

The Revelation



Chapter 5



REVELATION 5

Revelation 5:1-8:6 contains the prophecy of the Seven Seals. It is the introduction to the rest of the book.

This whole section is a very symbolic one. We will look at the picture and then try to discern the meaning of the symbols and the message which God is attempting to communicate through them.

Revelation 5:1-5 - And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

This chapter begins with God sitting on his throne in the throne room of the universe. His right hand contained a scroll which had writing on both the front and the back. It was sealed with seven seals.²⁰⁵

A powerful heavenly messenger steps forward and loudly asks: "Is there anyone here who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" There is no response from either heaven or earth to his challenge.²⁰⁶

This is a rhetorical question that sets up the responding answer from another heavenly being. It is analogous to the song recorded in Psalm 24:7-10:

205 Revelation 5:1

206 Revelation 5:2

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!

Lift up your heads, O gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory!

“I spent considerable time weeping uncontrollably,” John goes on, “because no one could be found who was worthy to open the scroll.”²⁰⁷

John is overcome with emotion that no one is able to open the scroll.

It’s easy to skip over this little verse and to miss the pathos and to fail to grasp the importance of this scroll. In John’s mind it was apparently a life-and-death matter that the scroll be opened and examined. It appears that the contents of the scroll were something which affected the future of the whole universe and the Kingdom of Light.

Then one of the Elders steps over to John and comforts him.²⁰⁸ “Don’t worry,” he says, “there is someone who will be able to open the scroll. Here comes Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the one born on earth of David’s lineage. He conquered the Prince of Darkness down on earth

207 (Revelation 5:4

208 Revelation 5:3

so he will be able to break the seven seals and open the scroll.”²⁰⁹

Revelation 5:6 - And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth;

The Revelation is a book of surprises.

The Lion is a lamb!

John glances away from the Elder he is conversing with expecting to see an Aslan-like uber-lion and instead sees a lamb, standing in front of God’s throne in the area of the four living creatures and the wheels within the circle of the twenty-four Elders thrones. The lamb looks to have just been slaughtered.

This is no ordinary lamb. It has seven horns and seven eyes which John tells us represent the seven spirits of God.

This lamb represents Jesus. In Revelation 5:9-11 this lamb is the one who “was killed and by your blood ransomed humans for God from every tribe and people and language group and nation.”

Twenty nine verses in Revelation alone refer to Jesus with the symbol of a slaughtered/sacrificed lamb.²¹⁰

Jesus is the One who John, in his gospel, records “The Baptizer” pointing to and calling “The Lamb of God.”²¹¹ He is the one Philip, one of Jesus’ disciples, equates with the slaughtered lamb in his conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch.²¹² Paul in 1st Corinthians 5:7 says that “Jesus our Passover lamb has been sacrificed;” and Peter tells us that “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood

209 Revelation 5:5

210 Revelation 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 8:1; 12:11; 13:8,11; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:9,14,22,23; 22:1,3)

211 John 1:29, 36

212 Acts 8:32

of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake.”²¹³

Revelation 5:7-8 - and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints;

There is a reason why God, from the moment of sin, chose a slaughtered lamb to represent the horror of Jesus’ sacrifice for our rebellion.²¹⁴ Only the horror of seeing something so innocent killed can begin to communicate the magnitude of the scandal of Jesus’ death on the cross for us. Most other animals are killed quickly for slaughter then hung up to bleed out the majority of the blood.. A sheep will not bleed that way so it has to be killed another way. A sheep to be slaughtered is brought in and tied to a post. Then, with no anesthesia or attempt to ameliorate the pain or horror for the animal, its throat is slit and it is left to stand until its heart pumps its circulatory system dry and it dies.

In the magnificence of heaven’s throne room, the sight of the lamb, its head hanging down and its throat cut, standing in a pool of fresh blood must have been horrifying. It was a vivid symbol that let John and us know immediately who was being referred to; it was a striking reference to what Jesus’ primary mission on earth was; and it establishes the reason why he was the only one worthy and capable of opening the scroll.

