

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 5

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A. General Description:

All of chapter 4 is an introduction to the main point of chapters 4-5, that is, to introduce the scroll with its seven seals. The symbolic presentation showed a scroll or a rolled-up parchment with seven seals affixed to the side in such a way that if unrolled the seven seals would need to be broken one by one. (From Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.)

With the heavenly vision of chapters 4-5, the stage was set for the dramatic events to follow, the opening of the seven seals. It is clear from this revelation that heaven is real, not imagined. These two chapters reveal the indescribable glory and infinite majesty of the Godhead in heaven. The following chapters reveal this sovereign power of God expressed in judgment on a wicked world sunk in unprecedented depths of sin and blasphemy. (From Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.)

We are now ready for the actual opening of these seals, but before beginning the study of chapter 6, note—a point often overlooked—that while the seals are opened, that is, stripped from the book, the book itself is never opened. Only six seals are opened in this chapter; the seventh is not opened until the trumpet judgments are about to be announced (8:1). Of these six seals, the first four form a group; the fifth and sixth stand by themselves. Each of the first four is introduced with a rider on a horse, from which derives the famous phrase used in many ways, in numerous literatures, “the four horsemen of the Apocalypse.”¹

The fact that the scroll is written on the inside, the back indicates that there was a lot to say (cf. Ezek. 2:10). The drama of seeking a worthy opener heightens the importance of the sealed scroll. To break the seals was to open the scroll. The function of seals in the ancient world was to protect important documents for private and select viewing. This scroll is so confidential that it has not one, but seven seals. Only when all seven are broken will the contents of the book be revealed. The “strong angel” (5:2) will appear again in 10:1 and 18:21. The one worthy to open the seals would have to match the worthiness of the Father (4:11). The revealing of God’s judgment involves worthiness (5:2), not power. The challenge goes out to heaven above, earth beneath, and underneath the earth (5:3; cf. Exod. 20:4; Phil. 2:10). When the seven seals are broken, the judgments of God are poured out on the earth (cf. 6:1).²

The worthy one is worshiped (5:8–14). “The prayers of God’s people” (5:8) relate to the prayers for the end of evil and the beginning of God’s kingdom. This is especially true of the prayers noted in the fifth seal (6:9–11). Both Father and Son are praised. For “new song” (5:9), see Psalm 98:1 and Isaiah 42:10. For being made “God’s

¹ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:8). Moody Press.

² Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (pp. 740–741). Tyndale House Publishers.

kingdom and his priests" (5:10), see 1:6 and 20:6. The new song is sung by all heavenly and earthly creation (5:13). The universality of Christ's work calls for this universal praise.³

B. Background Information:

1. John saw a mighty angel (cf. 10:1; 18:21) and heard him ask in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" This is the first of 20 times "loud voice" occurs in Revelation. The last is in 21:3. The Greek word rendered "scroll" is *biblion*, from which is derived the word "Bible." When no one was found to be worthy, John wept and wept (lit., "kept on shedding many tears"). (From Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.)
2. The Lion and the Lamb surely refer to Christ, with the Lamb referring to His first coming and His death and the Lion referring to His second coming and His sovereign judgment of the world. This is the only place in Revelation where Christ is called a Lion, whereas the word "Lamb" (*arnion*, "a small or young lamb") is found 27 times in Revelation and nowhere else in the New Testament. But two similar words for a sacrificial lamb are used in the New Testament: *aren*, found only in Lk 10:3, and *amos*, which occurs four times (Jn 1:29,36; Ac 8:32; 1 Pe 1:19). (From Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.)
3. (5:6) Whereas a lion was the ultimate symbol of power in ancient views of the animal kingdom (cf. also, e.g., Is 35:9; 65:25), a lamb was considered powerless (cf. Is 40:11); a slaughtered lamb was a dramatic contrast with a reigning lion (cf. Is 53:7).⁴
4. Since horns symbolize strength (1 Ki 22:11), the "seven horns" represent the authority and strength of a ruler (Da 7:24; Rev 13:1). The "seven eyes" defined as the seven spirits of God (cf. Zec 3:9; 4:10) symbolically represent the Holy Spirit (cf. Rev 1:4; 4:5). Because He alone is worthy, the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne (cf. Da 7:9,13-14). (From Bible Knowledge Commentary/Old Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries; Bible Knowledge Commentary/New Testament Copyright © 1983, 2000 Cook Communications Ministries. All rights reserved.)
5. Lambs were associated with a variety of sacrifices, but in Revelation this figure especially represents the Passover lamb, who delivers God's people from the plagues of the following chapters (cf. Ex 12:12-13).⁵
6. Many texts mention the lamb's horns, but the imagery of horns as symbols for authority is rooted in Daniel 8. The seven eyes ranging throughout the earth are from Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10. Because these may refer to angels (the image in Zechariah is modeled after Persian royal emissaries) in Zechariah 1:10 and 6:5-7, Revelation may apply the image to the seven traditional archangels of Judaism (8:2),

³ Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 741). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:5-6). InterVarsity Press.

⁵ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:5-6). InterVarsity Press.

subservient to Christ, rather than representing the Spirit of God. At any rate, the eyes in Zechariah are God's eyes; here they belong to the Lord Jesus.⁶

7. Legal documents were sealed, often with seven seals imprinted with the attestations of seven witnesses. (The wax seals would have to be broken to lose the strings beneath them, which wrapped the scroll and guaranteed that it had not been opened and thus altered.) This form was used for contract deeds and wills; it became increasingly common in Roman documents of the period, and some Palestinian Jewish documents of this sort have been recovered.⁷
8. Here the harp is mentioned for the first time (reappearing in 14:2 and 15:2). This idea of a new song is found frequently in the OT, as in Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1. Revelation 5:10 is practically a reaffirmation of the truth expressed in 1:6. Here, I think, for the first time we have the concept of the reigning of saints and a kingdom. Carefully note the statement, they reign (ed) upon the earth.⁸
9. Although Revelation is full of "sevens," it may be significant that the Romans wills were normally sealed with seven seals; seals on legal documents guaranteed that no one had opened or tampered with them. A will could not be opened until the death of the person whose will could be attested; if a will is in view here, it is significant that it is the lamb who has been *slain* who is worthy to open it. (The book may well be the lamb's book of life; cf. 3:5; 20:12.) At any rate, under Roman law a document was valid only when the addressee had received it; it is thus ready to take effect.⁹
10. Prostration was particularly a sign of worship before gods and kings in antiquity; Jewish texts usually reserved it for God himself. The image of prayers as incense was not uncommon (e.g., Ps 141:2), but here it alludes to the altar of incense and its censer in the heavenly temple (Rev 8:3). In this context, the harps probably indicate worship as in the charismatic, Levitical temple choir of old (1 Chron 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Chron 5:12; 29:25; Neh 12:27; cf. 1 Sam 10:5).¹⁰
11. Some Jewish texts were given to citing fantastically large numbers of people (e.g., they listed more slain in one battle than all the people who have lived in history); more reasonably, such texts estimated even larger numbers of angels. "Ten thousand" was the largest single number used in Greek, so "ten thousands of ten thousand" (myriads of myriads) is the author's way of calling them innumerable.¹¹
12. "Wealth" (πλοῦτος) is frequently associated with kingship (cf. Rev 18:17), but in the OT it is never directly attributed to God as part of the kingship metaphor. "Wealth" as a prerogative attributed to the Lamb (or God) occurs only here in Revelation. (3) "Wisdom" (σοφία), used in one other hymnic context of God (7:12), is an attribute that is thought appropriate for an earthly king and is often regarded as a gift the king has received from God (see Kaligula, *The Wise King*; Brettler, *King*, 55–56). (5) "Honor" (τιμή) is used elsewhere in Revelation twice of God (4:11; 7:12) and once of both God and the Lamb (5:13). Τιμή denotes the honor, respect, and status that a person enjoys when his position, wealth, and office are appropriately recognized in the community to which he belongs (*TDNT* 8:169–80; *EDNT* 3:357–59; *NIDNTT* 2:48–52).¹²

⁶ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:6). InterVarsity Press.

⁷ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:1). InterVarsity Press.

⁸ Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:8). Moody Press.

⁹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:7). InterVarsity Press.

¹⁰ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:8). InterVarsity Press.

¹¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 5:11). InterVarsity Press.

¹² Aune, D. E. (1997). *Revelation 1–5* (Vol. 52A, p. 365). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.