to turn this world around. At the risk of sounding corny, I couldn't help thinking of *The Sound of Music* where it dawns on Captain von Trapp that Austria (which is displayed so beautifully in the movie) will be lost to the Nazis. Lost in thought he's asked where he is. **“In a world that's disappearing, I'm afraid.”**

Many older Americans feel that way about our country and what we are leaving to our descendants. But John has seen, as it were, the full force of God's glory, **“lightnings, thunderings, and voices”** (**Revelation 4:5**). It is no mere prospect of some individual nation that may not make it. But that the entirety of the created order would remain alienated. Perhaps John is feeling the deep impact of what the author of Hebrews taught:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

John was an eyewitness to the beginning of this great victory in Christ and knew the joy of it (1 John 1:1-3). But he was currently imprisoned and faced with the prospect of it being snuffed out. And all of this with a deeper understanding of the holiness of God. When it gets right down to it, John, once again, needed to hear the gospel.

But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals” (Revelation 5:5).

In chapter four, John beheld the throne, which may have provoked his weeping. But in chapter five we read, **“Behold, the Lion.”** This is not brand new for John, as if the Christian faith is some novel religion that began two thousand years ago, as some people suppose. **“The Lion of the tribe of Judah”** extends back to a promise made in Genesis to Jacob’s fourth son.

It would be through Judah that the true King would come (Matthew 1:2). His enemies, being evil and darkness, would be overcome (Genesis 49:8-11). The promise reminds us of the overall theme of Revelation, being the victory of Christ over all opposition/evil. John, a student of the Old Testament would begin to see the majesty of the fulfillment of this promise. But it would be more. He is also the **“Root of David.”**

The **“Root of David”** is thought to be very odd because the root is prior to the plant. Yet David predates Jesus by a thousand years. Jesus is both David’s Son and David’s Lord (Matthew 22:41-46). All of the Old Covenant looked forward to Christ and all of the New Covenant looks back on Christ. Yet there may not be any passage in all of Scripture which so beautifully anticipates what the Messiah/Deliverer/Christ shall accomplish-what He shall reconcile-than the one referenced in Revelation 5:5. Recognize that Jesse is David’s father:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.² The Spirit of the Lord

shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. ³ His delight *is* in the fear of the Lord, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; ⁴ But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. ⁶ "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious (Isaiah 11:1-10)."

How wonderful it would be for John to hear this. How could he not help look?? What would he see? How is this great promise kept? What must take place for the renovation of all the earth?

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, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth (Revelation 5:6).

Once again, we're met with the literary device of hearing then seeing (the seeing elaborating on what had been heard). And what John sees, even for John (with his knowledge of the promise) must have been counterintuitive.

Nations will often use a powerful animal as a symbol of their strength. Russia has a bear, Britain has a lion, France has a tiger, the US

has an eagle. But the most powerful of kingdom's-the kingdom of God-has a Lamb. I don't know if I've ever seen a high school with a lamb as a mascot.

And John doesn't merely see a Lamb, but a **"Lamb as though it had been slain."** The great victory would be achieved through obedient suffering. It would be the blood of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Let us never lose sight of where and how our victory is achieved. And let us also never forget that we are to imitate Christ in this mentality.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Yet we need to be careful to understand the Lamb as appealing to Christ's work (as a sacrifice) and not lean on it too much in regard to Christ's nature. The **"seven horns"** indicates His great strength (Psalm 18:2). And the **"seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God"** speak to His oneness with the Spirit of both knowledge, power, granting of life and victory over the devil.

"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31). It is concurrent with the sending of the **"Helper"** (who is the Spirit) that **"the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:11).** The emphatic defeat of Satan will be addressed in chapter twelve. For now, let us just recognize that what the Lamb accomplished on the cross was the disarming of **"rulers and authorities" (Colossians 2:15).**

In His resurrection and ascension, He is...

...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (Ephesian 1:21).

Keep in mind that in future chapters there will be those who will seek to hide from **“the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16)**. The Scriptures call believers, even in the face of death, **“more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)**. Yet we tend to live as mere survivors.

Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne (Revelation 5:7).

Jesus taking the scroll from the Father is that which is anticipated in Daniel. The Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days and is given a kingdom that will never pass away (Daniel 7:14). Recall earlier in Daniel how, the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, that the image (which culminated with the Roman Empire) would be destroyed by the stone **“cut with no human hand” (Daniel 2:34)**. This all beautifully begins its fulfillment when Jesus takes the scroll. That which is sealed in Daniel is opened in Revelation.

For the remainder of the chapter we see the response of all creation.

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: “You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:8, 9).

One can only imagine the magnitude of such praise, this, as it’s been called ‘cosmic chorus’! A praise which, expressed by incense, includes the **“prayers of the saints.”** This, little doubt, includes the prayers for God’s justice (Revelation 6:10; 8:4, 5).

Here the song extends beyond the old song of creation to the new song of redemption. It is not merely one nation, as in the Old Covenant, but a worldwide redemption extending to every **“tribe and tongue and people and nation.”** But it is not as if we are mere spectators. We have been given and blessed and active role.

And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.”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: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”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: “Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever (Revelation 5:10-14).

As a kingdom of priests, we are to engage in true and godly leadership which, as we see in Christ Himself, is wise and sacrificial servanthood. This includes the evangelizing and transformation of all things. Contra premillennialism it is something we already are and are currently called to do. Contra (some) amillennialism it is “**on the earth**” and should not merely be relegated to the immaterial.

If Christ is not God, this praise would be blasphemous idolatry. But He is. And if this heavenly host, including innumerable angels, praise His holy name, how fitting that we, if we are among those who have been redeemed by His blood (which I pray includes us all), should worship Him as well.

The experience of John, which brought him from weeping to this astonishing throne room of praise, has been shared with us. Along with John, especially during worship, we are invited to “**Behold the Lion!**” How can such an experience not fuel the engines of faithfulness? Would not John, should not all of us, be bolstered in the call we have repetitively heard to overcome-to persevere?

Know this, that the Lion of whom John writes is also (for those who are of faith) the Advocate of whom John writes. Let this bring deeper meaning to these words,

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

Questions for Study

1. What is happening in chapter 5 that causes John to weep (page 3)?
2. Discuss the scroll. What does it contain? Why is it important (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is anticipated in the Old Testament with references to the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David (pages 5, 6)?
4. What is the difference between what John hears and what John sees? What do we learn from this (pages 6, 7)?
5. How do we see the prophecy in Daniel fulfilled in Revelation 5:7 (page 8)?
6. In what respect are Christians given an active role in the work of redemption (pages 8, 9)?
7. Is Jesus Christ your advocate? How do you know (page 9)?