Certain themes, as already noted, predominate in the Bible. The nature of Jesus death on the cross to “pay the price” to ransom us from Satan’s Kingdom of Darkness is the pre-eminent theme of the Bible. It is the warp and woof around which every other thread is woven; it is the motif of every other topic in Scripture. Without it everything else in Christianity, and in Judaism, collapses into a tangle of beautiful but senseless thread. Any attempt to shift the focus to anything else or to denigrate or de-emphasize it results, whether intentional or not, is removing the underpinning of everything else the message of the Bible is about. The Bible knows

213 1st Peter 1:17-20

214 Genesis 4:4

no other basis for the whole plan to save us from Satan's Kingdom of Darkness.

There is a reason why John is so agitated about this little book. We begin to discover what the scroll is, why it is sealed, and why John is so desirous it be opened when we look at the Bible's companion volume to the Revelation.

There is a striking contrast between what John will be told not to do with his book and what Daniel was told to do when he was finished writing his. When Daniel has completed his book he is told to "seal up the book until the time of the end."²¹⁵ For over a thousand years the Jewish people had studied Daniel, believing that it held the key to understanding human history, but it had been sealed by God and its mysteries, for the most part, remained just that.

Israel longed for the "end times" when all of the promises given by God would be fulfilled; when the lion would lay down with the lamb; when there would be no more persecution of the citizens of God's Kingdom; when they would truly live in a land flowing with milk and honey; when everlasting righteousness would be ushered in for all of God's people.

When John sees the "little book" in the hand of God, he recognizes it immediately. He could see the opening lines; he had memorized them as a child and spoken of them often over the years; he had heard them quoted in synagogue and temple and now, maybe, just maybe, the seals would be removed and the prophecies understood.

The lamb turns and steps up to God's throne and takes the scroll from his right hand. Now in Revelation we discover the Lamb, the hero of the story, Jesus, "One Like a Son of Man," removing the seals from the book one at a time. Daniel and the Revelation must be viewed as companion books. They cover the same series of events with a different emphasis (Daniel's book is concerned primarily with the course of events in secular world - particularly those that affect the Jewish nation. The Revelation overlays events which occur more in the spiritual realm.). Daniel begins at a much earlier date and includes earlier events; Revelation is a commentary, a further explanation, a revelation of further information about the events written of by Daniel. In the Revelation the Lamb not only removes the seals; the

215 Daniel 11:33

Author not only provides the key to understanding Daniel; he begins to add detail to the picture to make it even more glorious.

Revelation 5:8-10 - And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

When the lamb had taken the scroll from God the Father, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders bowed before the lamb. Each of them had a golden harp and golden bowls full of incense and they sang a different song from the one they normally sing: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open the seals because you were killed and by your blood you ransomed humans for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to our God. They shall reign on earth."

The Lamb is worthy because (1) he was killed, (2) because by his blood he ransomed people from every culture, ethnic, language group and country. Christ's charge to his followers to go to every nation with the Good News of what he had done and what was available to them through his death on the Cross²¹⁶ was based on what he accomplished. The result of his death is a fulfillment of Daniel's Seven's prophecy that the same lamb would receive the Kingdom at the end and return it to his people.

They were echoed by an unnumerable crowd of billions of heaven's messengers which had gathered to watch. They sang "The Lamb who was killed is worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Revelation 5:11-14 - Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who

216 Matthew 24:14

was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.

It helps to remember that we are watching a drama unfold in this book. It is an epic of Wagnarian proportions! Now, the whole chorus, a huge choir takes up the song of those around the throne. It is like hearing Handel's Hallelujah Chorus sung by a mass choir of millions of voices breaking out in song at the top of their lungs. It is massive, it is very loud, it shakes the building and rolls out to the ends of the universe.

As the song of the 24 Elders and the creatures in front of God's throne echoes out through the universe they are joined by every created being in the whole cosmos singing: "Bless the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb because they deserve honor and glory and might forever!" The four living creatures shout over and over again, "So be it!" and the twenty-four elders bow down before God and the Lamb and worship them."

