

The Book In Heaven

Revelation 5 Notes

The Throne (vss. 1-3)

- On the right hand of the One seated on the throne is a book of unparalleled significance. Filled to overflowing and sealed with seven seals to insure the secrecy of its decrees, it contains the full account of what God in His sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world. It symbolizes God's eternal purpose for man's salvation, the grand scheme of redemption. The idea of a heavenly book containing the future course of history is reflected in passages such as Psalm 139:16.
- The scroll is arranged in an unusual way, because as each seal is broken a portion of its content is enacted. That the scroll is also written on the back indicates how extensive and comprehensive are the decrees of God.
- A great voice is needed because the challenge is sent out to the far reaches of creation. We will meet this angelic messenger or herald again in 10:1 and 18:21. The call is for someone worthy to perform the supreme service of opening the book.
- To open the book meant loosing the seals and exposing its content. To look upon it meant more than merely viewing it, for John had already seen it lying on God's right hand. The threefold division of the universe (heaven, earth, under the earth) is also found in Philippians 2:10. From among an all-inclusive host no one responded, for no one was "able;" i.e., no one possessed the power or ability by virtue of his own resources or through a state of mind to open the book. The book was not offered to John.

The Multitude (vss. 4-8)

- John breaks out in unrestrained weeping, not from self-pity or because his curiosity regarding the scroll's content would not be gratified, but because it appeared that the purpose for which he had been caught up to heaven would not be realized. Therefore, he and the saints would be deprived of this knowledge and purpose of God by the want of one qualified to open the book.
- The One who is worthy to break the seals is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David. We have here perhaps the two most profound verses in the entire book because they relate the Jewish Messianic hopes to the good news of the coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus.

- Both of these titles are taken from the Old Testament. The first is from Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49:9-10 and the second is an allusion to Isaiah 11:1. This verse is quoted as applying to the Messiah in Romans 15:12.
- When John looks to the center of the celestial scene he sees a Lamb. The Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, bearing the wounds of sacrificial slaughter, stands ready for action. The use of the tenses in the original language emphasizes the lasting benefits of His sacrificial death and resurrection.
- The victory over Satan and death was accomplished on the cross. He conquered by an act of total self-sacrifice. The result is that He alone is worthy to open the scroll.
- Of course, seven is a number used to represent completeness. Horns are used throughout the scriptures as a symbol of power and authority. Therefore, we see Christ with complete power and authority. The seven eyes symbolize Christ having perfect knowledge along with His perfect power (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:24).
- We are given a visual representation of what Paul was talking about in Philippians 2:6-11. He emptied Himself and humbled Himself. He is the Lion of Judah but became the slaughtered Lamb for our sins. In one brilliant stroke, John portrays the central theme of the New Testament -- victory through sacrifice.
- With the handing of the scroll to the Lamb we enter into one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration anywhere recorded. The golden bowls are full of incense symbolizing the prayers of the saints. Despised on earth, the prayers of the saints are now brought forth before God in golden bowls. Incense and prayer are associated in the Old Covenant (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10).

The Praise (vss. 9-14)

- In chapter 4 the twenty-four elders praised the worthiness of God for His work in creation. In chapter 5 they direct their praise to the Lamb for His work of redemption. The idea of a new song grows out of the use of the expression in the Psalms (cf. 98:1; 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; etc.).
- Every new act of mercy calls forth a new song of gratitude and praise. In the midst of a prophetic passage (Isaiah 42:5-17) which extols the glorious victory of the One who "created the heavens and stretched them out" (vs. 5; cf. Revelation 4:11), we find the admonition, "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth" (vs. 10).
- They also sing a song to the Lamb about His worthiness to open the scroll. The song to the Lamb is a new song because the covenant es-

established through His death is a new covenant. It is not simply new in point of time, but more important, it is new and distinctive in quality.

- The Lamb is worthy because He was slaughtered and He purchased His people. He paid the price to buy His people back. Not only did He buy them back, but He made them a kingdom. This kingdom was already in existence, for John said he was a fellow partaker in this kingdom (Revelation 1:9). This kingdom was not in the future but had already been established.
- Because of this great sacrifice, the people He purchased reign upon the earth. This reigning is not in the future during some millennial reign. We reign with Christ now (Romans 8:37; Ephesians 2:4-7). Jesus has bestowed this great glory upon us through His death and resurrection.
- The adoration of the Lamb moves out in ever widening circles. Now it is the innumerable host of angels who lift their voices in a great hymn of praise. Their number is to be taken as symbolic of countless thousands. (cf. Daniel 7:10).
- The angel's sevenfold ascription of praise is in the third person and antiphonal to the elders' hymn of redemption (cf. 1 Chronicles 29:10-19). Power, riches, wisdom and might are not benefits which the Lamb is about to receive but qualities He possesses and for which He is worthy to be praised.
- The climax of the scene is reached in vs. 13 where all creation gives blessing, honor, glory and dominion to God and to the Lamb. The universality of Christ's achievement calls for a universal response. John hears the adoration of the entire created world.
- The four living creatures were the first to offer praise in the throne room vision of chapters 4 and 5; it is fitting that they should also bring it to a close.