It is often easy to lose the forest for the trees in a passage such as this - to focus on trying to determine the meaning of every little symbol and to miss the point which the author is trying to make. And, because of the chapter divisions and the sectional notes in many of our Bibles it is tempting to divorce Revelation 5 from Revelation 4 when in reality they form a single picture of a special celebration worship service of the Kingdom of Light in heaven.

All of the accouterments such as golden harps and bowls full of prayers are nothing more than that - utensils and instruments that are always a part of heavenly worship. We cannot even say with certainty if they are literal at all or symbolic or even John's attempts to describe something he had never seen or even imagined. For instance, if you had never seen or heard a Fender Stratocaster electric guitar, how would you describe it to other people who had never seen or heard such a thing if the only stringed instrument you or they were familiar with was a harp?

While it may very well be that the prayers of the saints are kept in golden bowls in

heaven filled with incense, it is not likely. The salient point of all this is that the worshipful prayers of the saints are an integral part of this heavenly worship, even if those saints are not able to attend in person.

The crux of this whole section comprised of Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 is that God and the Lamb have accomplished something of note that elicits unrestrained praise from the whole universe. That something is the ransom of humans from the Kingdom of Darkness by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb pointed to by the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament, that he has made all who choose to accept that sacrifice a kingdom and priests to God and that the day will come when they will reign again on earth.

John in Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 gives in a nutshell what he will spend the rest of the book explaining in much greater detail. It is the point of the Revelation and it is the single underlying focus of the whole Bible. The cross and what God set out to accomplish by Jesus' death on it make absolutely no sense outside of the context of this theme. It is the core motif upon which the whole symphony of other concerns in the Bible are built. It is the essence, the gist, the single primary focus of everything God has done in relation to planet earth since the fall. So, it will be worth our time and attention to examine this theme in greater detail before we proceed with the rest of the Revelation.

In Luke 3:5-7 we discover Jesus being tempted by Satan. We often breeze, lightly, through Jesus' temptations and fail to appreciate their complexity. This is the opening parry in what would be a three and a half year battle between Jesus and Satan. In war it is prudent to make an initial thrust to test your opponents metal, defenses and strategy. These temptations are Satan's opening salvo. Each is carefully crafted to test Jesus' commitment to the Kingdom of Light in a pivotal area.

In the first temptation, when he challenges Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy his desperate need for food, Satan tests Jesus' willingness to trust his father when the going got tough. Jesus didn't go to the wilderness of his own volition. The Spirit led him there; he was out in the wild places because God had a reason for him to be there. But being there was tough; it stretched Jesus' trust and endurance to the limits. Satan came along and in essence said, "God isn't doing a very good job of taking care of you. He brought you out here and abandoned you. You can't really be on

God's mission or you wouldn't be starving to death in the boondocks. He promised to provide all of your needs; he promised to never leave you, to take care of you, to watch over you and look at what has happened. So, you might as well take care of yourself. If God was really interested in you and invested in what you are doing you wouldn't be in the situation you find yourself in. Let's face it, he stranded you out here and left you to fend for yourself, so make dinner before you starve to death. "

In the third temptation when he provokes Jesus to throw himself off of the highest point of the temple Satan probes the degree of Jesus' commitment to going beyond the superficial in his relationship with God. In one sense it is the same issue as the first temptation come at from a different direction. "Listen," Satan says, "you have taken your stance on believing and acting on God's word.²¹⁷ I'll accept that. So, prove it. He says his angels will guard you in anything you do. He says they will take care of you and keep you from stubbing your toe on a rock and protect you from poisonous snakes and hungry young lions. He promises to deliver you and protect you if you love him and to give you a long life. When you are in trouble and call out to him he promises to answer and to be there for you and rescue you. So, I am calling your bluff. You say you trust him. Let's find out just how much you really trust him and while we're at it, let's call his bluff as well and see if he will really come through for you like he says he will."²¹⁸

"Oh, and Jesus, you going to say that this doesn't mean that he will take care of you when you are doing your own thing. Well, in this case, he led you out here into this God forsaken place, so you're on his mission. It's time to put up or shut up!"

Jesus' response reveals that he understands the underlying issue clearly. Again, referring to the Old Testament Scriptures he says, "Satan, you're not supposed to test God."

The issue is not whether we are to find out if God really means what he says²¹⁹; the question is our motive in doing so.²²⁰ Is our thinking and the action which follows it one of challenging God or is it trusting that he will follow through on his promises?

217 Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:7

218 Psalms 91

219 Psalms 34:8; Psalms 26:2; Malachi 3:10; Hebrews 3:9

220 (Deuteronomy 6:16; 1st Corinthians 10:9)

The second temptation which Satan brought was the most subtle of the three, slipped in with a conciliatory tone and geared to discover if Jesus really did make God the priority in his life. Satan had wanted this world and he got it by becoming his own god and getting it his own way.

Jesus came to this world to ransom it back from Satan by dying the sinner's death. He read the prophecies and he knew from his times of communion with the Father just what he faced. Death by crucifixion, as horrible as it was, was not what Jesus feared. The lash of the whip laced with iron and glass shards or the thorns driven into his head were not what created his angst; neither was it the trials, the abandonment by his friends and followers or the abuse he would suffer. The price sinners will pay for their rebellion if they do not accept his sacrifice is none of these.

The wages rebels will receive for their rebellion is the acceptance by God of their choice to be completely separated from him. No one in the universe has ever experienced that, yet, except Jesus on the cross. The ultimate consequence of rebellion is not eternal death with no consciousness, if that were so, then Jesus didn't experience what unrepentant rebels will experience. In three days he came back to life. The wages are not eternal burning in hell, because Jesus never experienced that. The wages of rebellion are the dying, the stark unadulterated terror of being separated from the source of all life; it is being sucked into the black hole of total estrangement from God that Jesus feared. It is realizing that the atomic bonds which hold together the sub-atomic particles of the atoms which make up what is you are being dissolved and that you are literally ceasing to exist. It was what wrung from his heart and lips the cry "My God! My God! I have been forsaken by God! Why? Why? Why?"

Satan in the second temptation offers Jesus a way out; he can receive everything he came for without paying the price Satan has demanded.

Satan showed Jesus a panoramic view of the whole world with every kindred, nation, tongue and people marked as to their location and size. "And he said to him, 'I'll give it all to you. Your rule can extend from pole to pole and clear around the world again. As you are very well aware, it was given to me and I can give it to anyone I want to give it to.'²²¹ You will be my vice-regent and will have complete

221 Luke 4:6

authority over everything. Just bow and accept me as your king and it's your's.

Jesus, God's way involves nothing but horrible mental, spiritual, emotional and physical pain. You are going to suffer as no one has ever suffered in order to ransom these people back from me and you know it! God's law demands it; there's no other way if you remain loyal to him.

You think he loves you? If he did, would he put you through all of this? Join me in my rebellion and I'll give it all to you, no pain, no suffering, no battle scars - it's your's for the asking. Why put yourself through all this? Jesus, we've known each other for too long. We've been friends for millennia. Sure, there was what happened in heaven. We went to war and I lost fair and square. I got what I wanted with this world and you and your dad got what you wanted. It was a draw and we're both happy. You have your universe and I have my world. So, let's let bygones be bygones and work together. It will all belong to us and we can divide it up any way we want."²²²

We often rush to Jesus' response that he would remain loyal to the Father and only serve him and we miss the implications of Satan's offer and what Jesus responded to. Jesus never disputes Satan's claim of ownership of this world and everything in it. For both of them it is a given. He only responds to the method he will use to gain it back.

When Adam and Eve were created God gave them a gift - they and their progeny were to rule this world.²²³ When they chose to obey Satan instead of God they transferred the rule of this world to him. They gave it to him and he could, as he claimed, "give to anyone he wished."²²⁴

This is the reason why, in Job, when the representatives of the various inhabited worlds in the universe come to heaven for a council, Satan comes as the legitimate representative of our world.²²⁵ That was why, by the way, he was very aware of what Jesus was doing on this earth and what he faced. He had been there in the

222 Luke 4:5-8

223 Genesis 1:26-28

224 Luke 4:6

225 Job 1:6; 2:1

councils of heaven when the plans were made and announced. He had demanded the ransom price for every citizen on earth and had been there when the decision was made to grant it by God himself dying for his people. He had been there ready to destroy Jesus at his birth²²⁶ not just because he had read the Bible's prophecies, but because he had been there in the councils of heaven and had the timetable in his hands. He had dogged Jesus every step of his growing up and was lying in wait for him when he entered the wild places after his baptism. Satan had worked for over 4000 years to plan and prepare for this confluence of events. He was the ruler of this world and he was going to defend his turf and expand it if possible.

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible acknowledges that Satan is the current ruler of this world. God, we discover in Daniel 2:44 will re-establish his rule over this earth at the end of human history as we know it. Until then it is Satan's domain. In Jesus's last public discourse he promises that when he is crucified and pays the ransom for each of us, "the ruler of this world one day will be thrown out."²²⁷ On the walk from the Last Supper to Gethsamene, Jesus says that they were not going to be able to talk long because "the ruler of this world is on his way."²²⁸ He goes on to say, "He couldn't do this if I didn't want to let him. I am choosing to allow this happen and when it is finished, the whole world will know who I am loyal to."

Paul in Ephesians 6:12 warns us that we are not at war with flesh and blood but against the against the principalities (area rulers), against the various echelons, and against the world rulers of this present darkness (who have dominion over this earth)²²⁹ who are all under the command of the "Prince of the Power of the Air"²³⁰ - in other words, against the whole unseen army of rebellion who currently rule this world. In Galatians he declares that the whole world is a prisoner to rebellion.²³¹

Jesus died on the cross to ransom us from the Kingdom of Darkness and its rulers. He paid the price to give us our freedom²³² so that we could be part, if we chose, of

226 Matthew 2
227 John 12:30,31
228 John 14:30,31
229 Colossians 1:13
230 Ephesians 2:2
231 Galatians 3:22
232 Ephesians 2:1-10; 6:12; Colossians 1:13,14

his Kingdom of Light.²³³

In Hebrews 2, the author tells us how important it is not to allow ourselves to drift away from our relationship with God who is our source of salvation. He tells us that Jesus through his death on Calvary received the right to have all dominion, everything on earth, restored to him. We don't see the reality of that, yet, the author continues, but we will when the time comes.²³⁴ That time is what the Revelation is all about!

The seventh chapter of Daniel's book makes it very clear that Jesus receives dominion over this earth at the end of the world and then restores it to the progeny of Adam and Eve who have chosen to rebel against Satan's Kingdom of Darkness and to become part of the Kingdom of Light.²³⁵

All of this is possible because of what the Lamb did when he died to ransom us. It is why he is "worthy break the seals and open the scroll."²³⁶ He was killed and by his blood ransomed men for God;²³⁷ we were bought with the price²³⁸ of Jesus' life in exchange for our own.

That is the point of the whole Revelation. The war is coming to an end. The final cataclysmic events are still ahead of us, but we are living at the climax of all human history. That is the joyful burden of the three angels who are sent out to the world in Revelation 14 - they carry the Good News that the Kingdom of Darkness is coming to an end. Satan's kingdom is doomed.

But that isn't all there is to the Good News. We can choose to be part of the Kingdom of Light! Is it any wonder that there is a celebration in heaven? Is it any wonder that the universe's rulers offer Jesus their worship, salute Jesus as the conqueror and make merry, singing his praises - honoring him as "worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

233 1st Peter 2:9

234 Hebrews 2:1-9

235 Daniel 7:14,22,26,27

236 Revelation 5:9

237 Revelation 5:9

238 1st Corinthians 6:20

The rest of the Revelation is an expansion and further explanation of what we read in Revelation 4,5.